

A Gnarled Old Tree

Sometimes we are lucky enough to catch a glimpse of why we are who we are. I have been fortunate to do so and have decided there is sufficient there to warrant a few stories of some of my ancestors and others that have had a special effect on my life. This blog is dedicated to that purpose.

[Home](#)[Helen Richardson - Eulogy](#)[Pauline Rae - Eulogy](#)[Reg Cassidy, Pilot](#)[Why People Go To Church](#)[On the Wallaby - 2001](#)[Our European Adventure](#)[Our Profile](#)[The Rovin Richos](#)

Reg Cassidy, Pilot

Reg was born Frederick Reginald Cassidy on Sunday 29 July 1917 in Bundaberg, Queensland. He was the first son of William Patrick and Florence Olive Cassidy (nee Caldwell). He had two older sisters, Florence Irene Caldwell, commonly known as Pat but later to become Sister Pius of the Saint Joseph order of catholic nuns, and Helen Virginia, one younger sister, Joan Margaret and brother, John Faris Gerard.



*Top Row: Helen Virginia, John Faris Gerard, Florence Irene Caldwell (Sr. Pius), Frederick Reginald, Joan Margaret
Front Row: Florence Olive, William Patrick*

William was born in 1882 at Bell, on Queensland's Darling Downs. At the time, his father Faris was the Overseer of the property Jimbour, from which the Bell township was excised. Florence was born on 15 June 1890 in Chicago, Cook, Illinois, USA. Her father, James Asbury Caldwell, commonly known as Asbury, and new stepmother, Edith Elizabeth Caldwell (nee Alston but known as Edith Elizabeth Fisher at the time of their marriage for she was a divorcee) emigrated to Australia in 1899. After an initial appointment as Pastor of the Congregational church at North Fremantle, they

settled in the thriving gold mining town of Kalgoorlie, Western Australia. It is believed Florence may have joined them while they were there.

After finishing school, William joined the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and was stationed in Brisbane. It is not clear when Florence moved to Queensland but we do know that in 1908 Asbury was the United States Consular Agent for Queensland. William and Florence were married in Saint Stephens Cathedral in Brisbane on 8 April 1912. By 1913 they had moved to Bundaberg.

William was transferred to Cairns, Queensland in 1918 and in 1922 Reg commenced his schooling there at the catholic primary school. Following another transfer to Brisbane in 1924, Reg attended St Josephs Convent school at Nundah, Brisbane. In 1928, on the day the school first opened its doors, he started at St Columbans Christian Brothers College at Albion Heights, Brisbane.

On leaving school, Reg also joined the Commonwealth Bank; however, he had thoughts of following in the footsteps of his big sister and many of his American ancestors. He seriously considered pursuing a religious vocation.

He was 21 when World War II broke out. That intensified his indecision. Should he join the Christian Brothers or join the air force and fight for his country. Joining the RAAF would be a fairly natural course were he to decide upon the military. His uncle, John Reginald Cassidy, William's brother, was developing a name for himself in the British Royal Air Force, and was subsequently promoted to the rank of Air Vice Marshall.

Family lore has it that Reg was receiving communion one morning at Corpus Christi Church, Nundah when he made a pact with his Lord. Should the communion wafer be white he would join the Christian Brothers, if it was meal, he would join the Air Force. History records the fateful outcome of his pact. He received a meal wafer.

On 8 January 1940 Reg enlisted in the RAAF in Brisbane. He was born to fly and spent his early days learning to do so out of Amberley in Queensland. His family reported he was something of a dare-devil. He would often telephone them to tell them of training fly-overs he would be doing close to home or family properties on the Darling Downs. He would cause them, but more particularly his mother, much concern by flying his Tiger Moth, an open cockpit training aircraft, over the properties upside down.

Reg was obviously a leader of men. By early 1942, just two years after enlisting, he was a Sergeant Pilot and a flying instructor. He was posted to 6 Service Flying Training School, Mallala, near Adelaide, South Australia. He was not



On the road to Mallala

happy with his posting. In a letter to his older sister, Sister Pius, he said, "--- still dodging Japs at Mallala, and also very discontented. We are not getting any flying at all at present don't know how long we are here for or when we will get on to decent aircraft." However, later he said, "We are not all so lucky(?) Four of our course are already killed or missing---."



Trainee pilot



Avro Anson on the tarmac at Mallala RAAF Bas

On the afternoon of 3 June 1942 Reg finally got the opportunity of doing some flying. Three aircraft were sent out to undertake what was subsequently referred to as seaward reconnaissance, a mission supposed to be Japanese submarine spotting. Aboard Avro Anson W2435 was pilot Reg, observer Sargent Kenneth Walter Hailey, gunner Sargent David Roderick Stewart and passenger LAC Laurence Francis Pickup. Official records state that takeoff time was approximately 1430 hours.

Avro Anson W2370, the second of the planes to leave, was piloted by Sargent Finlay Emmerson Anderson, and his crew comprised Sargent Joseph Grey Myers, Sargent Graeme Yeoman Wadlow and LAC William Stanley Butler. The third plane to leave immediately returned to base because of the state of the weather.

Official records state that in spite of repeated attempts by ground station and Parafield Aeradio Station nothing was heard from W2345.

At 1815 hours an Avro Anson plane, now believed to have been W2435, was spotted by the light keeper at Cape Willoughby Lighthouse, Kangaroo Island, South Australia. The lighthouse is situated on the most easterly point of the island.



Cape Willoughby Lighthouse



BEAUFORT FORCE 6
WIND SPEED: 22-27 KNOTS
SEA: WAVE HEIGHT 3-4M (9.5-13 FT),
LARGER WAVES BEGIN TO FORM, SPRAY IS PRESENT,
WHITE FOAM CRESTS ARE EVERYWHERE
See the full Beaufort Wind Scale below

The plane approached from the south and circled the light three or four times flashing Morse signals that could not be understood. At the time, according to the Cape Willoughby log records, the weather was very poor with 25 knots of wind, an overcast sky and drizzly rain. At 1835 hours the plane left the vicinity, headed in a south easterly direction.



Cliff face below the Lighthouse

The log goes on to record that later, at 1907 hours, the plane returned from the east and landed on the sea close under the cliffs near the light. It remained afloat and could be seen in the beam of the light for about 20 minutes before sinking. Searches went on for several days but no bodies were found.

It cannot be verified at this time but information provided to the family, supposedly from the light keeper, was that a member of the crew (thought to be Reg) was seen scrambling onto the rocks at the foot of the cliffs below the light. He could not be reached and disappeared during the night.

The head light keeper provided evidence at an investigation into the loss of W2435 by the Air Board. The précis of the Board's report adds the further information that in response to a Morse light message from the lighthouse asking what assistance was required, the floating plane flashed, "boat". There was no boat at the lighthouse.

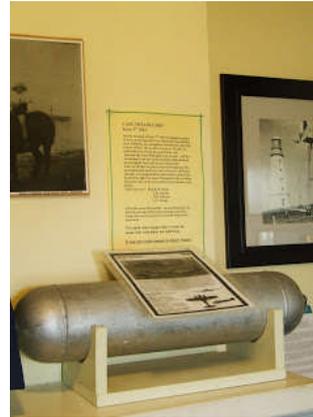
It is unknown why the investigation resolved that the landing site was about a half mile south east of the lighthouse or that the plane was last seen floating south about a mile away. There are a number of reasons why this finding could be flawed.



Reported area and direction of the landing in official records

A half mile south east of the lighthouse placed the landing site in open, unprotected water. With a reported wind strength of 25 knots the waves and swell would have been such that a safe landing would have been an incredible feat. The light from the lighthouse revolved such that it flashed every fourteen seconds. At 1907 hours in early June on an overcast night with drizzly rain, a relatively small plane floating in a heavy swell a half mile to a mile away would have been extremely difficult to spot in a slowly oscillating light.

A site close to the cliff face would have been better protected. Both the propositions that the plane landed safely and a member of the crew made it to the rocks become more feasible. It gathers greater credence by the later finding of an oxygen bottle, believed to have been from W2435. It is in good condition which would indicate that it did not spend much time in the water. It was donated by one Robert Howard to be displayed in a small museum in what was



The Oxygen Bottle from Avro Anson W2435

previously the head light keeper's residence.

It is very sad that the plane flew south east over the Great Southern Ocean. In that direction, the closest land would have been approximately 175 kilometres away. Although the coast in the vicinity of the lighthouse is extremely inhospitable, about five kilometres to the north west is long sandy beach. It is tucked away between two cliffs but, had it been visible, may have provided a safe landing place. Had they landed there, however, their best chance of survival would probably have been to stay with the plane and await the outcome of the air/sea search. The virgin scrub on Kangaroo Island is so thick it would have required sharp implements to get through it. The native animals are generally very small so that they can move through the thick undergrowth.

In 1942, Kangaroo Island was very sparsely populated. Only a small area around Kingscote, about forty kilometres away in a direct line, had been settled. It was not until after the war that much of the island was opened to returned soldiers in what was known as soldier settlements. Many land parcels were taken up and although much of the area was cleared for crops and grazing, substantial tracts were left in virgin state. There is now even a small private landing strip about 8 kilometres west north west of the lighthouse. However, in 1942 it is highly unlikely that other than on the beaches, the island would have provided any safe landing places.

While the drama surrounding W2435 was unfolding, W2370 also became lost in the adverse weather conditions. It crashed at approximately 1925 hours at Lake Albert, one of two very large lakes east of the Fleurieu Peninsular that lies to the south of Adelaide, South Australia. The body of the pilot, Sargent Anderson, was quickly located and the remainder of the bodies were located in subsequent searches.

There is some conjecture about the reason for the dispatch of the planes on such a day. It has been noted that they may have been sent on a navigation training run as opposed to seaward reconnaissance. Indeed, feedback to the family from Reg's colleagues on his training course indicated that the order for the flights should never have been issued. It does seem to be poorly considered when the experience of the crew and quality of the aircraft are considered.

There are questions that need to be answered but are unlikely to be so. The first is, why was Reg described as "Instructor"? Was he attending the course as an official or as a student? We know from family lore that he was in Brisbane in February 1942 flying Tiger Moths but left for Mallala shortly thereafter. It seems highly unlikely that within three months he would have been an Instructor on a course teaching flying on a plane he had little experience with. Remember, he complained to his sister that he was not getting any flying at the training school and intimated that the quality of the planes was poor. It appears that it was not much later that the Avro Ansons were phased out of service. In the meantime, they were involved in a series of accidents leaving numerous casualties and much loss of life of crew.

The second question arises out of an RAAF Minute Sheet, reference 163/163/384. In part it records in relation to the loss of W2435 and W2370: -

"The question of whether these cases should be referred to as air operations was referred to D.C.T. - (no objection) D.T. - (no objection) and Assistant Secretary. The latter considered no objection from political point of view but that the question of medals might arise and should be referred to D.F.S. Major Coleman would warn Secretary and Minister. D.F.S. stated there is no objection from medal point of view. All to be reported as Air Operations."

One can only speculate as to the concerns mentioned if indeed both crews were lost in the manner recorded. If they were lost in training exercises in circumstances where one pilot deliberately disobeyed orders and returned to base because of flying conditions, there may well have been embarrassing questions asked.



RIP Reg and colleagues. Your memory lives on.

Poem written by Sister Pius for her mother in June 1942, shortly after Reg's death.

If Thou shouldst call me to resign
 What most I prize, it ne'er was mine
 I only yield Thee what is Thine -
 "Thy Will be done!"

Renew my will from day to day
 Blend it with Thine, and take away
 All that now makes it hard to say
 "Thy Will be done."

ps. It is somewhat ironic that Reg's uncle, John Reginald, was later awarded the Commander of the Order of the British Empire for, among other things, his support in the development of a radio system to enable airmen to find their way home from operations ("Radar"). Actually, much of the world owes him a debt of gratitude. One of his subordinates who was heavily involved in the refining of radar, Godfrey Newbold Hounsfield, Kt 1981; CBE 1976; FRS 1975; Hon FRCS 1980; Hon DSc City 1976; Hon DSc London 1976; Hon DTech Loughborough 1976; Hon FRCP 1976; Hon FRCR 1976; Hon FEng 1994 (1919-2004) credited John Reginald with arranging for him to receive a Scholarship after leaving the RAF. Many internet stories recount the story but the following extract from <http://livesonline.rcseng.ac.uk/biogs/E000259b.htm> tells it all: -

"Research engineer

Born: 28 August 1919 Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire, UK. Died: 12 August 2004.

Godfrey Hounsfield, the inventor of the CT scanner, was the epitome of the brilliant boffin – modest, retiring and shunning the limelight. He was born on 28 August 1919, the youngest of the five children of Thomas Hounsfield, a steel engineer who took up farming in Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire. There Godfrey grew up surrounded by farm machinery, with which he became fascinated. 'In a village there are few distractions and no pressures to join in at a ball game or go to the cinema and I was free to follow the trail of any interesting idea that came my way. I constructed electrical recording machines; I made hazardous investigations of the principles of flight, launching myself from the tops of haystacks with a home-made glider; I almost blew myself up during exciting experiments using water-filled tar barrels and acetylene to see how high they could be waterjet propelled.' At Magnus Grammar School he was interested only in physics and mathematics. At the outbreak of the Second World War he joined the RAF as a volunteer reservist and was taken on as a radar mechanic instructor, occupying himself in building a large-screen oscilloscope. His work was noticed by Air Vice Marshall Cassidy, who got him a grant after the war to attend Faraday House Electrical Engineering College, where he received a diploma.

He then joined the staff of EMI working on radar and guided weapons, working with primitive computers. In 1958 he led a team building the first all-transistor computer, speeding up the transistors by providing them with a magnetic core. In 1967 he began to study aspects of pattern recognition and worked in the Central Research Laboratories of EMI.

Contrary to the public relations story, which has been repeated so often that it has come to be accepted as true, his idea did not occur to him when out walking, and it was not supported by the full resources of EMI. His colleague, W E Ingham, pointed out that EMI were not interested: they were not in the medical business, and it was only covertly that a deal was done with the Department of Health and Society Security to fund the development of what became the first CT scanner. The first brain to be scanned was that of a bullock. The prototype was soon shown to be successful in 1971, when it was used to diagnose a brain cyst at Atkinson Morley's Hospital and before long Hounsfield's work had been plagiarised and developed all over the world, mostly overseas. Hounsfield was unaware that Cormack, of Tufts, had published theoretical studies on the mathematics for such a device. A whole-body scanner was introduced in 1975.

Honours came thick and fast: CBE, FRS, the Nobel prize (shared with Cormack), a knighthood and an honorary FRCS. He remained a modest, retiring bachelor. His advice to the young was: 'Don't worry if you can't pass exams, so long as you feel you have understood the

subject.' In retirement he did voluntary work at the Royal Brompton and Heart Hospitals. He died from a chronic and progressive lung disease on 12 August 2004. He was unmarried."

Beaufort wind scale	Mean Wind Speed		Limits of wind speed		Wind descriptive terms	Probable wave height in metres*	Probable maximum wave height in metres*	Seastate	Sea descriptive terms
	Knots	m/s	Knots	m/s					
0	0	0	<1	0-0.2	Calm	-	-	0	Calm (glassy)
1	2	0.8	1-3	0.3-1.5	Light air	0.1	0.1	1	Calm (rippled)
2	5	2.4	4-6	1.6-3.3	Light breeze	0.2	0.3	2	Smooth (wavelets)
3	9	4.3	7-10	3.4-5.4	Gentle breeze	0.6	1.0	3	Slight
4	13	6.7	11-16	5.5-7.9	Moderate breeze	1.0	1.5	3-4	Slight-Moderate
5	19	9.3	17-21	8.0-10.7	Fresh breeze	2.0	2.5	4	Moderate
6	24	12.3	22-27	10.8-13.8	Strong breeze	3.0	4.0	5	Rough
7	30	15.5	28-33	13.9-17.1	Near gale	4.0	5.5	5-6	Rough-Very rough
8	37	18.9	34-40	17.2-20.7	Gale	5.5	7.5	6-7	Very rough-High
9	44	22.6	41-47	20.8-24.4	Severe gale	7.0	10.0	7	High
10	52	26.4	48-55	24.5-28.4	Storm	9.0	12.5	8	Very High
11	60	30.5	56-63	28.5-32.6	Violent storm	11.5	16.0	8	Very High
12	-	-	64+	32.7+	Hurricane	14+	-	9	Phenomenal

Beaufort Wind Scale



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