

From the Archives

With the **VP 60** ceremonies to be celebrated over the weekend of 13-14 August it is opportune to look at Grammar's contribution to World War II. Eight women and three hundred and fifteen men enlisted into the various forces [164 army, 134 air force and 17 navy]. Thirty-seven Past Grammarians were killed in action, the greater number being from the air force. Though in total the numbers may not look large it must be remembered that enrolments in the period leading up to the War would rarely have approached more than two hundred per annum.

In an article such as this it is impossible to do justice to the wonderful contribution Past Grammarians made to the war effort. As a result I have chosen four Past Grammarians to use as examples of our contribution. Two of the saddest would have to be **Chester Parker** [1934] and **Frank Sides** [1930]. Frank Sides was a boarder from 1926-1930 and was, perhaps, our greatest cricketer ever. While at School he was selected to play for Queensland. At the time he was aged 16 years and 320 days and is still the youngest player to represent the State. In 1934 he moved to Victoria where he played 14 matches for the State and at the end of the 1938 season his first class batting average as 42.95. In the last first class innings he played he made a century for Victoria against Western Australia. At the outbreak of the war he enrolled in the army and was killed at Bougainville in 1943. A great cricketing career was cut short.

Chester Parker was Grammar's second Rhodes Scholar. While at Oxford University he enlisted in the Royal Navy [submarine division]. While serving on H.M. Submarine Thorn he lost his life, aged 26, when the submarine was sunk. It has never been found and his service is commemorated at the Portsmouth Naval Museum. Chester Parker was the only ex Grammarian who enlisted in the Navy and was killed in action.

Many Past Grammarians chose to enlist in the Air Force. Twenty-three of the thirty-seven Past Grammarians killed in action served in the Air Force. Many were also shot down over Europe and remained prisoners of war for the duration of hostilities. One such prisoner was **Bushy Parker** [1937] who features in *The Colditz Story*. He was renowned for his skills in opening doors and windows and was instrumental in aiding many officers escape from Colditz. He remained in the air force after the war and was killed in 1946 while testing jet propelled planes. **Michael Skinner** [1941] flew Beaufighters towards the end of the war and is remembered as being in the last plane to drop a bomb over Berlin. The School Archives has a copy of the document recognizing this fact. It is worth noting that six Past Grammarians were awarded D.F.C.'s for their bravery in the air.

Perhaps Grammar's most prominent contributor to the war effort is **Sir Lawrence Wackett** [1911], A.F.C., D.F.C., Knight Bachelor. Wackett left Grammar in 1911 telling P.F. Rowland that Latin and Greek were not for him. From a young age he was keen on aeronautics and flying. Joining the 1st Squadron AFC during World War I Wackett was in the squadron that allegedly shot down the Red Baron. After WW1 Wackett remained in the Air Force rising to the rank of Air Vice Marshall after the Second World War. He led the RAAF during the Korean War. Wackett is best remembered for his design of planes. Some of the planes he designed were the Wackett trainers [CA 6 and the A3-200] and the Woomera A23-1 Fighter Bomber. He was knighted for his contribution to the aircraft industry.

This report from the archives does not do full justice to all those past students who enlisted during World War 2. Many paid the supreme sacrifice while many who survived endured great hardships during the conflict.

They will always be remembered.

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