

# 1842 Squadron (GHRFC Wing) Mission Report

Location: Australia

Mission Codename: Lions Tour

Date: 2002

**Please note: due to the official secrets act (1952) sections 14a subsections i through viii some names and dates have been changed to protect national security.**

*On a warm summer in the year 2002 1842 Squadron GHRFC wing met at an undisclosed airfield near London. These pioneering young men were equipped only with standard GHRFC uniform (polo shirt and slacks) and all they could stuff into a suitcase for a perilous mission deep into the South Pacific. This is their story:*

Due to a cock up at wing HQ involving Rear Gunner Lambden the sortie to Australia was forced to occur in 2 distinct waves. The first of these waves met at an airfield outside of London on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2002, arriving in dribs and drabs initially these brave youngsters, some of whom had never been involved in a mission such as this, soon banded together. The tension was clear on everyone's faces, what was going to happen, what could we expect in these hostile lands and, more importantly, would we all be coming back? Having made our way through pre-flight briefing and checks the first 2 casualties of the day occurred. Rigg and Jimbo failed to attend mission briefing in time and as a result were diverted via the windy city, forced to meet us later in LA. With this minor inconvenience sorted out everyone boarded the troop transport we would be calling home for the next 8 hours.

The flight to LA was uneventful and the chaps began to settle in, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad after all, how they were mistaken. A short stop over in LA allowed everyone to visit the mess hall and get a good square meal before the next (and longest) leg of their journey. Unbeknownst to many Jock Jackson had purchased some gin, a mistake he was later to pay for. The flight over the Atlantic was again quiet, many choosing to sleep, watch the films on offer or play cards. Some tentative drinking was occurring but nothing too serious, it still didn't seem real that we were actually going. A number of hours later (23-24, who knows). The weary crew touched down in Australia, our home away from home, and more importantly the sight of a number of skirmishes and the 3 major battles of this campaign.

A third short plane ride and a coach trip later and the advanced party reached the billets were to be stationed in for the next week or so, the Chateau Beachside, a large apartment complex overlooking the beach with a pool and Jacuzzi a short walk from the centre of Surfers Paradise. After cleaning themselves and acclimatising up the troops met in intelligence officer Woodville-Price's quarters for briefing and some familiarisation training, needless to say the gin brought by Jock reared its ugly head and a number of crewman, most notably pilot officer Lambert and flying officer Wheeler, suffered its ill effects. Familiarisation training over the troops made a recce into town, which resulted in much drinking and a more detailed exploration of shooters and crazy horses, two local nightspots.

The 1<sup>st</sup> full day in Australia was spent at wet and wild, here the troops learnt more about what to do should they ever ditch their aircraft into a waterpark. Training over the troops made they way back to their billets where they met up with the second, more experienced wave, arriving from

blightly. With the reinforcements here the mission could start in earnest. That night the whole squadron enjoyed a meal together, with some of the more seasoned veterans helping break in some of the newer recruits. The next few days were spent indulging in various activities such as training on the beach, swimming, drinking, fishing, horse riding, drinking, eating, visiting players and crazy horses and watching the Australian propaganda during the run up to the first major offensive of the campaign.

Match 1, Brisbane, 30.06.2002, 18.00hrs

The troops were mustered early in the day and to their shock and horror discovered that they might not all be involved in this most momentous of occasions. There was disbelief all around when Captains Davis and Ryan explained that we would have to draw straws to see who would get to go over the top and who would stay. The lots were drawn and the lucky few who got to go were congratulated by the unfortunate ones who had to stay behind. At 2hrs and 5 minutes to zero hour all the troops were gathered once more and told to board the personnel carrier waiting outside, regardless of whether they were going or not. Silently the troops, all dressed in either their blue and gold combat fatigues or specialist red tops, made their way aboard, the engine started, and Captain Davis revealed that we would all be going over the top! The tension in the air dissolved into laughter and cheers as everyone realised that we were in it together, we were going to do it for Britain, hooray!

The confrontation was a glorious victory, Brisbane didn't know what had hit it, wave after wave of troops rolled into the stadium, the whole place was a sea of red shirts, and at the frontline there was a victory for the Lions. The night was rounded off with drinking and carousing into the small hours.

Following our rout of the home forces in Brisbane it was time to leave for pastures a fresh, the battle may have been won but the war was not over. Our next theatre of operations was Melbourne. Our arrival came as a bit of a shock from the smallish, sunny coastal resort of Surfers. Melbourne was a big city, and it was cold and grey, not what we had been prepared for at all. The weather may have been bad but that was more than made up for by the excellent quality of our billets, first class accommodation with kitchenettes, televisions and video machines in every room.

A recce of Melbourne early that week led to a fortunate encounter with some WREN's, claiming to be the Lionesses, the Lion's official cheerleaders. Much photographic documentation of the work of these sterling females was made by the troops. A rendezvous was arranged for later that evening in a small hostelry in the town, the troops attended in full dress uniform and much time was spent polishing boots etc to a high sheen, however it turned out to be a no show by the Lionesses and the troops had to indulge in other activities, Airman Cartwright in particular used this time to perfect his blindsides, flying out of the sun technique, much to the concern of the other troops!

Later that week morale officer Challacombe arranged a tour of the Yarra valley, a prime wine growing region in this area of Australia. The tour began well enough with a trip to the Chandon estate, however things gradually declined in direct proportion to the increase in wine consumed, however all was not lost as stunt co-ordinator Breeze was able to demonstrate a particularly daring display of low altitude flying at the Banrock Station estate. A local 10 a side tournament allowed the troops to stretch their legs and the 1<sup>st</sup> team made it all the way to the final, to play a local London side, Old Colefians, who were the stronger on the day and won the tournament despite a brave battle by our lads. Some of the troops managed to infiltrate a large gathering of the enemy at what was colloquially known as a "footy match", this match gave the observers an insight into the psyche of their enemy, one old woman was heard to shout "you flaming mongrel, get off the pitch you're an animal" to one of the participants in the "footy match". Had the brave visitors bitten off more than they could chew in Melbourne?

Match 2, Melbourne, 07.07.2002, 17.00 hrs

The start of the second great conflict of this campaign began sedately enough with our lads being the guests of Crooked Hill RFC at a prestigious buffet meal prior to the engagement. The food was good, although a bit too exciting much for stunt co-ordinator Breeze who had to have a little lie down mid way through the meal, however the cunning enemy had a trick up their sleeve, no sooner had the meal ended than one of their chief propaganda officers took to the stage and began to numb our lads into a stupor with his stories of the financial goings on within the Australian RFU, it was almost too much to bear. Fortunately through the clever use of alcohol we were able to let his ravings wash over us like so much water from a duck (or duckbilled platypus's) back. The rally over our boys headed off to the Match. Things weren't to go our way that night. The locals had created a hostile atmosphere due to the uniform issuing of gold hats and scarves to the supporters, this sea of gold was however adequately countered by the tide of red shirts filling the stadium. However it was not to be our night, a lacklustre performance result in our first defeat of the campaign, with only one more major confrontation to go.

The troops left Melbourne a little dispirited, some were more dispirited than others and almost failed to make the airfield in time! The short hop to Sydney was uneventful and we were quickly bussed to our final rest point in Darling Harbour. These billets took the form of a more traditional hotel with good links via bus and ferry to the centre of Sydney. Once again time was spent recceding the local area, with incursions into local bars as well as the opera house, AMP tower, the Aquarium and various other tourist attractions. Whilst in Sydney a small contingent of the group made their way to a local sports bar and hotel here they mingled with the locals and indulged in one or two simple pass times much to the amusement of the onlookers. Unfortunately Junior airman Rigg became involved in an entanglement with the local law enforcement and spent some time in their company before being rescued.

The first and last full 15 a side rugby game was played in Sydney against a combined Korean university side. The Koreans were younger, fitter, had spent more time training and less time drinking than their opposition so they understandably won the game, however all was not lost and many of the troops revelled in this skirmish, comparing tales and injuries from their encounters with one another over a few beers after the game. That evening a kangaroo court marshal was set up to punish several wrongdoers, these punishments dealt out were for a variety of offences and mostly involved the consumption of alcohol in one form or another. Following the court marshal the chaps rolled (some literally) into town for some light refreshment and entertainment.

Match 3, Sydney, 14.07.2002, 18.00

The final battle of the war was upon us and due to the lasting problems caused by rear gunner Lambden not all of the lads were going to see action. The group drew lots to see who would get to travel to the match by boat, those who would have to make their own way there and try to get in somehow, and those content to watch the match on TV. Of those lads going down to the game fortunately all managed to get in but afterwards they questioned whether it was worth it. The match was close but with the Lion's unable to take the upper hand the Australians scored point after point. At the end of the game the Aussie's had done it, they had beaten the Lion's for the first time, but were we bitter, no, we felt that we had gone into this as boys and come out of it as men, war can have that effect on you.

You can still tell the veterans of Australia 2002, they get that faraway look in their eyes when you mention the Lion's to them, a kind of 100 mile stare, but they would all, everyone of them, go back and do it all again.

By Flying Officer (1<sup>st</sup> Class) James "Jock" Jackson GHRFC, UMDS, BSc (HONS)

Thanks go to Brigadier Harvey Pynn for making this tour happen, thanks grandad!