



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH

Newsletter October 2020



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COVID-19 AND CONTINUING NEED FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING AND OTHER RESTRICTIONS

AS PER THE PRESIDENT'S UPDATE DATED 2ND AUGUST 2020, ALL MEETING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITY CONTINUES TO BE SUSPENDED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

While Covid-19 restrictions have started to ease and further easing is expected in the next couple of weeks, there appears no likelihood for some time yet of reasonable number indoor gatherings that would allow us to resume our monthly luncheon meetings. While I do not anticipate us being able to have any social gatherings at our rooms during the month of November, we WILL have some sort of social gathering of Branch members during December whether it be an outside gathering/event or at a commercial premises if we are still unable to have internal gathering at our rooms with suitable numbers allowed. *(NH, Pres)*

Easing restrictions **DOES NOT** mean easing off on taking precautions. Increasing inter-region travel increases the risk of the spread of Covid-19 to our area so please, wear your mask, observe social distancing, no hand-shakes or hugs, practice good hygiene **are you still using the hand sanitiser or have you eased up a bit? Take Care.**

RENT RELIEF : While we were able to make use of our rooms for many "restricted number" openings of our rooms for a couple of months, that had to end when restrictions were once again strengthened. An application for rent relief submitted to the Ballarat City Council has been favourably met with no rent needed to be paid for the months of October, November and December. Should restrictions prevent us from using our rooms into 2021, a further application for rent relief will be considered by the Council. The co-operation of the City of Ballarat Council in this matter is much appreciated. *(NH, Pres)*

MAGPIE 91 : Canberra bomber A84-231, Call Sign 'Magpie 91', disappeared from radar while flying a typical night bombing mission near the border between Vietnam and Laos on the night of 3rd November 1970. Following a thorough search, Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver were declared Missing in Action.

It was not until 31st July 2009 that an air force recovery mission found their bodies in the wreck of their Canberra bomber on a remote hillside in Quang Nam province in Vietnam. Their RAAF Canberra aircraft had crashed in dense jungle on a hillside near the border with Laos. Michael and Robert were the last two Australian servicemen of the Vietnam War to be found and their remains repatriated to Australia.

In just a few days, (from the time of writing), **a commemorative service marking the 50th anniversary of the loss of these two RAAF aircrew officers will be held at the National Vietnam Veterans Museum, 25 Veterans Drive, Newhaven, Phillip Island, on Tuesday 3rd November at 1100 hours.**

ARE YOU ABLE TO ATTEND? It has been confirmed that Melbourne metropolitan residents will not be permitted to travel to this commemorative event which will likely result in a very disappointing very small attendance. Regional Victoria residents are permitted to travel **through** Melbourne. I will be leaving my Wallace address at 0700 hours on the day and at this stage Leigh Harvey and Rob Petty will be travelling with me. I have room for one more passenger who can be at my place **before** 0700 hours on the day..contact me ASAP.

ARE YOU ABLE TO ATTEND AND PROVIDE TRANSPORT FOR OTHERS ? Please let me know ASAP. *(Noel, 0439 929 322)*

Thank you to 1WAGS website coordinator Janet Bates for the following 1wags.org.au website update.

1wags.org.au The 1 WAGS Memorial website averages 50 to 60 hits per day with a total of 13,428 individual browsers visiting the site since the launch in February this year. There have also been 74,485 Spider visitors.

Over the month of October the most visited pages were PEOPLE, MEMORIAL ROLL, HISTORY, INFORMATION, RESEARCH, COURSES and GALLERY. Browsers come from all over the world with hits from Germany increasing over the last month.

A new page has been added in the MEMORIAL ROLL section titled 1 W.A.G.S Gallantry Citations. This page pays tribute to those 1WAGS trained airmen awarded 'gallantry citations' during their service in WW2. Approximately 170 personnel are listed on this page with, where possible, information about their citation. The most common award was the Distinguished Flying Cross followed by the Distinguished Flying Medal - Awarded for "an act or acts of valour, courage or devotion to duty whilst flying in active operations against the enemy"

Others were the G.M [George Medal], D.S.O [Distinguished Service Order], A.F.C [Air Force Cross], B.E.M [British Empire Medal], M.B.E [Member of the Order of the British Empire], C.G.M [Conspicuous Gallantry Medal], A.F.M [Air Force Medal] and the M.C [Military Cross]. Images of the medals are included on the page. The page is currently "Under Construction" with research being undertaken on each person who received a citation for their individual Profile Page.

The latest added and current *Feature Story* on the website relates to Ballarat born 1WAG Warrant Officer PETCH



Warrant Officer Francis Noel Miller Petch was born and educated in Ballarat. He trained as a Wireless Air Gunner at No. 1 W.A.G.S. Ballarat- Courses 34/35. He was posted to England and served with the 550 and 150 Squadrons in RAF Bomber Command. Warrant Officer Petch completed 36 Operations in the iconic Lancaster aircraft with bombing raids over Germany. This was a remarkable time of survival during operations encountering night fighters, flack, near misses of collision with other Lancasters and severe weather conditions. Warrant Officer Petch was discharged on the 28th November 1945 and returned to Ballarat to resume his life in his home town.

We pay tribute to the gallantry of Warrant Officer Petch and his outstanding RAAF service during WW2

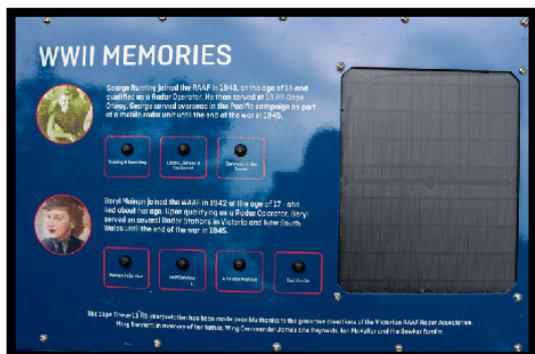
(Janet Bates, Website Coordinator)

VICTORIAN COMMUNITY HISTORY AWARDS

Referring to the 2020 Victorian Community History awards, *President of the Royal Historical Society Victoria, Emeritus Professor Richard Broome AM*, said that :

"It is astonishing that such a difficult time has produced the second largest number of entries to the Victorian Community History Awards in 22 years; 176 entries across all nine categories."

How well done then to AFA Vic Radar Branch President Chris Harneth and his team to have their collaborative work with the Cape Otway Lightstation in the development of the *No 13 Radar Station Cape Otway Audio and Visual Interpretive Project, "WWII Memories"*, being short listed into the final sixteen.



The "WWII MEMORIES" interactive entrance board in the photo at left acknowledges at the bottom of the board contributions made by individuals that made the project possible, including *"the generous donation by Marg Bennett in memory of her father Wing Commander James Eric REYNOLDS"*.

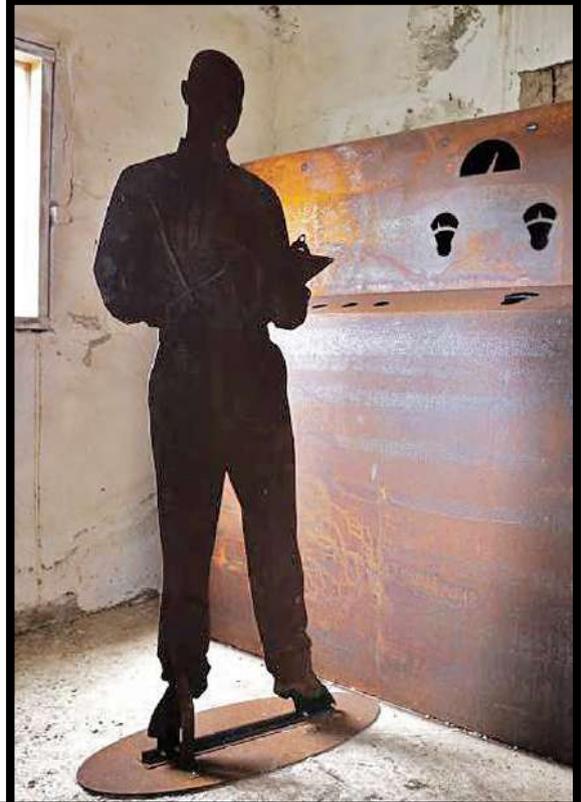
This Marg Bennett is of course our own member Margaret Bennett and her father, Wing Commander Reynolds who, following his war time top secret Radar Unit responsibilities became the post-war Commanding Officer at RAAF Ballarat with the establishment of the RAAF Air and Ground Radio School, which later, on 1 Dec 52, became the RAAF School of Radio.

Margaret tells me that during the five years of the war while the family lived in Essendon, they were never aware of where her father was going or what he was doing, so secret was the establishment of the various RAAF Radar units around our shores.

The AFA Vic Radar branch intends to hold a dedication ceremony at the exhibit sometime during the first or second quarter of 2021 and I have given an undertaking to the Branch President Chris Harneth that I will do everything to ensure that we have a busload of AFA Ballarat Branch members attend on that day and we will have Margaret Bennett with us. We still have our postponed 2020 bus trip to hopefully fulfil during 2021 but this will be another one to look forward to. Here are some photographs relating to the Cape Otway Lighthouse and 13 Radar Station display. (NH, Pres)



The original transmitter and receiver installed at RAAF 13 Radar Station Cape Otway



Cape Otway Radar Bunker

WORLD WAR II BARRACKS

During the operation of the Radar Station, up to 40 RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force) personnel were stationed here at any one time.

Their accommodation consisted of two large huts for sleeping quarters, showers and toilet block, and a mess (dining) hut also used for recreation. Sleeping arrangements were basic, a wire bunk bed, half a locker, straw mattress and three substantial grey wool blankets. The mess hut consisted of a kitchen and an adjacent room with collapsible tables and bench seats.

No Lightstation or Navy personnel were allowed on the top secret base. However we know that the Keepers' children visited often.



Cape Otway during WWII. Source: Morris Fenton & Ian Mackellar.



The use of Corten Steel silhouettes to depict RAAF staff at work is an interesting concept. (Above and Top Right images)

AVIATION FUEL DURING WORLD WAR TWO

This story is written using information from a previously classified article of the British Society of Chemists but which was declassified in 2014 and has been recently sent to me by member Keith Pitman. Thank you Keith.

Apparently during WWII the German Luftwaffe kept on using 87 octane aviation fuel while the British initially did also but later moved to 100 octane in their Spitfire fighters and the Americans, later again, used 130 octane in their P51 and other fighters.

It appears that both the German and British aircraft used 87 octane fuel for the first two years of the war. While that was fairly satisfactory in the German Daimler-Benz V-12 engine, it was marginal in the British Rolls-Royce Merlin XX engines in British aircraft.....it fouled the spark plugs, caused valves to stick and caused 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 fuel, the American General Motors-built Allison 1710 engines loathed and despised it, so something had to be done.

Along came an American named Tim Palucka, a chemist for the Sun Oil company in their South East Texas Refinery. He took a French formula for enhancing the octane of fuel and invented the "Cracking Tower". The oil companies began producing 100 Octane aviation fuel.

A Spitfire fuelled with 100 octane was 34 miles per hour faster at 10,000 feet than when fuelled with 87 octane. The need to replace engines went from every 500 hours 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.

Meanwhile, the Germans couldn't believe it when Spitfires that couldn't catch them a year ago started shooting their ME-109E and G models right out of the sky. Of course the matter had to be kept secret from the Germans who could have simply gone to the original French patents and copied them and done the same thing.

The American Allison engines improved remarkably with 100 octane fuel but did much better when 130 octane fuel came along in 1944. *(NH, Ed... with thanks to Keith Pitman)*

PHOTOS FROM MEMBERS DURING THEIR SERVICE ???

Disappointingly not a single contribution from members in the way of photographs taken or obtained during their RAAF or other military service, so here are some more of my own.



Left: waiting at Alice Springs for 75 Sqn Sabres to arrive for refuel en-route to Darwin. **Above:** aircraft refuelling. **Below:** Off again ... they will be there and settled in well before we get there.

When 75 Sqn went on mobility exercises to Darwin in the early 1960's, (this one Nov 1962), as the Sabres could not fly from Williamtown, (Newcastle NSW), to Darwin without refuelling, us ground staff would fly via Alice Springs and wait for the Sabres to arrive for refuelling and then they would head on their way and we would bring up the rear makes much more sense where the fighters are based these days. (Noel Hutchins)

