

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: SX 9930
Name: James Murray SCHMITT
Nickname: Murray



Medals and Decorations

1939 - 45 Star

Africa Star

Pacific Star

Defence Medal

War Medal 1939 - 45

Australian Service Medal 1939 - 45

Rank: Sergeant
Service: Army
Enlisted: 27 Jul 40
Discharged: 12 Sep 45

Murray was born at Cummins on 20 Oct 19 to Francis Frederick Lincoln (Linc) Schmitt and Sybil Schmitt (nee Goodes). His father was a ganger on the railways. There were 5 children in the family, all boys.

He went to school at Ungarra, although he spent 1 year at Arno Bay School, before leaving at the completion of Grade 7 in 1932, to work as a farm labourer.

In 1934 he joined the building trade as an apprentice brick layer, working for Clifford M Thorpe: the projects he worked on included the “new” Tumby Bay hospital in 1938 and many farm houses (mainly limestone) in the area. In 1939 the building trades went “bad”, so he left the industry and became a rabbit trapper as well as working on the hardstand for the Port Lincoln Airport with Jack and Bill Darling – they lived in a small shed at the airport for this job.

Murray joined the Army in Jul 1940 at Wayville (SA). He was allocated to Royal Australian Engineers (RAE) and undertook training at Wayville and Puckapunyal (Vic). In Nov 1940 he embarked at Melbourne on the “*Orchidy*”, disembarking in Cairo in Dec 1940. It was here that he was allocated to 23rd Corps Field Park Squadron (RAE) and attached to 7th Div, seeing service in Egypt, Gaza and Syria.

In Jan 42 his unit embarked at Aden bound for Malaya. Enroute, Singapore fell and the ship was diverted to India: 13 weeks after leaving Aden the troops disembarked at Fremantle. At this point Murray and 6 others were transferred to 23rd Field Company (RAE) and sent to Darwin and later to Victoria Downs Station to instruct in the use of explosives. With only a short break, to return to the School of Military Engineering for a bridging course, he remained in the Darwin/Victoria River area until May 1943,

when he was posted to Wagga Wagga (NSW) for a Bomb Disposal (BD) Course.

Murray made the most of his time at Wagga, as he reacquainted with Nancy Mitchell Flack whom he had met in 1942 on his return from the Middle East. They married in Melbourne on 20 Nov 1943, just prior to his posting to Cairns for additional BD training.

In Dec 1943 he again embarked, this time from Cairns bound for New Guinea, arriving at Milne Bay in Jan 1944. The unit was sent to Green Island to construct an airstrip and in Jun 44 to Bouganville; both these areas required extensive BD work, the unfortunate part being that most of the unexploded bombs belonged to the allies. He remained in Bouganville until returning to Australia on 29 Sep 1945 for discharge.

After discharge he returned to the building trade as a bricklayer and worked for E.F Marshall & Sons. In 1951 he started his own business in Westbourne Park (Adelaide) and remained in this business until his retirement in 1980; one of his sons (Glen) taking over the business.

Murray and Nancy had 5 children, 4 sons and a daughter. Their youngest son (Warren) also joined the Services (RAAF) and was awarded the Conspicuous Service Cross for service in Papua New Guinea. He currently flies for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).

For the next 4 years Murray and Nancy travelled around Australia in a caravan, before returning to Tumby Bay and constructing their home in Elanora Ave, where they still live today. Even though Murray was retired he could not keep away from the “game”, so he resumed (part time) bricklaying in Tumby Bay.

In his youth Murray played football for Tumby Bay and cricket for Ungarra. In his later years his main passion has been woodworking and fishing.

He was a member of Colonel Light Gardens Sub Branch of the RSL before transferring to the Tumby Bay Sub Branch, where he has been an active member.

