

Feature Story

The Night of Remembrance Day

At 1630 hrs on 11 November 1944, Edward Charman and his crew took off from RAF Waddington, in Lancaster NF917 (squadron code PO-Q) to bomb the Rhenania-Ossag oil refinery, at Harburg, near Hamburg Germany. They were loaded with 1 x 1000 lb bomb and 14 x 4lb clusters. There were 19 Lancasters from 467 Squadron taking part in the attack, but flak and night fighters awaited them, and not all would return.

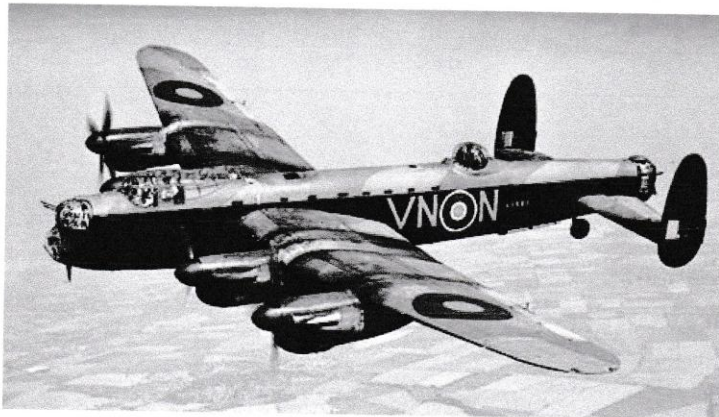
Edward George Charman was born in Bunbury, WA on 18 April 1924, the son of Ernest Edward Charman and Selina Holly Charman. Edward (Ted) was the second of seven children and attended Harvey State School, where he passed his Junior Certificate, and excelled at tennis, athletics and swimming. On leaving school at 16, he was employed as a junior clerk with the Liquid Fuel Control Board, and completed an accountancy course at Hartills Commercial College, Perth.

With his sights set on the RAAF, Ted joined Air Training Corps 77SQN, (Claremont) on 3 February 1942. On turning 18 he enlisted in the RAAF on 25 May 1942 and commenced basic training at No.4 Initial Training School, Victor Harbor.

After completing the course, he was selected as wireless operator/air gunner and posted to No.1 Wireless and Air Gunners School, Ballarat. Here he learned Morse and radio theory and trained on the CAC Wackett. Further training was given at No.3 Bombing and Gunnery School, West Sale, where he practiced gunnery in the Fairey Battle. He successfully completed the course and was awarded his Air Gunners brevet on 19 August 1943.

Ted was destined for Bomber Command and after farewelling his family in Cottesloe, he embarked from Melbourne on 27 September 1943, bound for San Francisco. He then travelled by train to New York, where he marvelled at the skyscrapers and joined other West Australians at the ANZAC Club. A few days later, he was on a crowded troopship crossing the U-boat infested North Atlantic.

After a misty arrival in the Clyde on 9 November 1943, Ted was billeted at the RAAF reception centre in Brighton. With two weeks leave, he visited London



Avro Lancaster. Courtesy Aviation Heritage Museum, Bull Creek

and the Boomerang Club in Australia House. He must have signed the guest book, because his name later appeared in the Australian newspapers.

His first posting was to No.10 Advanced Flying Unit at Dumfries, Scotland, where he was instructed on the Marconi radio in the twin engine Anson. He was then posted to 27 Operational Training Unit, Lichfield, where he trained on Wellington Bombers with his newly formed crew.

Ted was in good company, as he described in an airgraph to his sister Ailsa: "I am crewed up now and am very pleased to state that I have a WA man for skipper and the rear gunner is also from WA ... It is certainly a small world alright, because the cobbler of the skipper remembers the name Charman in Harvey and knows nearly all the people I do."

The close-knit crew were given a short course at Aircrew School, Scampton, Lincolnshire, before moving up to four engine bombers at 1654 Heavy Conversion Unit, Wigsley, where they converted to the Avro Lancaster.

Finally, their training was complete, and on 28 August 1944 they were posted to 467SQN, at RAF Waddington, Lincolnshire. Ted's crew were soon into operations over France and Germany, and by 11 November were considered an experienced crew. However, on this significant day, they would run out of luck in their attack on the Rhenania-Ossag oil refinery.

Rear gunner Thomas Nilen later reported: "At 20,500 feet on course to

target, visibility bad with misty cloud all above and below. We were all on lookout for target but must have overshot. I suddenly picked up TIs [target indicators] behind, so skipper decided to orbit and come on to target on current heading. Just as we dropped the starboard wing we were hit. I surmise it was in the bomb load. The ship must have disintegrated. When I came to I was travelling down, so I pulled the ripcord and landed breaking my leg in doing so. Only for having my seat type chute I would not have had a chance."



FSGT Edward Charman.
Courtesy Joyce Lerma.

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Rear: George French (mid upper gunner), Edward Leake (bomb aimer), Geoffrey "Bushy" Goodfellow (navigator), Edward Charman (wireless operator).
Courtesy Joyce Lerma.



Charman children – Joyce (m. Lerma), Myrtle "Dimpy", Violet "Cuddles", John "Jack", Glen Mae, Edward "Ted", Ailsa. *Courtesy Joyce Lerma.*

The aircraft had been hit by flak and crashed near the village of Ramelsloh, ten miles south of Hamburg. FSGT Nilen became a POW and spent three months in German hospitals until liberated by the American Army. The rest of the crew were all killed: FLGOFF Thomas Eyre (pilot), FSGT Geoffrey Goodfellow (navigator), FSGT Edward Leake (bomb aimer), SGT Henry Boardman (flight engineer), FSGT George French (air gunner) and FSGT Edward Charman (wireless operator/air gunner).

A total of 237 Lancasters and 8 Mosquitoes made up the attacking force, of which 7 Lancasters were shot down, including two from 467SQN. There was little damage to the refinery, but severe damage to the town of Harburg.

Soon after Ted went missing, his parents received the much-feared telegram. His youngest sister Joyce recalled, "Everyone went very quiet, and I was not told anything at the time". Ted's CO also sent a condolence letter: "The loss of your son has deprived the squadron of a wireless operator of great promise, whose characteristic skill and courage was an inspiration to us all." There was still hope that Ted was a POW, but a year later, his death was presumed.

Edward Charman was buried near the crash site in a communal grave for the crew, in Brackel village churchyard. In November 1947 he was reburied in Kiel War Cemetery, and shortly afterward, his proud father visited his

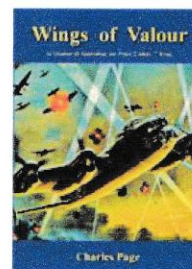


Ernest Chapman at Kiel War Cemetery.
Courtesy Joyce Lerma.

son's grave. The temporary white cross was later replaced by a headstone, which reads, "Till we meet again".

Edward Charman will always be remembered, especially as he died on 11 November - Remembrance Day.

Edward Charman is one of 51 Air Cadets from Western Australia who died in service. He is commemorated at the Australian War Memorial and Kings Park Memorial, Perth. The RAAFA WA Australian Air Force Cadets Branch have unveiled an Honour Board at the Aviation Museum, Bull Creek, Perth and at 7 Wing (WA) AAFC Pearce. The Cadets are also honoured in the book *Wings of Valour* by Charles Page, a copy of which is displayed in a glass topped Remembrance Cabinet at 7 Wing HQ, RAAF Pearce.



Wings of Valour, by Charles Page

Author of:
Wings of Valour
Wings of Destiny, and
Vengeance of the Outback,
Wings of Valour is available through the author.
 \$37.00 inclusive of postage.
 Email: chaz747@bigpond.com

Sources:
 National Archives,
 Charman E G
 427184 service
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 Australian War
 Memorial
 Aviation Museum,
 Bull Creek
 Joyce Lerma (sister)
 Charles Page
 Project Manager
 History, RAAFA WA,
 AAFC Branch