

## Duggan Court

In Altona Meadows, Duggan Court sits at the southernmost part of Victoria Street and runs off Featherby Way. It is a small 'cul-de-sac' containing about 18 homes. In around 1988, it was named in recognition of a young man who made the ultimate sacrifice during World War 2 while protecting his homeland. The naming of Duggan Court pays tribute to Private Melville Harold Duggan. He was killed in action on Tarakan Island, situated in the eastern Celebes Sea, off the northeastern coast of Borneo.

Up until March 1981, Private Duggan had not been recognised on local memorial lists. He had not been identified as a resident of Altona, and so, was not included on the central cenotaph outside the Council Offices. Fortunately, a new investigation at the time helped bring his story into the public eye and rectify this situation, allowing his story to live on to this day. So, who was Melville Duggan, when was he a resident of Altona, and what led to him having a street named in his honour?

Melville Harold Duggan was born on 22 September 1924, in Carlton, to parents Harold Louis Duggan and Alice Rose Lavina Duggan (nee Batge). Melville was named after his grandfather and was the second child born to the couple. Melville had an older sister, June Lavine Duggan, born the previous year, 1923, when the family had been living in Hobart, Tasmania. This is where both Harold and Alice were born and got married in 1922. When Melville was born, the family had already moved to the East Melbourne area. A year later in 1925, the couple's third child, Beverly Joyce Duggan was born.

During World War 1, Harold served with the Australian army, from October 1916 until his discharge in September 1918<sup>1</sup>. He was stationed on the Western Front in France with the 3rd, and then 1st, Machine Gun Battalion. Why the family moved across from Tasmania to Victoria is not known, but it may have been for better economic opportunities for himself and his family. By 1936, the Duggan family had moved from the East Melbourne area to the seaside suburb of Altona and were renting a property in Pier Street. It wasn't long before the family became entrenched within the progress movement for community improvement. Here, Harold Duggan took up the role of secretary of the Central Unemployed Committee. This organisation had been formed to assist those out of full-time employment due to the depression years and were not medically fit enough to enlist with the wartime defence forces. In 1941, Harold found himself defending the attributes of this group to members of the Werribee Shire council<sup>2</sup>, where some councillors felt that it was being unfairly used by some.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Harold's service records, he returned to Tasmania in June 1918, and was discharged from service on 3 September 1918 due to being medically unfit.

<sup>2</sup> Altona was under the governance of Werribee until it seceded in 1957.

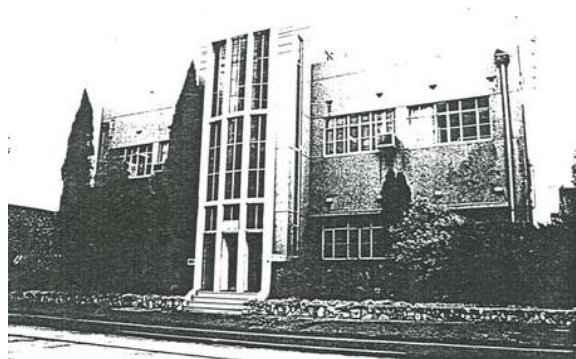
Now enmeshed in their new community, the Duggan children attended the Altona Primary School. Within the image of the 1938 Grade VIII<sup>3</sup> class below, Melville Duggan is pictured within the back row second from the right. His elder sister, June, is in the second row from the bottom, fifth from the left. Melville would have been about 14 and Jane would have been 15 years old. At this time, Grade VIII would have been the final year of compulsory



**(Altona Primary School, Grade 8/1938, Courtesy of Douglas K Grant)**

schooling for these students. Having completed this year, many would have gone off to seek employment in local businesses, factories and taken up a trade. However, a small number would have continued onto higher education.

Sometime after Melville left Altona Primary School, he gained employment with the Metters company in Gordon Street, Footscray. Metters had expanded their South Australian manufacturing operation to Footscray in 1928. Metters' products included gas and fuel stoves, as well as other domestic appliances, agricultural machinery, water tanks, coppers<sup>4</sup>, baths, basins, sinks, and grates. We are not aware of when exactly Melville joined the company, nor whether the work that he undertook changed at all when World War 2 began in 1939. During World War 1, manufacturing changed significantly to meet the requirements of the national war effort.



**Metters Stove Factory, Footscray (Footscray Conservation Study)**

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<sup>3</sup> Education levels, at this time were compulsory to Year 8 or 14 years of age. After that generally students went off to find employment or could choose to go on to higher education and University to gain professional jobs.

<sup>4</sup> A copper or copper boiler was used for domestic laundry. Linen and cotton were placed in the copper and were boiled to whiten or clean them. Clothes were agitated within the copper with a washing dolly, a vertical stick with a metal cone on the end.



**Private Melville Duggan**

On 1 October 1942, just weeks after his eighteenth birthday, Melville enlisted into the army at Wood Street, Newport. His service papers indicate that he had previously undertaken militia training with the 3rd Machine Gun Training Company. Following six months of training within Victoria, Private Duggan was transferred to the 3rd Machine Gun Company based in Cowra, New South Wales. By mid July 1943, he had been reassigned to the 1st Machine Gun Battalion and moved to northern Queensland for further training. It was in Queensland that Private Duggan was again reassigned, this time to the 2/23rd Infantry Battalion. By this point, the 2/23rd Infantry Battalion had returned from seeing action in New Guinea with the taking of Lae and the advance in Sio, which saw the Japanese withdraw from this area.

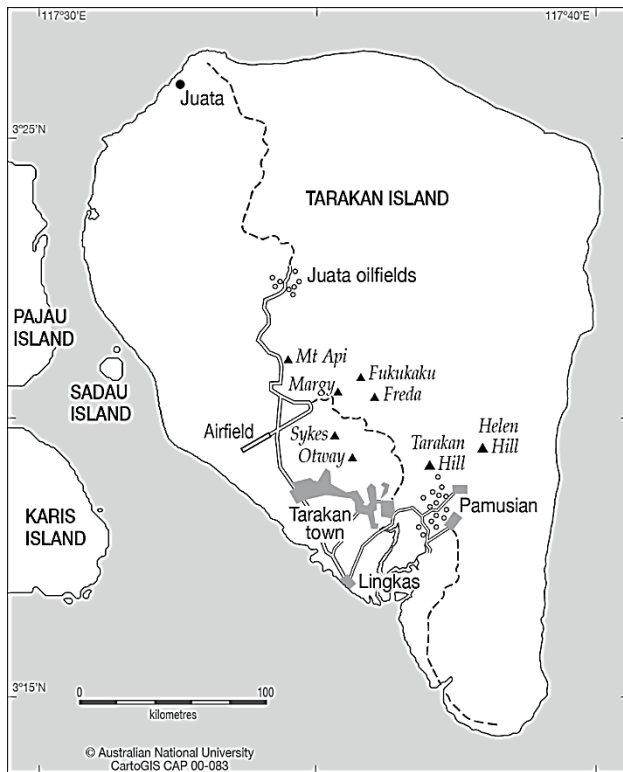
With Private Duggan now amongst their ranks, the battalion was based around Ravenshoe, Queensland, where it was almost completely rebuilt. Strategic uncertainties and the changing war situation meant that it was not committed to a further campaign until very late in the war, when the 9th Division was assigned to Operation Oboe. Within this plan, the 26th Brigade was tasked with capturing Tarakan as part of the Borneo campaign. A preliminary move was made to Morotai Island<sup>5</sup> in April, and then in the following month, the attack was launched. The 2/23rd and 2/48th battalions were assigned a lead role in the initial landing, which took place on 1 May 1945, and this was Private Melville's first direct action within the war.

After the massive pre-invasion air and naval bombardment, there was no opposition on the beaches, but sharp Japanese fire came from a location known as Lingkas Hill. The two battalions pushed inland towards the Tarakan township, overcoming Japanese resistance as they went. By nightfall on that first day, they had established a beachhead 2.5 km wide and 2 km deep. Tougher fighting was still to come. This must have been a rough initiation for a 20-year-old Private Duggan and other members who had recently joined the 2/23rd.

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<sup>5</sup> Morotai Island is northwest of West Papua, and east of Tarakan Island.

Tarakan is a triangle-shaped island 2.5 miles (4.0 km) off the coast of Borneo. The island is roughly 15 miles (24 km) long from its northernmost point to the southern tip and 11 miles (18 km) wide towards



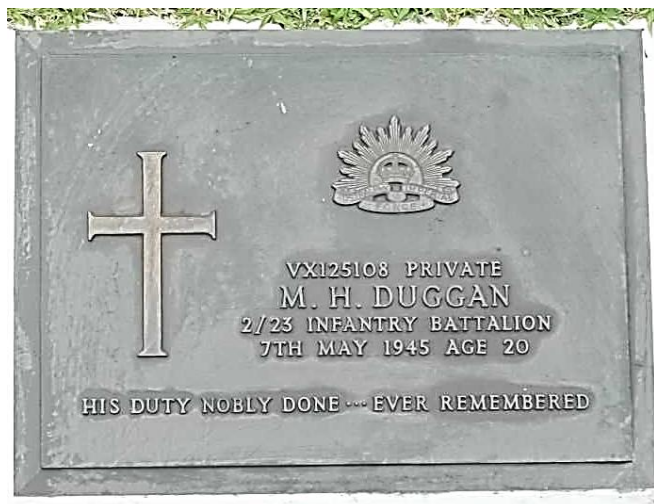
**The Island of Tarakan, Indonesia**

the north of the island. The small island of Sadau is located about 0.5 miles (0.80 km) off Tarakan's west coast. Almost all Tarakan's coastline is swampy, and in 1945, mangroves on the northern half of the island stretched 1 mile (1.6 km) to 2 miles (3.2 km) inland. The coastal mangroves in the southern portion of the island were narrower. Inland from the swamps, most of central Tarakan comprised a series of steep and densely forested hills just over 100 feet (30 m) high.

From May 6 to June 16, the mountain ridges behind the town were the scene of bitter fighting as Tarakan's Japanese defenders had withdrawn inland. The Japanese used mines, booby traps, and suicide raids to delay the Australian advance through the tangled hills and jungle-covered ridges. There were approximately 1,700 Japanese troops who were dug into positions in the north and centre of the island.

It was during one of these pushes through the jungle that, on 7 May, Private Melville Harold Duggan was killed. His patrol was moving around the area of the airstrip towards Margy. They continued to come up against enemy resistance from the Japanese who had located themselves in carefully selected defensive positions along, what was known as, Tiger Ridge, northeast of the airfield. 225 Australians were killed during the Tarakan campaign. Relative to the number of troops involved, it was the costliest of all the OBOE operations. Towards the end of May 1945, the 2/23rd moved along Snags Track from Rippon, fighting to clear the area around Margy.

Following the end of the war in August and Japan's surrender, those that had been killed in action were interred within the Labuan cemetery. The cemetery is based on the island of Labuan (part of Sabah, Malaysia), situated off the coast of northwest Borneo. Private Melville Harold Duggan is buried there (29.C.3), with many of his fellow Australian service personnel.



**Grave plaque 'Private M H Duggan', Labuan cemetery**





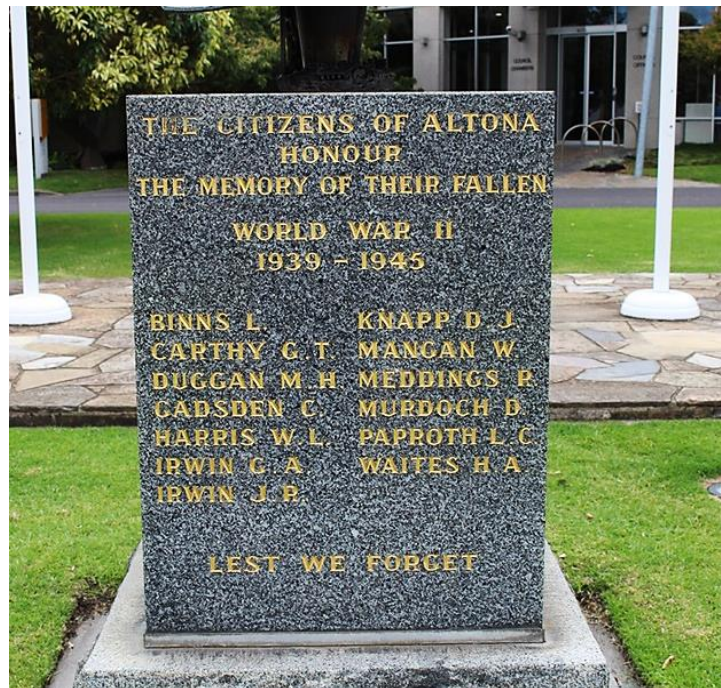
**Beverly Joyce Duggan**

Melville Duggan wasn't the only member of the Duggan family to enlist during World War 2. His father Harold enlisted and served with the Ambulance Sea Transport service as a Private. Melville's younger sister Beverly also enlisted on 25 May 1945 with the Australian Women's Army Service, working in recruitment, until being discharged on 2 August 1946. Joyce had been living in New South Wales, and after the end of the war, she remained there and eventually married.

Melville's story doesn't end here. Some thirty-five years later, Jack Parham, who had been a close friend of the Duggan family wondered why his name had not been included on the Altona memorial.

In October 1980, Jack contacted the Altona branch of the Returned & Services League for details about Private Melville Duggan. A letter was published within Melbourne newspapers calling for relatives of the family to provide more information that would confirm the family had in fact resided within Altona when Melville enlisted.

Jack also decided to undertake his own investigation, searching through prior electoral roll records, as well as writing to the Army Records Office. Both avenues confirmed that the Duggan family, including Melville Duggan, had resided in Davies Street and had been living in Altona between 1935 and about 1947. With his facts in hand, Jack approached the Council with his evidence and request to include the name of M H Duggan on the memorial. The result was that Private Melville Harold Duggan is now recorded on the cenotaph and he takes his place alongside other local servicemen who lost their lives during World War 2. It was also fitting, that at the earliest possible opportunity, his name was also given to a street so that his memory will not be forgotten.



**Altona War Memorial, Hobsons Bay Civic Centre, Civic Parade, Altona**

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**Edited:** Adam Virgona

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