



## 458 Squadron Association

### Victoria Flight

c/o Jeremy Orchard  
Secretary/Treasurer  
86 Pasley Street,  
Sunbury, Vic 3429

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## THE MINUTES OF OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT THE OBSERVATORY CAFÉ ON APRIL 25, 2026

With brilliant blue skies greeting us on a classic autumn day, ten of us marched to the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne. Earlier some of us attended the 5.30 am Dawn Service. One of the many highlights on this day was thinking about the very significant anniversaries this year: 85 years since formation of our Squadron in 1941, our Presidents Charles and Bill both turned 104 recently! Within the hour after completing our march, Victoria Flight President, Roland Orchard opened the meeting and called for a minute's silence in remembrance of recently passed Veterans, widows & members of 458 Squadron. He then recited the ode. Lest we Forget.

The meeting was called to discuss the coming year's focus and activities and to conduct the 2026 AGM. The meeting place was the Observatory cafe just across Birdwood Ave from The Shrine. In attendance were John Boydell, Rob & Julie Forgan, Chris & Heather Wurr, daughter Karen & husband Clint and son Hutchison, Neil Flentje, Edwina Bell, Roland Orchard, Jeremy Orchard. Apologies were received from Jane Foster, Gillian & Joe Somers, Matthew Wuillemmin, Rod Flentje, Pene Compton, Chris Orchard, Peter Hedgcock.

Those who marched were: John Boydell, Chris Wurr and grandson Hutchison, Neil Flentje, Rob & Julie Forgan, Edwina Bell, Roland Orchard, Jeremy Orchard, John Marino. This year we had 6 Air Force Cadets displaying the picture of the Wellington and carrying our Banner; Two from 407 SQN in Broadmeadows, two from 416 SQN in Moonee Ponds, one from 405 SQN in Sunshine and one from 401 SQN Surrey Hills. Following beside us (with the onlookers) as we marched and meeting us at the end of the march were family members of the Wurr clan.

### **Office Bearers 2026/2027:**

Refer to the attached agenda document also. Roland advised that all positions were vacant and called for nominations.

President: Roland Orchard nominated by Chris W, seconded by Rob F. Carried. Re-elected

Senior VP: Chris Orchard nominated by Julie F, seconded by Neil F. Carried. Re-elected

Junior VP: Neil Flentje nominated by Rob F, seconded by Chris W. Carried. Re-elected

Secretary/Treasurer: Jeremy Orchard nominated by John B, seconded by Julie F. Carried. Re-elected

Historian: Peter Hedgcock accepted to continue in office (post meeting)



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### Victoria Flight President's Report for 2025/26.

Welcome everyone and thanks for your attendance for this year's 2026 ANZAC Day march and AGM. As you can see, I've re-introduced an Agenda for the AGM to hopefully make the meeting a bit more structured.

First order of the day is to please join me in a minute silence for those 458 RAAF Squadron servicemen who paid the ultimate sacrifice in order to preserve the freedoms that we have today.

#### The ode

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

**Lest We Forget.**

Since our last AGM in 2025, we were saddened to hear of the passing of our 458 Veteran and Australian President Bert O'Leary, last year on the 16 July, 2025 at RSL Vasey Aged Care, Frankston, Victoria. Bert had spoken fondly of the time with 458 in 1945 at Gibraltar. Bert is survived by 3 sons, many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Jeremy, Chris, John Boydell and I represented 458 Squadron Association at Bert's funeral at Springvale Cemetery, Victoria, on 1st August. The 458 Squadron Banner was also displayed at the ceremony. Our sincere condolences to the O'Leary family on behalf of the 458 Squadron Association. Rest in Peace Bert.

I was also saddened to hear of the death of our South Australian correspondent Rick Michell. Rick's daughter Ali emailed me telling me that Rick passed on the 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2025 at Laurel Hospice (Flinders Medical Centre, Adelaide) aged 75 year. Rick's dad Colin Michell served with 458 Squadron as a Wireless Operator Air Gunner. Flying Officer Michell completed 24 operations with 458 afterwards became an instructor in the Middle East. He was posted back to Australia and honourably discharged in February 1945. Colin was an active member of the 458 Squadron Association South Australia Flight after the war. Rest in Peace Rick.



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I have also recently received sad news from Wendy Carney, daughter of 458er the Late Stanton Simpson and Marie Simpson. Wendy's mother Marie passed away on the 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2026. She was 93. Marie lived in Scone, NSW. Rest in Peace Mrs Simpson. Warrant Officer Simpson served in the RAAF 2/1/43 to 25/1/46 as a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner. With 458 Squadron from 8/1/45 to 1/2/45. Then went on to serve with 38 Squadron RAF for the last few months of the war.

458 Squadron Association held the Malta Reunion last October 13<sup>th</sup> -17<sup>th</sup> 2025. 46 members attended the Reunion. There were many memorable moments during the Reunion, the outstanding being the Memorial Service at the Air Force Memorial in Valletta and the scattering of Flt. Lt. Don Bitmead's ashes during a presentation and memorial ceremony at the Malta Air Wing, Luqa Airport. There were many other memorable moments most of which I published in the Newsletter in January.

A special mention about our hosts at Alghero, Sardinia, where Jeremy, Rob and Carolin Wilkinson and I visited prior to the Reunion. Valter Battistoni, the retired CEO of the Alghero Airport and the retired Commander of the Italian Aeronautica Militare, Alghero Air Base, Colonel Francesco Demontis. These two gentlemen bent over backwards to make us welcome. Jeremy, Rob and I covered our adventures at Alghero in the Malta Reunion edition of the Newsletter, however, I just wanted to reiterate how friendly and special we were made to feel during those few days. Moments that will stay in our hearts for the rest of our lives. Thank you Valter and Francesco.

Another special mention must go to Claire Dujardin who equally welcomed Jeremy, Chris, Norma, Jessica and I with open arms at Charleroi, Belgium. After those memorable days in Sardinia and Malta, we were subjected to another barrage of love, overwhelming sense of togetherness and friendship and a mutual passion for our beloved 458ers. Claire is next level in her passion and enthusiasm when it comes to Aussies and the ill-fated crew of 458 Wellington Z1218. Again, our Belgian adventures were mentioned in the Malta Reunion Newsletter. I dearly hope everyone read it.



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I would like to pass on my thanks to our generous donors over the past year. These donations are extremely helpful in funding our website and newsletter running costs. Our Treasurer will have a full report on this and other financial matters pertaining to the 458 Squadron Association in the last 12 months. I would also appeal to everyone to consider payment of dues for 2026/27 which are due today. These dues are extremely helpful in paying for the aforementioned ongoing costs in running the website and publication of the 458 Newsletter. On the subject of the publishing of the printed copy that I post out to some 31 addresses here in Australia and the UK, I have drafted a letter that I would like to post to the Australian recipients which I will pass around for comment. As you will read it is an exercise to reduce costs to our somewhat burdened Association finances. I think it is fair to say that I would still like to post printed editions to our two 458 Squadron Veteran Co-Presidents in the UK. Both are 104. I also send a printed copy to Mrs Christina McKenzie, widow of Lt. Col. Bruce McKenzie. Mrs McKenzie lives in Scotland and enjoys reading the Newsletter.

Another special thank you goes to our Vice President Chris Orchard for the time and effort he puts into the Eric Jewell Award on a yearly basis. The Eric Jewell Award came about due to the very generous donation by Eric's family in memory of the hero pilot of 458 that he truly was. I implore each and every one of you to visit the Eric Jewell Award page on our website to remind you of the time and effort Chris has put into this most worthy of projects thanks to the generosity of Eric's family.

Last but by no means least, thanks to the support from our Victoria Flight Secretary/Treasurer Jeremy Orchard, VPs Chris Orchard and Neil Flentje and 458 Historian Peter Hedgcock for their tireless devotion and ongoing behind the scenes works in keeping things afloat, project works and memorabilia sales which help with the financial running of things here in Victoria. Thank you on behalf of all 458 Squadron members.



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#### Senior Vice-President's Report:

*“They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old”*

What they did for us, the men & women of that generation, needs to be underlined again and again each year.

Hello and welcome to you all.

A hearty thank you to the Executive Committee for all the work in the past year, and thank you to everyone for your support, in all the ways that you can, including your presence here today.

We honour our loved ones who served all those years ago, in order to win freedom against **insane ideologies** that just plain and simple DON'T work! Either then, now or ever!

It's an honour to pay tribute to one of these men. This year it is:

**WOFF ROBERT (“BOB”) E. ELLIS**, Service Number – 427457, WOA, Date of birth – 19 April 1914, Place of birth – Plympton, South Australia. Place of enlistment – Perth, WA. (please continue reading in the Senior VP Report)

#### Eric J JEWELL Award Submissions:

1. A submission from 3 Wing AAFC (NSW & ACT), located in with over 3,500 Cadets and 500 Staff. Their submission is to support the 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.



2. A submission from 412 AAFC Squadron, located at East Albury, NSW to support some of their cadets who have to travel from remote locations to/from weekly Squadron parades.



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3. A submission from 309 AAFC Squadron, located at Holsworthy, NSW to support the purchase of banner, banner belt, pole and finial.



4. A submission from 234 AAFC Squadron, located at Caboolture, QLD to support the purchase of field rucksacks for multiple use on bivouacs.



### Junior Vice-President's Report:

- \* Neil has bought a scanner for research work
- \* Glad to participate and do research during the year.



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#### 2026 Treasurer's Report: Current Financial Statement

458 Squadron Association Victoria Flight bank account statements (CBA) are emailed to the Treasurer quarterly, including internet banking. On our website we also have a paypal account to receive donations (also by electronic funds transfer) and to receive payments for our memorabilia items. In 2024 a Goalsaver (GS\*) account was opened up. (TD's were closed)

Balance on 25/4/25 = \$2459.05 + \$1386.62 paypal + \$6019.61 GS\* - \$3298.20 EJ Fund = \$6567.08

Balance on 25/4/26 = \$ 917.86 + \$1460.40 paypal + \$4233.84 GS\* - \$1295.20 EJ Fund = \$5316.90

Nett = -\$1250.18

Consisting of:

- Income:

- \$300 membership dues
- \$263.40 from four kind Donations
- \$25.00 for 458 Badges sold
- \$25.00 for DVD sets sold
- \$8.00 for Pins sold
- \$157.63 Interest earned from Goalsaver account earning 4.75%
- - \$15.02 accounting adjustment/currency exchange rate variation (in paypal acct)
- Total = \$764.01

- Expenses:

- \$585.19 for postage & paper/cartridges costs for 3 Newsletters
- \$1279 for Website Hosting for the year (includes new Newsletter email service to prevent spam blockers – this service is an additional \$67 per year)
- \$150 anti-virus software for laptop
- Total = \$2014.19

- Income – Expenses = \$764.01 – \$2014.19 = -\$1250.18

Summary: Challenges this past year (compared to other years) includes, in every category, lower than usual dues, donations, merchandise sales and bank interest. Some of this is unpredictable. The result also reflects the Potent web increase from \$600 /yr to \$1279 /yr for hosting our website. Keep in mind we have an unlimited sized/paged website. At least one proposal will be put forward in the AGM to address this shortfall.



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**\*Extraordinary Item:** Supporting future generations of youth in the Australian Air Force Cadets (AAFC)

Income: \$8k & \$5k generous donations from the family of Eric Jewell (in 2018 & 2020)

Expense: \$1200 for the inaugural 2018 Eric J. Jewell Award

Expense: \$1449.60 for the 2019 Eric J. Jewell Award

Expense: note that due to covid, no Eric J. Jewell Award was given in 2020

Expense: \$3000 for the 2021 Eric J. Jewell Award

Expense: \$1320 for the 2022 Eric J. Jewell Award

Expense: \$1432.20 for the 2023 Eric J. Jewell Award

Expense: \$1300 for the 2024 Eric J. Jewell Award

Expense: \$1553 + \$450 = \$2003 total for for 2025 E. J. Jewell Award – see webpage

Current 2026 Balance: \$1295.20. This figure has been put into a Goal Saver account to earn interest of 4.75% p.a. at CBA. Funds will be available to use from this account for the 2026 EJ Jewell Award.

### Summary:

+ **Well done** to VP Chris for overseeing the 2025 EJ Jewell Award program once again.

+ **Well done** to “Hedgy” Peter Hedgcock, our Historian who runs the Memorabilia Shop. This is our 12<sup>th</sup> full year for the Shop. See webpage:

<http://458raafsquadron.org/memorabilia-shop.html>

+ This is the second year we are experiencing (financially) the increase in Potentweb fees (an additional \$679/yr), overall it was a difficult year for our finances but not for our continued mission. I am very grateful for the kind donations of the 458 family. Your generosity makes possible the smooth running of the Association.

+ Tabled for 2026 AGM: proposal is to increase annual fees from \$75 to \$100 per family to cover the increased website hosting costs. Voted on and passed unanimously.

*Thanks to those who have already paid their dues for 2026. Association membership is now due for the coming year, \$100 per family; Veterans & wives no charge.*

### Secretary's Report:

Another eventful year in the life of 458 Squadron Association. Some highlights:

- **Congratulations** to our Co-Presidents in the UK, Charles and Bill, both of whom turned 104! recently. See Newsletter #282



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- Our website [www.458raafsquadron.org](http://www.458raafsquadron.org) just had its 14<sup>th</sup> birthday!
  - **Congratulations** to our Flight President Roland who, as the Newsletter Editor and Publisher has once again produced tremendous results, Editions #280, #281 and #282! And a superb result produced by him for the Special Edition #281 comprising 164 pages! covering 458's Reunion in Malta in October. Commemorative services were held in Valletta, Malta and after the Reunion, in Charleroi, Belgium honouring our fallen and their never to be forgotten service and sacrifice. See #281 at our website for all the details.
  - More Serviceman's Stories were planned to be added to our website, an on-going project
  - I wrote and submitted a grant application last year to Upgrade/Renovate our website (after 13 years in operation). The result of the application was received 2 months late in August 2025. They said the website information e.g. Servicemen's stories, was already publicly available. I had no way of addressing this misconception of the decision makers. However, I am reviewing whether to re-submit the grant this year and correct their blind spot. I think we would have a reasonable chance of success this time. This project, if given the go ahead, will be coordinated with Potent Web, our current website host/designer. **Please review and comment back to me on the following information from Potent Web about this topic:**
  - **Potent web Custom Design:** Essentially this is a process that includes consultation and a custom design developed per your direction and feedback. You can review all of our large custom designed sites here: <https://www.potent.com.au/portfolio/large-website> (nb: the newspaper ones use a platform that is quite similar)
  - Here's a few examples of old & new, to give you some ideas (the 'new B-24 site is actually now nearly 10 yrs old):
  - NEW 2015: <https://www.b24australia.org.au/>
  - OLD: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120324021045/http://b24australia.org.au/>
  - NEW 2023: <https://www.vicstaterosegarden.com.au/>
  - OLD: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230304075825/https://www.vicstaterosegarden.com.au/>
  - NEW 2022 <https://www.specautoequip.com.au/>
  - OLD: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120221231801/https://www.specautoequip.com.au/>



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#### Focus, Action items and Plans for 2026/2027:

As concluded from previous meetings, the emphasis continues on the following:

- Focus on continued support of our Veterans & Spouses and descendants here and around the country and overseas through our Flight correspondents
- Seek feedback from all Veterans, descendants and members regarding the website and continue to build the website, particularly the individual Serviceman' stories that will be shown via the Honour Roll page, the Serviceman's stories page and the Nominal Roll page.
- Continue to build/add to the 458 RAAF Squadron Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/groups/458squadronraaf](http://www.facebook.com/groups/458squadronraaf) This social media platform will attract youth/next generations. Continue to look at ways to involve youth/next generations at a greater level.
- Round-table **action items** discussions included: **(i)** from Roland, draft letter to members who receive printed copies of the Newsletter **(ii)** from Roland, consider introducing dues for all members in other States of Australia and perhaps the UK and Canada. This is to ensure the ongoing hosting costs of the website and Newsletter production costs are met. In previous times all 458 members paid for their Newsletters. Consider a trip to Sydney to review with NSW Flight and **(iii)** per the Secretary's report, pursue the Website renovation project. **(iv)** And next point as follows:
- The Committee set to finalize reviewing the Australian Air Force Cadet applications for the 2026 Eric J. Jewell Award. To be completed by end June. See VP report on pages 5 and 6.

#### Closure of the Meeting

The President closed the meeting at 12.25 pm (having started at 11.30 am), thanked those in attendance and wished all Veterans, spouses, descendants and members to stay safe and well and happy for the coming year.



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**Photos of the March**





Above: finished the march; and then at the AGM;  
Below: RAAF solo Roulette flyover at The Shrine during our march, just above the Banner at right

