

TALES FROM THE ARCHIVE

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Some Pathfinders just stand out - whether from their striking personality, unusual looks, outstanding bravery, or the dramatic incidents which occurred whilst they were flying with the PFF.

One particular favourite in the Archive has always been the twenty-one-year-old Australian pilot, Frank McEgan.

FRANK McEGAN

In 2001, Frank McEgan's sister, Jeanette, wrote a remembrance of him. Simply entitled MY BROTHER FRANK, it begins:

"William and Irene McEgan lived in Mount Street, Strathfield. Their first-born was a son, Eugene Francis (Frank) McEgan. Two years later he was followed by a sister Shirley, and two years later by another sister, Jeanette, myself."

Strathfield is a suburb west of Sydney. The family was Roman Catholic, and used to go to Mass at St Martha's, Strathfield.

"We caught the bus down Homebush Road to the church. During Mass, my brother who was then called Poss, shortened from Possum, would lick the bus tickets and put them on his eyelids and flick his eyes open and shut which made his sisters giggle and receive a reprimand from Mum."

Frank's strong and independent character is very obvious in Jeanette's reminiscences. At one point she wrote: "Frank was a real individual and spelt his English phonetically as did Bernard Shaw, and refused to spell the conventional way though he was reprimanded at school. He did not do the Leaving Certificate Exam but left school prior to it, still spelling right, rite."



LAST TOUCHES TO GLIDER
FRANK McEGAN, of Coronation Parade, Enfield, putting the final touch to a glider which he has made with the help of three friends. McEgan, a Leading Aircraftman in the R.A.A.F., claims that the glider is the largest in Australia. It has a 66ft. wing span, took 18 months to build, and cost £70. It will be tested at Lidcombe on Sunday.

Frank was obsessed with flying from a very early age: he was always making model aeroplanes and his room was festooned with the planes hanging from the ceiling.

As soon as he could, at the age of 18, he joined the Royal Australian Air Force. There, he and some friends built a full-sized glider with a 66 foot wingspan, which they called the Falcon. It was only on his final leave, however, that Frank was able to fly the Falcon for the first and last time.

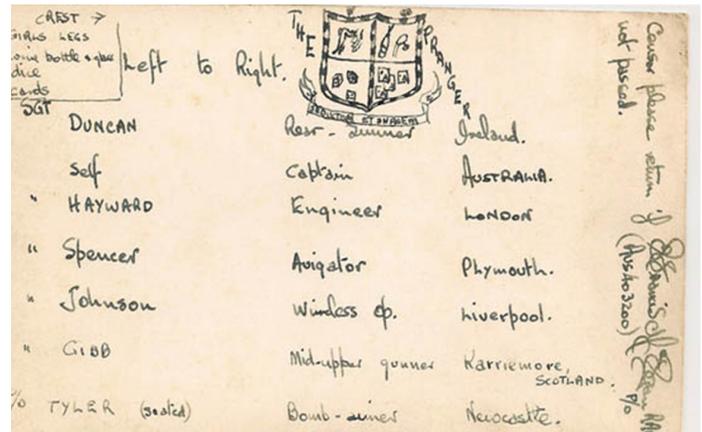


Shortly afterwards he left to catch a train with his Air Force friends. Jeanette remembered: "With the rest of the family on the verandah at 'Sorrento', the family home in Margaret Street, he kissed me goodbye and went off never to return. He was killed in Germany piloting a Pathfinder Lancaster with No. 97 (Straits Settlement) Squadron on the night of November 22, two weeks before his 22 birthday, on his 22nd mission."

FRANK'S TIME WITH BOMBER COMMAND

Before his tragically early death, Frank had clearly very much enjoyed his life as a bomber pilot. To the right, in his handwriting, is the back of a photograph of his crew which he sent home to Australia. Note the wonderful Coat of Arms at the top, the emblems of which are girls' legs, wine bottle and wine glass, dice and cards.

The Latin motto is somewhat difficult to read, but it appears to be 'SEDUCTOR ET SHAGEM'. It seems most unlikely that he would have sent this home to his family, so perhaps it went to a male friend in Australia. He was aware of its risqué nature, because he wrote a note asking the censor, "Censor please return if not passed".



LEFT Frank's crew; he is standing at the back. This is a different photograph to the one with the writing on the reverse.

When off-duty, Frank seems to have been leading a somewhat racketsy life. After his death, when RAAF officials examined his personal effects prior to sending them home to his family, they recommended that his diary, together with the diaries of two other Australian airmen from different crews, should "be destroyed owing to their general moral tone, which would, undoubtedly, cause distress if read by their next of kin". As Frank came from a pious Roman Catholic family, this was probably true. However, it remains

a vivid example of the paternalistic way in which the RAF and the RAAF protected aircrew's families from the truth of the lives – and deaths – of their bomber boys.

Frank was fatally wounded by flak on his last flight, and died with two other crew members. The remaining four aircrew became prisoners of war.

He is buried in Germany, in the Reichswald Forest Cemetery, having originally been buried at Achmer. It is not known whether this photograph of his grave, with its original, temporary wooden cross, was taken at Achmer.

To see Frank in his prime, every inch the dashing young RAAF pilot, watch the film on the Archive's website: <https://raf-pathfinders.com/crew-mcegan-cine-film/>

