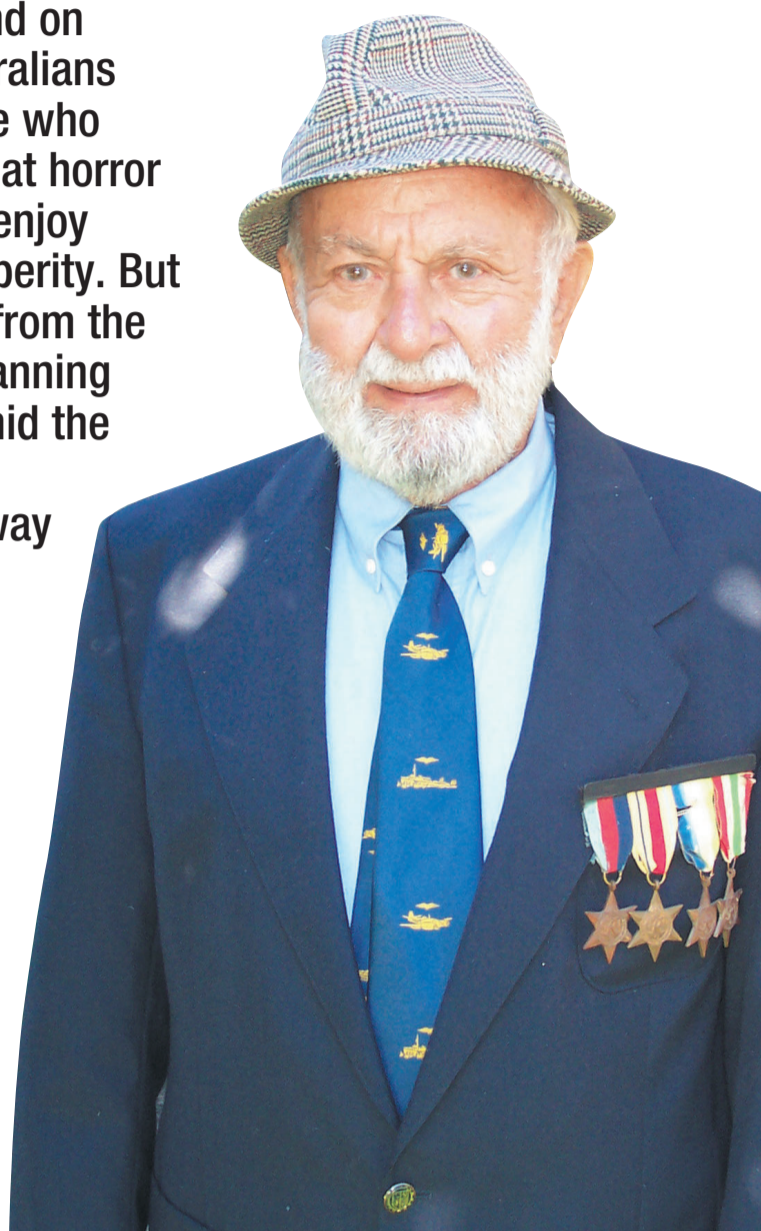




# Focus

War is horror and on Anzac Day Australians remember those who went through that horror so that we can enjoy peace and prosperity. But as this excerpt from the diary of Fred Manning shows, even amid the horrors of war, Aussies find a way to have a laugh



Fred Manning, far left, had two paintings commissioned of events that involved him in World War II. The crash-landing in a North African vineyard, left, a Beaufighter strafing a barge in German-occupied Europe, above, and Fred as a young flyer, right



## Flying in the face of danger but with a cheeky grin

### On our way to Blighty Canada 1942

TO begin a story in 1942, I had been in Canada a while, in Macleod, Alberta, training to fly Avro Ansons (Aggies), and it was as cold as a frog's tit! Would you believe, to keep those Aggie motors from freezing solid, the Erks built igloos over them with radiators underneath, just so us Aussies could have flying machines.

Instrument flying in those days was a section of cockpit, blacked out. After numerous attempts, I had finally managed to fly a mile or so straight and level, much to the delight of the instructor, a nice enough guy for a Canadian.

Suddenly, and I mean real suddenly, the old Aggie drops its nose almost vertically and heads for Mother Earth with extreme alacrity. What the (expletive) says an excited instructor, as he grabs control and endeavours in vain to straighten the beast out. By now we have lost 3000-4000 feet and are still going straight down. So it's 'Go Baby, go get out' is the order of the day. I needed no incentive and having made the rack where my chute is stowed, I managed to pull the ripcord instead of the rack release.

There was I, hopelessly entangled in a chute which by now was covering most of the inside of our Aggie. Our jolly old instructor finally managed to straighten us out at about 200 feet and jubilantly stooped back to the field, threatening to beat the shit out

of me as soon as he could untangle me from my silken web.

Now this is what I think was the true story.

My instructor was married, and his wife Lorraine and I got to be very friendly. So that day, I think he decided to give me a little lesson and snuck up on us while I was instrument flying, preparing to tuck his wing under our tailplane to give us a gentle surprise flip.

It would certainly have been enough to cause an inexperienced pilot like me to mess my trousers. However, under instruction from my on-board instructor, I had started to turn into him. It was almost Finis Freddo, all because I had a weakness for the ladies.

### Going solo Cranfield, Surrey, England 1943

The first sight of the snub nose Beaufighter with a menacing stance in night-fighter black produced a thrill that only a real fighting aeroplane can give. It's built like a crouching bulldog with its big motors and short nose, the blast tubes of the four 20mm cannon and six .303 machine guns. There was no dual control so, after a conducted tour on the ground, one was given a 'watch this' trip, standing behind the pilot and then 'you are on your own son' ... and the very best of British.

I could not bring myself to fire on the survivors ... although to this day I still wonder if they were the enemy who would now live to kill more allies.

Full power. Wow! 3500 horsepower, and yours truly and Beull No.7575 were skyborne. What a thrill, and a far cry from my 10hp Hillman car! The first trip was all pleasure. Then back to base and into the landing circuit. Fine pitch with wheels down. Ten flap. Final-full flap. Ease power off, and I hit the strip ... and bounce! It felt like I bounced 100 feet back into the air, so I powered on, pulled up and came around to try again.

I repeated that bouncing performance five times before my instructor, who by this time had made it to the control tower, talked me in. As I taxied in exhausted, that Pommy so-and-so said 'Manning! Do another circuit!' We were now attached to Coastal

Command anti-shipping strike Beaufighters. November 4 saw our first two aircraft operation with 272 Flight Sergeant Mantelow and ourselves.

We flew from Foggia an hour before dawn to the Adriatic coast, up the coast to Ancona. Dawn and flak, as we were now in enemy territory, on to Venice and across to Trieste, down the Yugoslav coastline to Flume Fjords.

We flew the Flume Fjords coast and Flight Sergeant Mantelow spotted a TLC (Tank Landing Craft), about 50m in length, running German troops into Yugoslavia.

Mantelow attacked first, firing cannon and his eight rockets in one salvo.

My turn. I opened fire at about 3000 yards, closing to about 1000 yards with 20mm cannon. I then fired four armour-piercing rockets and broke away.

The sea was full of survivors and their gunner was still shooting at us. I could not bring myself to fire on the survivors, a decision seconded by Flip, although to this day I still wonder about it if they were the enemy who would now live to kill more allies.

We were now flying at about 100ft, and 280mph when Flip yells over the RT 'aircraft attacking - I think they are 109s!' They were. Two of them. We staved off five attacks.

Finally the attacks stopped and they flew away - presumably out of ammo. Much later, in the 1980s I had a motor business in Brookvale (Sydney) and one day a fellow came in for some

work on his ice cream truck. We got to talking and I discovered he had been an Me-109 Luftwaffe pilot in the Adriatic area in 1944 and remembers chasing and firing on Beaufighters.

What a small world. Of course, I charged him extra!

### A trip to a vineyard 153 Squadron, Algiers (North Africa), July 1944

The squadron's main job was to protect Allied shipping from Luftwaffe intruders. Our patch along the Mediterranean coast was from Casablanca to Bone - several hundred miles.

One day the radio blared at 7am and we were given orders to take off and patrol the sector between Bone and our base at Algiers.

Turning left on climb out with full power, the port motor suddenly quit and pieces flew off in all directions. I have always had very quick reflexes, and these were all needed now as the remaining motor was doing its utmost to tip us upside down which, in a Beaufighter, is a lethal position!

There was enough time (a few seconds) to feather the airscrew on the dead motor and drop some flap.

We were heading down a narrow valley with hills all around, but we lacked engine power to climb out. We were around 100ft over a pine tree forest, with a vineyard at the end of the valley. We skimmed the road, took

out a power pole and wires, and were still flying at 130mph when I pushed the nose into the ground. We ploughed through 240 yards of vineyard before stopping 20 yards short of a canal and 50 yards short of a house.

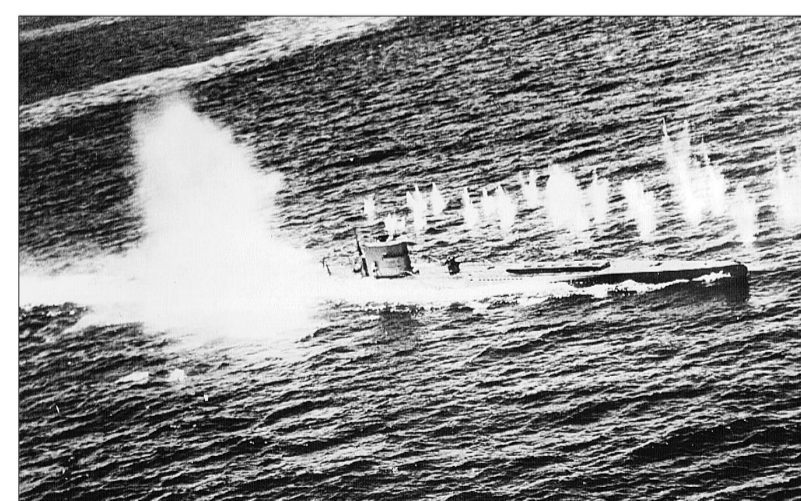
When I finally staggered out of the cockpit there was cheering from a mob of locals who appeared from the forest like Robin Hood's Merry Men. They were armed with petrol tins and hoses. Instead of me being Manning from the skies, I had instead supplied them with manna from heaven - the 400 gallons of fuel we carried.

Besides having escaped death yet again, another bonus for Flip and me was that the vineyard owner and his wife dished us up a fabulous breakfast of egg, chips and a bottle of their very own vin blanc.

### Seagulls of mass destruction Italy, 1944

We were on one of our intruder patrols from Foggia to Venice, Grado, Trieste and Fiume. The only target was a half-submerged coastal tanker sitting on a sandbank.

At about 50ft, with cannons only, I fired off a three-second burst, about 120 rounds, and was pleased to see most of them strike home. What I did not see were the several squadrons of enemy seagulls which arose from the wreck and attacked our aircraft!



Strafing and dropping depth charges on a U-boat

We took 19 hits. I rapidly put a couple of thousand feet between us and the Adriatic and surveyed the damage.

Outside of a cockpit full of seagull meat and feathers, a couple of dents here and there seemed to be the only problem, everything else looked OK.

A good thing there were no Jerries about that day.

### Depth charges away England, April 1945

Our main duty at this stage was to patrol from the Hook van Holland to Den Helder then past the Frisian Islands to Heligoland, back to the

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Our first target was a U-boat which we hit with a five-second burst of cannon fire, about 200 rounds

Second time around saw the depth charges doing their work. They go off with an almighty bang, especially when you are only a couple of hundred feet above them owing to their three-second fuse. We circled around the area for a few minutes. No submarine, just a disturbed ocean! We were getting low on fuel so packed up and headed home.

Who knows what happened to them, but I guarantee those depth charges rattled their teacups!

### A big battle, England, spring 1945

We all felt the war was drawing to an end and the idea now was to survive. Flip and I were awaiting our official notification that our tour of duty had expired but as it turned out there was a room for one more trip and an epic one at that.

Our first target was a surfaced U-boat which we hit with a five-second burst of cannon fire, about 200 rounds, mostly in the conning tower area. It looked well damaged as we roared over at low level. There were deck guns but no gunners, probably as the sub was trying to dive when we attacked.

Minutes later as we proceeded down the Langelands Belt, a merchant ship appeared. We made a quick climb to 1000 feet and dived at them. A short burst of cannon fire got us into rocket range and I fired two AP rockets. These resulted in two hits below the waterline.

Continuing on our rampage another small coastal steamer got the same treatment. We had now used half of our rockets and a third of our cannon. At this time Flip had spotted a much larger ship on the horizon which we prepared to attack. With a longer burst of cannon fire to keep their heads down, we fired two rockets into the waterline, and then had to climb rapidly to clear the superstructure as the ship was huge.

It turned out to be the 10,000 ton, 500ft liner Der Deutsche evacuating troops to Norway. Two destroyer escorts made sure we did not have it all our own way and as we attacked they literally hosed us with flak. One of 254 Squadron had seen us attacking and came over to help. He turned out to be the last Beaufighter casualty of the war as the Jerry ack-ack shot him into the sea.