

Lieutenant Wilfred Allinson Taylor

December 12th 1922
9th Division Signals -
SX16674



2023 Premier's Anzac Spirit School's Prize

Wilfred Allison Taylor was born on December 12th, 1922 in Norwood, South Australia and was one of two children to parents Sidney and Dorothy. He spent his upbringing playing various sports including football, tennis, and bike racing, of which he won an open bicycle race at Appila. At the age of 16, Taylor's family relocated to Whyalla where he would attend Whyalla High School until Year 11 (Taylor, 2023). Prior to enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force, Taylor served as a postmaster in Eudunda for three years and reflected that it was a relatively easy job.



Source 1: Wilfred with this sibling, parents, and Aunt (Taylor, 2023).

Military service was a family trait, Taylor's father Sidney having served in France during World War I and in 1918 received a near-fatal wound in his rear abdomen, so large "you could put a fist in" (Bendall, 2006).

Taylor enlisted in Whyalla on January 21st, 1942, aged 19 years and was placed in the 2/8 Armoured Regiment. This unit was originally formed in Bendigo, Victoria, as part of the 2nd Armoured Brigade and would serve in the Pacific during World War II. One month after enlisting, Taylor was transferred to a signal training depot in Bendigo where he received several promotions and eventually was promoted to Lieutenant, Signals Reinforcements in April 1943 (Taylor, 2023).

Taylor embarked on the *HMT Katoomba* at Townsville on October 21st, 1943, bound for Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, with the 2/8 Armoured Regiment Signals Troop. Four days after his arrival, Taylor marched into the Reinforcement Depot in Donadabu; He would serve here for four months where his regiment's job was to defend the Allied airfields from Japanese forces while he overlooked the wireless section. Most of Taylor's time would be spent at the camp in Bootless Inlet.



Source 2: Taylor (bottom left) with the 2/8 Armoured Regiment Signals Troop (Taylor, 2023).

During their time in Port Moresby, the 2/8th Armoured Regiment would relieve the 2/6th Armoured Regiment after the battles of Buna and Milne Bay (Australian War Memorial 2023), however Taylor would be placed in Donadabu waiting to be posted and kept other soldiers in check (Taylor, 2023). Whilst there, Taylor received a small Christmas parcel containing a bar of soap, a small piece of chocolate, and a handful of razor blades from an unknown source. He wrote back to the mystery sender to find out it was a woman named Lorna Craze and they continued to send messages back and forth (Bendall, 2006).

Reflecting on his experiences in Papua New Guinea, Taylor expressed his gratitude for the situation despite the frequent rain and poor living conditions. He remarked that the locals would run in and out of mess halls and tents and he had a complete lack of privacy. Taylor recalled the Japanese frequently patrolling at night in their A6M Zeros and that he took it upon himself to lift everyone's spirits by listening to American signals who also patrolled the night in their Night-Fighters. Taylor recalled that his comrades found this amusing and distracted them from the Zeros and the looming threat of being under attack (Taylor, 2023).



Source 3: Taylor took this photograph of Bootless Inlet (Taylor, 2023).

One night the United States Night-Fighters flew low over Taylor's position which enabled him to intercept their radio communications. Taylor recalls the American pilots saying on their frequencies, "*What's down there you see friend or foe... they look friendly enough to me*" (Taylor, 2023). On February 1st, 1944, Taylor's time in Papua New Guinea ended and he embarked on the *MS Brastagi* for Brisbane.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Mitsubishi A6M Zero's were deadly aircraft during the war in the Pacific (Australian War Memorial, 1945).

On February 5th, 1944, Taylor disembarked and was escorted to a regiment in Singleton, Victoria where he would be put on lookout and was given a faulty weapon, of which he did not realise until his service was up:

'They gave me a rifle ... so I used to have my magazine loaded, didn't have anything in the barrel ... at midnight walking back to my tents no one attacked me. Luckily I found out when we finished up they said "hand in your rifle" ... I went to eject all the cartridges and it wouldn't eject.'

(Taylor, 2023)

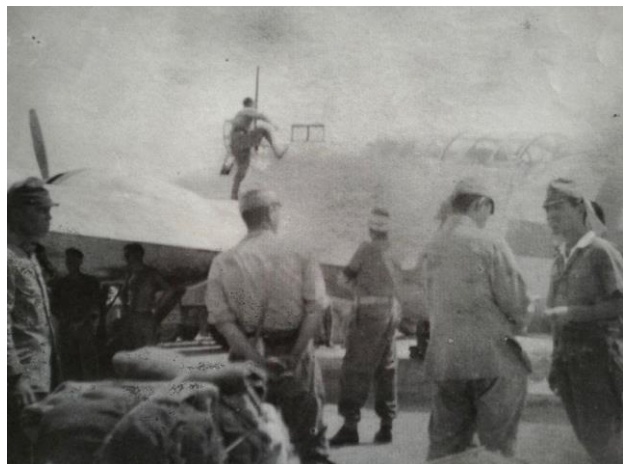
On the 20th of July, 1944, the 2/8th Armoured Regiment disbanded and Taylor relocated to Packapunyal, Victoria. It was here that he met with Lorna who fell head over heels in love with him, noting that he was funny and "*handsome, just like his photo ... He came to my house. It was a bit funny, but I made some scones and he thought they were alright*" (Bendall, 2006).

Almost a year later, Taylor marched out to the 1st Australian Corp Headquarters where he would be sent to Borneo on the *USS Sea Ray* to join the 9th Australian Division Signals in May, 1945. On June 25th, he disembarked at Morotai and engaged in amphibious battle training to prepare for his next mission as part of *Oboe VI*, whose main goal was to liberate North Borneo which had previously been invaded by Japanese forces in 1942 due to its strategic value of oilfields (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2005). Taylor was flown to the island of Labuan and recalled the hunger and fatigue he felt walking to headquarters after chopping through grass that was *“as thick as bamboo”* (Taylor, 2023).

The 28th and 43rd Battalions went ashore and moved inland until they encountered enemy resistance. Allied forces engaged in aerial bombing and artillery to attack the Japanese enemy who withdrew inland before launching a counter attack on American and Australian troops (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019). The 2/28th Battalion were able to move in on the enemy in an area called ‘The Pocket’ after the use of flame-throwing Matilda tanks which blasted and burnt out the Japanese bunkers (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2005). The result was horrific with Japanese bodies being so badly dismembered that an accurate body count was impossible, of which Taylor recalled that this was an unpleasant experience and commented on the smell and how *“they stunk ... and had it a lot worse than I did”* (Taylor, 2023).

The 13th Battalion would soon discover the emaciated Indian prisoners of war at Lutong and Taylor learnt of the horrific treatment of soldiers at the hands of the Japanese (Australian Associated Press, 1947; Anzac Portal, 2022). Over 22,000 Australian servicemen were captured by the Japanese across the Pacific war (Stanley, 2002); in Borneo POW’s were subject to mass beatings and were assaulted with *“pick handles and sword sticks, and stones were thrown at them by the guards. Mass beatings occurred regularly and for no apparent reason.”* (Australian War Memorial, n.d.)

Two weeks later, after rejoining the 9th Australian Division Signals, Taylor witnessed the surrender of the Japanese lieutenant-general Masoa Baba, Commander of the Japanese 37th Army and Supreme Commander of Japanese forces in Borneo. During this event he was shocked but later reflected that a *“little Jap bloke with 6ft ‘6 commandos escorting him”* was a funny sight (Taylor, 2023). Taylor photographed this moment and is shown right. Baba would later be tried, convicted, and executed for war crimes relating to the Sandakan death march.



After the Japanese surrender in August 1945, British and Australian efforts focused on rebuilding the towns and villages of Borneo as part of The British Borneo Civil Affairs Unit. In September 1945, Japanese forces were ordered to identify the bodies and mark the graves of the 600 people who had died due to neglect in Sandakan (Cheong, 1945). The living conditions at Sandakan were repulsive, with the prisoners of war having to drink muddy and diseased water and only 11 lbs of rice per day (Australian War Memorial, 2023).

On October 16th, 1945 he was detached to the Sandakan Relief force which was home to one of the deadliest prisoner of war camps and was the beginning of the notorious Sandakan death march (Australian War Memorial, 2019). One of Taylor's duties was to *"report on what communications are left, there wasn't much. Went to the post office ... I looked out the window and there's a nice mound of dirt so I let lightly on rather on going back the stairs and I found out later it was 250 pound unexploded bomb"* (Taylor, 2023). Taylor continued to serve at the headquarters in Labuan until February 7th, 1946, when he embarked the *SS Lake Charles Victory* for Brisbane before returning to South Australia to be discharged.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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Source 5: Sandakan Prisoner of War Camp October 24, 1945. The Commander of the North East Borneo Force examines the site of the camp's regimental aid post (Australian War Memorial, 1945).

Taylor returned to Whyalla and continued working as postmaster until his retirement in 1983 and celebrated this through a trip to New Zealand. He married his sweetheart Lorna (dec.) and together had a son and daughter, and devoted his time coaching her netball team and eventually won three championships (Taylor, 2023).

Since returning from war, Taylor was an active member of the Morphett Vale RSL and attends Remembrance Day marches and Anzac Day ceremonies. He received a Commemorative Certificate and Medallion marking the end of World War II and was acknowledged for his 50th year with the RSL - three months before his 100th birthday - in 2020.

Taylor is a kind and caring person who doesn't let his past get to him. He found his experiences in the Pacific War educational and is grateful for all that he had been given. Taylor was and will always be an upholder of the Anzac spirit. His positive attitude and care for those around him influenced his attitude and approach to the war. In his service, Taylor would always find a way to make other soldiers laugh and light up their spirit and his embodiment of mateship and perseverance are some of his best qualities. No matter what obstacle has been in his way - whether that be grass as

thick as bamboo, the unpleasant sight of Sandakan, a complete lack of privacy in Papua New Guinea or the looming threat of death by the Japanese A6M Zeros - he has pushed through adversity with care for comrades.



Wilf Turns 100

Yes, in December our most senior Service Member, Wilf Taylor, reached the magic milestone and celebrated with family and friends at the RSL.



Images courtesy of the Morphett Vale & District Returned Services League Sub Branch, 2023.

At the start of 2023 I reached out to my previous HASS teacher to participate in the Premier's Anzac Spirit Schools Prize as I had previously enjoyed researching Anne Donnell's involvement in World War I in Year 9. However, as my ancestors who served in war were German and New Zealander, I began researching local service people as a starting point.

I explored Morphett Vale and District RSL website and searched through their digital Honour Board for potential servicepeople. I came across Wilfred's name and was intrigued as he had served in Borneo and Papua New Guinea and was still alive. I had researched Kokoda in class and wanted to learn more about this wartime history. I also found an article about Taylor in the RSL news section and thought that this would be a rare opportunity to interview a living veteran who served in World War II.



I reached out via email to Ron Payne, the President of Morphett Vale RSL, asking if Wilfred would be open to talking with me. Ron gave my email to Wilfred and we scheduled an interview time and location for the 24th of March. I went with my Nan to his house with some prepared questions and looked forward to hearing his responses. My Nan helped Wilfred get comfortable in the interview as this was the first time I had interviewed someone. This helped me grow my confidence which meant I could speak to Wilfred easily whenever I had a question to ask later on. It also helped me with a job interview a few days later. We spoke for two hours and he told me a lot about the war in the Pacific, the role of signals, as well as a few jokes. Before leaving, he handed me two books - *'Eyewitness to War'* and *'Borneo 1942-1945'*, to help with my research.

With the support of my teacher, we broke down Taylor's wartime experience chronologically and identified some areas to conduct further research such as the Sandakan death march and Oboe IV. I also went back to visit Wilfred several times to ask more questions and scan some photos and he gave me some newspaper clippings on Papua New Guinea and Borneo (see right). I found a book at my school library, *'Australian Prisoners of War'* which was written by the Department of Veteran Affairs, and helped me put myself in the shoes of Wilfred when he travelled to Sandakan.

I accessed Trove to locate newspapers that related to General Baba and his atrocities in Borneo to build my background knowledge. I also accessed the Virtual War Memorial Australia website to obtain sources of information however was disappointed that



nothing had been recorded yet - I hope that this biography will serve as a digital record of Taylor's service to his country and family.

Throughout the writing of Wilfred's biography I bonded with my Nan who really loves history but never learnt it at school in New Zealand as females had to learn nursing instead. I am grateful for this opportunity to not just me but also my Nan as it helped her explore her love of history and answered both of our questions. Due to economic circumstances, my Nan did not have these opportunities to learn as much growing up and I am grateful that I can.

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