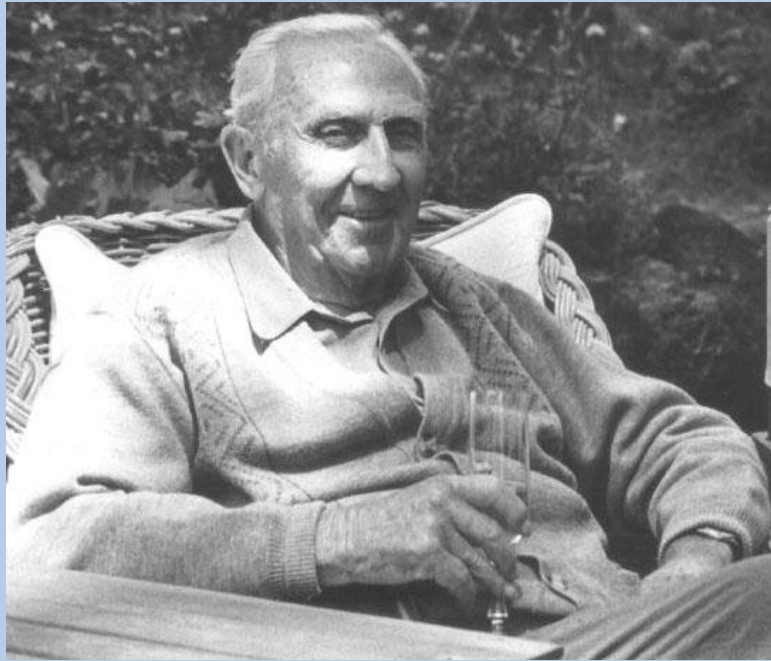


# My Life

by

Robert Hollow



Written during 1998

## Introducing Robert Hollow.

Robert Keith Hollow was the youngest of eight children born to Alfred Hollow and Margaret Leitch. Alfred was a descendent of the Redruth Hollows, his father and grandfather, both Joseph Hollow settled in El Dorado in Northern Victoria during the 1850s. Alfred was born in El Dorado in 1868 and worked as a miner there in his early life. At the time of his marriage in 1899 he was a miner at Rutherglen 30 miles North-west of El Dorado.

## My Life by Robert Hollow

I was born at Rutherglen on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1914, the youngest son of Alfred and Margaret Hollow.

Two of my brothers died before I was born and the rest of the family in order of age were Ivy Esme, Alfred Mervyn, Colin Charles, Lillian May and Hilda Gwendoline. Our home was a small settlement called North Prentice outside Rutherglen.

When I was five our family moved to Wangaratta, Ivy and Alf started teaching at this time.

We attended the Methodist church and Sunday school. At one of the Sunday school picnics I was able to save Jack Harman, a small child who had fallen into a deep hole in the creek. His family later on presented me with an expensive tennis racquet.

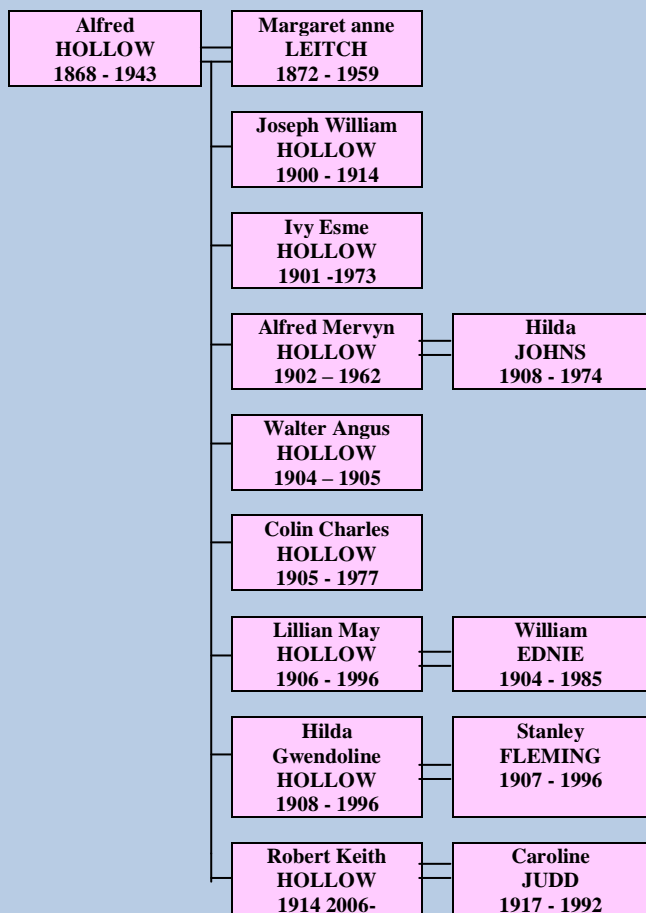
I attended the Wangaratta primary and high schools and matriculated in 1930. In my final year I became the boy captain of Ovens house and school captain. At the combined secondary school sports at Beechworth I won the 100 yards sprint in the time of 11 seconds and the 220 in 24 seconds, both records. These stood for many years. Actually Ailsa was in the senior years at high school when they were broken. Our relay team who won at these sports also won gold medals in a relay at the Benalla R.S.L. sports.

At the end of my last year at high school I was presented with the W.E. Davies Memorial Prize for sport, influence and general helpfulness to the school. The girl winner was Doris Keir exactly the same age as me. After matriculating I applied for positions in the Education Department, the Post Office, railways and the four banks in Wangaratta but it was the time of the great depression and no juniors were being taken on.

During the next year or so I worked at odd jobs such as lopping trees, on a tobacco farm, etc. At that time the Waratah football team was formed in Wangaratta later being the Wangaratta Rovers. I played with them and as a result was offered a position in the butter factory in the cream room. While playing with the Waratahs I was voted the fairest and best player one year receiving a silver cup.

At the Butter Factory I received a wage of four pounds twelve shillings a week, but in the spring I sometimes had to work until 11 or 12 o'clock at night if the trucks got bogged. This was above the basic wage for men and I was only eighteen. This was a permanent position but I always wanted to be a teacher so when I was offered a position as a junior teacher at Walwa some 140 miles from home I accepted it.

## The Children Of Alfred and Margaret Hollow



Alfred and Margaret had eight children whilst living at North Prentice, a mining settlement, just outside Rutherglen.

Around 1920 the family moved to Wangaratta. Alfred worked for some time as a powder monkey in a mining operation at El Dorado, about 10 miles from Wangaratta. He rode by push bike to work on Monday mornings laden with supplies for the week and returned each Friday evening. Around 1930 the mine (Cock's Pioneer) closed and he found work in Wangaratta at Irving's timber yard.

Robert, or Bob as he is more commonly known as, wrote down his story in 1998.

My wages as a junior teacher were thirty-two shillings a week and I had to pay twenty-five shillings a week board. Later I applied for a school nearer Wangaratta and was posted to Chiltern. I had to borrow money to send a telegram home for money to get there.

At Chiltern I met Alma Harvey and after going to teacher's college in Melbourne in 1936 I became engaged to her. Later we broke it off.

At the teachers college I played in the football team in the top amateur competition and received college colours for football and swimming. Receiving my Trained Primary Teachers Certificate (T.P.T.C.) at the end of the college year. I was sent as a temporary teacher in 1937 to Winton North and Branji before receiving a permanent position to Myrhee, south of Wangaratta. After two years I moved to Neilborough East and boarded at the Shamrock Hotel in Neilborough. Just before this I bought my first car, a secondhand A model Ford coupe. My intention was to travel into Bendigo to attend the School of Mines to get further qualification but I met Carrie who later became my wife and I never got near the School of Mines.

The War had started so in 1940 I enlisted in the R.A.A.F. for aircrew, but I had to have a specialist examine my nose and throat before I was accepted. When accepted I had to study

mathematics but this was no worry as I was able to complete the work in a few weeks. I was not called up until July 1941 and after initial training at Victor Harbour I was selected for training as a pilot. I became engaged to Carrie at this time and thinking I would finish my training in Australia and that it would be four months or more before I finished training we planned to get married after I got my wings.

I trained on Tiger Moths at Benalla and after seven hours of instruction I went solo, a very thrilling time for me. Carrie

came over to Benalla several times and I was able to take her to meet my parents for the first and only time before we were married.

On completion of my course at Benalla the officer in charge of my flying recommended me for training on multi-engine planes, I had made up my mind that I wanted to be a fighter pilot on single engine planes. I approached the officer whom told of his decision at our wind up night and after a few drinks and a lot of talk he agreed to alter his recommendation to either single or multi-engine training.

I found out that we were going to Canada to complete our training and rang Carrie straight away. It was then that we decided to get married on my final leave only about a week away.

Carrie had to make all the arrangements and get her wedding gown and also arrange for Gwen Bassett, her friend, to be bridesmaid. My brother Colin was best man. We were married in the vestry of the Bendigo Catholic Cathedral as Carrie was a catholic and I wasn't.

We went to Melbourne on our honeymoon but visited our parents to say farewell. I had to report to Bradfield Park in Sydney to be ready for sailing to Canada and we were lucky to get a room in the same house as a friend of mine, Alan Egan, was living. He and his wife Ivy had just been married too.

Alan and I had to report to our camp every day but got home about four o'clock every day. The four of us had a great time seeing the sights of Sydney and the harbour. We warned our wives that we would have stay at the camp if we were going to board ship.



**Bob and Carrie (Caroline Judd) at Footscray after their engagement in 1941.**



**ID Photo – Robert Keith Hollow, 1941**

When the time came and we had not arrived home the girls came out to the camp that night and the guard on the gate said we could not go out but sent word to us that they would be at the corner of the wire fence surrounding the camp. When we met the girls Alan and I climbed over the fence and spent several hours with our

wives. I got anxious about 12 o'clock and we decided to go back. We had just got over the fence when the siren went for a parade where roll was called.

Next morning buses took us to our ship, the "Monterey", at the Sydney wharf. Our wives saw the buses and followed and were able to get on a ferry that followed our ship out to the Sydney heads.

The Monterey was an American pleasure ship and we were treated as ordinary passengers and the food was terrific. As America had not entered the war against Germany the ship was lit up at night and for us it was a pleasure cruise. The ship called in to Auckland, Fiji, Samoa, and Hawaii. The news that we Australian airmen were on the ship must have spread for at every place we visited there were people to take us sight seeing and to entertain us. At Hawaii we saw Pearl Harbour with all the warships and it was just a week before the Japs bombed it. When we arrived there quite a few aircraft came and flew around our ship to welcome us.

We landed in America at San Francisco and marched through the city to Oakland where we boarded a train for Vancouver in Canada. We spent a day in Vancouver and four of us were picked up by a man in a large car and were taken on a tour of the city. Most of the others in the group had similar tours.

From there we travelled across Canada to our new station, Camp Borden, in Ontario. The ones who were to train on Multi-

engine planes got off just before at Winnipeg.

Our trip was rather dreary although we used to keep up a supply of beer in a bucket of snow by buying fresh supplies each stop. The trip took about five days and we couldn't have a shower so we felt pretty dirty.

We reached Camp Borden just as it got dark so we had to spend the night in the train. Needless to say the showers at the camp were very busy next morning. All the buildings at the camp were centrally heated and we had double bunks in our sleeping quarters. As this was their winter there was snow everywhere and we were issued with caps like tea cosies and fur lined over boots that went over our shoes. As this was No 1 Training Camp we had many facilities for our spare time. The recreation building had a basketball court, bowling alley and a place where you could borrow ice skates, skis, bows and arrows and practically every sporting equipment you wanted.

Our first month was spent on ground subjects such as navigation, theory of flight etc. One section was the Link trainer where a machine with a cockpit and all aircraft dials indicating air speed, rate of climb and other instruments we were able to practice our navigation etc. It was there that I became a friend of one of the officers in charge who helped me later when I had a crash.

The next month we started flying in more powerful planes, the Yale and the Harvard. It was rather awkward at first for being juniors we usually had to fly the Yale plane. It was a plane built for the French airforce so all instruments were in French. Instead of miles per hour it was kilometres per hour so we had to learn to convert. All printing on the instrument panel was in French. In addition they had no cockpit heating so we had to rug ourselves up very well. We were given warmer clothing, as it was winter.

The landing field was rolled every morning to firm down the snow. Sometimes when there was a thaw the concrete runways

were visible and we had to land on them. On one occasion after a thaw as I was landing the wheels on my plane struck a patch of ice and the plane skidded around and one wing hit the ground and was badly damaged. I had to make a report on what happened and was very worried but my officer friend at the Link trainer informed me the Chief Flying Officer



**Bob at Camp Borden, Ontario, Canada**



had done the same before me.

We were there for Christmas but were invited by people to Toronto to spend our leave with them. I had a wonderful Christmas with a family and the people in the whole street had a party.

Our flying consisted of acrobatics and blind flying that was done by putting a hood over us. We had to have another pilot in an open cockpit with us as safety officer. We were tested on our flying and our navigation and had to do a navigation test with our instructor. The test was to fly a triangular course that we planned before going out, giving the courses we were to fly and the estimated time we would get to each point. However I was surprised, for after reaching the first place on the triangular course I was told to circle and go under the hood and tell him where we were and then set a course for our base and tell him our time of arrival there. That meant I had to find out where I was on my map, guess the direction of our base and our time of arrival. I was lucky enough to finish up within sight of our base at my estimated time of arrival. I got an above average report.

Three of us were selected to make reports on the suitability of the trainees for officers. I don't know how I got the job but I think my officer friend had something to do with it. After our tests we had a wings parade where our wings were pinned on us. Before the parade we all spent hours sewing on our sergeants' stripes and after receiving my wings I was selected to receive a commission as a pilot officer. I was very proud when I sent a cable to Carrie and my mother to tell them. After the wings parade the ones selected as officers were invited to the officer's mess for drinks.

Next day arrangements had been made for us to spend our leave in New York. We had to get a number of signatures and injections before leaving and then we set off by train. An Australian club there entertained us and it only cost us for our accommodation at the hotel. The people took us everywhere and paid our expenses. One gentleman put his car at the disposal of us with a driver to take us sight seeing. The driver paid for everything, meals and all.

After leaving New York we went to Halifax in Newfoundland to wait for transport to England. Our group was flat broke but I, as an officer, received my salary before my sergeant mates so I was able to lend them money to go on with. We sailed for England on the "Batory", a Polish ship, in a convoy with warships all around us. As an officer I had to wear a white armband and was in a cabin on one of the top decks. My mates as sergeants were crammed in cabins holding about eight of them and only able to get one bottle of beer a day if they were lucky.

I and another mate of mine, also an officer, sent one of our white armbands down to our sergeant mates and they took it in turn to come up to the officer's mess for drinks with us.

We landed in Scotland and travelled down to Bournemouth by train. We passed through Bath on the way down and saw the damage done by the bombing the night before. Great areas of buildings were flattened and some were still smouldering. At Bournemouth we officers lived in an eight-storey building and had our meals at a large hotel. Here we had our first bombing for light bombers attacked the town. Most of us went up to the roof and saw them coming. Luckily no bombs fell near our building. We officers were measured for our uniforms and were given officers' caps and greatcoat. We were to have a week's leave and a group of people led by Lady Macdonald of the Isles arranged places for us. Don Meredith and I wanted a country holiday and were sent to a farm in Brandarby in Yorkshire. The people we stayed with owned the whole village and were very wealthy. They gave us a wonderful time. On going back to Bournemouth I got my full uniform and had my photo taken.



**Pilot Officer Robert K Hollow, the "Official" photo.**

My next station was near Wolverhampton and there we worked on aeroplane engines and were able to see many of the planes in service especially the spitfire. After about a fortnight there we were sent to a station near Peterborough. There we flew Miles Masters as a refresher course. It was at this station we went to the local dance. Noel Gray and I met some girls and after the dance went to get some drinks and on the way

through the crowd I spilt all the beer down a lady's frock. As a result, after she came back from changing, she asked us for dinner at her home on the Sunday. Mr and Mrs Charles Russell gave us a wonderful time as they made it into a large party. After we left Peterborough we used to go to see them even if it was only for a day.

Our next station was Hawarden near Chester and it was an operational training station on spitfires. During an exercise on low-level formation the throttle on my plane broke off and my engine was only idling. As I was over a densely populated area I decided to try to glide to Hawarden. Unfortunately the spitfire doesn't glide very well and I was just about at the aerodrome when I went through a tree. I left my wings in the tree and slid for about two hundred yards before finishing in a barbwire entanglement on the edge of the drome with the fuselage broken in the cockpit area. I was lucky although I bashed my head on the gun sight I only had two black eyes, a split just below my eyebrow and several cuts on my bottom.

I was taken by ambulance to the sick bay but was able to walk in and sit in the waiting area. Nurses were rushing around getting things ready and then the matron came in asking where the crash victim was. Next day I was released from sick bay and had to report to the flight area and made to fly for half an hour to see if I had lost my nerve. I was paraded before the commanding officer and told I could have some leave. I refused, as I wanted to stay with my mates.

However after finishing the course I was sent to an English squadron, number 41, Noel stayed on as an instructor and the others went to different squadrons. Noel later went to a squadron and was shot down and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. Noel got in touch with me later as he was at a farm at Thoona, not far from St James and found some of my friends there.

After spending about two months with the 41 squadron, seeing a little action over England and the channel I was sent back to Australia. My last week at the squadron was training on night flying, as they were to become night fighters. I was rather pleased to get out of it especially as I was going home.

I went to Canada on the "Queen Elizabeth" and it was crammed. I was in a cabin where the three tiers of bunks had just enough room between them for one man to get dressed. We showered in salt water but had a jug of water for cleaning teeth etc. On reaching Canada we immediately went by train to New York and were supposed to board ship and sail immediately for home. However the "Sarpedon" had a Chinese crew who walked off the ship and we had to wait for a new crew from Canada. We didn't mind, as we were able to spend Christmas and New Year in New York. We lived on the ship but were able to go into the city by ferry. Naturally we spent most of our time there. I had nearly thirty invitations to

## **A Knight In Dull Armour.**

First, if its anything but high summer, dress up warmly, the temperature above 30,000 feet falls to minus 60 degrees Fahrenheit and they haven't got around to heating fighter cockpits, yet.

Thick underwear, long socks, heavy sweater under your uniform. Fleece lined leather flying boots (you can keep maps tucked in the top of them) easiest place to reach in flight. Put your revolver in the other boot if you bothered to bring it. It'll jerk out when your parachute opens anyway.

Now your flying overalls, nobody wears the heavy SidCot suit now, so its just a light weight job to keep oil off your uniform. Then the Mae West - your life saving jacket. A bright yellow waistcoat with a thick Kapok filled collar to keep your hear above the water and a whistle in a pocket (if you believe that blowing a whistle, whilst floating in the English channel will help).

Flying helmet, leather, with earphones built in over each ear, an oxygen mask with microphone that fits over nose, cheeks and chin and always smells like old rubber, goggles too. Suprisingly good vision but not all pilots wear them; some use them just with tinted lens, pulled them down when looking into the sun. Still they may save your eyes if the instrument panel starts blowing petrol back in your face. It's up to you.

You don't leave your parachute in the cockpit unless its a fine day and you're expecting a "Scramble". You'll never need a parachute of course, put it in before you climb in. Straps around waist, over shoulders, up between your legs, and pull them tight unless you want to break your back when it opens. You'll walk out to the aircraft like a ruptured chimpanzee, but the ground crew will give you tactful nudges with their shoulders to help you climb onto the wing.

Your seat is just a shallow pan designed to fit the parachute pack. You sit on the chute. They used to have rubber cushions between it and you but replaced it with a one man dinghy pack. Not as comfortable but possibly more useful. What feels like a lump of sharp metal under your backside is the CO<sub>2</sub> bottle for inflating the dinghy in a hurry.

Strap yourself in: Straps over the shoulder and up across the thighs. Tight, Tighter still. If you find yourself on your back you don't want to be rolling, around the cockpit like a pea in a drum. Plug in your R/T lead and your oxygen tube - something like an elephants trunk dangling from your mask.

The cockpit: It's a spitfire, fits you like a glove. It just almost touches your shoulders on either side. The perspex canopy almost touches your head above. You can move your booted feet a few inches in either direction. You can stretch your arms right forward or down, but need to bend your elbow if you pull them back up. No matter you can control a fighter with just a few inches of movement of your hands and feet

You can still turn your head. You can turn it like a roulette wheel if you think a non-friend might be behind you. You should have remembered to wear a silk scarf of stocking to stop fighter pilot's neck. Tie it tight and tuck it in. It might strangle you if it catches when you try to ball out.

That's about right. You can move your hands, feet and head the few inches that are required; your Spitfire will do the rest. You are the most powerful, the fastest, the most maneuverable fighting man in the world.

From a training handout, 1941.

Christmas dinner by people in the street that saw we were Australians. Arrangements had been made for us to go to a country club for the day.

At most of the nightclubs we were allowed in without any cover charge. On one occasion three of us went to have a drink in the flash men's bar at the Waldorf Astoria. We ordered our drinks and the waiter came and told us a gentleman at another table would like us to join him at his table. He spent some time with us and then when he was leaving said he would put his car and driver at our disposal next day. That day we were driven around the city and the driver paid for everything. That night the gentleman picked us up and took us to Harlem, the Negro quarter of the city. We had an American Negro lawyer with him and we finished up at a Negro nightclub, "The Harlem Hot Spot". There we had a few dances with the Negro women.

On New Year's Eve we decided to take a room at a hotel in 42<sup>nd</sup> street so that we could see the celebrations in the city. We had arranged to meet others of our group in the Astor Hotel on the corner of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Broadway. It was some time before midnight when we went to meet them but Broadway was so packed with people that we were carried past the hotel and had to go around the block and try again.

At one restaurant the owner gave us cards showing his place and we wrote messages on them and he offered to send

them home for us. Carrie received my card some weeks before we got home so she knew I was on my way home.

Our first port of call on the way home was Cuba but we were not allowed to get off the ship. On reaching Christobel, the entrance to the Panama Canal, we were allowed off the ship and spent a day there. Travelling through the canal was very interesting for the ship had to be lifted up in a series of locks so it could go through a lake in the middle then be lowered again the other side. The ship went through the first lock and a

large heavy gate closed behind it. Water was then pumped in raising the ship up higher.

After passing the canal we set off across the Pacific Ocean to New Zealand. We had no escort ships and the ship had two big guns. We had to take it in turns at night to watch for enemy ships or submarines. The ship was only travelling slowly so it took some time to reach home. The food was mostly rice with some meat, which was going off by the time we reached New Zealand. We came around the west coast of Tasmania before reaching Melbourne and the sea was very rough. Waves were breaking well over the ship's bridge and we couldn't go out on deck.

When we got home we had a couple of week's leave and Carrie and I spent it by visiting my family and her family. After the leave I was posted to Mildura for a refresher course on flying and Carrie came up with me.

After Mildura I was posted to a station outside Newcastle but Carrie couldn't be with me there. We flew spitfires there as a refresher course.

After this I was posted to Woolloomana, a place not far from Laverton, where 79 Spitfire Squadron was being formed. I had flown spitfire before, I was selected to take an advance party of



**Spitfire at Woolloomana, 1942**

twenty men up to Goodenough Island to build a camp for the squadron when it came up there. This island is off the northern coast of New Guinea and the landing strip was being built.

The site of our camp was at the foot of the mountains and to get to it we had to blast away a steep rise and make a road. On the campsite was a small native village and I had to buy the huts with a few tins of Bully Beef and about a dozen packets



of army biscuits. The natives had built other huts further up the hill near us and when they left I burnt the lot.

A group from 76 Squadron was also up there to build their camp alongside us. When the squadron arrived I had plenty of Bully Beef and biscuits so I got the men with me to store it near my tent. I told them that when the squadron arrived they could take some of it and trade with the natives for paw paw and bananas as long as they kept me supplied. So I always had plenty of fresh fruit for the pilots of the squadron.

When the squadron arrived we spent our time patrolling the area North of New Guinea and across to New Britain. A patrol was always sent out at dawn and two planes were on stand by until the rest of the squadron arrived about 8.30 am.

I was sent down at one stage to bring up a plane from Townsville. The CO told me to get supplies of whisky etcetera, and put it in the ammunition bins although Air Board said we were always to be fully armed. I flew from Townsville to Horn Island at the tip of Queensland and then across Torres Strait to Moresby. I had

to have a Beaufort bomber escort me across Torres Strait but I thought that if I went down in the sea all they could do was to tell the Airforce where I went down. From Moresby I flew to Milne Bay and then on to Kiriwina Island, further north from Goodenough Island where they had moved to while I was away.

The men who came up with me were the ones sent to prepare the new camp and I gave them instructions what I wanted near my tent. I found they had a copper and a water tap just outside my tent and the showers were only about fifteen yards away.

Our work on the islands was limited because although we had emergency fuel tanks attached we did not have the range to do much attacking. We mainly were to attack bombers going to bomb positions in New Guinea.

As I was up on the islands a month or so before the other pilots I was first to get home leave. After the leave I was sent to a camp in Canberra where there were Army officers at an Army Co-operation School where they learnt what the

Airforce could do for the Army. Eight Airforce pilots were there to fly the planes and demonstrate how the Air force could help the Army. The pilots flew them around demonstrating strafing, bombing, etc. After the course I was appointed to HQ Western Area in Perth to form an Air Support Section to help the Army. At first I was only collecting a wireless truck and wireless equipment then I got a wireless operator sergeant and a corporal for the section. I had to learn to code and decode messages to be sent to the Army by wireless. The section visited Army camps and demonstrated how the Air Force could help the Army by bringing in planes to strafe and bomb selected enemy positions. Unfortunately I split the tibia bone in my knee playing football and spent over

six months in hospitals in Perth and Melbourne and was grounded from flying.

When I was discharged from hospital I was sent to Watsonia to lecture aircrew going up to the islands on living and working in the islands.

Written during 1998.

*Bob was discharged from the Airforce in 1945 and returned to*

*teaching at Llanelly State School on November 11, 1945.*



**Bob at Kiriwina, 1943**

### **ROBERT (BOB) HOLLOW'S WAR HISTORY**

Victor Harbour, South Australia 20/6/41 – 19/8/41  
Benalla, Victoria 20/8/41 – 16/10/41  
Bradfield Park, N.S.W. 23/10/41 – 13/11/41  
SS Monterey 13/11/41 – 1/12/41  
Camp Borden, Ontario, Canada 8/12/41 – 27/3/42  
Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada 5/4/42 – 1/5/42  
Bournemouth, England 13/5/42 – 30/5/42  
Cosford, England 1/6/42 – 23/6/42  
Peterborough, England 26/6/42 – 20/7/42  
Hawarden, England 20/7/42 – 15/10/42  
No 41 Squadron, Llanbedr, Wales 25/10/42 – 28/11/42  
HMS Queen Elizabeth 3/12/42 – 8/12/42  
HMS Sarpedon 2/1/43 – 22/2/43  
Mildura, Vic. 11/3/43 – 2/4/43  
Williamstown, N.S.W. 6/4/43 – 5/5/43  
Wooloomanata, Vic., Goodenough Is., Kiriwina Is. 5/5/43 – 19/11/43  
Canberra, ACT 13/12/43  
Perth, Western Australia  
Watsonia, Vic.