

WING COMMANDER ATHOL GALWAY HOPE WEARNE, DSO, DFC
(Australia's Douglas Bader).

The exploits of Douglas Bader, DSO, DFC of the Royal Air Force are well known throughout the World of having lost both legs in an air crash accident in 1931 and rose to fly again in the second World War.

Douglas Bader was fitted with artificial legs and the doctor gave him a stick and told him he would never walk without one.

The Air Ministry decided that a pilot without legs could not fly. He was discharged from the Royal Air Force.

When war broke out in 1939 the Royal Air Force would only offer him a ground job, which he refused. By sheer persistence he fought his way back to flying and rejoined the Royal Air Force.

His exploits are well known, being documented in books and film.

What is not known is there is a parallel story in Australia of some similar circumstances where an Australian Royal Australian Air Force Officer lost portion of his leg to a shark and remained in the Air Force rising to the rank of Wing Commander.

Athol Galway Hope WEARNE was born in Midland Junction, Western Australia on 28 October 1916 and enlisted in the Royal Australia Air Force at Point Cook on 16 January 1939.

Whilst a Flying Officer, being aged 24 years he was swimming at Trinity Beach, 17 kilometres north of Cairns on 12 September 1942 when he was attacked by a shark. A person shouted a warning that a shark was in the area, but the shark grabbed Athol Weame before he could make the shoreline. A doctor who was with the party gave first aid and Athol Weame eventually recovered.

Unfortunately his right foot was severed and calf removed. His leg was surgically amputated below the knee. It was believed a tiger shark 2.4m to 3 m in length attacked Athol.

Incidentally three years later; an Australian serviceman was savaged and died on the same beach. A third attack, also on Trinity Beach on 19 April 1946 resulted in a male person being attacked by a shark. Unfortunately he died of lacerations to the leg beach he could reach hospital.

Athol Weame was a member of both Nos 1 and 20 Squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force.

No 20 Squadron was formed at Port Moresby in New Guinea on 1 August 1941. Equipped with Catalina aircraft and Empire flying boats, the unit's first task was to conduct extensive seaward patrols and clear three Japanese vessels from Australian waters.

The squadron resisted Japanese landing forces at Kavieng and Rabaul in late January 1942 and maintained night bombing operations against these two targets throughout the year. Surprise Japanese aircraft attacks on Port Moresby during March resulted in the loss of several catalinas and the Squadron was forced to relocate to Bowen in Queensland in May

During 1943 the Squadron made regular combined attacks across New Britain, in support of allied plans to recover the island. The following year four aircraft were detached for operations from Manus Island.

The Squadron carried out operations over Bangka Strait, the Celebes and Java.

To-wards the end of the Second World War the Squadron flew mercy missions throughout the South-West Pacific Area.

In November 1945 the Squadron was based at Rathmines in New South Wales and it was disbanded on 27 March 1946.

Athol Weame was Commanding Officer of the Squadron from 30 May 1944 to 18 March 1945.

No 11 Squadron was formed as a general reconnaissance unit at RAAF Base Richmond on 29 September 1939. Three days after the outbreak of World War II, the Squadron was moved to Port Moresby, New Guinea. Reconnaissance patrols were commenced.

With the invasion of Japanese naval and air attacks in the Port Moresby area, the Squadron was relocated to Bowen Queensland on 7 May 1942.

After the cessation of hostilities on 14 August 1945, the Squadron carried out mercy flights.

The Squadron was disbanded on 15 February 1946.

It was reformed at Rathmines on 1 July 1945 from the Search and Rescue Wing at that location and continued to operate Catalina aircraft.

Athol Weame was the Commanding Officer of No 11 Squadron from 1 July 1948 to 4 November 1948.

Later Athol Weame commanded the RAAF School of ground training at Rathmines.

He was discharged on 28 October 1968 at Williamstown holding the rank of Wing Commander.

He was awarded the Companion of the Distinguished Service Order and Distinguished Flying Cross.

Athol Weame retired to Toronto and passed away in 2005.

References:

The RAAF and the Flying Squadron - Norman Barnes
WW2 Nominal Roll, Department of Veteran Affairs
Shark Down Under - Alan Sharpe
Reach for the Sky - Paul Brickell

Mr Dick Wills

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Dear Sir

RE PROPOSED AFA NSW NEWSLETTER

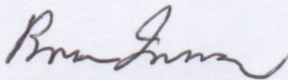
Mr Brian Morelli gave me a copy of the attached email regarding your proposed newsletter.

I am a member of the RAAF National Service Rare Breed Association having carried out national service training at Rathmines in 1955.

Attached is a copy of an article which I have written regarding Wing Commander Athol Galway Hope Wearne who had his right foot severed and calf removed as a result of a shark attack at Trinity Beach near Cairns on 12 September 1942.

Bearing in mind the huge amount of publicity which is being given regarding shark attacks, I thought this article which I have written might be of interest.

Yours faithfully



Brian Inman

B.F. Inman