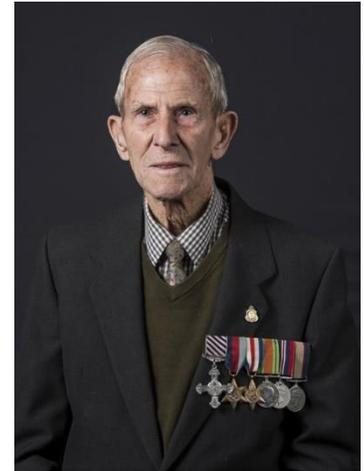


SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

FLYING OFFICER HOWARD HENDRICK DFC OAM

WORLD WAR 2 PILOT, 460 SQN (RAAF)

Howard Hendrick was born in Renmark in the Murray Riverland on 2 October 1923, the eldest of three sons of Tom and Laura Hendrick. Born in Shropshire, England, his father migrated to Australia at the age of 16 with five other friends seeking opportunity in the young new country. Enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force, Tom joined the 28th Infantry Battalion and served his new country in Gallipoli from September to December 1915 before transferring to the 32nd Infantry Battalion, a South Australian unit, and moving to the Western Front where he served for the remainder of the war. He saw action at Fromelles in 1916, Bullecourt in 1917 and 1918 where he was awarded the Military medal for distinguished action, and St Quentin in 1918. Tom returned to Australia and settled on a soldier settlers fruit block in Renmark due to his completing his service with the 32nd. Tom married Laura, an Englishwoman that he had met on leave during the war and together they brought up three children on the land in the Riverland.



Howard Hendrick in 2016. (AWM)

Growing up in a rural community during the 1920s and 1930s, life was simple and challenging but enjoyable for the young Howard. He attended Renmark North Primary School and then Renmark North High School where he excelled in physics, chemistry and mathematics, graduating year 12 in 1941. He attended scouts and fished along the Murray River in his spare time when not going to school or helping on his parents' property. He completed 6 months with the Renmark Rifle Club as an older teenager.

Being 15 years old and still at school in 1939, Howard saw the winds of war rapidly change in 1940. Like many small Australian communities, the youth of Renmark responded to the call of duty and enlisted in the Army, Navy and Air Force. Howard was no exception, seeing the war as an opportunity. Enamoured by the stories of aviation pioneers during the 1920s and 1930s, he already possessed a keen interest in aviation and thus, enlisted with the Air Force Reserves on 30 October 1940 just after his 17th birthday. He later said *"When I was five, Kingsford Smith flew across the Pacific. From then I always harboured a dream that one day I might fly. Like others my age, I enlisted in the RAAF as soon as I was able, but right from the beginning it was from my need to help defend our country, and of course, to learn to fly."*



Enlistment photo of Howard Hendrick (NAA)

In April 1942, he was called up for duty and on 25 April 1942, enlisted at No 5 Recruiting Centre Adelaide as trainee aircrew. He proceeded to Mount Breckan, Victor Harbour where he completed basic training on Course No 27 at No 4 Initial Training School. He remembers living in an eight-person tent sleeping on a palliasse in basic conditions which were challenging during winter. While at 4ITS, he studied mathematics, meteorology, navigation, weapons, morse code and flight while also undergoing physical training and drill.

Completing three months of basic training, Howard was selected for pilot training and proceeded to Parafield in the north of Adelaide to learn basic flying training at No 1 Elementary Flying Training School. Prior to the start of World War 2, the Royal Aero Club of South Australia (RACSA) operated at Parafield training pilots. In December 1939, the RACSA commenced working with No 2 Flying Training School (RAAF) to train RAAF pilots. This unit became No 1 Elementary Flying Training

School in early January 1940. In mid-January, the first course of 22 students commenced with a second course of 24 students commencing in February and a third course in March. The noted pilot FLTLT Bill Newton, who was awarded the Victoria Cross for bravery on operations with 22 SQN in New Guinea, was a trainee on the February course. During this period, the training was conducted on several requisitioned DH-60 Gipsy Moths and Miles Hawk aircraft. While being the mainstay of pilot training in the 1930s, the aircraft were dated and were quickly replaced by the more rugged DH-82 Tiger Moth aircraft during 1940/1941 at Parafield.

It was the DH-82 Tiger Moth that Howard learned to fly but only after a frustrating first four weeks where his course was restricted to studying flight training and support tasks around the tarmac including helping pilots start their engines, removing chocks, and checking logbook accuracy. However, living conditions were markedly better than Mt Breckan with the trainees accommodated in small huts sleeping on beds and eating in a mess hall.

Howard remembers his first two flights with an instructor were not promising. The first was conducted in poor weather and Howard suffered airsickness returning to the ground convinced he would never fly again. The next day, Howard returned to the air for his second flight with an instructor in sunny weather and flew well except for underestimating the landing and landing too quickly. After much study that night, his third flight on the third day proved much better and Howard demonstrated to his sergeant instructor that he had the capacity to be a pilot. On the 2 October 1942, his 19th birthday, Howard completed his first solo flight in a DH-82.



1EFTS Tiger Moth aircraft at Parafield during World War 2. (SAAM)

Completing basic flying training in mid-November, Howard was posted to No 7 Service Flying Training School (7SFTS) at Deniliquin in western New South Wales. Formed in June 1941 at the new RAAF Base Deniliquin, 7SFTS was one of the RAAF's eight Service Flying Training Schools established to meet the growing demand for pilots for the war effort as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. Located in the small rural town of Deniliquin in southern New South Wales, the base was new and the facilities were still under construction when the first course commenced with 50 students late July 1941. By the end of 1944, 7SFTS had graduated 2,206 pilots and the school was temporarily re-formed as the Advanced Flying and Refresher Unit (AFRU) before disbanding in May 1946. The school conducted the training operating the CAC Wirraway; a single-engine dual seat aircraft which by mid-1941 had become a reserve aircraft for Australia's defence and largely relegated to flying training after being proved to be out-classed in aerial combat in the initial engagements of the Pacific War in December 1941.



RAAF Station Deniliquin and 7 SFTS during World War 2 (Wikipedia)

Howard remembers the base as being hot and dry. Drought conditions caused severe dust issues impacting not just domestic living conditions but also aircraft operations in terms of restricted visibility and engine failures.

The SFTS training comprised two streams, intermediate and advanced, and included such techniques as instrument flying, night flying, advanced aerobatics, formation flying, dive bombing, and aerial gunnery. The total duration of training varied during the war as demand for aircrew rose and fell. Initially running for 16 weeks, the course was cut to 10 weeks (which included 75 hours flying time) in October 1940. A year later it was raised to 12 weeks (including 100 hours flying time), and again to 16 weeks two months later. It continued to increase after this, peaking at 28 weeks in June 1944. Howard completed 18 weeks training at Deniliquin.

On an air to ground gunnery training sortie, Howard was diving from 3,000 feet when he heard bullets tearing into his propeller resulting in the engine beginning to vibrate. He immediately found a nearby clearing and conducted a forced landing. Inspection of the aircraft later revealed the gun firing mechanism was out of synchronisation with the propeller.

On 11 April 1943, Howard was awarded his Wings and promoted to Sergeant and selected for fighters. He proceeded on to several weeks leave before proceeding to No 4 Embarkation Depot at Adelaide. In mid-April and then No 2 Embarkation depot Sydney in late April before finally arriving in Brisbane in early May when he was told he would be sent to England for service in the European theatre. On 5 May he embarked on a US Liberty Ship, a 14,000-ton vessel carrying 100 aircrew to the United States. Howard remembers seeing an Australian hospital ship, the AHS Centaur, sail by. The next day, Howard learned that the Centaur had been torpedoed by a Japanese submarine northeast of Moreton Island with 268 crew and passengers lost, providing a sobering and scary thought to Howard and the other aircrew as to the constant danger of travelling by ship.



SGT Howard Hendrick just after receiving his Wings in 1943. (Hendrick Family)

Arriving in San Francisco, Howard and the other aircrew travelled by train to Taunton near Boston, Massachusetts where they stayed at Miles Standish Camp, a US Army camp, which served as a holding camp accommodating over 20,000 defence personnel of various nationalities waiting to be moved to the European theatre. Howard then travelled to New York and embarked on the *Queen Elizabeth* which had been requisitioned as a troopship and could carry nearly 20,000 crew and passengers in that capacity. Six days later, Howard arrived in Scotland and then travelled by train to No. 11 (RAAF) Personnel Despatch and Reception Centre at Brighton on the southern coast of England in Sussex. 11 PDRC was the receiving station for Royal Australian Air Force non-commissioned air crew arriving in the United Kingdom and was where personnel would wait for up to 3 or 4 months before being posted to training or other units. The unit was a busy one accommodating large numbers of personnel transitioning to units in England. An idea of the size of the establishment can be gauged from the figures recorded on 16 June 1943 - 20 officers, 25 NCOs and 33 other ranks on the permanent staff, with 947 non-commissioned and 206 officers being accommodated at the unit waiting for posting orders.



RAAF Personnel on parade at 11PRDC, Brighton, in August 1943. (AWM)

Howard remained at 11PRDC for 2 months waiting for a posting to a fighter conversion unit. However, during that time, the focus on training transitioned from fighters to bomber crews and Howard was restreamed onto Bomber Conversion training which brought initial disappointment. He was posted to No 15 (Pilot) Advanced Flying Unit (15 (P)AFU) based at RAF Ramsbury in southern England between Bristol and Reading. Established from early 1942, the numbered (P) AFU's existed in the RAF to "acclimatise" newly arrived pilots from the British Dominions to flying conditions in Europe. They were introduced because so many pilots found the European flying conditions completely different to those of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In particular, flying in wartime Britain had distinct challenges including environmental (more cloud, winter fogs, industrial smog, rain), navigation (thousands of small villages, major towns and large cities, airfields, railway lines and roads) and congested skies (barrage balloons, large numbers of aircraft operating in limited airspace). The training at 15 (P) AFU was conducted on the twin engine Airspeed Oxford and thus, was Howard's first experience on multi engine aircraft.



A 15(P)AFU Airspeed Oxford on a training sortie

In late January 1944, Howard was posted to No 84 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at RAF Desborough in northern Northamptonshire in central England. 84 OTU was a heavy bomber conversion unit where aircrew came together to form a crew and convert onto the Vickers Wellington heavy bomber. It was at Desborough where Howard met and came together with the crew that he would fly his bomber Command missions with. These included Bill Lyttle (an Englishman who was an RAF navigator), Bill Miles (another Englishman who was a wireless operator), King Cole (an air gunner from Brisbane), Roy Stearman (a bomb aimer from Sydney), Doddy Dason (a fellow South Australian from Adelaide who was an air gunner).

The crew began conducting cross country training sorties operating as a team with each respective crew member performing their specialist roles as a member of the team. For example, the navigator plotted and maintained their position, the wireless operator transmitted signals with ground and other aircraft, the bomber aimer learned to guide the pilot into ingressing to the target and the air gunners learned to identify and report air threats. Completing operational training, Howard then completed conversion onto Lancasters completing heavy bomber conversion at No 1656 Heavy Conversion Unit at RAF Lindholme. The short four-week course was the final stage in training for bomber aircrew and was designed to familiarise crews to the four engine heavy bombers such as Lancasters, Halifax and Stirling aircraft.



Howard Hendrick and his 460SQN crew: From Left Howard Hendrick (pilot); FSGT Bill Little (Navigator); FSGT King Cole (Tail Gunner); FSGT Roy Stearman (Bomb Aimer); FSGT Bill Miles (Wireless Operator); Flt Sgt "Chook Hayes (Flight Engineer); FSGT Bill Morris (Mid Upper Gunner). (Howard Hendrick family)

Completing all his training, Howard was posted to No 460 Squadron (RAAF) at RAF Binbrook in northern Lincolnshire in eastern England on 24 June 1944 more than two years after enlisting. By mid-1944, 460 Squadron (RAAF) had already

established itself as a distinguished squadron being one of the three RAAF Lancaster squadrons (the others being 463SQN and 467SQN). By the end of the war, 460SQN had become one of the most respected Bomber Command units. The squadron flew the most sorties of any Australian bomber squadron and dropped more bomb tonnage than any squadron in the whole of Bomber Command—24,856 tons, which it dropped over 6,262 sorties. In doing that it lost 188 aircraft and suffered 1,018 combat deaths of which 589 were Australian. This was the most of any Australian squadron during the war, with No. 460 Squadron effectively losing the equivalent of its total unit strength five times over its existence. RAF Bomber Command represented only two percent of total Australian enlistments during World War II but accounted for almost 20 percent of personnel killed in action.



A 460SQN Lancaster being loaded with bombs for another mission. (AWM)

The RAF Binbrook station commander was GPCAPT Hughie Edwards, a West Australian and Bomber Command veteran who had been awarded the Victoria Cross, the Distinguished Service Order and the Distinguished Flying Cross. Several weeks after arriving at Binbrook, Howard was summoned to the base commander's office where he was met not only by GPCAPT Edwards but also WGCDR J. Douglas, the 460SQN Commanding Officer, and a flight commander. The purpose of the meeting was for them to interview Howard and establish his credentials for commissioning to Officer. He evidently succeeded as shortly after, he was advised that he would be commissioned as a Flying Officer.

He arrived at a particularly interesting time where 460SQN and Bomber Command was being used in support of the allied consolidation and then advances after the Normandy landings, targeting critical targets such as V1 and V2 targets, interdiction targets in Belgium, France and Holland and strategic targets in Germany.

On 12 August 1944, Howard conducted his first operational mission where he augmented another crew as a second pilot to gain operational experience. It was a long-range mission where 460SQN aircraft augmented other bombers in a mass 1,000 aircraft mission targeting Brunswick, located 500 miles away in central Germany. Two days later, he flew his first of many missions with his crew flying PB 187 AR-B (B-Baker); a brand-new Mk II Lancaster which they would fly for 27 of their 30 combat missions. Their first mission was in support of a Canadian Division operating in the Falaise area where they needed to drop their munitions during daylight at an altitude of only 3,000 feet. On the next day, he was flying one of 27 460SQN Lancasters targeting Volkel Airfield in the Netherlands. Having a short break, he then flew a strike mission on 29 August targeting the Baltic port city of Stettin where 460SQN lost two Lancasters and their crews. In early September he

flew missions on the 5, 6, 8 and 10 September striking German strong points around Le Havre. Such missions were conducted at lower altitude operating normally around 6,000 feet.

Two days later, Howard and his crew flew their longest and deepest mission into Germany yet targeting Frankfurt. Departing Binbrook around 6pm, they did not return till after 1.30am. Shortly before ingressing into the target, they encountered German fighters with the gunner loudly shouting over the intercom "Messerschmitt close – starboard." Howard then saw tracers fly past the cockpit window meaning the German fighters were now firing on his Lancaster. The Lancaster then got caught in multiple German search lights. Howard immediately opened the bomb doors and directed the bomber aimer to release their bombs to lighten the load of the aircraft to allow it to go into evasive manoeuvring. He then closed the bombs doors and immediately threw the aircraft into a downward corkscrew spiral descending from 22,000 feet to 6,000 feet. The aircraft rapidly descended and shook violently but the gunners reported the German fighters giving up. Howard then had to arrest the violent dive the aircraft had entered. Recovering to Binbrook, the crew were exhausted but relieved. The aircraft was inspected the next day and declared a write off with wing rivets having been sprung, fuel tanks moving and bolts connecting the major spars fractured, highlighting the immensely violent manoeuvring Howard had put the aircraft through to evade the German fighters. He had saved his crew but at the cost of the aircraft.

In late September, 460SQN returned to supporting the allied advances in northern France. On 25, 26 and 27 September, Howard flew missions targeting German positions including coastal batteries around Calais operating at the low altitude of 6,000 feet and prone to enemy ground-based air defences.

In October, only several months after arriving at 460SQN, Howard was made acting flight commander of A Flight, 460SQN, bringing added responsibility for up to 15 aircraft and their crews. It was a significant leadership role on top of his own responsibilities as the pilot and leader for his crew. The timing was challenging as 460SQN was involved in significant operations targeting strategic targets such as defence industries deep in the German heartland. The majority of these were large mass raids comprising more than 1,000 aircraft. On 14 and 15 October he flew consecutive raids against Duisberg followed by strikes on Essen on 23 and 25 October and Cologne on 28 and 30 October. Such missions became the norm for the next three months.



Image of 460SQN aircrew and groundcrew with a 460SQN Lancaster taken in December 1944.(AWM)

On 2 January 1945, Howard was flying one such mission targeting Nuremberg and this time, FLG OFF Hendrick was escorting a new pilot for their first mission. The aircraft encountered the normal heavy flak and enemy fighters requiring evasive manoeuvring and a bit of luck. After dropping their load of bombs and starting their return to base, the aircraft was suddenly hit by flak causing the outer port engine to erupt in a ball of flame and loss of the mid-upper gun turret. Howard and the young junior pilot feathered the engine and threw the aircraft into a dive to try to extinguish the engine fire. They were able to extinguish the outer engine but then found the flames and flak had damaged the inner port engine as well, so they also feathered that engine, knowing they now risked recovering to base flying on only two engines at a reduced speed and alone. Nursing the stricken aircraft back to Binbrook, Howard and the junior pilot landed the aircraft nine hours after it had taken off. It was a remarkable feat of airmanship and the crew's 29th mission.



A Lancaster Bomber of Bomber Command is illuminated in the night sky over Hamburg by flares and anti-aircraft fire showing the fierce air battles that Lancaster crews endured in the air during World War 2. (AWM)

His final and 30th mission was flown two weeks later on 14 January – another 8-hour mission deep into Germany targeting strategic industry around Merseberg. Of the 110,000 aircrew that served with Bomber Command during World War 2, more than 55,000 perished. Of the more than 10,000 Australians that served in Bomber Command, more than a third perished. Defying the odds, Hendrick and his crew survived their operational Bomber Command tour at 460SQN.

Completing his tour of duty with 460SQN, Howard was posted in February 1945 to an instructor's position at No 1667 Heavy Conversion Unit where he converted new pilots on to the Avro Lancaster. Although not operational, the position still highlighted the inherent risks of military aviation. On one night, watching from the ground, he directed a young crew to go around the airfield circuit for one more take-off and landing only to see the aircraft lose an engine on take-off and crash in a ball of flame with the loss of all aboard. The tragic incident hit Howard hard knowing it was his direction that

partly led to the devastating loss. In reality, the post-accident examination revealed that it was a tragic accident caused by an engine malfunction that could not be foreseen; losing the engine on take-off is a catastrophic risk for any aircraft.

Following his posting as an instructor, he was briefly posted to 463 SQN from August to September 1945 where he supported the repatriation of allied POWs from continental Europe to England. However, the rapid demobilisation of units and personnel in Europe after the German surrender allowed Howard to return to Australia in November and eventually be discharged in early January 1946 bring an end to his war service. Completing 31 missions with 460SQN, Howard was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation read "Flying Officer Hendrick has completed numerous operations against the enemy, in the course of which he has invariably displayed the utmost fortitude, courage and devotion to duty."

Post war, desiring to continue flying, Howard initially flew as a commercial pilot with British Overseas Airways Corporation flying Avro Yorks and Lancastrians between London, Johannesburg and Sydney. However, he returned to Loxton after four years of flying to live and work on the family Soldier Settler block. He retired in his eighties and has become a local hero of the Loxton community, sharing his stories as a veteran with schools, oral collections and in his own book, *Full Circle*, published several years ago. He was awarded the Loxton Citizen of the Year in 2016 and in 2019 was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for services to the community. He was awarded the France's highest military honour, Knight of the Legion of Honour at a ceremony in Adelaide in 2017. In 2024, he a street was named after him in Loxton in recognition of his service to the community.



Hendrick flying a BOAC Lancastrian in 1948. (Hendrick Family)



Howard Hendrick pictured with the Loxton Waikerie Council Mayor Trevor Norton at the naming of a street in his honour. (Hendrick Family)

Today, Howard is one of South Australia's few remaining Bomber Command veterans. In 2023, he celebrated his 100th birthday with the Loxton community, RAAF members and the AFA-SA at the Loxton Show where the RAAF provided a 100 Squadron Hudson aircraft flypast. He also received a Chief of Air Force Letter of Congratulations and a RAAF Coin. In 2024, the Loxton Waikerie Council named a street in his honour for his 101st birthday.



Howard Hendrick on his 100th Birthday with GPCAPT Greg Weller (RAAF Edinburgh) and Robert Black (AFA-SA)

Howard Hendrick is a member of the local Loxton RSL and the Air Force Association (South Australia) and has attended both Loxton and AFA-SA commemorations. He has also become a good friend of RAAF Edinburgh who have embraced him

as a valued World War 2 RAAF veteran. He has attended in recent years the AFA-SA Bomber Command Commemorative Service at Torrens Parade Ground, Adelaide, where he has been a special guest honoured for his service in World War 2.



Three special Bomber Command veterans pose with dignitaries at the 2024 Bomber Command Commemorative Service: From left AIRCDRE Adrian Maso (Senior Air Force Representative South Australia), WGCDR Andrew McCarron (CO 462SQN), Mr Howard Hendrick (Pilot 460SQN), Mr Ray Merrill DFC (RAF 218SQN, Tail Gunner), Mr Angus Hughes (467SQN, Observer), Her Excellency Frances Adamson Governor of South Australia, and Mr Lawrence Ng (President Air Force Association South Australia).

**Greg Weller
History Group
SA Aviation Museum
December 2024**



Howard Hendrick with Dr Robert Black (Vice-President AFA-SA) at the 2024 Bomber Command Commemorative Service in Adelaide (Luke Scott Photos)