**Gordon William Male Baringhup 1957**

For Gordon Male, life in early 1957 was good. He was 39, ran his own plumbing business in the old Central Victorian goldfields town of Maldon, was highly respected in the community, married to Beryl, with two young daughters, and was adoptive father to Beryl’s son Kenneth.

He’d put behind him some incredibly tough times during the Second World War – he’d been serving with the Australian Army’s Lark Force in New Britain in 1942 when the Japanese invaded. In the face of overwhelming odds, Lark Force’s commanding officer declared it was every man for himself.

Of the 1500 soldiers, nurses and civilians in Rabaul, more than a thousand were taken prisoner, most of them subsequently executed or lost at sea. Gordon was among the few hundred who struggled through the New Guinea jungle in appalling conditions and eventually made it back to Australia. The experience left its mark – he later refused a war pension. It was a principled decision which was to unexpectedly make things difficult for Beryl.

On February 21st 1957, Gordon responded to a call for volunteers to help fight a fire at nearby Neereman – a tree had fallen in strong winds, bringing power lines down and starting a blaze. What Gordon and his fellow firefighters didn’t know was that the power lines had also fallen across a five-strand wire fence which ran along a local road. The fence was “live”, carrying 6,000-plus volts.

Somehow Gordon came into contact with the fence, and was killed. A young local farmer, Frank Addlem, met the same fate when he opened a gate in the same fence line on his own property, and another man was badly injured. Many others, equally unaware of the danger, had lucky escapes before they were warned and the power turned off.

Beryl was left to bring up the three children, with only a widow’s pension for support, though some compensation from the State Electricity Commission helped.