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R.A.A.F. No. 361

GEORGE MEDAL FOR VETERAN OF TWO AIR WARS

Flying veteran of two air wars Air Commodore Arthur Henry Cobby, D.S.O., D.F.C., and two bars, of the Royal Australian Air Force, has been awarded the George Medal for the gallant rescue of two brother officers from a burning flying-boat at Townsville, Queensland, in September, 1943.

Air Commodore Cobby's name is listed among 27 Australian awards for gallantry in operations against the Japanese released today.

Air Commodore Cobby, whose home town is Brighton, Victoria, is 49. He was an Australian flying ace of the 1914/18 War, serving as commanding officer in France of the famous No. 4 Squadron, a component of the Australian Flying Corps (precursor of the R.A.A.F.). His other decorations were won in the last war in which he was also mentioned in despatches.

The incident upon which Air Commodore Cobby's latest award is based occurred when a flying-boat, in which he was returning from New Guinea, crashed at Townsville and exploded a depth charge on alighting. The aircraft was badly shattered, and 13 of the 19 occupants were either killed or drowned.

Air Commodore Cobby managed to extricate himself from the wreck, and although injured he re-entered the submerged hull three times to rescue members of his staff. As a result of his strenuous efforts against the great pressure in the cabin he was able to assist a wing commander, who had a badly broken arm, to the surface.

The second time he extricated another wing commander, and brought him to a position on top of the fuselage.

He re-entered the cabin of the aircraft a third time but was unable to effect any further rescues.

An official statement says that owing to the fact that at least one other depth charge was unexploded and that at any moment the wrecked aircraft might slip under water Air Commodore Cobby displayed outstanding courage in risking his life while effecting the rescues, and that his devotion to duty was worthy of the highest praise.

After the last war Air Commodore Cobby remained a member of the permanent Australian Air Force until he resigned to take up a position in the department of civil aviation, Melbourne. He occupied this post until the present war began, when he was called up from the Reserve.

For a time he was Director of Recruiting at R.A.A.F. Headquarters, and was then appointed Air Officer Commanding North-Eastern Area, Australia.