William McAloney

William Simpson " Bill " McAloney , GC , OBE (12 May 1910 ? 31 August 1995) was a senior engineering officer in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and an Australian exchange recipient of the George Cross , the highest civil decoration for heroism in the United Kingdom and formerly in the Commonwealth . Born in Adelaide , he worked as a mechanic before enlisting in the RAAF as an aircraft engine fitter in 1936 . In August the following year , he attempted to rescue the pilot of a crashed Hawker Demon aircraft engulfed in flames at an airfield in Hamilton , Victoria . The first on scene , McAloney rushed into the wreckage in an effort to extract the unconscious pilot . The pilot 's leg was trapped , however , and while struggling to free it one of the wing tanks burst , knocking McAloney unconscious . McAloney was pulled from the aircraft suffering severe burns and spent the next month in hospital . He was subsequently awarded the Albert Medal for his actions in the rescue attempt .

McAloney sufficiently recovered to return to his work in the RAAF , and during the Second World War was primarily involved in engine repair and engineering staff work in Australia . Commissioned as a flying officer in 1942 , he saw service in Dutch New Guinea during late 1944 . He received a permanent commission in the RAAF in 1948 , and was advanced to squadron leader in 1950 . During the Malayan Emergency , he served as technical officer to both No. 90 Wing and No. 1 Squadron , based in Singapore . In 1960 , he was made Officer Commanding Engineering Squadron at the Aircraft Research and Development Unit , and was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his efforts in the post . McAloney retired in 1966 with the honorary rank of group captain . In 1971 , the Albert Medal was discontinued and living recipients of the decoration were invited to exchange their medal for the George Cross ; McAloney took up the offer and formally became a recipient of the latter . He died in 1995 at the age of 85 .

Early life

McAloney was born on 12 May 1910 in Adelaide , South Australia , the eldest son of William Samuel McAloney and his wife Mary (née Murphy) . The young McAloney was educated at Thebarton Technical High School and the Adelaide School of Mines . In 1925 , McAloney registered for compulsory military training in the Citizen Military Force , serving as a private with the 43rd Battalion until November 1929 . During this time , he gained employment as an automotive mechanic with Vrai Ltd , where he received on @-@ the @-@ job training in place of a formal apprenticeship . McAloney was employed with Vrai for three years , before he took a position with Adelaide Car Service .

In 1931 , McAloney purchased a garage and engineering workshop in Wirrulla . He operated the establishment for the next five years , the business conducting work on various types of vehicle including cars , trucks and tractors . However , the business ultimately experienced financial difficulties and was forced to close . In a ceremony on 24 June 1935 , McAloney wed Dora Winifred Johnson ; the couple later had four daughters and three sons .

Military career

Airman and Albert Medal

In light of his business closure , McAloney was forced to seek alternate employment and he consequently enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force on 1 July 1936 . Ranked aircraftman , he completed a fitters course and qualified as an aero fitter and turner before being attached to No. 1 Squadron at RAAF Base Laverton , Victoria , in September . He was employed in a maintenance role within the unit , working on the Jupiter Gipsy and Rolls @-@ Royce Kestrel engines of Bristol Bulldog and Hawker Demon aircraft respectively . During 1937 , McAloney completed a part @-@ time air gunner course . His first child , a son named William , was born later that year .

On 31 August 1937 , three Hawker Demon aircraft of No. 1 Squadron were on a training flight , during which they landed at an air base in Hamilton , Victoria . The exercise coincided with the local agricultural show , and the planes briefly provided a stationary display for the public . Recommencing their journey , the first aircraft had already taken off when the second was seen to have difficulties . The pilot , Pilot Officer Kenneth McKenzie , had attempted a climbing turn when the aircraft 's engine stalled , sending the machine into a dive . McAloney ? who was a passenger in the third aircraft ? witnessed the incident and signalled for his pilot to stop . On doing this , McAloney immediately leapt out of his plane and ran across the airfield . Out of control , the second aircraft struck the ground and rapidly became engulfed in flames . The first on scene , McAloney dashed into the wreckage in an effort to extradite the two crew members , and was able to grab hold of McKenzie who was sprawled over the flaming main fuel tank . McAloney pulled McKenzie free of the cockpit and down on to the aircraft 's wing , though McKenzie 's leg became trapped in the wreckage . Despite this , McAloney continued his efforts to free McKenzie , burning his hands on the pilot 's smouldering clothes . At this point , one of the wing tanks burst , rendering McAloney unconscious . He was pulled from the aircraft suffering severe burns , and spent the next four weeks in hospital undergoing treatment . Both McKenzie and his observer @-@ gunner , Sergeant Norman Torrens @-@ Witherow , perished and it was later ascertained that , owing to the injuries sustained on impact , they would not have survived even if the rescue attempt had been successful .

Although McAloney 's rescue attempt was unsuccessful , the president of the RAAF court of inquiry into the incident , Squadron Leader Charles Eaton , noted his " conspicuous gallantry " and the coroner publicly commended McAloney 's actions . McAloney 's efforts that day were ultimately recognised with the award of the Albert Medal , the announcement of which was widely circulated in the media . The notification and accompanying citation for the decoration was published in the London Gazette on 18 February 1938 , reading :

Whitehall , February 4 , 1938 .

His Majesty The KING has been graciously pleased to award the Albert Medal to Aircraftman William Simpson McAloney , Royal Australian Air Force , for conspicuous gallantry in attempting to rescue an officer from the burning wreckage of an aircraft at Hamilton , Victoria , on the 31st August , 1937 .

Despite the fact that the aircraft was ablaze from nose to rudder , Aircraftman McAloney dashed into the flames and continued his efforts at rescue until pulled away in an unconscious condition , having received severe burns which necessitated his removal to hospital .

The award of McAloney 's Albert Medal is unique , as he is the only member of the RAAF to receive the decoration . The award also proved to be the last Albert Medal bestowed upon a living Australian , with all such subsequent presentations until the medal 's discontinuation in 1971 being posthumous .

= = = Second World War = = =

McAloney was presented with his Albert Medal by the acting Governor @-@ General of Australia , William Vanneck , 5th Baron Huntingfield , in a ceremony at Parliament House , Melbourne on 31 May 1938 . McAloney recovered sufficiently from his injuries to return to his duties with the RAAF , and in September was attached to No. 1 Aircraft Depot for a period of three months . During this time he was promoted to leading aircraftman , before returning to service with No. 1 Squadron . He was formally transferred to No. 1 Aircraft Depot from August 1939 , and was advanced to corporal on 1 September that year . With the outbreak of the Second World War , McAloney received a rapid series of promotions over the following eighteen months , first to sergeant in April 1940 , flight sergeant in March 1941 , and finally to warrant officer in February 1942 . He was primarily consigned to engine repair and engineering staff work in Australia during the conflict . After making sergeant , he became No. 1 Aircraft Depot 's non @-@ commissioned officer in charge of overhaul and test work on the Rolls @-@ Royce Kestrel engine . His duties were expanded with his March 1941 promotion to include the overhaul , inspection and testing of both the Kestrel and Rolls @-@ Royce Merlin aircraft engines .

In August 1941 , McAloney was posted to the Directorate of Equipment at RAAF Headquarters , Melbourne . In this capacity he advised on the procurement of equipment and spare parts for RAAF aircraft . He was further tasked with compiling a register of aeroplane equipment at RAAF flight training units and operational bases throughout Australia . The latter entailed McAloney visiting several Air Force units in Victoria , New South Wales and Queensland to check equipment stores . On 1 March 1942 , he was commissioned as a flying officer . Transferred to the Directorate of Equipment Administration in July , McAloney was made Officer Commanding Technical and Photographic Staffs and served as a liaison between his own directorate and that of Technical Services .

Promoted to temporary flight lieutenant on 1 August 1943 , McAloney was sent to the Directorate of Technical Services from November as the specialist officer on American and gas turbine jet engines . The following November , he was dispatched to Dutch New Guinea to rectify issues being experienced with Pratt & Whitney engines in operations by aircraft of the 1st Tactical Air Force . He returned to Australia and his position with Technical Services in December , and saw out the remainder of the war in this post . McAloney decided he wanted to remain in the Air Force on the cessation of hostilities , and subsequently sought a permanent commission in the post @-@ war RAAF . Having continued on a short @-@ service commission in the meantime , his application was ultimately approved in September 1948 and he was granted the substantive rank of flight lieutenant . His younger brother , Robert Simpson McAloney , also saw service with the RAAF in the Second World War . He had enlisted in late 1937 and rose to the rank of warrant officer before his discharge in 1946 , his final posting being to No. 1 Communication Unit .

= = = Post @-@ war and senior engineering officer = = =

In mid @-@ 1946 , McAloney was involved in an investigation into a series of engine failures experienced by RAAF aircraft . The inquiry led him to visit operational and transport units throughout Australia , in an attempt to determine whether the issues were the result of substandard maintenance or defective components . He returned to his duties at the Directorate of Technical Services on the investigation 's conclusion . Made squadron leader in March 1950 , he attended a land / air warfare course the following year . McAloney was posted to Singapore in June 1952 as the technical officer to the Changi @-@ based No. 90 (Composite) Wing , formed specifically for service in the Malayan Emergency . The attachment proved short lived with the disbandment of No. 90 Wing in December , at which point McAloney transferred to No. 1 Squadron , then operating out of Tengah .

McAloney returned to Australia in August 1953 , his next appointment being to the staff at the Department of Air in Melbourne . He possessed complete administrative control over matters pertaining to aircraft engines in this post , including the acquisition , repairs , modifications and financial expenditure on such . In 1956 , he completed a course in industrial mobilisation , later undertaking a unit in industrial electronics . With his January 1957 promotion to wing commander , McAloney was transferred to Maintenance Command , where he held a policy formulation position responsible for the servicing of aircraft . He served three years in this post , being made Officer Commanding Engineering Squadron at the Aircraft Research and Development Unit (ARDU) in October 1960 . The function of ARDU was to test aircraft from local and overseas manufacturers , evaluating whether they were suitable for acquisition by the RAAF . McAloney 's role focused on the supervision of maintenance for test aircraft , along with completing modifications and fitting specialised equipment trialled at ARDU . The introduction into service of the Mirage IIIO fighter coincided with his time in this post . He was set to retire from the RAAF on reaching the age limit for his rank in 1964 , but his appointment was extended a further two years owing to the shortage of technical officers . For his service with ARDU , McAloney was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire in the 1966 New Year Honours List . The recommendation for the honour credited McAloney with enhancing the safety record at ARDU , and commended his constant efforts during the adoption of the Mirage and his actions to ensure the serviceability of the diverse variety of aircraft at the unit . He retired from the RAAF on 9 December 1966 and , in recognition of his 30

years of service , was granted the honorary rank of group captain .

= = Later life = =

McAloney retired to his home in Sandringham , Victoria , where he indulged his passions in gardening and golf . In 1971 , owing to the decline in status and significance of the Albert Medal , the British Government announced that living recipients of the decoration would be invited to exchange their medals for the George Cross , and henceforth formally become recipients of the latter award . All six living Australian Albert Medal recipients at the time opted to accept the offer , McAloney and four others travelling to London to receive their awards . The five men , Jack Chalmers , Stanley Gibbs , Robert Kavanaugh , Dick Richards and McAloney , were presented with their George Crosses at an investiture ceremony in Buckingham Palace by Queen Elizabeth II on 12 July 1972 .

Aged 85 , Bill McAloney died on 31 August 1995 ; the 58th anniversary of his rescue attempt . Remembered as " pleasant and fatherly ? almost gracious " , he was survived by his wife and six of their seven children . Two of McAloney 's sons served with the Australian Army in the Vietnam War , Paul Simpson completing two tours as a corporal with the 6th Battalion , Royal Australian Regiment , and John Douglas as a lieutenant with the 4th and 5th Battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment . John McAloney was decorated with the Military Cross for rescuing one of his men who had been wounded , and then personally clearing several caves defended by Viet Cong despite sustaining a wound himself . He rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel and commanded the 1st Battalion , Royal Australian Regiment in the mid @-@ 1980s before his death in 1991 .