

Stories from the Honour Boards

Stories of those who served and are remembered on the Honour Boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel at Saint Andrew's Uniting Church

Booklet Number 125

VICTOR MERCER-SMITH 1896 - 1966



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Please see a Guide if you would like a copy.



Victor Mercer-Smith was commissioned in the RAF in 1917. He is wearing his Pilot's and Observer's wings on his tunic.

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Corner Ann and Creek Streets
Brisbane QLD 4000
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Wing Commander Victor Mercer-Smith OBE

Victor Mercer-Smith was born in Brisbane on 3 July 1896, youngest son of Captain Sydney Mercer-Smith (master mariner) and Amy Maud née Robjohns. Victor's sister was Frances Bowerman (1891 to 1967) and his brothers were Harry¹ and Sydney.² Victor's grandfather was Rev Henry Robjohns, a Congregational minister, hence his listing on one of the Wharf Street honour boards in the Merrington Anzac Memorial Peace Chapel.

A student at Brisbane Grammar School in 1910, Victor Mercer-Smith served in the navy, army and air force during his lifetime and participated with distinction in two world wars.

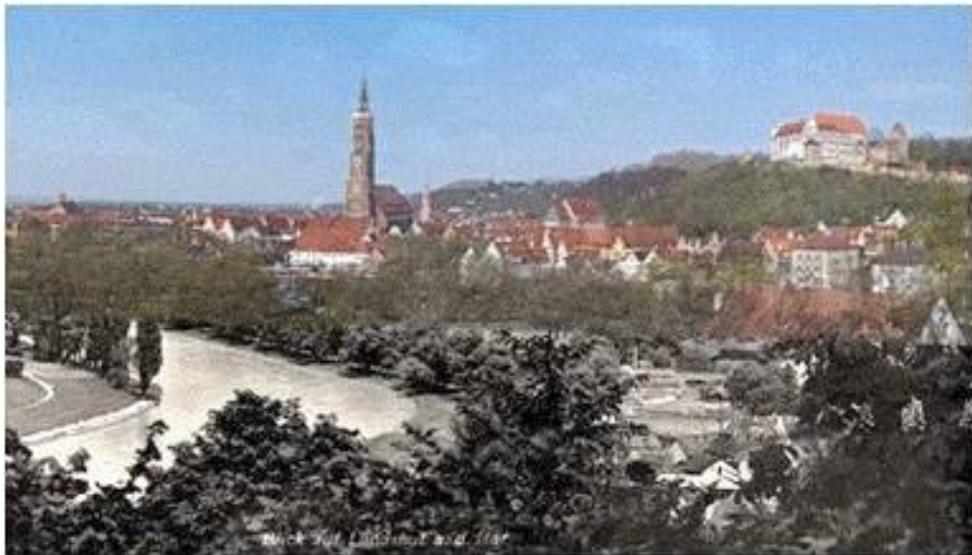
In Brisbane he joined the Royal Australian Naval Reserve and was mobilised as a signaller on 4 August 1914 under the command of his father. On enlisting to serve in the Australian Infantry Force on 5 July 1915 when he was 19 years old, he was appointed to the 25th Battalion for initial training at Enoggera. Victor Mercer-Smith embarked from Brisbane on HMAT *Itonus* at the end of the year as acting sergeant. On arrival in Egypt he reverted to the rank of private and transferred to the 9th Battalion which soon afterwards sailed for France and the Western Front. The battalion took part in operations against the German army beginning with heavy fighting at Pozières in the Somme valley. He was promoted to the rank of corporal in November and in the same month was selected for training at the School of Instruction at Exeter in preparation for entry to the Royal Flying Corps.

1. Harry Mercer-Smith, *Stories from the Honour Boards*, Booklet 11

2 Sydney Mercer-Smith, *Stories from the Honour Boards*, Booklet

During this training period in England he shared a room with his cousin Charles Edward Kingsford Smith whom he referred to in his letters home as “young Kingsford”. The families used their middle names to describe which Smiths they were referring to. Victor graduated successfully and he was commissioned in the Royal Air Force (RAF) on 16 March 1917. 2nd Lieutenant V Mercer-Smith commenced duties at 15th Reserve Squadron at Doncaster on 15 May 1917. In consequence of this appointment Victor Mercer-Smith was discharged from the AIF in which he had served a period of 1 year 255 days during which his military character was described as ‘very good’.

Lieutenant Mercer-Smith served at RAF stations at Cramlington, Upavon, Bromley, Biggin Hill, Denham Place and Spitalgate before being captured at Roye after being severely wounded. He received a gunshot wound to the foot and the shoulder when he was shot down while a pilot with 103rd Bombing Squadron. After hospital treatment over several weeks for his injuries in Germany, he was made a Prisoner of War at Kriegsgefangenenlager Landshut on the River Isar, Bayern.



*The town of Landshut where Victor Mercer-Smith was a prisoner of war.
Heinrich Himmler lived here as a child.*

He was repatriated on 13 December 1918 and soon afterwards received a letter from Buckingham Palace welcoming him home.

King George V wrote,

“The Queen joins me in welcoming you from the miseries and hardships which you have endured with so much patience and courage. During these many months of trial, the early rescue of our gallant officers and men from the cruelties of their captivity has been uppermost in our thoughts. We are thankful this longed-for day has arrived and that back in the old Country you will be able once more to enjoy the happiness of a home, and to see good days among those who anxiously look for your return.

George R. I.”¹

Victor returned to Australia for a brief period but there were no opportunities for pilots so he returned overseas.

From 1919 to 1935 he was employed in the Federated Malay States as an executive in a trading firm, Adamson, Gilfillan Co Ltd at Penang and Kuala Lumpur. While there he was an active member of the Penang and Kuala Lumpur Flying Clubs.

The deaths of both Victor’s parents occurred in Brisbane during 1933. Mrs Amy Mercer-Smith who died in March was involved in several voluntary activities in Brisbane, among them writing articles and stories. She was obviously referring to her son Victor in an article entitled “Rubber in Malay” published in 1926 in Brisbane when she wrote of a young Australian in charge of factories and workshops, “a late member of the Ninth Battalion, A.I.F., and a flying man of the Royal Air Force.

1.Letter, King George V to released Prisoners of War, Buckingham Palace, 1918. The 'R' and 'I' after his name indicate 'king' and 'emperor' in Latin ('Rex' and 'Imperator').

Brought down behind the German lines, badly wounded, he endured the horrors of one of the worst German prisons. There was no place for him in Australia when he returned from the war. Airmen were not needed; today they are advertising for them. In a far away Eastern land he has found work and a welcome. They call him 'Tuan', meaning sir or master, the solemn sad-eyed babies give him a smile as he passes. He looks at them all with pity, so helpless is their outlook on life. They think of him as 'big fella master' so tall and soldierly is his carriage and so kindly his smile."¹

Victor's father, Commander Sydney Mercer-Smith died in August 1933. Victor returned to the United Kingdom in 1935 and in the same year arrived in Buffalo, New York, USA. He rejoined the Royal Air Force and in World War II commanded several RAF stations including Hawkinge, West Malling, Gravesend and Old Sarum stations. He was in command at Gravesend during the Battle of Britain and rose to the rank of Wing Commander. He was twice mentioned in dispatches in 1940 and 1942 and was awarded the Order of the British Empire on 1 January 1945 for services to the Royal Air Force. In 1945 Wing Commander Mercer-Smith served in France in an RAF delegation. He was discharged from the Royal Air Force in 1951.



He lived in retirement in London at St Marylebone, Westminster. At the age of 64 years, Victor Mercer-Smith married Dorothy Eileen Ward (1897-1980) at the Register Office Chelsea on 16 December 1960. Dorothy was a widow with one child and had ties to Malaysia. Victor died on 7 November 1966 at Froxfield near Petersfield in Hampshire. His body was cremated at Aldershot, Hampshire.

A collection containing war service medals, badges and memorabilia of Victor and his brothers and his father and mother is held at Brisbane Grammar School. Victor's name is recorded there on the World War I and the World War II honour boards in the Great Hall. Saint Andrew's Uniting Church is also privileged to honour the lives of Harry Mercer-Smith who paid the supreme sacrifice and his brothers, Sydney and Victor who served their king and country with dignity and competence.

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Lest we forget