

## **Ronald John Rigg**

R.A.A.F 80473, 1941-1946.  
29<sup>th</sup> January 1923, born Perth, WA.

Educated Perth Boys School. Attended World Scout jamboree at Bradfield Park, Sydney, Christmas 1938. Fellow scouts were David Brand, later Sir David and Percy Hope, Surveyor General, Western Australian Government. Over 12,000 scouts attended from all over the world.

On returning from Sydney I applied for a position as Junior Salesman with J.C. Hume and Co, indent agents in the basement of Economic Chambers, William Street, Perth. My boss was only 29 years of age when war broke out, my father joined the company and ran it during the war years.

In 1941 I joined the 9<sup>th</sup> Auxillary Horse Brigade, and in May 1942 transferred to the R.A.A.F when my call-up came along. I was posted to Pearce Air Base and from there onto armament school where I trained as an armourer and then posted to Point Cooke and the bombing range at Little River.

My posting to Darwin came in 1943 and together with many associates we left Melbourne for Adelaide and then the long trip north to Alice Springs by cattle truck and on to Darwin by train. A long trip but most exciting, dry and dusty.

I was most excited to be posted to the famous Battle of Britain fighter squadron 452 Squadron Spitfires, based at Strauss on the twenty-eight mile peg south of Darwin.

Air raids were quite frequent and we lost many great friends during the coming months. As an armourer I always followed the three aircraft to which I was allocated and this took me as far away as Millingimbi in the Crocodile Islands in East Arnhem Land and across to Kalumburu at the Drysdale Spanish Mission. It was at the Mission that I celebrated my twenty-first birthday with eighteen inches of rain falling that weekend.

The highlight at the end of Darwin service was to be involved with the great airlift of the wing to Dunreath Airport, see attached report. The lift involved tons and tons of equipment, aircraft and personnel, a mighty task.

I was sad to leave 452 Squadron and all my mates, however that is Air Force life. I was later transferred to a bomb demolition squad and was involved in destroying many thousands of tons of ordinance in North West Australia, I was discharged in 1946.

Fortunately my old job was still vacant at J.C. Hume and Company. My old boss had stayed in N.S.W. and my father and I bought the business, changed the name to A.J. Rigg and Sons Pty Ltd and I stayed on until retiring in 1994.

We had disposed of all of our agencies and set out in 1960 to import direct from Asia. We travelled far to Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines,

Bangkok, Malaysia and were invited to China early in the sixties before the cultural revolution. China trade was enormous and most rewarding.

We also ventured to the United Kingdom, Spain, Germany, Greece and golf cars from the United States of America.

My father passed on in 1994 and I am enjoying retirement after receiving my "O.B.E" from the Highgate Branch of the R.S.L. A great group of guys.

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#### Drysdale River Mission Airstrip – Kalumburu

Drysdale River strip, being Australia's closest point to Portuguese Timor, was a very busy airstrip. Not only as an ideal sand crash strip for aircraft in trouble, but as a jumping off and refuelling point for 31 Squadron Beaufighters from Coomalie Creek south of Darwin. Dili and the Barbar Islands were regular targets.

Drysdale River was classified as a forward Operation Area after a tragic Japanese air raid in 1943. The Very Rev. Fr. Thomas Gil and two natives were killed when the mission was bombed.

Three spitfires from 452 Squadron were sent over to Drysdale for protection and I was duty armourer. After landing safely we experienced eighteen inches of rain as the sky opened up closing the airstrip for several days.

I celebrated my twenty-first birthday at the mission. The camp was "dry" owing to a lack of supplies caused by the rain. Fortunately I had accumulated six bottles of Flag ale to share amongst those present. A memorable evening.

Again I had the experience of completely stripping a 20mm Hispano canon as there were no special tools available to free a breach block jammed with the rim of an expended shell case.

#### Guildford Airport – Dunreath W.A.

My last big move with the Squadron was the massive task of shifting to Dunreath, now Perth International Airport. Two aircraft crashed on this journey without loss of life.

After several days of constant alert, the expected raid did not eventuate and the Squadron under the command of Sqd. Ldr. Lou Spence returned to Darwin with other aircraft of the Wing after a most successful operation.

#### Sir Harry and Lady Oakes

It was generally recognised that many of our aircraft had been in service for quite some time. While cleaning F/O Adrian Goldsmith's old plane – 15½

confirmed kills, I noticed an inscription painted underneath the recently painted camouflage.

“DONATED BY SIR HARRY AND LADY OAKES”.

It was not unusual at the start of WWII for eminent citizens to donate aircraft. Sir Harry Oakes, Governor of the Bahamas was murdered some years later.

On a brighter note, before leaving the Squadron we received a much later Spitfire Mark VIII, four bladed propeller and very sleek. I thought that this was to be the very last work in aircraft design. It was very sad to leave 452 Sqdn. and the many friends that I had spent so much time with as I would have loved to have continued on to Morotai in the Halmaheras.

Next posting was to be 14 Squadron Beaufort Bombers based at Pearce and Fairbridge Farm for coastal patrol from Albany submarine base to Exmouth in the North.

#### 452 Squadron Millingimbi Service – Squadron Records 1943

The 10<sup>th</sup> August 1943 proved to be a most exciting day for the ground staff selected to fly to the forward R.A.A.F. outpost situated at Millingimbi some 325 miles north-east of Darwin in the Arafura Sea. The largest of the Crocodile Islands.

Following a visit to Millingimbi by Governor General Lord Gowrie, three Spitfires from 452 Sqdn. were requested to be stationed at the strip to combat Japanese reconnaissance aircraft which had been harassing shipping in the area.

We left Hughes Airfield by a sturdy No. 2 Squadron Hudson bomber and in minutes were flying over the vast waterways and remarkable terrain of Arnhem Land with thousands of white birds swirling below.

As sole armourer I acted as emergency gunner on the starboard Vickers G.O.

Approaching Millingimbi we encountered two Japanese float planes, which were on reconnaissances, probably “Jakes”. I did not sight either aircraft from my position and both were believed to have been shot down and destroyed by accompanying Spitfires piloted by Flying Officers Fred Young and Bill Coombes. It was a great night at Millingimbi.

During the encounter, a firing pin was broken on one of the 20mm Hispano cannons. With little equipment the “armoury” consisted of a plank between two petrol drums and the assistance of a welder on a passing work boat, the pin was built up with high tensile steel and filed into perfect shape with excellent results.

Millingimbi was quite a relief after Strauss, with swimming and a little paddling in the mission dugout canoe in between squadron duties. A little damper cooked on the lid of an oil drum over an open fire by the friendly natives was a rare treat.

The Methodist Mission situated at Millingimbi was in control of excellent hands and run by the Reverend Kolinio Saukuku, ably assisted by the Reverend Harold Shepherdson. I believe that both men were capable of running the mission transmitter and navigating the coastal shipping safely at all times.

Millingimbi is a rugged area and shows the wreckage of former 2 Sqdn. Hudson The "TOJO BUSTER". The area is occasionally visited by natives from far away Cape Stuart and I was lucky enough to attend a local "Corroboree".

It is normal at forward outposts to have four aircraft in attendance, with three on standby at all times. Four pilots were available and consisted of Flying Officers Fred Young, Bill Coombes and Jerry Cowell, Pilot Officer Paul Tully. Ground Staff Sgt. Stan Andrews, Ron Rigg, Armourer and John Hibbett, Electrician.



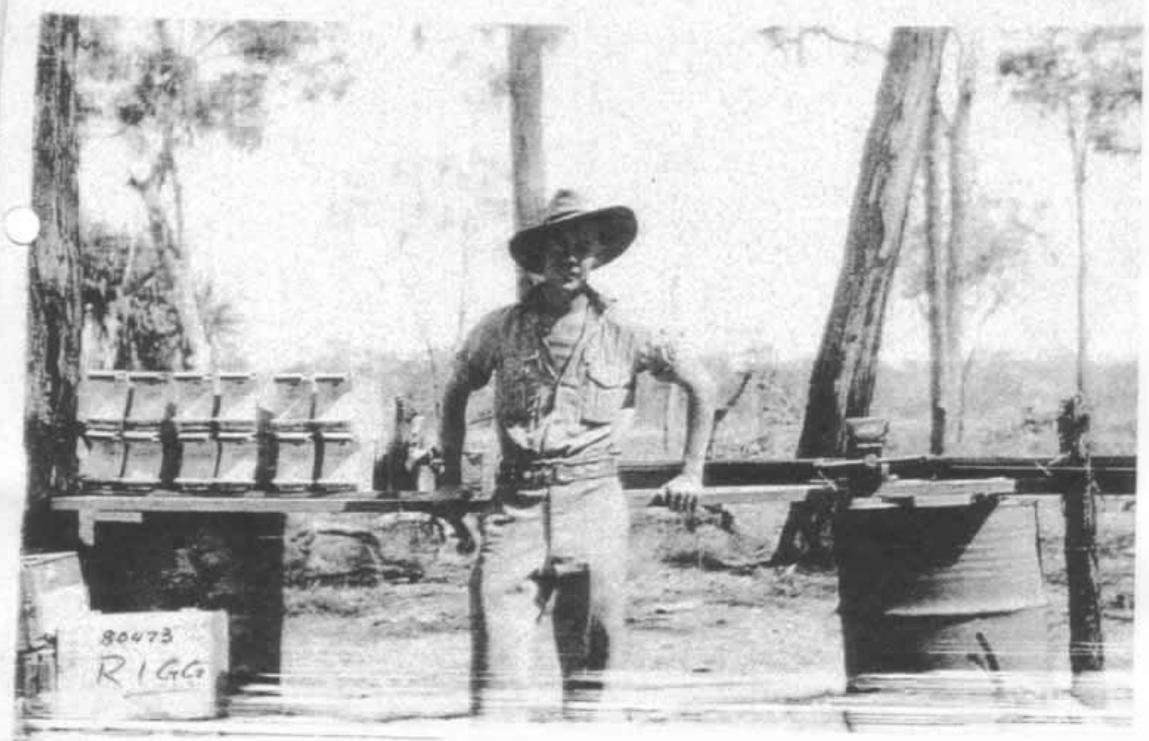
CHASING CROCODILES

MILLINDIMBI 1943

RON RIGG STAN ANDREWS JOHN HIBBITT  
(R.A.F.)



BEACH MILLINGIMBI 1943



30473  
RIGGS

# SPITFIRE ASSOCIATION

MEMBERS AT R.A.A.F. BALL – OFFICERS MESS DARWIN, N.T.



*Left to right: Eric Norrie (A.C.T.), Ray Bowes (President), Charles Lucre (N.S.W.), Peter Radtke (N.T.), Jenny Radtke (N.T.), Ron and Fay Rigg (W.A.)*



*Club Member Ron and Fay Rigg representing Western Australia.*



*Eric Norrie (A.C.T.), left, Ron and Fay Rigg (W.A.), Ray Bowes (President, N.S.W.), and Charles Lucre (N.S.W.).*

≡ *From Around The Club* ≡

WA member **Ron Rigg** who served on 452 Sq. Adron in the NW Area, did a stint on **Milingimbi Island** in 1943, so he is well positioned to shed some light on what it was like on this remote outpost, whose worst feature, according to Ron and fellow member **Fred**

**Young**, (who was there at the same time as Ron) was the presence of aggressive sand flies and in great numbers.

Fred's fair skin made him a prime target for these beasts and his legs became so swollen from their bites, that he had great difficulty getting in and out of his shorts. Ron wrote as follows.....

*10<sup>th</sup> August 1943, proved to be a most exciting day for the ground staff selected to fly to the forward RAAF outpost, situated at Milingimbi, the largest of the Crocodile Islands, some 325 miles north-east of Darwin, in the Arafura Sea.*

(At this point in Ron's story, he states that the deployment of the three Spitfires and their skeleton ground crews, was due to a request to have fighters there to combat Japanese reconnaissance aircraft that had been harassing shipping in the area. This may well have been so, but No. 1 Fighter Wing had been dispatching deployments of Spitfires and ground crews to this remote strip on a regular basis for some time, in order to give protection to the Beaufighter Squadrons that dropped in to refuel, on their returning flight from missions to Japanese held islands to the North. The Jap strategy was to follow the Beaus home and attack them as they landed. Please correct me if I am in error on this point. ED.) Ron continues.....

*We left Hughes Airfield in a # 2 Sqdn. Hudson and within minutes, we were flying over the vast waterways and remarkable terrain of Arnhem Land with thousands of white birds swirling below and on the flight I acted as emergency gunner on the Starboard Vickers GO gun.*

*Approaching Milingimbi, we encountered two Japanese reconnaissance float-planes (probably "Jakes"), which were not in my field of vision, but I believe were destroyed by our Spitfire escort. Fred Young and Bill Coombes were involved in this action which gave cause for great celebration at Milingimbi that night.*

*During the encounter, a 20 mm Hispano Cannon firing pin was broken, but with the assistance of a welder from a passing work boat, the pin was repaired in our armoury, which consisted of a plank and an engineer's vice perched between two 44 gal petrol drums. The welder*

*built the pin with high tensile steel, I filed it into shape and the Hispano was restored to perfect working order.*



**Ron Rigg and his "Armoury". Note the three spare sets of .303 ammo magazines.**

*Milingimbi was a pleasant relief from Strauss, with swimming (Crocs?) and a little paddling in the Mission dugout canoe as well as damper cooked by friendly natives on an oil drum lid over an open fire, being a rare treat.*

*The Milingimbi Methodist Mission operated a radio transmitter and assisted in the safe operation of the shipping lanes at all times and was visited from time to time by natives as far away as Cape Stuart.*

*They held a Corroboree while we were there which I was lucky enough to attend.*



**L-R: P/O Paul Tully, Sgt. Stan Andrews, LAC John Hibbert (RAF?), local Aboriginals and Ron Rigg. Ron Rigg, 3 Kilkenny Rd. Floreat, WA. 6014.**

## *Return to Darwin 2002.*

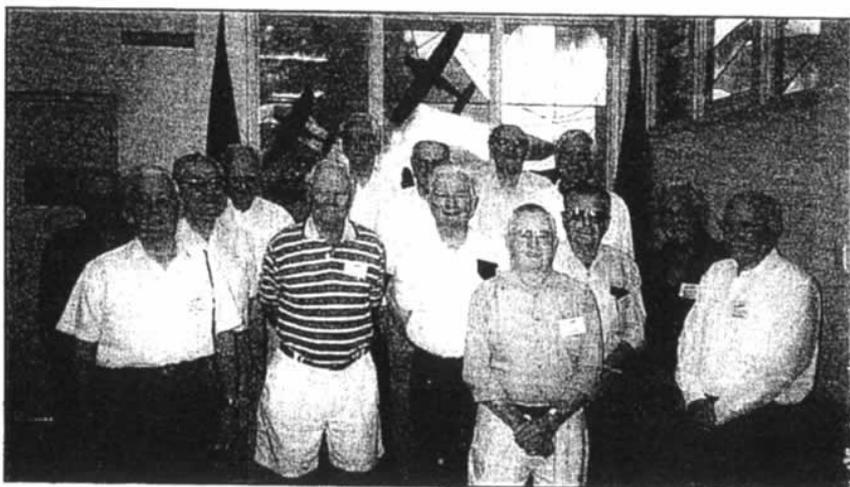
For the fourteen members and five wives/partners who undertook the "Return to Darwin 2002" trip on 18<sup>th</sup> July last, the four day programme of events was a great success, due undoubtedly to the hospitality and assistance given us by The Aviation Historical Society and in particular our old friends, Peter and Jenny Radtke and Bob Franklin.

Two mini-buses, with Peter and Bob behind wheels, transported us on tours of Darwin and its environs, the old fighter and bomber strips and down the track to Adelaide River and its War Cemetery.

Dinner in the RAAF Base Officer's Mess and two evening meals at the harbour front Yacht Club, were enjoyed by all, as was the Sunday morning church service at the RAAF Base Chapel, which was followed by an inspection of the US Marine FA-18s, that were operating out of Darwin at the time of our visit.

All in all, possibly the best "Return to Darwin" that we have had.

**Ray Bowes.**



L-R: Scotty Irons, Bruce Kingston, Ray Hart, Keith Gamble, Ron Rigg, Ray Bowes, Ron Cundy, Bob McGlinchy, Charles Lucre, Cliff Moore, Lysle Roberts, Ron Lambert, Bruce Read and Cedric Askew, before the Spitfire section of the stained glass windows of the RAAF Base Chapel.

MILLINGIMBI 1943

No. 2 SQDN HUDSON

TOJO BUSTER



12 SPARE TANKS .303 FOR BROWNING M/G<sup>S</sup>  
ARMAMENT SECTION - MILLINGIMBI

RON RIGG 452 SQN SPITFIRES 1943

