



The Federal Redistribution 2009
QUEENSLAND



Objection Number 55

Ann and Brian Nielsen

2 pages



3 Mallen Street
HILTON SA 5033
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Australian Electoral Officer for Queensland
GPO Box 2590
BRISBANE QLD 4001

We wish to support Julia Lang and her family in their submission and recommendation to have the new Queensland Federal Electoral Division named WATERS instead of the proposed name of WRIGHT. We believe this would be a fitting way for the Federal Government to finally recognise the accomplishments of this remarkable man.

Leonard Victor (Len) Waters (June 29, 1924 – August 24, 1993) was the first Australian Aboriginal military pilot and was one of only four indigenous people to serve in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) during World War II. Aboriginal people at the time suffered significant discrimination and disadvantages in Australian society, such as restrictions on movement, residence, employment, access to services and citizenship.

Although the military had officially barred or restricted the recruitment of Aboriginal people in earlier periods, these impediments were significantly relaxed after Japan entered World War II, and Australia came under direct attack for the first time.

Waters volunteered for service in the RAAF on August 24, 1942, at Brisbane and was accepted. He began training as an aircraft mechanic, but later volunteered for aircrew service, was accepted and commenced this training in December 1943. His initial training was at No. 1 Elementary Flying Training School, Narrandera. He completed his training, and received his "wings" as a Sergeant Pilot, at No. 5 Service Flying Training School, at Uranquinty, New South Wales. Waters' training continued at Mildura, Victoria with No. 2 Operational Training Unit.

While he was on leave, Waters was reportedly jailed in Moree, New South Wales, for not carrying an identity card, which was one of the racially discriminatory institutions affecting Aboriginal people at the time.

On November 14, 1944, he was posted to No. 78 Squadron, a fighter unit based on Noemfoor, an island off Dutch New Guinea (West Papua). When he arrived, he was allocated a P-40 Kittyhawk. By chance, a previous pilot had nicknamed the plane "Black Magic" and painted those words on its nose. As is the case with other people of colour, Australian Aborigines are sometimes referred to as being "black". Waters found the name of his plane an amusing coincidence and chose to retain it.

By this stage of the war, Japanese aircraft were almost non-existent in the South West Pacific theatre; 78 Squadron's main role was ground attack, and Waters flew 95 sorties, from Noemfoor and later from the air bases at Morotai and Tarakan, in Borneo. During one mission, his aircraft was struck by a cannon shell that embedded itself behind him in the cockpit without detonating. He flew for another two hours, with the possibility of the

shell exploding at any time, a situation he likened to having a loaded gun against his head. "I'll tell you what", he said after returning to base, "that was the best landing I ever made". On January 1, 1945 he was promoted to Flight Sergeant. By the end of the war, Waters was commanding operations which included commissioned officers.

Waters also held the RAAF middleweight boxing title. He left the air force with the rank of Warrant Officer, on January 18, 1946. One of his brothers, Donald Edward (Jim) Waters, served as an infantryman with the Australian Army during the war.

Return to civilian life

After he returned to Australia, Waters attempted to start a regional airline serving south west Queensland. This did not succeed because he could not secure finance or bureaucratic approval. One source says that Waters wrote four letters seeking government approval, but never received a reply. He never flew a plane again.

Len Waters has already been honoured in the following ways:

- his depiction on a stamp and a first day cover by Australia Post
- the opening of Len Waters Place, a park in Inala
- Moree Plains Shire Council has created Leonard Waters Park, in Boggabilla, New South Wales
- naming of Len Waters Street, in Ngunnawal, Australian Capital Territory
- the erection of a monument by the Balonne Shire Council in St George

Sincerely,

ANN & BRIAN NIELSEN