

Memorial Box 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wartime Service

Flight Lieutenant David Paul DFC



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P10129.001

Flight Lieutenant David Paul DFC, c. 1945

Born in 1920, David Valentine Paul grew up on the north shore of Sydney with his brother and sister. Affectionately known to his family as “the big fella”, Paul was an active sportsman and excelled as a front-row Rugby League forward. His great-grandmother, Lucy Fraser, was an Aboriginal woman from the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales.

A kind and gentle man, Paul left school at 14 and went to work as a drover and a dry-cleaner. When war broke out in 1939 he pinned his hopes on joining the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Having never finished school, Paul enrolled at the local technical college to obtain the education qualifications needed to gain entry. He successfully enlisted in the RAAF in January 1941.

The following April he undertook training with the newly established Empire Air Training Scheme in Rhodesia (modern-day Zimbabwe). This program was implemented to supply Britain with the manpower required to maintain the Royal Air Force (RAF) in the impending air war against Germany. Paul displayed an average aptitude for flying but was

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a keen and dedicated pupil. Eight months later he was posted to No. 454 Squadron as a pilot.

For the next two years Paul flew Baltimore Bombers over the Aegean Sea to obtain crucial photographs of enemy shipping. His commanding officer, Wing Commander John Coates, later wrote that he had become one of the squadron's most outstanding pilots. But on 4 December 1943 Paul and his crew failed to return from a reconnaissance operation. He was reported as missing, and his family waited for three months before receiving news of his fate.

Paul's plane had been hit by enemy fighters. Although the aircraft's fuel tank had burst into flame, he had managed to successfully ditch the plane into the sea. Of the four-man crew, three survived, including Paul. Rescued from the water by a pair of German seaplanes, Paul and the others were sent to a prisoner-of-war camp near Berlin.

While in captivity Paul was recommended for and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his "outstanding leadership, initiative and determination". He was also awarded the Goldfish Club badge, given to Allied aircrew who survived a ditching at sea with the assistance of a floatation device.

At the end of war Paul was liberated from the camp and returned to Australia soon afterwards. He went on to have a distinguished career in the New South Wales Police Force, and continued to serve as a squadron leader in the RAAF Reserve until his death in May 1973.

Activities for research and classroom discussion

1. Like most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who served in the Second World War, Paul did not identify himself as Indigenous. Why?
2. Paul initially displayed an average aptitude for flying, but was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. What does this suggest about the type of person he was?
3. How do you think Paul's family may have felt upon hearing he was missing in action?
4. Why do you think the Goldfish Club chose this particular emblem for their badge? Research the Caterpillar Club, the Guinea Pig Club, and the Winged Boot Club: what were the requirements to join these associations?



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5. Official war artist Tony Albert created this sculpture in response to his grandfather's experience as a prisoner of war during the Second World War. Here Albert describes his grandfather and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and servicewomen as "forgotten heroes". Do you agree? Why or why not? How would you like to remember them?



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Tony Albert, "Forgotten Heroes", c. 2014, sculpture 110 x 82 x 5.5cm

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