

William Simes

*William Charles Kenwick*



454 Squadron – Flight Mechanic

115144



## William Simes

William Charles Kenwick didn't just inspire my name, he inspired the people lucky enough to know him. William means 'strong-willed warrior' and he certainly lived up to his name, persevering throughout life. On Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1922, William Charles Kenwick entered the world, ready to leave his mark. Born at the Nurse Copley Private Nursing Home to his parents Herman George Kenwick (a firefighter who also cared for horses and raised greyhounds) and Emma Lucy Barclay (a housekeeper). William 'Bill' Kenwick lived with his family of 5 and was the eldest of 3 children. Young William loved to spend time at Henley Beach with his family, exploring the sand dunes, fishing with friends and by all accounts get himself into mischief. He attended Henley Primary School and Thebarton Technical School, a school where boys learnt to turn and fit steel with machinery.



William Kenwick and his eldest sister Betty

At the age of 14, William left school to work in the family business owned by his Grandparents; A W Kenwick & Sons. This was a prestigious jewellery store, where he worked for 5 years with his Grandfather Arthur Kenwick and his Uncle Morton Kenwick. William liked being a jeweller, although he had dreams of becoming an architect which were changed due to The Great Depression and a lack of funds.



Arthur Kenwick(left), William Kenwick(middle) and Morton Kenwick(right) with the tea set for the royal wedding

William attended the recruitment centre in Adelaide, requesting to be an instrument maker. He attended an interview and medical examination, bringing references with him. Mr W. P. Low a watch and clock expert stated, "I can confidently say his quickness and ability at locating and correcting mechanical troubles have been exceptionally good." He went on to say, "I have the pleasure in recommending him (William Charles Kenwick) to anyone who wants the services of a really persevering and capable young man." recognising William's abilities and perseverance.

19-year-old William had been working in his Grandparent's prestigious workshop, learning his craft. These skills were nurtured by his Grandfather, who took on a mentoring role. William sat an aptitude test with results showing neither pass nor fail, with both crossed out by the examining officer. His aptitude report went on further to state "worth the chance, suitable for enlistment. Ask Trainee Group V (5)," signed examining Officer Burton. Although William had not passed his aptitude test, Officer Burton saw potential in him.

REPORT (For Official Use Only) **TRADE TEST** *for the Guards*

9A607

Understands conditions *OK*

Notes required *one week*

Description: *medium build, neat appearance, Respectful, suitable*

APITUDE TESTS *Not Considered* *worth the chance, suitable for enlistment, ask Trainee Group V*

IN ACCORDANCE WITH A.S. 21(5)(b)

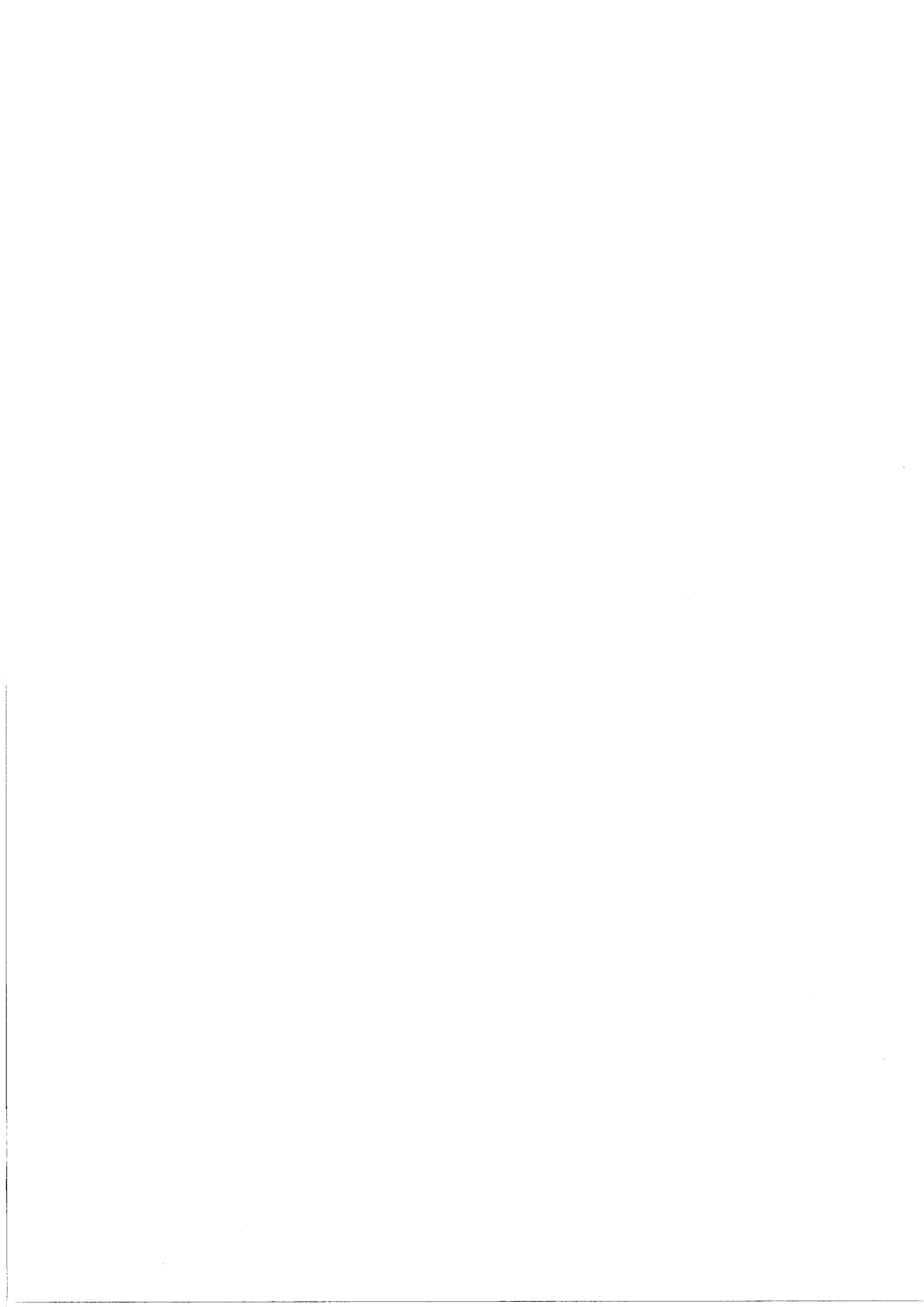
Considered *worth the chance, suitable for enlistment, ask Trainee Group V*

Date *7/7/42* *W.P. Burton* Examining Officer

Medical	Dental
	Fillings Extractions Dentures Treatment
Examining Officer	Examining Officer
Date	Date

Signature *W.P. Burton*  
Date *7/7/42* Rank *W.P.*

Close up of aptitude test results on William's application for enlistment documents showing "Worth the Chance"



## William Simes

William attended basic training in Adelaide, camping in simple RAAF tents. From September to November 1943, he attended the RAAF course the No. 252 Engineering School for a Flight Mechanic in Melbourne. It was at this training that William met his lifelong mate, the late Clifford Spiers of Victoria, forming a mateship that would stand the test of time. William scored 70.75/100, passing his Flight Mechanic training. His perseverance was evident, as although he did not pass his aptitude test, Officer Burton's willingness to give William a chance came to fruition.

William then moved to the Port Pirie Bombing and Gunnery School for 12 weeks where he undertook extra training and met, Dorothy Margaret Lewis, whom he married after the war. In September of 1943, William began his voyage with his newly found RAAF mates Con, Clifford, and Mac. Starting at Brisbane they sailed to Fremantle to refuel the SS LURLINE. The next day the troops headed to Mumbai (Bombay) where William changed ships to the ORMONDE, a steel twin screw steamer and travelled to Suez, Egypt. Leaving the boat at the Suez Canal he travelled by road to the transit centre in Almaza for six weeks. William travelled by rail to Marsa-Matruh, located on Egypt's Mediterranean coast, where he collected a truck, taking it to Tobruk where it was left. William then moved to Benghazi, Libya, where he joined the 454 squadron.

The conditions in Benghazi 1944, were intolerable. William faced living and working under the hot desert sun and sandstorms that would appear within minutes and last for what seemed a lifetime. The sandstorms made William's flight mechanic work near impossible and for pilots a near death experience. Sand would not only sting and get into your eyes, mouths, and ears, it got into every opening of the aircraft. William's perseverance, attention to detail and precision ensured his planes were cleaned, so they could continue flying. Cleaning the engines, guns, flaps, and undercarriages was an important task despite it being painstaking work. This was just the tip of the iceberg as the crew also faced the likes of scorpions, camel spiders, and dehydration. Working in these conditions showed William's dedication to ensure his colleagues were safe and could complete their duties.

The 454 first operated as a maritime patrol squadron, spending time working over the Mediterranean. If it wasn't for their close mateship and bonds the squadron may not have been as successful. Its main targets were enemy submarines and merchant shipping. It was also used for long-range reconnaissance and occasionally employed in strikes. During this period, William and the 454 Squadron operated from the airfield Berka III, until the 25 of July



Map with pin-points of William's movements



William Kenwick & Clifford Spiers  
Falconara – 1944



William Kenwick (Bottom Left) and his crew  
in front of a Baltimore Plane



## William Simes

1944. The 454 Squadron conducted day searches in the Eastern Mediterranean in 1942 – 44; formation strikes in the Aegean Sea against the Gothic line.

As a flight mechanic, William worked on Baltimore planes which were twin engine bombers. William ensured that the 454 squadrons planes were working correctly by repairing broken parts and keeping the planes maintained. A traumatic part of William's maintenance was to ensure that the gun turrets were cleaned by hosing them out. Unfortunately, this cleaning duty could entail decapitated bodies and body parts of his fallen mates, a task that left its mark on William. Despite these difficulties, William's perseverance ensured the Baltimore planes were able to take to the sky.



A Baltimore plane - 1943

William and the 454 squadron relocated to Pescara in Italy, July 1944, and engaged in a new role; to provide air support for ground forces in the Italian Campaign, also known as the Liberation of Italy. This campaign consisted of Allied Forces and their fight against the German Armed Forces. The 454 squadron operated from multiple airfields such as Pescara (26 July - 17 August 1944), Falconara (18 August 1944 - 6 December 1944), Cesenatico (7 December 1944 - 15 May 1945), and Villaorba (16 May - 14 August 1945). Falconara's disgusting conditions consisted of heavy glue like mud which impinged the squadrons' ability to service and carry out tasks. Perseverance was shown by the 454 squadron at Falconara in September as the squadron delivered 328 bombs throughout difficult weather. The squadron performed their tasks so well that they earned a reputation for efficiency despite the conditions. In Cesenatico, the 454 squadron again faced difficulties meeting operational demands, with weather consisting of harsh winds, rain and intermittent sleet and fog. William and mates experienced such cold conditions that they invented a makeshift heater using aviation fuel that they syphoned from the Baltimore planes. The contraption worked for a while; however, it was very dangerous, and several tents burnt to the ground. The 454 completed ground support missions, attacked targets, and experimented with radar-controlled bombing techniques. On May 2, 1945, the 454 squadron's war in Italy ended with the surrender of the German forces.

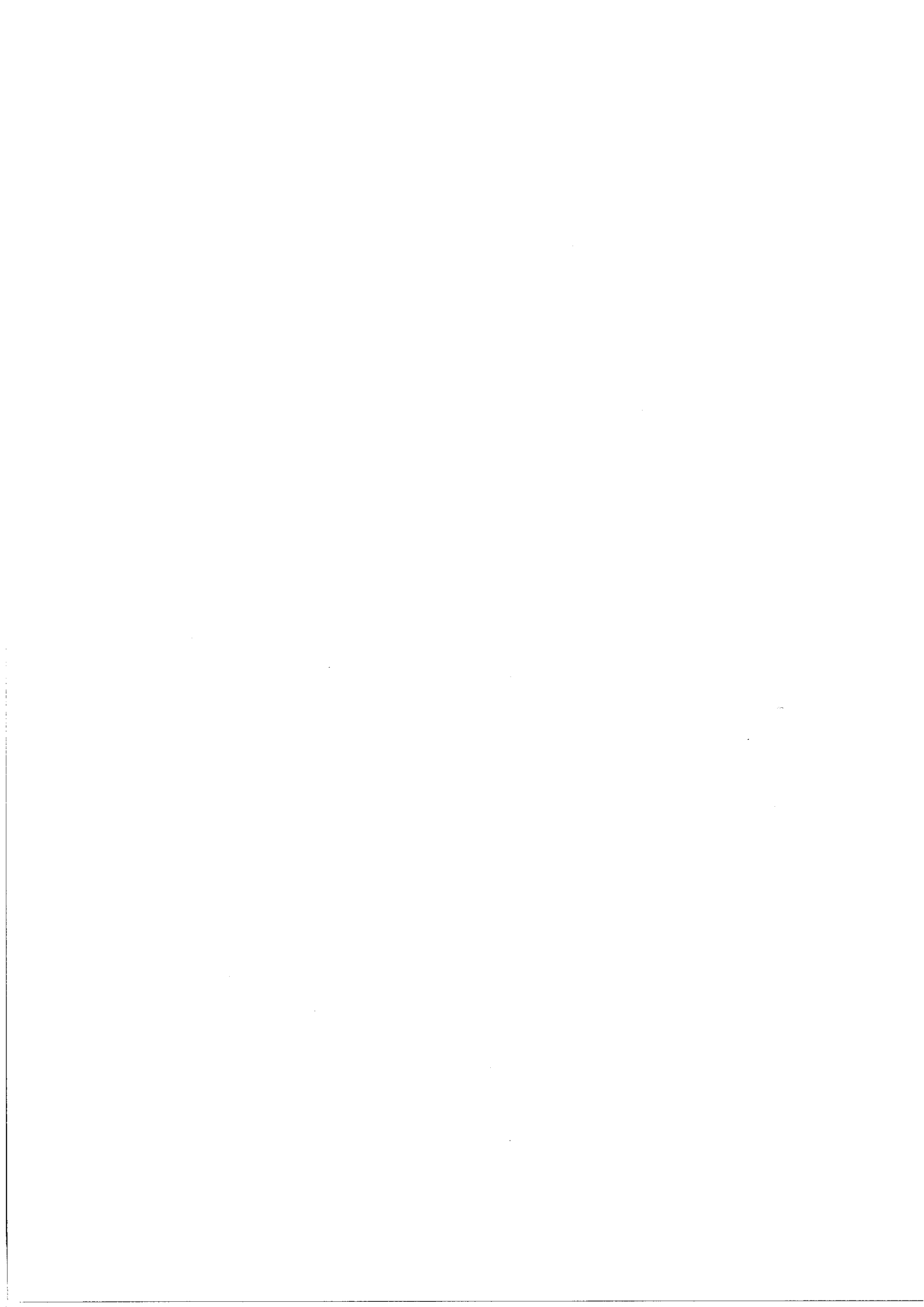


Falconara camp - 1944

After finishing in Italy, William moved to England where he travelled to Melbourne and then Mallala. On March 26, 1946, William Kenrick was discharged from the RAAF and returned to Adelaide, resuming work at A W Kenrick & Sons. On the May 9, 1947, William married Dorothy Margaret Lewis of Port Pirie, who were later blessed with 3 children, Suzanne, (1948), my grandmother, Helen (1951) and Judy (1954). As a father, William was happy to step outside of the traditional male role whether it was looking after his children or partaking in his hidden talent of knitting baby clothes. Demonstrating a caring and helpful father/husband that William was.



Newly Weds: William and Dorothy Kenrick



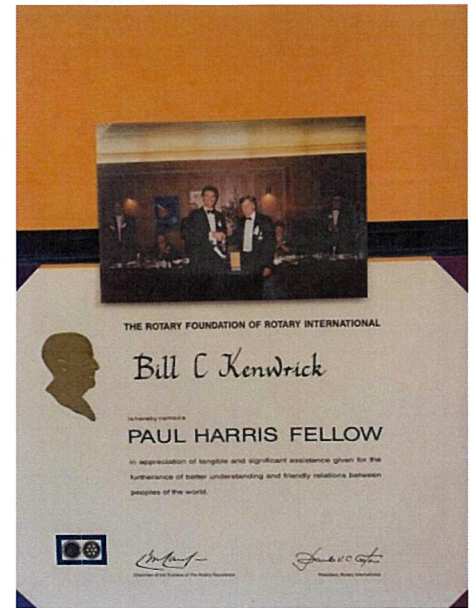


## William Simes

William was actively involved in the Thebarton Rotary Club for 18 years, from 1980-1998. William was the recipient of the respected 1996 *Paul Harris Fellow Award*, awarded "In appreciation of tangible and significant assistance given for the furtherance of better understanding and friendly relations between people of the world." William showed mateship by working and helping within the community, forming relationships with members both in Australia and overseas. William was described as a selfless and caring man, dedicated to bettering the lives of others.

A W Kenrick & Sons was such a successful and trusted business, that in 1947 they made a silver tea set that was presented by the state of South Australia to honour the occasion of Princess Elizabeth's marriage. A W Kenrick & Sons also made the Inter-Dominion Cup, the most coveted trotting trophy in the southern hemisphere, demonstrating mateship and perseverance within the tight knit family.

Cliff Spiers' and William's friendship continued even after the war, where they would often catchup over a barbeque or Christmas, despite living in separate states. Sadly, on 15 September 2007, William Charles Kenrick passed away in Adelaide, South Australia. This 'strong willed warrior's' life was one that should be remembered as spirited, courageous, and caring. I William Simes, hope that I can live up to this honoured name and carve a path in history, as William Charles Kenrick did.



1996 Paul Harris Fellow Award



454 Squadron barbeque 1990



Left to Right: William Kenrick, Grandfather Arthur & Uncle Morton



Uncle Morton & William Kenrick



William's Medals from left to right:  
1939/45 Star, Africa Star, Defence Medal,  
1939/45 Medal, Australian Service Medal



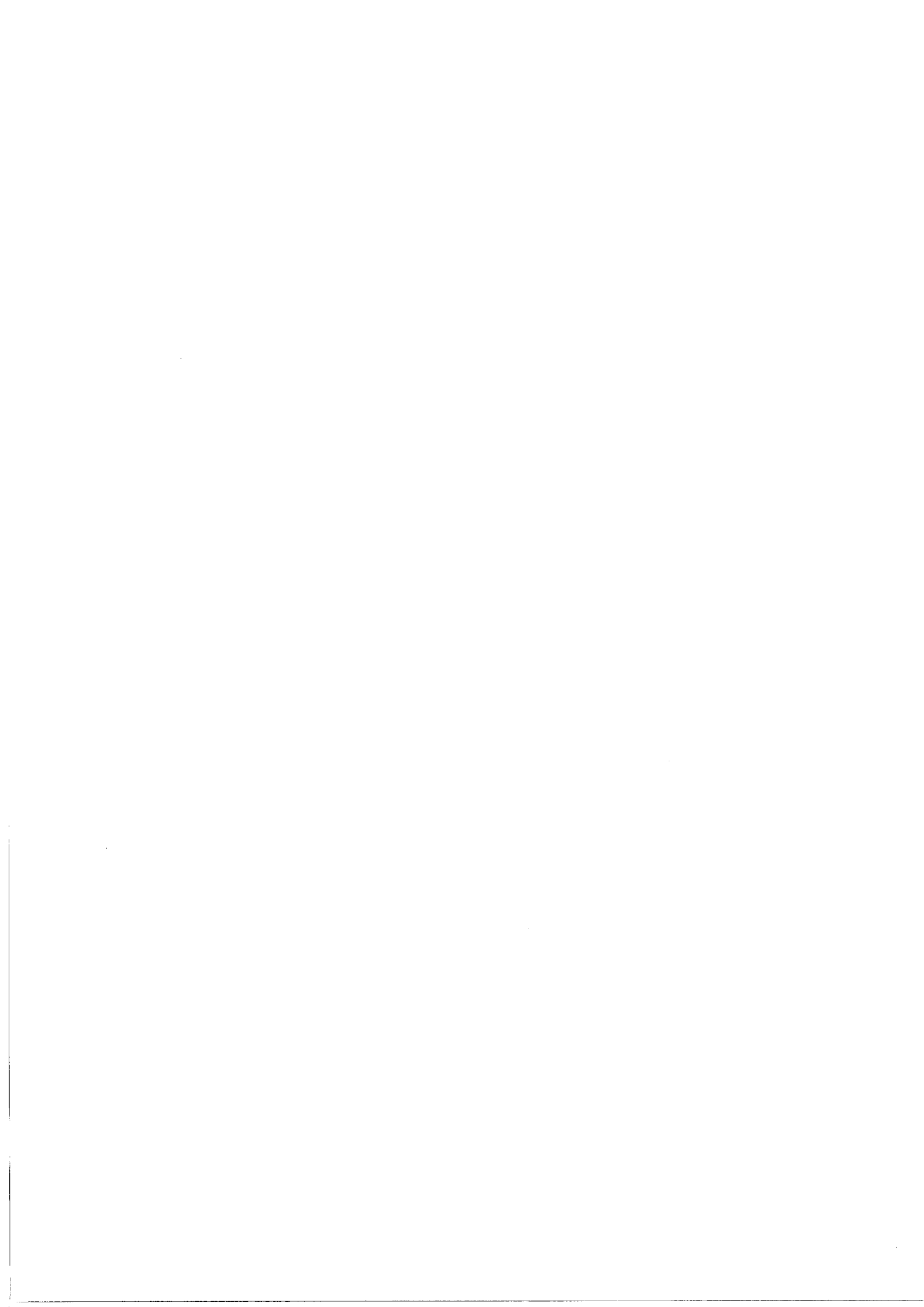
## PART B

I decided to research William Charles Kenwick as he is my great Grandfather and namesake. Gathering information at first was extremely challenging as there was minimal firsthand information written about his wartime experiences on the websites I visited.

It was through the National Archives of Australia (NAA) that I was able to discover documents about William, however, understanding the documents was challenging. The National Archives of Australia gave me 44 documents to decipher and use to piece together William Kenwick's story. I was able to locate a website that was dedicated to the 454 and 459 Squadron history and I contacted the website administrator, Michael Antonios. I conducted a phone conversation with Antonios who was able to find more information and decipher the abbreviations and Williams movements. This resulted in Antonios updating the information that he had for William Kenwick on his website. Not only this but Antonios was also able to add Clifford Spiers to the website, as he did not previously appear as one of the members of the 454 squadron.

Family members also assisted with firsthand stories about William and events during the war. I was able to cross reference information with the book, *Alamein to the Alps*, written by Mark Lax, a serving RAAF Officer. *Alamein to the Alps* was specifically written about the 454 squadron, one of the lesser-known RAAF European units. The book details what the squadron experienced and gave insight into operations of the unit. Using the NAA's documents I could understand where and when William's movements occurred. I also used a diary entry that was found by his eldest daughter, my grandmother Suzanne Simes, to assist with William's firsthand experiences. Using this information and Google Maps I was able to plot his journey from Australia to fighting in the Mediterranean and Europe.

Overall, I have learnt about the struggles and victories of my great Grandfather, William Charles Kenwick. I have learnt where he travelled, what his role entailed and about his personal life and character before, during and after the war.



## Bibliography

### Website:

- 'Broken Hill Silver For Princess's Gift' 1947, *Barrier Miner* 12 August, pp. 3, viewed 19 April 2022, Trove Newspapers and Gazettes, Trove
- 454 and 459 RAAF Squadrons Association 2018, *454 and 459 RAAF Squadrons*, viewed 26 April 2022, <<https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/454history>>
- Cleveland, - 1953, 'SA Family Making Coveted Trophy', *The Advertiser*, 12 November, pp. 12, viewed 19 April 2022, Trove Newspapers and Gazettes, Trove
- Connolly, P 2021, *ROYAL WEDDING GIFTS FROM DOWN-UNDER*, viewed 8 May 2022, <https://paulineconnolly.com/2021/wedding-gifts-from-australia-to-a-royal-couple/>
- Monument Australia 2010, *454 Squadron*, viewed 21 April 2022, <https://monumentaustralia.org.au/themes/conflict/ww2/display/94492-454-squadron>
- National Archives of Australia 2002, *William Charles Kenwick*, viewed 24 April 2022, <https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/DetailsReports/ItemDetail.aspx?Barcode=4860953&isAv=N>
- Rotary 2022, *Our History*, viewed 21 April 2022, <https://www.rotary.org/en/about-rotary/history>
- The Australian War Memorial 2022, *No. 454 Squadron*, Canberra, viewed 30 April 2022, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U59439>

### Book:

- Lax, M 2006, *Alamein To The Alps*, Mark Lax, Australia Capital Territory

### Image:

- *Anzac Day 1990* 2018, Photograph, 454 and 459 Squadrons, viewed 18 April 2022, <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/Williamwc?lightbox=datapitem-l2ebg25j>
- Connolly, P 2021, *ROYAL WEDDING GIFTS FROM DOWN-UNDER*, viewed 8 May 2022, <https://paulineconnolly.com/2021/wedding-gifts-from-australia-to-a-royal-couple/>
- Helen Morcom, 2022, *Uncle Morton & William Kenwick*, photograph, Stansbury, South Australia
- Helen Morcom, 2022, *William Kenwick and his Grandfather Arthur & Uncle Morton*, photograph, Stansbury, South Australia
- Kate Simes, 2022, *William Kenwick's war medals*, photograph, Adelaide, South Australia
- Le Guay, LC 1943, *The ground crew members are seen here working on a Martin Baltimore aircraft of the squadron.*, Photograph, Australian War Memorial, viewed 22 May 2022, <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C331363>
- Simes, WC 2022, *Map pin-pointing William Charles Kenwick's movements throughout the war*, Map, Google Maps, viewed 22 May 2022, <https://www.google.com.au/maps/@25.334858,42.7142967,4z/data=!4m7!1m3!11m2!2sqpZ-h8qTRFKtcvmS3imGNg!3e3!11m2!2sqpZ-h8qTRFKtcvmS3imGNg!3e3?hl=en&authuser=0>
- Suzanne Simes, 2022, *Falconara camp*, photograph, Adelaide, South Australia



## William Simes

- Suzanne Simes, 2022, *Newly Weds Dorothy and William Kenwick*, photograph, Adelaide, South Australia
- Suzanne Simes, 2022, *Paul Harris Fellow certificate*, photograph, Adelaide, South Australia
- Suzanne Simes, 2022, *William Kenwick and Clifford Spiers in Falconara*, photograph, Adelaide, South Australia
- Suzanne Simes, 2022, *William Kenwick and his crew in front of a Baltimore plane*, photograph, Adelaide, South Australia
- Suzanne Simes, 2022, *William Kenwick and his eldest sister Betty*, photograph, Adelaide, South Australia

## Personal Communications:

- Suzanne Simes, personal communications, April/May,2022
- Helen Morcom, personal communications, April/May,2022

