

Cyril Gadsden



In April 1966, a new land sub-division was established at the north-west corner of Freeman and Blackshaws Roads in Altona North. A list of names was submitted for the new streets and courts, with the Altona Council choosing to name the first eight after service personnel who were killed in action during World War 2. They were also listed on the Memorial standing in front of the council buildings in Civic Parade. One of these streets, which runs between Knapp Street and Freemans Road, was to be known as Gadsden Street, named in honour of Cyril Gadsden.

William Cyril Gadsden (who later went by Cyril) was born in the Melbourne suburb of Prahran on 21 April 1906, to parents William Louis Gadsden and Florence Elizabeth Gadsden (nee Harding). He was the second eldest of five children born to William and Florence. Shortly after Cyril's birth, the family moved to Brighton East and it was here in 1912, roughly a year after the birth of their

fifth child, that Florence sadly passed away.

This left William a young family, of which the oldest was only eight, to manage on his own. However, within a year, William had remarried. His second wife was Fanny Louisa Harding, the elder sister of Florence. It should be remembered that in these times there was no government support for families, and so, support from family members was always required and greatly appreciated. Given that Fanny was now thirty-two years old and unmarried, she may have seen it as her obligation to support her sister's children. There may have also been an attraction between William and Fanny that brought about this marriage for they had a further three children.

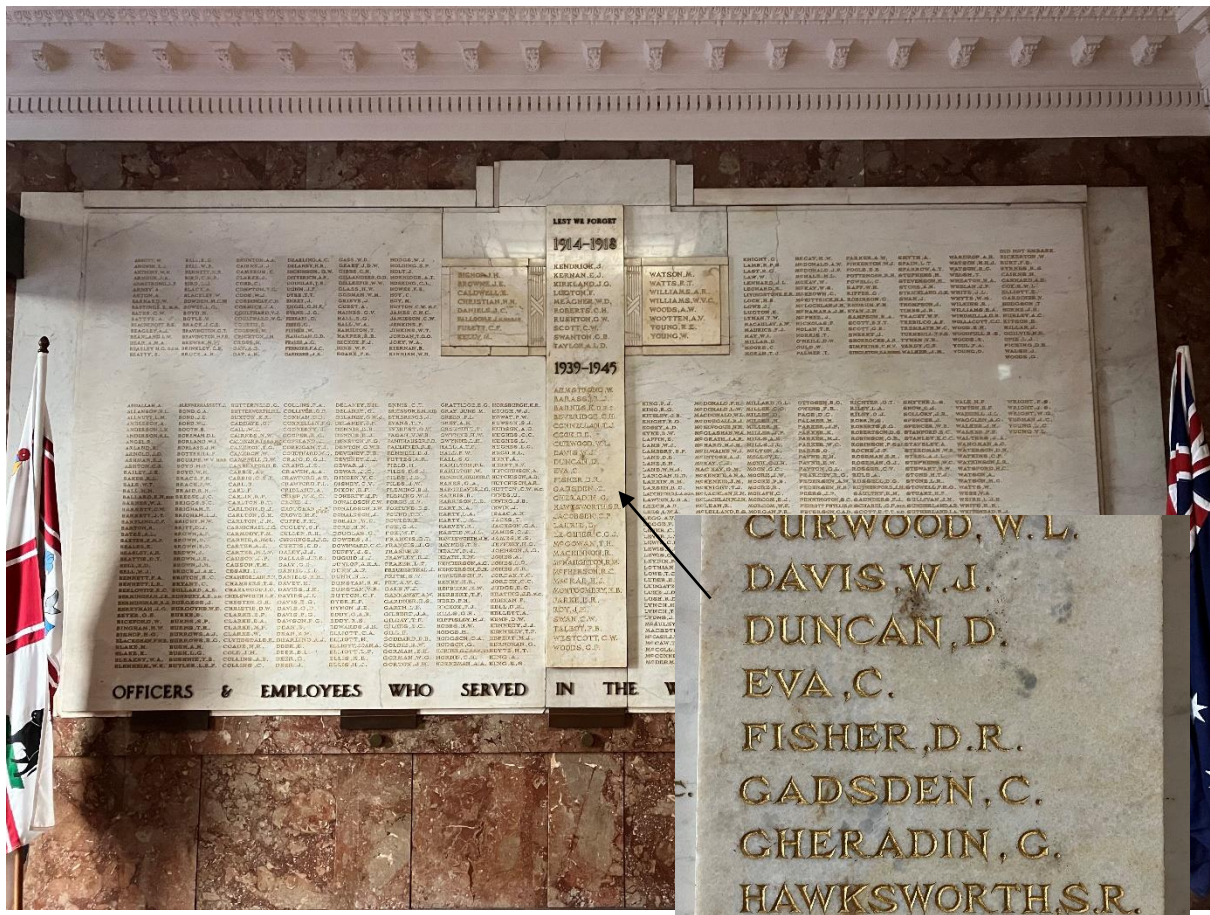
In 1925, the family moved across town and settled in the new seaside western suburb of Seaholme, which was within the Altona area. By this time, Cyril would have been close to finishing his schooling and venturing out to find employment. Following their move to Seaholme, William commenced his own building firm, so Cyril and his younger brother Clarence may have worked with their father within the building industry. As Seaholme was only a few years old, builders would have been in great demand. In 1937, Cyril married Dorothy (Dorie) Maude Walker (nee Patton) who was also living in the Altona area with her family.

The Patton family were early settlers in Altona, having become founding members and passionate supporters of the suburb's many clubs and institutions. The Patton family had also suffered more than their fair share of tragedies. One of the worst occurred in 1931 when Dorothy's first husband, James Walker, her father Walter, and two brothers, Mick and Herbert, went out fishing in the bay one seemingly perfect spring day. What happened next nobody knows for sure, other than to say that neither the men nor the boat were seen again. The only evidence ever discovered was a small piece of timber, the lid from the engine box, which was found washed up on the Eastern side of the bay about six months later.

Cyril and Dorothy settled down into family life, living together in the Gadsden family home in Seaholme. During this time, Cyril was still working with his father and brother Clarence in what might have been the family business. Married life was going smoothly for Cyril and Dorothy, but things

changed dramatically in late 1939, firstly with the Second World War commencing in September. His father, William Louis Gadsden, then passed away on 29 December 1939 at the age of 59. Very soon after, his stepmother Fanny Louisa Gadsden also passed away on 18 January 1940. This must have been devastating for the siblings who had now lost their mother, father, and stepmother.

It might have been around this time, or a little earlier, that Cyril gained employment with the Melbourne City Council as a labourer and driver. He and Dorothy remained living at the Beach Street property in Seaholme together with his brother Clarence and his wife, Mena. As the Second World War continued and more casualties occurred to Australian personnel, it was inevitable that members of the Gadsden family would soon enlist in the conflict.



Honour Board at Melbourne Town Hall, images courtesy of the Melbourne City Council

Clarence Leslie Gadsden was the first to enlist, and in January 1942, he joined the Citizens Militia Force who served, as required, at strategic locations around Victoria, and later across Australia. Cyril then enlisted into the army on 23 September 1942, being appointed to the rank of private with the 2/31 Infantry Battalion. Almost a year later, their stepbrother, Horace Victor Gadsden, enlisted with the Royal Australian Air Force and served from September 1943 until 28 May 1946.

Private Cyril Gadsden undertook his training at Puckapunyal, just outside of Seymour, Victoria, between September and November 1942. He then moved up to New South Wales where he undertook jungle warfare training for the first six months of 1943 before joining the rest of his battalion in action. Prior to his involvement however, the battalion had already accomplished a great deal during the war so far. They had served in the Middle East before being shipped back to Australia when Japan entered

the conflict. On 1 November 1942, they became the first battalion to re-enter Kokoda, playing a key role in smashing the last Japanese defensive position on the trail at Gorari between November 7 to 11. The 2/31 Battalion was then briefly involved in the operations at Gona between 23 November and 4 December. They later returned to Port Moresby by air on 15 December and eventually sailed back to Australia in early January 1943.

By mid-1943, the 2/31 Battalion, now with Private Cyril Gadsden present, returned to Port Moresby on 26 July to prepare for their next operation - the advance on the Japanese base at Lae in New Guinea. The 2/31 Battalion were flown into Nadzab on 12 September, and after a hurried advance, joined the fighting east of Lae, which fell on 16 September. On 29 September, the men of the 2/31 Battalion were flown from Nadzab to Kaipit and spent the rest of the year engaged in patrol actions in the Ramu Valley and the foothills of the Finisterre Range. After a successful campaign, they returned to Australia on 16 February 1944.

Like most of the AIF battalions, the 2/31 Battalion was about to spend over a year training in Australia in preparation for what was to be their final operation of the war.

It was when his battalion had returned to Australia in March 1944 that Private Cyril Gadsden reported that he was ill. He was evacuated to and initially treated at the 115 Australian General Hospital in Heidelberg, Melbourne. He was diagnosed with tuberculosis and moved to the 106 Australian General Hospital at Bonegilla in northern Victoria, which specialised in the treatment of this condition, on 27 October 1944. Unfortunately, his condition did not improve. Private Cyril Gadsden passed away shortly afterwards on 16 November 1944, and he was interred within the Albury cemetery, just across the border in New South Wales. He was only 38 years old and had been married for seven years.



Memorial at Albury cemetery - Private Cyril Gadsden

His death left Dorothy Maude Gadsden a widow for a second time. Dorothy remained living in the Altona area, where she had the support of a large family and friend base for many years, and she never remarried. Her brother-in-law, Horace Victor Gadsden, lived close by and became a key figure within the local Returned and Services League of Australia (RSL). The Patton family continued to be a driving force within many of the local Altona community groups. Dorothy eventually moved to Mildura, living on the Murray River until her passing in 1996.

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