



# SITREP

Air Force Association NSW News and Views

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## 30 Squadron Queen's Colours Consecration

*From Bruce Robertson (now 101 years young), President 30 Squadron RAAF Beaufighter Association and Yvonne Holt OAM, Secretary 30 Squadron RAAF Beaufighter Association*

No 30 (City of Sale) Squadron has recently had the honour of being presented with the Queen's Colours by Governor-General His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd) at RAAF Base East Sale in Victoria. The original 30 Squadron was formed at Richmond in March 1942. There were about 300 airmen in the original Squadron and, sadly, I am the only original member left now, after losing two of my best mates, who I went off to war with, within a couple of weeks of each other in 2020.



**Bruce Robertson and Yvonne Holt with four of the five COs of 30 Squadron since its re-formation in 2010.  
L-R: WGCDR James Svede (2nd CO), WGCDR Neil Foate (5th CO), WGCDR Sharyn Bolitho (1st CO),  
WGCDR Martin Quirke (3rd CO)**

Arrangements for the consecration had previously been organised twice, but COVID-19 arrived, so had to be cancelled. When we were given the latest date, I could not believe it – 23rd March 2021 - the Consecration was to be held on my 101st birthday! A group of our 30 Squadron RAAF Beaufighter Association members drove from Sydney and others from Victoria for the most memorable couple of days. Sale had not had rain for a while, except for that day, so Plan B had to be put into action. The parade etc had to be held indoors, but this did not dampen any enthusiasm by anyone.



Governor-General David Hurley and his wife Mrs Linda Hurley had attended our Battle of the Bismarck commemorations on several occasions at Richmond when he was Governor of New South Wales, so we had a great camaraderie with them. At the lunch after the official ceremony, a birthday cake was brought in. I asked Mrs Linda Hurley to help me cut it – which she did – then she and her husband sang a special birthday song they had written for their grandchildren. To see and be part of this was most enjoyable for everyone.



**Governor General David Hurley and his wife Linda about to sing their Happy Birthday song to Bruce**

Following are a few stand-out memories I have of my time in 30 Squadron from 1942. I had just turned 22 and was a wireless operator at Richmond Air Force Station (they didn't call it a base back then). I had joined the air force in April 1941 but had been in the militia before the war and at the start of the war we went up to Fort Scratchley on guard duty. Then when I joined the Air Force, I underwent intense training for six months or so in wireless. I was posted to No 30 Squadron, a Beaufighter squadron but we didn't have any aeroplanes; we'd never even heard of a Beaufighter!

While we were waiting for the planes to arrive, a few mates and I helped out at Richmond signal station, monitoring wireless communications. In those days, morse code was vital; there were no computers of course. I was on the midnight to dawn watch, in the early hours of June 1 1942 just listening out in case there were any aircraft in distress. I had headphones on and this morse code came into my ears. When I tried to write it down, it didn't make sense. So I said to myself, "It must be Japanese". It was what they called Karna code and later some of our wireless operators learned it. I yelled out and the signals officer and staff came around and had a listen. Then we got on to two direction finding stations, prior to radar coming on the scene. They pinpointed the signal as being near Sydney Heads; it was the mother sub. There was a Lockheed bomber on standby loaded with bombs and it went off looking for the sub, but it was a black night, no moon and they didn't find anything. The air raid sirens went off and nobody really knew what was happening. There were huge sirens mounted on many light poles and you could hear them from kilometres away. My wife-to-be, Beryl, later told me she and her family had to go to the air raid shelters. Later I learned about the Japanese midget sub attack mostly from what I read in the papers.



**30 SQN Beaufighter – O, taken against the Owen Stanley Ranges.**

When we finally got our aeroplanes, I flew in a Beaufighter – the most magnificent aeroplane with the quietest Hercules engines earning the nick-name "Whispering Death". Beaufighters flew at sea level, thus enabling them to "strike swiftly" (our motto) and silently. An early flight from Richmond flew down round every bend of the Hawkesbury River just below the gum trees out into Broken Bay over Lion Island and Barrenjoey Lighthouse, and we fired some shots into the sea, dropped a green marker, and flew back again.

I was later stationed with the No. 30 Squadron in New Guinea where the squadron became renowned



for its involvement in battles such as Kokoda, Milne Bay, and more importantly the battle of the Bismarck Sea, a decisive aerial engagement that stopped the Japanese from reinforcing New Guinea. Once again, I was on wireless duties and I heard the whole battle of the Bismarck Sea being carried out over the radio. Our fellows were ordered to not comment on air during the battle, but I could hear the Americans singing our praises like 'Look at those so and so Aussies' in glowing terms.

In late 2019 the Air Force at Richmond saw fit to take me on a commemorative flight duplicating the 1942 Beaufighter episode. The same journey down the Hawkesbury River, Broken Bay, Lion Island and Barrenjoey Lighthouse. This time in a magnificent Hercules aircraft. This time no shots were fired. I was then 99 and had recently got a new knee. An ABC photographer and reporter went on the flight and it was made a feature on the Saturday night News on ABC Channel 2.



#### Note on Colours and Standards

In 1952, Her Majesty the Queen approved the award of the Standard to operational squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force. Squadrons qualify for the award of the Standard after 25 years of service.

The practice of consecrating Colours is of very long standing, and because of this religious significance, the Standard becomes not only an outward sign of unity, loyalty and achievement, but also a symbol of fellowship with God. It is to be honoured as a symbol of the trust which the sovereign reposes in the Squadron and as an emblem of achievements. It is a shrine of our traditions, a reminder of the devotion and sacrifices of our predecessors and an inspiration to those who serve.

The No. 30 Squadron Standard is a fringed and tasselled silken banner in Royal Australian Air Force blue, mounted on a pike surmounted by a golden eagle. It has a decorative border of various Australian native flora. In the centre of the Standard is the No. 30 Squadron crest, with the squadron's 11 battle honours adorning each side. The motto at the base of the No. 30 Squadron crest is 'strike swiftly'.



### **Friendships Can Happen in the Toughest of Times**

*From Bruce Robertson (now 101 years young), President 30 Squadron RAAF Beaufighter Association through Yvonne Holt OAM, Secretary 30 Squadron RAAF Beaufighter Association*

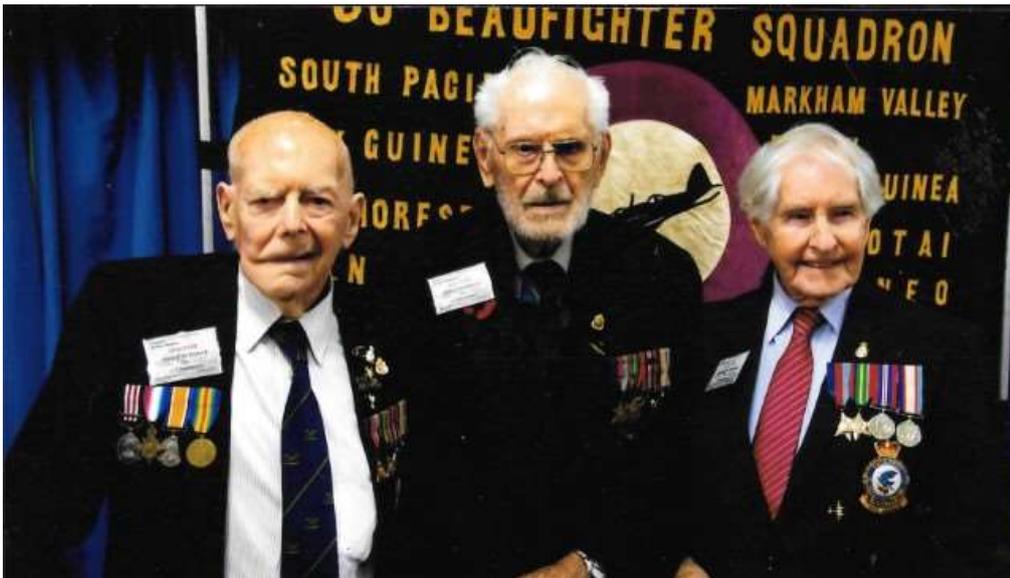
**T**he three remaining 30 Squadron originals left were having fun at the 2019 Bismarck Sea luncheon at Richmond Base: Alex Jenkins, Fred Anderson and Bruce Robertson. They were singing those great words of "You are my Sunshine, my only sunshine" etc. The conductress was Mrs Linda Hurley the wife of the Governor of NSW – soon to be Governor-General of Australia. What a turn - super quality entertainment! Little did we know that Fred (99, passed away 20th May 2020) and Alex (98, passed away 1st June 2020) were soon to depart this earthly life.

I feel that I (Bruce) should mention several things that drew us together during those war years of 30 Squadron and cemented our friendship in the years to follow. Alex was one of the first members of the squadron as it was forming at Richmond. He was an engineer and trained to know all the ins and outs of those remarkable Hercules engines (two) that powered the wonderful Beaufighter. Those engines were truly remarkable in that they were practically noiseless. The enemy could not hear them approaching and soon called the Beaufighter with these "sleeve valve" silent engines, "whispering death". Alex was an expert with the engine power of the Beau.

During July 1942, three hundred young airmen marched through the streets of Richmond Base on their way to Clarendon railway station to the tune of the song "Goodbye" from the musical "White Horse Inn" being played by the Air Force Band. Air and ground crews were well trained and ready to meet their enemy some few days ahead. Amongst these fine men, two who were destined to come closer as time went on were Alex Jenkins, a top engineer and Bruce Robertson, a morse code wireless operator.



Armed with rifle and bayonet, they boarded their special troop train and headed for Townsville, in Queensland's tropical weather.



**The three 30SQN Musketeers: Alex Jenkins, Fred Anderson and Bruce Robertson**

Townsville was chosen so that our boys could get the feel of the hotter days that lay ahead in New Guinea.

After one month slipped by, we knew we were ready to move on to we knew not where. One evening many of the squadron were sitting on wooden seats in Townsville's open air picture theatre enjoying the main feature. Suddenly, the

film was interrupted by a hastily printed 'message announcement' stating that "all 30 Squadron men were to report back to camp immediately". Half the audience made a hasty departure and began looking for their transport to take them back to camp. Alas! There was only one utility truck waiting to take some thirty or forty boys back to their base. The transport driver of the ute was Norm Carroll who turned a paler shade of his suntan when he saw the horde of airmen trying to clamber on to his vehicle. Bruce and Alex managed to get on board. Some were sprawled on the bonnet and others hanging on to any part of the ute that offered a toe hold. The utility seemed to be travelling sideways from time to time on the precarious journey back to camp. Norm the driver was having difficulty seeing the road partially obscured by precarious bodies. By a miracle those 30 boys managed to arrive safe and sound and began packing up ready to leave for our New Guinea location.

The next day was departure day. We were transported to a wharf in Townsville where a good looking ship, the "Taroona" was waiting to transport this Airforce squadron, only five months after being born at Richmond Station. 30 Squadron trucks and all equipment were lined up on the wharf ready to load. Then came the realization that no one was making any attempt to load the ship. The "wharf labourers" (who were to do the loading) had decided to call a strike. The wharfies were a Communist Union and decided to just sit around and watch the 30 boys do their own loading. The ship was loaded by teatime and preparations were made to get under way during the night. Then a dramatic operation took place. The wireless boys, some engine fitters, plus others were informed there was no room for them on board the ship. Alex Jenkins and Bruce Robertson were amongst this party. We were transported to Garbutt Airport and spent the night trying to get some sleep with a kit bag pillow on the concrete floor.

Waking early, we received some great news. Our party was to fly to Port Moresby; what fantastic news! Our aircraft was an American Douglas DC-3. Time of departure was about 10.00am. The aircraft set down at Cooktown where we had some lunch. There were no roads leading into Cooktown in those days. Ships and aeroplanes were the only way to get there. It was named by Captain Cook some one hundred and thirty years earlier. Alex and Bruce became great friends on this flight.

As the squadron settled in at "Wards Strip" Port Moresby, Alex was given the job of looking after the engines of the Beaufighter in which Fred operated as the wireless navigator. A great friendship grew as they both cared for their special Beaufighter. We 30 boys all got to know each other well and remained



great mates for the rest of the war. Alex, Fred and Bruce, and their 30 Squadron families were the greatest of friends for all those successive years of their lives.

During December 1943 till about March 1944, various squadron original members received a call to say your time is up, pack you kit bag and head for home in good old Aussie. Bruce arrived back with two weeks leave and found Beryl's arms and good news waiting for him. They had become engaged just before he left for 30 Squadron's war. Beryl had teed up wedding invitations with her girlfriend's father who was a printer. Only the wedding date had to be added. It was Saturday. Monday, invites printed; Tuesday, invites posted; Thursday, acceptances received; Friday, wedding at 6pm. Big calamity for Bruce. All his friends were at the war! Bruce and Beryl met Ralph Nelson (30 Squadron) on a train at Wiley Park. "You have got to be my best man". "Sorry, I'm on my way now to Wagga Wagga" Ralph said. "However, Fred Anderson is on leave at his wife's (Doris) family farm at Panania". "Thanks Ralph!". We headed for Panania (now a busy Sydney suburb), and found Fred who said he would be delighted to give me away to Beryl. The wedding at Lakemba's St Andrews. Reception at the Parisian, Campsie. There were wedding cars, three course meal for eighty guests (mostly ladies and young ones), two piece orchestra (piano and double bass). The cost, according to the receipts (I still have) was twenty eight pounds. Spent the next week in our little cottage at Earlwood then posted to Darwin. Dear Fred was also off to Darwin with 31 Squadron. And so, a very special lifetime friendship was forged with Fred and Doris. You can gather from these few words that Alex, Fred and Bruce were the Three Musketeers from 30 Squadron – One for all and all for one!



## UNEF II Air Unit Left for Egypt

10 June 1976

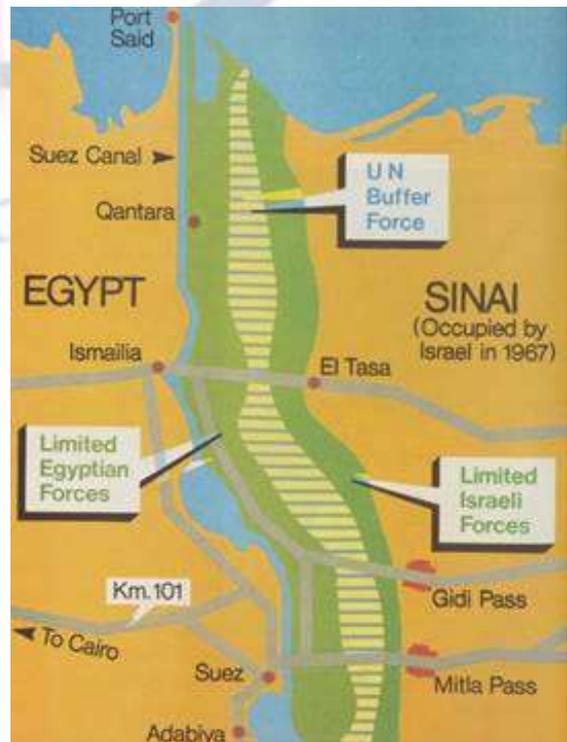
*This material is compiled from various sources including the History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, the RAAF Museum, the Australian War Memorial, ADF Serials and [www.ozatwar.com](http://www.ozatwar.com). The History and Heritage Branch–Air Force is not responsible for pre-1921 items. Whilst every effort is made to confirm the accuracy of the entries, any discrepancies are solely the responsibility of the originator. As I am not a member of History and Heritage Branch-Air Force, all Air Force history or heritage queries should be directed, in the first instance, to [airforce.history@defence.gov.au](mailto:airforce.history@defence.gov.au)*

On this day, a 16-man forward party left Canberra to prepare for the arrival at Ismailia, Egypt, of the air unit committed by Australia to the second United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF II) in Sinai. The unit, referred to as AUSTAIR, was required to help monitor the 300 kilometre-long buffer zone separating Egyptian and Israeli forces after the 1973 war fought along the Suez Canal.

At full strength, AUSTAIR comprised four Iroquois helicopters operated by 13 officers and 32 airmen - all drawn from the RAAF except four aircrew and maintenance personnel from the RAN. The first helicopter was flown from No 5 Squadron at RAAF Base Fairbairn by C-130 on 8 July, with the rest following in further C-130 flights that month, and the first mission in support of UNEF II was flown on 1 August. The unit remained in Sinai for three years.

**UNEF II background is here:**

<https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unef2mandate.html>





## The Tale of the Phantom Willys Jeep

*From Sandy Main*

Back in 1976-79, we had four UH-1H Iroquois detached from 5 SQN and sent up to Ismailiya, Egypt, to serve with UNEF2, patrolling the western half of the Sinai. The unit was called Austair and our role was to ensure that both Egypt and Israel were observing the Camp David accords. At the completion of four years, UNEF2 was disbanded and a new, bigger force ("Multinational Force and Observers, MFO") was subsequently created and based further east, near el Arish, as the Israelis withdrew to plan across the desert (We took part in this too, 1982-86, with 10 Aust/NZ aircraft).

As a fairly small part of UNEF2, we had I think two VW Kombis, two Passats, and two jeeps, for unit transport, all painted in UN white and black, with UN numbers. Ringo was the last CO, and I served as his XO for the last three months or so. The unit was pulled out by a succession of RAAF C130's, seven I think, over about two weeks. For some reason, Ringo was pulled out on the first or second aircraft, leaving me to do the final clean up, not that there was much to do, apart from completing the pack up and hand the vehicles back to the UN Transport section, run by a Dutch contingent. But here I was confronted by a novel problem.

Our ingenious techies, frustrated by occasional shortages of vehicles, had, over the years, raided the UN vehicle boneyard, which had some hundreds of wrecks of all kinds, and purloined all the bits necessary to make another jeep. Thus, the "Phantom" was born, complete in UN colours but with a severely fudged number which nobody could read. Just after Ringo left, I realised that I could hardly hand back a vehicle which didn't exist as far as the Dutch were concerned and I pondered how best to deal with the problem. I even considered driving it onto the last Herc, bound for home, payload allowing, but the likely hoo-haa about it on arrival in Canberra was too much to contemplate.



**Group portrait of members of the United Nations Emergency Forces II (UNEF II), in which 46 RAAF personnel were involved in monitoring a ceasefire between Egypt and Israel after the Yom Kippur war in 1973.**

Well, the solution dropped into my lap in the bar one night about a week before the final day: one of our UNEF friends was an American guy called Sonny Ranny, who was the RCA tech who maintained the HF radios in the desert for the force. He was fond of fraternising with us in our makeshift bar on



top of a battle-damaged, pockmarked old Egyptian hotel in central Ismailiya (the Sin(ai) Palace) and on this occasion he asked me what I was going to do with the Phantom on the last day.

I answered (truthfully) that seeing as how I was to be the last man out, I was probably going to have to leave it down at the airfield with the keys in it and hope the Dutch would collect it sooner or later, before they left, as well. But Sonny's reply was ideal: "Would you like me to take care of it?" This offer I quickly accepted, hoping (sort of) that he would drop it off at the transport section and deal with the flak, but suspecting that a more likely



**A Jeep similar to 'The Phantom', although the Phantom was sans roof and apparently in worse condition than this example of UN Jeep.**

fate was that it would be slipped into his garage (he lived in Ismailiya) and painted some fancy colour, never to be seen by the UN again. At least not in UN colours, anyway. Given the Arab skill in keeping old things going, it may still be running around Egypt someplace for all I know. Thus ends the tale of the Phantom, every bit true, I swear. These things don't just happen in novels like "Catch 22."

**Footnote:** Some of our readers will be aware that during our time in 'Nam with 9 SQN, similar RAAF mechanical and electrical geniuses (geneii?) created a complete, flyable UH-1B, also missing a number, all out of bits from the nearby US Army aircraft boneyard in Vung Tau. That aircraft is, I think, now in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, numbered A2-1023?



## **Some History of the Formation of the RAAF**

*From Alan Lyons, President No22 (City of Sydney) Squadron Association*

**E**ven before the First World War Australia possessed military leaders who realised the value of Airpower to the armed forces. In line with military thinking that remains relevant today, their ideas were based on units consisting of a small number of permanent staff administering and training a large number of part time "Citizen" members. However, the advent of that first great unpleasantness (WW1) governed the actual form Australia's involvement with military aviation would take for some time. After serving with much distinction in Europe and the Middle East, the AFC was disbanded on its return to Australia in 1919.

On 29 April 1919, Major General J.G. Legge, the Chief of General Staff, had produced his "Outline Policy for the Military Air Force of Australia." In this document he confirmed the original ideas on cadre squadrons with the following statement: "The Military Air Force of Australia should be mainly composed from Citizen Forces, with a proportion of Permanent Troops. The latter was to provide for the instruction of the force, and the maintenance of the machines."

The former commander of the AFC in the Middle East, Lieutenant Colonel Richard Williams, had been brought home from England in 1919 and appointed Director of Air Services in Army HQ. Being a firm advocate of an Australian Air force, he was pleasantly surprised, in early 1920, when the government of the day asked him if the sum of £1,000,000 pounds (\$2,000,000) would be sufficient funding to establish and operate an air force for the period 1920-21. The then Prime Minister, "Billy" Hughes, had declared himself to be "fanatic in his belief in aviation". This belief, a gift of 128 aircraft



from the British government, and the enthusiasm of LTCOL Williams and the Minister for Defence Mr G.F. Pearce, ensured that an Australian Air Force would soon be a reality. An Air Board was formed on 9 November 1920. It consisted of:

First Air Member - Director of Operations and Intelligence, WGCDR R. Williams.

Second Air Member - Director of Personnel and Training, WGCDR S.J. Goble.

Third Air Member - Director of Equipment, Capt B.A. McBain.

Fourth Air Member - Finance Member, Mr A.C. Joyce.

A secretary to the Air Board, Mr P.E. Coleman, was also appointed.

In line with Royal Air Force (RAF) practice, LTCOL Williams' rank had been changed to the equivalent wing commander, while Captain McBain was immediately promoted to squadron leader rather than the Army equivalent of major. On 22 December 1920 Williams presented a very comprehensive memorandum covering a detailed programme and general principles for the formation of the force. This memorandum charged the permanent force with the responsibility for the administration and training of both the permanent and citizen units and for the supply and care of both equipment and stores required by them. The Citizen Forces units proposed were:

No 2 and No 3 Squadrons: Corps Reconnaissance - to co-operate with the Citizen Military Forces. (This point was given as the reason for the Air Force units themselves being citizen units.)

No 7 Squadron: Torpedo Carriers (Economy was given as the reason for this unit being a citizen unit.)

The formation of the citizen units was to be looked upon as an experiment, with a trial period to examine their effectiveness. The memorandum also proposed the raising of an Air Force Reserve from the large number of ex-AFC and some ex-RAF members living in Australia. The Air Council, consisting of the Minister for Defence, two members of the Air Board and the Controller of Civil Aviation approved Williams' submission on 23 December 1920. The Minister for Defence was anxious that the Air Force be formed as soon as possible. On 15 February 1921, the Air Board sent to the Air Council a recommendation that the Air Force be formed on 31 March 1921. Williams had insisted on this date, rather than the originally suggested 1 April, in order to prevent the new arm of the Defence Force becoming known as 'April Fools'.

The Commonwealth of Australia Gazette No 28, for 31 March 1921 announced the formation of the "AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE". The prefix "ROYAL" was granted soon after and promulgated as effective from 31 August 1921. The 128 aircraft gift from Britain consisted of:

35 x SE5A single seat fighters,

28 x DH9 two seat reconnaissance bombers,

30 x DH9A two seat reconnaissance bombers (an improved version of the DH9),

35 x Avro 504K two seat trainers.

To these were added:

10 x Sopwith Pup single seat scouts (fighters), purchased during the war,

6 x Fairey 111D floatplanes (obtained in England),

20 x Avro 504K trainers (obtained in England),

6 x Avro 504K trainers (manufactured locally).

In the original Air Defence Bill, the Minister for Defence, Senator Pearce, provided for two air forces. One a Naval Air force, would to all intents and purposes, be "WAR READY". The other, a Military Air force, would consist of mainly Citizen Units with only a few regulars. When presenting the Bill to the Senate on 8 April 1921, Pearce expressed his hope that an expansion of civil aviation would provide a source of aircraft and trained personnel for the Citizen Force. This Bill included a lot of technical and legal content taken from the British Air Force Act. Because of these complications and their doubted relevance to Australia, the act was not passed by parliament.



**DH9 two seat reconnaissance bombers**



**SE5A single seat fighter**

Despite having no statutory authority and with a background of worsening economic conditions, the newly formed Australian Air Force was getting on with the job. By July, amongst other things, Air Council approval was granted “subject to funds being made available”, for the purchase of land at Richmond in New South Wales.

Legge’s originally suggested permanent establishment was for 20 Officers and 500 Other Ranks, supporting a Citizen Force of 654 Officers and 7,209 Other Ranks. The initial establishment for the new proposal was 150 Officers and 1,000 Other Ranks, with 35 Officers and 300 Other Ranks in the Citizen Force. The 1920-22 programme provided for a minimum establishment of 108 Officers and 791 Other Ranks to be obtained at a gradual rate. Initially the intention had been to raise future units from Citizen Air Force (CAF) trainees. Now, faced with financial constraints, the Air Board decided that trainees could not be allocated to the CAF and therefore all members must be volunteers with previous qualifications.

November 1921 saw the Air Board receive approval for its recommended formation of an RAAF Reserve. However, the tight purse strings were to take effect here too. There would be no uniforms or training for the estimated 500 trained pilots throughout Australia, who might join the reserve. Also, the financial situation meant that the RAAF manpower would be pegged to the then current level of 50 Officers and 258 Other Ranks. In October 1922, the rates of pay ranged from eight shillings (80c) per day for an aircraftsman first class (AC1), up to one pound fourteen shillings (\$3.40) for a squadron leader.

In late 1927 Williams argued that military aviation could be fully developed only by airmen. In so doing he managed to, at least temporarily, curb the ambitions of the Navy and the Army to gain their own air arms. AM Salmond arrived in Australia in June 1927 and set about his examination of all aspects of the RAAF. He particularly noted as being undesirable, the requirement for CAF Officer candidates to undertake four months of continuous training at Point Cook. The four month period limited the opportunity to train to those university students who could afford to take long end of year vacations. Williams, who was in at least partial agreement with Salmond, continued to argue for a strong permanent air force. The politicians remained in favour of the more cost effective CAF units.



America is the only country where a significant proportion of the population believes that professional wrestling is real, but the moon landing was faked.





## The Gift

*From Tomas 'Paddy' Hamilton*

My shift was nearly over, I'd soon be on my way  
The eastern sky would herald in, another Mother's Day  
I tuned into a talkback show, as the dawn did slowly creep  
The switchboard seemed to be jam packed, with women who could not sleep

The subject seemed to focus on, strange gifts they had received  
And some of these weird presents, just couldn't be believed  
Lawn mowers and spanner sets, might be the choice of some  
But I find them inappropriate for that special mum

When it comes to showing gratitude, you may pay out great amounts  
But when it's all said and done, it's the thought that really counts  
For the smallest token from one's heart, made with loving care  
Is often the true reflection, of the love that you both share

Then her voice came on the airwaves, free of others gripes  
With a soft and gentle accent, from the land of Stars and Stripes

I listened on intently, to the story that she weaved  
As she told us of a special gift, that she had once received

A little pair of earrings, shaped like two butterflies  
The simple proof of her son's love, brought tears to this mother's eyes

He'd left the price tag on them and she felt a little sad  
As she realised her five year old, had spent every cent he had

She wore them every Mother's Day and you could always tell  
When her son was in the limelight, she wore them then as well  
She wore them when he went to war and shed such bitter tears  
When she got that dreaded call that every parent fears

Like his mates who went before him, he went with no regret  
Cut down in Afghanistan, by a foe he'd never met  
Though the world was at his feet, the day that he was born  
When it comes to politics a soldier is just a pawn

In a flag draped casket, he came home from the fray  
And she buried him at Arlington, where her nation's heroes lay  
She sat there broken hearted, feeling so bereft  
Her memories and his butterflies, were all that she had left

That tiny pair of earrings is now worth more than gold  
And this grown man was moved to tears by the story that she'd told  
I drove home quietly thinking, with a heart that seemed like lead  
Silently reflecting on every word she'd said

When I arrived I gazed upon the photos on the wall  
Of my children in their uniforms, standing proud and tall  
And I prayed to God in heaven, "Please grant me this one goal"  
"That I may never have to pay this grieving mother's toll"



We're fighting two pandemics: Corona virus and stupidity.



## Parachute Use Began in RAAF

26 May 1926

*This material is compiled from various sources including the History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, the RAAF Museum, the Australian War Memorial, ADF Serials and [www.ozatwar.com](http://www.ozatwar.com). The History and Heritage Branch–Air Force is not responsible for pre-1921 items. Whilst every effort is made to confirm the accuracy of the entries, any discrepancies are solely the responsibility of the originator. As I am not a member of History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, all Air Force history or heritage queries should be directed, in the first instance, to [airforce.history@defence.gov.au](mailto:airforce.history@defence.gov.au)*

On this day, Flight Lieutenant Ellis Wackett made a freefall parachute jump from a D.H.9a over Richmond air base, New South Wales – the first time this had occurred in Australia. The previous year Wackett had been on a posting in England, and spent time at the RAF station at Andover where a squadron was using parachutes; while there, he learnt to pack and use the new life-preserving equipment. On return to Australia, he began the introduction of parachutes into the RAAF. The rear cockpit of a



D.H.9a bomber (A1-10), normally the gunner’s position, was modified to carry a small ladder on the port side of the aircraft fuselage. On the day of the first jump, the aircraft had reached 3,000 feet when Wackett clambered over the side and stood on the ladder and, with one hand already on the ripcord, let go. His descent and landing went without incident.

**A biography of Ellis Wackett is here:** <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wackett-ellis-charles-wack-15886>



## First Emergency Use of a Parachute

15 May 1930

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On this day, Flying Officer W.G. (‘Gordon’) Rae became the first RAAF member to save his life in a mid-air emergency by using a parachute. He had been instructed to spend 30 minutes practicing inverted aerobatics over Point Cook in a new Bristol Bulldog biplane fighter, A12-4, which had been in service with No 1 Flying Training School for only two weeks and had less than 20 hours flying time. While attempting an inverted loop, the machine’s upper wing collapsed with a loud crack and folded upwards, whereupon the Bulldog began spinning down, still in an inverted position. Rae jumped from the plummeting aircraft at about 2000 feet and safely landed by





parachute, thereby becoming the first RAAF pilot to join the ‘Caterpillar Club’ (whose members all owed their survival to a British Irvin parachute). Following this incident, the Air Board banned pilots from attempting outside loops and ‘bunts’ (half outside loops).



## Gratuitous Photo of Air Force’s 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Fighter



RAAF F-35 A35-011 doing the Canberra Anzac Day Flypast on 25 Apr 2021 with New Parliament House in the background

Photo by Wal Nelowkin



## Stealing a German Focke Wulf 190

*From Pieter La’Brooy*

Lt Bruce Carr was a P-51D pilot (*Angels’ Playmate*) with the 354th Fighter Group who was shot down over Czechoslovakia on 2nd November 1944 and ended up stealing a FW-190.

After carrying a dead chicken for several days, 20 year old Bruce Carr still hadn’t decided how to cook it without the Germans catching him. But, as hungry as he was, he couldn’t bring himself to eat it; in his mind, no meat was better than raw meat so he threw it away. Resigning himself to what appeared to be his unavoidable fate, he turned in the direction of the nearest German airfield. Even POWs get to eat. Sometimes. And they aren’t constantly dodging from tree to tree, ditch to culvert. And he was exhausted. He was tired of trying to find cover where there was none. Carr hadn’t realised that Czechoslovakian forests had no underbrush until, at the edge of the farm field, he struggled out of his parachute and dragged it into the woods.

During the times he had been screaming along at treetop level in his P-51 ‘*Angels’ Playmate*’, the forests and fields had been nothing more than a green blur behind the Messerschmitts, Focke-Wulfs, trains and trucks he had in his sights. He never expected to find himself a pedestrian far behind enemy



lines. Being a red-hot fighter pilot, however, was absolutely no use to him as he lay shivering in the Czechoslovakian forest. He knew he would die if he didn't get some food and shelter soon.

"I knew where the German field was because I'd flown over it, so I was headed in that direction to surrender. I intended to walk in the main gate, but it was late afternoon and, for some reason, I had second thoughts and decided to wait in the woods until morning. While I was lying there, I saw a crew working on an FW-190 right at the edge of the woods. When they were done, I assumed, just like you assume in America, that the thing was all finished. The cowling's on. The engine has been run. The fuel truck has been there. It's ready to go. Maybe a dumb assumption for a young fellow, but I assumed so. So, I got in the airplane and spent the night all hunkered down in the cockpit.

Before dawn, it got light and I started studying the cockpit. I can't read German, so I couldn't decipher dials and I couldn't find the normal switches like there were in American airplanes. I kept looking, and on the right side was a smooth panel. Under this was a compartment with something I would classify as circuit breakers. They didn't look like ours, but they weren't regular switches either. I began to think that the Germans were probably no different from the Americans in that they would turn off all the switches when finished with the airplane. I had no earthly idea what those circuit breakers or switches did, but I reversed every one of them. If they were off, that would turn them on. When I did that, the gauges showed there was electricity on the airplane.

I'd seen this metal T handle on the right side of the cockpit that had a word on it that looked enough like 'starter' for me to think that's what it was. But when I pulled it, nothing happened. Nothing. But if pulling doesn't work, you push. And when I did, an inertia starter started winding up. I let it go for a while and then pulled on the handle and the engine started. The sun had yet to make it over the far trees and the air base was just waking up, getting ready to go to war. The FW-190 was one of many dispersed throughout the woods, and at that time of the morning, the sound of the engine must have been heard by many Germans not far away on the main base. But even if they heard it, there was no reason for alarm. The last thing they expected was one of their fighters taxiing out with a weary Mustang pilot at the controls." Carr however, wanted to take no chances.

"The taxiway came out of the woods and turned right towards where I knew the airfield was because I'd watched them land and take off while I was in the trees. On the left side of the taxiway, there was a shallow ditch and a space where there had been two hangars. The slabs were there, but the hangars were gone, and the area around them had been cleared of all debris. I didn't want to go to the airfield,

so I plowed down through the ditch, and when the airplane started up the other side, I shoved the throttle forward and took off right between where the two hangars had been."



German FW-190

At that point, Bruce Carr had no time to look around to see what effect the sight of a Focke-Wulf erupting from the trees had on the Germans. Undoubtedly, they were confused, but not unduly concerned. After all, it was probably just one of their

maverick pilots doing something against the rules. They didn't know it was one of OUR maverick pilots doing something against the rules. Carr had problems more immediate than a bunch of confused Germans. He had just pulled off the perfect plane-jacking; but he knew nothing about the airplane, couldn't read the placards and had 200 miles of enemy territory to cross.



At home, there would be hundreds of his friends and fellow warriors, all of whom were, at that moment, preparing their guns to shoot at airplanes marked with swastikas and crosses – airplanes identical to the one Bruce Carr was at that moment flying. But Carr wasn't thinking that far ahead. First he had to get there, and that meant learning how to fly the airplane.

“There were two buttons behind the throttle and three buttons behind those two. I wasn't sure what to push, so I pushed one button and nothing happened, I pushed the other and the gear started up. As soon as I felt it coming up and I cleared the fence at the edge of the German field, I took it down a little lower and headed for home. All I wanted to do was clear the ground by about six inches, and there was only one throttle position for me: full forward.”

“As I headed for home, I pushed one of the other three buttons, and the flaps came part way down. I pushed the button next to it, and they came up again. So I knew how to get the flaps down. But that was all I knew. I can't make heads or tails out of any of the instruments. None. I can't even figure how to change the prop pitch. But I don't sweat that, because the props are full forward when you shut down anyway, and it was running fine.”

This time it was German cows that were buzzed, although as he streaked across fields and through the trees only a few feet off the ground, that was not the intent. At something over 350 mph, below tree-top level, he was trying to be a difficult target, but as he crossed the lines, he wasn't difficult enough. “There was doubt when I crossed the lines because every SOB and his brother who had a .50-calibre machine gun shot at me. It was all over the place and I had no idea which way to go. I didn't do much dodging because I was just as likely to fly into bullets as avoid them.”

When he hopped over the last row of trees and found himself crossing his own airfield, he pulled up hard to set up for landing. His mind was on flying the airplane. “I pitched up, pulled the throttle back and punched the buttons I knew would put the gear and flaps down. I felt the flaps come down but the gear wasn't doing anything. I came around and pitched up again, still punching the button. Nothing was happening and I was really frustrated.”

He had been so intent on figuring out his airplane problems he forgot he was putting on a very tempting show for the ground crews. “As I started up the last time, I saw the air defense guys ripping the tarps off the quad .50s that ringed the field. I hadn't noticed the machine guns before, but I was sure noticing them right then. I roared around in as tight a pattern as I could fly and chopped the throttle. I slid to a halt on the runway and it was a nice belly job, if I say so myself.”

His antics over the runway had drawn quite a crowd, and the aircraft had barely stopped sliding before there were MPs up on the wings trying to drag him out of the airplane by his arms. They didn't realise he was still strapped in. “I started throwing some good Anglo-Saxon swear words at them, and they let loose while I tried to get the seat belt undone, but my hands wouldn't work and I couldn't do it. Then they started pulling on me again because they still weren't convinced I was an American. I was yelling and hollering, then suddenly, they let go, and a face drops down into the cockpit in front of mine. It was my Group Commander, George R. Bickel. Bickel said, ‘Carr, where in the hell have you been, and what have you been doing now?’” Bruce Carr was home



Lt. Col. Bruce W. Carr stands by *Angels' Playmate*



and entered the record books as the only pilot known to leave on a mission flying a Mustang and return flying a Focke-Wulf.

For several days after the ordeal, he had trouble eating and sleeping, but when things again fell into place, he took some of the other pilots out to show them the airplane and how it worked. One of them pointed out a small handle under the glare shield that he hadn't noticed before. When he pulled it, the landing gear unlocked and fell out. The handle was a separate, mechanical uplock. At least he had figured out the important things.

Carr finished the war with 14 aerial victories after flying 172 missions, which included three bale-outs because of ground fire. He stayed in the service, eventually flying 51 missions in Korea in F-86s and 286 in Vietnam, flying F-100s. That's an amazing 509 combat missions and doesn't include many others during Vietnam in other aircraft types.

What makes a fitting ending to this story is that Bruce Carr was still actively flying and routinely showing up at air shows in a P-51D painted up exactly like 'Angels' Playmate' into his later years of life. The last original 'Angels' Playmate' was put on display in a museum in Paris, France right after the war.



## Happy New Year

*This article is an edited extract of the original written by Bruce Byron*

Introduction: In 1964 the RAAF deployed new Caribou tactical transport aircraft operated by the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) to the developing war in Vietnam. Based at Vung Tau in the south of the country, RTFV later became No.35 Squadron RAAF. The aircraft operated there for eight years, with personnel serving an operational tour of 12 months. Various histories of the war all refer to the Caribou as a support aircraft to the Australian Army Task Force.

The Caribou did indeed support the Task Force by providing re-supply flights that carried personnel, rations, mail, ammunition and assorted freight. However, the bulk of 35 SQN's efforts were actually in support of American forces as part of the US Air Force 7<sup>th</sup> Air Force, 834<sup>th</sup> Air Division. Such flights covered the expansive Mekong delta region in the south known as IV Corps, the area around Saigon known as III Corps and the rugged Central Highlands, II Corps which was a focal area of the US Army 5<sup>th</sup> Special Forces (the Green Berets) that manned remote fortified camps in the western provinces of South Vietnam.

Not many histories of Australia's involvement in the war make mention of the RAAF Caribou's role in supporting these remote camps with their very short, dirt airstrips. However, to a man, all 204 RTFV/35 SQN pilots and loadmasters who served in Vietnam operated to these camps as part of their regular monthly tasks. II Corps was also the initial flash point of the Tet offensive that occurred in late January 1968. What is not recorded in any official records of the Tet Offensive, is that there was one lone RAAF Caribou that conducted ammunition re-supply flights for a number of days to towns under attack and US Special Forces camps in need of ammunition, when the vast majority of airlift aircraft were kept on the ground at coastal bases. The following is that Caribou crew's story.

In Asia, the lunar new year is a very big deal – the most important annual celebration by far. The Vietnamese lunar new year is called Tet, or more correctly, Tết Nguyên Đán which translates loosely as *Feast of the First Morning of the First Day*, and normally occurs in January or February. In 1968 Tet was due to be celebrated from Tuesday, January 30, one day after my 21st birthday.

To be honest, even though I'd been in South Vietnam for a few weeks, as the end of January approached, I'd never heard of Tet or a lunar new year, such was the cultural separation of the times. I suspect most of my colleagues in 35 SQN were in the same boat. However, in the opaque world of diplomacy in a war zone, the two sides to the conflict had apparently agreed to a cease fire over Tet. As it turned out, the agreed cease-fire is a good lesson for future diplomats and military commanders. If you're fighting a war, you're fighting a war - and agreements such as cease-fires just act as a smoke screen for commanders who understand that concept. The North Vietnamese understood.



On the 27th January I was rostered for the week long detachment to Nha Trang with Stewart McAlister. Although a Flying Officer, Stew was in his late twenties and as such was one of the mature old hands of the Squadron. Stew was only weeks from finishing his 12-month tour in South Vietnam. Most importantly to me, he was approved as a right hand seat check-captain, which meant he could be the aircraft captain (aircraft commander) whilst permitting a junior aircraft captain, like me, to fly from the left seat as he confirmed my ability to do the job and become familiarized with operations in South Vietnam. Our loadmaster for the detachment was Corporal Doug Angus, an experienced engine fitter mechanic who, like all squadron loadmasters, was also trained to fix mechanical problems of most types when away from base. To assist with the loading of the aircraft, our fourth crew member was Leading Aircraftman Alexander Busby.



**Bruce Byron – Vietnam 1968**

This was to be one of the last missions that would complete my familiarisation process and introduce me to some of landing strips manned by the US 5th Special Forces in the middle of the country known as II Corps. Stew tasked me to fly the first half of the 005 Mission from Vung Tau to Saigon, then northward along the coast, landing at the relatively minor towns of Phan Thiet and Song Mao before visiting the major USAF base at Phan Rang, where the RAAF's 2 SQN Canberra bombers were based. To keep track of our movements through the country we needed to report by high frequency (HF) radio to the USAF 834th Air Division Airlift Command Centre (ALCC), callsign *Hilda* on each sector.

Out of Phan Rang we continued north along the coast to Nha Trang, landing there around midday. As with all the previous sectors from Phan Thiet onwards, we flew out over the water keeping a sensible distance of about 3nm from the coast to minimize the possibility of random ground fire from Viet Cong troops. When flying over the water tracking either north or south along the coast all we needed to report to *Hilda* was that we were "feet wet" to give them an idea of where we were tracking. Being a major distribution base for tactical airlift, Nha Trang had a local office of the ALCC, known as an Airlift Coordination Element (ALCE) on the airfield that allocated all our tasks when we were based at Nha Trang.



**US Army engineers and their new air strip at Tieu Atar**

Stew flew the afternoon missions whilst I provided co-pilot support and operated the various radios. For the remainder of the day and again the next day (28th January), we flew supplies into various SF camps including Qui Nhon, Pleiku, Mang Buk, Plei Mrong, Plei Djerang, Dak Pek, Duc Xuyen (also called An Loc), and back to overnight at Nha Trang. I woke up on the morning of the 29th of January in Nha Trang as a 21 year-old: it didn't feel any different. After a USAF breakfast of eggs and assorted sweet stuff, we headed out to the aircraft to begin another very busy day at the office.



Although there was no formal advice to us about likely increased enemy activity, CIA intelligence reports released to the public many years later show that the Americans were expecting action from the communists in our area of operations.

One particular task was to conduct an airdrop of supplies to the newly established SF camp of A-Team 231 at Tieu Atar, some 50nm to the north-west of Ban Me Thuot which was a major base for the South Vietnam Army (ARVN) and a regional HQ for various US Army units, including the 5th Special Forces. The camp had only been established the month before in December 1967 and had been receiving all supplies by helicopter or parachute supply drop whilst US Army engineers cut a clearing in the teak tree woodland and levelled a relatively short 1500 foot dirt air strip. Following the dispatch of supplies to Tieu Atar, the engineers advised us by radio that the air strip had just been completed and asked if we wanted to be the first fixed wing aircraft to try the new airfield surface and land. Stew agreed to the invitation and flew the circuit and successful landing. After landing and shutting down our engines, the US Army engineers were delighted with our assessment that we considered the strip operational and wanted us to share in a celebratory bottle of champagne produced by the officer in charge – a US Army captain. The engineers enjoyed the champagne.

Our last flights of the day were supply tasks to the SF camps at Buon Blech to the north of Ban Me Thuot and then west again to Tieu Atar. After a late afternoon arrival at Tieu Atar, we either decided by ourselves or were tasked by Hilda to overnight at Pleiku, rather than our normal overnight base of Nha Trang. Although the USAF hosted us at Nha Trang, and there was a reasonable USAF presence at Pleiku, it was normal practice for us to be transported and billeted by the 5th SF at Pleiku because of our close working relationship with their teams in the Central Highlands.

Arriving at Pleiku just before dark, Stew noted that there were no other transport aircraft on the ground; no A1 Skyraiders, and very few other aircraft. Normally, there would be a number of C130 and C123 transport aircraft parked overnight. Stew queried the tower on the lack of aircraft, but they seemed none the wiser – or at least they weren't telling us. We found out later that all other airlift aircraft had been evacuated to coastal airfields late in the afternoon. On



**Tieu Atar 29th January 1968: US Army engineer captain, Bruce Byron and Doug Angus**

shutting down our engines and securing the aircraft in a very exposed part of the empty tarmac, the Pleiku based SF personnel arranged transport for our four man crew to the SF HQ of Detachment C2 at Camp Holloway, about 3km from the main Pleiku strip. The various SF officers and NCOs we met at Holloway on arrival were effusive in their gratitude for the service we provided to their forward teams and settled us into their accommodation as though we were part of their unit. The barracks accommodated SF officers and NCOs in Quonset huts – a semi cylindrical prefabricated corrugated steel building. The huts seemed to be part buried below ground level and surrounded by thousands of sandbags, no doubt in recognition of the reality that occasional mortar or rocket attacks could be expected. After a couple of beers and something to eat, I was asleep in a standard Army camp bed. And then the fireworks started.

I was quickly back in the land of the living when I realized that the noise was a combination of explosions very close combined with continuous automatic gunfire. At 0100 hours on 30 January, the enemy had broken the agreed cease fire and launched the Tet Offensive attack on various parts of the Pleiku military complex, airfield and the small city of Pleiku about 3km due west of Holloway. Engineers Hill to the north was hit about the same time as mortar or rocket rounds starting landing in Camp Holloway. Although that sort of attack is normally designed to strike a bit of panic in those



being attacked, the SF officers and NCOs seemed to take it in their stride with absolutely no sign of panic. Stimulated by the natural adrenaline rush of what was happening around me, I just took my cue from our hosts. We were told to follow others to a bunker to be briefed on what to do. Presumably, this was some sort of command bunker.

Outside the protection of the sandbagged barracks, the noise increased. From each direction it seemed, there was the constant sound of automatic gunfire. Some of it was a relatively soft but rapid clatter of numerous M-60 7.62mm calibre machine guns, and another was the heavier and less rapid sound of the 50 calibre heavy machine gun. One of our hosts explained that there were three perimeters made of obstacles and razor wire. Each perimeter was separated by about 50 metres of relatively open ground that would give the defending machine guns easy view of attacking troops – in daylight anyway. Graceful streams of red tracer bullets filled the dark sky. Incoming tracer seemed to be arcing up in the distance before falling randomly into the Camp Holloway compound. Outgoing tracer was much lower as though the defending guns were aiming directly at ground targets not far away. The problem of being able to see the invading forces was solved by regular launching of M127A1 White Star parachute flares shot up by flare pistol or hand-held grenade launcher. The flares floated gently down, illuminating ground between the defensive perimeters.

Doug and Alexander were told to report to machine gun posts on the inner perimeter to assist the M60 or 50 Cal gunners. Later in the night as the fighting on the perimeter eased, Doug and Alexander had a lucky escape when standing up to get a better view of the outer perimeter, an enemy rocket passed directly between the two of them, exploding on a building behind them in the camp. Following our briefing in the command bunker, Stew and I had been dismissed back to our accommodation which was effectively a protected bunker. At first, sleeping wasn't really an option. Although the rate of incoming mortar rounds seemed to lessen, the automatic gunfire was incessant. Having the memories of my prisoner of war training course not two months old, I contemplated a scenario of North Vietnamese (NVA) or Viet Cong bursting in through the door brandishing AK-47 automatic rifles, whilst I stood there with my pathetic 9mm pistol. It didn't bear thinking about – but I did anyway. All we could do was talk to the few SF officers who, like us, were told to keep their heads down and presumably, their powder dry. One SF officer, a captain in his mid-30's from memory, must have sensed a bit of concern in this 21 year old Aussie pilot and struck up a conversation. I remember telling him that I had turned 21 yesterday to which he responded with an offer of a glass of Bourbon. In the circumstances I didn't think that was a great idea.

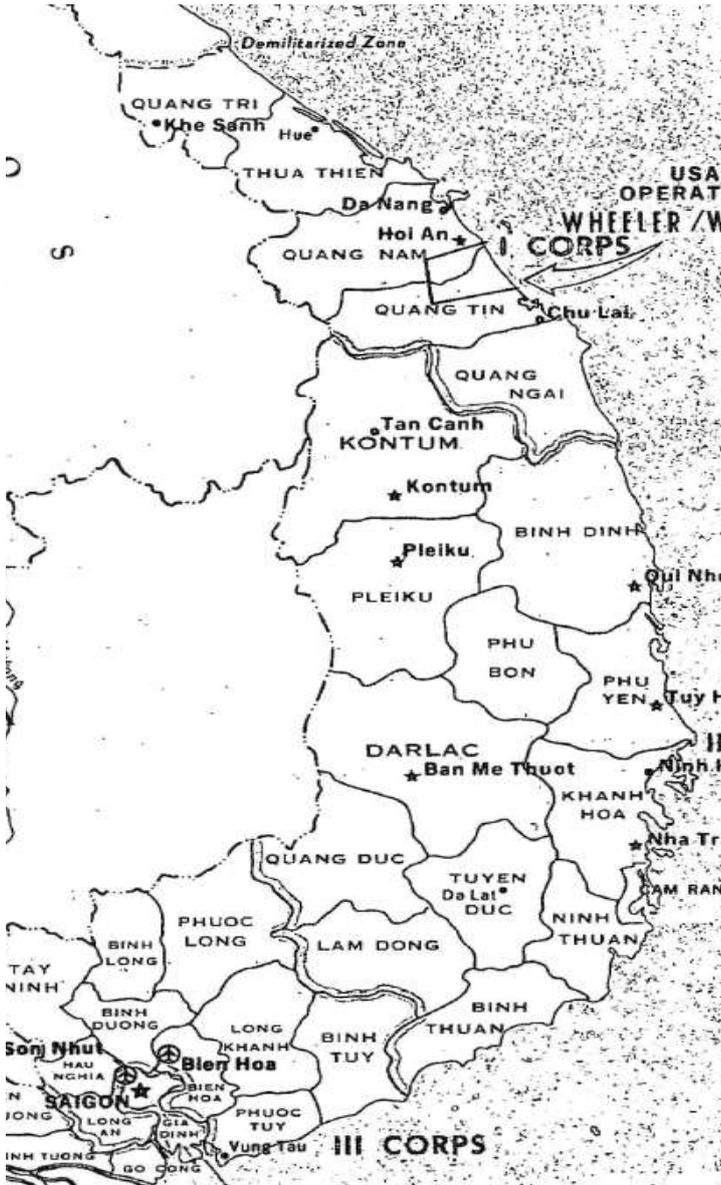
By dawn the fighting, or at least the noise, had stopped. I heard the familiar sound of helicopters getting airborne, presumably to scout for remaining attackers and for local commanders to assess damage to the base and surrounding facilities. Stew gathered up our loadmasters and asked if we could all be transported out to the main airstrip to see if our aircraft had survived. If it had, we were keen to get out of Pleiku. Our SF hosts were quite firm – we were to stay put until they assessed if it was safe to travel the few km to the airfield. We didn't argue. However, by 0900 hours they agreed to take us and provided four Jeeps for the task. The front Jeep was manned by SF personnel with a mounted M-60 machine and two portable M-60s, then Stew and I in the second Jeep as passengers, Doug and Alexander in a third Jeep, and finally a fourth Jeep with another mounted M-60 bringing up the rear.

I remember that we didn't talk – we just looked. From what I could see Camp Holloway hadn't been hit too hard but there were obvious signs of action in the open areas and along the road. A number of US armoured tracked vehicles were disabled and burning by the roadside. Although the attacking forces must have had to travel light to reach Pleiku, they obviously had brought some heavy weapons. As we approached the airfield from the south-east, I can still see a small mound of bodies, presumably all NVA or Viet Cong about 100 metres from the road and near the airfield perimeter. The openness of this terrain must have provided easy targets for defending US gunners.

Although we were never warned of an impending attack on the night of the 30th, nor briefed after the event that the attack that night was one of many others in II Corps, it became clear decades later that the CIA and senior US commanders had an idea of what was coming. Stew's unease at seeing virtually



no aircraft on the ground the night before was well founded. Decades later, CIA intelligence reports became public, showing that the CIA had been tracking large NVA elements which they knew had been in the area for some time.



Map included with all versions of CIA reports: The situation in South Vietnam

Amazingly, RAAF Caribou A4-210 was sitting alone and intact, on the open and empty parking area. Apart from pure luck in not being hit by the rocket barrage aimed at the airstrip, she must have presented an easy target for NVA or Viet Cong troops attacking the airfield. However, despite evidence of action around the airfield perimeter, it was clear they never got close enough to destroy her. Stew wasn't so sure. A logical thought was that our aircraft may be booby trapped with explosives of some sort, so all four of us carefully checked every hole, panel and possible locations in the undercarriage bays where a grenade may be hidden. She was clean. Stew powered up the HF set and attempted to contact both Hilda and our squadron at Vung Tau. No contact. So here we were in the middle of the Central Highlands with a perfectly serviceable Caribou at a time when multiple locations were either under attack or recovering from one and expecting more.

Almost immediately, our SF hosts virtually pleaded with us to fly ammunition re-supply sorties into their most vulnerable A Team camps close to the border. Although it was Stew's call as detachment commander, we all agreed to help the SF for the day since it was clear that all other airlift aircraft of the 7th Air Force had been evacuated to the coast and there was no one else around to help. But we agreed amongst ourselves that we wouldn't spend another night in the

highlands. Instead, we planned to head for Nha Trang once we had done as much as we could during daylight. For the rest of the day we carried ammunition – lots of it. The first task was to the SF camp at Plei Me to the south west of Pleiku, then back to Pleiku for more ammo. By early afternoon we had also re-supplied the SF Camps of Plateau GI and Mang Buk, both located in the same river valley about 40nm to the north of Pleiku in the heart of the mountainous region of the Central Highlands.

As reported by the CIA, the attack on Pleiku was just one of a number of coordinated attacks against provincial capitals and concentrations of ARVN or US troops. The province of Kontum to the north of Pleiku had its capital at Kontum City, a short 21nm distant. Kontum had been hit even harder than Pleiku in the early hours and communist troops held the city. Our next ammunition supply task was to Kontum. Doug's detailed logbook shows we landed at Kontum at 1500 hours on 30 January. From US intelligence reports now accessible, it is clear that at this time there was significant action in Kontum City and near the airfield

Once on the ground, there was no one to be seen. We had spoken to the US forces by radio prior to landing but it was clear they didn't want to take the risk of unloading the aircraft. With pallet loads of



2.75 inch rockets marked for Kontum, Stew didn't want to take the risk of dropping them off the back ramp in case the rocket propellant, notoriously unstable, exploded. But there was no way we wanted to keep them on board and risk an airborne explosion triggered by enemy gunfire that was a more likely risk, given the action going on around us. So, leading from the front, Stew jumped on a handy forklift and delivered the rockets to the US forces who at that time, didn't seem too keen to collect them. Fighting continued in Kontum city for many days after our visit.

Once out of Kontum, we headed back to Pleiku for our last resupply task before ideally, heading to the coast for the night. But things don't always go to plan. Arriving back at Pleiku just after 1530 hours, Doug broke the news that we must have taken some enemy gunfire coming out of Kontum that had destroyed part of the right engine exhaust system. The resulting hot gases had burnt a small hole in the top surface of the aircraft skin. As an engine fitter by trade, Doug knew what to do, but he needed a spare part – a transitional tube component of the exhaust system. Since Pleiku was also frequented by USAF Caribous of the 483<sup>rd</sup> Tactical Airlift Wing on a regular basis, there was a shipping container of their spare parts adjacent to the parking area that contained the required part. Three hours after landing at Pleiku, Doug had fitted the part and put a temporary patch on the wing surface.



Doug Angus Vietnam 1968

After one more resupply run to Plei Djerang, we were now heading to the coast for the night - which was all very well in theory. However, Nha Trang had also been hit by the Communists the night before and the Americans said they were expecting more attacks that night. As such, they wouldn't activate the runway lights. With plenty of fuel on board, we headed home to our squadron base at Vung Tau, over 200 nm to the south. By this stage in the proceedings of Tet, Communist forces had made numerous attacks in, and around Saigon, to the north of Vung Tau. The result of all this action in the South of the country was that everyone, including the US Army air traffic controllers at Vung Tau, were a little on edge. They wouldn't turn on their runway lights either! But being our home base, and knowing the layout of the airfield runways relative to surrounding building lights, Stew flew a circuit and approach to the longer runway, aided by the Caribou's powerful landing lights that I turned on for him as we approached the runway.

Despite the uncertainty of which areas were secure and which weren't, we were allocated A4-208 as a replacement aircraft and were on our way north the next day to complete our detachment based at Nha Trang. We flew our first leg to the Plei Djerang camp direct from Vung Tau. From Plei Djerang it was across to Nha Trang to accept tasks from the local ALCE. The Nha Trang ALCE staff loaded our aircraft with ammunition, including a pallet of 2.75 inch rockets and tasked us to deliver this load to the Ban Me Thuot City strip rather than the usual Ban Me Thuot East airfield. Ban Me Thout had been subjected to attack the day before in the early hours of 30th January, and heavy fighting in the city was still going on. The larger Ban Me Thout East strip had been overrun by communist forces.

The Ban Me Thuot City strip was mixed PSP and earth and was a comfortable length for us at 4400 feet, orientated south west to north east with the built-up areas of the city not far off the western boundary of the airfield. Presumably due to a westerly or southerly wind component we landed toward the south west and taxied to the relatively small parking area on the north side of the strip. Fortunately, the parking area was serviced by two narrow taxiways forming a one-way system for airlift aircraft to enter via one taxiway, off-load in the parking area and exit via the second taxiway. In that way departing aircraft would not need to wait for arriving aircraft to clear the taxiway.

Like most airstrips that supported ARVN or US Army units, there was a small wooden tower where a US army soldier would provide simple guidance by radio relating to security, air traffic and wind



direction. I was flying this sector as I had done with many of sectors over the last few days. We taxied into the parking area behind a C-123 that was in the process of unloading. At about this time the tower operator, with considerable urgency in his voice, notified us that enemy forces were swarming over the simple airfield perimeter fence on the city side of the airfield. His advice was quite clear – we should get the heck out of here as soon as possible – and he was heading for the bunker. Stew can recall seeing him coming down the tower ladder in a hurry. Stew immediately instructed Doug to prepare for a ‘speed unload’ of the pallets of ammunition. The loadmasters knew precisely what to do – this involved removing all restraining straps and positioning the electrically operated back ramp at a slight downwards angle so that the pallets, when rolled backwards on the roller tracks in the cabin, would slide off the back of the aircraft assisted by gravity. A speed unload wasn’t a procedure that was documented in any squadron manual or standard operating procedure, but it had been used by some crews in the past to minimise time on the ground at risky locations. It was a good example of necessity being the mother of invention.

From a pilot’s point of view, once the load was ready, the procedure required the pilot to select reverse thrust and start backing the aircraft at about 10 knots. This gave the unrestrained pallets a rearward momentum. At that point, the pilot had to deselect reverse thrust and put the propellers into forward thrust with the pallets rolling out the back and down the ramp. But there was a risk here. Before transiting from rearward movement in reverse thrust to forward movement, application of the mainwheel brakes could result in the aircraft tipping back on its tail. With a heavy load moving to the rear of the aircraft, application of the brakes would most likely have resulted in us stuck with our nose in the air and on this occasion, sitting ducks for the approaching enemy troops. Stew commented later that at that time he wasn’t sure if I had ever conducted this informal procedure, or even heard about it. But there wasn’t time to have a careful briefing or even ask if I knew what I was doing. Luckily, he needn’t have worried. Reversing the Caribou was something I had done many times, particularly in New Guinea and I’d been in-country long enough to learn about the ‘speed unload’ procedure from other pilots via informal ‘Officers Mess bar briefings’.

There was also a risk that we could be blown up by our own actions. Although most ammunition such as boxes of 7.62 calibre rounds and larger 105/115 mm artillery shells are relatively stable when subjected to an external force, the stability of the rocket propellant in the 2.75 inch rockets as they dropped about a metre to the ground was a bit of an unknown. But the unloading took no more than 30 seconds and we were still in one piece. Now to get the heck out of there. The C-123 beat us to the runway and immediately turned toward the south west on his take-off roll toward the city – and the attacking troops.



**Stewart McAlister – as a Caribou Commanding Officer in 1981**

There was very little time to discuss our departure options. With very few words exchanged between the two of us, Stew briefed that he would do the checks and set the flaps for take-off as I followed the C123 on the take-off roll as quick as I could. Once airborne, we agreed that I would execute a hard low-level turn to the left as soon as the wheels were off the ground. That way, we would try and minimize our exposure to the large number of enemy troops who we could see were now at the far end of the runway. Without a load on board, the Caribou was in the air in a few hundred metres from where the taxiway joined the runway. I was used to very low level flying from New Guinea, so as agreed, at about 20 feet above the ground I turned hard left through about 90 degrees



and flew as low as I dared over the rubber trees to the south of the strip. As the aircraft gathered speed with maximum power except for take-off (METO) selected by Stew, I kept the aircraft at about 20 feet above the trees until we reached our maximum allowed speed of 165 knots and then converted that excess speed to height in the Caribou's version of a zoom climb. By now we would have been about 5nm south of the airfield.

In the short period that it took for us to affect our escape, things hadn't gone so well for the C-123. At the time of our hurried take-off, we were amazed to see that the C-123 had continued his take-off straight ahead, over the heads of the attacking troops and presumably their comrades in the city itself. As a result, he took a significant amount of small arms fire. As we were climbing to a safe height following our low-level run over the rubber trees, the C-123 announced over the radio he'd lost his left engine due to ground fire and requested assistance from us in inspecting damage to his aircraft. We happily offered to help and as we were now at a safe height, Stew took control and manoeuvred to take a closer look. From memory we both can't recall any obvious external damage other than he'd shut an engine down. From there we flew in loose company back to Nha Trang on the coast.

The next day, 1st February, was relatively straightforward. Perhaps because the expected attacks on SF camps hadn't been as intense as anticipated, and with the Communists focused on major centres, we flew just one SF camp re-supply to Dak Seang out of Pleiku in the morning, before returning to Nha Trang. From there we completed our eventful 005 Mission detachment with flights to scheduled airfields in the Central Highlands, Tan San Nhut at Saigon and return to Vung Tau. Although we didn't seek to make too much of our week's activity with our Vung Tau colleagues when discussing what had happened, we were surprised many years later to learn that a full record of the week was never made.

At the completion of the week's unique operations, all four of us felt a sense of satisfaction at having done our job in challenging circumstances. On reflection years later, I put our success down to a combination of determination, ready acceptance of possible physical harm that came with the job in a war zone, exceptional training provided by the RAAF and the delegation by RAAF commanders to let front line crews make their own tactical decisions. Although the success of the week was the result of the combined effort of a four man crew, many of the decisions were ultimately the responsibility of the senior person on the day, so it was appropriate for the departing CO to recommend Stew, as detachment commander, for a well-deserved Mentioned In Dispatches (MID) award as follows:

*On 30<sup>th</sup> January, Flg Off W S McAlister, was captain of an aircraft operating out of Pleiku remained at Pleiku when the airfield and nearby town were attacked by a strong Viet Cong force. Despite the danger that the airfield may have been overrun, he remained after all other aircraft had evacuated the area to complete two re-supply missions. These missions were to airfields where US Army forces were badly in need of the ammunition which he delivered.*

*On the following day Flg Off McAlister again showed outstanding determination and great courage when he flew ammunition into Ban Me Thuot whilst the airfield was under heavy fire from enemy mortars and small arms.*

It should have been a Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC)!



Black boxes may be replacing pilots, but pilots can be maintained easily and produced by unskilled labor.

As George Carlin said, "If black boxes survive crashes, why don't they make the whole airplane out of that stuff?"

I'm at the age when I realize the best thing about flying fighters was free oxygen.





## Airman of the Year 2020

*Reprinted with permission from CONTACT magazine*



**Corporal Daniel Loane has been awarded the Air Vice Marshal B.A. Eaton Award, Air Force Airman of the Year for 2020.**

Photo by Sergeant Pete Gammie.

**R**ecognised for service excellence, Communication Electronic Technician Corporal Daniel Loane has been named the Air Force Airman of the Year for 2020. Corporal Loane's leadership, exemplary judgement and technical mastery led to the award nomination, supported by his significant service contribution to Operation COVID-19 Assist. He joined the Air Force in 2011 and is based at RAAF Base Darwin as the No. 114 Mobile Control and Reporting Unit (114MCRU) maintenance manager within the tactical air defence system section.

Reflecting on his career, Corporal Loane said military service played a significant role in his personal development and he was honoured to receive the Airman of the Year Award. "In today's RAAF, becoming a confident speaker, leader, coach, mentor and manager are all part of standard progression and you receive all the resources you need to achieve success in your life," Corporal Loane said. "I thought that being 'the nomination' from 114MCRU was a great win. To be held in a high regard by my colleagues and chain of command is a job well done kind of thing. "I don't know if there is any greater confidence that can be bestowed on someone in my position as a relatively new corporal. It makes me feel confident in my ability, trusted by the organisation to be a role model for those around me and encourages me to share what I have learned and experienced."

Corporal Loane said his nomination referred to his response to a civilian vehicle accident near the remote Northern Territory checkpoint he worked at for the operation. "As Joint Task Unit 629.7.2 detachment commander at the remote Tanami checkpoint in the Northern Territory, I was certainly out of my technician comfort zone, however to be a part of a whole-of-government operation was an amazing experience and one that I am proud to have been involved in" he said. "Ensuring the safety of civilian commuters on that day and assisting them on their safe return to their loved ones was an honour and a privilege." Corporal Loane's proactive approach to community engagement across the region during his deployment laid strong foundations for a closer relationship with the ADF and the community into the future, demonstrating leadership beyond his worn rank.

Commanding Officer 114MCRU, Wing Commander Sean Gell, said Corporal Loane's technical mastery and collaborative approach ensured the generation of a positive learning culture toward the delivery of capability for mission success. "Corporal Loane set an exceptional standard throughout



2020 and, with a significantly reduced team, maintained the section output while fostering an exceptional rapport with the operations team,” Wing Commander Gell said. “The net result of this has been an open and frank dialogue that provides the operators with an enhanced understanding of system faults and remediation while consolidating the trust between the two sections – genuinely creating a single team, focused on the effective delivery of Air Force capability. “Additionally, his development and implementation of the Mobile Control and Reporting Unit deployment guide has ensured that his efforts to drive technical mastery will endure beyond his tenure within the unit.”

Reflecting Defence Values through his service contributions and community efforts, Corporal Loane also regularly volunteers to represent Air Force within the wider community. This, together with all of his service achievements throughout 2020 were collectively recognised as part of his nomination. “I join with 114MCRU in congratulating Corporal Loane as a worthy recipient of the award. His initiative and RAAF bearing are an example to his peers and of great benefit to the Air Force. 114MCRU is proud of his achievements,” Wing Commander Gell said.

Commander Surveillance and Response Group, Air Commodore Barbara Courtney, also extended her congratulations to Corporal Loane. “As Commander of our incredible Surveillance and Response Group team, it gives me no greater pleasure than to witness the acknowledgement of our bright young talent and the incredible work they do,” Air Commodore Courtney said. “Corporal Loane’s commitment to the continual improvement of 114MCRU capability, and his superior performance as a corporal has been exceptional, and he can be justly proud of his efforts.” The Air Vice Marshal B.A. Eaton ‘Airman of the Year’ Award is awarded to an airman of the rank of corporal or below to recognise the calibre of the individual and their significant contribution to the Service and community.

The full list of award winners is:

- **Air Force APS Team Member of the Year Award:** Michael Docherty, Air Force Training Group, awarded to an APS employee who exemplifies APS and Air Force values and makes an outstanding contribution to Air Force.
- **Chief of Air Force Instructor of the Year Award:** Flight Lieutenant Adon Lumley, Air Mission Training School, this award highlights the unquestionable importance of training and education to the Air Force and formally recognises the commissioned officer who has excelled in this field.
- **Warrant Officer of the Air Force Instructor of the Year Award:** Sergeant Bree Godfrey, School of Postgraduate Studies, this award highlights the unquestionable importance of training and education to the Air Force and formally recognises the instructor who has excelled in this field.
- **Her Majesty the Queen’s Gold Medal:** Pilot Officer Cameron Clark, No. 79 Squadron, awarded by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to the most outstanding officer trainee from OTS or ADFA to recognise exemplary conduct, outstanding performance of duty, and influence on fellow officers.
- **Squadron Leader WT Riggs Trophy:** Sergeant Chris Dickson, No. 464 Squadron, awarded for the best official photograph of the year.
- **Lipshut Family Bursary:** Corporal Megan MacAuslan, Defence Force Recruiting, provides an education bursary to an outstanding airman or airwoman of the rank of corporal and below.
- **Air Force Association Trophy:** Headquarters Air Force Training Group, awarded for proficiency and contribution by Force Element Groups and Wing Headquarters.
- **Duke of Gloucester Cup:** No. 10 Squadron, awarded to the most proficient flying squadron.
- **Hawker Siddeley Trophy:** No. 26 Squadron, awarded to the most proficient unit with primarily whole-of-base functions.
- **Markowski Cup:** No. 3 Aeromedical Evacuation Squadron, awarded to the most proficient specialist support unit.
- **RAAF Maintenance Trophy:** No. 36 Squadron, awarded to the most proficient Air Force maintenance unit in recognition of their engineering and technical excellence.
- **Stonehaven Trophy:** Air Mobility Training and Development Unit, awarded to the most proficient training unit.





## National President's Message

*From Carl Schiller OAM, CSM*

### ADF Firefighter Scheme

In previous SITREPs I have mentioned the contamination exposure of our ADF, mainly Air Force, Firefighters who were trained and employed at the Point Cook base during the late fifties through to the end of 1986. A group of these firefighters had been advocating for a decade to Government for recognition of the exposure and the numerous serious health issues that many of these veterans have suffered over the years.

In late 2018, AFA Ltd took up the case with DVA and Air Force. DVA over the years had commissioned several epidemiological studies into the ground samples from the former RAAF Fire School site at the base to determine the possible health effects from exposure to the various chemicals identified in the soil. The studies undertaken by world renowned occupational physicians revealed the possibility of many very serious cancerous and non-cancerous conditions from exposure. However, these studies could not provide the level of proof required under the applicable veteran support Act linking the exposure to the health conditions suffered by many of these firefighters. Regularity and extent of exposure to the myriad of noxious chemicals in the ground soil were impossible to determine.

Noting the limitations of the applicable veteran support legislation to support these veterans, AFA Ltd argued with DVA there was a distinct likelihood of injury based on the epidemiological investigations. It also argued that firefighting had been recognised in various State legislations as a hazardous occupation, which contained recognition of certain cancerous conditions associated with firefighting. Also, Section 7 (8) of the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 provided similar protection for Defence firefighters.

However, Commonwealth Acts containing presumptive clauses 'looked forward' precluding protection of firefighters in this earlier cohort. Indeed, firefighters who were based at Amberley during the F111 Deseal/Reseal period of activity were covered by presumptive legislation, that is they did not have to prove they contracted a recognised health condition, but only that they had been employed as a firefighter at the base during the applicable period. Adding to the argument was the global recognition of the hazardous nature of firefighting with most states within the USA providing similar presumptive recognition.

Following many hours of negotiation, numerous briefs, and interviews with DVA staff and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Morrison Government announced in its Federal Budget 2021-22 a financial and health support package for ADF Firefighters who served at the RAAF Base Point Cook Fire Training School between January 1st, 1957 and December 31st, 1986. The ADF Firefighter Scheme, as it is to be known, is in recognition of the potential for health effects from being exposed to a wide range of hazardous substances during historical fire training, when Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was not of the same standard available today. Thirty-one cancerous and non-cancerous conditions have been acknowledged.

Approximately 300 former ADF firefighters are likely to benefit. DVA recently advised about 120 firefighter veterans have registered their intention to claim when processing begins in September this year. Interest in the Scheme should be sent to [ADF.FIREFIGHTER.SHEME@DVA.GOV.AU](mailto:ADF.FIREFIGHTER.SHEME@DVA.GOV.AU) with service details and any existing claims details (if you have them). Recognition for these firefighters is a significant achievement for the Association. We should be proud to be a member of an organisation that is ready to stand beside our fellow veterans and their families and advocate on their behalf.

### Air Force Association Foundation

Previously, I also mentioned the National Board's agreement to establish an AFA Foundation, which has CAF's support. Last month, the Board agreed to the Foundation's Objects that will provide its Board of Management wide scope to approve proposals that will address whole of life well-being of veterans and/or their dependants. Note, the Foundation would support all veterans regardless of their Service origin.



Directors also endorsed the development of an AFA national homeless veteran and family support scheme as a 'start-up' project for the AFA Foundation. Initially, the Foundation would focus its support and fundraising for a WA Division's veteran homeless initiative and any other divisions that wished to embark on a similar endeavour. Further initiatives that fall within the scope of the Foundation's Objects would be considered once the Foundation becomes operational and has sufficient funding.

A Trust Deed has been finalised and the Foundation is seeking Deductible Gift Recipient status. A formal AFA Foundation brand is to be created and a Board of Management identified. Further, AFA Ltd has engaged a professional fundraising company specialising in the not-for-profit sector to establish a case for seed funding to determine the potential to raise funds for a homelessness recovery scheme. The initial task will take up to three months to complete and cost AFA Ltd \$27.5K. The establishment of the Foundation is an exciting initiative that aims to benefit veterans and families throughout the country and is another opportunity for all Divisions to become actively involved.

#### Air Force/Air Force Association Alumni Group

CAF has supported the idea of an Air Force/Air Force Association Alumni Group. It will provide an opportunity to better connect former serving and serving members. AFA Ltd is about to commence work on this task and welcomes any member who may be interested in joining an Alumni Working Group to help progress this initiative. Interested members should contact Peter Colliver, National Secretary at [natsec@raafa.org.au](mailto:natsec@raafa.org.au).

#### Air Force 2021 and Avalon 2021

Air Force intends to further commemorate its 100th Anniversary at Point Cook later this year to coincide with Avalon 2021. I will be meeting with AF2021 Branch early next month to discuss how the Association may assist in publicising the various events. Advice will be provided to Divisions.

#### Lastly

The Association continues to further strengthen its relationship with Air Force. It has achieved a great outcome with the ADF Firefighter toxic exposure case and is well underway with its AFA Foundation initiative. It continues to provide considered responses to calls for input on veteran and family matters, which can be viewed on the National website. Despite COVID, the Association is moving forward.



## **Recollections from my days as OC TVL**

*From Peter Scully*

**M**y rank as OCTVL was GPCAPT and my opposite Army commander was a Brigadier – and never the twain did meet, as the Brig was not too keen on the RAAF. My staff car was a very, very old Ford LTD which had air conditioning. The Brig had a brand new posh Ford, which did not have the benefit of cooling. This incensed the Brig who complained to Canberra that this 'junior' officer had this benefit but he, being senior, did not: unfair.

The following is true. I received a direction from Canberra to remove the air-con from my car. However, being in Nth Qld 'the South' was Brisbane, and below that was not recognised. So, I did nothing about it and whoever ordered this nonsense didn't check, so I continued my tour in comfort.

Despite the animosity of our relationship, on his posting the Army commander called at my office asking a favour: Could he have use of one of our crash boats to entertain the local dignitaries. I would have loved to have said: 'No' but I weakened and gave permission. They went out to the reef fishing and that evening he invited all to dinner at the Army Mess. I was not invited – fortunately, as it turned out. They dined on the fish they'd caught including some very large Coral Trout. They all came down with ciguatera poisoning with several admitted to hospital, including the Mayor. So I had the last laugh – mean of me I know, but nevertheless.





## The Cook

*From Tomas 'Paddy' Hamilton, 13 April 2021*

*Dedicated to my late father in law, Private Thomas Bateson Saunders NX104684*

He had so many nicknames, tucker fu&%er and bait layer  
But when an army marches on its stomach, he is the major player  
Our cook could serve up anything boiled, baked or fried  
Like the medic and the pay clerk you always kept him on side

When the CSM would charge you, on evidence unfounded  
Epsom salts in his coffee, would keep him truly grounded  
You only had to do it once and he soon got the drift  
No one knew who did it, the result was always swift

If stray cats were a plague, he always knew  
When it was time to rustle up, a hearty rabbit stew  
There was always plenty of stock around and no one made a fuss  
Even when a tuft of pelt, looked a little sus

Should unexpected troops arrive and leave him somewhat short  
It didn't seem to bother him, for this was his retort  
"They say the good Lord Jesus, served five thousand souls and more  
Some extra flour and water, will feed the whole corps."

One day he looked like death warmed up, all that was missing was the wreath  
When he had finished throwing up, he couldn't find his teeth  
We didn't see them anywhere, no matter how hard we did forage  
Then, they were located, in the boiler with the porridge

We were in the pub one Friday night and when Cookie appeared  
He told us he'd won the seafood tray, but it had disappeared  
It was discovered some days later, and it seemed so bizarre  
His missus found it sitting on the back seat of her new car

Poor Cookie has long left us, to that cookhouse in the sky  
He may not have worn a Michelin hat, but at least he had a try  
Like so many of our company, he failed the final test  
Some succumbed to their demons, Agent Orange took the rest

Generals receive the glory, for what their troops achieve  
Aching hearts and memories, for loved ones left to grieve  
A laugh is worth a thousand tears, as the years roll by  
For they will never be erased, no matter how hard they try.



Don't irritate old people. The older we get the less 'Life in prison' is a deterrent.

I'm on two diets. I wasn't getting enough food on one.

I really don't mind getting older, but my body is taking it badly.





## AFA Ballina Branch RAAF Centenary Celebration

*From Luz Osborn, wife of Peter Osborn, Vice President RAAFA Ballina*

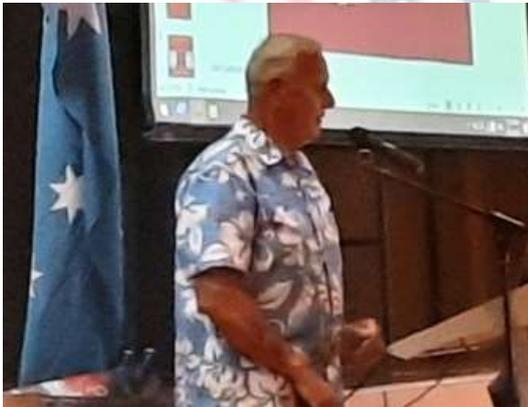
Every achievement calls for a celebration. Yes indeed, as The Royal Australian Air Force has reached its milestone - 100 years of great service both within and without Australia. Australia relies on the Royal Australian Air Force both in conflict and peace. To reach 100 years is a big step, a great achievement I should say. Active service it is and is still growing strong through the years. Serving with The Royal Australian Air Force requires commitment and dedication. Wholeheartedly, our men and women have



The oldest and youngest members cutting the RAAF 100 cake

given all their love and lives in order to serve Australia with great pride and joy in their hearts. Loving is serving as our Royal Australian Air Force is ready to respond any time they are called on duty. They stay connected and together they value our culture and history and come what may, they are always willing to serve without any hesitation.

Happiness mixed with sadness was in the hearts of those who attended the lunch celebration at Ballina RSL Club on Sunday, 28th March 2021. Happiness that Australia is enjoying the freedom that we have now; sadness that it cost the lives of our valuable men and women who paid the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. Everybody deserves to rejoice and be grateful for the many blessings that we have received, be they great or small. A BIG thanks to Dick and Colleen Wills who arranged for the celebratory luncheon which was a huge success, being attended by one hundred adults and two children.



John Thurgar, recounting the recovery of Magpie 91

John Thurgar shared the story of two young men, Pilot Officer Robert Carver (navigator) and Flying Officer Michael Herbert (pilot), the crew of Magpie 91, who went missing during a bombing mission in November 1970 in Vietnam. Their comrades tried to find their missing mates without success, and so they left Vietnam with heavy hearts. John Thurgar and his Mission Team had commenced searching for Carver and Herbert's bodies, and no matter the cost, they were determined to find for those missing heroes. Fortunately, the Vietnam Government and various other contacts were able and willing to help.

The search teams toiled in the rugged terrain, rain or shine and it was no easy task; like trying to find the proverbial needle in a haystack. After 29 agonising years, victory at last! The Rescue Team's hard work had paid off. They found the bodies and the wreckage of their Canberra bomber in a remote hillside area in Quang Nam province in the South Central Coast region of Vietnam, near the Laotian border. Carver and Herbert were the last Australians who had been found and repatriated to Australia. It was "Mission Accomplished". Well done! Salute to our Royal Australian Air Force!

*We Will Remember Them  
Lest We Forget*





## Nearly A King Hit

*This material is compiled from various sources including the History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, the RAAF Museum, the Australian War Memorial, ADF Serials and [www.ozatwar.com](http://www.ozatwar.com). The History and Heritage Branch–Air Force is not responsible for pre-1921 items. Whilst every effort is made to confirm the accuracy of the entries, any discrepancies are solely the responsibility of the originator. As I am not a member of History and Heritage Branch-Air Force, all Air Force history or heritage queries should be directed, in the first instance, to [airforce.history@defence.gov.au](mailto:airforce.history@defence.gov.au)*

Allan Nesbitt of Bathurst, NSW had an unusual experience at 4(c) OTU at Aness, Scotland which he describes here.

During training we were flying over the Pentland Firth, between Scotland and the Orkney Islands, when we came across the magnificent sight of a huge armada of battleships and large vessels, all apparently having just left their base at Scapa Flow. We were idly enjoying the unusual spectacle, never having seen so many ships together before when a voice on our intercom said, ‘Hey skipper, I think they’re signalling to us from that battleship with the Aldis Lamp’.



But it was no Aldis Lamp! Before we could reply we were surrounded by puffs of black smoke from close ack-ack bursts. I can assure you that no Spitfire pilot could have bettered the evasive action taken by the skipper of our Sunderland. We learned afterwards that King George VI was visiting the fleet on manoeuvres and the Navy was either taking no chances, or just showing off their ack-ack prowess. Surely they couldn’t mistake a Sunderland for a JU-88 we thought? Of course, no one had told us to avoid the area, and as we found out later, the Navy was not too crash-hot on aircraft identification. We never found out whether they were aiming at us, or firing wide warning shots.

Still cranky about this episode, we were sent on a liaison course at an RN base at Londonderry, Northern Ireland and spent a day on a submarine in Lorne Harbour, west Scotland, crash-diving and re-surfacing while several Coastal Command squadrons did practice bombing runs over us. All great stuff, but I was amazed to discover that the submarine gun crews could not recognise any of the aircraft involved - Sunderlands, Catalinas and Liberators, whereas we had to be proficient in both aircraft and ship recognition.

However, the Navy rose to the occasion when we all retired to the CPO’s Mess, when they ‘spliced the main brace’; which consisted of a tumbler three parts full of Jamaican Rum, which they insisted we drink - it being a tradition - or risk offending them. The resulting feeling of ‘walking on a cloud’ for several hours afterwards certainly overcame our fears of claustrophobia in the sub.

SKYLARKS - the lighter side of life in the RAAF in WWII, edited by Eric Brown



## The Gathering of Eagles

*From Grahame Carroll, President, Albury-Wodonga Branch*

The Gathering of Eagles event at the Albury War Memorial on Monument Hill at 7:00am on Wednesday 31 March 2021 was well attended and reported. We had a large contingent of RAAF personnel from the Army Logistic Training Centre and good before-school attendance by 412 SQN AAFC cadets. The RAAF Ensign flew all day on Monument Hill.

The Gala Dinner held at RAAF Base Wagga on the evening of the same day focused on Wagga's role in the WWII Empire Air Training Scheme, the Riverina locations involved, and the base's current and future outlook. The local member and Deputy PM were the principal guests.





## Sunrise to mark Centenary

*From Grahame Carroll, President, Albury-Wodonga Branch*

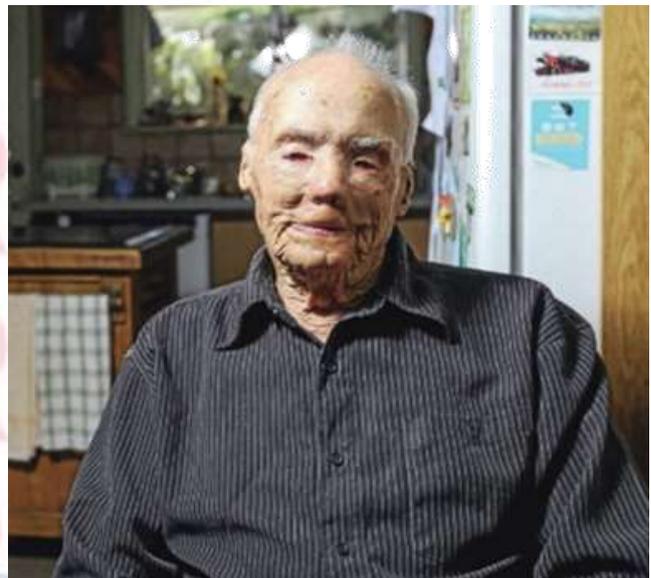
The Royal Australian Air Force's centenary was observed at sunrise in Albury by a man who has witnessed nearly all of its achievements. RAAF Korean veteran Charlie Boase cut the cake at an anniversary event put on by the Albury-Wodonga branch of the Air Force Association.

"I've had 91 of those 100 years," Mr Boase said. "When I joined up in 1950, the aeroplanes that were around then were unsophisticated - if I got inside of one now, I wouldn't know what to do. "The Hercules came in about two years before I got out, and before that we were training on Tiger Moths. "They were the modern planes then."

A fly over of Albury by a 76SQN Winjeel was conducted on the 31<sup>st</sup> March to mark the anniversary, The Winjeel was a training aircraft that Mr Boase knew well as a mechanic and driver. "They got rid of the Tiger Moth and the Wirraway and replaced them with the Winjeel" he said. "I joined the Air Force to learn to fly, and they said I wouldn't make pilot. They said you'll be sent off as a navigator, so I did 12 months on a navigator's course and didn't like it, so I went back to truck driving."

Although Mr Boase was badly injured when an aircraft he was working on exploded in 1954, the Air Force gave him much. "Aside from all of that ... there was the mateship. I also met my wife there" he said.

The commemoration was organised by the Air Force Association Albury-Wodonga branch president Grahame Carroll. "We wanted to reflect on the very start of the first day 100 years ago, with the raising of the of the ensign at sunrise" he said. "Services like the RAAF don't chalk up 100 years all that often and there are a lot of other air forces around the world that are much younger than ours." Mr Carroll said Australian military aviation commenced not long before the start of World War I with the Australian Flying Corps. The first aircraft flew from Point Cook in 1914 and the AFC conducted operations as part of the Australian Imperial Force in the Middle East and Europe.



**RAAF Korean War veteran Charlie Boase**

Picture: Tara Trehwella



## More Than One Use for a Briefcase

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Patrick Gordon Taylor was rejected by the Australian Flying Corps but travelled to the UK and was commissioned in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). He saw service with the RFC's Nos 66, 88 and 94 Squadrons attaining the rank of Captain and awarded the Military Cross in 1917. Returning to Australia in 1919, he flew as a private pilot, worked for De Havilland Aircraft Co. in England, completed an engineering course and studied aerial navigation. He operated a Gipsy Moth seaplane from Sydney Harbour (1928-32) and also flew as a captain with Australian National Airlines Ltd (1930-31). He was second pilot and navigator in the Fokker *Southern Cross* on Sir Charles Kingsford Smith's 1933 and 1934 flights (Australia-New Zealand-Australia) and navigator aboard Charles Ulm's



Avro Ten Faith in Australia for two flights in 1933 (Australia-England-Australia). Disappointed at missing the Victorian Centenary Air Race, 'Smithy' and Taylor completed the first Australia-United States of America flight, via Suva and Hawaii (21 October–4 November 1934) in the Lockheed Altair, *Lady Southern Cross*.

On 15 May 1935, Taylor was Kingsford Smith's navigator in the *Southern Cross* for the King George V jubilee airmail flight (Australia-New Zealand). After flying for six hours, the heavily laden aircraft had almost reached half-way when part of the centre engine's exhaust manifold broke off and severely damaged the starboard propeller.

'Smithy' closed down the vibrating starboard engine, applied full power to the other two, turned back to Australia and jettisoned the cargo. The oil pressure on the port engine began to fall alarmingly. The flight appeared doomed. Taylor reacted heroically. Climbing out of the fuselage, he edged



Undated photograph of Kingsford Smith in front of the Southern Cross

his way against the strong slipstream along the engine connecting strut and collected oil from the disabled starboard engine (*Ed: From the title, presumably in his briefcase*) before transferring it to the port engine. With assistance from the wireless operator, John Stannage, he carried out this procedure six times before the aircraft landed safely at Mascot some nine hours later. For his resourcefulness and courage, Taylor was awarded the Empire Gallantry Medal, gazetted on 9 July 1937; this medal was superseded by the George Cross, instituted in May 1941.



## Ex-RAAF Centenarian Gets Surprise Service Memento

*Reprinted with permission from CONTACT Magazine*

World War II veteran George Lincoln was presented a Royal Australian Air Force 100th birthday commemorative memento on 11 May as part of the centenary year project to honour RAAF centenarians.

Mr Lincoln turned 100 on February 25. He was born in the Sydney suburb of Marrickville and enlisted in the Air Force from his home at the nearby suburb of Arncliffe in October 1942, at the age of 21. During his six months of training at Point Cook, Victoria, he learned Morse code. He was later posted to Western Australia where he served the remainder of his time with the Air Force. Mr Lincoln worked as a telephonist sending coded meteorological messages back to Perth from regions including Broome, Nookanbah near the Fitzroy Crossing, Potshot, Kalgoorlie and Forrest Airfield.

“I posted out of 327 Radar Unit to Nookanbah, which was a new aerodrome with only four signal operators making up a total of about 12 men,” Mr Lincoln said. “We camped two miles from the Fitzroy River which was 250 miles inland from Broome and when it rained, the river flooded three miles wide. “We had to erect tents up about 2-3 feet which helped a bit and during the wet season we would catch sawfish, which were as big as sharks, and the cooks would prepare and cook them for us.”



Mr Lincoln discharged from the Royal Australian Air Force in March 1946 as a leading aircraftman, having served his final six months at Forrest. He went on to breed, train and racehorses in Victoria – many winning at Mooney Valley Racing Club.



**Senior Australian Defence Force Officer for RAAF Base Williamtown Group Captain Anthony Stainton presents George Lincoln a Royal Australian Air Force centenary memento.**

Story by Wing Commander Sue Yates. Photo by Sergeant David Gibbs.

Senior Australian Defence Force Officer for RAAF Base Williamtown, Group Captain Anthony Stainton, presented Mr Lincoln with the commemorative memento in recognition of his service in a small private ceremony at Port Macquarie, NSW, with his wife of 58 years, Ruth, his daughter Catherine and close friends. Mr Lincoln said he was surprised to be contacted to receive the memento. “It was quite a surprise to receive the call from the Air Force as I haven’t been actively engaged with the services since I discharged in

Moore Park, NSW, in 1946,” Mr Lincoln said. Group Captain Stainton said he was proud and privileged to make the presentations to past-serving centenarians who celebrate their birthday in Air Force’s centenary year.



## Preparations For Royal Commission Moves To Next Phase

*From the Office of the Hon. Darren Chester, Minister for Veterans Affairs, Minister for Defence Personnel Canberra ACT, Saturday 22 May 2021*

**P**reparation for the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has moved into the next phase. Over the past month I have had discussions with hundreds of veterans, serving members and families across the nation. The feedback has been extremely positive and constructive and while opinions have been incredibly diverse, we all have one common goal: to prevent suicide within the Defence and veteran communities.

More than 1400 pieces of written feedback on the themes that will inform the Terms of Reference have been received by DVA alone. Some of the common areas of concern identified throughout the consultation process relate to the transition process from Defence to civilian life, dealing with DVA in accessing assistance and the complexity of the legislation and the claims process, as well as mental health support, operational tempo and rotations, negative treatment of personnel, and a number of issues that impact families of those who serve. Publication of the feedback is optional and where consent has been provided, DVA has been progressively making these available on the website.

The consultation phase has now concluded and all feedback provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) will be passed to the Attorney-General’s Department, who will draft the Terms of Reference. This is standard practice for a Royal Commission, and as evidenced by the Aged Care and Disability Royal Commissions, the community can have complete confidence in that process. To be clear, DVA, the Australian Defence Force and the Department of Defence are not involved in the conduct of the Royal Commission itself or the drafting of the Terms of Reference. The Royal Commission itself will be completely independent of Government.

We have a world-class system of support for veterans and their families and Australians can be proud of the fact that \$11.8 billion in taxpayers money is provided every year to allow DVA to do its work. There’s an enormous amount of help available through DVA, ex-service organisations and community



groups which is making a difference every day and it is so important that none of this stops during the course of the Royal Commission. But the system isn't perfect and the Royal Commission is an opportunity to identify any weaknesses, listen to the ideas of Australians, and implement changes that can help to save lives.

I would like to thank all those in the community who have provided their feedback. And for any member of the ADF, veteran or their families who may be struggling as a result of this process, please reach out to Open Arms Veterans and Families Counselling on 1800 011 046. Help is available.

- [The Defence all-hours Support Line](#) is a confidential telephone and online service for ADF members and their families **1800 628 036**
- [Open Arms](#) provides 24-hour free and confidential counselling and support for current and former ADF members and their families **1800 011 046**

Media Contacts:

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DVA Media: 02 6289 6466



## 5SQN Article in Last Issue Stirs Memory

*From Wal Nelowkin WGCDR Eng Aero (Ret'd)*

I have met a number of the people mentioned in *SITREP*, and have connections (some tenuous) with aircraft and places mentioned in the stories. My first posting as a Pilot Officer Eng Aero was on-the-job-training (OJT) at 5 SQN RAAF Fairbairn in 1968.

When I was on Engineer Basic Course at Wagga in 1969, I met some of the 5 SQN Huey Pilots on detachment (doing helo training in 'quiet' airspace). I had a car while there, so I got volunteered as Duty Driver for a Pub/RSL run into Wagga one night. I drank Coke, so that I would be able to safely transport my 'Huey Heroes' back to Forest Hill after they had lost their money to the RSL's pokies.

On the way back to base, one of my back seat pax decided to convert my Ford Zephyr Mk I to remote control. He covered my eyes from behind, and gave verbal steering instructions – which actually kept me on the 'straight and narrow'. This continued for a few minutes, until the Huey driver's mates protested, and told him to allow me to go back to Visual Driving Rules (VDR). 'Nil Vision Rules' (NVR) was definitely harder than Instrument Flight Rules (IFR).



**The Ford Zephyr Mk I used for the NVR driver experiment**

We survived this impromptu remote control driving experiment, but had I run into a tree, I think that the Wagga constabulary wouldn't believe what the primary cause would have been. Luckily, I can't recall the name of the person responsible – just as well I guess. I now know what was meant by the term 'flying blind'.





## Clear Definition of Politics

*From John Clarkson*

A Russian Jew named Jacob was finally allowed to emigrate to Israel. At the Moscow airport, a customs inspector found a statue of Lenin in his luggage. “What is this?” Jacob replied, “Wrong question, comrade. You should have asked ‘Who is this?’ This is Comrade Lenin. He laid the foundations of Socialism and created the future prosperity of the Russian people. I am taking it with me as a memory of our dear hero”. The Russian customs official sent him on his way. At Tel Aviv airport, the Israeli customs official also saw the statue and asked, “What is this?” “Wrong question, sir. You should be asking ‘Who is this?’ This, my friend, is Lenin, the bastard who caused me, a Jew, to leave Russia. I take this statue as a reminder to curse him every day”. The Israeli official sent him on his way.

When he settled in his new home, Jacob placed the statue on a table. The following evening, he invited friends and relatives to dinner. Spotting the statue, one of his cousins asked, “Who is this?” Jacob replied, “Wrong question. You should have asked ‘What is this?’ This is five kilograms of solid gold that I managed to bring with me without having to pay any customs duty or tax”.

The Moral: “Politics is when you can tell the same story in different ways to fool different people and come out smelling like a rose”.



## RAAF Received its First Jet Aircraft

5 June 1946

*This material is compiled from various sources including the History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, the RAAF Museum, the Australian War Memorial, ADF Serials and [www.ozatwar.com](http://www.ozatwar.com). The History and Heritage Branch–Air Force is not responsible for pre-1921 items. Whilst every effort is made to confirm the accuracy of the entries, any discrepancies are solely the responsibility of the originator. As I am not a member of History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, all Air Force history or heritage queries should be directed, in the first instance, to [airforce.history@defence.gov.au](mailto:airforce.history@defence.gov.au)*

During May 1946, an ex-RAF Gloster Meteor F.3 jet aircraft was delivered to the RAAF’s No 1 Aircraft Depot at Laverton, Victoria. The aircraft had been provided on loan by the British War Ministry to enable the RAAF to gain experience in operating a radical new type.

It was flown on this day by Squadron Leader Derek (‘Jell’) Cuming, who earlier that year became the first RAAF officer to complete the Empire Test Pilots course. Two days later the



**A77-1 wearing RAF serial EE427**

Meteor was taken on strength with the tail number A77-1 and allotted to No 1 Aircraft Performance Unit for trials. Australia did eventually acquire the Meteor for squadron service, but only in 1951. By that time, the de Havilland Vampire had already become, in 1949, the first jet acquired in numbers for the RAAF. In the meantime, A77-1 had suffered a heavy landing at Darwin in February 1947 and been scrapped.

**More on the Meteor here:**

<https://www.airforce.gov.au/sites/default/files/minisite/static/7522/RAAFmuseum/research/aircraft/series2/A77.htm>





## Unplanned Ejection

14 June 1951

*This material is compiled from various sources including the History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, the RAAF Museum, the Australian War Memorial, ADF Serials and [www.ozatwar.com](http://www.ozatwar.com). The History and Heritage Branch–Air Force is not responsible for pre-1921 items. Whilst every effort is made to confirm the accuracy of the entries, any discrepancies are solely the responsibility of the originator. As I am not a member of History and Heritage Branch–Air Force, all Air Force history or heritage queries should be directed, in the first instance, to [airforce.history@defence.gov.au](mailto:airforce.history@defence.gov.au)*

On this day, Sergeant A.T. ('Tom') Stoney was cruising in a Meteor Mk8 jet at 15 000 feet near No 77 Squadron's base at Iwakuni - 32 kilometres south-west of Hiroshima on Japan's main island of Honshu - when the aircraft's ejector seat fired without warning. The Meteors had only recently been delivered from Britain to re-equip the squadron for operations in the Korean War, and Stoney was on an acceptance test flight in aircraft A77-231.

Due to an apparent malfunction in the ejector seat's system, he suddenly found himself propelled from the aircraft and descending by parachute about seven kilometres from Iwakuni, while the Meteor crashed into a nearby mountain and burned.



77SQN Meteors at Iwakuni, Japan

Stoney sustained a back injury in the incident, although this did not prevent him from serving a second operational tour in Korea. This was the first time that an ejector seat had been employed in a RAAF aircraft and its use was entirely involuntary.

**More on the Meteor in Korea here:** <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U59415>



## The Warbirds Nest

*From Tomas (Paddy) Hamilton 23 Jun 20*

We arrived here many years ago, but now I stand alone  
beneath the mountains shadow, in the Hunter town of Scone  
Tiger Moths and Chipmunks, buzzed around the town  
and after serving in the Air Force, it was time I settl'd down.

When I returned again, I heard a pleasing story  
A treasure trove of vintage planes, brought back to former glory  
Flown in the nation's darkest days legends of the air  
Now found in the warbirds nest, restored with loving care

A warrior approaches, I hear the V-12s growl  
Distinctive cloak of camouflage, angry roo on the cowl  
Glistening in the sunshine, she barely shows her age  
A flick roll down the runway, the lady is on stage



The ping from shut down pistons, a whiff of oil and fuel  
Switches off, chocks in place, engine left to cool  
I gaze in total wonder and words of praise are said  
She sits there without a care, like a true thoroughbred

A push back into the hangar, to join her wartime mates  
Down through many decades, she still has what it takes  
Heroes have long since passed on, Bobby Gibbes and Colin Pay  
Leaving a proud legacy, which still lives on today

Their pilots had to show their skill, no computers or GCI  
Flying second nature, dead reckoning and true of eye  
And as the hangar door slides shut, their memory has survived  
I countdown to the next display, when past glory will be revived



## What is a Grandparent?

*From John Clarkson (taken from papers written by a class of 8 year old students)*

- Grandparents are a lady and a man who have no little children of their own. They like other people's children.
- A Grandfather is a man and a Grandmother is a lady.
- Grandparents don't have anything to do except be there when we come to visit them. They are so old they shouldn't play hard or run. It is good if they drive us to the shop and give us money.
- When they take us for walks, they slow down past things like pretty leaves and caterpillars.
- They show us and talk to us about the colours of the flowers and also why we shouldn't step on cracks.
- Grandparents don't say "Hurry Up".
- Usually Grandmothers are fat, but not too fat to tie your shoes, and they wear funny underwear.
- Grandparents can take their teeth and gums out.
- Grandparents don't have to be smart.
- Grandparents have to answer questions like "Why isn't God married?" and "How come dogs always chase cats?"
- When Grandparents read to us, they don't skip things. They don't mind if we ask for the same story over and over again.
- Everybody should try to have a Grandmother, especially if you don't have television because they are the only grownups who like to spend time with us.
- Grandparents know we should have a snack time before bedtime, and they say prayers with us.
- Grandfather is the smartest man on Earth! He teaches me good things, but I don't get to see him enough to get as smart as him!
- It's funny when they bend over – you hear gas leaks and they blame it on their dog!





## F-35A's First Public Air Show Display

*Reprinted with permission from CONTACT magazine*



**An F-35A Lightning II aircraft from RAAF Base Williamtown, thrills the crowds with an aerial handling display at the Central Coast Air Show, NSW.**

Photo by Corporal Craig Barrett.

The ADF's newest strike aircraft has successfully conducted its first public working display, in the skies over the NSW Central Coast. The F-35A Lightning II took to the skies for a 20-minute display of power and precision at the Central Coast Airshow, which showcased ADF elements in the air and on the ground.

Pilot, Flight Lieutenant Ross Bowman, said it was a privilege to demonstrate the aircraft's capability in public for the first time. "Flying an F-35A is an absolute thrill, every time you fire up the engine, you get a real buzz inside you," Flight Lieutenant Bowman said. "Compared to the Hornet, I noticed a huge power difference, as soon as the afterburner is lit, you're forced back in the seat, and before you know it, you're up into the airspace," Flight Lieutenant Bowman said. "A big thing for me is inspiring the younger generation, and hopefully they get to experience what I'm doing at the moment," Flight Lieutenant Bowman said.

Australia has assessed the F-35A as the most capable and best value fifth generation multi-role fighter to meet Australia's future air power needs. An F-35A squadron stands ready to conduct technologically advanced strike and air combat roles. More than 50 Australian companies have directly shared in more than \$2.7 billion in global F-35A production and sustainment contracts to date, affording further opportunities to small and unique Australian businesses who indirectly benefit through supply chain work.



Picked up a hitchhiker. He asked if I wasn't afraid he might be a serial killer? I told him the odds of two serial killers being in the same car were extremely unlikely.

A dentist and a manicurist married. They fought tooth and nail.



## Follow up to an Earlier Issue of SITREP **Operation Fast Caravan – from the eyes of the Sabre People**

*From John Clarkson*

I read with interest Peter Scully's article on his experiences of his arrival in Butterworth with 75 SQN and some of the teething problems they experienced. Peter spoke of some of the areas of friction between the 'new boys' on the block and the establishment of 478 Squadron and the Sabre people. Yes, there were some touchy situations from time to time. I was a little hesitant about writing this for fear of upsetting some of those people who were there at the time. However, after reading Peter's essay, I feel a little more comfortable writing this one on how we felt about these chaps coming with their new high-speed fighter.

When I recall my memories of the occasion, I can now look at them with the wisdom of hindsight, and perhaps dilute some of the ill feelings we had at the time. There is no doubt that the entire exercise of 'Operation Fast Caravan' was a huge success, as it gave the squadron such a good start in Butterworth. Their CO, Wing Commander Jim Flemming, handled much of their entry into the area and base with considerable flair. We others were led to believe that these Mirage fellows could do no wrong. Hence the notice on the board at the RAAF Hostel around July in 1967, which said: "All personnel travelling from the island to the Base for work will cross the Penang Straits on the ferry, excepting those personnel of No 75 SQN, who are to walk across". Hence the belief that 75 SQN members could walk on water!

To understand where the fellows from 77 SQN (Sabre) stood during this period, I need to back track to the previous year. Prior to December 1966, 78 Wing consisted of 478 SQN, and Nos 3 and 77 SQNs. The Indonesian Confrontation was still in full swing, and an Operational Readiness Platform (ORP) was being maintained both at Butterworth and at Tengah in Singapore. The ORP at Butterworth was operated by the Sabres from 0600 to 1800 every day, and by the RAF



**77SQN Sabre**

Javelins from 1800 to 0600 every night. When the RAF Javelin squadron was withdrawn to the UK, the ORP was handled by the Sabres only, and was shared equally by Nos 3 and 77 SQNs. Admittedly, by this time, the frequency of live scrambles was decreasing, probably to about one or two per week compared to some years previously when there would have been about one per day. Of course, all aircrew and groundcrew were on the Ubon roster and when there, the ORP would have been scrambled at least once or twice per day.

To achieve this with reasonable efficiency, two aircraft were armed every day with 300 rounds (150 per gun) of HE ammunition, two live Sidewinder missiles, and two combat size external fuel tanks (110 gallons each). Those two aircraft were parked in the 77 SQN flight line during the evening and following their pre-flight inspection at 0530hrs in the morning, the pilots would taxi them down to the ORP at the southern end of the runway, to be 'on call' by 0600 hrs. A third aircraft was usually armed each evening and parked in the 77 SQN flight line as a spare for the next morning. When the two operational aircraft and their pilots were 'on call' and the main workforce had arrived and went about their normal flying programme, the spare aircraft would be disarmed and made available for the normal flying programme. The main advantage of having two Sabres on the ORP was that if the radar station perceived that an unidentified aircraft was approaching the area, they could, with confidence, scramble the ORP aircraft knowing they would be airborne within about 120 seconds of the call by the radar people. So, up until Christmas 1966, Nos 3 and 77 SQNs were sharing the duties of the ORP. Aircrew and ground crews would alternate their rosters to share the duties.



In January 1967, 3 SQN left Butterworth for Williamtown to be re-equipped with the Mirage. That left 77 SQN to handle the ORP duties on their own. By mid-1967, although the frequency of alerts was decreasing, we were still doing ORP: we were still arming aircraft with HE ammunition and live Sidewinders seven days per week. Of course, during this period, 77 SQN was also flying a very heavy ordnance programme every week. Each week, we would rotate between air-to-air gunnery, (providing the banner tug ourselves), air-to-ground gunnery, rocketry, and practice bombing, with a programme of heavy bombing at Tengah about twice per year.



75 SQN Mirage, Butterworth

Members of the 77 SQN ground crew expected 75 SQN to join the ORP roster once the squadron had settled in. However, we were informed that if two Mirage aircraft were fully armed with HE ammunition and live missiles and parked at the end of the runway for the whole day, with pilots sitting some 20 metres away, they would not have been able to get airborne in less than two minutes. That is when we found out that the Mirage was not suited to this type of operational activity.

From January 1968, we all knew that 77 SQN would return to Williamtown to be refitted with the Mirage, but nobody knew when this would happen. So, from this time onwards, ground crew members were told that they would stay in 77 SQN right up to the last day of their three years in Malaysia, then to be flown back to Australia by civil air. Also, as each ground crew member departed from 77 SQN, they were not replaced.

So, the ORP operations continued until about June 1968, when the powers that be decided that the urgency of an ORP was not needed any more. By this time, the manpower of 77 SQN was being gradually depleted. Whilst the ORP duties were a small part of the overall duties of the squadron, I believe this was just a small 'itch' in the side, as our friends with their new high-tech aircraft didn't come up to our expectations.

Around March or April 1968, there was a huge defence exercise, involving the RAF from Tengah, the RAAF at Butterworth, the Australian and British Army, (on the east coast of Malaysia), and the Royal Navy, also on the east coast. 77 SQN was given the task of ground attack to the 'enemy' who were trying to invade up near the NE border between Malaysia and Thailand. 75 SQN was tasked with the air defence of Butterworth and surrounding areas. RAF Squadrons, including the Lightning aircraft, were tasked to 'attack' the base at Butterworth as any opportunity arose. This exercise went for about three or four days, and we were sleeping in the hangar when not actually at work. I remember our squadron handled its tasking very well indeed, but we were told that the base at Butterworth was 'attacked' several times, as the 'air defence' of Butterworth (75 SQN) was not able to get airborne quickly enough to defend the base against these invaders. I think that was another straw in the camel's back. Sadly, some of the younger men, both pilots and ground crew, were quite condescending toward we Sabre people. Also, I must admit that there were times when we Sabre people may not have been too kind to the new kids on the block!

Even as recently as 2018, the friction between the Mirage and Sabre people was still evident. When the 3 SQN Association began to plan its big celebration of 50 years since its arrival in Butterworth in January 1969, I wrote to them asking to amend their invitation sheet. I suggested they say, "50 years since 3 SQN returned to Butterworth", for the squadron had done exceptional service in Malaysia between 1958 and 1967. His reply was, "We'll change the words if you insist, but those previous years with the Sabre don't count". Of course, since then, the Mirage squadrons have accounted for themselves very well indeed. But just a few of us have memories of that brief period when both the Mirage and the Sabre were operational in Butterworth.





## Australian Air Force Cadets 80th Anniversary

*From Wing Commander (AAFC) Paul Hughes, Lead Project Officer AAFC 80, HQ AAFC*

### Governor General Reception – AAFC 80 Media Release

The Governor General, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia, together with his wife Mrs Linda Hurley, hosted a reception at Admiralty House in Sydney acknowledging and celebrating 80 years of the Australian Air Force Cadets. Other invited dignitaries included DCAF, AVM Stephen Meredith; Chairman of the AAFC Foundation, AVM Kym Osley; DGCADETS-AF AIRCDRE Craig Heap; CDR-AAFC, GPCAPT(AAFC) Mark Dorward and WOFF-AF, WOFF Fee Grasby.

To mark the 80th year of the Australian Air Force Cadets, two inaugural awards have been introduced by the Commander of the Australian Air Force Cadets, GPCAPT(AAFC) Mark Dorward, to nationally celebrate the achievements of both cadets and the frontline instructors who selflessly bring out the best in the cadets they train and develop.

Each Wing was represented at the reception by their respective state's Cadet of the Year and Instructor of the Year Award recipients. Through the introduction of the National-based awards of 'Australian Air Force Cadets - Cadet of the Year' and the 'Warrant Officer of Air Force - AAFC Instructor of the Year', all of the Wing-based recipients were invited to attend panel-based interviews where the selections of the inaugural national awards were decided.



**The Governor-General presents the 2021 winner of the AAFC Cadet of the Year Cadet Under Officer Grace Wilton with her trophy and perpetual shield.**

Photo: FLTLT(AAFC) Michael Bros

GPCAPT(AAFC) Dorward explained how important these inaugural awards are to the future of the organization, recognising all members' passion,

dedication, service and commitment to their communities. He also described how impressive all participants were in their interviews, providing a very challenging task for the assessment panels in deciding the National selections for both of the awards.

The National award recipients were named during the reception and awarded by His Excellency the Governor General. The **National AAFC Cadet of the Year** was named as Cadet Under Officer Grace Wilton from 6 Wing South Australia. The **National AAFC Instructor of the Year** was awarded to Corporal (AAFC) Meg Goulding from 4 Wing Victoria.

Due to COVID19 restrictions, attendees from the Victorian 4 Wing joined the reception via video link along with other attendees who were restricted in travel. His Excellency described the event as a celebration of service, commitment and passion of all past and present AAFC members: "As the theme for the anniversary 'inspiring today, leading tomorrow' reflects, it's a time to look forward to the next 80 years".

In October, the AAFC will be conducting an 80th Anniversary National Parade in Canberra, hosted by the Commander, GPCAPT(AAFC) Dorward.





## Dawn Service

*From Phil Whiteman*

“By the left, QUICK-MARCH”  
 Rrraat-tat-tat, rat-rat-tat, the kettle drummers lead the way  
 The weary old Diggers, step off, left - left, left, right, left...  
 Along the dark street we march, toward the new day, full of rum  
 Left - left, left, right, left...  
 Off we go to remember  
 What's around the next corner?  
 Memories come back - boot camp, back packs, 3-0-3s, all bloody day  
 Old fella in front pulls aside, getting weary, can't get to the next corner  
 His mate goes to help; we keep their spaces and go with the flow  
 Another corner,  
 There it is  
 Cenotaph being guarded, crowds gathered  
 "HALT", still good timing, hey?  
 The young one doesn't know, almost cleans up those in front, he-he-he!  
 "Into line, RIGHT-TURN"  
 President welcomes, Chaplain prays, all heads bow  
 "ATTENTION"  
 Last Post plays  
 “WE WILL REMEMBER THEM”



Photograph by Phil Whiteman



## A History of Wartime Aviation Gasoline

*From Felix Parker*

*The following is an article by the British Society of Chemists, declassified in 2014:*

In the first two years of the war, it seems that German and British aircraft both used 87 octane gasoline. While that fuel was fairly satisfactory in the German Daimler-Benz V-12 engine, it was marginal in the British Rolls-Royce Merlin XX engine in British aircraft. It fouled the spark-plugs, caused valves to stick and made for frequent engine repair problems. Then came lend lease and American aircraft began to enter British service in great numbers. If British engines hated 87 octane



gasoline, American General Motors built Allison 1710 engines loathed and despised it. Something had to be done!

Along came an American named Tim Palucka, a chemist for Sun Oil (SUNOCO) at their southeast Texas refinery. Never heard of him? Small wonder, as very few people have. He took a French formula for enhancing the octane of gasoline, invented the cracking tower, and produced the first 100 octane aviation gasoline. This discovery led to great joy among our English cousins and great distress among the Germans.

A Spitfire fuelled with 100 octane gasoline was 34 miles per hour faster at 10,000 feet. The need to replace engines went from every 500 hours of operation to every 1,000 hours which reduced the cost of British aircraft by 300 pounds sterling, and even more when used in four-engined bombers. The Germans couldn't believe it when Spitfires that couldn't catch them a year ago started shooting their ME-109 E and G models right out of the sky. Of course, the matter had to be kept secret. If the Germans found out that it was a French invention, they'd simply copy the original French patents.

The American Allison engines improved remarkably with 100 octane gasoline, but did even better when 130 octane gasoline came along in 1944. 130 octane also improved the performance of the radial engine bombers we produced. The Germans and Japanese never snapped to the fact that we had re-invented gasoline. Neither did our 'friends' the Russians.

In all, 100,000 Americans died in the skies over Europe. Lord only knows what that number would have been without 'super-gasoline'. And it all was invented just a few miles west of Beaumont, Texas and we never knew a thing about it.



**SUNOCO officials pour the billionth gallon of high octane aviation fuel produced during WWII**

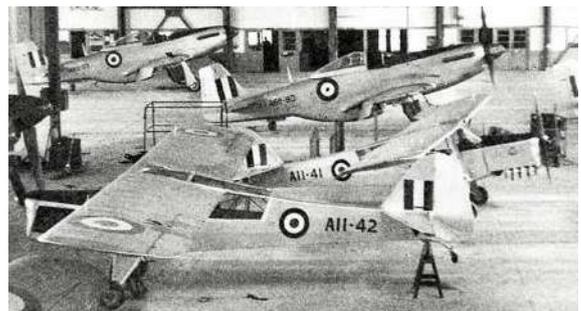


## Recruiting Hi-Jinks, 1948

*From Jim Hall, by Stan Curran (dec'd)*

*Stan was a member of 3SQN Association Queensland for many years. He was an Engine Fitter in WWII and retired as a Squadron Leader / Engineer Officer in 1975. Stan's story below was originally featured in 'The Whisperer', the newsletter of the Boston and Beaufighter Association of Queensland. It reflects a stage in RAAF history which will not EVER be repeated, set in the time of 3 Squadron flying Mustangs, Wirraways and Austers out of Canberra, a far cry from the squadron's later fast-jet operations.*

**A**fter WWII, the RAAF had an "interim" Air Force for about two years; this was to allow time to change over from wartime to a post-war Permanent Air Force. The standard for the new Permanent Air Force was very high and towards the end of the interim Air Force, it was realised that too many skilled men had been culled out; new recruits were required. It was decided that a recruiting drive was necessary. It was 1948, I was in No.3 Squadron in Canberra. We were equipped with Mustang and



**3 Squadron's Austers and Mustangs at RAAF Fairbairn circa 1949. [Neil Follett Collection]**



Auster aircraft. I think the Austers were mainly used for instrument flying. Most personnel were WWII veterans. To say the pilots were a bit "Gung Ho" would be an understatement. They were very skilled Mustang pilots and to them the Austers were mere toys.



**Beautiful Stanwell Park; obviously prime recruiting territory.**

No.3 Squadron's share of the recruiting was to embrace the South Coast of NSW, between Nowra and Stanwell Park. We were to take three Austers, three pilots and two ground staff and the new Sikorski helicopter, which was still on trials, to meet us at Nowra. The plan was to go to HMAS Albatross at Nowra, stay overnight, and fly over to Nowra the next day, then go on to Wollongong, book into a hotel and operate from there for the next week. I was selected to go as Corporal Engine Fitter / NCO in-charge. A corporal was needed to sign the daily serviceability checks. The other ground staff was a Flight Rigger.

Although I was stationed at Canberra, my wife Daisy and I had our home in Sydney, and I was lucky to get home at week-ends. It would be a good opportunity to have a weeks holiday with Daisy at Wollongong, so we made a double booking at the hotel and arranged to meet there.

We met the helicopter crew at Nowra, and next day we flew around the Nowra district. The pilots were authorised to do low-flying, and also to take civilians on joy flights, providing they first signed an indemnity form. The pilot I was flying with decided to fly low up the Shoalhaven River. It was pleasant flying up the river, when suddenly the pilot pushed the stick hard forward and at the same time he was saying something unprintable. It was only then that I realised we were flashing under a cable that was strung across the river. We must have missed it only by inches. That was the end of low-flying up the river.

We were making our way up the coast. At Kiama the helicopter was on the oval, and my pilot did a demonstration of slow-flying. I could hardly believe an aircraft could fly so slow without stalling. I was a little concerned as the oval had a ring of tall trees around it; if we stalled we would have nowhere to go but the trees. All went well; we landed at Wollongong, secured the aircraft for the night and went to the hotel where Daisy was waiting to meet me. Next morning we went down to the strip, which was parallel with the beach. One of the pilots coaxed Daisy to go for a flight for the first time - she had some reservations but bravely went along. As soon as they were airborne one of the other pilots said to me, "Give me a start, and we will go up and formate on them." Imagine Daisy's surprise when she saw another aeroplane only feet away tucked behind the starboard wing.

After we landed and re-fuelled, the pilots decided to go in different directions. My pilot decided to go north up the coast. Soon after leaving Wollongong, we were passing over a large Surf Club building. The club house was in the middle of two large open-top dressing sheds, men's on the south side, ladies on the north side.

It was obvious that the members were sun lovers, as each shed had numerous benches for the members to lie on, and get an all-over suntan. I soon became aware that the pilot was intent on recruiting more females than males, judging by the number of times we flew over the north shed. I thought they may become offended and complain, instead quite a number stood up and waved. Needless to say - during the week the surf shed had plenty of attention! I didn't tell Daisy, as I thought she wouldn't have approved.

We went up to Stanwell Park and back, low-flying both ways. The surf club just happened to be in our flight path on the way back. When we landed the Rigger saw us in. By the look on his face I guessed that something was wrong. He said, "A kid kicked a football when you were flying low on the beach,



and you hit it." The ball had gone through the propeller, damaged the front engine cowl, then bounced into the leading-edge of the port wing. The dent in the wing wasn't too bad, it would be a big repair job, but was OK to fly. The engine cowl was a mess. I took the propeller off and then the cowl. Then I took the cowl to a garage in the town and borrowed some panel-beating tools. I had to be careful not to stretch the metal, or the Dzus Fasteners would be out of register. After about an hour it looked pretty good, so I took it back, and was pleased to find it fitted perfectly.

The next day we were flying over Port Kembla at about 1,000 feet; the pilot said, "That looks like a nice big flat paddock down there, I've always wondered how these would glide. If anything goes wrong we can land there." With that he switches off the engine! It glided OK, but he had left it a bit late to re-start the engine; when he tried, there was no response. We were getting dangerously low, so he gave away the engine, to concentrate on a dead-stick landing. I was getting concerned, the paddock looked like a bowling green when we had height, but the lower we got the worse it looked. There was some livestock, cows and hens, and the ground was rough, it looked bad. We were lucky enough to land without incident. We pushed the aircraft onto a road, about 20 feet away. The road went for about half a mile in a sweeping bend. The pilot was confident he could take off if I lightened the load by going back in a taxi. I 'blew' the engine out (open throttle, switches off, petrol off, and turned the engine several revolutions); the engine started first time. Then the pilot did a clever take-off, following the bend of the road. Of course, we had quite an audience for all this, one of the locals rang a taxi for me, and I met the pilot back at Wollongong.

The next incident was the following day. We were flying over Port Kembla, and there was a man on top of a flat-roofed shed, painting it green. The pilot said, "Watch me put him off the shed." I thought I would rather be watching from the ground. The pilot flew in real low and straight at the man. I expected to see him jump off the roof. To my amazement he stood up, feet apart, and shook his fist. The pilot said, "He's mad, I'll put him off this time." I had reservations about who was mad, and I wasn't too fussed being where I was. When we went around again, the same thing happened. The man still shaking his fist. I thought, "I'm glad that's over!" when to my dismay, the pilot said, "This time or never." I really thought it was going to be never. This time he went in below the height of the shed, ever so close. I had a vision of the man between the port wheel and the wing tip. As we flashed over I saw his right arm go up, in a throwing action. The pilot said, "He's absolutely mad." I didn't say anything, but a lot of thoughts were going through my head. On the way back I was wondering whether the man had thrown anything at us. As soon as we landed I had a look at the port side of the fuselage, and sure enough there was wet green paint splashed along the side. I put some petrol on a rag and wiped it off. (I wonder how many people have been in an aeroplane, and had it painted when flying over a shed?)

On the Friday night the pilots went to a dance and a party with the nurses at the hospital. During the party it was arranged that they would put on an air race on the Saturday morning. The course was to be around the lighthouse at the beach, in line with the main street, then up the main street for about two miles to the hospital; about ten laps, doing very tight turns around the hospital and the light-house. Well, it certainly stirred things up in Wollongong. We ground staff heard that some of the senior hospital staff made complaints in high places.

THE WEEK FROM THE INSIDE  
"LOW FLYING"

I thought petrol was scarce. Evidently the R.A.A.F. has plenty of it, judging by the manner in which planes were flying over this district at the weekend and early this week. I understand the planes were flying around in support of a recruiting campaign.

The planes were dangerously low on occasions; they must have disturbed hospital patients; they did upset children in secondary schools sitting for examinations. One resident informs me the planes were so low, passing over the roof of his home, some tiles lifted and then fell back into place again owing to the suction from the propellers.

*Illawarra Mercury, front page article, Thursday, 25 Nov 1948*



There were questions asked in Parliament. It was feared the pilots may be in trouble. However, we didn't hear any more about it. Daisy went home on the Sunday. We had a great week and the No.3 Squadron 'Recruiters' went back to Canberra.



### AFA NSW Division AGM

*From Mounira Hijazi, Executive Officer, Air Force Association NSW*

For the first time in two years, the association was able to hold a face-to-face AGM in New Lambton. Due respects were made to the fallen. President of the Air Force Association of NSW, Ron Glew, reported on key issues and highlighted the key focus areas for the association. While it was a challenging year due to the pandemic the association did not waiver from the important initiatives and celebrated many achievements including commemorating the RAAF 100th year of service to the nation. Our focus remains steadfast, and the association will continue to advocate and provide support to veterans and their families and plan for the future of the association.

In honour of the men and women who served our nation, the board members laid a wreath at the New Lambton Great War Memorial.

We would like to thank our guest speaker Matthew Walsh, Commanding Officer of No. 26 SQN and dual-hatted as the Williamtown Air Base Executive Officer (ABXO) for attending the AGM and running us through current operations at WLM and future visions.



Happy group of AGM attendees



### And Now for Something Completely Different...

*From Pieter La'Brooy*

