

AN AIRMAN'S STORY



Service No.: 122413
Name: John SOUTHERN
Nickname: Jack



Medals and Decorations

1939 - 45 Star

Pacific Star

Defence Medal

War Medal 1939 - 45

Australian Service Medal 1939 - 45

Rank: Leading Aircraftman

Service: RAAF

Enlisted: 23 Feb 1943

Discharged: 22 Nov 1945

Jack was born on 3 Jan 1911 at Port Adelaide to James Southern and Alice May Southern (nee Williams). There were 5 children in the family, 3 boys and 2 girls, of which he was the eldest. His father was a merchant seaman (marine engineer) who died and was buried at sea when Jack was only 4 years old. Jack's mother remarried, but unfortunately she died soon after this and the children were sent to an orphanage.

Jack went to school at the Walkerville Boys Home, leaving as soon as he could; he worked at whatever jobs were available in the area, before moving to York Peninsula. He gained his driving licence in 1929 and went to work for J. Harvey as a lorry driver and barley "lumper" at Pine Point near Ardrossan (SA). It was during this time that he met his wife to be, Eva Ruth Magor (Tops); they were married on 23 Apr 1940. The first of their four children, Janet May Southern, was born in Adelaide on 21 Feb 1942.

A year later he enlisted in the RAAF (23 Feb 1943) at the age of 32 and gave his occupation as "motor driver". His locality of enlistment was Muloowurtie (York Peninsula), although place of enlistment was Adelaide. A previous application for enlistment in the Militia had been rejected on medical grounds.

Jack was then sent to 1 Reception & Disposal Squadron (Sqn) for recruit training on courses 9 & 10, both of which he passed before undertaking trade assessment as a motor transport driver, an assessment that required several mechanical aptitude tests. After training he was posted to No.5 Sqn, RAAF, on 3 May 1943.

5 Sqn was originally raised in 1917 as a training unit for pilots of the Australian Flying Corps during WW1; the unit was disbanded in 1919. The Sqn was re-raised at the beginning of 1941 at Laverton (Vic): on 17 May 1942 the unit was relocated to Toowoomba (Qld) and remained there for a year before re-deploying to Kingaroy (Qld)

and then to several locations on the Atherton Tableland (Qld), including Mareeba. It was at this location that Jack marched into his unit. A few months after arrival he was detached for a short period to Townsville, before again rejoining his unit.

On 11 Nov 1944 No. 5 Sqn was deployed to Piva Airfield at Torokina on Bougainville (PNG): Jack accompanied his unit, embarking from Townsville. The Sqn operated with units of RNZAF undertaking reconnaissance, artillery observation, ground attack, and aerial resupply missions in support of Australian ground troops fighting against the Japanese on the island. The Sqn also operated detachments on New Britain, Madang (PNG) and the Solomon Islands; Jack spent some time in all of these locations. He, with his unit, returned to Australia on 27 May 1945, embarking at Lae (PNG) bound for Townsville.

On arrival back in Australia he was posted to No. 7 RAAF Hospital at Townsville for a month and then transferred to No. 3 Communications Unit for 5 months before finally returning to 4 Personnel Depot in Adelaide for discharge on 22 Nov 1945.

No. 5 Sqn RAAF was disbanded on 18 Oct 1946 . During the war, 24 members of the Sqn lost their lives

After discharge he applied for a "soldier settlers" block and within 4 months was notified that he had been granted Sect 293, Hd of Hutchison. This block was ideal for his purposes, with the house near Mine Hill Creek and located at the base of the foothills with sea views. It was here that a further 3 children were born

As for many of the "soldier settlers" in this area, Bob Coad supplied his truck to assist with the family move.

Jack was a strong member of the Tumby Bay RSL and was well known as a non drinker, but would socialise with his mates whilst sipping a sarsparilla.

Jack and Tops remained on the farm until his death on 6 Sep 1960: he is buried in the Tumby Bay Cemetery.

His wife died on 6 Jun 2012 and is also buried in the Tumby Bay Cemetery.



Boomerang fighter, No.5 Sqn RAAF