

The Service Record of  
**Edwin Day**  
in the  
Royal Australian Air Force  
1941-43

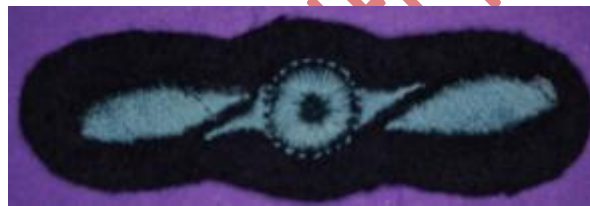


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Edwin Day was born in Adelaide in 1922 but later moved to Townsville, QLD where he did all his schooling. On 31 March 1942, Edwin reported to the RAAF Recruiting Centre at Woolloomooloo in Sydney for enlistment as trainee aircrew in the Air Force. At the age of 19, he was enlisted in the Air Force with the rank of Aircraftman Class 2 (AC2) and was allocated the service number of A403913. On enlistment, he gave his previous employment as Insurance Clerk and his home address as 40 Middle Head Rd, Mosman NSW, the address of his father, Victor.

After completing the enlistment paperwork and undergoing a medical examination, Edwin reported to No 2 Initial Training School at Bradfield Park in Sydney to do his initial training course. This course was known as 'rookies' course and was done by all recruits entering the Air Force. The area occupied by the former RAAF Bradfield Park is now the suburbs of Turramurra and Lindfield. There was no airfield there, just rows of long huts of a wartime design. Some huts were administrative offices, some were classrooms and some were barracks for the trainees and other personnel.

The trainee aircrew received classroom instruction in mathematics, physics, meteorology, radio theory, air force law and hygiene. On the physical side, they spent hours learning drill (marching), playing regular sport and learning to fire rifles. At some stage during their training, the trainees were assessed for flying ability and were selected for the different streams of aircrew training – to be trained as a pilot, navigator, wireless (radio) operator or air gunner. By 23 May, Edwin had been selected for wireless operator/air gunner (WOAG) training, had completed his initial course and went on leave. The next day, he was promoted to Leading Aircraftman (LAC).



*Propellor badge worn by Leading Aircraftman on the sleeve of the winter uniform*

After returning from leave, Edwin moved to No 2 Embarkation Depot, also at Bradfield Park, to do his preparation for the move overseas. This probably involved getting vaccinations and being issued with clothing that he would need overseas. On 13 June 1941, he embarked on a ship for Canada, arriving at Vancouver on 3 July. He was immediately moved, probably by train, to the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) No 3 Wireless School at Winnipeg to begin his wireless operator course. This course taught him everything he would need to know about operating the wireless (radio) on an aircraft.

The wireless operator/air gunner was a highly trained member of each bomber crew, often taking longer to train to 'wings' standard than a pilot. These aircrew members were trained in the dual role of wireless operator and air gunner because in the small- and medium-sized bomber aircraft, they were required to do both jobs. In the later heavy bombers, the number of crewmembers was larger, so air gunners (AGs) manned all the gun turrets leaving the WOAG fully occupied operating the wireless.

In WWII, the aircraft wireless sets were hand-tuned and had to be carefully adjusted by the operator to get good performance. The primary means of communication between aircraft and ground stations was by Morse code which took hundreds of hours of training to master to the required

standard. Speaking over the wireless was only used over a short range and was usually done by one of the pilots. A major role of the WOAG was to get information to assist the navigator (also called 'observer' before 1942). One method of finding the aircraft's position was for the WOAG to transmit a request to a ground station which had direction finding equipment and could tell which direction the wireless transmission had come from. The operator on the ground could pass this direction back to the aircraft. This bearing information from two or more stations could be plotted on a map by the navigator to find the aircraft's position. The WOAG also had to get updates to the weather affecting the aircraft and pass these to the pilots. All this was done by Morse code.

Edwin would have spent hours and hours in the classroom listening to Morse code and decoding the letters one by one. He also had to learn to send Morse code. After he had passed all the tests in the classroom, he had to get used to receiving and sending Morse code in the noisy and turbulent environment of an aircraft – quite a difficult task.

Following the wireless operator course, Edwin had to train as an air gunner. On 20 December 1941, Edwin arrived at No 7 Bombing and Gunnery School which was located on RCAF Station Paulson, Manitoba, Canada. During his 4-week air gunner course, Edwin would have learned how to strip, reassemble and fire the Browning .303 machine gun that was standard armament in British bomber and maritime patrol aircraft of the time. The students then learned the art of firing the guns from an airborne aircraft, usually a Fairey Battle aircraft. The student in the rear of the Battle fired a single Vickers machine gun at either a target on the ground or a target towed by another aircraft. Each student received about 7 hours of airborne gunnery training.



*Air gunner firing the Vickers gun in a Fairey Battle*

With the completion of his air gunnery course, Edwin was promoted to sergeant and awarded his air gunners brevet and his wireless operators badge. The RAAF did not have a wireless operator/air gunner brevet so members of this aircrew group wore the air gunners brevet on their left breast and a wireless operators badge on the sleeve.



*Air gunner brevet*



*Wireless operator badge*

On 25 January 1942, Edwin embarked on a ship at Halifax, Nova Scotia bound for England. On arrival, he spent several weeks at the No 3 Personnel Reception Centre at Bournemouth in the south of England, doing administration and waiting for a position to become available. On 11 March, he arrived at No 1 Signal School in Lincolnshire for training on the newest wireless set in use on bomber aircraft. Six weeks later, he began training on Wellington bomber aircraft at No 14 Operational Training Unit at RAF Cottesmore in Rutland, England.

The Wellington bomber was a twin-engine medium bomber that was one of the principal bombers of RAF Bomber Command in the first 3 years of the war, until the 4-engine heavy bombers came into use in 1943. It had a crew of 5 or 6, depending on the mission.



*An RAF Wellington bomber*

Edwin was promoted from sergeant to flight sergeant on 19 July 1942. However, due to communication delays, he was probably unaware of the promotion for several months and many of the documents on his file show his rank as sergeant even after this date.

From 24 August to 30 September, Edwin flew Wellington bombers with No 156 Squadron on operations over Europe although the actual number of missions he flew is unknown. On 30 September, the role of this squadron changed, making Edwin no longer qualified to fly in it. He was posted to No 460 Squadron at RAF Brighton in Yorkshire for training on Lancaster aircraft. On 31 November, this training continued at No 1656 Heavy Conversion Unit until 13 January 1943 when he returned to No 460 Squadron as a fully trained Lancaster wireless operator/air gunner.

The Lancaster was the principal heavy bomber of the RAF in WWII. It carried a greater bombload and had longer range than the Wellington, so it could be used to attack targets at much greater range. It had a crew of seven.



*A Lancaster bomber*

Two weeks after arriving at the squadron, Edwin and his crew took off on the night of 26/27 January 1943 as part of a large bomber force attacking a German submarine base at Lorient, France. Their aircraft was never seen again and no wreckage was found.

Edwin Day and the other six members of the crew were all listed as 'missing-in-action' which was changed several months later to 'missing-presumed-dead'. Their names were inscribed on the Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede, England, as having 'no known grave'. He was 21 years old.

### **Medals**

His records show that Edwin was awarded the following medals for his service:

- 1939-1945 Star,
- Aircrew Europe Star, and
- Defence Medal.

In the years since 1945, the eligibility for some medals has changed, so Edwin is also eligible for the Australian Service Medal 1939-45 and the War Medal 1939-45.

## Milestones of Edwin Day's Career

Date	Rank	Unit	Location	Comments
31 Mar 41	Aircraftman class 2 (AC2)	No 2 Recruiting Centre	Woolloomooloo NSW	Enlisted
31 Mar 41		No 2 Initial Training School (2ITS)	Bradfield Park, Sydney	Began No 13 Aircrew Course
23 May – 3 Jun 41				Leave
24 May 41	Leading aircraftman (LAC)			Promoted to leading aircraftman
4 Jun 41		No 2 Embarkation Depot (2ED)	Bradfield Park, Sydney	Began preparation for going overseas
13 Jun 41			Sydney	Embarked on ship for voyage to Canada
3 Jul 41			Vancouver, Canada	Disembarked
4 Jul 41		No 3 Wireless School	Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada	Start of wireless operator's course
20 Dec 41		No 7 Bombing and Gunnery School (7BAGS)	Paulson, Manitoba, Canada	Gunnery course
19 Jan 42	Sergeant			Promoted to sergeant and awarded air gunners brevet and wireless operators badge
25 Jan 42			Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada	Embarked
8 Feb 42			England	Disembarked
20 Feb 42		No 3 Personnel Reception Centre (3PRC)	Bournemouth, England	For administration and allocation to a squadron or training unit
11 Mar 42		No 1 Signal School (1SS)	RAF Cranwell, Lincolnshire, England	Wireless training
21 Apr 42		No 14 Operational Training Unit (14OTU)	RAF Cottesmore, Rutland England	Train on Wellington aircraft
19 Jul 42	Flight Sergeant			Promoted to flight sergeant
24 Aug 42		Posted to No 156 Squadron (156SQN)	RAF Warboys, Cambridgeshire, England	Operational flying on Wellington aircraft



30 Sep 42		Posted to No 460 Squadron (460SQN)	RAF Brighton	Training on Lancaster aircraft
31 Nov 42		Posted to 1656 Heavy Conversion Unit	RAF Brighton	Continue training on Lancaster aircraft
13 Jan 43		Posted to No 460 Squadron (460SQN)	RAF Brighton	Operational flying Lancaster aircraft
Night of 26/27 Jan 43				Aircraft failed to return after an attack on German submarine base at Lorient, France.



Flight Sergeant Edwin Day

**Lest We Forget**