

# Forgotten victims of gas poisoning

## AUTHOR REVEALS CHEMICAL WEAPONS STORY

Sarah Sharples

A SECRET consignment of chemical weapons was sent by ship to Australia, ending up at Glebe Island in Balmain, where unprotected and unsuspecting wharf labourers and air force staff were sent in to clean up leaking drums.

The results were catastrophic for the men and many died or ended up permanently disabled.

The details of the shocking story are revealed in a book called *Death by Mustard Gas*, written by author, Geoff Plunkett.

Many of the men were sent to Royal Prince Alfred Hos-

pital suffering mustard gas poisoning which resulted in burns, loss of eyesight, respiratory problems, photophobia and rashes and blisters on the groin area.

Nurse Phyllis Heydon was on duty when some of the men were brought in and was directed to tell no one about the patients.

“One of the fellows that was there, he jumped out of the window and killed himself,” Mrs Heydon said.

“I didn’t have anything to do with them – the sisters looked after them, as it was hush-hush and secret, and I never mentioned it to anyone.”

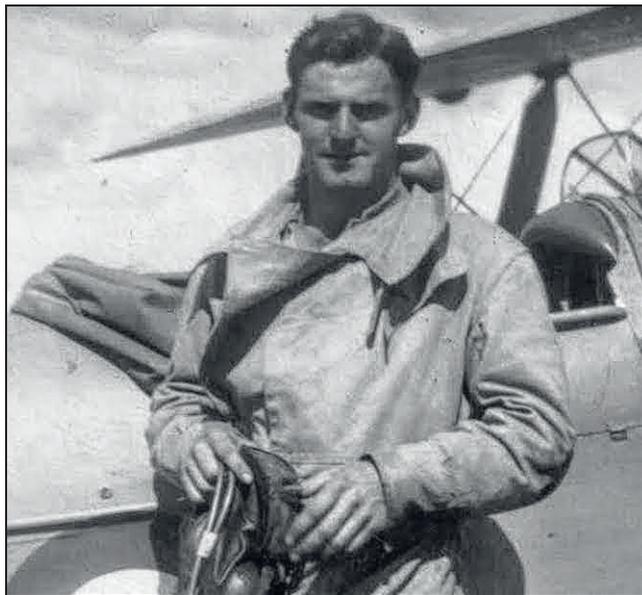
Plunkett discovered by

strange coincidence that Mrs Heydon had also met a gas victim while off duty, and went on to marry him.

Mrs Heydon, now 93, said she married Ken within four months of meeting him due to World War II, and he spoke about getting burnt on the shoulder, neck and wrist while unloading the drums on to a train.

As a result of his burns, Mr Heydon lost his position in the Empire Air Training Scheme which meant he could not go to England to train in Spitfire and Hurricane planes.

**The book is available for sale at a cost of \$34.99**



### MUSTARD GAS

■ Mustard gas is still present on the Australian mainland, in the oceans and along coastal fringes, with its chemical weapons having been retrieved as recently as 2012, and more may lie in graves waiting to be uncovered

■ The book includes accounts of official deceit, intimidation of gassed labourers and denial of natural justice and can be purchased at [bigskypublishing.com.au](http://bigskypublishing.com.au)

■ Author Geoff Plunkett has been researching Australia’s chemical weapons history for the past 20 years and is also the author of *Chemical Warfare in Australia*



Ken Heydon, top, was burned by mustard gas, and his wife Phyllis Heydon, above left, was a nurse at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital when victims were brought to the hospital.