



## ANZAC DAY Friday 25-Apr-2025

### VICE-PRESIDENT REPORT

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

Another year passes and "The Ode" *rings ever true*. This year will mark 80 years since the end of World War 2.

Another ANZAC Day for our young people and "The Ode" gradually gathers momentum.

Thank you to the Executive Committee for all the work in the past year.

Thank you to everyone for your support, in all the ways that you can, including just being here today.

We honour our loved ones who served to help win the freedoms we enjoy today. We think of all from 458 that never came back. It is truly an honour to recognise and pay tribute to a 458 Veteran each year. So here goes ...

Nick Murphy from Mandurah, WA, ordered three 458 Lapel Pins way back on July last year. His connection with a 458 veteran is that he is married to the 3<sup>rd</sup> daughter of "Joe" and "Phyl" Watson.

To that point, this year, let us honour "Joe":

**WO BRYAN ANDREW ("JOE") WATSON**, Service Number – 406705, WOAG, Date of birth - 30 Dec 1917, Place of birth – Perth, Western Australia. Place of enlistment – Perth, WA.

Joe's personnel file (all 77 pages) is available on the National Archives of Australia website. Perhaps the most poignant entry is on page 20, a letter from the CO of 458 Squadron, Lt Col Bruce McKenzie, to Joe's wife:



No. 438 (P.A.A.F.) Squadron 47  
Royal Air Force,  
British North African Forces.

August 8th, 1943.

Dear Mrs. Watson,

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Before this letter reaches you, information will have been received that your husband A.406705 Sgt. B.A. Watson failed to return from operations on the night of 4 / 5 August 1943.

It is possible that the aircraft in which your husband was operating was forced down in enemy territory or in the sea and that he is now a prisoner of war.

Past experience has shown that usually considerable time elapses before news is received from the International Red Cross that men have fallen into enemy hands.

For security reasons, I am unable to give you any further details, but I hope that it will not be long before we all hear that he is safe and well.

Yours sincerely  
S. H. McInnes  
Lieutenant Colonel, Commanding,  
No. 438 (P.A.A.F.) Squadron.

Mrs. B.A. Watson,  
c/o L.O. Gray,  
Battery Road,  
Bournemouth,  
W. Australia.



**Joe's survival epic** starts at the bottom of page 101, all of pg 102 and part of 103 of "We Find And Destroy":

Another survival epic, involving wireless operator-airgunner, Sgt Watson, occurred at the beginning of August. A Wellington captained by Sgt Spencer and one of six operating on 4

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12 Aug 43 August, was on shipping reconnaissance over the Tyrrhenian Sea. Two hours out, trouble occurred. Wing received the signal at 0017 hours, "Returning to base, engine trouble", but nothing further was heard. The crew were Sgt Spencer and F/Sgt Adams (pilots), F/Sgt McKay (navigator), Sgts Ebbage and Watson and F/Sgt Fischer (wireless operator-air gunners). On 12 August, eight days later, Headquarters signalled the Squadron that Sgt Watson had been picked up alive, in a dinghy.

His story was that at 0025 hours on the 5th, the port engine had, after coughing, finally cut. It had been feathered, the course had been set for base and the torpedo was jettisoned. Suddenly the crew heard the pilot say, "Stand by for ditching". But the aircraft went straight into the sea before anyone had time to go to ditching stations. It was not known whether this was because the aircraft became unmanageable or because the pilot had not realised he was so low and was unprepared for the crash.

Sgt Watson, however, had time to open the astro-hatch and thought later that he was shot out of it. He only remembered struggling under water. On surfacing, he saw oil burning on the water but no aircraft. An uninflated dinghy was floating 20 yards away and although bruised and unable to use his arms, Sgt Watson made his way to it. After half an hour's struggle he managed to get into it. The severely injured Sgt Ebbage had also survived the crash and, after contacting Watson, also got aboard the dinghy. Watson found the ration box and tried, despite his own injuries to open it to find morphia for Ebbage. He fainted and when he came to again, a couple of hours later, Ebbage had died. Two days later, Watson buried him at sea.

Watson remained adrift for another six days, strictly rationing himself with water and

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## MCKENZIE'S AIR FORCE

Horlicks<sup>1</sup> ration tablets. When rescued he still had five tins of water left and four tins of Horlicks tablets. During the eight days several aircraft, including German, appeared but he could not attract their attention. On the 12th, just after midday, a Catalina, with a Lightning fighter escort, appeared and Sgt Watson was able to attract attention by standing in the dinghy and waving a red flag. The Catalina alighted and using a rope, picked up Watson. He was given coffee and tomato juice, taken to Bizerta and then to the 96th General Hospital. Watson's survival was due to his own courage and determination – he occupied himself by singing and kept cool by day, by dipping his clothing in the sea.

From the 458 Unit History, pages 276, 277:





DDI/3a GRI/15-42

R.A.F. Form 540

See instructions for use of this form in R.R. and A.C.I.,  
para. 2349, and War Manual, Pt. II, Chapter XX and  
notes in R.A.F. Pocket Book.

## OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK

Page No. 42

458 No. 155 Squadron RAF  
of (Unit or formation)No. of pages used for day 11  
Month

Place	Date	Time	Summary of Events	References to Appendices
Portofino, Liguria.	1943 August 1st.		<p>On this day Flying Officer G.H. Graham R.A.F., Squadron Requisition Officer, proceeded to the Middle East prior to taking up an appointment in the United Kingdom.</p> <p>A Prisoner of War Camp was started by the Squadron and 25 Italian prisoners of War were collected from the Prisoners of War Camp, Rome. From their letters it is obvious that they are pleased to be where they are. They are mainly employed in the Messes and are doing a good job of work.</p> <p>In the night of 1/2nd August, three aircraft of this Squadron patrolled the East coast of Sicily and Corsica, approached to Corsica, 'cross-over' to Italian coast and from La Rocca Port to Civitavecchia.</p> <p>The Captains were: Sgt. Baker, W/pt. Bishop and W/Lt. Douglas. There were no sightings. One Wellington 'W' failed to return. The crew comprised W/Lt. Douglas and W/pt. Bishop.</p> <p>At 0400 hours a sighting report was received from aircraft 'W' 1414 - 3915' North 100° East - 3900'. Also 1415 - 1416 - 3916' North 90° East - 3915' received 0400. Nothing further was received from this aircraft which may have attacked the life. Intensive air sea search operations were carried out in the area of the sighting during the following day without result.</p>	
	2nd.		<p>On the night of 2/3rd August five Wellingtons were dispatched on shipping searches along the East coast of Italy, from Naples to Cape Isabella and a 'cross-over' in North North Westward line between Albania and La Rocca Point.</p> <p>The Captains were: W/Lt. Baker, W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Douglas, W/Lt. Bishop and W/Lt. Bishop. Other than Hospital ships, there were no significant sightings.</p>	
	3rd.		<p>On the night of 3/4th August five Wellingtons of this Squadron carried out shipping searches West of Sicily and Corsica. The Captains were: W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop and W/Lt. Bishop. There were no enemy sightings other than one Hospital ship. Several night fighters were seen and evaded.</p>	
	4th.		<p>On the night of 4/5th August six Wellingtons of this Squadron were sent on coastal searches off the East coast of Sicily and Corsica, the Islands, approached to Larnaca and East coast of Italy from Messina Straits to Larnaca Point.</p> <p>The Captains were: W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop and W/Lt. Bishop. There were no important sightings.</p> <p>Unfortunately one Wellington failed to return. The crew comprised: Sgt. Bishop (Captain), W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop (Navigator), W/Lt. Bishop, W/Lt. Bishop and W/Lt. Bishop (Engineer).</p> <p>A message was intercepted at 0017 hours 'Returning to Base - engine trouble' 1415' North 100° East, but nothing further was heard.</p>	

National Archives of Australia

NAA: A9186, 144



		Page No. 2	
	Date	Time	Summary of Events
Proville.	4th August.		
	(Cont.)		<p>On the 4th August advice was received from Headquarters, R.C.A.F., that Sgt. Watson, being 8 days adrift in a dingy. Sgt. Watson's story the next morning at 0800 hours, the aircraft was feathered and the aircraft set course for base sending out "JJ". The torpedo was also jettisoned. Suddenly the pilot (Sgt. Watson) shouted "Land by-for ditching" but the aircraft went straight in before anybody had time to take up position. It was not known whether this was because the aircraft became unmanageable or that the pilot did not realize he was so low and was unprepared for the crash. Sgt. Watson had time to open the astro hatch and think he must have been shot through this but only remembers struggling under water. On surfacing he saw burning oil on the water but no aircraft, while an uninflated dingy was floating on the water 20 yards away. Although bruised and unable to see his arms Watson made for the dingy and after half an hour's struggle was able to get into it. Sgt. Abbege also survived the crash and was able to contact Watson and also got into the dingy. Abbege appeared to be badly hurt and was vomiting. He could not see and was in great pain. Watson found the ration box and tried to open it for soup, but fainted before he was able to do this, and when he came to about two hours later Abbege appeared to be dead. Two days later Watson buried Abbege at sea. During the whole time he was adrift in the dingy Watson strictly rationed himself with water and Horlicks tablets and when rescued still had five tins of water left and four tins of Horlicks tablets. During this time several aircraft, including German, appeared but he could not attract their attention. On the day of the 10th, just after 11:00 a Catalina with a lightning escort appeared. Watson was able to attract their attention by standing up in the dingy and waving a Red Flag. The Catalina circled, alighted and picked up Sgt. Watson with a rope. He was given coffee and tomato juice and then brought to Blarney and taken to the 10th General Hospital.</p>



### Eric J. Jewell Award Submissions:

1. An application from 723 AAFC Squadron, located in Joondalup (30 km north of Perth city), with over 100 Cadets and Instructors.



Their submission is to support two cadets, Julyen and Christian, both in financial hardship situations, to cover the annual membership fee.

2. An application from 224 AAFC Squadron, located at Wirraway Drive, Rothwell, QLD (40km north of Brisbane), on behalf of 2 Wing Band. The role of 2 Wing Band is to provide musical support to the Wing and Squadrons, either in a Concert or Ceremonial format. The submission is for updating their Drum Kit which has been with the Band for the past 8 years

