



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH Newsletter



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FROM THE PRESIDENT

In this newsletter, we celebrate two of our most regular attendees, Dr Tom Roberts and Mr Kevin Grundell, on the milestone of their 90th birthdays. We additionally celebrated the birthdays of some of our other members including our oldest member, Mrs Margaret Bennett.



I trust you all enjoyed your Easter break, and celebrated in a way that is meaningful to you.

Easter is a time for reflection on the importance of family and friends, as many of us draw on our loved ones for emotional support in our daily lives.

Many of you will be aware of the situation of Kevin and Dot Grundell's great-granddaughter Nora, who recently went through 6 weeks of intense chemotherapy, followed by surgery to remove her kidney and the 17cm mass taking over her tiny body. She will potentially then need another surgery to remove the tumours from her lungs, followed by more chemotherapy, and possibly radiation (yet to be determined).

A fund has been raised to assist Nora and her family and we are proud to report that our sponsor APCO provided Nora with a special gift as well as a \$3000 donation towards her ongoing care. Our association also made a small donation.

Peter Dowling
President



IMPORTANT DATES COMING UP

Social Luncheon Tuesday April 9

Garry Snowden discusses the story of George Merz, Australia's first Aviator casualty of the Great War.

Video featuring John Monash, The Forgotten ANZAC

President Peter Dowling with Kevin and Dot Grundell and APCO's gift for Nora



CELEBRATION OF OUR
NONAGENARIANS

Dr Tom Roberts

Tom has recently had a milestone 90th birthday and the Ballarat Branch held a lunch to celebrate. We were very pleased that his son Peter was able to join us on the day.



In 2012 Tom was awarded the Order of Australia in recognition of his service to medicine, community and the Royal Australian Air Force Association.

His long list of achievements and involvement spans much of Ballarat's business, sporting and community life, with service to organisations including Ballarat Health Services, the Art Gallery of Ballarat, Ballarat Harriers Club, the Commemorative Days Committee, Sportsmen's Association of Australia and many more.

Tom's interest in the Airforce Association has been over a number of years. He was the longest serving President serving six straight years from 2007 until 2012.

After a one year break he was back again for two more years 2014 to 2015 and then again in 2018. It was then that Tom decided to call 'time'. A nine year record.

In 2011 he published Wingless, the definitive list of Australian airmen who were held as prisoners of war. He nominated his work as President of the Royal Australian Air Force Association and long career as an obstetrician and gynaecologist as some of his most significant achievements. Tom has been credited with delivering 10,000 babies during his career as a Ballarat obstetrician.

Tom was also the driving force of research into those airmen who trained at No. 1 Wireless Air Gunners School Ballarat, in particular those who were killed in Action or on Active Service. The consequence of this research with Peter Schoutens and Janet Bates was the formation of the 1 WAGS Memorial website.

On receiving the Order of Australia in 2012, Tom said, "It's a great honour, but really the greatest achievement in my life has been marrying my wife and producing our children and grandchildren." Tom and his wife Penny have five adult children - Alison, Geoffrey, Jennifer, Peter and Bruce, all of whom are now pursuing their own careers and achievements.



Blowing out 90 candles is a big job!

Air Force friends and family help celebrate



Mr Kevin Grundell

Kevin Grundell is a proud representative of “The Nashos” (see separate article this page) and he too celebrated his 90th birthday recently.

He enlisted for Compulsory National Service as an 18 year old during the Korean War. He trained at Puckapunyal for 3 months and then returned home, joining the Royal Australian Electrical Mechanical Engineers. In a 2017 oral history interview for the Ballarat Ranger Military Museum, he reflects on driving large army vehicles for the first time:

I was issued with an Army licence, basically that covered everything. Which was great, because apparently you were supposed to do tests for them all. I went up to Seymour. Actually, I went up on my own, there. We were bringing the twos back, the both of us went up, and we brought the Jeeps and the GMCs and the Blitzes back. There was only one of those recovery trucks. And when I got up there, like I had an order, sort of. And I presented that. And the fellow took me down to it. And boy, I've never seen anything so big in my life. And I said to him, I said, “Gee,” I said. “How do you drive this thing?” And he says, “Show me your licences.” So I produced the license. And he says, “It's on your license.” He says, “You can drive it yourself”. Well, anyway, after a few K down the road, I did familiarize myself with it a bit. But, boy, for a start, I had no idea what I was letting myself in for.”

The Association was pleased to help Kevin celebrate his birthday, with special guest Mr Neil Leckie and Mrs Kath Kellett. Neil is a former Electrical Engineer and TAFE Teacher with an interest in Ballarat's history. Neil is also a former Army Reservist with an interest in Ballarat's military history. He manages the military museum at Ranger Barracks in Alfredton.



Kevin and Dot Grundell -Kevin ready to blow out the candles

National Service

National Service – compulsory military training – has a long tradition in Australia. Since Federation, a National Service scheme has existed four times. This included during both the First and Second World Wars, though these men were never deployed beyond Australia's borders. Many did go on to join the First and Second Australian Imperial Forces so they could serve overseas.

The third National Service scheme existed from 1951 until 1959. However, it was criticised as being irrelevant to modern defence needs. Skill was considered more important than numbers, and the constant training of new recruits was a drain on finances and manpower.

The fourth and last National Service scheme began in 1964. For the first time, national servicemen were integrated into the regular army in order to serve overseas in Vietnam. More than 200 national servicemen were killed during the Vietnam War.

This service is to remember the 280,000 men who undertook National Service between 1951 and 1972. These men are affectionately known as the 'Nashos'.



1 WAGS REPORT

Sponsored by APCO Alfredton



Warrant Officer John Cromie

Thankyou to Sue Williams for her wonderful presentation of her father Warrant officer John Andrew Cromie's service in the 460 and 550 Squadrons. Andrew trained at 1 WAGS Course 25 and was the only survivor of his Lancaster which was shot down in a bombing raid over Germany.

He then spent one and a half years as a POW in Germany before being freed by the Russians.

Sue presented the Airforce Association Ballarat Branch with a photo book of her father's service.

As from the start of April 2024 175,292 individual browsers have accessed 1 wags.org.au from all over the world.

Flying Officer Raymond Lewis Merrill is featured in the latest Contact Magazine.

Ray trained as a wireless operator/air gunner at 1 WAGS Ballarat Course 27 and no 3 Bombing Air Gunners School West Sale. Ray was posted to the UK and completed a remarkable 36 operations in Stirling and Lancaster aircraft.

He served with the 218 Squadron in Bomber Command as a tail gunner and was awarded the DFC for his " skill and fortitude in operations against the enemy."



101 year old Ray was honoured by the RAAF Base Edinburgh's 462 Squadron where he presented photos and memorabilia to the base.



Ray Merrill holds a photo of his crew next to Air Commodore Adrian Maso (L), while Wing Commander Mark Sweet holds the letter signed by Eisenhower, at the RAAF Base Edinburgh Officers' Mess.

Above - Sue Williams displays some of her father John Cromie's memorabilia

Below - President Peter Dowling presents Sue with a Certificate of Appreciation