

## *Pilot Officer James Leo Daly DFC*

### *Navigator, 101 Squadron, RAF Bomber Command, World War II*

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#### **The Man**

My great-uncle James Leo Daly. He was known to everyone simply as Leo.

Leo was a schoolteacher. Educated by the Jesuits at St Patrick's College, East Melbourne. Precise, patient, calm under pressure — qualities formed in a classroom that would serve him in ways he could not yet imagine when he stood in front of his students in the years before the war.

*One of the Jesuits on staff at St Patrick's during those years was Fr John Forster SJ, who taught there from 1926 to 1932 — the years Leo would have been fifteen years old. St Patrick's was a small school, so it is very possible the two knew each other. The connection runs through my grandparents, Jeremiah and Marjorie Ryan (nee Forster) — known in the family as 'Pater' and 'Mater'. Mater was a great-niece of Fr John Forster SJ, and Pater's sister, Margaret, was married to Leo.*

James Leo Daly was born on 23 May 1910, in Rochester, Victoria. He enlisted in the RAAF on 10 October 1942, in Melbourne, at thirty two years old. By the time he began flying operations in October 1944, he was thirty four — ancient by the standards of Bomber Command, where the average age of aircrew was twenty and anyone over thirty was called "Dad." He volunteered anyway.

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#### **The Theatre of Departure**

There is nothing subtle about a Lancaster bomber preparing for war.

The aircraft itself was enormous — over twenty one metres from nose to tail, a wingspan of thirty one metres, weighing thirty tonnes fully loaded with bombs, fuel and crew. It sat on the dispersal pad in the Lincolnshire darkness, ground crew moving around it with torches, armorers loading the bomb bay, fuel bowsers pumping aviation fuel into tanks that held over two thousand gallons.

Then the engines.

A Lancaster had four Rolls Royce Merlin engines — the same engine that powered the Spitfire, the Hurricane, the Mosquito. Each one produced 1,280 horsepower. Together they produced over 5,000 horsepower, enough to lift thirty tonnes of aircraft, crew, bombs and fuel into the night sky.

Starting them was a ritual in itself. The ground crew would prime each engine in turn. The pilot would call — *contact* — and the propeller would turn slowly at first, coughing and

backfiring in the cold night air, before catching with a sound that was felt as much as heard. One engine. Then two. Then three. Then four.

When all four Merlins were running the noise was extraordinary — a deep, resonant thunder that rolled across the airfield and into the surrounding countryside. The airframe shook. The instruments trembled in their housings. Conversation inside the aircraft without an intercom was impossible.

The Lancaster would taxi slowly to the runway threshold, joining a queue of other aircraft doing the same — dark shapes moving in the darkness, exhaust stacks glowing faintly blue, the thunder of dozens of Merlin engines building to something that the people in the villages around the airfield had learned to recognise as the sound of men going to war.

Then the green light from the control tower.

The pilot would open the throttles — all four together, smoothly, firmly. The Merlins would rise from thunder to a roar that shook the earth. The Lancaster would begin to move, slowly at first, then faster, the tail lifting as speed built, the aircraft heavy with its load, using every yard of runway before the wheels finally lifted and the ground fell away beneath them.

Climbing into the dark English sky. Setting course. The navigator's curtain drawn. The instruments glowing. Ahead — Germany.

Leo sat at his table as the Lancaster climbed, the four Merlins settling into the steady, rhythmic note that aircrew called the Lancaster's song. He checked his charts, his calculations, his instruments. He knew the route. He knew the target. He knew the risks.

He had done this before. He would do it again.

The navigator's job began the moment the wheels left the ground and did not end until they touched down again — however many hours later, however many miles away, in whatever condition the aircraft and crew had survived to return.

For Leo Daly, that journey began thirty two times.

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## **The Training**

Before he ever reached a Lancaster, Leo trained as a navigator, wireless operator and gunner at No. 1 Wireless Air Gunners School (1 WAGS) at Ballarat, Victoria — a school purpose-built for the task, raised as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme that fed aircrew from across the Commonwealth into RAF Bomber Command.

The classroom skills that had served him as a schoolteacher — precision, patience, the discipline of getting a calculation right the first time — were exactly what the instructors at Ballarat were trying to build in every trainee who passed through. For Leo, it was less a transformation than a redirection: the same steady mind, turned from a blackboard to a chart table.

From Ballarat, further training followed at No. 4(C) Advanced Flying Unit and No. 18 Operational Training Unit, refining the skills of dead reckoning navigation before he was posted operational. He left Australia on 27 December 1943, and arrived in the United Kingdom on 11 February 1944, before being posted to 101 Squadron — the posting that would ask everything of what he had just learned.

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## **Wartime London**

The journey itself took forty six days — too long for any flight of the era, and consistent with a wartime troopship convoy, likely routed well clear of the Mediterranean.

He arrived into a city that had believed the worst was behind it. Three weeks earlier, on 21 January 1944, the Luftwaffe had begun Operation Steinbock — what Londoners would come to call the ‘Little Blitz’ or ‘Baby Blitz’. After nearly three years of relative respite since the devastation of 1940 and 1941, German bombers were once again over the capital by night. It was a far smaller campaign than the original Blitz, but no less real to the people living through it — fourteen raids on London alone before it petered out in May, more than 1,500 civilians killed.

Leo landed into that renewed danger before he had flown a single operation of his own. Months of training still lay ahead of him — first in Scotland, then in Yorkshire — before he would climb into a Lancaster and turn the direction of the danger around, carrying it back over Germany himself. But his first experience of the war in Europe was not as an airman delivering it. It was as a newly arrived Australian, standing in a blacked-out city, listening to the sirens of someone else’s raid.

Five days later, on 16 February 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower formally established his own headquarters in London as Commanding General of the U.S. Forces in Europe, finalising the planning that would become D-Day. A newly arrived Australian navigator and the Supreme Allied Commander landed in the same city within the same week, for entirely different reasons — one to help direct an invasion, the other still months from his first operation.

Londoners did not yet know it, but an even newer terror was still four months away. The first V-1 flying bomb would not fall until 13 June 1944, a week after D-Day — the city Leo had just landed in had endured the old kind of raid, and was about to face a kind nobody had seen before.

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## **The Squadron**

He trained as a navigator and was posted to 101 Squadron, RAF Bomber Command — the most dangerous posting in the most dangerous air force in the world.

101 Squadron flew Avro Lancasters. But not ordinary Lancasters. These aircraft carried secret jamming equipment — codenamed Airborne Cigar — designed to disrupt German radio communications and protect the hundreds of bombers in the stream around them. The

equipment worked. It also broadcast the aircraft's position to every German night fighter within fifty miles.

101 Squadron's motto was 'Mens agitat molem' — Latin for "mind over matter." For the men flying with the Airborne Cigar equipment, it was more than a piece of Latin on a crest. Every sortie meant carrying a device that made their own aircraft the most heavily targeted Lancaster in the bomber stream, and getting through it required exactly what the motto promised: nerve and discipline holding steady against odds the equipment itself had stacked against them.

The Germans knew which Lancasters were jamming them. They hunted them specifically.

A raid in Leo's era typically meant four hundred to seven hundred four-engined bombers dispatched together — not flying in formation, which was a daylight American tactic, but strung out through the darkness in what crews called the bomber stream: individual aircraft, unseen and invisible to each other, flying the same route at the same height, relying on darkness and numbers rather than visible mutual protection. His own raid on Essen on 12 December 1944 involved 540 bombers — a single, ordinary night's work for Bomber Command by that stage of the war.

To understand what Leo was flying into, the numbers tell their own story.

Across RAF Bomber Command as a whole, 55,573 aircrew were killed out of 125,000 who served — a death rate of 44 percent. A Bomber Command aircrew member had a lower statistical chance of survival than a British infantry officer on the Western Front in the First World War. Bomber Command losses represented almost 20 percent of all British and Commonwealth personnel killed in action during the entire war, yet aircrew made up only a small proportion of total service numbers. Of every 100 men who flew, fewer than 30 could expect to complete a full tour of thirty operations during the worst periods of the campaign.

For Australians specifically the toll was devastating. More than one in three RAAF personnel serving in Bomber Command were killed — accounting for 20 percent of every Australian combat death in the entire Second World War, from a group that represented only a fraction of total enlistments.

The enemy was not the only danger. Over 8,000 Bomber Command airmen were killed in accidents during training or non-operational flying alone. On the night of 7–8 November 1941, in a raid on Berlin, Mannheim and Cologne, 392 aircraft were dispatched into storms, thick cloud, ice and hail so severe that only 73 of the 169 bombers sent to Berlin even reached the city. Thirty seven aircraft were lost that single night — 7.4 percent of the whole force — many of them believed to have gone down over the North Sea from ice building up on their wings and fuel exhaustion in the terrible conditions, rather than anything the Germans did at all. Navigating through weather like that, in the dark, without modern instruments, was its own kind of combat.

A standard Bomber Command tour was thirty operations, not exceeding two hundred flying hours. Leo's own signed record shows thirty two sorties and 199 hours, 35 minutes — he flew a genuinely complete tour, almost to the exact hour, with two sorties to spare.

And then there was 101 Squadron.

At full strength the squadron operated 42 aircraft with eight crew each — approximately 336 men at any one time. Over the course of the war 101 Squadron lost 1,176 aircrew killed — the highest of any RAF squadron — and 145 Lancasters destroyed on operations. The squadron effectively lost its entire complement of men more than three times over. Only three other squadrons in the entire RAF lost more aircraft.

Leo Daly flew thirty two sorties in those aircraft.

The statistics say he probably shouldn't have come home. He did.

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### **The Navigator's Table**

Leo Daly's office was a curtained table roughly the size of a school desk, positioned just behind and below the pilot of his Lancaster. On it sat his charts, his instruments, his logs. A small lamp provided just enough light to work by. The curtain was drawn tight — not for privacy, but to stop the glow of his instruments being visible to enemy fighters in the darkness outside.

He navigated by dead reckoning — calculating position from a known starting point using speed, heading and time. Simple in principle. Brutally difficult in practice. Wind at altitude bore no resemblance to the forecast. The pilot was constantly adjusting heading. Enemy flak forced evasive action that threw every calculation off. Leo had to track every deviation, every correction, every lost minute, and continuously update his picture of where they were.

When skies were clear he could take star sights through a small astral dome above his table — a bubble sextant pressed against the Perspex, measuring the angle of a star above the horizon. Three stars, three readings, a triangle of position lines on the chart. If the triangle was small, he was accurate. If it was large, he had to judge which corner was most likely the truth.

Around him, invisible in the dark, were hundreds of other Lancasters. The bomber stream stretched for miles — a river of aircraft flying the same route at the same height, none showing lights, none able to see the others. Any navigational error didn't just risk Leo's crew. It risked a collision with another Lancaster materialising from the blackness without warning.

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### **The Sorties**

His own signed record — a RAAF biographical questionnaire completed on 7 April 1945 — puts a precise figure on his tour: 199 hours and 35 minutes of operational flying, across thirty two sorties. Ten were flown in daylight. Twenty two were flown at night.

His targets, in order:

11 Oct 1944 — Fort Frederik Hendrik: coastal fortification, supporting the Allied ground advance on Antwerp

19 Oct 1944 — Stuttgart: vehicle manufacturing — Daimler-Benz engines

22 Oct 1944 — Essen: the Krupp armaments works, the arsenal of Germany  
 28 Oct 1944 — Cologne: rail hub and industrial centre  
 30 Oct 1944 — Cologne: rail hub and industrial centre  
 9 Nov 1944 — Wanne-Eickel: critical fuel target — synthetic oil refinery  
 11 Nov 1944 — Dortmund: steel production and rail marshalling yards  
 16 Nov 1944 — Düren: rail and communications hub ahead of an Allied ground offensive  
 18 Nov 1944 — Wanne-Eickel: critical fuel target — synthetic oil refinery  
 21 Nov 1944 — Aschaffenburg: rail and river crossing  
 4 Dec 1944 — Karlsruhe: rail marshalling yards connecting the western front  
 6 Dec 1944 — Merseburg: the Leuna synthetic oil plant — one of the most heavily defended targets in Germany  
 12 Dec 1944 — Essen: the Krupp armaments works, the arsenal of Germany  
 15 Dec 1944 — Ludwigshafen: the BASF chemical and synthetic oil plant  
 17 Dec 1944 — Ulm: rail hub supplying the southern front  
 31 Dec 1944 — Osterfeld: coking plant, coal and steel production  
 14 Jan 1945 — Merseburg: the Leuna synthetic oil plant, for the second time  
 16 Jan 1945 — Zeitz: synthetic oil refinery  
 22 Jan 1945 — Duisburg: the largest inland port in Europe — steel and coal  
 7 Feb 1945 — Kleve: tactical support for Allied forces crossing the Rhine  
 20 Feb 1945 — Dortmund: steel production and rail marshalling yards  
 5 Mar 1945 — Chemnitz: manufacturing and rail, supporting the eastern front against the Soviets  
 11 Mar 1945 — Essen: the Krupp armaments works, the arsenal of Germany  
 12 Mar 1945 — Dortmund: steel production and rail marshalling yards  
 13 Mar 1945 — Gelsenkirchen (Hahlbusch/Datteln): oil and industrial production  
 15 Mar 1945 — Misburg: oil refinery near Hanover  
 25 Mar 1945 — Hanover: rail hub and oil production  
 27 Mar 1945 — Paderborn: tactical support against SS Panzer divisions  
 31 Mar 1945 — Hamburg: U-boat yards, major port, oil refinery  
 3 Apr 1945 — Nordhausen: V-weapon assembly plant, a slave labour facility  
 14 Apr 1945 — Potsdam (Berlin): German military headquarters, in the final weeks of the war

A few things stand out across that list. Merseburg appears twice — the Leuna synthetic oil plant was one of the most heavily defended targets in the whole of Germany, ringed with flak and night fighters, and Leo flew there twice and came home both times. Essen, too, appears three times: the Krupp works were the literal arsenal of Germany, and Bomber Command returned to them again and again. A heavy concentration of targets from late 1944 onward are synthetic oil plants and refineries — Wanne-Eickel, Merseburg, Ludwigshafen, Zeitz, Misburg — reflecting the campaign that historians now regard as decisive: starving the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe of the fuel they needed to fight at all. Rail marshalling yards recur constantly too, a slower strangulation of German logistics rather than a single knockout blow. And in his final sorties, the targets shift from industry to direct tactical support — Kleve for the Rhine crossing, Paderborn against SS Panzer divisions — the bomber war narrowing, in its last weeks, into close support for the armies advancing on the ground.

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## **The Scheldt and Antwerp**

Leo's first operation was not against a German city at all. Fort Frederik Hendrik, near Westkapelle in the Netherlands, was a coastal fortress the Germans had renamed Stützpunkt Hendrik, part of the Atlantic Wall, its guns covering the approaches to the Belgian port of Antwerp.

By October 1944 the Allied armies had outrun their own supply lines — fuel and ammunition for days, not weeks. Antwerp was the largest port in Europe, and capturing it intact could have solved the crisis at a stroke. But the Germans still held the Scheldt estuary and its gun batteries, and without clearing them the port was useless, however many docks and cranes stood ready and waiting.

On 11 and 12 October 1944, over two hundred bombers of the Allied strategic air force attacked the fort, Leo among them. The 3rd Canadian Division was fighting on the ground to clear German troops from coastal strongpoints along the Scheldt, Fort Frederik Hendrik among them, as part of the wider battle to open the estuary. The fort itself fell on 25 October 1944, shortly after the raids.

Leo's very first sortie, then, was not city-bombing at all — it was direct, immediate support for an Allied army fighting to open the port that would go on to supply the final drive into Germany.

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## **Nordhausen and the V-Weapons**

His second-to-last sortie, on 3 April 1945, was to Nordhausen — one of the darker targets of the war. Beneath the town, in tunnels dug into the Kohnstein mountain, the Mittelwerk factory assembled Germany's V-weapons using slave labour drawn from the nearby Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp. Thousands of prisoners died constructing the weapons that were later fired at London and other cities — American forces liberated the site only weeks after Leo's raid.

The V-1 flying bomb was, in effect, an early cruise missile: a small pilotless aircraft packed with explosives, launched from ramps in France and the Netherlands toward London and other British cities. The first fell on 13 June 1944, just a week after D-Day. Its distinctive engine note earned it the nickname 'doodlebug' — and it was the silence, when the engine cut out before the dive to earth, that Londoners learned to dread. Around 10,000 were launched at Britain, causing more than 22,000 casualties and forcing a final wave of child evacuations out of London.

The V-2 was something else again — the world's first ballistic missile, travelling at supersonic speed with no warning and no possible defence, capable of reaching London from launch sites in the Netherlands in around five minutes. The first struck Chiswick on 8 September 1944; the last fell on London in late March 1945, barely a week before Leo's own

raid on the factory that had built it. Roughly 3,000 were fired, killing around 9,000 people. It was also, grimly, the direct ancestor of every space rocket that followed, including the Saturn V that would later carry men to the Moon.

Both weapons were aimed squarely at civilian populations rather than military targets — weapons of terror, not war in the conventional sense. Bombing their production and launch sites, whatever the human cost of the slave labour building them, was considered essential to protecting the very city Leo had first landed in, back in February 1944, during the Little Blitz.

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His last sortie was to Potsdam, on 14 April 1945. Potsdam was no ordinary target — it was the seat of Nazi military headquarters, the heart of the German High Command, the place from which the orders that had prosecuted six years of war had flowed. Bombing Potsdam in April 1945 was striking at the very nerve centre of the regime in its final days. The war in Europe ended less than a month later.

*It is worth noting that Leo signed his own biographical questionnaire — the same form quoted throughout this account — on 7 April 1945, exactly one week before that final raid on Potsdam. Whether that was simply routine administration, or something else entirely given what he knew he was about to fly into, is impossible to say. But the timing invites the thought.*

He flew thirty two times. He came home every time.

A schoolteacher from Australia, navigating in the dark, on missions that helped starve Germany of fuel, strangle its rail network, support the armies advancing on the ground, and finally strike at the headquarters of Nazi Germany itself.

That's a remarkable final entry in any logbook.

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## **The Devotional Medal**

Before every mission there was a ritual. Leo's crew — young men mostly, teenagers and early twenties — would ask him before boarding whether he had his devotional medal with him. Given his own Catholic upbringing and Jesuit schooling, it was likely a small Catholic devotional medal — a saint, or the Sacred Heart — the kind many airmen of the era carried, whatever their own faith, as a private hedge against the odds. It was not a casual question. These men were flying into the most dangerous airspace in the world and they took such things seriously.

On one occasion Leo had left it behind in barracks. The crew refused to board without it. They made him go back and retrieve it — and then held the aircraft for a rapid take off to rejoin their squadron.

Thirty two sorties. Leo came home every time.

Make of that what you will.



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## The Bracelet

Christmas 1944 — deep in the middle of his operational tour, between sorties over Germany — Leo was in London. He found a silver bracelet in a shop somewhere in that battered, defiant city and sent it to his wife Margaret in Australia for Christmas.

It is a wartime London souvenir bracelet — seven oval silver panels, each engraved with an iconic London landmark. The Houses of Parliament. Westminster Abbey. Tower Bridge. Windsor Castle. And St Paul's Cathedral — the great dome that had stood above the smoke and flames of the Blitz, rising intact above a burning city on the night of 29 December 1940, photographed and published around the world. It became the symbol of everything they were fighting for.

Leo chose that bracelet. He sent it across a wartime world to his wife, from a city that had survived, by a man who intended to survive too.

The London bracelet — seven silver panels, St Paul's at the centre — was left to his niece, my mother, Marilla 'Mardi' Timms (nee Ryan), and she still wears it today.

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## The Decoration

Leo Daly was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation read simply that he had displayed "*the utmost courage, fortitude and devotion to duty.*"

The Cross itself had been instituted by the King in 1918, "to signify his appreciation of acts of valour, courage, and devotion to duty, by officers in the Royal Air Force and in Air Forces of Self-Governing Dominions beyond the Seas," granted to those "recommended for an act or acts of valour, courage, or devotion to duty whilst flying in active operations against the enemy." Its award entitled the recipient to append the initials 'D.F.C.' to his name — initials Leo, by every account, never once used.

Around 185,000 men served as aircrew across the whole of the RAF during the Second World War, in every command, not only Bomber Command. Set against roughly 20,000 DFCs awarded across the RAF and Commonwealth, something in the order of one man in every nine or ten aircrew ever received one.

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## His Honours

Leo's WWII entitlement, in order of precedence:

Distinguished Flying Cross — awarded for gallantry, courage and devotion to duty in active operations against the enemy.

1939–1945 Star, with Bomber Command Clasp — the Star recognised operational service overseas in the early war years; the Clasp, specifically recognised aircrew who flew at least one operational sortie with RAF Bomber Command.

France and Germany Star — awarded for operational service in France, Belgium, the Netherlands or Germany from 6 June 1944 (D-Day) onward.

War Medal 1939–1945 — awarded to full-time personnel of the armed forces for service between 3 September 1939 and 2 September 1945, wherever served.

Australia Service Medal 1939–1945 — awarded for eligible service, at home or overseas, in the Australian Armed Forces during the Second World War, originally requiring at least 18 months of full-time service. Leo enlisted on 10 October 1942 and was not discharged until 18 December 1946 — well over four years of full-time RAAF service, comfortably clearing the threshold.

Five stars and medals standing in for thirty two operations over Germany and occupied Europe — and, like the man who earned them, saying very little about what they actually cost.

The Distinguished Flying Cross award was confirmed in the Commonwealth Gazette of 25 September 1945, which listed Pilot Officer James Leo Daly, No. 428300, among the recipients of the Distinguished Flying Cross. The same date, the London Gazette carried the RAF supplement recording the award to “James Leo Daly (Aus.428300), 101 Sqn.” — the British and Australian records of the same decoration, entered on the same day.

It was not a common decoration. Between 1918 and 1972, only 2,391 Australians ever received the Distinguished Flying Cross, and most of those awards — like Leo's — were earned in the skies over occupied Europe during the Second World War. Set against more than 20,000 DFCs awarded across the entire Royal Air Force and Commonwealth in that war, an Australian recipient was the exception rather than the rule — roughly one in nine Australians. Leo was not simply one of many. He was one of a genuinely select few.

Closer to home, the school where Leo first trained tells the same story in miniature. More than 151 personnel who passed through No. 1 Wireless Air Gunners School at Ballarat are recorded as having received a gallantry citation during the war — the major ones being the Distinguished Flying Cross and its non-commissioned equivalent, the Distinguished Flying Medal, both awarded for “an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty whilst flying in active operations against the enemy.” Of those 151, twenty five were killed in action. Leo was one of the ones who came home.

Understated in the way only the British military can manage. What it meant in practice was this — a thirty four year old Australian schoolteacher flew twenty two night missions in the

most targeted aircraft in the most dangerous squadron in Bomber Command, navigating in total darkness without lights over the most heavily defended airspace in the world, and brought his crew home every time.

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## **After the War**

Leo was discharged from the RAAF on 18 December 1946, from his posting at RAAF Laverton, Victoria — more than four years after he had enlisted, and well over a year after the war in Europe had ended. His final sortie, to Potsdam, had been on 14 April 1945 — barely three weeks before the war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945. He was not discharged until December 1946 and it seems likely he was still in England on VE Day when the war in Europe ended — possibly on leave, his operational tour behind him — among the crowds and celebrations he would spend the rest of his life quietly commemorating from home, on the other side of the world, every year afterward. After the war he marched every Anzac Day with the Odd Bods — the association formed in 1947 by RAAF personnel who had served embedded within RAF and allied units during the war. Men scattered across European commands, without a home unit association back in Australia, who found each other and kept faith with each other until the end.

Every Victory in Europe Day, the Odd Bods held a service at the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne, and Leo attended each year, among the men who understood what he had done because they had done it too.

Leo returned to teaching after the war. Former students recall a "Mr Daly" — known affectionately to some as "Pop Daly" — who taught grades four through six at Spotswood State School in Melbourne's western suburbs through the 1950s, moved to Kingsville State School, Yarraville, for a period in the early-to-mid 1960s, and then returned to Spotswood as headmaster in the late 1960s. He was remembered as "a very strict and good teacher," and one former pupil recalled him specifically as "a WW2 hero... air force I think."

He and Margaret had no children. But they were deeply loved.

Leo passed away on 18 November 1985. His wife Margaret followed in 1989.

From Leo's service there were three things the family held — his medals, his flight logbook, and a large painting of a Lancaster bomber under fire and searchlights. The painting is believed to have been given to the RAAF Museum at Point Cook in Victoria.

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## **The Green**

Leo was an avid lawn bowler in the years after the war, and he travelled extensively for competition — the same steady hands that had held a pencil over a chart table now holding a bowl on the green.

In 1969, playing for the Footscray Bowling Club, Leo won the R.S.L. National Fours alongside J. Griffiths (Footscray), Bill Harmon and Keith O'Brien (Williamstown) — a

national title, twenty four years after his Distinguished Flying Cross. The navigator who had once plotted a course through the dark over Germany spent his peacetime plotting the line of a bowl across a green, competing at the highest level his sport offered.

## **The Legacy**

Leo and Margaret had no children of their own. In the absence of direct descendants, it has fallen to his nieces, nephews, and their own children to carry his memory forward — and it is in that spirit that his story is told here. Leo is not forgotten.

His DFC citation sits in the Australian War Memorial. His service record has been digitised and is held by the National Archives of Australia. His flight logbook recorded every target, every sortie, every night he climbed into a Lancaster and navigated into the dark. The bracelet he sent from wartime London is still worn by my grandmother.

He came home from thirty two operations over Germany and occupied Europe and lived a quiet life, saying nothing much about any of it. If he said anything at all about the war, it was one line, repeated so often that it became the thing most people remember of him: how lucky I am to be here.

That is perhaps the most remarkable thing of all.

He was a schoolteacher who became one of the most decorated navigators in the most dangerous squadron in Bomber Command. He was needed, and he rose to it — completely, without fanfare, and with the same steady competence he had brought to a classroom full of children before the war came.

I am his great-nephew and I hope telling Leo's story keeps his story present.

Liam Timms.

Sydney, Australia.

30 August 2026.