



## Jack McNamara

*Bill McNamara – OAM*

John Henry McNamara, (Jack) was born on 25th October 1921, the second of six children born to Harry and Olive McNamara. He was born at Richards Avenue, Riverstone, this avenue was better known by the community as 'Butchers Row' because all the houses in the street were owned by the Riverstone Meat Company. Jack's father Harry was the foreman in charge of all the handling of livestock at the meat works.

Jack spent his childhood in Butchers Row and attended the old Riverstone Public school for his early primary education, transferring to the new public school when it opened in 1929. The old school building is now the museum and houses the Riverstone Historical Society.

From all accounts Jack was a good scholar and after completing 6th class he transferred to the Marist Brothers school at Parramatta to complete his secondary education. He excelled in athletics, and in rugby league he captained the 6 stone 7 team that won the Marist Bros combined schools competition. This team was undefeated, scoring 218 points to 11 against, in a season, and played a curtain raiser to an Australia v England Test match, against a team from Queensland.

Jack played football with Rivo C grade with players like Noel (Butch) Drayton, Manny McCarthy, Waffie Schofields, Ronnie Wallwork, and John 'Socker' Ward.

Like most boys growing up in Riverstone in those times he was keen on fishing in South Creek and catching rabbits with his ferrets out in the meatworks paddocks. I recall Jack being expelled from the fellowship after a school get-together for Rivo school children held in the old Oddfellows Hall (now demolished). His expulsion was for dropping a cake of soap into the water being boiled for their afternoon tea.

Our family moved from Butchers Row to a house in Riverstone Road for a few years, and then we moved to a ten acre farm that Harry had bought on Carnarvon Road, Marsden Park. Harry was promoted to a livestock buyer for the meatworks but unfortunately was killed in a motor accident at Picton whilst returning home from a cattle sale at Moss Vale.

With no car driver in the family and being too far out from the town and schools, we moved back to 57 Riverstone Road. When Jack left school he commenced his working career at Sargood Gardiners, a clothing warehouse in Sydney.

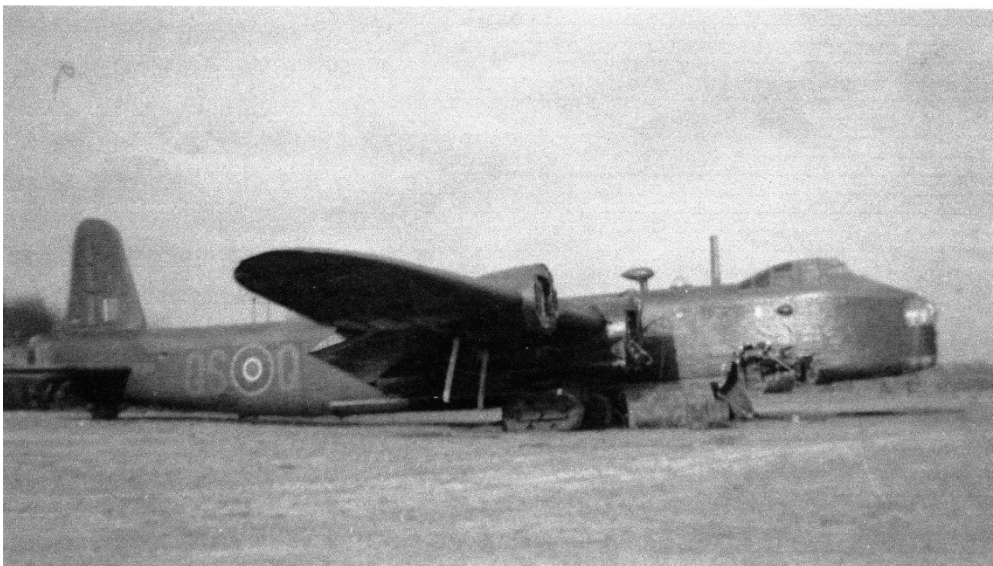
A few years later the Second World War broke out and Jack joined the Royal Australian Air Force on 9th November 1941 and was stationed at Bradfield Park, Sydney before transferring to Narromine, NSW for his initial air training and where he had his first solo flight.

In November 1942 he was posted to No 1 SFTS camp, Borden-Canada to complete his training. In March 1943 he was transferred to Worcester, England, and in April transferred to the Pilots Advanced Flying Unit at Greenham Common.

He was then transferred to No. 82 operational training unit at Ossington, flying Wellington bombers, and in October 1943 gained his first posting on the 4 engine bombers. In November he was posted to Bomber Command No. 620 squadron based at Chedburgh.

In March 1944 he was posted to the RAF station at Fairford for his first operational flying. He took part in the D Day landings on 6th June 1944. His log book shows he carried out 29 operational flights against the enemy.

On one of these operations his plane was badly hit and damaged, one engine and propeller shot clean off and the fuselage was badly torn. Out of radio contact, he nursed the plane back to England and made a successful crash landing at his base. (See photo below.) The crew escaped uninjured but the incident upset Jack and it was months before he could talk about it.



He received his Commission as a Flying Officer in 1944 and later in September that year was awarded the Croix De Guerre by General Koenig, Leader of the French Forces.



On the 28th December, 1944, flying a British Stirling 4 engine bomber he was shot down by a German fighter whilst returning from a mission over Norway. Jack and his six crew members were all killed on impact.

On a trip to Norway in 1956 I had the opportunity to visit Jack's grave. With a friend we hired a car and an interpreter and drove about 50 km from Oslo to the small village of Sande. We found a beautiful little cemetery with a Lutheran Church on one side and a butter factory on the other.

A group of young boys were standing with their bikes in front of the cemetery and the interpreter asked them if they knew of any British Airmen buried there. They all answered as one and with that jumped the fence and with their snow boots trampled down a track in the snow for us to walk to the graves. The seven headstones were visible above the snow.

We asked the boys if there was anyone locally who could tell us more about the crash and they referred us to the owner of the butter factory next door. On meeting the owner he explained that he saw the British Stirling bomber shot down by a German fighter, with the bomber crashing into the side of a hill in very heavy snow.

That night the owner and his friends tried to help the crew, but they had all died on impact. The next morning the Germans retrieved the bodies and with the assistance of the Lutheran Pastor gave the airmen a Christian burial, with the German soldiers saluting them at the ceremony.

I asked the owner how the graves were cared for; he told us Norway's National day is celebrated in May each year (similar to our Anzac Day) and on this day all the war graves are decorated and

honoured. It was a sad day but very fulfilling to know that Jack is with his crew in this faraway land, his grave and heroic deeds are appreciated and not forgotten by the Norwegian people.

When it was announced that Jack was awarded the Croix de Guerre by General Koenig, and also when he was posted missing and eventually announced deceased, our mother received many letters and telegrams, too many to repeat in this article but I will share with you one of the letters, particularly one from a lady unknown to our family with whom Jack and his friends spent many happy hours of their leave time. It will give you some idea what Aussie boys went through in the wasted war years.

4<sup>th</sup> March 1946

Dear Mrs McNamara

You will be surprised to hear from me again after all this time, but I have just received news from my sister, that you have just received news of your dear Jackie passing. I am so grieved for you and your family, as we all hoped there might still be a chance for him. We think of him often and the happy times we all had together, in spite of the hardships we were all enduring, we tried to keep the boys cheerful. I am so thankful we have this lovely photograph of him, always looking at us. It certainly was a lucky day, when we persuaded him to come to Eastbourne with us and have that taken. It was the last day we all had out together with him, he chose the film we should see and it was "Gone with the Wind" he said he had seen it twice before, but he enjoyed it so much. Well my dear, you can take comfort in the thought that your Jack was a very brave lad, full of courage, he was afraid of nothing and was so certain that he would come back safely. Before we landed in France he was doing very important secret work, dropping arms and equipment to the Maquis the underground movement in France and taking Frenchmen over and at night and dropping them in a given spot at a certain signal when we were so depressed after the Fall of France, he was constantly telling us how brave the Frenchmen were and we should hear all about what they were doing later. It must have been the important part he took in assisting the French that gained him that great honour. He used to pilot a "Stirling" Bomber, they were rather an easy target for the enemy as they could not go to such a height as the "Lancaster" and on one occasion he was hit very badly after he had completed his task but was still 250 miles over enemy territory, but in spite of having had one engine and propeller shot clean away and the whole side of his fuselage ripped clean off with all communications inoperable, he managed to bring what remained of his bomber back safely to base after he was forced to make a crash landing.

It shook him up very much and even after a weeks rest, he came to us looking very poorly. We saw a snap taken of his bomber after this it looked a wreck. He certainly deserved declaration for that feat. He didn't tell us a word of this, we learned about it from his friend Leslie Brown, a New Zealander, who came here with Jack for a week. He was a 26yr old school teacher but I never know his home address. He was a nice lad, a real father to Jack. They both went on a mission over the Pyrenees, just their two bombers, they left here at 10pm, Jack returned at 5am but Leslie never came back with his bomber, Jack was very upset. I often wonder if you received Jacks personal belongings, he had such a quantity of interesting snaps and a good camera.

He was so devoted to you and his sister Molly, Monica and brothers, his one thought was for you to be comfortable and happy. I do hope your other son has returned safely to you.

My sincere wishes to you all  
Elizabeth Lource

(This is a copy of a typed version of the original letter.)