



**JOURNAL OF THE 458 SQUADRON COUNCIL
Year 75 No. 275 December 2023**



Squadron Co-Presidents:

**Charles Humbles- United Kingdom
Bill Wake – United Kingdom**

Squadron Treasurer: Beryl Dodds. 8 Yarraman Avenue, Frenchs Forest, 2086 NSW

Squadron Secretary: Stephen Bruce. Unit 5/10 Kissing Point Rd, Turramurra NSW 2074

Newsletter Editor and Publisher: Roland Orchard. 78 Edward Road, Chirnside Park. Vic. 3116. email: editor@458raafSquadron.org

Flight Correspondents:

NSW-Stephen Bruce. Unit 5/10 Kissing Point Road, Turramurra NSW. 2074

SA- Rick Michell. 3A Lewis Avenue, Glen Osmond. SA.5064

VIC-Roland Orchard. 78 Edward Road, Chirnside Park VIC. 3116

WA-Nick Bertram

Queensland – Brett Taylor

UK- Keith Wilkinson

Canada – Adam & Cate Wagstaffe

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*** Mail all communications for Squadron Secretary to Stephen Bruce (address above), and for the Squadron (and NSW Flight) Treasurer to Beryl Dodds (address above) ** Have you notified Editor Roland Orchard if you prefer to receive your newsletter by email? Are there others in your family, or circle of friends, who would like to receive a copy by e-mail? Please advise the Editor – see postal address above or email Roland at editor@458raafSquadron.org
Mobile 0400 433 382**

***Contributions and reports for the next Newsletter #276
are due to The Editor by 31st March, 2024.***

Vale

Mrs. D Turier. NSW Flight.

FLIGHT REPORTS

Canada Flight Report by Adam & Cate Wagstaffe



It is always a pleasure to receive news from Roland, who recently forwarded an email from Christopher Watts, who runs the Aurora Heritage Authority, a heritage service provider in Aurora Ontario. Christopher has been working on an art installation at a local gallery that will honour 14 RCAF pilots and was keen to gather more information on an Aurora resident named Warrant Officer II Perry King who served with 458.



Aurora has a memorial honouring the cities brave who sacrificed all in the line of duty. This cenotaph was first dedicated in 1925 with 77 names and was amended in 1966 to include an additional "Altar of Sacrifice" that included 55 names of the heroes from the Second World War, including Perry King.



The City of Aurora further memorializes it's fallen heroes by naming their streets after them. All the names on the cenotaph are to be honoured on street signs around Aurora with an accompanied poppy. Unfortunately, over 50% of the men from Aurora who died serving, are not displayed as intended on the 'Streets of Honour'.

Christopher has discovered that Perry King of 458 is one of the unfortunate ones without a street sign. Though Christopher has spoken to the Heritage Advisory Committee to amend the policy and get Perry King a sign, we also discovered a connection to our family with another RCAF Spitfire pilot from Aurora named Lloyd Chadburn.

When I myself was knee high to a grasshopper, my two sisters and I tumbled into the world of Air Cadets and were active members of 151 Chadburn Squadron in Oshawa, Ontario. We learnt all there was to know about Wing Commander Lloyd Chadburn, thanks to our commanding officer at the time Major Robert Forbes who wrote the biography on Chadburn "Gone is the Angel" (1997). It was amazing to realize Chadburn and King were on a memorial together and both lads were not being properly honoured in Aurora.

Christopher was also seeking clarification on Perry's military career with 458 and asked why there was no grave or gravestone honouring him. A letter found in the Library Archives written by Perry's mother Ester to the war office in 1948, questions why her son had no grave. The War office replied in 1952 to say:

"The Imperial War Graves Commission (of which Canada is a member) is entrusted with the care and maintenance of all the graves of our fallen and the commemoration of all those who do not have "known" graves. Unfortunately {...} there are many thousands of British aircrew boys who come under this category. Their names will be inscribed on General

Memorials that will be erected {...} One of these Memorials will be erected at Malta, and the name of your son will appear on that Memorial.” - WR Gunn

Perry had two brothers. William David King who in August of 1940 enlisted as 1st Lieutenant in the Toronto Scottish regiment (M.T.C. #20) and moved to the Armoured Reinforcement Division at Camp Borden in 1942 and later that year to the 8th Canadian Reconnaissance Regiment overseas. William joined the RCAF and died in a training exercise flying a Harvard in Camp Borden Ontario in 1943. William received the standard grave marker which is why his mother wrote letters to find out why her son Perry did not. Perry’s twin brother Dale enlisted with Perry and was a Wellington tail gunner with 428 Sqdn and was shot down over Germany and became a prisoner of war in March 1943, just a month after Perry died.



L-R: Dale, William, and Perry. Photo provided by Christopher Watts.

We do not have Perry’s logbook, so his war service is derived from his RAF Airman’s Record Sheet, his Record of Service, Squadron ORB (69 Squadron RAF and 458 Squadron RAAF), We Find and Destroy by Peter Alexander, Letters from Officer Commanding, R.A.F. Station Luqa, Malta and from Training Squadron records.

Perry enlisted in the RCAF on the 20 February 1941 and spent almost two years training to become a Wellington pilot. He flew seven missions, including the last fateful one on his twenty first birthday, with two Squadrons in Malta and leaves behind a mystery about his last flight, the one which he and his crew lost their lives. A mystery that we will try to solve in this submission, a mystery that was born from the fog of war and the most difficult operating conditions in Malta in late 1942 and early 1943.

But we will start at the beginning. Perry was born 25 February 1922. He attended Aurora High School for four years, completing his junior matriculation in all subjects except Latin and French and went on to attend St. Andrew's College. The College would later award students who excel in studies, games, deportment and character the King Memorial Trophy after Perry.



Figure 1 The King Memorial Trophy at St. Andrew's College. Photo provided by Christopher Watts

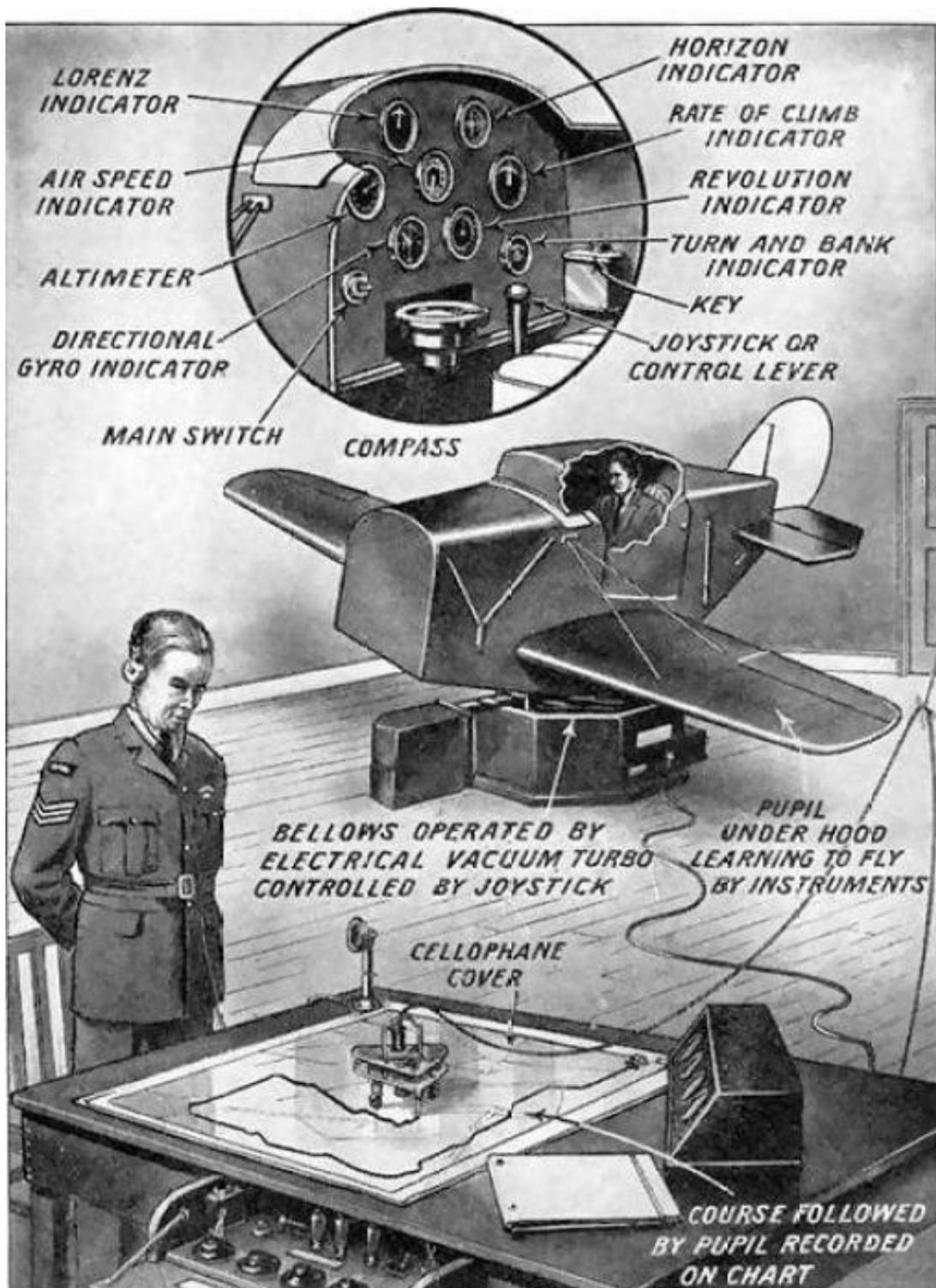
In 1939 he worked at the Bank of Montreal as a ledger keeper and clerk and enlisted in Toronto, Canada on the cold day in February 1941.

In March of 1941 he was ordered to report to No. 1 Manning Depot in Toronto. Manning Depot was located in the fairgrounds at the Canadian National Exhibition. To be precise it was in the Equine Building (horse stables). Unlike horses that would be one to a stall, the recruits were four to a stall. It was here that Perry was issued an ill-fitting uniform, was given multiple injections and was taught to march and salute and do turns on guard duty. This first eight weeks was a somewhat sober introduction to life in the service.



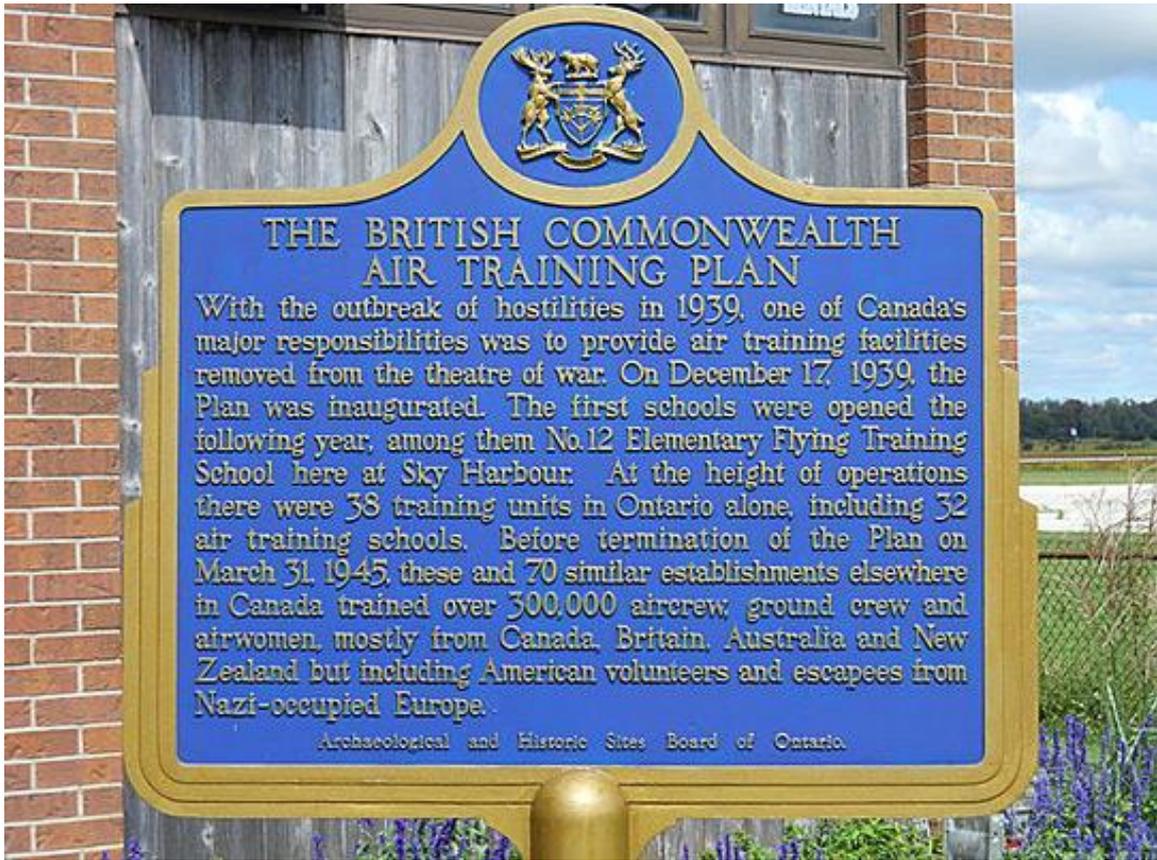
Manning Depot, Toronto, Canada.

After Manning Depot Perry was posted to an Initial Training School. For many this was at a Toronto location but for Perry and others it was to Brantford Ontario, the location of No. 5 Service Flight Training school. Although interestingly Perry would return to No. 5 E.F.T.S later in his training, at this time he was there to be exposed to the Link Trainer. This was used to simulate flight and through its use and theory of flight training, prospective pilots were given their first exposure to being “washed out” or deemed unfit for further pilot training. After two months of Link training and flight theory Perry and other graduates were posted to No. 12 Elementary Training School (E.F.T.S) in Goderich, Ontario.



Link Trainer, also known as the 'Blue Box' or 'Pilot Trainer' - a flight simulator produced in the early 1930s.

No. 12 E.F.T.S Goderich was where the real flying began. Cadets received 126 hours of ground lectures and 50 hours of flying. They were expected to go solo after 8 hours. More washouts occurred here. Perry did his initial training on the Fleet Finch aircraft and graduated from class 35 on the 25 September 1941.



No. 12 E.F.T.S had other interesting graduates throughout the war. One of them was Jackie Rae, who went on to become a spitfire pilot and flew with Wing Commander Lloyd Chadburn (name and connection to this article and our family). Jackie Rae the uncle of Canadian



Politician and diplomat Bob Rae, also become well known for his “Spitfire Band” swing music, post war.



#12 E.F.T.S. Goderich Ontario graduating class #35 on 25 September 1941. From L-R Perry King back row 6th from left.

Perry meanwhile had little time to celebrate his graduation, in fact just one day later he was back at No. 5 S.F.T.S in Brantford to begin his training on twin engine Avro Ansons. ...as he had been deemed Bomber pilot material.



Avro Anson in front of Brantford control tower

Perry was part of course number 39. Three months later he graduated and received his “wings” officially and was promoted from LAC to Sergeant. Brantford airport still exists today and indeed 3 of the original wartime hangars still stand, but during WW2 it graduated



No. 5 S.F.T.S. graduating class 39 on 18 December 1941. From L-R Sergeant Perry King (middle row, 7 from left).

2,143 pilots.

Group Captain B.F. Johnson presented wings and addressed the graduates during the Thursday evening wings parade held at 2000 hours:

"You have been given the finest instruction possible and now it is up to you to make the most of it. You have much to learn yet, and it will come through your own experience [...] Many of you will be going overseas immediately, and you must have no illusions of what you

will be facing. You will be faced by a powerful, unscrupulous enemy - make no mistake about it, the Germans are mean, dirty fighters. You will be provided with planes equal to and superior to those of the enemy. You will need all of your skill. [...] This great training scheme may very well be the vital factor in the whole war. You have all done very well, and I am proud of you."

I think the comment about going overseas immediately was directed at Perry as he left for a ship in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a trip of 1900 kilometres, the very next day and 14 days later, he was in the UK. On arriving, like thousands of pilots arriving from BCTAP training in Canada, USA and Africa, Perry King reported to No. 3 Personnel reception Centre (PRC) in Bournemouth on the south coast of England. He remained there for two months waiting for his next training posting.

The concentration of pilots in a very small area of hotels (where they were billeted) did not go unnoticed to German intelligence and bombing raids of various size were constant throughout the war. One particularly nasty raid occurred in May of 1943. It is estimated that over 100 Canadian airmen died at the Metropole hotel and 7 Australians at the Central Hotel.



But after two months in Bournemouth Perry was posted to No. 2 S.F.T.S. At Brize Norton on Oxfordshire to fly Airspeed Oxfords. Initially in our research it seemed strange that Perry would go to a second SFTS having done his twin engine/preliminary bomber training in Canada, but further research shows that No. 2 S.F.T.S at that very time was converting.



By 1942 the Commonwealth Air Training Plan was in full swing and most aircrew were being trained up to SFTS level in Canada, South Africa or Southern Rhodesia, before arriving in or returning to the UK. It was therefore decided to convert the SFTSs to (Pilot) or (Observer) Advanced Flying Units. These units would concentrate on training personnel arriving from overseas in the techniques and conditions of flying in a blacked-out northern Europe. As a result, No. 2 SFTS became No. 2 (Pilots') Advanced Flying Unit on 14 March 1942, using Airspeed Oxfords.

Perry spent almost three months at No. 2 SFTS before his final training posting to an Operational training Unit, but as was often the case in the "Hurry up and wait" bureaucracy of war time England he had to spend a further two months at No. 7 Personnel Reception Centre in Harrogate in the north of England.

On the sixth of August 1942 Perry King was posted to No. 7 Coastal Operational Training Unit (7 (c) O.T.U.), this time travelling to Limavady Airfield in Northern Ireland, where he would start flying the Wellington for the first time and form a crew ready for Squadron posting.

At 7 (c) O.T.U. the training included night, low altitude flying and torpedo training. Perry and his crew completed their conversion to the Vickers Wellington and coastal tactics in December of 1942.

Having completed 22 months of training Perry was on the way to the Middle East and the last two months of his life. The two months was by operational and historical accounts hectic to say the least. Much of what follows is deduced from Squadron records, personnel records and official letters, but also what follows is part of the mystery of the last flight that never took off!



Malta at the end of 1942 was finally seeing the light after a devastating siege of two years, but the infrastructure, military order and record keeping had naturally taken a big hit.

In November 1942 the Axis lost the Second Battle of El Alamein, and the Allies landed forces in Vichy French Morocco and Algeria under Operation Torch. The Axis diverted their forces to the Battle of Tunisia, and attacks on Malta were rapidly reduced, effectively ending the siege. In December 1942, air and sea forces operating from Malta went over to the offensive.

Into this fray flew three Squadrons, 221 RAF, 458 RAAF (Both equipped with torpedo bomber Wellingtons) and 69 RAF equipped with a mismatch of various aircraft and crews supposedly as a photo reconnaissance Squadron but included Wellington bombers; and now



Perry King, his crew and perhaps a Wellington V111 (LB134).

On arrival in the Middle East Perry and crew reported to AHQ Malta on the 23 December 1942. Now according to Perry King's records, he was next posted to 458 RAAF on 14 February 1943, but on investigating his crew records, some of them show posting to 69. Sqdn RAF on 15 January 1943. By going to the Squadron records of 69 Sqdn RAF we can indeed see that Perry King and crew were part of the Squadron from 15 January 1943 until Feb 01.1943.

69 Sqdn. RAF had been in the thick of the fray that was Malta since the beginning of the siege. No. 431 Flight in Malta had been formed to operate Maryland aircraft in the strategic reconnaissance role in August 1940 at North Coates but transferred to the island in September. However, on 10 January 1941, the flight was raised to Squadron status as No. 69 Squadron. It operated across the whole Mediterranean area from Italy in the North to Libya in the South and gradually collected a wide range of types for the role. These included Hurricanes, Spitfires, Beaufighters Mosquitos, Baltimores and even Wellingtons. Some of these types also undertook more anti-shipping and anti-submarine patrols. It was led by the colourful and maverick (by the standards of the staid RAF and its "stiff collar" attitude to discipline) Adrian Warburton. Wing Commander Warburton had amassed what could be termed his own airforce. A mishmash of types of aircraft that he had employed to harry the axis forces on any and every occasion.



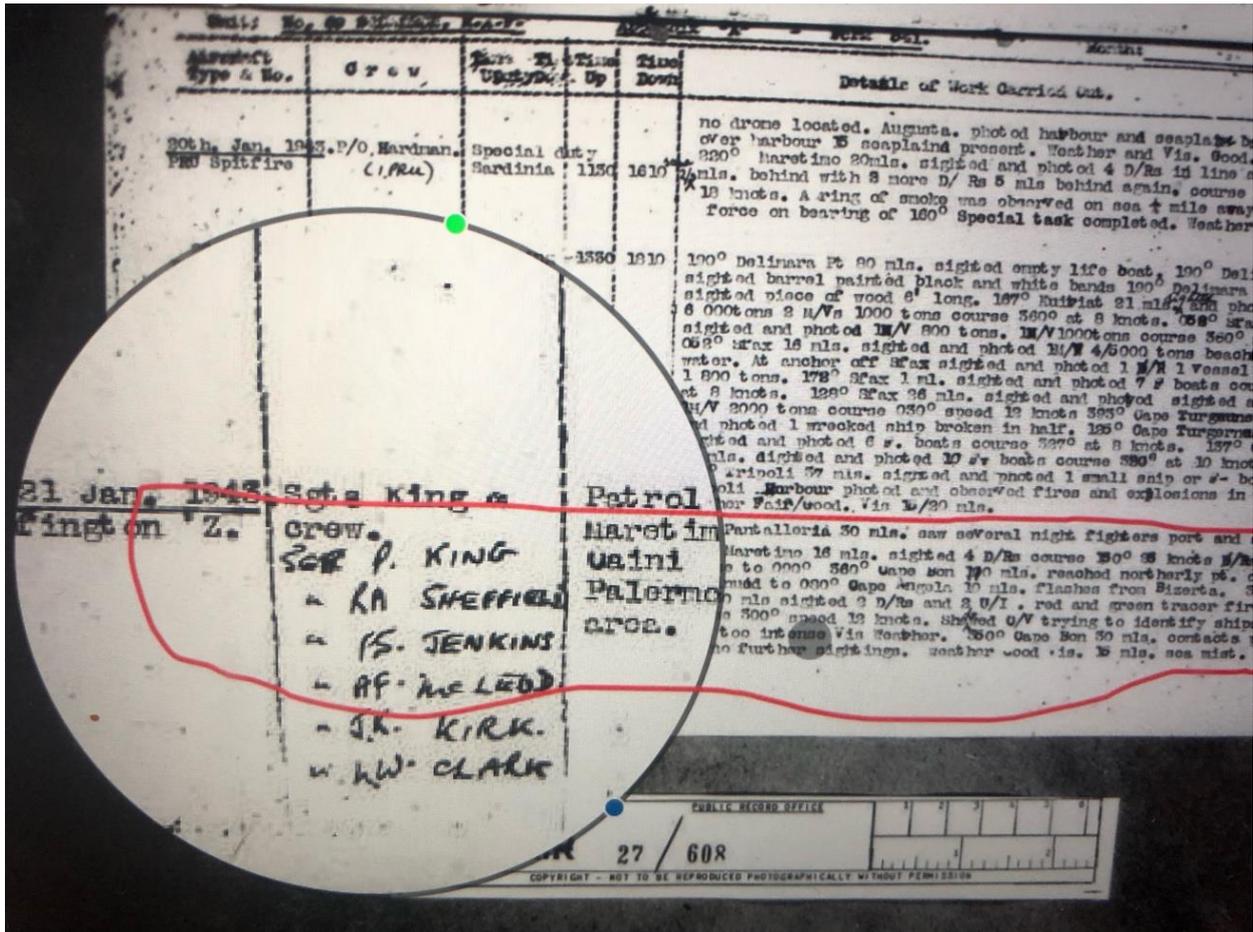
Time	Event	Remarks
0500	180° Maritime 20 mls. picked up Rooster and homed on it so continued patrol. Napetemo commenced patrol SE. working so flew low to utilise moonlight. Covered complete area at 3/500ft. and then covered western half with contacts of many lights from coast S/W. 300° maritime 60 mls. S/W for come W/T. S/W. all U/S. Brought Torp. back.	
1150	Syracuse covered area N. of Syracuse to Florida. Sighted 6/7000 tons damaged in harbour. Augusta sighted small ship Catania Garbini Gela Photographed dromes! Gela 1/Large present. Siscari photoed dromes. Catania photoed photo Marsamom/Pachino, and landing ground at Pachino. Weather Vis. Good.	
1312	Keliba commenced patrol 1 small M/V 800 tons 340° Kuiriat 0200 speed 7 knots. Sighting report sent photo/taken. Some photos outside Sfax harbour 2 F-boats at anchor and 2 prob about same size as F-boats photo taken. 3 F-boats and 1 set Cape Turgeuses 33 mls. course 380° speed 10 knots. 2 boats	

Records were kept of missions, but aircraft types were often listed by nickname and crews were often recorded by only the captains name with the other crew sometimes filled in later or just left "unknown". All of this fully understandable given the time and place. We can determine and highlight that Perry King and crew were part of and indeed flying missions with 69 Squadron in the latter part of January 1943.

The first was as second pilot with Flying Officer Dodd on the night of the 17/18 January 1943.

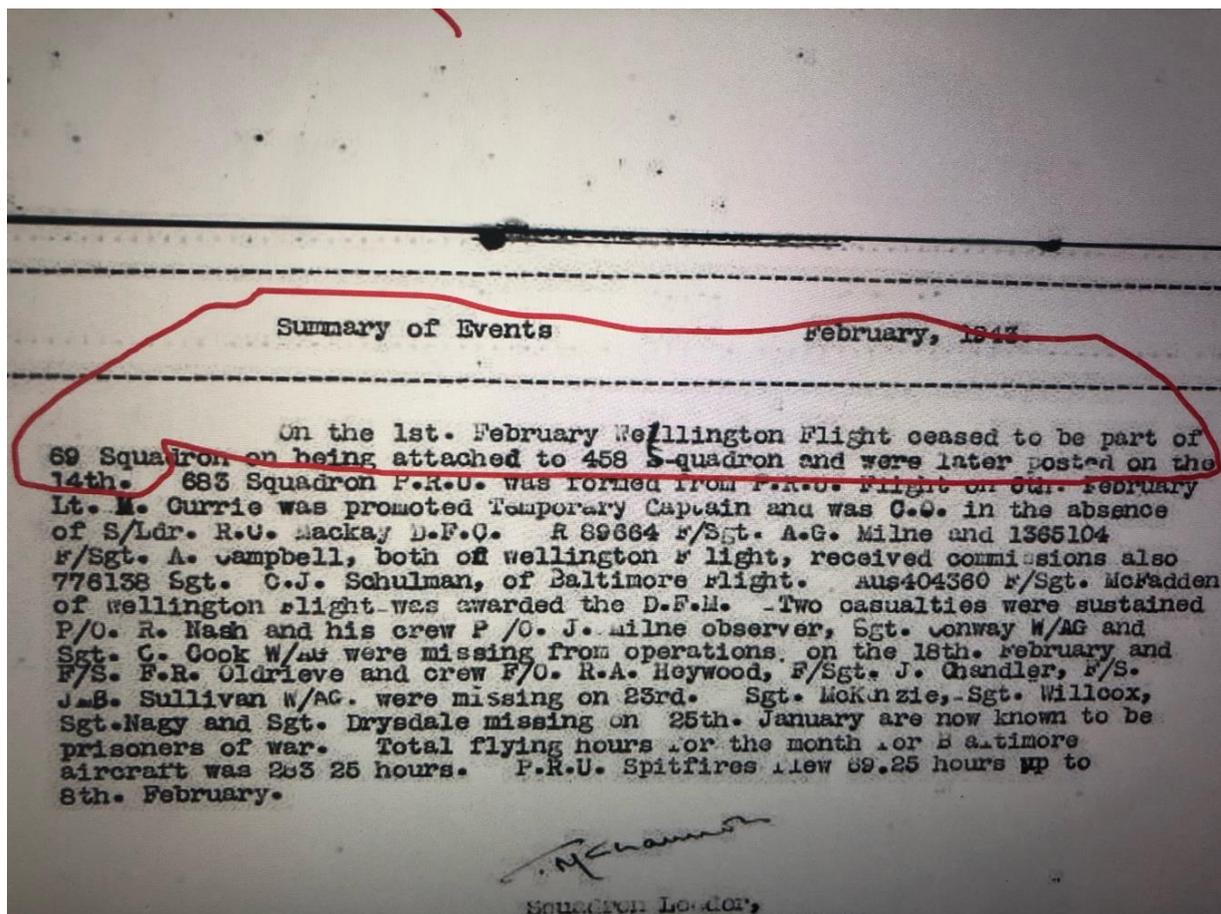
Perry as captain and crew flew an 8-hr patrol on the night of the 21/22 January to the Palermo area.





Further missions were flown with 69 Squadron on 24/25 January and again on 26/27 January both of 5–6-hour duration. Unfortunately for us, the Squadron records only identify the aircraft letter for each mission and not the serial number, so we cannot say that LB134 was a 69-Squadron aircraft. What we do know was that at the same time that Malta based 69 Squadron Wellingtons were being flown by Perry King and crew, both 221 and 458 Squadrons had detachments of aircraft and crew flying out of Luqa airfield, Malta.

We also know that effective 1 February 1943 the Wellingtons and their crews of 69 Squadron were transferred to 458 Squadron.



This was made "paper" official on 14 February 1943, but missions flown in February (except one!) by Perry King and the other ex 69 Squadron crews were now recorded in the Operations Record Book of 458 Squadron RAAF.

Perry King flew missions with 458 RAAF as recorded in the Squadron records. On the night of 3 February 1943 in Wellington HX991 on the night of 15 February in Wellington HX991 (returning with engine trouble) and on the night of 21 February in Wellington LB134...this is important because LB134 was the aircraft that he and crew were flying on the night of the 25th when they were posted missing in the 458 records. Wellington LB134 was also flown by Sgt Norton and crew on the 15th and by F/O Taylor and crew on 9 February. So LB134 was definitely a 458 Squadron Wellington.

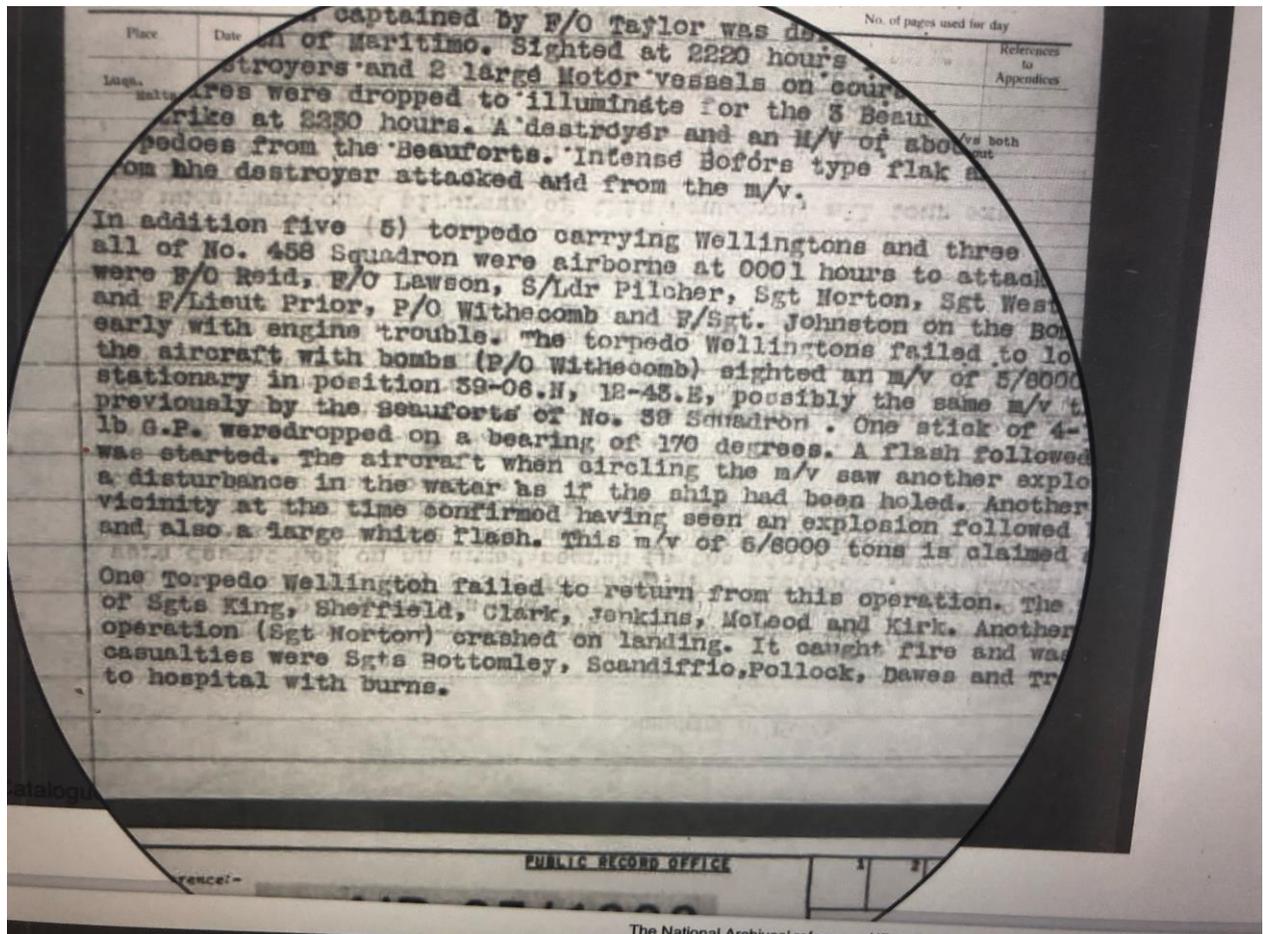
DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT
BY No. 468 (N.A.A.U.) Squadron.
FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY, 1945.

SECRET

DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT
				Up	Down	
3/4th Feb.	Wellington. Vill. "O".	R. 181506. Sgt. Westman, R.W. Pilot.	Captain.	0020.	0610.	Shipping Search and Strike Maritime/ Trapani Area. Strato Cumulus Cloud. Visibility Poor very dark. Weather Fair. No sightings and no interference during patrol.
3/4 Feb.	Wellington. Vill. "O".	R. 93340. Sgt. King, P. R. 102577. Sgt. Sheffield. R. 106933. Sgt. Clark, L.W. R. 90549. Sgt. Jenkins, F. R. 95108. Sgt. Kirk, J.P. R. 72884. Sgt. McLeod.	Cap 2nd Navig W/Op S.I.		0555.	Shipping Search and Strike Maritime/Trapani Area. Strato Cumulus Cloud. Visibility Poor. Weather Poor. Sent Sighting Report at 0115 hours. Ship investigated near Palermo Harbour entrance. No wake seen. No Plak or S/Is. Returned to Base.
3/4th Feb.	Wellington. Vill. "O".	R. 93340. Sgt. King, P. R. 102577. Sgt. Sheffield. R. 106933. Sgt. Clark, L.W. R. 90549. Sgt. Jenkins, F. R. 95108. Sgt. Kirk, J.P. R. 72884. Sgt. McLeod.	Cap 2nd Navig W/Op S.I.		0558.	Shipping Search and Strike Maritime/Trapani Area. Cloud Strato Cumulus. Visibility Fair. Weather Fair. 1 Enemy Night Fighter made beam approach at 0240 hours ut lost after taking avoiding action.

Aircraft Type and No	Crew	Duty.	Time Up.	Time Down.	Details of Sortie or Flight.	References
Wellington. H.X. 602. 21st. J. 2851	R. 181506. Sgt. Westman, R.W. Pilot.	Captain.	1756.	0115.	Strike. North of Trapani.	
Wellington. L.B. 154. 21st. R. 93340.	Sgt. King, P. R. 102577. Sgt. Sheffield. R. 106933. Sgt. Clark, L. R. 90549. Sgt. Jenkins, F. R. 95108. Sgt. Kirk, J. R. 72884. Sgt. McLeod.	Cap 2nd Pilot Navigator W./Op S.E./O Rear gunn			Strike. North of Trapani.	
Wellington. L.B. 155. 21st. Aus. 401843.					Strike. North of Trapani.	

On the night of the 25 February 1943 a major shipping attack mission was flown by 458 Squadron, with 6 torpedo and 3 bomber Wellingtons involved.



The Squadron record of events and summary of events for February 1943 list all the departing crews but with no mention of Perry King and LB134. It does say that two crews returned with engine trouble and then it lists Perry King and crew as one of the torpedo crews saying, "One Torpedo Wellington failed to return from the mission, Sgt King, Sheffield, Clark, Jenkins, McLeod, Kirk". So, we have no record of Perry taking off but do show him as missing from a 458 Squadron operation. Later correspondence from "Officer Commanding RAF Station Luqa" to AHQ Malta states that King and crew were flying a 221 Squadron Wellington Mk V111. LB134. It seems that this letter has become the source of the understanding that Perry King and crew were flying for 221 Squadron when they went missing. We think this letter is an error.



Perry King and his crew remained “missing presumed killed” until 1947. In fact, family was advised until the end of the war that the crew could be alive as prisoners of war! Following many letters from Perry’s mother and the fiancé of Sgt J.F. Kirk WO/WG, the Canadian graves commission uncovered an interview with the Captain of an Italian naval boat. He described how they had come across the bodies of Perry King and crew, identified by their papers and how they had given them a sea burial.

We will endeavour to tell more detailed histories of the rest of the Perry King crew in future issues.

Perry King was promoted to Warrant Officer (WO2) on the 19 December 1942, but likely had not received notification before his death.

R93340 Wo2 King.P- Pilot (Captain) RCAF
R102577 Sgt Sheffield, R.A.P.- Pilot RCAF
R106933 Sgt Clark, I.W.- A/Obs RCAF
R95049 Sgt Jenkins, F.S.- WO/AG RCAF
R95108 Sgt Kirk, J.F. – WO/AG RCAF
R72864 Sgt McLeod, A.F. – WO/AG RCAF

The Malta Memorial commemorates almost 2,300 airmen who lost their lives during the Second World War whilst serving with the Commonwealth Air Forces flying from bases in Austria, Italy, Sicily, islands of the Adriatic and Mediterranean, Malta, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, West Africa, Yugoslavia and Gibraltar, and who have no known grave. The Memorial was unveiled by The Queen on 3 May 1954.

The memorial was designed by Sir Hubert Worthington, R.A., while the eagle which surmounts the column is the work of the sculptor Charles Wheeler, R.A. The Malta Memorial contains the names of 58 aircrew from 458 Squadron RAAF, 24 of them Canadian: Including Perry King and crew.





United Kingdom Flight Report by Keith Wilkinson

Congratulations to 458 Squadron co-president Charles Humbles and his wife Joyce.



They have celebrated their 83rd wedding anniversary - an achievement so special it was commemorated with a card from the King and Queen (see photo).

On a bright and sunny morning on November 23rd they received a number of anniversary cards at their home and were especially delighted when they opened the one from the Royals.

The couple - who met when they were both ballroom dancers - looked back with fond memories on the day they tied the knot in 1940 when Britain was at war with Germany. Charles was then just 18 and his bride was 20. They are now aged 101 and 103. They married in a hurry because Charles was in the RAF and was expecting to be posted abroad. He was given 14 days leave but they didn't have a honeymoon, nor an engagement. It was the first time the local vicar had married anyone in uniform.

"The vicar was thrilled to bits," said Joyce. "In fact, he did the service for free. He didn't charge us at all. We even had a choir." There was, of course, strict rationing back then and supplies for a wedding were hard to come by. The simple reception was at Joyce's home at Abbots Langley in Hertfordshire, England "I made my wedding dress myself," remembered Joyce. "I also made the bridesmaids dresses. I had always done dressmaking and had a sewing machine."

Joyce and Charles were parted for a number of years during the war. Charles was sent overseas to work with the RAF and RAAF ground crews looking after aircraft - and much of that time was with 458 Squadron and its Wellington bombers in North Africa and the Mediterranean.

The couple are still together in their own two-storey home and, despite recent falls, have not had to go into a care home. They have managed to hold on to their independence although they do now have daily visits from carers and Meals on Wheels.

When I spoke to them on the morning of their anniversary, they were just having their daily gin and tonic - a little earlier than their normal time. "As it's our anniversary we decided to have it now," said Joyce. "We always enjoy our gin and tonics."

Meanwhile, I have also been chatting merrily with our co-president Bill Wake and all is well. He is still making his twice-weekly trips into town. Like Charles and Joyce he has his routines. Not for him a daily gin and tonic - but each morning at 5.30 a.m. he likes to have a cup of tea.

There is some further news from England regarding 458 Squadron. Many people will not be aware that there is a tribute to The Squadron at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, England. I went to see it earlier this year.



The eucalyptus tree that was planted a few years ago has had to be pruned, but lots of new life is sprouting up and all looks okay. A blue plaque (see photo) says: "Planted in tribute to all who served with 458 SQUADRON RAAF."

It was quite a moving experience to see it. Even though the arboretum is absolutely vast, it wasn't hard to find as it is close to one of the main thoroughfares. It's wonderful to see the Squadron remembered in this place, which attracts many thousands of visitors.



Queensland Flight Report by Brett Taylor

Following my June newsletter, I have received a reply to my query regarding the background to the Dec 1941 photograph of James Howard "Rupe" Holmes and Sven Ivanouw Hansen, Queenslanders in 458 Squadron. Trish Hickey replied with some information regarding my query. She is the niece of Peter Hickey who wrote about Rupe in his last letter to his parents before he was killed on 9 January 1941.

James Howard Holmes.

An extract from Peter Hickey's letter of 25th December 1941 to his parents.

"Rupe Holmes from Brisbane is doing very well here also. Rupe is captain of his own crew and is a real good pilot and a very fine chap, (and) is one of my best mates. One of the best-hearted chaps in the world, always happy and impossible to get out of sorts.

The other night our Wing Commander Tommy Howlett, the Sgt gunner who shot down the Me (Messerschmitt?), and Rupe had an argument about running. 'All right,' says the Winco, 'half past nine in the morning at the aerodrome, £1 each way and the winner takes it.' The stakes were put up and the whole Squadron was out to watch and side bets galore. The old Rupe Holmes just romped home and collected the money."

James Howard Holmes "Rupe" was born in Brisbane on 16 March 1915, the son of James Holmes and Elizabeth Jane Jackson.

Rupe's mother Elizabeth died on 19 April 1944, when he was overseas.

A letter in his service record dated 28 June 1975 gave his address as 'Tilparoo' Obley Road, Dubbo, NSW. He was a member of the RSL Club there.

He died on 31 October 1991 in Dubbo aged 76.

Sven Ivanouw Hansen

Born 6 December 1913 in Queensland to Carl Sophus Hansen and Louisa Sophia Carlson. He lived at Sandy Creek in the Warwick district`

Sven was married on 10 August 1946 at Lismore NSW to Molly Lorraine Armstrong. They first lived in Cairns North Queensland but later moved to the northern rivers area of NSW where Molly's mother was living. He belonged to the Mullumbimby Lions Club.

He died on 23 November 1996 at Coffs Harbour. The funeral notice said 'Late of Killarney Heights and Woolgoolga.

The information Trish gathered was mainly from part of Peter Hickey's last letter to his parents in late December 1941 a short time before he was killed on a raid while crossing France. The complete letter is shown in full under Peter Hickey's servicemen's story on the 458 website. This story about discovering what happened to Peter and his crew is quite extraordinary and was pursued in 2008 by an Air France Captain about the aircraft that had crashed on his family's farm at Colomby, Normandy. He along with a number of others traced living relatives in Australia, New Zealand and England who visited the site.

If you have not read this story I urge you to do so as it demonstrates the appreciation by many French people of the sacrifice by so many.

458 Assistance to the USAF 15th Air Force in Italy

While looking through my father's WWII records I found a letter written from William Gibson to him dated 21 March 1991. This was written after a visit by William and his wife to my parents in Adelaide some months earlier. William was probably a pilot of a B17 in the 840th Squadron of the 483rd Bomb Group stationed in Southern Italy and part of the 15th Air Force, while 458 was based in Ancona in

November 1944. The front line was about 35 miles to the north of Ancona at the time. In the letter William refers to the help 458 Squadron provided to the 15th Air Force during their Italian operations. The mission of the 15th Air Force was to destroy oil refineries, storage capacity and transportation systems as well as troop concentrations. Their immediate target from Ancona was to bomb the Ploesti Oil Refineries in Romania. William says as the aircraft flew to the Adriatic Sea large formations of a 1,000 plus aircraft formed. They had protection from P-38 and P-51 fighters. Dad describes the “mauling” their aircraft received and the panic, due to the state of aircraft returning from operations and from really bad weather. He said “I will never forget their aircraft trying to land. May day calls and wireless SOS messages were howling in” obviously from aircraft that had to ditch in the sea and needing air sea rescue. He said it was “difficult to sort out Who’s Who,” as quite a number of the Yanks forgot to give their call sign.”

The 15th were operating B17 (Flying Fortress) and B24’s from Italy and in his letter William Gibson provided the summary below of the characteristics of the B17. The Mark XIV Wellington was lighter, faster but with less range, bomb load or altitude ceiling.

B-17 CHARACTERISTICS

(1) Wing spread	107 ft.
(2) Length	97 ft.
(3) Gross weight loaded	60,000 lbs.
(4) Speed - climbing to target (indicated speed)	160 mph
- returning from target (indicated speed)	200 mph
(5) Max altitude - loaded	32,000 ft.
- empty	35,000 ft.
(6) Range - to mission and return	2,000 miles
(7) Flying time - to target and return	11-12 hours
(8) Fuel capacity - 95 octane av. gas	2,200 gal.
(9) Bomb load - twelve (12) 500 lb. bombs	6,000 lbs.
(10) Engines - by Pratt and Whitney	4 @ 1,250 HP
(11) Runway length required	4,000 ft.
(12) Armament - 50 caliber guns	13 guns
(13) Bombing capability - day	Norden Sight
- night/clouds	Radar & Norden Sight
(14) Crew - Pilot, Copilot, Navigator, Bombardier, six (6) Gunners	10 total
- (one gunner could substitute for bombardier by dropping bombs when lead ship drops)	9 total
(15) Quantity of aircraft produced	10,000 plus

Bad weather and Mediterranean aerodrome conditions



From a USAF website I found this photograph which shows a B24 landing on a flooded runway. The photograph caption just says the 15th USAF Airforce Strategic bombing from Italy, operated from airfields which flooded after heavy rains.

My father's WWII diary confirms a similar situation for 458 in September 1944 at Falconara, Italy, where he says taxiways had mud a foot thick, and aerodrome vehicles had to be 4x4 to get around. He says "Whitten distinguished himself by taxi-ing into a drain, which

didn't help matters. Wrecked the stern frame and geodetics, rear wheel housing etc"

My father also describes the weather around this time.

"Fighter Ops rang and asked me if we could help and we said we would. The Met man had a hell of a gloomy tale to tell.

Cumulonimbus with low cloud, down to 400-500 feet. No picnic.

Didn't like sending old Riddoch out in that, so our crew went to have a look. Old Dave, the Met King, was right; it was bad. Two great water spouts up to 2,000 feet. The Fighter Controller tried to control us, but it is not satisfactory with General Reconnaissance Wimps. The spot where the fellows were in the sea was under a whacking great cloud. The water was trying to start a water spout, but couldn't quite do it. Ye Gods, it was very very rough under that cloud and we had to come out. Poor fellows in the drink, we had to leave 'em there because our auxiliary oil pump ceased working and our oil temps were rising. When we taxied in "R" was running, so we stopped and found that George Riddoch had been ordered to look for two star Reds. I rang the Group Captain and got the sortie scrubbed, just as well or we would have had a Wimp in the sea as well."

Even in Bone in early 1944 Dad's diary description was "the perimeter (aerodrome) track is underwater and must be seen to be believed. Thick mud a foot thick at least, so it is not surprising that our accident rate is high."

Gibraltar and normal aerodrome conditions

When the Squadron arrived in Gibraltar the Station Commander was shocked to see the state of the Wellingtons and hardly a complete uniform between all the men. When the vehicles finally arrived, he had them all cleaned and repainted.

Another AWM photograph of 458 aircrew from Queensland

During my search of 458 on the Australian War Memorial website I found the following photograph taken in Bone in 1943 by the RAAF photographer Laurie Leguay.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

MEC2616

The photograph caption says:-

Bone, Algeria. c. 1943. Group portrait of air crew members of a Vickers Wellington Mk XIII aircraft of No. 458 Squadron RAAF. Back, left to right: Flight Sergeant (Flt Sgt) G. Johnson of England; Flying Officer L. B. Simpson of Toowoomba, Qld; Lieutenant R. D. Duffy of South Africa; Wireless Operator G. Ring of England. Front: Flt Sgt E. Kelly of Brisbane, Qld; Flt Sgt W. J. Honan of Maryborough, Qld.

This month's question

Does anyone have any more war time or other information about the Queenslanders in this photograph, ie., Flying Officer L.B. Simpson of Toowoomba and Flt Sgt E. Kelly of Brisbane and Flt Sgt W.J. Honan of Maryborough?

With my limited genealogy researching skills I was not able to find any information myself.

Please contact me on

btaylorc6@gmail.com

if you do have any information that can help.



Victoria Flight Report by Roland Orchard

Since the last publication of The Newsletter, Jeremy & Chris Orchard, John Boydell and I visited the proposed accommodation for the 458 Squadron Reunion, Seasons5 Spa and Resort, situated at 454 Point Cook Rd, Point Cook, Victoria. We toured the venue looking at the reception area, the restaurant, conference room and two of the rooms. We were satisfied that this venue would have suited our Reunion.

All this being said, I am saddened to announce that the 458 Reunion Committee have decided not to go ahead with this 2025 Reunion. A number of reasons have brought us to this decision.

- As stated in our proposal and verified by Seasons5 management Proposal (Quotation), the accommodation costs are \$330 per night for Queen Bed Room, \$385 per night for the Two Single Bed Rooms and \$385 per night for the Accessibility rooms. The deposit Seasons5 require us to pay is 25% of the total and is non-refundable. Full payment is required two weeks prior to our stay (not the case at the 2022 Williamtown Reunion). This amounts to almost 100% increase per night compared to the 2022 Williamtown Reunion on both counts. Please note that other suitable accommodation was reviewed and we were quoted over \$500 per night. Widening the search for accommodation, for example in Melbourne CBD or surrounds, makes it impracticable for travelling times to and from the Air Show. These points, on their own, made us question the viability of holding the Reunion at the time of the Air Show.

- For those wishing to fly into Avalon or Melbourne Air Ports, you can bet your bottom dollar the airlines will escalate return airfares as they normally do when demand is increased.
- The boardroom cost at Seasons5 to display our 458 memorabilia and family photos is high and sadly not accessible for wheelchairs. (in contrast to Williamtown.)
- Whereas at Williamtown we were treated to an RAAF spectacle of a 'free' air display during their training day, there is the added financial cost of \$250 per head for Gold Pass (seating provided) or \$90 per head (no seating) entry into the 2025 Air Show. An added cost in comparison to Williamtown 2022. Believe me, I have attended every Air Show at Avalon since its inception in the early '90s and due the size of the airport and its displays, the Gold Pass seating is the way to go.

As previously stated, at Williamtown we were treated to an unexpected RAAF 'air show' while having our final breakfast at Williamtown Fighter World. Unexpected in the sense we would have been happy with a couple of take offs and landings by the new F35 aircraft, instead we were treated to almost 2 hours (if not more) of various types of RAAF aircraft taking off and landing during their day of training. After this incredible display there was a suggestion that Victoria Flight should host the next reunion during the International Air Show. At the time it seemed like an exciting and fair and reasonable request however, after exhaustive research and review it is just not financially viable for many, to hold a 458 Squadron Reunion with the feature event attending the International Air Show. We believe many more 458 Squadron Association members would attend a Reunion centred around a more affordable Reunion. As stated, we are saddened to come to this conclusion and apologies to everyone for any inconvenience that the Reunion proposal may have caused. We are happy to receive any feedback regarding this assessment. Please contact me (Roland Orchard) if you do have such feedback. Thank you to all for your understanding.



West Australia Report by Nick Bertram

No report



New South Wales Flight Report by Stephen Bruce

No report



South Australia Flight Report by Rick Michell

No report

EMAILS

Fri 2/06/2023 1:07 AM

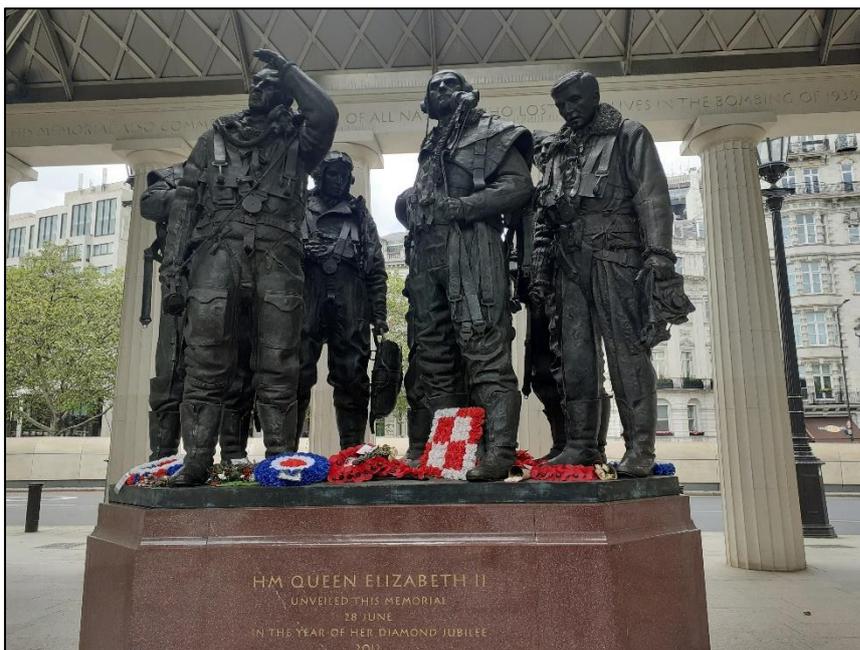
Hello Roland

Hope you and everybody at 458 Squadron are well. Here are some photos from the Spitfire flight yesterday. Not sure what it is about these planes, but they are jaw-droppingly beautiful and knowing you are flying in something that actually fought in WW2 is something else. In awe of those brave young pilots that fought in these.

We did a victory roll over the White Cliffs of Dover - bloody amazing. Last week, I had lunch at the RAF Club in Piccadilly and afterwards visited the nearby Bomber Command memorial. Will send photos in a separate email.

Melanie Coles De Vlieghe





Bomber Command Memorial.
Green Park.
London.

All photos courtesy of
Melanie Coles De
Vliegher.

**(Melanie was
researching
W/C N G Mulholand.
See Newsletter March
#273 page 22.
Thanks Melanie.
Ed.)
Thu 22/06/2023**

4:55 AM

Hello Roland

Attached is photo of Wing Cimmander N G Mulholland 'a name projected on Australuan War Memorial. Rather moving isn't it.

Melanie Coles De Vlieghe



(Thanks again Melanie. Yes, very moving. Ed.)

458 Squadron 28-31 March 2025 Reunion

As stated in the Victoria Flight Report, it is with great sadness that we announce that the 2025 Reunion will not be going ahead due to many constraints, the overall cost being the main one. Thanks everyone for your understanding.

DONATIONS.

If you wish to donate, please see the donation page on our website or contact the editor. These donations help in ongoing costs of the 458 Squadron Newsletter Publication & 458 Squadron Association Website management by [*Potentweb](#)

458 SQUADRON ONLINE STORE

See our Memorabilia Page on our website for more details and more items available.

<https://www.458raafSquadron.org/memorabilia-shop>



458 SQUADRON BADGE
(VELCRO BACKED)



458 Sqn. RAAF Invenimus Et Delemus

WELLINGTON PRINTS BY ARTIST DES KNOCK



458 Sqn. RAAF Invenimus Et Delemus

WELLINGTON PRINTS BY ARTIST DES KNOCK

Wing Commander Norman George Mulholland DFC
458 Squadron Commanding Officer
1/9/1941 - 15/2/1942 (MIA)



*Merry
Christmas*



*HAPPY
NEW YEAR*