

HEHIR Robert Joseph (407289 RAAF)

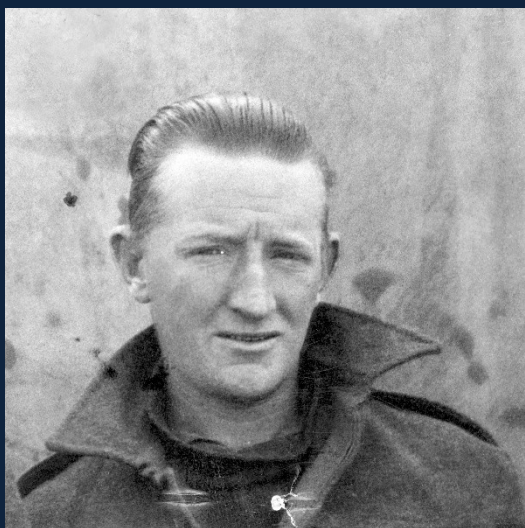


Image 1 ©naa.gov.au 2017
An enlistment photograph

Name	Hehir, Robert Joseph Flight Sergeant RAAF
Service Number	407289
Date of Birth	19th May 1918
Died	13th June 1942
Place of Birth	Payneham SA
Resident	Victor Harbor SA
Cemetery	Inscribed on the El Alamein Memorial, Lost in Action

Robert Joseph Hehir was born at Payneham (SA) on 19 May 1918, the eldest of three children of John Arthur Michael Sarsfield Hehir and Annie Caroline Helen Hehir (nee Gourley). The family moved to Victor Harbor and Robert continued his education at Victor Primary, and Victor High School. He left school in October 1934. On leaving school, Robert gained employment as a house painter. The family was living in Victoria Street. Robert applied for air crew training with the Royal Australian Air Force on 9 March 1940, and although his academic record was not outstanding, he displayed qualities that were often sought by the selection panel – an outdoor sportsman, and in his case, his knowledge of signalling and morse code. Robert was enlisted into the RAAF on 17 August 1940.

He underwent his air cadet training at No 1 Initial Training School (ITS) at Somers (Vic) where only after four weeks training he was mustered for training as a wireless air gunner and sent to No 1 Wireless & Air Gunnery School (WAGS), Ballarat. Following intensive training lasting until early March 1941 when he trained further at No 1 Bombing & Air Gunnery School (BAGS) Robert was awarded his Air Gunnery badge on 5 April. A short stint of pre-embarkation leave was granted until the 16 April. Which was followed by his transfer to the embarkation depot in Sydney to await the next ship to the west coast of the United States and then onwards to Canada and Britain. His service file does not indicate how he travelled to No 70 Operational Training Unit (OTU), which at the time was based at Nakuru, Kenya. The OTU was tasked to train pilots to operate in Middle Eastern conditions and as such was equipped to train twin-engined crews for light and medium bomber training.

On 21 February 1942, Robert was posted to 14 Squadron RAF, which at the time was based in Egypt, flying the twin-engine Bristol Blenheim MkIV's. No 14 Squadron had returned to operations in the Western Desert in October 1941, arriving in time to participate in the Operation Crusader advance towards Benghazi. Unfortunately the success of the British ground offensive was short-lived and the Squadron found itself caught up in the mass retreat eastwards towards El Alamein. In May 1942, the Squadron was once again withdrawn from operations, this time to convert to the Martin B26 Marauder. Although the original intention was to resume tactical bombing operations in the new aircraft, the Squadron instead found itself carrying out armed torpedo reconnaissance and naval mine-laying sorties over the Mediterranean.

The 14 Squadron Association's website records:

By June 1942, the Squadron was operating from a desert landing ground near Sollum in Libya and although under frequent attack from low-flying ME 109's this was not the main concern. The Afrika Korps was just about to break through the 8th Army defensive line adjacent to, and around, Tobruk. Soon enough the whole of the front totally collapsed, leaving all squadrons operating in that area, in danger of being quickly overrun, and their aircraft destroyed. In the absence of any specific instructions from HQ, the CO of 14 Squadron decided that all Squadron aircraft should take off immediately and fly east until they found a landing-strip that could accommodate them as near as possible to the RAF HQ at Burg-el-Arab.

The Squadron was located at Landing Ground (LG) 116, about 12 miles west of Fuka Egypt. It was quickly evacuated when the Axis forces over-ran the area and the Squadron withdrew to Qassassin, Egypt. The Squadron continued to fly missions against the enemy. On 13 June 1942, Blenheim Z6044 took off to participate in night landing practices; aboard were RAF Sgt CM Leaver (Pilot), RAF Sgt H Powell (Observer) and Flt Sgt RJ Hehir.

Whilst the training was in progress a local air raid warning was received. The pilots of the airborne aircraft were ordered to circle and close in. Blenheim Z6044 was reported missing and failed to return to base; it may have been shot down over the sea, but nothing further is known about the aircraft and its crew and it was officially recorded in 1948 that the crew had no known grave. The men's names are inscribed on the El Alamein Memorial. The Victor Harbor Times edition of 26 June 1942 reported Flt Sgt Hehir missing.

Robert's younger brother, Kenneth John Hehir (born 24 July 1920) had earlier enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy on 27 September 1937 at the age of 17. He served on various ships until he was discharged on 23 July 1950.

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Compiled by the Victor Harbor RSL History Research Team, June 2017. Updated by T.Young
15/08/2025

Appendix

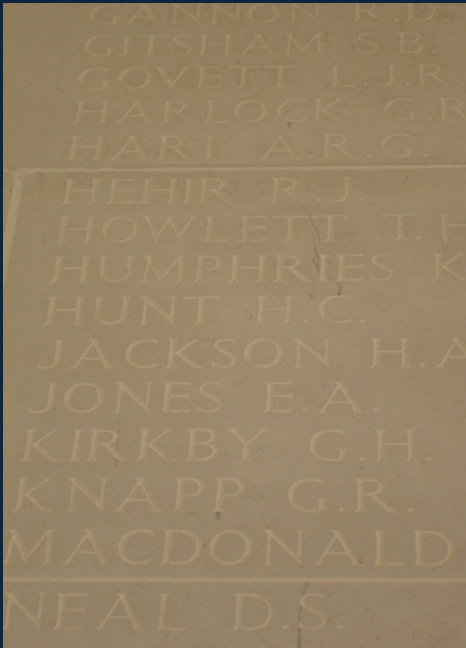


Image 2© Patricia FLETCHER, 2008.
Flight Sergeant HEHIR's inscription on the El Alamein Memorial, Egypt.

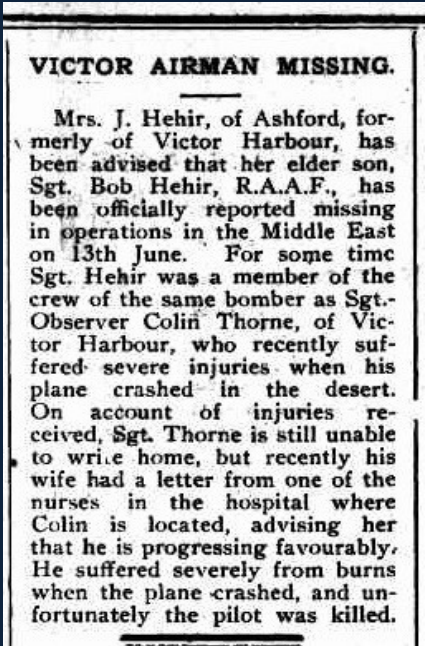


Image 3©nla.gov.au2025

Location on the Roll of Honour

Robert Joseph Hehir's name is located at panel 123 in the [Commemorative Area](#) at the Australian War Memorial (as indicated by the poppy on the plan).

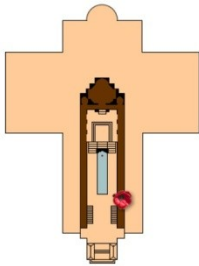


Image 4 & 5 ©awm.gov.au2025
Roll of Honour location and projection

Roll of Honour name projection

Robert Joseph Hehir's name will be projected onto the exterior of the Hall of Memory on:

Sunday, 8 February 2026 at 12.45 am

Friday, 22 May 2026 at 4.41 am

Wednesday, 12 August 2026 at 12.48 am

Monday, 2 November 2026 at 9.24 pm

For more information view the [Roll of Honour name projections page](#).

Please note: These dates and times are estimates. The actual time of projection could also change as a result of weather and other factors, so it is advisable to check closer to the date. In the rare event of a temporary loss of electrical power, the names scheduled for display in that period will not appear until the next time listed.

NAA: A9301. 407289

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SGT BENNETT A S F/O W D BLACKTOCK 404230 402517 SGT DARR N C
406458 SGT DUFFY T M F/O A H DUNNELL 403262 407809 SGT WHEAT R
403676 SGT O'BRIEN J O 404662 SGT POWELL R D 408219 SGT BLANCHING
W G (4030409) SGT COOPER A E 404913 SGT GLENTON-WRIGHT M L
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NAA: A9301, 407289

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