

*Charles Towsey of Henley upon Thames in the County of Oxford's Gentleman*

*Mary Harriet Sparks*

*H. B. Moorhouse*

# TOWSEY TALES

*Pat Towsey  
Henley upon Thames  
Oxon.*

*Edmond Towsey*

**NAME:** Cyril Patrick 'Pat' Towsey  
**BIRTH DETAILS:** 2 May 1918 Auckland  
**DEATH DETAILS:** 19 March 1998 Auckland  
**CHART REF:** Towsey Chart A1  
**MARRIAGE DETAILS:** 14 Feb.1947 Auckland  
**SPOUSE:** Josephine Doris Reid

Pat Towsey was the second son of Cyril and Mamie Towsey and followed the career path trodden by his father and grandfather, as a professional musician.

The first episode that I know of from Pat's life, is a story that he told me himself about his relationship with his grandfather, Arthur John Towsey. This story has some similarity to one told to me by another of



*Circa 1922: Pat Towsey with grandfather*

Arthur John's grandchildren; Violet Monfries, when I asked for her memories of Arthur John Towsey.

Violet mentioned that one day, her grandfather gave her quite a large amount of money to go to the shop. She lost the money and was most distraught, but her grandfather was very sweet and loving. All of her memories of him are of that gentle, loving old man.



*Circa 1925: 'Botop' and 'Binki'  
Cyril Patrick and Arthur Charles Towsey*



**Daniel O'Connor, circa 1880**  
*with an ear gene that would be difficult to suppress forever.*

On another occasion, Arthur John was staying with the Towseys, who by then had moved up to Auckland. Pat was busy playing some game when his mother came in and said; "Would you please go to the shop and buy such-and-such?" Pat, who did not want to interrupt his game, went to his grandfather and said "Grandpa, would you please go to the shop and buy such-and-such?"

What Pat remembered was Arthur going to his mother and saying in a dramatic, outraged tone; "Do you know what your son said to me!?"

My impression is that although Arthur might have been outraged by young Pat's bad manners, it could also be that Pat was too young to pick up on the amused irony in his grandfather's tone.

One of Pat's predominant features, that is immediately obvious, is his fine ears. This seems to be a prime example of a pronounced gene that lies dormant for a couple of generations before popping back up, or in the case of Pat's ears, so clearly displayed in the photo from 1925. We can see the very same feature in a picture of his mother's mother's father, Daniel O'Connor.

The following is an entry from the diary of Pat's elder brother, Arthur, from 27th November, 1932, where Arthur seems to be coming to terms with the fact that his little brother is no longer going to just tootle along, following his big brother's directions.

### *A Day At The Beach, Circa 1928*

Mamie Towsey (centre) with her boys, Arthur and Pat  
Ellen Cooper (right) and her eldest daughter, Kathleen



"Pat now 14, is rapidly developing his own ideas which I suppose I am not in the position to judge; his ability and confidence at the piano make me regret my lost opportunities. Music is more than an entertainment to me and unfortunately I can find no phrase to cover my appreciation of this art".

## Auckland Star 14 July 1931



SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS AT MUSIC EXAMINATIONS.—Front: Edna Nielsen, Lenora Omsley, Valmai Nielsen. Back: Dorothy Franchi, Patrick Towsey, Barry Bilton, Miri Ball.

### AWARDS FOR 1934

#### ROYAL SCHOOLS OF MUSIC

The following awards of exhibitions and medals have been made by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, London, to candidates who sat for examinations in the year 1934:—

Licentiate examinations, two prizes of £25 awarded to candidates gaining the highest marks in each Island: Patrick Towsey (Mrs. Towsey, Auckland), pianoforte; Janetta M. McStay (Miss May O'Byrne, Invercargill), pianoforte.



Pat, Mamie & Arthur, Auckland, early 1935

## Pat Towsey joins the RAF

Pat Towsey did his initial training in a camp north of Wellington, in New Zealand, before going over to Britain for further training, after which he was posted as a Pilot Officer (equivalent to the army rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant), with Bomber Command.

We have often seen in films how WW2 pilots would go off on their dangerous missions and then wind down afterwards with raucous behaviour in the Officer's Mess.



Aircraft Servicing



Circa 1941  
Pat with Mamie, just  
before he enlisted

EVENING POST, 8 January 1942

### HIGHLY COMMENDED AUCKLANDER'S COURAGE RECENT RAID ON BREST

(By Telegraph—Press Association—Copyright.)

(Rec. 2.20 p.m.) LONDON, January 7.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Bomber Command has brought to the notice of all bomber stations the commendable courage and resolution of a young Auckland pilot officer, C. P. Towsey, during a recent raid on Brest.

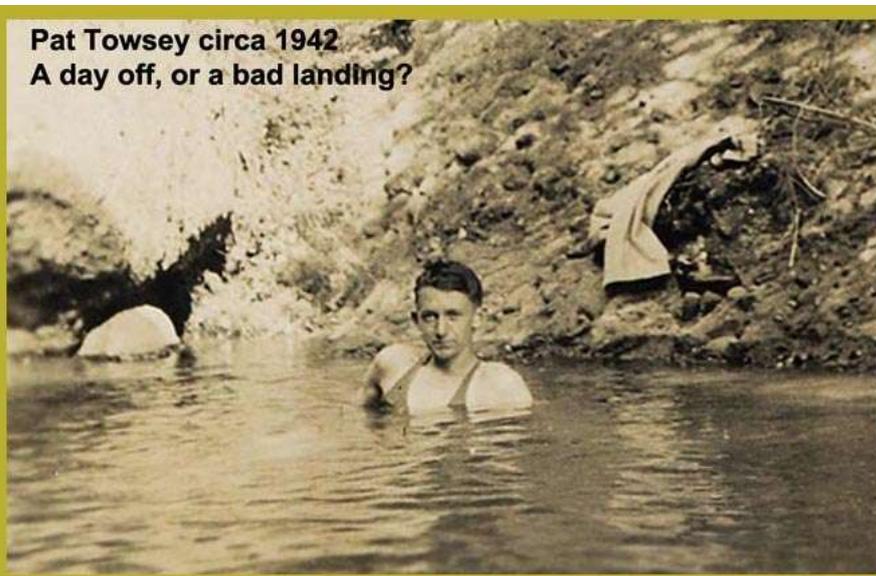
Although the whole of the crew suffered severely from air sickness because of exceptionally bad weather and their oxygen supply failing, Pilot Officer Towsey pressed on to the target, placed his bombs successfully, and then safely returned to base. Pilot Officer Towsey had to carry on almost unaided because of the illness and lack of oxygen of the exhausted crew. The flight lasted over eight hours, including from two to three hours without oxygen at a great height.

The Commander-in-Chief declared that the exploit was all the more commendable because it was only Pilot Officer Towsey's fourth operation as a captain.

I believe that it was by chance, decades later, that Pat's son met a woman

who had worked in the mess where Pat was at one time stationed. She mentioned that after all of the drunken pilots had staggered off to bed, Pat would come into the mess and play classical music, alone, on the piano.

We see that five months later, Pat has been promoted to Flight Lieutenant (equivalent to the army rank of Captain). After November of 1944, he was promoted to Squadron Leader (equivalent of army Major rank). By the end of the war, Pat was acting in the rank of Group Captain (equivalent to the army rank of Lieutenant Colonel). An acting rank means that you are doing that job but have not yet completed the training requirements to attain the Substantive, or permanent, rank.



Pat Towsey circa 1942  
A day off, or a bad landing?

Evening Post, 21 May 1942

## PARATROOP RAID DESCENT ON BRUNEVAL THRILL FOR N.Z. PILOTS LONDON, March 17

"I was rather thrilled at taking off with a 'live' load instead of the usual inanimate cargo of bombs," said Flight Lieutenant C. P. Towsey (Auckland), who took part in the combined raid against Bruneval, when an important German radio station was wrecked. Other New Zealand airmen who took part in the raid were Flight Lieutenant J. Coats and Sergeants P. H. J. Pohe (Taihape), A. B. Cooke, and E. Clow (New Plymouth).

"Going over I chatted with the paratroop section leader, thinking he might be a bit nervous, but he seemed perfectly at ease and confident," said Flight Lieutenant Towsey.

"It was wonderfully clear, and as we were first in we didn't get very much flak. As we were running up I said to the leader, 'Good luck, see you in the morning,' wondering very much whether I would or not. But next day, after a frightfully anxious wait, he turned up as cheerful as ever. I asked him if we'd put him on the right spot and he assured me that everything had been perfect.

"The whole time the rear gunner was absolutely in his element as at such a low height he was able to answer back the few gun posts we encountered.

"In the first group to go over three of the four planes were captained by New Zealanders and there were more in the other groups."



1942 England. Pat Towsey with crew before bombing mission over Germany.

## RAF MEN RESCUED

*A Gallant Wireless Operator.*

LONDON, Nov 15.1942

-The Air Ministry reveals that a Coastal command squadron lost 3 Whitley bombers in successive days off the southwest of England, but within 4 days all the crews were rescued. One crew drifted in a dinghy in wild weather for 81 hours, another for 1 hours and a third for 34 hours. The third Whitley bomber was piloted by Squadron-Leader G. R. Coates, of Auckland, who the previous day had participated in the search for the second Whitley Coates and his Australian navigator, Sgt E. J. Hone, who were both injured and dazed by the crash, said that they owed their lives to the pluck of the wireless operator, Sgt H. C. Sharp. Coates and Hone struggled out of the sinking Whitley when the water was lapping over them. They found the dinghy had broken away and was some distance away. Sharp dived from the dinghy into the sea and pulled Coates and Hone to safety. Squadron-Leader C. P. Towsey, of Auckland, who volunteered to search for Coates and Hone, found the dinghy and dropped provisions and directed rescuers to the spot.

Evening Post, 2 September 1943

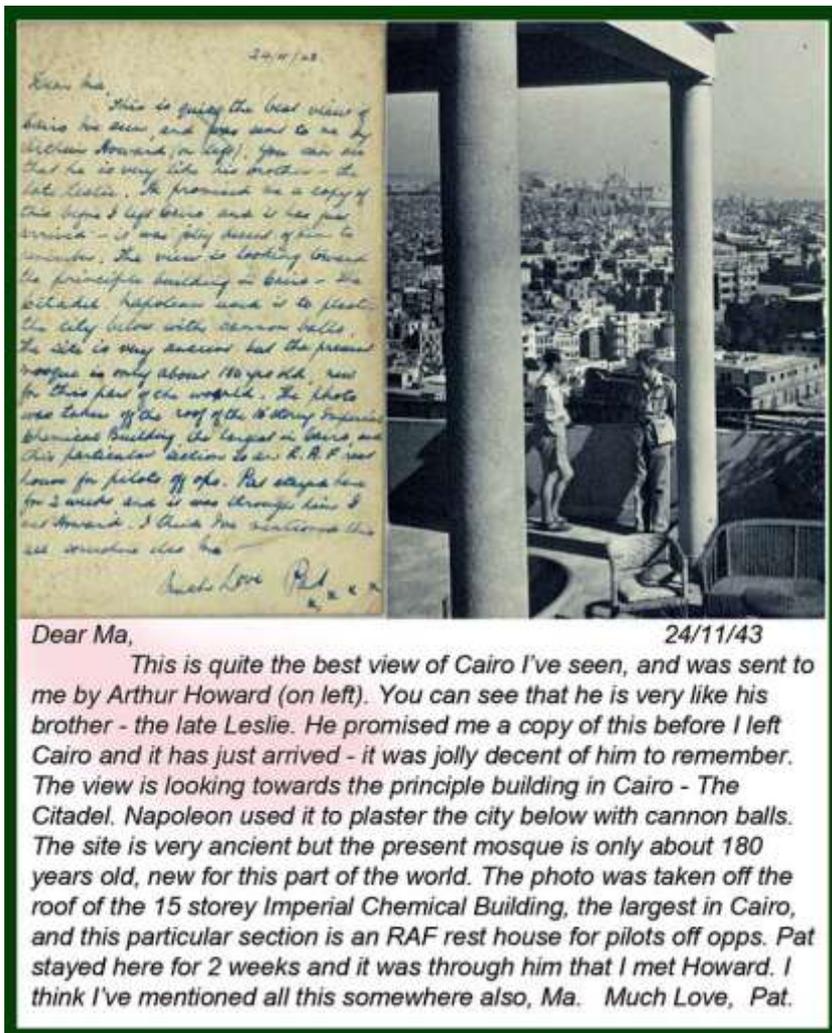
**Distinguished Flying Cross.**—Flight Lieutenant Cyril Patrick Towsey; Mrs. C. Towsey, 12 City Road, Auckland (mother). Flight Lieutenant Roy Elliott Hanlon; Mr. T. E. Hanlon, 28 Boundary Road, Hamilton (father). Flying Officer Frederick James Read;

# The London Gazette

**Of FRIDAY, the 20th of AUGUST, 1943**

Flight Lieutenant Cyril Patrick Towsey  
(N Z 403480) Royal New Zealand Air Force  
No 40 Squadron

This officer has completed a large number of sorties many of them against enemy targets in Europe. On one occasion in October 1942 when detailed to search over the sea for a missing air crew, Flight Lieutenant Towsey made flights totaling nearly 30 hours until he succeeded in his quest. In the Middle East Flight Lieutenant Towsey has participated in numerous operations and his efforts have been marked by outstanding determination to bomb his targets effectively He has invariably displayed great courage and devotion to duty



Dear Ma,

24/11/43

This is quite the best view of Cairo I've seen, and was sent to me by Arthur Howard (on left). You can see that he is very like his brother - the late Leslie. He promised me a copy of this before I left Cairo and it has just arrived - it was jolly decent of him to remember. The view is looking towards the principle building in Cairo - The Citadel. Napoleon used it to plaster the city below with cannon balls. The site is very ancient but the present mosque is only about 180 years old, new for this part of the world. The photo was taken off the roof of the 15 storey Imperial Chemical Building, the largest in Cairo, and this particular section is an RAF rest house for pilots off opps. Pat stayed here for 2 weeks and it was through him that I met Howard. I think I've mentioned all this somewhere also, Ma. Much Love, Pat.

After many missions over Germany and then helping to protect convoys crossing the Atlantic, Pat was posted to Egypt.

In May 1943, at the time that Flight Lieutenant C P Towsey was in Egypt, his brother, Arthur was visiting Alexandria, as purser on a supply ship. Their cousin, Pat Cooper, who was with the New Zealand Artillery, was also in Egypt at that time.



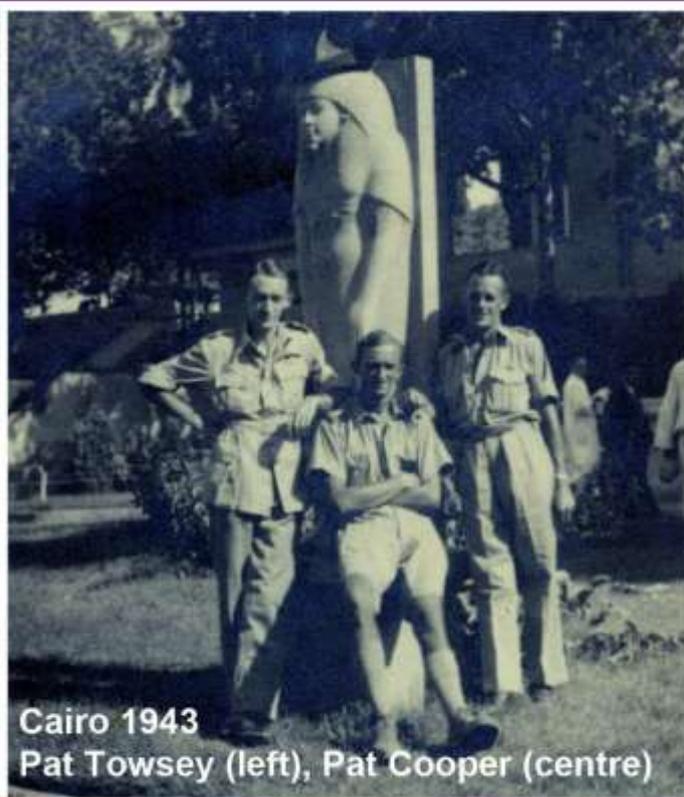
3rd Sept 43

Dear Ma,

I am still in Cairo waiting for my new posting. I've been having a quiet time - sleeping eating reading and some music - met a Jewish family whom I visit. Have you read *The Four Winds of Love*, by Compton McKenzie? Quite good. You should also read Shaw's *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*. I'm waiting for news of you and all the folks. Still only 1 telegraph from you since February. Send a cable to 203 SKomp RAF ME. I have some hopes of getting back to N.Z. for a spell next year. I'm due and intend to start squealing a bit later on. I believe Art is somewhere near here at present but have had no reply to a letter I sent him. Would love to meet him.

Love to yourself and everybody.

Pat



Cairo 1943

Pat Towsey (left), Pat Cooper (centre)

## AIR HERO APOLOGISES FOR HIS "TAME" STORY

(By E. K. GREEN)

PAT TOWSEY, who used to do serious things with a piano, is a quiet sort of chap. He hasn't changed much that way—not even as Flight-Lieutenant C. P. Towsey, D.F.C. and two "mentions."

Not even after three and a half years overseas, flying with R.A.F. bomber squadrons over places like Stettin, Cologne, Essen, Emden and Rostok in Germany, Paris, Brest and so on in France, odd spots in North Africa and Tunisia, Genoa and up about Naples in Italy, and a few thousand miles of anti-submarine patrolling with the Coastal Command.

No, Pat hasn't changed much. Not even after "bailing out" once, being "shot up" occasionally, flying for hours on one occasion without oxygen at 15,000ft, and dropping British paratroops at Bruneville.

Quiet is the descriptive word.

Do I give the impression he has done something in this war. I'm sorry. Actually, he just had a "prosaic, quiet time."

And his D.F.C. and two "mentioned in dispatches"? Nothing much really; quite simply explained—hand-outs.

**All in the Day's Work**

He told me about it, himself, under diligent questioning, and apologised that he didn't have a better story to tell. There is such a thing as under-statement for the sake of emphasis. It wasn't like that in this case. Pat was quite sincere about it.

It's an R.A.F. and R.N.Z.A.F. attitude, and comes from living for years among other chaps who have all had somewhat similar experiences, who don't "talk shop," and who mustn't, under any circumstances, "shoot a line." The unusual, the adventurous, the hazardous, is all part of the day's work and nothing to write home about. It's difficult for a civilian to understand that this isn't just a pose. There's nothing in civilian life to offer as an apposite case; nothing, that is, so packed with hazard as to make hazard normal.

If you remember that, you can fill in the drama in Pat Towsey's story (and you can multiply it to infinity, and make it the normal story of a New Zealand pilot returned from war). There was the occasion, for instance, when he had to bail out by parachute. It was the finish of his second bombing mission over Germany as a second pilot on a Whitney.

"We were coming back from Stettin. . . . Had overshot the place, got off our course, and ran out of petrol. It meant crash-landing in the dark or bailing out. As second pilot I was the first to go. No, I'd never jumped before, but we'd practised the drill. I didn't notice much until the parachute opened. I was lucky, landed in a nice soft plough field. Didn't break anything."

**An Airman's Best Friend**

Then there was the general story of adventuring over Germany on 28 occasions, bashing at factories and things. "I never had many exciting experiences. Got a few holes now and again. Saw the odd fighter now and then, but always managed to get into a bit of cloud and get away. Nearest we came to it was once when we saw three Jerries standing off, signalling our position to the ground. A lot of stuff came up. After that they started to close in, but we managed to duck into a bit of cloud. . . . Cloud? Yes. Our best friend at times."

Do you get the general idea? You fill in the bits about the tensed-up nerves, the drama of the take-off, the queuing over enemy borders, with hostile eyes straining upwards, and hostile aircraft waiting to pounce, the long fingers of the searchlights probing the night, the bumping of the plane, the flak bursting brilliantly all about, the strain of concentration over the target, the sudden relief when the bombs are gone, and then running the gauntlet home. After all, that's just the background. Nothing to talk about.

After that you can take a touch-and-go show in a Wellington, all the way from Britain, over the Alps, down to bomb Genoa and home again, in the simplest terms. "Oh yes. You haven't got much to spare on that run in a Wellington. You can't fool round too much, or you're a gonner. You've just got enough gas to get home on."

**Action Over Brest**

To get the real idea of this "Find the Story" game, you want to look up a newspaper file of January 8, 1942, and a news item there stating that the Commander-in-Chief of the Bomber Command had brought to the notice of all bomber stations "the commendable courage and resolution of a young Auckland, Pilot-Officer C. P. Towsey," who, despite severe air sickness and the failure of his oxygen apparatus, "pressed on to the target and placed his bombs successfully. He had to carry on almost unaided because illness and oxygen lack exhausted his crew. The flight lasted over eight hours, including two or three hours without oxygen at a great height."

Towsey, who was then making his fourth flight as a bomber's captain, was mentioned in dispatches for that.

Did he remember a certain incident over Brest associated with a Gneisenau and Scharnhorst raid, I asked him.

"Oh that? Just ran out of oxygen and the crew got a bit sick. It was a bit bumpy, but it was the lack of oxygen that upset us—a breakdown of the apparatus before we got to the target."

"How high were we flying? Oh, about 15,000 feet over the target. Nobody passed out, but we were all pretty seedy—just felt sick."

That must have been a happy landing back in Britain? "I was never so pleased in my life. That was Pickard's first show in the squadron, and he was so pleased that all his crews got in and out again safely that he gave me a bit of a write-up."

**Story of an Ace**

Pickard. . . . There was a chap who would have had a real story. The ace of the Bomber Command. A star of "Target for To-night." Had flown more missions than anyone else, and done every sort of job, including dropping and picking up spies. The late Wing-Commander Pickard—"Pic" for short. . . . a grand chap. Towsey was in his squadron when they dropped British paratroops for the first such raid. That was at Bruneville, in the south of France; an attack on a German radio direction finding station.

Towsey forgot to mention that it was that show which earned him his second mention in dispatches.

And then, about his D.F.C.? That was the time, he said, when he and a few other Whitney pilots were called on for anti-submarine patrolling to help out Coastal Command just before the North African show. An Auckland squadron mate, Squadron-Leader Reg. Coates, developed engine trouble and went down in the ocean about 300 miles due west of Cornwall.

"We had a rough bearing on his position, and went out and did a square search. We were lucky to pick him up after searching round about the area for a couple of hours. We couldn't land, of course, so we flashed back the position of the dinghy and they sent out a destroyer."

**The "Keeping Alive Medal"**

"That was what I was cited for, but, frankly, we call it the 'keeping alive medal.' You get it when you've been on a certain number of missions. They rake up something that sounds good as a citation. Of course, there are immediate awards for some outstanding feat. That's different."

That, be it explained, is the old soldier complex. The medals that "come up with the rations." They started off in the R.A.F. by saying that so-and-so had "rung the gong" when he won an award. Now they call the D.F.C. familiarly "a gong." And they "kick the gong around. . . ." an attitude recommended only for those who wear them, or who know from experience what it means to fly "so many missions."

Take Towsey's case, as an example. His citation, published on August 26, 1943, recorded that in that sea rescue, "he made flights totalling 30 hours till he succeeded. He has participated in numerous operations, his efforts being marked by outstanding determination to bomb targets effectively. This officer has invariably displayed great courage and devotion to duty."

**On Feelings—and Tolerance**

Or, if you like, you can read a lot into a casual remark, offered by Towsey, in answer to a question whether he had experienced oxygen lack on any other occasion than the Brest incident. "No," he answered. "I've felt a bit queer at times, but not from oxygen lack."

There was a final question for this R.N.Z.A.F. pilot who has served in Britain and the Middle East, taken an instructor's course in Southern Rhodesia, and taught air pupils at Palestine. What had he learned mainly? His answer was prompt.

"Tolerance. I was always in R.A.F. squadrons, with a good mixture of English and Dominion pilots, and a few Poles. In my crew there was an Australian, a Canadian, an Englishman and a Scot. They were all fine fellows and we got on well together. I went over with the usual prejudices, but I found the English charming people. I came back through the States, and I liked what I saw there, too."



*Pat with Mother, Auckland, 1945*

## Auckland Star 14 November 1944

### AIRMEN BACK HOME

(P.A.) WELLINGTON, Monday.

Airmen who have returned to New Zealand in drafts which have arrived recently from the United Kingdom, Canada, India and Australia include the following men from the Auckland Province:—

Flying-Officer J. A. Fowler, Flying-Officer H. E. Mark (Auckland), Flying-Officer D. A. Sanders (Hamilton), Flying-Officer O. J. Morgan (Waihi), Sergeant J. E. Roper, Corporal N. C. Bicheno (Auckland), Flying-Officer S. L. Brydon (Whakapara), Sergeant A. B. Orr, Sergeant E. L. Perkinson, Sergeant J. L. Sherwood, Flight-Lieutenant D. A. Hamblyn, Flying-Officer E. A. Mortimer, Flight-Lieutenant C. P. Towsey (Auckland), Flying-Officer K. E. Forsyth (Taumarunui), Flight-Sergeant V. H. Simmons (Auckland), Leading-Aircraftman P. S. Newell (Opotiki), Leading-Aircraftman R. L. Tait (Tauranga).

Late in the war, Pat Towsey, who by then had been promoted to the substantive rank of Squadron Leader and the acting rank of Group Captain, had been reposted from Europe to the Pacific, where he trained other pilots. He apparently found this to be more dangerous than flying missions in Europe, so resigned his commission and returned to New Zealand, where he resumed his career as a pianist.



*Josephine Reid and Pat Towsey  
Auckland, 1945*

## RADIO PROGRAMMES

IYA, Auckland.—7.30: Patrick Towsey (piano), Prelude and Fugue in G Minor, Sarabande (Bach), Gigue, Sarabande (Zipoli). 8.0: Trevor de Clive Lowe ('cello) and Marjorie Gully (piano), Sonata in B Flat Major (Dolmangyi). 8.26: Studio Recital by Cecilia Parry (mezzo-soprano). 8.38: Staram Orchestra, Choreographic Concerto for Piano and Eighteen Instruments (Poulenc). 9.25: Evening Prayer. 9.30: Songs from the Shows. 10.0: America Talks to New Zealand. 10.10: Masters in Lighter Mood. 12 December 1945

### Pat Towsey Marries Josephine Reid

Pat and Josie married in February 1947.

Considering that this photo was taken before Pat's discharge from the Air Force, which must have been some time in 1945, it seems that they had quite a lengthy engagement.

The stripes on Pat's sleeve, are those of a Wing Commander.

As I mentioned: in times of war, soldiers are often promoted to a temporary rank, one above that for which they are fully qualified. So, whereas Pat's substantive rank at the time of discharge was Squadron Leader (the equivalent of an army Major), he was operating as an Acting Wing Commander (the equivalent of Lieutenant Colonel).

Josie was born in Sydney, on 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1921.

Her father was George Chapman Ward Reid, who was born in Western Australia in 1888. Her mother, Kathleen Lydia May Lyons, was ten years younger, born in Dublin in 1898.

In the photo of George Reid from WW1, the position of the pip on his shoulder and the insignia, indicate that he was a Captain in the Australian Army.



*George Chapman Ward Reid during WW1*



*Circa 1913  
Kathleen Lydia May Lyons*

George Reid's father, George William Reid, was a pharmacist, who had lived in Kalgoorlie and then Perth, in Western Australia, before moving at some point to Mount Gambier, in South Australia, and then to Sydney. He and his wife, Anne Nichols, had six children, of which Josie's father was the fifth.



*1922 Josie with her mother, Manly Beach*

Josie's parents lived firstly in the Perth suburb of Cottesloe, before moving to Sydney, where Josie was born in 1921, followed by her brother, Lloyd, in 1924. The Reid family then moved to New Zealand in 1931, where George Reid established a rubber company in Auckland.

Pat and Josie Towsey had three children, starting in 1948. Pat developed diabetes in the 1950s and continued to play and teach piano until his death, at 79 years of age, in March 1998.



*Josie Reid, circa 1938*