

In honour and recognition of all those who served our country, in this, the year of the 100th anniversary of the ANZAC and the 97th anniversary of Remembrance Day, I would like to tell the story of a Black Head Surf Club member who served in World War Two and never made it home.

Reflection of Glory

John (aka Jock) Affleck was a well-known business man in the local areas of Nabiac and Taree, as an agent for selling Dodge Cars and also providing a taxi service. After returning from taking his wife Annie and young son Ian on a trip back to Scotland in 1922, Jock purchased a dairy farm situated at Tipperary just outside of Krambach, high on one of the surrounding mountains. He named the farm 'Liberton' and intended to develop it into a breeding farm as well as running cattle. Planning for the future, Jock had visions of having his son Ian help and eventually taking over the running of the proposed stud.

When Black Head Surf Life Saving Club was formed in 1925, Jock signed up as a member, and making him one of the original members. He gave his full commitment to the club, serving on the committee, was Vice President for a few years, an official at many surf carnivals and in later years was the Beach Inspector. During his time as Beach Inspector, his duties pertained only to the sand unlike other Beach Inspectors who carried out full patrols as life savers. The reason for this was Jock never obtained his bronze medallion and it was also because of the absence of the medallion that Jock was excluded from becoming a Life Member of Black Head Surf Club. One of the most important duties Jock had to undertake during his time as Beach Inspector, was making sure swimwear attire was appropriate, 'regulations at the time meant that the bottom half of bikinis needed to consist of six inches (15cms) of fabric'.¹ A lovely local lady recalls the fear Jock instilled in young girls when they would head to the beach for some sun and 'boy watching', only to see Jock heading in their direction to check the size of the bikini they were wearing: 'we were scared of him, he was so strict'.²

Strict he may have been but he was also very respected, and wanting to acknowledge his work and commitment to the club; 'in recognition of his long association with the club ... active interest over the years in carrying out the spade work always associated with any voluntary

¹Daniel Ziffer, *'The girl who beat the post-war bikini ban'*, Entertainment Reporter, August 27, 2005, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/the-girl-who-beat-the-postwar-bikini-ban/2005/08/26/1124563029397.html?from=moreStories>, accessed 12 November 2015.

² Mrs J. Edstein, Black Head Village, October 2015.

movement', a presentation of a lifesaving 'emblem' was awarded to Jock in 1939.³ His wife Annie also helped out with the surf club and joined the Black Head Ladies Surf Club when it opened, and when he was old enough, their son Ian also joined and proved to be a dominant participant.



Fig. 1: Jock Affleck's 1939 recognition 'emblem'.

After finishing his primary education Ian Affleck (Jock's son) went to Hawkesbury Agriculture College, to study the diploma course in dairying; he became known more for his athletic ability than his scholastic achievements. Ian also thrived in the surf club environment; achieving his Junior Qualifying Certificate in 1933 aged fourteen years. A gifted swimmer, Ian represented Black Head Surf Club on several occasions: in Taree Swim Club meets, won the handicapped

³ 'Surfing: Black Head Season opened', The Northern Champion (NSW: 1913-1954), Saturday 21 October 1939, p. 6.

surf swim leg of the Inaugural Bender Cup and later, in that same season, competing once again in the Bender Cup, placing second to Wally Scott: Wally, a twenty-two year old club bronze medallion holder, went on to win the Surf Swim gold medal at the Australian Surf Club Titles 1935.



Fig. 2: Ian Affleck 1935c

Ian's swimming prowess became known throughout the Manning district and once he achieved his bronze medallion (30 November 1935) expectations were of him becoming a surf life saving state champion: possibly creating a lot of pressure on such a young man aged just sixteen years. In 1937 he was part of the Black Head R & R Branch Champion team, 1938 he attained his Instructors Certificate and in 1939 he came second in the Senior Belt and first in the Senior Surf Swim at Branch championships, he then went on to compete in the Australian Surf Life Saving Championships held at Manly. 1939 was also the year that Australia entered World War Two, the Affleck family, like many Australians at that time, would have been listening to their radio, over the occasional crackling of the airways, the voice of Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies would permeate through homes announcing Australian's intentions of joining the war in Europe, 'Fellow Australians, It is my melancholy duty to inform you...'.⁴

In the 1940 surf club season, Ian won the Senior Surf Championship and Senior Belt Championship, he was also a participating member of the Wallamba Team that won the Paton Shield and a surf boat crew member, competing and winning at a Port Macquarie carnival. 1940 was also the year Ian enlisted to serve in the armed forces. It is quite reasonable to think that Ian's father, Jock, would not have been happy with this decision; his son and only child heading to war, he knew about war and what could happen, World War One was not that far back in history. Jock had plans, plans for himself, and plans for Ian and Ian's future, these had been put in jeopardy by his son's enlistment. For Ian, his mind was made, there was a whole world outside 'Liberton' farm and he had wanted to be a part of it and explore.

By the end of June 1940, Ian had enlisted in the Air Force but after discovering he was assigned to office work, decided to join the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), where he was assigned to the 2/15th Field Regiment and spent the next twelve months training in Cowra, Bathurst and Sydney. While in Sydney, during a visit to a friend's house, Ian met Ida Maxwell who lived next door to his friend; it wasn't long before the couple were dating and in 1941 married just before Ian's regiment was to embark overseas. Yet Ian never travelled with his regiment, missing the embarkation because of a serious bout of gastroenteritis, serious enough to give him a stint in

⁴ Sir Robert Menzies, Declaration of War speech, 3 September 1939.

hospital. Ian did eventually sail out in the October 1941 and catching up with his regiment in Singapore and unfortunately had another stint in hospital, not long after his arrival, this time with a bout of the mumps. For a few months, Ian had a rough time with his health, things improved and he found that army life suited him and he enjoyed it and by the end of December, he was promoted to Sergeant. It was also not long after arriving in Singapore Ian received the news that his wife Ida was pregnant with their first child, news that quickly erased the disheartening start to his army career and filled him with excitement and delight.

Early 1942 Ian was transferred to the Provost Corps. (at this stage in the research, reasons for this are unknown) and while guarding the base, Japanese forces attacked. As the Japanese forces delivered shell fire, Ian was standing near when one exploded; projectiles killing men around him and wounding Ian. He was taken to the Cathay Theatre, suffering shrapnel wounds and was operated on by Surgeon –Major Notts the next morning. Ian, surviving the surgery and had recovered from the anaesthetic when ‘Japanese entered the hospital and took away every able-bodied man’.⁵ Reported as missing and assumed to be a prisoner of war (POW), in May 1944 Ian’s wife Ida, wrote to the Records Office acknowledging the news of Ian possibly being a POW and asking for more information if they had any. Over twelve months later, September 1945, news came that Ian had died of his wounds on 18th February 1942; two months shy of his 23rd birthday.

Ian is thought to be buried on Padang, East of the Cathay Building, his name is inscribed on the Roll of Honour at the Singapore Memorial. Ian was a young man who made a strong admirable impression on all who knew him. Lieutenant Hector Chalmers, a superior officer who had worked with Ian, wrote in a letter back home to his family, explaining to them his feelings after capitulation, the loss of five of his seventeen men and of Ian: ‘Staff serjeant[sic] Affleck ... finest physical specimen I have ever seen ... I felt his loss more than I can say he was the most promising of all my lads’.⁶ An indescribable loss for Ian’s parents Jock and Annie, and to his wife Ida and their child, a son, born four months after Ian’s death. To honour her husband, and

⁵ *‘News of our soldiers: Staff-sgt. Ian Affleck’*, The Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer (NSW: 1898-1954), Friday, 5 October 1945, p. 3.

⁶ Hector McDonald Chalmers, letter, 9 June 1942, original owned by Mr I.M. Affleck.

possibly to give her child something of his father's, something nobody else would have; Ida named her child Ian. Ian, who grew up in Sydney, was well aware of his father's swimming and surf club achievements and would regularly visit Black Head beach. He was even depicted in a cartoon caricature, alongside his grandfather, about the local characters of Black Head. He may not have realized it at the time, but Ian was able to share with his father, the father he would never see, never hear his voice or be able to hug or hold his hand; he would at least be able to share the same familiar sights and smells, the same awareness, from the coolness of the ocean's water to the warm summer sands of Black Head beach.



Fig. 3: Ian Affleck 1941c

Ian Affleck was one of 31 members of Black Head Surf Life Saving Club to enlist in 1940. The surf club has many members who had served in World War One also (some in both World Wars), each and every one of these members have stories to be told; at this point in the research, Ian was our only member known to have been killed in action.

‘These boys had not only won honor for themselves in their undertaking for their country, but the members of the club felt some reflection of their glory, as the club has always engendered a spirit of patriotism and service’.⁷

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⁷ *Annual Smoko: Black Head surf club*, the Northern Champion (Taree, NSW: 1913-1954), Saturday 24 May 1941, p. 3.