



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH

Newsletter



June/July 2024

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last newsletter we covered the journey of the 1WAGS memorial plinth from its site at the Ballarat Showgrounds to the front of Hut 48 at the airport. This is of course a very fitting new home as the heritage buildings including Hut 48 survive from the aeon of 1WAGS in WWII.

It is therefore even more fitting that the plinth has now been joined by the recreated 1WAGS banner, to form a more permanent reminder of the history of 1WAGS on the airport site. Please read the separate article on page 3. I'd like to particularly thank Signarama for the provision of the banner at cost and to Ballarat Council for the effort in placing the plinth into its new surroundings and the recent work on the carpark area around the Hut.

On another note, each year the Association presents a ball on the last Saturday in August, as a part of the events commemorating the Battle for Australia. This year is no exception and the themed ball will take place on Saturday 31 August.



In addition, make sure you diarise Tuesday December 10 for our special Christmas luncheon which will once again be held at Ballarat North Sports Club including a wonderful Christmas show performed by Tony Diamond. As this format was particularly enjoyed last Christmas, we will be doing it again.

Peter Dowling

President



IMPORTANT DATES COMING UP

Social Luncheon Tuesday August 13

Acknowledging the Battle for Australia.

Social Luncheon Tuesday September 10

Acknowledging the Battle of Britain.

Social Luncheon Tuesday October 8

Daniel Harvey will talk to us about the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation.

Saturday 31 August

Hurry - only a few tickets remaining!

AFA - BALLARAT PRESENTS
BLACK & WHITE BALL

TO COMMEMORATE THE
BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA DAY

ENTERTAINMENT
*** THE PACIFIC BELLES
DANCE MUSIC BY
MANTEL

DANCING FOR ALL.
SEQUENCE, BALLROOM, FREESTYLE,
ROCK N ROLL, LINE DANCES, AND JIVE

LIMITED NUMBERS - BOOKINGS ESSENTIAL
CONTACT ANN - 0414 441 149

**SATURDAY,
31ST AUGUST 2024**
7:30PM - MIDNIGHT
BROWN HILL HALL
375 HUMFFRAY STREET NORTH,
BALLARAT

COST \$35 PER HEAD.
INCLUDES TABLE SERVICE SUPPER TOWN
CUP RECOMMENDED, DOOR PRIZES, GREAT
EVENING OF ENTERTAINMENT AND DANCING.

OUR OLDEST MEMBER?



Mrs Kathryn Wilson and her daughter Beth

We were recently contacted by Ms Beth Wilson, who advised us that she regularly reads this newsletter with her mother Kathryn. Following acknowledgement of some of our members' birthdays earlier in the year, particularly those turning 90 or more, Beth wanted to share that her mother might be the oldest member of the Ballarat Branch having recently celebrated a lunch for her 96th birthday.

Thanks to Beth for sharing a little of Kathryn's story:

Kathryn grew up in Redan and attended Ballarat High School, leaving school to work as a telephonist with the PMG. Her father was a Gallipoli veteran and during WW2 the family hosted a number of American Marines during their R&R leave in Ballarat. Kathryn's mother died young and she took over the care of the home and looking after her brother, Alex, and younger sister Margaret. Kathryn and her sister Marg are a great pair together still.

Kathryn married Con Wilson in 1952 and lived in Sebastopol since the early 1960s. Con served in the RAAF in Darwin during the war. Sadly, he died in 2010.

Kathryn and Con had 2 daughters, Beth and her sister Margaret and is the proud grandmother of 4 grandchildren and 5 great grandchildren.

Kathryn was an active member of a number of community organisations through the years, enjoyed travelling with family and friends and loved pottering in her garden (her roses were always glorious). She remains bright and active and is currently being cared for at Nazareth House.

SOCIAL LUNCHEON



JUNE 11

For our June social luncheon, we were able to see a very entertaining video on behind the scenes of the making of the famous movie "The Great Escape" starring Steve McQueen.

Steve McQueen enlisted in the US Marine Corps in 1947, with his mother's permission since he was not yet 18 years old. While initially struggling with the discipline required to be a marine, he ultimately embraced it and focussed on self-improvement. He was honourably discharged in 1950.

In 1952 with financial assistance under the GI Bill, he began studying acting. He also began competing in weekend motorcycle races at Long Island City Raceway and soon became an excellent racer.

Following his role in "The Magnificent Seven" in 1960, his career catapulted. He did however raise the ire of the top-billed Yul Brynner with his gun-twirling, scene-stealing antics.

He was top-billed for the 1963 film "The Great Escape". He was reportedly difficult to work with, requiring scenes to be re-written to give him greater prominence. Insurance concerns prevented him from performing the film's famous motorcycle leap, which was done by his friend and fellow cycle enthusiast Bud Ekins. The film established McQueen's box-office clout and secured his status as a superstar.



The Magnificent Seven: Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, Horst Buchholz, Charles Bronson, Robert Vaughan, Brad Dexter and James Caan –how many of these became famous over the succeeding decades?

Steve McQueen died of mesothelioma in 1980 aged 50. It is likely that his condition was caused by asbestos, probably due to his exposure while removing insulation from pipes aboard a troop ship while he served in the Marines.

SOCIAL LUNCHEON

JULY 9



The U3A ukulele group, Two Little Ducks, led by Jacqueline Cleverley, did us proud at our luncheon in July.



The group practises each Monday afternoon in the common room and has entertained, to their great pleasure, the U3A 500 card group playing next door. Your president and secretary participate in this card group.

Therefore, when the invitation was extended, it was with great delight that it was accepted.

The members tapped and sang along to many favourites including Scarborough Fair, Da Do Ron Ron and Daisy Bell. We truly appreciated the camaraderie and entertainment with many aeroplane themed songs.

Following, we visited the talented U3A silver jewellery group, which also uses Hut 48 on Tuesday afternoons (see page 5).

NEW SIGNAGE JOINS THE PLINTH

1WAGS Co-ordinator and tireless historian Janet Bates created a banner to commemorate the activities of 1WAGS and its location at Ballarat Airport. The Airforce Association Ballarat Branch recently erected a permanent banner at Hut 48 Ballarat Airport in recognition of the vital role 1WAGS played in training airmen during WW2. The sign aims to give greater awareness to the community as to the heritage of the base.





1 WAGS REPORT

Sponsored by APCO Alfredton



As of the 5 August 2024, there have been over 236,000 individual browsers to the 1 WAGS Website (www.1wags.org.au) from Australia and world-wide.

THE BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA

Liberator A72-80 of No. 21 Squadron RAAF

Of the 1,182 1 WAGS trainees who were killed during operations in WW2, 299 perished due to aircraft accidents both in Australia, the Pacific and the U.K. One such aircraft accident resulted in loss of eleven lives, with five airmen having trained at 1 WAGS, Ballarat.

All eleven crew were killed when the consolidated heavy bomber ditched into Vansittart Bay off Western Australia on the 23 March 1945. It is the highest ever loss of life in an Australian military aircraft accident in Western Australia. One of those killed, Warrant Officer PARKER, was born in Ballarat.

The following is an excerpt from No. 24 Squadron Operations Record Book A50 entry date 23 March 1945 as related in Beasy, J and C Truscott: The Diary of Australia's Secret Wartime Kimberley Airbase, Australian Military History Publications, Loftus NSW 1995:

At 0650 hours today (Friday 23 March 1945) Squadron Leader Straus, Captain, and crew (plus one passenger) took off in Liberator A72-80 from Truscott Strip, leading a formation of four aircraft on an armed recce (reconnaissance) of the Lombok area. Shortly after take-off, Squadron Leader Straus called Truscott tower on VHF (Very High Frequency radio) indicating that he was preparing for an emergency landing. Owing to low altitude it was apparent that Squadron Leader Straus could not locate the strip. At 0713 hours a message was received that Squadron Leader Straus was about to ditch in Vansittart Bay. Following this, the crews of the remaining three aircraft saw A72-80 ditch with wings level but at a fairly high rate of decent. The aircraft caught fire on impact with the water and disintegrated. The control tower at Truscott ordered HMAS COONGoola, at West Bay for sea rescue purposes, to proceed to the scene of the crash. HMAS COONGoola arrived there about four hours later and searched the area, recovering only the body of Flight Sergeant Rodgers. Spitfires and Venturas searched the area throughout the day and again the following morning.

Identified from left to right in the back row are:

- 250759 Squadron Leader Nathaniel Ivan Straus of East Malvern, Victoria MID (Pilot)
- 427775 Flight Sergeant Harry James Boyd of Pomborneit North, Victoria (2nd pilot)
- 426733 Flying Officer (FO) Raymond Allenby Whiting of Ascot, Queensland (Navigator Bomb Aimer)
- 404485 Flight Lieutenant Charles David Parry-Okeden of Chinchilla, Queensland (BLO)
- 416215 FO John Wilson Hursthouse of Elbow Hill, South Australia (Wireless Operator Air) **1 WAGS Course 15**
- 401748 Warrant Officer (WO) William Richard Flanagan of Warrandyte, Victoria (Wireless Operator Air) **1 WAGS Course 13**

Front row, from left to right are:

- 408591 WO Herbert Gordon Parker of Cootamundra, NSW (Wireless Operator Air) **1 WAGS Course 14**
- 46563 Sergeant (Sgt) Ronald Malcolm Morris of Wagin, Western Australia (Flight Engineer)
- 121592 Sgt Alexander Douglas Whitehead of Jervois, South Australia (Armourer Air Gunner)
- 436889 Sgt William Anthony Jordan Rodgers of Albany, Western Australia (Air Gunner) **1 WAGS Course 39**
- 422716 Sgt John Richmond Ryan of Bondi, NSW (Air Gunner) **1 WAGS Course 45**

Missing from photo :

- 36484 Corporal Douglas William Madden (Instrument Maker)

Janet Bates - 1WAGS Co-ordinator

SOCIAL LUNCHEON

JULY 9 (continued from p 3)



Following the ukulele concert, members trooped over to the long room, to meet with the jewellery and silversmithing class.

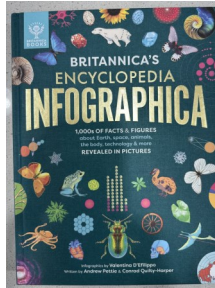
This group joins the many amazingly talented people in U3A and it was a great pleasure to interact with other co-tenants of Hut 48 and learn more about what they do.

This page highlights some of the handiwork of this group.



VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

Vietnam Veterans Day is commemorated on 18 August each year. This year, the Air Force Association was invited to attend the commemoration and, as is now customary, our president presented a book rather than a wreath.



In Australia, Vietnam Veterans Day is commemorated on 18 August, this being the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan in 1966.

Almost 60,000 Australians served over the 10 years of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. Of these people, about 3,000 were injured and 521 were killed. These losses were vastly sustained by the army - the airforce lost 70 to injury and/or death. It is estimated that there are about 35,000 surviving Vietnam veterans in 2024.

Many Vietnam veterans have experienced anxiety and other effects of **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**, both on the battlefield and upon returning home. Most soldiers who were involved in active combat situations in the war returned home with little assistance to make the transition back to civilian life.

Vietnam veterans who returned home were **spat at in public, and at some RSL branches were ignored and made aware that their presence wasn't welcome**, having served in what was by some considered to be not "a proper war".

On 18 August 1966, in a rubber plantation near the village of Long Tan, Australian soldiers fought one of their fiercest battles of the

Vietnam War. The battle saw D Company, 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, face an enemy force of over 2,000. Heavily outnumbered, D Company held fast for four hours, supported by accurate artillery fire from Nui Dat, before reinforcements arrived. The battle saw 18 killed, and was the largest loss of life on a single day for the Australians.

In 1969, D Company returned to Long Tan to erect a memorial cross and commemorate the battle. Over time, this day became synonymous with all those who served and died in the Vietnam War. In 1987, then Prime Minister Bob Hawke made this official, announcing that Long Tan Day would now be known as Vietnam Veterans' Day.

