

Bomber crashed way into history

Lance Collis Badman

If you visit Lance Badman's soldier-settlement farm in Wrattobully in the South-East, you will find the name *Wanigela* on the gate.

Lance never spoke of his World War II experiences and few in the close-knit community knew what the name implied.

Lance was already enlisted in the RAAF Reserves when he married Jean Groom, from another Yacka family, in 1941, and by April, 1942 he was trained and assigned to 32 General Reconnaissance Squadron with Flight Officer Lex Halliday, and fellow crew members Alan Gawler and Ron Castles. Lance was the

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wireless operator and “death-seat” rear gunner.

Just two months later, they were on patrol from Horn Island in the Torres Strait when the bomber had to make a forced landing near the northern coast of New Guinea, as it was called then.

Lex Halliday had chosen a patch of tall kunai grass to make his landing, wheels down. He got out and took a look around, and decided it would make an excellent emergency landing ground.

While they waited to be rescued, the crew took photographs of themselves with crowds of locals who had come to take their first look

close-up at an aeroplane, bedecked with the kunai grass and showing the swathe they had made on landing. The plane was undamaged, so Halliday called for help and in the meantime asked the villagers to make a runway in the grass. Another Hudson flew in with fuel and both planes took off successfully.

The place was near a mission station, Wanigela, and it was about to take a crucial role in the war against the Japanese in New Guinea.

Halliday reported his find to Group Captain “Bull” Garing, the liaison officer between the RAAF and General Douglas MacArthur, who commanded the Pacific theatre of war. Garing inspected the Wanigela field and advised MacArthur it could be used to fly in soldiers to

tackle the Japanese, entrenched further along the coast at Buna.

MacArthur was distrustful of the entirely untried notion of airlifting his troops. But he was unable to cross the Owen Stanley Range from Port Moresby or attack Buna from the sea. The US and Australian air force officers argued they could fly troops over the Owen Stanleys to Wanigela.

In October, MacArthur relented and they received the go-ahead for Operation Hatrack. It involved engineers being flown in to Wanigela on October 4 and clearing a bigger runway with the help of the villagers. The next day, 1200



Diggers could be flown in from Milne Bay, followed by a further 3000 US troops flown over the mountains from Port Moresby in the US Army's first ever airlift.

Lance, with Halliday, Gawler and Castles, became the longest-serving crew of 32 Squadron, which was disbanded in 1945. Aside from the name *Wanigela* on the Wrattobully farm gate, the Badman family photograph album has a series of those photos taken after the forced landing. Lance, who was discharged medically unfit in May, 1945, never got back to New Guinea.

He was the youngest of four sons born to the progressive wheat and sheep farmers Albert and Ann at Yacka in the Mid North. Albert wanted a better education for his sons and also had political ambitions, so he moved to Adelaide in the mid-1920s and became a senator and later a federal MHR.

After World War II, the 17 soldier settlers of Wrattobully had to establish themselves. They built their own community hall and tennis courts, phone lines, formed their own CFS unit, and helped out on each others' farms. ETSA power didn't arrive until the 1970s, so they learned how to be self-sufficient.

Lance was 94 when he decided to stop keeping his garden, and he and Jean moved into aged care in Naracoorte.

Welcomed: Lance Badman, crew and locals after a forced bomber landing in New Guinea in 1942.

Milestones

Lance Collis Badman
Bomber crew member.

Born: September 25, 1915; Yacka

Died: July 4, 2012; Adelaide
Education: Yacka and Murrumbidgee primary schools, and Intermediate Certificate at Prince Alfred College

Achievements: World War II bomber crew that accidentally played a key role in “Operation Hatrack”, and Kokoda.

Family: He is survived by his wife of 71 years, Jean, and Anne, Pamela and Margaret, five grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

