

FLYING OFFICER JAMES FRANCIS SPENCE RAAF 128259 - 7 Airfield Construction Squad

Biography:

James Francis Spence was the son of Joseph Frank and Alice Spence and was born at Sydney on 15 Oct 1899.

The Gympie Times & Mary River Mining Gazette, QLD – 22 Apr 1899, page 3, reported Joseph and Alice's marriage:

"SPENCE-FERGUSON. On 20 September 1898, at the Manse, Philip Street, Sydney, by the Rev. WT Adams, BA, Joseph Frank Spence, Master Mariner, son of the late James Spence, Kirkwall, Orkney Isles, Scotland and Alice, third daughter of the late John Ferguson, Merchant, of Gympie."

James was the eldest of four children: Joseph born 1902; Roy born 1903; and Ivy born 1906.

James attended the Sydney Technical High School and obtained excellent results for his Leaving certificate held in December 1916. While attending University in Sydney, James joined the Australian Imperial Forces towards the end of WW1 on 23 Sep 1918, just after his 18th birthday. His WW1 dossier states that he had 4 years' experience as a cadet and one year with the Militia. His medical examination states that he was 5 feet 9 inches tall, had a medium complexion, brown eyes and hair, and was of the Presbyterian religious denomination. He was Private N94633 in the University Unit of the AIF. Following the end of WW1 on 11 Nov 1918, he was demobilised on 31 Dec 1918.

James Francis Spence married Clara Elizabeth Fryar at Manly, Sydney, in 1919. They had three children: James, Elizabeth and Jean. Clara died at Lewisham Hospital, Sydney on 4 Feb 1932, aged 33 years. She was buried at the Field of Mars Cemetery, North Ryde.

James remarried in Sydney in 1933 to Alice Maude Bratby. In 1937 they were living at Five Dock, Sydney, and James was working as a civil engineer. In October 1941, James Spence was appointed as engineer to the Amaroo Shire Council, based in Cumnock. On 26 Mar 1942 James Spence enlisted with the Australian Army and served part time as a Corporal with the 26th Btn Volunteer Defence Corps.

On 29 Mar 1943 James, aged 43 years, enlisted at Melbourne in the Royal Australian Air Force and served as a Flying Officer with the No. 7 Airfield Construction Squadron. Airfield Construction Squadrons were the RAAF equivalent of Army Engineers, with a primary task of constructing and maintaining forward airfields, runways and support infrastructure in the Pacific Campaign. The unit was first formed in October 1943 and served in the New Guinea and Bougainville Campaigns. It was noted on James' enlistment form that a special qualification he held was that he spoke German. He listed the sports he played were swimming, cricket, tennis and golf.

James attended an Officers' Course from 29 Mar - 24 May 1943 and given the rank of Pilot Officer. He was promoted to Flying Officer on 22 Nov 1943.

James Spence returned to his position as engineer for the Amaroo Shire Council at Cumnock and welcomed back in February 1945. His wife Alice had been allowed to stay on at the engineer's cottage while her husband was absent on service.

The Wellington Times - 5 Feb 1945, page 7, Amaroo Shire Council - Welcome to Mr Spence:

"The President [Cr SR Reynolds], in welcoming Mr Spence back to his position as Engineer, thanked him for the service he had rendered as a member of the RAAF and expressed the Council's pleasure at his return..."

F/O James Spence was discharged from the RAAF at his own request to rejoin Civil Service at Cumnock on 20 Jan 1945. He received the 1939-45 Star, 1939-45 Pacific Star, the War Medal and the Active Service Medal.

Two of James Spence's children also served in WW2 and are listed with him on the WW2 Honour Roll on the Cumnock War Memorial Gates. James Spence served in both the Australian Army (N199599 & NX160383 Bombardier) and the RAAF (445871 Aircraftman 2). Elizabeth (Betty) Spence served as Corporal NF462711 in the Australian Women's Army Service.



He resigned his position as the Amaro Shire Council engineer in September 1945 to take up the position as Engineer for Bland Shire Council based at West Wyalong.

In 1946, James' daughter, Jean Clare Spence, married at Sydney, Ivan Eggleston, son of Isabella and Walter Eggleston of "Clearview" and "Russell-Lea", Cumnock. The couple settled at "Russell-Lea". James and Alice returned to Cumnock many times over the following years to visit Jean.

James Spence left West Wyalong in April 1950 for an appointment as City Engineer with the Broken Hill Shire Council. *The West Wyalong Advocate* – 3 Apr 1950, P2, in a tribute to Mr JF Spence, stated: "Ability, fairness, understanding and popularity with the construction and administration staffs of the Bland Shire Council, were tributes paid to Mr JF Spence."

James Spence died suddenly, aged 50 years, on 5 Sept 1950 at the Broken Hill Hospital. *The Barrier Daily Truth, Broken Hill* - 6 Sep 1950, page 1, reported a tribute to Mr James Spence from the Mayor, Ald W Riddiford, saying:

"He was a most valuable servant of Council. Mr Spence was extremely well liked by the officers and staff of his department. He understood the men and was always ready to apply himself to any emergency and all problems that arose in the course of his work..."

His body was transferred to Sydney and after a service held at the Presbyterian Church, Drummoyne, he was buried at the Field of Mars Cemetery, East Ryde, on 7 Sep 1950.

Alice Maud Spence died, aged 81 years, on 3 Apr 1972 at St Leonards, Sydney, and was interred at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium.

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Above: Cumnock Memorial Gates.

Right: Photo of James F Spence from his war files.

