

# CAPTAIN L.J. BALDERSON – THE LOST BROTHER

by Mike Andrew

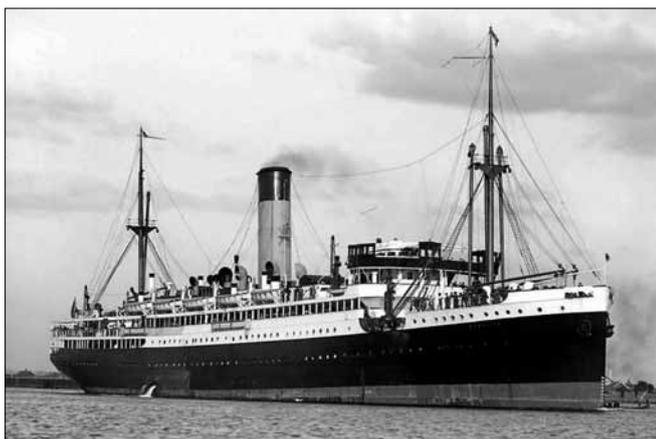
*Loris Balderson was a member of the first intake of Australians to be selected for the Royal Flying Corps and, after training in England, served with 18 Squadron on the Western Front. After completing his tour, he trained as a flying instructor and was posted to the newly formed 22 TDS in Ireland. After returning to Australia, post-war, he was accepted into the fledgling RAAF as a pilot and was a member of its No 1 Course. As interest in the airborne use of radio grew during the 1920s, he became a signals officer and played a large part in the development and testing of both air and ground radio in Australia.*

**L**ORIS JOHN BALDERSON was born on 5 December 1895 at Brighton, Victoria in Australia. He was the son of Ernest Edward and Isabella Balderson and was the third of four children, the others being Lucy, Florence and Maxwell John. After his mother passed away, his father abandoned the family and went to live in New Zealand. The children were raised by their aunt, Letitia (Letty) Sharpe at 241 Hotham Street, Balaclava, Victoria and were never reconciled with their father.

Loris joined the Melbourne Electric Supply Co Ltd. on 6 December 1910, the day after his fifteenth birthday, and completed a five year apprenticeship in the manufacture and erection of electrical plant. During this period he was employed as an electrical mechanic in the company's power house and at the lighthouse at Point Lonsdale, overlooking the entrance to Port Phillip Bay with its treacherous tidal current, known as 'the Rip'.

In common with many other Australians of the period, he was active in the Citizen Forces and joined the 34th Fortress Company, Army Engineers, spending two years as a cadet and a further three as a private. After the outbreak of war, as Australia committed increasing numbers of men to the conflict, he was discharged from the reserves at his own request prior to enlisting in the 3rd Pioneer Battalion on 21 February 1916, aged 20 years 2 months. He gave his Next of Kin as his younger brother, Maxwell Balderson, but this was later changed at the request of his Aunt, as Maxwell was only

*HMAT Wandilla, on which Balderson sailed to England. The vessel was later sold to Italy and, as the hospital ship Arno, was sunk by British aircraft on 10 September 1942.*



*A self-conscious Loris Balderson pictured pre-war, wearing cadet uniform in the back garden of the house at Hotham Street. The cat was clearly unimpressed by the appearance of this fearsome warrior.  
:Loris Balderson*

sixteen years of age at the time and she considered this inappropriate. His medical examination at this time gives a good impression of him – 5 feet 6½ inches tall, 9 stone 1 pound in weight with a dark complexion, brown hair and blue eyes. His religion was stated as Presbyterian and he was allocated the Service Number 67. He enlisted with his friend Samuel John (Sam) Bramley, also aged 20, who had been with him at the 34th Fortress Company. They were to remain together throughout their training and subsequently transferred into the RFC at the same time.

Loris initially remained at Battalion Headquarters as a Private, before being transferred to the AIF Signal School at Broadmeadows. He passed out as a Signaller on 6 April 1916 and returned to Battalion HQ. He underwent additional training at the Signal School from 10 April to 10 May 1916 and his results show that he had become extremely proficient.

The Battalion embarked from Melbourne on 6 June, 1916 aboard HMAT A62 *Wandilla*. Loris wrote to his aunt, describing his emotions as the ships passed through Port Phillip Heads and he took a last look at the lighthouse he had previously operated, thinking of the time he had spent there. Shortly after leaving port, the troops were inoculated which left both Loris and Sam suffering from sea sickness for a couple of days. This soon passed and the pair managed to find others who shared their interest in music and arranged a concert. Onboard the *Wandilla* the signallers were quartered above the waterline, but not so far as to prevent a heavy sea washing through an open porthole and soaking them all!

On arrival at Perth, Loris and Sam were given shore leave and visited relatives, singing duets and dancing. The ship left the following day and was given a wonderful send off with boat sirens and factories all blowing whistles. Once clear of the land the conditions worsened and sea sickness quickly returned but Loris took his mind off it by instructing some of the others in signalling. Another concert was arranged, titled *The Battle Eve*, and a visit was arranged to the bridge, where the friends were allowed to use the semaphore signalling machine.

By 27 June 1916 the convoy had arrived at Durban and the troops were taken on a route march around the Bluff, past the whaling station. This was where whales were brought ashore to be processed and was renowned for its horrendous smell and attendant sharks which would attack the carcasses as they were towed to the slipway.