

# Remembrance Day 11 November 2015: Two Mountain Men

## Introduction

Some of the people on the War Memorial are deeply embedded in the fabric of our community. Their families may still have descendants here and they are an intrinsic part of our collective memory – the names of the Gregson and Scrivener, Kirk and Wynn families are very familiar to us; and not only because their names are on the War Memorial. Evidence of these families is found all over the two mountains.

On the other hand, despite my pleas for any information, there are also names on the War Memorial which seem to have faded from memory, some of them leaving little or no trace. Occasionally though visitors come here, visit the church and the gardens, and talk to locals about a relative who may have been part of life here. If we are lucky they visit someone such as Libby Raines who makes a careful note of what they say and passes it on to me!

These two very different ends of a continuum of local memory probably mirror the names on many of the war memorials in Australia; there are over 2500 war memorials of various kinds in NSW alone. (There is no official Australia-wide listing). I think also of the war cemeteries in Europe and other far off places which may contain some or even many memories while others stand there mute and solitary except for their companions 'on the other front'.<sup>1</sup>

Today we are going to explore an example of each of these possibilities, both from WWII.

At a meeting of 16 January 1993, the people from WWII whose names were to be inscribed on the War Memorial were decided from lists compiled by J Smart, T Kirk, and N Mclean<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately we do not know which of the names were on whose list. The names are on the added section of our War Memorial and include the two people who we are talking about today: Mervyn Wynne and Colin Smith. It was necessary for some of the suggested names to have the initials confirmed by someone at that meeting, but for today's two servicemen this is not shown as necessary, presumably because they were either well-known or because there was no one at the meeting who could do this.

On 27 March 1993, WWII and Vietnam service names were added at a special ceremony. At least 92 people were present...

Mervyn Wynne's name on the Memorial is written as 'M C Wynne'; that 'C' should of course be an 'O' for Owen. I am delighted that we are being reminded of his life and service by his daughter-in-law, Irene.

## Mervyn Owen Wynne

Born: 4 August 1925 Sydney, NSW Australia  
Education: at Wynstay, Mt Wilson, NSW; Tudor House, Moss Vale, NSW;  
Geelong Grammar, Geelong, Victoria  
Married: Lesley Morrisby Fisher from Galambo, NSW Australia on 2  
February 1952  
Three children: Robert Owen, Michael Ross and Jennifer Ann  
Died: 18 May 2008 Inverell, NSW Australia



Merv's childhood was certainly special living at Wynstay with his siblings, Ronny Mike and Jane. Mrs Wynne regularly held fund raising fetes for various mountain charities on the big lawn. Merv remembered the preparations, fun and the people. There were lucky dip bags, a chocolate wheel, fudge, caramels, stuffed toys his mother made along with the most delicious afternoon teas. He participated in all activities at Wynstay and on Mt Wilson as a child and roaring around in the winding mountain roads perched up in the dickie seat of his mother's Sunbeam, during school holidays and after discharge from the army.

There were adventures all over the mountain, tennis parties and tournaments, cricket, horse riding, fishing, bee keeping, charades, crabbing for those big red yabbies in the creeks, trekking through the rain forests, working with and watching the workmen on Wynstay and other

properties, assisting his father, being spoilt by Flo, the wife of Mathy who cooked for the family and being taught to laugh as boys do at jokes by Mathy, Flo's husband and general all-rounder, who was his father's batman in WW1. Merv watched the bush fires rage and assisted in their control.

The cherry tree, about 100m from the back door was the branding tree for the occasional calf that needed branding. Merv and Ron would drag up the calf and tie it to the tree and yell to Flo to run from the kitchen where the branding iron was heating in the wood fire of the stove.

After beginning education at Wynstay, schooling began with the amazing Miss Dorothea (Dolly) Moore, Merv was to board at Tudor House, Moss Vale. When it was time to leave he ran away into the rain forest, but he was found. He missed home dreadfully; however he applied himself and was rewarded as dux in his last year. Boarding school was not like Dolly's classes at all. Dolly organised the children into dramatic play enactment of history facts, encouraged music, pottery, laughter, dance and song and made the more serious learning fun.

WWII broke out and he, along with the sons of Lord Wakehurst the Governor of NSW, was sent to Geelong Grammar where it was believed to be safer than Sydney. He rowed in the 1<sup>st</sup> Eight and in 1942 won 'Head of the River' on the Barwon River and was awarded with a gold medallion and a small silver oar. Merv did not see much of his family during his years at Geelong due to petrol rationing, though he remembered one occasion his mother visited and a pilot friend of the family took them on a joy ride along the top road over Geelong.



Mervyn was very anxious to join the army as he was a cadet at Geelong, however he was too young to sign up, so worked as a jackaroo for six months on Nap Nap Station, Balranald, near Hay, NSW which was owned and run by the Ronald family, with connections on his English mother's side of the family.

In 1943 he joined the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF), 2/5 Armoured Regiment, training at Puckapunyal, the Army base in Victoria for a year, followed by jungle training in the Gold Coast hinterland at Canungra Qld, as the action and danger to Australia in this stage of WWII, had moved to the tropics where the first tanks to arrive in New Guinea had promptly bogged.

WWII ended before Merv's division participated in active service and he spent his last year of service indenting war material on the wharf at Woolloomooloo. Again there was a great frustration

as he itched to get back to Queensland but the longest serving soldiers were the first to be discharged. Finally in 1946 Merv was discharged and home with his family in time for Christmas.

Throughout his service Merv was known as 'Doc' because of his initials - MO (Mervyn Owen) which in army jargon stood for Medical Officer, but other than that Merv never talked of those years, except to tell me he peeled a lot of spuds during his service years and that he was saddened and frustrated to never see action, as his father, Lieutenant Colonel Owen Wynne was a brave and highly decorated officer in the Great War and who in WW2 was Aide-de-Camp to Lord Wakehurst, in Sydney.

Merv was trained to be a rear gunner and tank electrician and although he experienced great frustration waiting for action, learning to be an electrician was a valuable education as years later, about 1955, he was able to wire his and his wife's newly built homestead on a Soldier Settler block he drew in 1953 at Walgett NSW which they called Minnamurra. The power was, of course, 32 volt and electricians were scarce in the west at that time.

Throughout his life, handsome Merv stood tall and straight, loyal to friends and family, keeping true to his beliefs, ideals and convictions with the strength of character to overcome alcoholism.

In the early 1960s he joined the Collarenebri branch of AA. His needs were simple, his intelligence complex, deep and analytical. Merv was a quiet achiever and a quiet listener. One could be sounding off, giving opinions, standing on a soap box or just yabbering thinking that Merv was not listening, but when the discourser drew breath Merv would come out with comments that showed he had been listening effectively the whole time. Never one to shirk public speaking when asked, our shy, quiet, reserved Merv would hold the audience captive with his depth of knowledge, his ability to get to the point clearly, succinctly and with a touch of humour. His sense of humour popped up at times that surprised everyone and he would chuckle, deeply and his shoulders would shake, his big chest heave and his eyes twinkle.

One Christmas, at an appropriate time with the appropriate audience, he told the Christmas Angel joke; his timing was perfect by the way, with stock, property sales and purchases, with family advice, with farming, and jokes, anyway he asked 'Do you know why the Angel is always at the top of the Christmas tree?' No, we didn't so he started on a description of Santa's day gone bad with drunken elves, missing reindeer, toys not finished and packed, a cranky Mrs Clause etc. etc.; when the good angel knocked on the door asking in a super sweet voice 'where would you like the tree Santa?' Well you could have knocked us over with a feather after we finished laughing as much at the joke as the way Merv told it and in fact that Merv told it at all. I wonder how many years Merv had been 'sitting' on that joke waiting for the right time to tell it!

The men in the family are all gentlemen, like Merv, faithful, never swearing in front of women, they are home bodies, interested in all rural matters. Merv was a great sheep breeder, winning many trophies at the Walgett show, quiet handlers of cattle and green enough to care for the country they lived on, politically aware and thoroughly enjoying the retelling of yarns, recall of friends, incidents, deals, AA members and tales from the past and present. Smokos were always the right time for these recalls, drinking tea and eating from Lesley's never empty biccie tin.

Merv's upbringing here on the mountain gave him a lifelong respect for and understanding of the environment and a love of working on and with the land. He loved his childhood at Wynstay but was only ever interested, as an adult, in being 'on the land' with his wife Lesley, a partnership cherished by every person that came in contact with them. Merv and Lesley fought rural battles together trying for a better deal for landholders. For example:- the fight against rural rates rises, and they were involved in the organisation that formed the floor price for wool, Landcare and the Cattlemen's Union, just to name a few. His rural enterprises were well planned and executed with sheep, cattle and farming, keeping as 'green' as was feasible to improve the country and stock. Merv was a great innovator of land management and was ahead of the game instigating irrigation and growing wheat on Minnamurra at Walgett, grass fed Hereford cattle at Telegraph Point, returning farmed out country at Duri to health and finally semi-retiring on Torvale at Inverell with farming and cattle. He kept in contact with the land right to the end as he wanted to die with his boots on, as the saying goes and he did.



All family members loved having Christmas with Merv and Lesley. Traditions continued from both sides of their families. English Christmas traditions from Merv's side both maternal and paternal along with Australian bush abundance and trimmings from Lesley's upbringing. All the family loved Merv and he loved us all in his own quiet way, giving sound advice if asked. His home was our home for as long as we cared to visit or stay.

Vale Mervyn Owen Wynne we miss you as sharply as the first day you 'moved off camp' eight years ago dying as he lived, privately and peacefully and 'on the land'. Thankfully his ashes are safely secured in the Church Yard here at Mt Wilson, returning him to the mountain and memories of his childhood.

Irene Wynne, (married to Mike, second son of Merv and Lesley with permission and additions from all the immediate family on 12 October 2015 at The Valley, Bingara NSW.)

## Colin Smith

As I mentioned in the introduction 'C Smith' is on the added plaque on the War Memorial for those who served in WWII, or in Vietnam. When I first started doing these Remembrance Day talks I read and re-read the names on the War Memorial. My heart sank as I thought about how many Smiths there would be in the WWII records; I did not even know whether he served in the army, the air force or the navy. So I put C Smith in the too hard basket. The ways of research are mysterious; and while there are many people who knew and remembered Mervyn Wynne so far as I knew nobody knew anything about C Smith. Then I became lucky...



A few years ago some people called into to see Libby Raines and while they were talking one of them, Robyn Butler, mentioned that she had had an uncle called Colin Smith who had lived for a while with the Davies, who almost 'adopted him'<sup>3</sup>. Being someone who remembers everything to do with Mt Wilson Libby recalled that I had asked for any information about some of the people on the war memorial, and she wrote to me with the contact details that Robyn gave to her, 'We had a visit from Robyn Butler recently. She asked where Woodstock was, so of course I gladly told her and asked why she wanted to know'.<sup>4</sup>

This was the beginning of a thread that has allowed me, with the help of Colin Smith's younger relatives to compile the following

information. One of the earliest pieces of information was that Colin Smith had served in the RAAF; this made finding him a whole lot easier. Having talked to Robyn at some length<sup>5</sup> she said that I should speak to her brother, also Colin Smith. As you can imagine my scribbled notes from the conversations became rather confused between these two Colins – but eventually things became clearer. So what I have to say today is really due to Libby's memory and Colin Smith's family's interest in their uncle. I am very grateful to his family for this interest, and their patience. And I am delighted that they are with us today.

At the beginning all I brought to knowing about Colin Smith were mistakes. I thought, wrongly as it turned out, that Colin Smith had been a teacher at the Mt Wilson school and had boarded with the Davies; an opinion that his family shared. The other thing I thought was that Colin Smith had survived the war – he does not have an asterisk beside his name on the Memorial. Research is always interesting when you begin with mistakes! But let's put the combined knowledge into some sort of chronological order.

C Smith's full name was Colin Hugh MacKenzie Smith. His mother's name was Ann, nee Cameron and his father was William Richard Smith. He was born in 1911, into a Methodist

family. There was some confusion about the year of his birth, either 1911 or 1913, and the former is the one from his service record. He was probably born in Hurstville, in Sydney. His father was a builder from Walcha, and seems to have moved about a bit as the children were born in different places. He had three brothers, Gordon (father of Colin and Robyn), Frederick and Alexander; and a sister Dorothy. Colin was the youngest of the five siblings, and Alexander the eldest (he was electrocuted in 1946). His father left the family when Colin was only two and seems to have then led an obscure existence; little is known of the later years of his life other than his last days were spent at Port Hacking and he is buried in Rookwood cemetery.<sup>6</sup> The family moved to Maitland, probably when his father left, as his mother had originally come from Maitland. They lived in 8 Sempill Street, West Maitland in a house which is still there<sup>7</sup>. Family cousins still live in Maitland.

We do not know where Colin went to primary school but he did go to Maitland Junior Technical High School from 1925 to 1928, doing the intermediate certificate in 1928; and then to Maitland High School until 1930 when he did the Leaving Certificate. He passed English (a first class pass), technical drawing, business principles, history, geography, economics and book-keeping; he failed maths. Robyn remembers being told that he did not get into teachers college immediately – perhaps that fail in maths had something to do with it.

The family gathered for Christmas at grandmother Ann's place and a niece remembers her uncle Colin being there. Robyn remembers her mother saying that Colin was a lovely man who always noticed how she dressed, making a complimentary comment 'oh you've got a new dress on...' Colin notes that his cousin Judy said 'like many others he was a kind, gentle and very friendly man... like his brothers.'<sup>8</sup>

There is a five year gap until Colin is recorded as having attended Armidale Teachers College in 1936 and 1937. His 'Application for aircrew', dated 26 July 1940, notes that in 1937 he passed all the required subjects in a class 2A examination, including maths. Apparently he played cricket, tennis and golf.<sup>9</sup> He is recorded in the Armidale College list of veterans<sup>10</sup>.

It was a two year qualifying course to become a primary teacher. I am indebted to Brenda McLennan at the NSW Department of Education and Training for giving me a copy of Colin Smith's teaching record. She could not have been more helpful. His first posting, on 28 January 1938 was as an assistant teacher to class 5 at Giants Creek, later known as Sandy Hollow (1970). He was paid 234.3.0 pounds per annum. Colin taught there for two years and was then transferred to Innesbrae Public School where he was the teacher of class 6. His salary increased to 293.19.5 pounds per annum He taught there for a bit over one year, until May 1941<sup>11</sup>. Incidentally the public school at Sandy Hollow is still open but Innesbrae closed in 1943

This teaching record shows that he enlisted in the RAAF in Sydney on 28 April 1941, when he took the oath in Tenterfield his address was Leefield via Tenterfield, he departed Sydney on 13 June 1941 and by 1942 he doing his air force training in Ontario, Canada<sup>12</sup>. He was 29 years old, 6 foot tall with grey eyes and black hair. His service record gives his mother Ann as his next of kin, but his older brother Alexander as the 'person to be informed of casualties'. His service number was 411397, and, as I mentioned above, his birth date is given as 13 December 1911. The record notes that he had training in 'first aid and artificial respiration', and that he had served in the 13<sup>th</sup> battalion militia for 6 months. His religion is given as 'Methodist'. The medical examination passes him as 'fully fit [for] flying'<sup>13</sup>:



The Australian Government signed up to the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), under which the Royal Australian, New Zealand and Canadian Air Forces would train aircrews to be loaned to the Royal Air Force. Most would serve in British squadrons, though some would be posted to 'Article XV', or '400-series' squadrons. These squadrons were raised by the RAF but with their nationality officially recognised – for instance 460 Squadron RAAF, to which the famous Lancaster G for George at the Australian War Memorial belonged. Many aircrews who survived their tours of duty returned to Australia to serve in RAAF Squadrons as instructors. Training of EATS recruits took place in Australia, Canada, Rhodesia and Britain. By war's end almost 40,000 Australians had been sent overseas under this scheme, serving in Europe, the Middle East, Burma and other places.<sup>14</sup>

Colin was part of this training scheme and on finishing his training at Winnepeg, he left Canada from Vancouver and arrived in the UK on 10 February 1942. He entered the RAF 'training pool' and was given the rank of sergeant. His 'character and trade' is noted as 'very good'. In May 1942 he completed training at the No1 Signals School. He joined 460 squadron as part of the RAAF personnel serving on attachment in the Royal Air Force, flying in a Wellington bomber on 5 August 1942. The service record includes a photograph which shows a serious thin faced young man. A more casual photo shows him with a lovely smile. It is tempting to see these as 'before and after' images. Colin served as a front gunner and radio officer.



Crew Viney, l-r: Sgt. Warren Jarret, Sgt. Colin Smith, F/Sgt. Cyril Viney, Sgt. Henry Turner and Sgt. Nick Dan. Source Margaret Betty (daughter) via Mike Kleinlugtebeld - 22 Mar 2011 (from <http://www.teunispats.nl/jack-edward-gibbs-4.htm>; 27 February 2016)

On 7 August 1942 he is listed as 'missing believed killed in air op. from UK.' and on 27 August 1942 this is confirmed as 'presumed dead' by the Air Ministry, UK<sup>15</sup>. The plane was shot down by three German fighters 'night raiders' after 'a half hour engagement'<sup>16</sup>. Colin Smith is buried, along with 21 other servicemen, in Dalfsen General Cemetery, (plot 6, row 1, grave 4) Netherlands<sup>17</sup>. He was 30 years old. The pilot was Cyril Charles Viney. One crew member survived the crash, Irwin Muncton. He had jettisoned the bombs and when the plane caught on fire he got out with a parachute. After the war he found the farmhouse which had caught on fire from the bombs but the people had got out and did not 'feel any animosity'<sup>18</sup>. In one of those peculiar coincidences of war Muncton ended up in a POW camp with another Australian, Alex McClland, Colin Smith's (the younger) other uncle on his mother's side. Both being Australian and from the same place, Alex managed to get Muncton to talk, he having been silent since his arrival in POW camp.

So why is Colin Smith on our War Memorial? His nephew Colin Smith wrote:

In the mid seventies my family and I went to Mt Wilson to spend some time with the Davies. The Davies were the couple uncle stayed with while he was at Mt Wilson. Mr Davies said I looked like my uncle, they took him in as a son they didn't have, they were very close at that time. My mum, dad and young sister spent time with the Davies in the late sixties. Mr Davies said to dad [Gordon] that he thought dad walking towards him looked just like uncle Colin. So there is no doubt he was at Mt Wilson and the Davies spoke about his teaching experiences<sup>19</sup>.

It is not possible to find out which of the three locals, who compiled those lists of suggestions for the WWII veterans for the War Memorial, nominated Colin Smith. I think though, it may have been Jane Smart. One mystery remains. None of us have been able to find out why Colin Smith visited the Davies, and apparently on more than one occasion. All we can really assume is that he was well known enough on the mountain for his name to be on the War Memorial. I give the last word about Colin to his nephew who wrote recently:

Last Friday I picked up a new set of replica medals I had ordered with ribbons, such a small thing for the supreme sacrifice. I still have not been able to find the connection between Mt Wilson and my uncle apart from Matt and Flo Davies. There is no doubt about the Davies part in all this. One thing is certain, my uncle made that sacrifice so he will be remembered with great distinction on that day [11 November]<sup>20</sup>.

There is a Post Script to today's talk. There are several errors on the War Memorial and we have, coincidentally, mentioned two of them today. If possible I think these should be altered to give the correct information and I am very interested in what you think about this so please talk to me or contact me later...

Alison Halliday

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Slessor, 'Beach Burial'

<sup>2</sup> From Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Historical Soc. archive

<sup>3</sup> Robyn Butler in phone conversation 2015

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Libby Raines

<sup>5</sup> Phone conversations with Robyn Butler 11/12 July 2015

<sup>6</sup> from Colin Smith in phone and email communication, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Robyn Butler

<sup>8</sup> email from Colin Smith

<sup>9</sup> Official Service record

<sup>10</sup> [www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/.../armidale\\_teachers\\_college\\_re...](http://www.warmemorialsregister.nsw.gov.au/.../armidale_teachers_college_re...)

<sup>11</sup> Brenda McLennan, Library and Data Services, Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation

<sup>12</sup> air force service summary

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Short history and compilation from National Archives by Alan Storr 2006

<sup>15</sup> air force service summary

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Muncton to Phil Viney, brother of the pilot, dated 20 January 1943

<sup>17</sup> Commonwealth War Graves Commission

<sup>18</sup> Colin Smith, junior

<sup>19</sup> email from Colin to Alison Halliday, 21 September, 2015

<sup>20</sup> email from Colin Smith to Alison Halliday 25 October 2015

