

GILLESPIE, Albert George (N/A)



Image 1 © Laurence Gillespie family collection
2011

Informal portrait of Pilot Officer Albert George Gillespie.

Name	GILLESPIE, Albert George Pilot Officer RAF
Service Number	N/A
Date of Birth	7th June 1912
Died	6th August 1938
Place of Birth	Rose Park SA
Resident	Rose Park SA
Cemetery	St Nicholas Church, Feltwell UK

Albert George Gillespie was born on 7 June 1912 at Rose Park, South Australia, the sixth child of seven children of Daniel Laurence Gillespie and Agnes Amelia Gillespie (nee George). Albert's father had served in WW1, and died in 1922, age 49.

Daniel's widow Agnes, moved to Victor Harbor in 1923 and leased the Warringa Guest House, which she later purchased (Warringa is now the Anchorage Hotel). Albert and his siblings settled well, and Albert was educated at Sacred Heart College. He later undertook medical studies at Adelaide University and Melbourne's Newman University.

In 1936, to enhance his medical studies, Albert's mother financed a trip for him to study abroad in England. Albert boarded the liner RMS Strathaird from Brisbane on 28 August 1936, arriving in London on 2 October 1936.

Things in Europe were changing as Nazi led Germany rapidly expanded its hold over surrounding countries. Europe was on the precipice of war, and England, like its allies were taking interest. For Albert, life in London was good; however the diligent nature towards his studies had lapsed. Albert withdrew from London University and enlisted in the Royal Air Force where he trained as a pilot. He graduated from flying school and was granted a commission as a pilot officer in August 1937.

By 1937 Britain was rapidly building up its defence forces in the face of what appeared to be inevitable war with Germany. British forces regularly undertook training manoeuvres and in early August 1938, some 900 aircraft and 15,000 pilots and airmen, together with 17,000 Territorial Army troops, began the largest Home Defence war exercise held in that country.

On 6 August 1938, fog and low cloud with heavy rain proved an impediment to the aircraft participating. Flying Officer John Adam as pilot, Pilot Officer Albert Gillespie, as second pilot, together with aircrew Pilot Officer Edward White, Aircraftmen Charles Suthers and Patrick

McGovern, all of 37 Squadron RAF, took off from RAF Feltwell late in the evening, in their Handley Page Harrow Mk I bomber. Just after midnight, the aircraft crashed into high ground at Great Barton, Suffolk. All five crewmembers were killed. Poor visibility on the night exercise was attributed as the cause of the crash.

Albert was buried with full Royal Air Force honours in St Nicholas Church Communal Cemetery, Feltwell, Suffolk.

His mother and family were so well respected in Victor Harbor that the RSL and the community resolved to have Albert's name commemorated on the Victor Harbor War Memorial, even though Albert had died prior to the commencement of World War Two.

Albert's brother Keith, served in the Royal Australian Air Force during WW2. He initially trained as an air gunner but suffered from a perforated right eardrum whilst in the United Kingdom, attached to RAF Bomber Command. Permanently grounded, Keith returned to Australia and was re-mustered as a pharmacist and served in Australia, and was involved in the campaign to retake Borneo from the Japanese. Keith was discharged in 1947 with the rank of Flying Officer.

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Compiled by the Victor Harbor RSL History Research Team, September 2020. Updated by T.Young
02/01/2026

Appendix

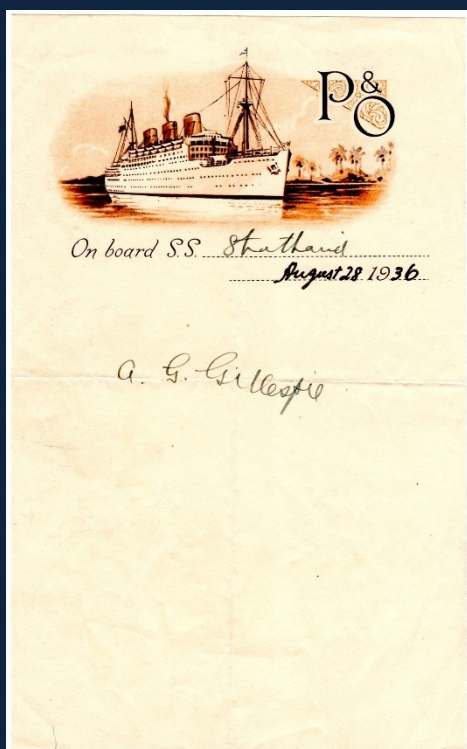


Image 2 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011

Note written by Albert after he embarked aboard the Strathaird from Brisbane.

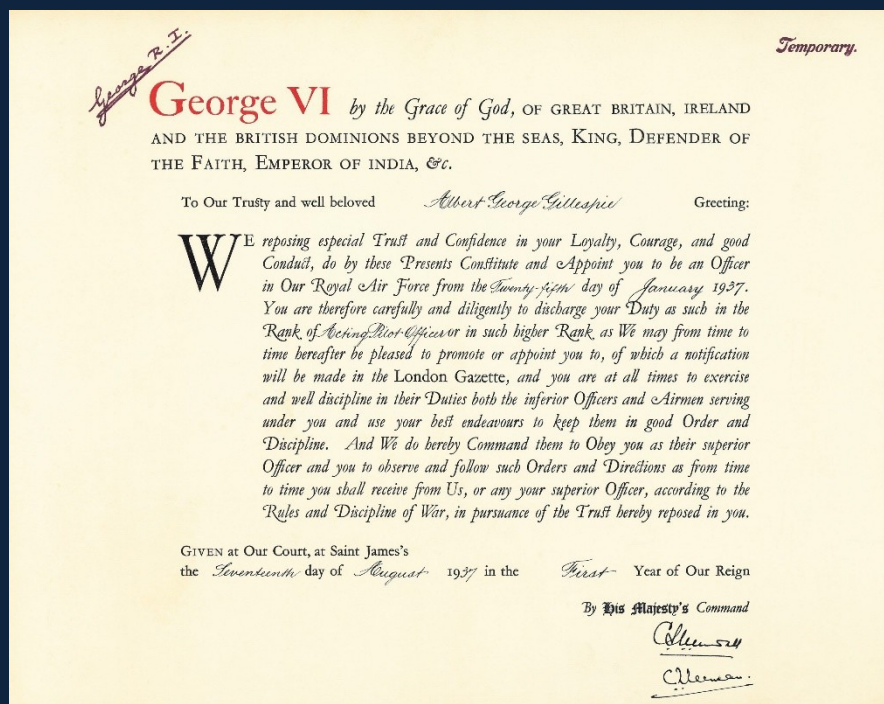


Image 3 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011

This Commission, or Royal Warrant, is for the rank of Pilot Officer in the Royal Air Force and was issued to Albert George Gillespie by King George VI, following his successful completion of pilot training in 1937.

This Royal Warrant was presented to the RSL Victor Harbor Sub-branch in May 2011, by Mr Laurence Gillespie, a nephew of Pilot Officer Albert Gillespie. Laurence served in the Australian Army during World War Two as SX29595 Sergeant L.K. Gillespie.



Image 4 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011

This aircraft is believed to be the Handley Page Harrow Mk I bomber that Albert was the co-pilot of; it appears that snow has fallen and is aside the runway.



Image 5 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011
This aircraft is believed to be the Handley that Albert was the co-pilot of.



Image 6 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011
Albert shown in uniform outside the officer's mess at RAF Feltwell.



Image 7 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011
The second officer is believed to be Flying Officer John ADAM, pilot of the Handley Page Harrow aircraft.

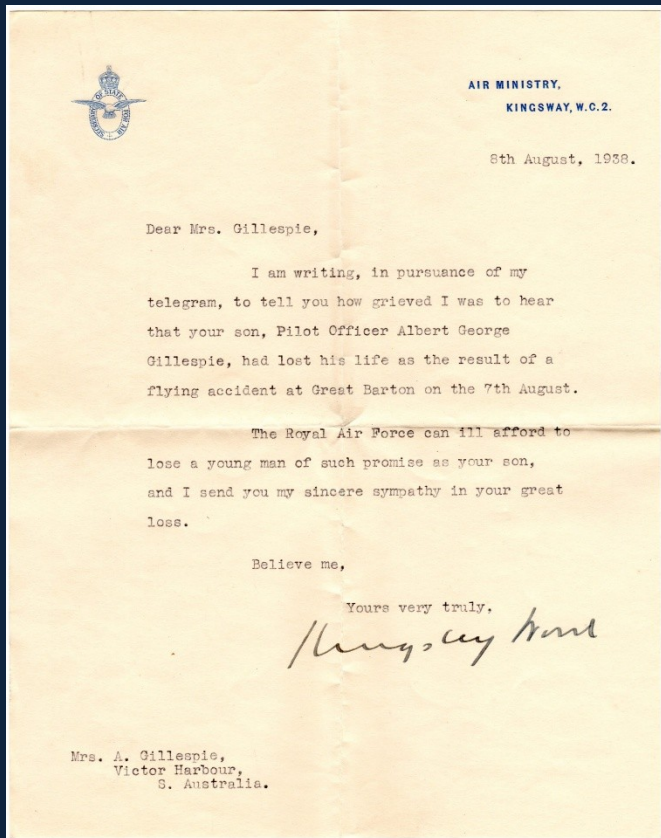


Image 8 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011

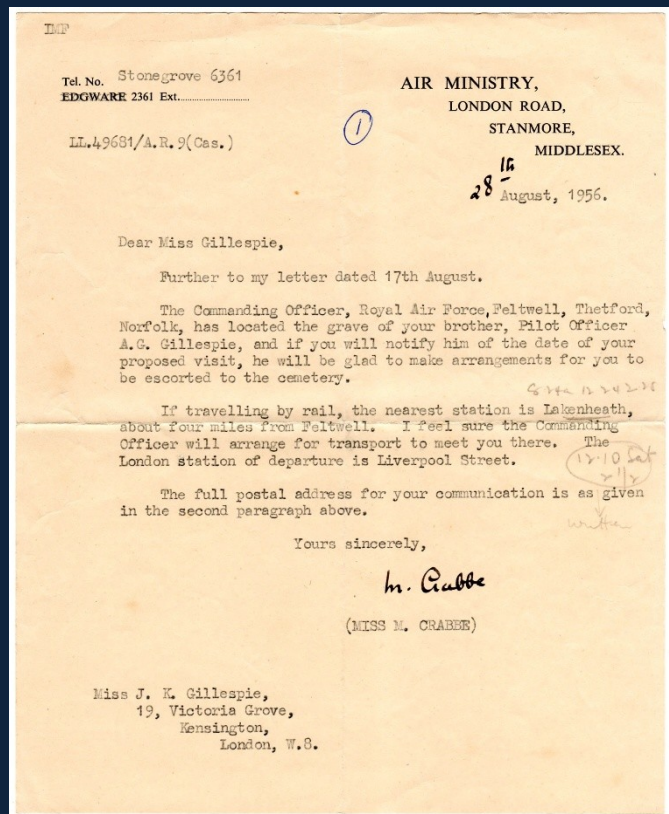


Image 9 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011
Letter from the Air Ministry in London to Miss Jean Gillespie, sister of Albert, which preceded her visit to the United Kingdom to visit Albert's grave at Feltwell.

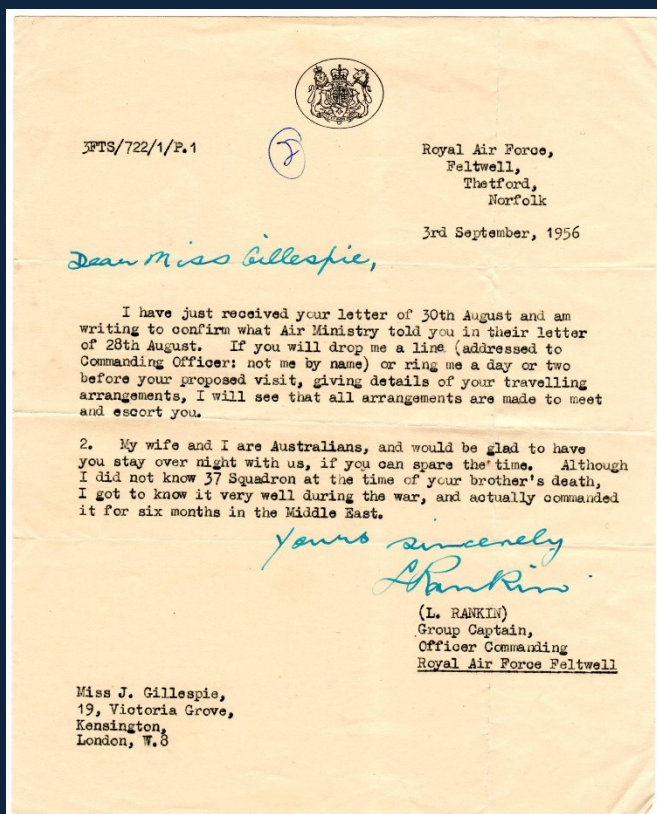


Image 10 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011



Image 11 © Aviation Safety Network 2011
Remnants of the crashed airplane that killed Albert Gillespie.



Image 12 © Milnes collection 2011
The entrance to Felthwell Church and cemetery grounds.



Image 13 © Milnes collection 2011
Albert's grave is located in the pre-Second World War section of the Cemetery.



Image 14 © Milnes collection 2011
Albert's grave is amongst the graves of other airmen who died pre-war in flying accidents.



Image 15 © Milnes collection 2011
This is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission section of the Felthwell Cemetery, it adjoins the communal cemetery section.



Image 16 © Milnes collection 2011
This is the Commonwealth War Graves Commission section of the Felthwell Cemetery, it adjoins the communal cemetery section.

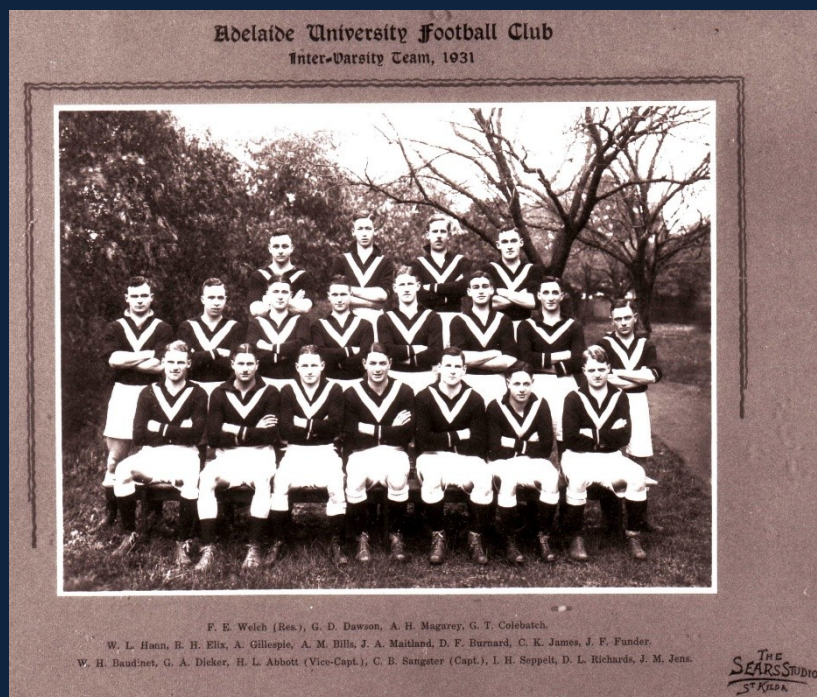


Image 17 © Adelaide University Archives collection 1988
Adelaide University Intersarsity Football Team – 1931 – 1931
Copied in 1988 from original in possession of D F Burnard. Photographer



Image 18 © Laurence Gillespie family collection 2011
Mrs Agnes Gillespie at Warringa Guest House; the date of the photograph is unknown.

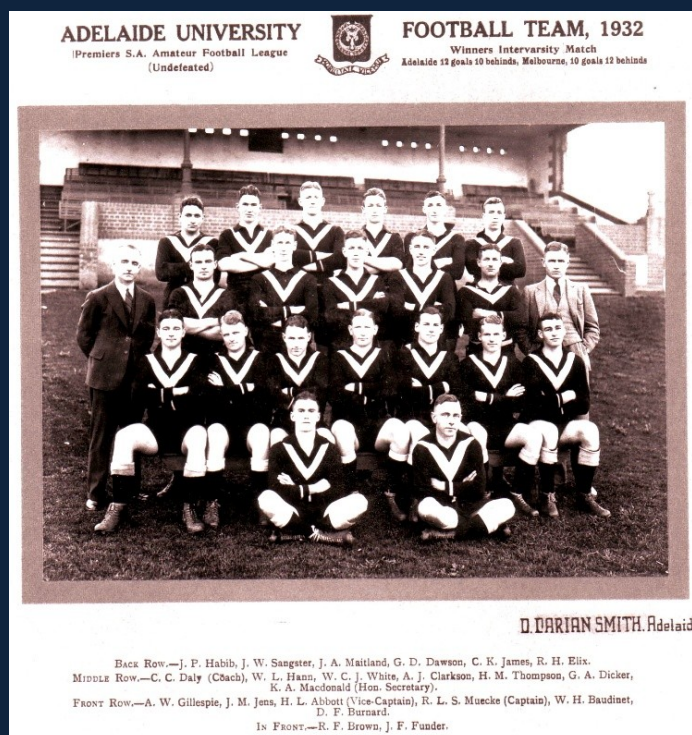


Image 19 © Adelaide University Archives collection 1988
Adelaide University Football Team – 1932 – 1932
Copied in 1988 from originals in possession of D F Burnard.

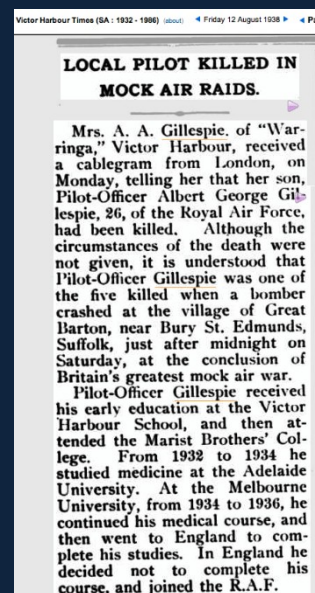


Image 20 ©nla.gov.au
Article from the Victor Harbour Times, edition of 12 August 1938.