

## 1954 Panel - The Back of Beyond Tom Kruse Legend

### **E.G. (Tom) Kruse MBE (1914 – 2011)**

Very few can claim the title of Outback Legend. E.G. Kruse is one who reluctantly has had the title bestowed upon him. The photographs and found objects in this room are a small tribute to the life of a remarkable Australian.

**Early days:** Esmond Gerald (Tom) Kruse was born at Waterloo in the mid north of South Australia on August 28<sup>th</sup> 1914. He was the tenth of Henry and Ida Kruse's twelve children. His father was a blacksmith. At a young age he was nicknamed Tom. He lost half of his ring finger on his left hand in an incident involving an anvil in his father's workshop. Tom left school at an early age and went to work for John Penna at Yunta. He didn't enjoy his time in the classroom. ***'I'd rather cut a ton of wood with a blunt axe than write a letter'***.

When pioneering outback transport operator Harry Ding moved his expanding business from Olary to Yunta, he bought the Penna garage and with it came a young man who would become one of Outback Australia's most talented drivers and capable bush mechanics – Tom Kruse (# refer to Reference folder).

**Birdsville Track Mailman:** In searing 50 degree plus temperatures, Tom drove his first Marree to Birdsville mail run for Harry Ding on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1936. He was 21 years old. Tom took over the mail contract from Harry in 1941. He married Valma Fuller (from Yunta) in 1942. They set up home here in Marree and had four children – Pauline, Phillip, Helen and Jeffrey.

**The Back of Beyond:** Shell Film Unit Producer / Director John Heyer wanted to shoot a story about the tension between man and the elements. Heyer was a young talented Sydney based film director. On a research trip up the Birdsville Track in 1951 with painter Sidney Nolan and armed with background he'd gathered from George Farwell's ***Land of Mirage***, Heyer met Birdsville Track mailman Tom Kruse and determined he would be the central character in his film ***The Back of Beyond*** (# refer to Reference folder – *The Back of Beyond*).

Until ***Crocodile Dundee*** was released in 1986, ***The Back of Beyond*** was the most awarded film made in Australia. The film premiered in Outback Australia at Marree on Saturday 24th July 1954.

The series of photographs in this frame were shot during and following the production of ***The Back of Beyond*** and feature locations in Marree, the crossing of the Cooper Creek sequence and a number of hero shots from the film.

***The Back of Beyond Credits:*** Producer / Director - John Heyer, Cinematography - John Wood, Script - John and Janet Heyer & Douglas Stewart, Score - Sydney John May, Narration - Kevin Brennan, Distribution - Shell Film Unit.

**Photo Credits:** Kruse and Heyer Family Collections