

STUDENT READINGS TO ACCOMPANY DR RICHARD REID'S REPRESENTATION AT THE DARWIN DEFENDERS' CEREMONY 2020

READING 1: Wombey - Military Medal Citation, 1942

Lance-Bombardier Frederick Ronald WOMBEY, No N. 270852, 14 Anti Aircraft Battery.

On two occasions at least, during attacks on oil tankers at Darwin by enemy dive bombers and machine gun fire from the air, Lance Bombardier Wombey ordered the gun crew to take cover whilst he waited for the attacking plane to be sufficiently near to be a good target. His action was partly responsible for the failure of the enemy to dive bomb the vital area he was defending.

Reading 2: Hero Kept on Firing

Sydney Sun, Monday 21 September 1942

Although the rest of his gun crew were knocked out by bomb blasts, Lance Bombardier Fred Wombey kept on firing in face of Jap dive-bomb attacks.

During the big bomb raid on Darwin on February 19 Wombey and his colleague Gunner W. T. Hudson earned the first military medals for gallantry in Australia...

[The 20 year old Wombey]... was in charge of an important light machine gun post. He had just sufficient time to man the gun when the Japs came over and dive-bombed the post repeatedly at 200 feet. One bomb landed 15 feet away and levelled the machine gun post. With the rest of the crew knocked unconscious, Wombey gathered the gun together and kept on firing.

He fired more than 1000 rounds and saw tracers bite into many Jap machines. His section is credited with 3 planes...

Wombey is now annoyed because the Japs come over so high these days they are far out of his range.

READING 3: Fred Wombey goes to War

Australian Women's Weekly

'After the other boys went,; said Mr Wombey, 'Fred who helped me in the orchard, used to nag and nag about enlisting. I thought two in the A.I.F was a fair thing and at last I gave my consent for Fred to Enlist for home defence.

'He was only 18 then and about 12 months ago when they called for volunteers for Darwin Fred was amongst them. He wrote then and said – "they only wanted 22 in our crowd and they had 100 volunteers. I was one of the 22 so I don't know whether I'm one of the lucky ones or not yet."

'Before the Japanese war started Fred used to write quite long letters. We used to have a great laugh over the tales he'd tell us about the boys pretending to be tropical.' Said Mrs Wombey.

'But as soon as the Japs came into the war and things began to happen he didn't tell us a thing. Never a line or a name in Fred's letters has ever been touched by the censor. Evidently they were told not to go into any details about the raids and Fred obeyed.'

READING 4: - Wombey family reaction to his Military Medal award

Australian Women's Weekly

Next day was a red-letter day for the Wombey children at school. Betty and Doreen found themselves the centres of attention at the Goulburn High School.

'I heard two of the girls whispering together,' said Betty. 'Then one came and asked me about Fred, and she was soon telling everybody, "Yes it's their brother."

'The head teacher came in and congratulated us too.'

Don and John came into their share of the spotlight too. At the little school at Tallong, Don, who milks three cows before he sets out on the three mile bike ride to school, has one great hope. It is that the war will last long enough for him to grow up and join the Air Force.