



# AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH

## Newsletter



### Summer 2024

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

We have reached the end of another very happy and successful year. Although our number of members has diminished over the years, we have had a steady attendance at our social luncheons and have been entertained by a variety of guests and presentations.

While this format will continue into 2025, we are looking at ways to increase and stimulate the membership of Ballarat Branch of the Air Force Association. Unlike other branches of the association, we are extremely lucky to have both the use of Hut 48 in the historic precinct of the airport and the heritage of the IWAGS training from World War II.

In looking at ways to capitalise on this heritage, the Ballarat Branch will be sponsoring an event over Heritage Week in May 2025. We are collaborating with historians and enthusiasts to create an event that will bring visitors and vintage aircraft to Ballarat and the airport precinct. I will keep you informed of developments, so watch this space!

In another initiative, we have received members from both Geelong and Bendigo branches for luncheon and information exchange (see separate article pages 5 and 6).

Finally, I wish you and your families all the best over this festive season and a happy 2025.

*Peter Dowling*  
*President*



## IMPORTANT DATES COMING UP

### New Year Picnic Lunch

#### Tuesday January 14

As in previous years, we will meet for a picnic lunch in the BBQ pavilion near Pipers at Lake Wendouree opposite the tramway pavilion and public toilets.

Please meet for a midday start.

Do not bring food - sandwiches and treats will be provided.

### Social Luncheon Tuesday February 11

We will resume our usual social luncheons at midday on February 11.

### Note from the Editor

It has been my pleasure to produce this Newsletter for you for the past 2 years. In order to increase the creative content, the publication will move from bi-monthly to quarterly, starting with this final edition for 2024.

I look forward to sharing more with you in Autumn 2025.

*Sue Alexander - Editor*

# Christmas Luncheon

2024



Enjoying morning melodies....



Following 2023's successful format, we once again attended the Ballarat North Sports Club to enjoy "Morning Melodies" (featuring plenty of Christmas hits and some bad "dad" jokes as well as a couple of naughty jokes) followed by our Christmas lunch.

The Club did us proud with the lunch offering and we had an amazing array of raffle prizes, with most guests being able to take something home. We were once again blessed with a generous hamper from Catherine King's office (unfortunately her representative had to withdraw from the lunch at the last moment) and our IWAGS sponsor APCO also donated a very generous hamper and some smaller prizes.

We had, as usual, an array of conserves and pickles, beautifully presented, provided by long-term member Margaret Chapman. Margaret has experienced challenged health over the last few months but still hasn't missed a beat with providing these tasty offerings, in addition to her homemade sausage rolls, at every luncheon. We'd really like to thank Margaret for her ongoing generosity and support.

We were joined for our lunch by representatives of our co-tenants at Hut 48, U3A and the Engineers group. We welcomed past president Nina Netherway and current vice president Miriam Peck. We also welcomed regular attendees at our social luncheons, Peter and Jacky Bandy.

There was great merriment opening the bon-bons and reading the truly terrible jokes.



A table full of raffle prizes...



# Enjoying the 2024 Christmas Party



L-R Ernie Chapman, Margaret Chapman, Peter Dowling, Bob McDonald, Ken Marsh



L-R Keith Pitman, Tom Roberts, Peter and Jacqui Bandy



Janet and Peter Bates



L-R Kath Kellett, Kevin and Dot Grundell



L-R Madelene and Bill O'Halloran, Daryl Oldaker



Nina Netherway



Peter Allen

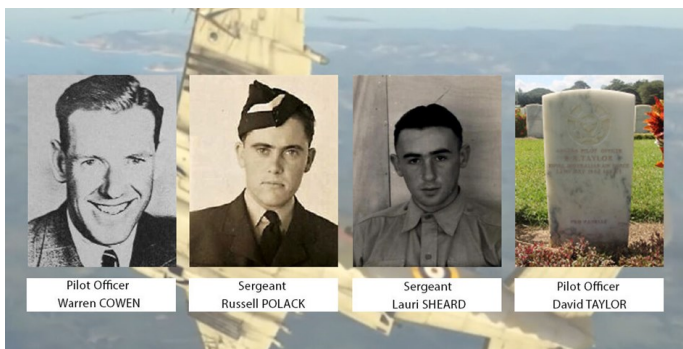


# 1 WAGS REPORT

Sponsored by APCO Alfredton



I wish you all a Merry Christmas and thank you for your support during 2024.



The FEATURE STORY on the 1 WAGS website as per last newsletter pays tribute to the crew of the Lockheed Hudson A16-201 shot down by nine Japanese Zeros near Popondetta in Papua New Guinea. The four crew of 32 Squadron were:

Pilot Officer Warren COWEN - Pilot

Sergeant Russell POLACK - Gunner

Sergeant Lauri SHEARD - Gunner

(1 WAGS Course 15)

Pilot Officer David TAYLOR - Navigator

(1 WAGS Course 16).

The ABC 'Australian Story' recorded a program 'ENEMY LINES' about the heroism of the crew and at our request has reformatted it as a Youtube documentary. We will show the program to our members next year. Follow the link to watch it now.

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-11-01/enemy-lines-july-1,-2002/10447776>

## Australian Story

### **VIDEO: Enemy Lines**

Producer Margaret Parker

Posted Thu 1 Nov 2018 at 3:41am Thursday 1 Nov 2018 at 3:41am, updated Mon 18 Nov 2024 at 7:14pm Monday 18 Nov 2024 at 7:14pm

Video Duration: 28 minutes.

Loved ones worked to earn recognition for Warren Cowan and his heroism during the war.

*(Australian Story)*

### **POTT, John Henry RAAF 400122**

Sergeant John Henry Pott 400122 of 216 Squadron RAF was killed when Bristol Bombay L5847 crashed near Gazala, Libya - his body was not recovered and he is commemorated on the Alamein Memorial.

After an enquiry to 1 WAGS from the niece of 1 WAGS Airman (Course 2) John Henry POTT, Peter Colliver sent the following information:

*Immediate family members of a deceased Australian Defence Force (ADF) member can request unissued service awards for them:*

- **Unissued medals:** *The next of kin can apply for unissued medals for the deceased veteran.*
- **Replacement medals:** *The next of kin can apply for one replacement set of medals if they don't already exist. You can apply online using the Defence Medals Application Form. You'll need the original recipient's full name and date of birth.*

**Replica medals:** *If the medals have already been issued, you can purchase replicas from a commercial company. The Air Force Shop is just one source.*

Peter W Colliver OAM  
National Secretary  
**Air Force Association**



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Janet Bates - 1WAGS Co-ordinator

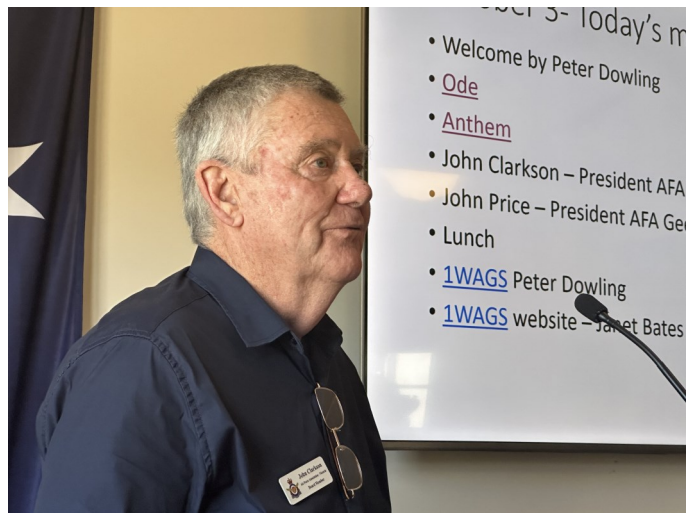
# SOCIAL LUNCHEON EVENTS



On Thursday 3 October, we were privileged to be visited by the Geelong Branch of the Air Force Association, as well as the Victorian State President, John Clarkson at an *ad hoc* additional luncheon.

We welcomed a bus load of guests from Geelong including President John Price, Past President John Delia and Secretary Phil Royce.

We were extremely pleased that John Clarkson was also able to make it to Ballarat. As our normal social luncheons on Tuesdays conflict with the monthly meeting of Vic AFA, he was able to take advantage of the changed day to visit us. John outlined some of the challenges ahead for the Air Force Association overall, including the aging membership and serving members' best interests. He also said to this point that within the next few years it is envisaged that headquarters for Victoria will move from the current location in Hawthorn to an area west/southwest of the city, closer to the more active branches.



Victorian State President of the Air Force Association - John Clarkson

**Right** - John Price, President Bendigo Branch addressing the lunch and describing some of the challenges faced by the branch and

**Below** - group shot of some of the Ballarat Branch and some of the visiting Geelong Branch members, with state President John Clarkson.





On Tuesday 8 October, we welcomed Bendigo Branch President, Reinhard Goshiniak, who spoke about his role in the airforce and on the Board of the Victorian Air Force Association. It is anticipated that Ballarat Branch will visit both Geelong and Bendigo branches, to understand common issues and cross-pollinate ideas.

## **Group Captain Sir Douglas Robert Steuart Bader, CBE DSO & Bar DL FRAeS**

(This article adapted from Wikipedia)

At our meeting in October, acknowledging the anniversary of the Battle of Britain, we watched a video of the life of Douglas Bader.

This well-known World War II hero and subject of Paul Brickhill's novel "Reach for the Sky" has hero status with many of the general population.

When the film *Reach for the Sky* was released, people associated Bader with the quiet and amiable personality of actor Kenneth More, who played Bader. Bader recognised that the producers had deleted all those habits he displayed when on operations, particularly his prolific use of bad language. Bader once said, "[they] still think [I'm] the dashing chap Kenneth More was". Bader's more controversial traits were touched upon by

Brickhill in the book *Reach for the Sky*. "He is a somewhat 'difficult' person", Brickhill told (Sir) Billy Collins, head of his publishing house William Collins and Sons, after spending over a year talking to him. Nevertheless, Bader was received as a legendary figure by the wider public, who closely identified him as a leader of *The Few* in the Battle of Britain.



By Cuthbert Orde, for Air Ministry of UK government - RAF Museum

Bader suffered from parental neglect as a child and his parents showed little interest in him. Becoming unruly, and without parental guidance, he was sent ultimately to St Edwards boarding school where his aggressive energy found a new lease of life and he excelled at sports.

On 26 July 1930, Bader was commissioned as a pilot officer into No. 23 Squadron RAF based at Kenley, Surrey. Flying Gloster Gamecocks and soon afterwards Bristol Bulldogs, Bader became a daredevil while training there, often flying illegal and dangerous stunts.

On 14 December 1931, while visiting Reading Aero Club, Bader attempted some low-flying aerobatics at Woodley Airfield in a Bulldog Mk. IIA, K1676, of 23 Squadron, apparently on a dare. His aircraft

*Douglas Bader cont.*

crashed when the tip of the left wing touched the ground. Bader was rushed to the Royal Berkshire Hospital, where parts of both his legs were amputated.

In 1932, after a long convalescence, Bader fought hard to regain his former abilities after he was given a new pair of artificial legs.

Bader got his chance to prove that he could still fly when, in June 1932, Air Under-Secretary Philip Sassoon arranged for him to take up an Avro 504, which he piloted competently. A subsequent medical examination proved him fit for active service, but in April 1933 he was notified that the RAF had decided to reverse the decision. In May, Bader was invalided out of the RAF,

Against a background of increasing tensions in Europe in 1937–39, Bader repeatedly requested that the Air Ministry accept him back into the RAF. He regained a medical categorisation for operational flying at the end of November 1939 and on 27 November, eight years after his accident, Bader flew solo again in an Avro Tutor. Once airborne, he could not resist the temptation to turn the biplane upside down at 600 feet (180 m) inside the circuit area. Bader subsequently progressed through the Fairey Battle and Miles Master (the last training stage before flying Spitfires and Hurricanes).

In January 1940, Bader was posted to No. 19 Squadron based at RAF Duxford near Cambridge, where, at 29, he was older than most of his fellow pilots. It was here that Bader got his first glimpse of a Spitfire. It was thought that Bader's success as a fighter pilot was partly because of his having no legs; pilots pulling high g-forces in combat turns often blacked out as the flow of blood from the brain drained to the lower parts of the body, especially the legs. As Bader had no legs he could remain conscious longer, and thus had an advantage over opponents with legs.

On 12 December 1940, Bader was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for his services during the Battle of Britain. His unit, No. 242 Squadron, had claimed 62 aerial victories.

## **Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation - the Early Years**

At the November luncheon, the members and guests were presented with an overview of the early years of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation by Daniel Harvey.

In 1935, the General Manager of BHP, Essington Lewis, visited Europe and formed the view that war was inevitable. Becoming concerned that aircraft would not be available from Britain in Australia's defence, he lobbied the Australian Government to establish the modern aircraft industry.

The government required little persuasion and encouraged negotiations between a number of Australian companies. The outcome was the formation of CAC in 1936. Initially the companies involved were BHP, General Motors-Holden and Broken Hill Associated Smelter. These were joined by Imperial Chemical Industries, the Orient Steam Navigation Company and the Electrolytic Zinc Company. By September 1937 a factory had been completed at Port Melbourne.

Shortly after the establishment of CAC, Mascot-based Tugan Aircraft Co. was purchased for £ 20,000. This led to Lawrence Wackett joining the company as General Manager. It is almost entirely due to Wackett's efforts that the Wirraway became the first aircraft produced by CAC. In 1935 Wackett had led a technical mission to Europe and the United States to evaluate modern aircraft types and select a type suitable to Australia's needs and within Australia's capabilities to build.



Lawrence J (Wacko) Wackett

The mission's selection was the North American NA-16; with CAC's modifications this became the Wirraway. CAC also undertook production of the Pratt & Whitney R-1340 engine used in the Wirraway and also built some propellers when supplies from alternative sources became problematic.



NA-16

The production plant was to be built at Fishermen's Bend on the Yarra river. It was chosen because it was close to the Melbourne port, rail and road. GMH would be a neighbour.

Construction began April 1937 and finished in September 1938. Cost was estimated at £100,000. Other costs were plant and machinery £139,000, jigs & tools £50,520, licence fees £38,550 and raw materials £109,000. Expenditure on 31 of December 1939 was £583,940.

The work force was made up of 17 former Tugan employees and predominantly Victorian Railways tradesmen from Newport railway workshop. In August 1939 CAC had 2000 employees and a wages bill of about £10,000 a week.



The NA-33, an improved design of the NA-16 with retractable landing gear, was finally settled upon. All the airframe drawings had to be redrawn with British hardware. This was a huge task. There are about 50,000 parts to make a Wirraway and 12,000 of them different. It was decided to keep US hardware for the engines & propeller. In the Wasp engine there were some 4000 parts, 625 of them different. The T-6 Texan was an all metal stressed skin redesign of the NA-16. It has over 1600 drawing sheets. Documentation such as production documents and manuals had to be written.



CAC Drawing Office

The challenge Wackett saw was that if they were not producing aircraft within 3 years of CAC inception, it would not happen. Ultimately, there were 755 Wirraways produced from July 1939 to July 1946.

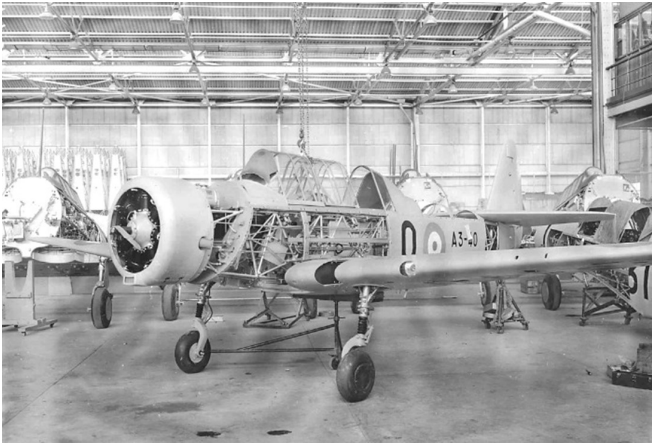


The First CAC-built Wirraway

The Wirraway was used as an advanced trainer, reconnaissance, light bomber, army cooperations, target making and for resupply by air drop using storpedos. A storpedo has a parachute. It was a real work horse. The RAAF even used it in an air defence role at Rabaul in 1942 because there was a lack of fighter aircraft in RAAF service.

The CA-2 Wackett Trainer was the first aircraft to be designed by CAC. It used a mixed construction for the air frame of tubular steel frame fuselage and wooden wings. The same construction techniques as used by Tugan, which meant pre-existing experience could be relied on. It was also the method used by De Havilland on the Tiger Moth. Wind tunnel testing done at Farnborough in the UK found it to have spin instability issues that resulted in the tail plane being relocated.





CA-6 Wackett Trainer Assembly

De Havilland Gypsy 4 engines powered the prototype and it was under powered. The Gypsy 6 engine was considered but they were out of production. The Warner Scarab radial engine was settled on and imported from the USA. CAC built 200 CA-6 production variant Wackett Trainers. The wings were built at GMH down the road.

They were used as intermediate trainers for a short time before being transferred to wireless operator training.

The design of the Boomerang was started on 21/12/1941. Fred David was the chief design engineer of the project. The design team was made up of 15 engineers and draughtsmen. The CAC Board wanted a fighter in the most timely manner possible. CAC had previously done a design study of a two seat multi gun fighter P147. It was basically a re-engineered Wirraway but this was decided to be inadequate. What was decided was to use the Pratt & Whitney R1830 twin wasp radial engine that CAC were building for the DAP Beaufort bomber at their Lidcombe engine plant in Sydney. They reused the Wirraway jigs and some of the parts and modified some of the other Wirraway parts and created new parts as needed.

From design start to first flight was 159 days. The P-51 Mustang took 149 days. Not from the start of design but from the contract signing to first flight. 250 Boomerangs were built. They cost £21,254 each and the first five were built together.

The Boomerang was used as a rear based interceptor on mainland Australia and as a fighter trainer. This meant more P-40s and Spitfires on the front lines. It had a long range of 1500 km without the use of its drop tank. Better range and low altitude performance than the P-40s and Mk V

Spitfires made it ideal for ship fighter cover and army cooperation. They were also used by communication squadrons and the CA-19 could carry a camera in the belly for tactical reconnaissance (low altitude).



Boomerang First Flight

The CA-14 & CA-14a Boomerangs were modified with a turbosupercharger and intercooler behind the pilot. They also fitted a cooling fan to the engine. This provided the high altitude performance that was lacking in earlier models. It was too little too late by the time it was done. The USA did not want to supply CAC with the turbosuperchargers believing there was no way they could be built.

In 1947 to 1948 the Aeronautical Research Laboratories conducted fatigue testing research on Boomerang wings and 1 fuselage. Howard Arthur Wills head of Structures Division presented a paper titled "The Life of Aircraft Structures" at the Second International Aeronautical Conference in 1949. This explained the technique of determining aircraft fatigue lives using applied loads and fatigue data. They develop a fatigue database. All of this was a world first.



Fatigue Testing Model

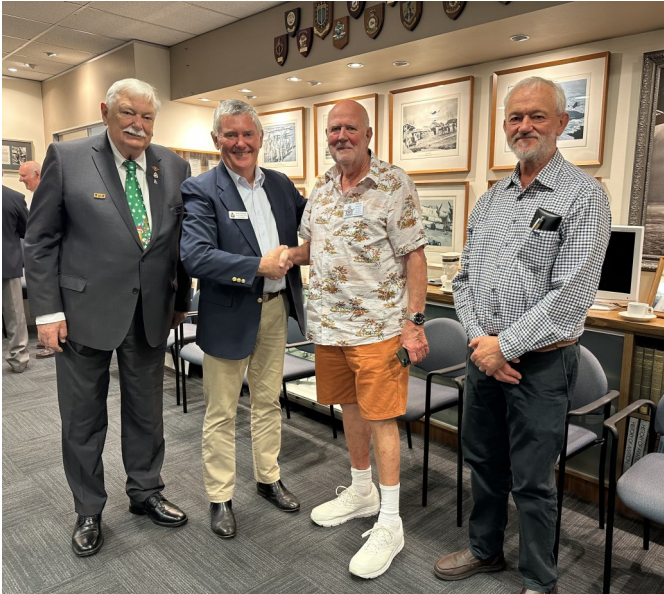
Later designs during World War II were the sophisticated Woomera and CA-15, however these types were destined to fly only in prototype form.

## Air Force Association Victoria

### President's Meeting and Christmas

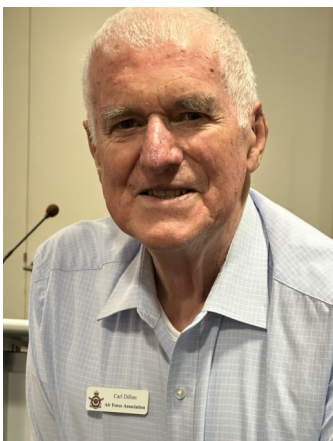
On Sunday 8 December, Christmas drinks followed a short meeting of the Presidents of several of the Victorian Branches of the Air Force Association. The nature of the branches and their activities were quite diverse.

President Peter Dowling and Secretary Sue Alexander attended the meeting.



L-R: Reinhard Goshiniak - President Bendigo Branch, John Clarkson - President Victoria State, Peter Dowling - President Ballarat Branch, Chris Harnath - President Radar Branch

As well as catching up with some old friends (above), we had the pleasure of meeting Ballarat members Bev and Carl Dillon. Whilst Bev and Carl reside in Melbourne, they have family members and a strong association with Ballarat. In a footnote to the article on Margaret Bennett's "Recollections" published in the last Newsletter, Carl described his attendance at TAFE in the 1960s



and being held to a very high standard by his teacher - one John Reynolds, formerly in charge of the air force base in Ballarat!

We hope to see Bev and Carl at a future luncheon.

Carl Dillon

## Bob McDonald



At our October meeting, we had the opportunity to acknowledge the long term membership and contribution made by Bob McDonald. Bob is unsparing in his efforts to help others. He is pictured with his certification for 15 years of membership, but as that was in 2017 he now has a few more years tucked under his belt.

### A Footnote

President Peter Dowling has an association with the Air Force of some 25 years and is also President of the NSW Sunderland Branch. In this capacity Peter attended the 55th Annual Awards Dinner with 10 SQN based in Edinburgh. During the evening Peter gave a presentation on the Empire Training Scheme, which gave rise to the training of all the pilots, navigators and air gunner/wireless operators on the Sunderland aircraft. Peter's father was a wireless/airgunner and trained at IWAGS in Ballarat, returning as an instructor after active service.



Peter Dowling (3rd left) with sons and daughters of 10 and 461 SQN Sunderland flying crew at the 55th Sunderland Awards Dinner.