



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH

Newsletter



April/May 2024

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Although accompanied by a much smaller representation than in previous years, I was honoured once again to March in the ANZAC Day service on behalf of the Ballarat Branch of the Air Force Association.

It is humbling to experience the appreciation of the crowds of Ballarat residents who lined the streets to honour those who have represented this country in times of conflict.

At the request of the RSL, this year - as in previous years - a book was laid rather than the traditional floral wreath. This ensures the event will live on over the years in the minds of the recipients of the book, who will be students at one of the local schools.



IMPORTANT DATES COMING UP

Social Luncheon Tuesday June 11

The story behind the Great Escape

Social Luncheon Tuesday July 9

Once again we will be entertained by the U3A ukelele players and singers



Peter Dowling
President



Keith Pitman - A Tireless Volunteer

During our May social luncheon meeting, we took the opportunity to acknowledge our long time AFA member Keith Pitman for his dedication and volunteerism, in particular for the sale of Anzac badges.

Keith has been selling badges for over 30 years!

For 2024, Keith made sales of over \$18,000 on behalf of the RSL by personally attending Skipton, Coles stores, Ballarat Golf Club, Woolworths stores and Lucas Shopping Centre for a total time of 64 hours. 1WAGS co-ordinator Janet Bates donated 16 hours of her time to assist Keith this year for which he expressed his gratitude as it allowed him to attend the Self Serve tables at Lucas and Woolworths for another \$5000.

Janet presented Keith with a Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the Air Force Association, as well as a gift donated by 1WAGS sponsor APCO.

Those who know Keith will understand this activity is very much in keeping with his personal involvement and support of many members of the RSL and the Air Force Association.

President Peter Dowling and 1Wags Co-ordinator Janet Bates acknowledging and thanking Keith Pitman for his extraordinary efforts to assist others through the sale of Anzac badges.



Janet Bates outlines the extent of Keith's achievements through his volunteerism.



D DAY Invasion

(Article courtesy of Herald Sun 31 May 2024)

“I wish the Australians were with us.”

Eighty years ago this week, as the Allies launched the greatest seaborne invasion in history, a British general voiced what many were thinking.

Knowing that the D-Day landings – the first step in liberating Western Europe from the Nazis – would be a tough fight, and could end in disaster, Major-General Francis “Freddie” de Guingand is said to have wished the renowned Aussie 9th Division, legend of Tobruk and El Alamein, was on hand.

Sadly for Freddie, right-hand man to the Allied ground forces’ famed overall commander Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, Australia’s infantry were by then fighting closer to home, and the bulk of the extraordinary beach and air assaults on

June 6, 1944 were carried out by British, US and Canadian divisions.

Nevertheless, Australians were very much present, with 3300 serving on that “day of days” and thousands more across the crucial weeks either side, in the air, by sea and even, in small numbers, on land.

That fact is not well-enough known, says the Australian War Memorial’s senior historian Lachlan Grant.

“Traditionally there has been a sense that it wasn’t much of an Australian story,” he says of Operation Overlord, the battle for Normandy in Northern France. “But there *is* a large Australian story there – we just needed to find out who the people were.”

Which, along with fellow historians, he has done – a challenging job because many of those involved were serving on attachment to British forces, as opposed to in all-Aussie units. (cont. p4)

SOCIAL LUNCHEON

APRIL 9



At our April meeting, we were pleased to once again hear from Garry Snowden, President of the Arch of Victory Group who gave a short talk covering many aspects of those Ballarat-born individuals and their respective war experiences. Garry is a font of knowledge and we could have listened to him all day

Following Garry's talk, we were reminded of a great Australian through the video [Monash: The Forgotten Anzac \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Monash:TheForgottenAnzac)

General Sir John Monash GCMG KCB VD is widely acknowledged as one of the great Australians. He was Australia's outstanding military and civilian leader as well as a great contributor to Australian life. Born to German Jewish parents in 1865 in Melbourne, Monash was Dux (jointly) of Melbourne's Scotch College. He graduated from The University of Melbourne with degrees of a Master of Engineering in 1893, a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Law in 1895, and a Doctor of Engineering in 1921.

Before the Great War, Sir John Monash worked as an engineer in Melbourne where he was recognised as an innovator in the use of reinforced concrete. During the First World War, he led a brigade at Gallipoli and was noted for his brilliant command of the Australian Army Corps in France which resulted in a number of major victories that are credited with having shortened the course of the Great War. Post-war, Sir John Monash was the first General Manager of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria. Later he became the Vice-Chancellor of The University of Melbourne.

As well as being a founding member of the Rotary Club of Melbourne, Australia's first Rotary Club, he was also the founding president of the Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand. Sir John Monash, who was one of the principal organisers of the annual observance of ANZAC Day, as well as an advocate for Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance, died in 1931. His State Funeral was attended by an estimated 300,000 mourners who came to pay their respects to a great Australian.

SOCIAL LUNCHEON

MAY 14



We were highly entertained following our luncheon by Tony Robinson's Tour of Duty of Ballarat in 2019.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=Tony+Robinson+tour+of+duty+Ballarat&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&hl=en-au&client=safari>

A NEW HOME FOR THE PLINTH

Our President Peter Dowling was recently approached by Ballarat Council concerning the fate of the memorial plinth at the Ballarat Showgrounds commemorating the first site of the recruits to 1WAGS, prior to the airport location.

Following consideration of various options, it was decided that the plinth would be best honoured in front of Hut 48. As it turned out, it was a far bigger job than imagined but the plinth now has pride of place in its new home.



D DAY Invasion (cont. from p2)

And their experiences are extraordinary: from a World War I Gallipoli infantry veteran who by June 1944 was a naval commander to a widow who served as at the Dunkirk evacuation, in the Blitz, in Overlord, and at the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

The biggest body of Aussies involved were airmen, bomber crews pounding enemy defences and running decoy missions for weeks before the invasion, and on the day itself, fighter pilots and ground-attack crews ensuring crucial air superiority and hammering German infantry and armour trying to reach the front, and transport crews ferrying the paratroopers and glider assault teams that landed on the night of June 5, plus supplies.

By July 1944 there were about 14,000 Aussie air force personnel based in Britain. On June 6 alone, about 1000 flew missions with Royal Australian Air Force squadrons and 1800 with the British Royal Air Force. But securing the skies was costly and Allied airmen paid a high price with about 16,000 killed over the period.

“We often note that about 12 Australian airmen died on D-Day and two sailors died on D-Day,” says Dr Grant. “But that was just the first day of the campaign. And there was a large build-up to date in the weeks and months beforehand, very much involving the air force.

“These months in 1944 that encompass D-Day were the worst in terms of the highest casualties for the Royal Australian Air Force for all of the Second World War. Well over 1000 Australian airmen were killed in the skies above Europe during this period, both before and after.”

As the Allies pushed further into France, air squadrons moved their bases across the Channel, leading to increased operational ability, and reuniting Australian personnel with the French people who had taken the Diggers to heart in World War I.

But beyond the photos of ground crew grinning with gendarmes, or pilots toasting in cafes, the air war remained both vital and hideous. Anyone after an idea of its terrifying nature would be well advised to watch the recent TV epic *Masters of the Air*.

“Of course it was about American bomber crews, but it did a really good job of reflecting what it was like to try and survive the bombing campaign,” Dr Grant says, noting the similarities with the Australian experience as commemorated by the Australian War Memorial’s Bomber Command exhibition.

Similarly, he commends the biopic series *Band of Brothers* and movie *Saving Private Ryan* as good starting points to imagine what Overlord was like for soldiers on the ground.

“Absolutely, those two shows (are a good representation),” he says. “*Band of Brothers* in particular, as it was based on the accounts of real people who were there. That’s why it has such enduring quality and was so popular with viewers, because they really emphasise with these real people, these stories – it was real history.”

The ground fighting in Normandy, like the air war, was brutal. Almost 37,000 Allied soldiers died between June and August (2500 on D-Day itself), out of more than 425,000 Allies and Germans killed, wounded or captured. An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 French civilians also died.

Australian infantry – veterans of Africa, Greece, Crete and by 1944 mainly involved in equally vicious fighting against the Japanese – were fortunate to avoid the Overlord ground campaign, says Dr Grant, despite Freddie de Guingaud’s well-meant wish.

Yet a handful of Australian soldiers was on the ground – 13 officers sent to watch and learn from the D-Day landings in preparation for amphibious assaults against Japanese-held territories closer to home.

Among them was Major Henry “Jo” Gullett, a decorated veteran of North Africa who soon dropped his observer status. “He was sort of there to observe at the start, but as casualties mount up, he’s serving officer, so he takes command of a British unit,” Dr Grant says.

Gullett – who carried his Australian rifle everywhere, despite his officer status – was shot and wounded while leading an assault through the Norman countryside.

His experience echoed that of another D-Day Aussie at another legendary landing. (cont. p6)



1 WAGS REPORT

Sponsored by APCO Alfredton



80th Anniversaries of World War II

In 2024, we mark many 80th anniversaries of events that occurred during WWII.

The Great Escape

It is the 80th Anniversary of 'The Great Escape', 24 March 1944, in which 76 Allied Airforce POW's tunneled out of a German prisoner-of-war camp in Poland. Most of the POW's who escaped from Stalag Luft 111 faced a tragic end. Only 3 made it to safety. The others were recaptured and 50 of them were executed on Hitler's orders. Six Australians were part of the escape with all but one being executed.

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the Royal Air Force Police conducted the hunt for those responsible, succeeding in bringing 18 members of the Gestapo to justice in 1947. Thirteen of those were then later executed.

On parade at the 80th anniversary commemorations were 13 currently serving RAF Police personnel carrying portraits of those POWs executed.



(Poland)

D Day Landings

It is also the 80th Anniversary of 'The D Day Landings' 6 June 1944, also known as The Battle of Normandy, which led to the liberation of France and Europe. Operation 'OVERLORD' as the invasion was called was an extensive aerial and naval bombardment as well as an airborne assault with 24,000 American, British, Canadian and allied airborne troops. Casualties were heaviest at Omaha beach with its high cliffs. Allied casualties were documented for at least 10,000 with 4,414 allies confirmed dead.

It is little known that Australians, predominantly members of the Royal Australian Air Force and Royal Australian Navy, were among those who ac-

tively contributed to the operation. Thirteen Australians were killed on 6 June, but the campaign lasted beyond that one day. On 7 June, 20 Australian airmen were killed; on 8 June another 22 died, and the losses continued until August. In fact, more than 1,100 Australians were killed in Europe in the build-up to and during the Normandy battle (April–August 1944). To this day, June 1944 remains the costliest month in terms of casualties in the history of the RAAF.



The crash of Lancaster ME663 RAAF 460 Squadron

Lancaster ME663 of 460 Squadron RAAF based at Binbrook UK was shot down on the 10th April 1944 by a German night-fighter and anti-aircraft fire and crashed near the town of Aale in Denmark. The aircraft was homeward bound after an operation to lay mines in the Baltic.

Five of the seven crewmen were killed in the crash and are buried in Esbjerg (Fourfelt) Cemetery in Denmark. Two became PoW with one dying of his injuries during captivity.

The 'Bomber Boys' of Lancaster ME663:
CHAPMAN, Leslie Harold [Flight Sergeant] 410641 RAAF Wireless Operator/Air Gunner. Born Stawell, Victoria.
KILLED Age 20

CROSBY, Peter Alan [Flight Lieutenant] DFC 416656 RAAF Pilot. Born Brighton South Australia.
KILLED Age 20

BILLETT, Clive [Flight Sergeant] 414191 RAAF Bomb /Aimer. Born Darwin, Northern Territory.
KILLED Age 25

ROBB, Laurence William [Flying Officer] 418879 RAAF Air Gunner. Born Alexandra, Victoria. Trained at 1 WAGS Ballarat Course 29.
KILLED Age 33

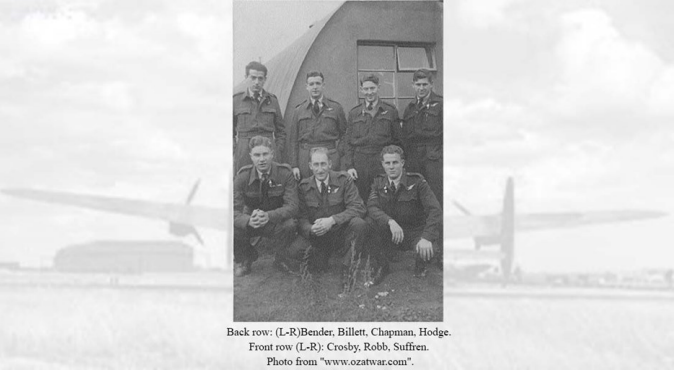
BENDER, Milton Harold [Pilot Officer] DFC 173405 RAF Engineer Born Middlesex England.
KILLED Age 20

HODGE, Frederick Stanley [Flight Sergeant] DFM 426100 RAAF Rear Gunner. Born Melbourne, Victoria. Taken prisoner by German captors and survived the war.

PoW - discharged 28th November 1945

SUFFREN, Charles Edward [Flying Officer] DFC 409280 RAAF Navigator. Born Ballarat, Victoria. Survived but with severe injuries. He passed away in a LUFTWAFFE Military hospital in Germany 10 months after the crash and is buried in Durnbach Cemetery in Germany.

POW - died of injuries



Back row: (L-R) Bender, Billett, Clappman, Hodge.
Front row (L-R): Crosby, Robb, Suffren.
Photo from "www.ozafwar.com".

A special tribute story has been posted in The Ballarat Courier and the Stawell Times.

An interview was conducted on ABC radio with Prue Bentley and Danish-based journalist Lisa Martin.

An 80th Anniversary Service was held in Denmark.

READ MORE: FEATURE STORY 1wags.org.au

Janet Bates—IWAGS Co-ordinator

VALE Reverend John Furness

The Reverend John Furness was born in Fiji, the first of four sons born to Reverend Oliver and Edna Furness.

John moved around in his childhood with his father's ministering and following school graduated from Burwood Teacher's College. John was called to the Ministry and undertook Theological Training at the University of Melbourne.

John commenced his Ministry at Yanac, then Canterbury and finally at St Andrews in Ballarat for 7 years. He retired from full-time preaching in 2005. In 1974 John had joined the Regular Army and in 1982 joined the Army Reserve. This service put him in good stead to provide Chaplaincy to numerous schools and colleges including Ballarat and Clarendon College and serving many ex-military organisations including Legacy, the

Vietnam Veterans and the Air Force Association here in Ballarat.

He died in Ballarat on 18 May 2024, aged 83 years. His funeral service was attended by almost 200 mourners, many being from the Veteran Community.



Reverend John Furness in Ballarat—Courier photo

D DAY Invasion (cont. from p4)

George Dixon, of Tasmania, was an original Anzac who landed at Gallipoli on April 25, 1915. He was just 15, having enlisted underage. Days later he received multiple gunshot wounds and was invalided back to Australia.

In 1940, Dixon enlisted again, this time in the Royal Australian Navy. Decorated in the 1943 Sicily landings, by D-Day he was a lieutenant-commander in charge of one of the tank landing ships supporting the Canadian landings on Juno Beach.

Dixon was one of about 500 Australian sailors in action on D-Day, serving on all sorts of vessels from battleships and motorised torpedo boats to transports and midget submarines. The extraordinarily complex seaborne operation, named Operation Neptune, was the key to success in Overlord.

Australia's role in the liberation of Europe serves as a reminder of why the country was at war at all. While we might understandably focus on the struggle against Japan in Asia and the Pacific, Dr Grant reminds us that "Australians went to war in 1939 over affairs in Europe. It was, after all, in response to the Nazi invasion of Poland that Australia declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939."

Writing in the AWM's Wartime Magazine, he also notes that Australia did not enter World War II simply because of its ties with Britain, but because, in the words of then prime minister Robert Menzies, if German aggression went unchecked, "there could be no just peace for the world".