



In memory of

**Sergeant
RALPH KELL DOWSE**

404136, 70 Operational Training, R.A.A.F.
who died age 25
on 21 April 1941

Son of Arthur Llantiff Dowse and Lilian Maud Dowse;
of Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia

Remembered with honour
ISMALIA WAR MEMORIAL CEMETERY



SERGEANT

RALPH KELL DOWSE

70 OPERATIONAL TRAINING, R.A.A.F.

SERVICE NUMBER: 404136

Sergeant Ralph Dowse, the son of Arthur Llantiff Dowse and Lilian Maud Dowse (nee Tate), was born at Toowoomba in Queensland on 15th January 1916. He had been educated at the Toowoomba Grammar School during the period 1929 to 1933 and passed the University of Queensland Junior Public Examination. After leaving school he studied accountancy subjects with the Institute of Chartered Accountants and Hemingway & Robertson. He applied for air crew training in the Royal Australian Air Force on the 2nd January 1940. At the age of 24 years and 1 month he was enlisted in the Citizen Air Force of the R.A.A.F. on 4th March 1940 at No. 3 Recruiting Centre in Brisbane after giving an undertaking that he would serve for the duration of the war and an additional twelve months. He was allotted the service number of 404136. He had previously served in the Machine Gunners Section of the 15th/26th Infantry Battalion for two months and as a Sapper in the 11th Field Company Engineers for a year and his discharge from that unit was granted to enable him to join the Royal Australian Air Force. At the time of enlistment, he was employed as an Audit Clerk with a firm of chartered accountants prior to his enlistment and he resided with his family at 30 Isobel Street, Toowoomba. His physical description was that he was 6 feet 1 inch in height and weighed 157 pounds. He had a dark complexion, brown eyes and black hair. He stated that he was of the Church of England religion. He gave his next of kin as his father Mr Arthur Llantiff Dowse, a Manufacturer's Representative, residing at 30 Isobel Street, Toowoomba.

Sergeant Ralph Dowse joined No. 1 Air Observer School at Cootamundra in New South Wales on 27th May 1940 for training as an Air Observer. Upon completion of his training he was transferred to No. 1 Bombing & Gunnery School at Evans Head in New South Wales. He joined No. 1 Air Navigation School at Parkes in New South Wales on 19th November 1940. He qualified as an Air Observer and was awarded the Air Observer qualification badge on 16th December 1940. He joined No. 3 Embarkation Depot at Sandgate in Brisbane on 17th January 1941 and was promoted to the rank of Temporary Sergeant. He joined No. 2 Embarkation Depot at Bradfield Park in Sydney on 27th January 1941 in preparation for overseas service on attachment to the Royal Air Force. He embarked by sea transport from Sydney in New South Wales on 4th February 1941 and after disembarking from the ship in Egypt he joined the Middle East Pool on 24th March 1941.

He joined No. 70 Operational Training Unit at Ismailia where training was conducted to prepare single seat fighter pilots and twin-engined aircrew to operate in Middle Eastern conditions on 11th April 1941.

Sergeant Ralph Dowse was an Air Observer and member of the crew of a No. 70 Middle East Operational Training Unit Blenheim Bomber L8481 that crashed 12 miles west of Ismailia, Egypt, on 22nd May 1941. The aircraft was detailed for a formation flying practice commencing at 0700 hours and upon returning from the practice the pilot had difficulties with the engine and the aircraft was unable to keep flying and crashed to the ground. The other two crew members survived the crash but Sergeant Dowse was thrown from the aircraft and died instantly. At the time of his death Ralph Dowse was 25 years of age. The Air Ministry notified his father, residing at 20 Isobel Street, Toowoomba, that his son lost his life as a result of air operations and that he was buried in the Ismailia War Memorial Cemetery in Egypt on 21st May 1941.



Australian War memorial photograph MED0298

An Observer in a Bristol Blenheim bomber peers down on the target during a raid on Halfaya in Egypt.

At a subsequent Court of Inquiry the pilot, Sergeant Fred Lucie, stated:

On the 21st May 1941 I was detailed for a formation practice starting at 0700 hours. After about fifty minutes flying while we were approaching Ismailia, I glanced at the instruments and saw that the port engine oil pressure had dropped from ninety degrees to zero. I broke away from the formation and closed the port throttle and carried out the necessary procedure for single engine flying, making towards Ismailia on a right hand circuit. I attempted to come into land and not being satisfied that the undercarriage was locked down I flew off to try and verify whether the undercarriage was safe for landing.

I pulled the flaps to up as I am not sure that they came fully up, more than thirty five degrees on the indicator. The aircraft started going to the left and the turn intensified whilst at the same time we were losing height rapidly; I had the idea that if the aircraft was not spinning it would very soon do so and I throttled back the starboard engine immediately but we were not far from the ground; I straightened the aircraft as well as I could and tried to hold off.

From the deliberations of the Court of Inquiry it was decided:

The accident was due to a spin to port assisted by a failure of the port engine, while the undercarriage and flaps were not fully retracted. The pilot tried his best under the circumstances, and not that he is seriously injured, it is not considered further action necessary.

Ralph Kell Dowse's name is commemorated on Panel No. 121 at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and locally on the Toowoomba Mothers' Memorial, the Toowoomba Soldiers' Memorial

Hall Honour Board, the St James' Church Memorial Tablet and the Toowoomba Grammar School WW2 Honour Board.

The following newspaper report was published in the *Courier Mail* on Saturday, 24th May 1941:

News has been received in Toowoomba that Sergeant Observer Ralph Kell Dowse, 25, Royal Australian Air Force, has been killed in air operations in Egypt. He was the eldest son of Mr and Mrs A.L. Dowse, of Isobel Street, Toowoomba, and was educated at the North State and Toowoomba Grammar Schools. He served for five years on the staff of Messrs Thompson and Sharland, chartered accountants, Brisbane, and before his enlistment was with Messrs. Griffin and Ralph, Brisbane. His only brother, Edgar, is serving with the transport section of the A.I.F. abroad.



Photo of Ralph Dowse's grave that was sent to his family prior to the Ismailia War Memorial Cemetery being created and Commonwealth War Graves headstones being erected on each grave.

Toowoomba Grammar Archive records show that he enrolled as a day student on 28th January 1929 and left the school on 5th December 1930. His parent was shown as Arthur Lantiff Dowse residing at 20 Isobel Street Toowoomba. His parents presented the Academic Honour Board to the School in November 1946 in memory of Ralph. He passed six subjects in the Junior examination and received a prize for Junior Mathematics.

The following article giving news of his death was published in the Old Boys' Register in June 1941: Word is received that Sergeant Observer Ralph Kell Dowse, R.A.A.F., aged 25 years, eldest son of Mr and Mrs A.L. Dowse, 20 Isobel Street, Toowoomba, had been killed as a result of air operations in Egypt. After leaving the School he served for five years on the staff of Messrs Thompson and Sharland, Chartered Accountants, Brisbane. Prior to his enlistment was with Messrs Griffin and Ralph, Brisbane. His only brother, Edgar, is serving with the transport section of the A.I.F. abroad. Sincere sympathy is extended to his parents.

The following article appeared in the Old Boys' Register in June 1947: Only yesterday there was unveiled in the hall an Honour Board in memory of Sergeant Observer Ralph Kell Dowse, who was killed in the Middle East. On it are inscribed the names of University Scholars, Byrnes Medallists, and Rhodes Scholars. Its presence will keep green the memory of one who dearly loved the School, in addition to filling one of our long-felt wants. The mention of this board will, I think, suggest to you that some war memorial is necessary to honour the 99 Old Boys who we know fell on service, and that the first steps towards its realisation should soon be taken.

The following article appeared in the Old Boys' Register in June 1947:

The late R.K. Dowse. Just before Sergeant Observer Ralph Kell Dowse left for the front, he expressed the wish to his mother that, if he did not return, some small gift should be made to the School on his behalf. He was killed in action in the Middle East, and his parents, Mr and Mrs A.L. Dowse, of Isabel Street, have honoured his request by presenting £10, to be used for School purposes, and have promised £1/1/- annually for a prize, to be called "The Ralph Dowse Memorial Prize," The latter will be given annually for Junior Mathematics, while the former will be spent on something of a permanent nature. Ralph Dowse entered the School in 1929, and was only 25 at the time of his death. He was a particularly keen member of the Branch of the Old Boys' Association. We shall remember his quiet dignity, his earnestness and his love of the School; and we offer our sincere condolence to his sorrowing parents.

External Links

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