



# AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH

## Newsletter



December 2023/January 2024

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### FROM THE PRESIDENT

2023 provided us with another year of social interaction with our members and we look forward to 2024 providing many more such opportunities.

We are conscious of the advancing age of many members and this curbs opportunities for excursions that were a feature of past years. However, we continue to provide speakers and topics of interest as a part of our regular social luncheons.

We very much enjoyed our Christmas concert and luncheon with fabulous entertainment and a Christmas spread provided by North Ballarat Sports Club, in our own private dining space. We were honoured to be joined by a representative of Catherine King's office but unfortunately we could not be joined by AFA Victoria's president John Clarkson, as our lunch conflicted with their monthly board meeting.

As most of you are aware, sadly we recently lost another member of our association, Stan Kellet (see separate valediction). Stan was a very regular attendee of luncheons and will be very much missed, particularly for his wit, humour and irreverence.

On a final note, I congratulate our 1WAGS sponsor APCO on their first birthday. The sponsorship has been gratefully appreciated in support of our association and the ongoing records of 1WAGs.

*Peter Dowling*

*President*



### IMPORTANT DATES COMING UP

#### **Social Luncheon Tuesday March 12**

The story of POW survivor John Andrew Cromie as told through his diaries.

#### **Social Luncheon Tuesday April 9**

Featuring John Monash



**Please join APCO to celebrate their first birthday in Learmonth street Friday 1 March -**

- **Power FM live broadcasting**
- **Face painting**
- **Giveaways and spinning wheel**
- **Western Bulldogs**
- **Food tastings**
- **1 WAGS display**

# VALE STANLEY JOHN KELLETT (Stan)



## 1 WAGS REPORT

Sponsored by APCO Alfredton



Longstanding Ballarat Air Force Member Stan was born 31 December 1936 and passed away on 16 January 2024, after a long illness.

Stan lived and worked in Ballarat over his long life and was a proud husband and family man. He and wife Kath had two sons (one deceased) and a daughter and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Stan was one of the original “Nashos”, delaying entry into the National Service while he completed his apprenticeship. He proposed to Kath while undertaking his service. He built lifelong bonds with other Nashos and carried this experience throughout his life.

## 1 W.A.G.S PRISONER OF WAR



THE 1 W.A.G.S. MEMORIAL PAYS TRIBUTE TO THOSE RAAF TRAINEES WHO SERVED IN ALL THEATRES OF WAR DURING WW2 AND BECAME PRISONERS OF WAR.

*To date 150 1 W.A.G. personnel were held in captivity with 31 dying as P.O.W.s. These airmen were held in German, Italian and Japanese camps. Twenty-two P.O.W.s died at the hands of the Japanese. The rest were whilst prisoners of Italian/German captors.*

### RAAF Prisoners-of-War from Europe Welcomed



Ex RAAF POWs Welcomed Home 11 September 1945 Trove

FOLLOWING NAMES:





# CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

DECEMBER 12

# ....AND NEW YEAR PICNIC



Our one man band Christmas entertainment



Sue Alexander with lunch guests

Dot and Kevin Grundell with



Three generations of Bates family



Bill O'Halloran "Best Hat" and tongue-meister President Peter Dowling



Ernie Chapman, Marg Bennett, Marg Chapman, Heather Vickers



Peter Allen, Janet Bates, Marg Harvey



Bill Bahr, Gordon Harvey



Sue and Keith Pitman, Dot and Kevin Grundell, Keith Lanyon



## MINE DETECTION DOGS



I came across this story of two notable dachshunds, Herman and Berta von Hildensheim, that served as mine detection dogs (MDDs) towards the end of WWII.

The brave pair of dogs is credited with having uncovered more than 600 land mines throughout Europe, mostly in Italy, towards the end of the war.

I researched the role of dogs in mine detection and a brief history of MDDs follows, adapted from an article by Roly Evans of James Madison University, published in issue 26.1 & 2 of *The Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction*.

While mines had been used before, World War II was the conflict that saw the landmine coming of age as a major weapons system. The first documented use of MDDs during the Second World War is not clear.

The United Kingdom probably led the way in the early development of a MDD capability. From 1942, the development of mines with reduced metal content, even the simplest models, presented a significant detection problem. The available metal detectors could not be used to reliably detect these models, especially in heavily metal-contaminated conditions.

Trials commenced in early 1943 and the demonstrated potential of the MDD was enough for four Royal Engineers Dog Platoons to be formed in April 1944 for subsequent use during Operation Overlord in Normandy and thereafter.

The United States also sought to develop an MDD program in 1943. A number of training methods were tried, including positive and negative reinforcement. The immediate results were not promising.

228th Engineer Mine Detection Company deployed one hundred dogs to the Fifth Army in Italy in June 1944. Unfortunately “substantial” casualties and unsatisfactory further training and testing led to the withdrawal of the company by September 1944 and its disbandment in February 1945, even though the use and impact of mines in all theatres was increasing.

The continuing problem of finding landmines meant that research and debate continued during the decades following the Second World War. The United States started actively training and using dogs to detect mines and booby traps in Vietnam in 1969. After the withdrawal of US ground combat forces from Vietnam by 1973, the United States sought to build on the hard-won lessons of Vietnam and did not disregard MDDs as had largely been the case after World War II.

In humanitarian mine action (HMA), MDDs tend to work land that has been processed, often with all vegetation removed. Many of the early principles of using dogs in HMA were established in Afghanistan, including using at least two different dogs to search an area in order to increase confidence that there were no mines present.

MDDs remain a valuable tool for demining operators. Just as in the 1940s, MDDs form part of a team with a handler. Both require careful selection, training, and accreditation, and the dogs also require significant additional logistical support from kennels to veterinary care. MDDs will always be limited by weather conditions, whether it is humidity, wind, or heat. Certain environments with a range of scents will also be difficult for MDDs. No dog can guarantee to work perfectly at all times.

MDDs have undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the effort to find and remove mines. They are an additional tool to enhance the productivity of mine clearance operations but are not a stand-alone system for conducting mine clearance operations.