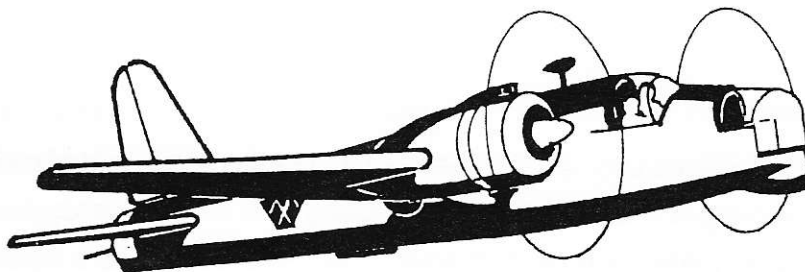


458

SQUADRON NEWS



RAAF

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AVE ATQUE VALE

Peter Charles Alexander

CMG OBE OAM JP CTuC OPR GCM

Recipient of Centenary Medal

1915 - 2003

With the greatest possible regret, we have to report the death after a long illness of Peter Alexander, the mainstay of 458 Squadron's life as a viable post-war association. Peter died peacefully surrounded by loving members of his family on Boxing Day 2003.

On vacation in Britain in 1940, Peter joined the RAF but managed to secure a posting as a radio operator mechanic to 458 Squadron which was then at Holme on Spalding-Moor and he remained with the Squadron until it was disbanded in Gibraltar 1945. On his return to Australia post war, he was primarily responsible for setting up the Squadron Association as a permanent entity first by organising its own post office box number and then forming it into a branch of the RAAF Association.

Probably the two most important elements in his work for the Squadron were the writing and editing of the Squadron history 'We Find and Destroy' and the editing of the quarterly Newsletter. This publication, which he guided and developed, has not missed publication in 54 years, a feat which at different times brought congratulatory messages from HM Queen Elizabeth and the Prime Ministers of Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. His prodigious memory, his ability with words and his broad experience of 458 Squadron and the activities of the RAAF has allowed the Newsletter to keep the Squadron Association abreast of Air Force and especially War Veterans' affairs as well as maintaining contact between members.

At different times Peter held virtually all the available offices of the Squadron Association and filled these with distinction. His advice was sought and almost invariably followed in all matters of the Association's responsibility and he initiated many courses of action for members' benefit. A modest, self effacing man, he was in fact, the embodiment of post war 458 Squadron.

However, Peter also devoted much time and effort to the RAAF Association and having held numerous positions within it, only recently retired after over 40 years as its honorary secretary. He was for many years on the executive of the AFC and RAAF Club. His retirement after 32 years as National Secretary of the Australian Veterans and Defence

Services Council earned him the following tribute from the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Ms Danna Vale, in February 2003 "Peter, you are a National Living Treasure and your life is an exceptional example of citizenship of the highest order". He was very active in the World Veterans' Federation and on retirement was made an Honorary Life Vice President. In 1997 he was awarded the WVF Rehabilitation Prize the only other Australian recipient of which was "Weary" Dunlop.

Apart from his work for ex servicemen, Peter's voluntary efforts extended to starting the Kenya Australia Society of which he was president for over 30 years. Through the Polish Branch of the RAAF Association he established a close relationship with the Polish community and was twice awarded decorations by the Polish Government. He began and presided over the Australian branch of the (British) Association of Chartered Certified Accountants and joined the Ryder Cheshire Foundation becoming its NSW chairman for several years. Peter was an executive member of the Ethnic Communities Council and a foundation member of the Scottish Australian Heritage Council. He presided over the Celtic Studies Appeal at Sydney University, was convenor of the Celtic Council of Australia, founded the Council for Scots Gaelic and the Scottish Polish Club and was a proud warden of the Scottish memorial cairn.

Peter will be sorely missed.

458 SQUADRON ALL STATES REUNION

Negotiations are still in progress for a site for the last All States Reunion, to be held in Canberra early November 2005. We are looking for a place which will provide the same standard of accommodation and service we received at the last two reunion sites but recognise that Canberra is a rather more expensive place to stay than most. We hope to have all the details for you in our next Newsletter

CORNSTALK COMMENTS. from Eric Munkman

Peter Alexander's passing is a very sad loss to all 458ers and other ex-service people for whom he did so much. Peter will be sadly missed and our deepest sympathy goes to Rita

and her family. Pete Pettit and I visited him a couple of days before he died and had the honour of attending his private funeral. Peter's request was that we keep the Newsletter going as long as possible so, to help carry out that request, would members please send along any news items to their flight correspondents whose names are listed at the head of this Newsletter.

Farewell "Mr 458", you will always be remembered as the man who did so much for us.

Other news includes the Remembrance Day Service which Eric and Dorothy attended at All Saints Air Force Memorial Church on Sunday 9 November sitting in the 458 Squadron dedicated pew. It was a morning rather than an evening service and was for that reason much better attended.

Another most successful luncheon was held at TAFE Catering College at Ryde and popularly considered to be the best yet. Would any member wishing to attend one of these functions please contact me and I will put their name on a 'contact' list.

Nancy Hills (widow of Ron) phoned to say 'hello' and to enquire about Squadron members. She is in reasonable health considering the fact that she has had two strokes and wishes to be remembered to her Squadron friends.

Dorothy and I spent a short time in early December with Laurie and Betty Crowley at their property in Junee. It was very interesting to us as it was the first time we had ever been on a property of such magnitude. It rained for three days at the wrong time so they were unable to harvest much to everyone's disappointment. It is not all beer and skittles being on the land and I have spoken to Laurie since our visit to find that the harvest was practically a total loss.

Bob Lyndon has had quite a spell in hospital but I am now pleased to say that after many tests and much treatment he has been discharged and is now convalescing in a private hospital.

Bob Bruce has not been at all well for a long time and is at the moment undergoing a protracted course of treatment at the Adventist Hospital. Bob has found the whole process so onerous that he has been forced to resign from his positions of Squadron Secretary and treasurer of the NSW Flight which accounts for the fact that receipts for subscriptions to the Squadron Association have not yet been posted, we are very sorry. Frank Ward has agreed to accept the treasurerships of both the Squadron (vacated by Peter Alexander's death) and the NSW Flight and Jimmy Whitem will take over the Squadron secretary's job. Our very grateful thanks go to both these stalwarts.

CANUCK CAUCUS. from Bryan Quinlan

All ex-458 Squadron Canadian Flight members extend our deepest sympathies to Rita and family on their sad loss. We join in the tribute to and the recognition of Peter's wonderfully productive life and his years of dedicated service to others. His record of achievements speaks for itself and requires no embellishment. We thank you Peter. "....We will remember you!"

Initially, the prime purpose of this report was for Canadian Flight to join in the much-deserved tribute to Peter Alexander. Sadly, the report has to be expanded to include a similar testimonial to Mickey Reid who unexpectedly passed away on 27 January at age 85, following major surgery one week earlier. Peter's all-important role in 458 Squadron affairs is well-known by all and it is no exaggeration to recognize that Mickey fulfilled an equivalent function over the years in the formation and growth of the 458 Squadron Canadian membership.

Our first thoughts of course go to Rita and Margaret and their respective families and on behalf of all Canadian Flight members we offer our most sincere and heartfelt sympathies on their sad loss, in which we all share. Peter's indispensable role in the building, developing and fostering the 458 Squadron organization, his authorship of the Squadron history "We Find and Destroy" and his over 50 years as editor of the 458 Newsletter are among his well-recognized achievements, to which must be added his participation in numerous other activities dedicated to working on behalf of veterans world-wide.

We in Canada are less familiar with his non-458 involvements, however, we are truly grateful and appreciative for the part he played as both the lead architect and the essential bonding element in preserving the World War II 458 Squadron esprit de corps throughout Australia and the movement's subsequent extension to New Zealand, the U.K. and Canada. His shoes will be hard to fill, however, we are confident that, with the very capable Eric Munkman, Pete Pettit and no doubt others who are willing to step into the breach, the Squadron organization remains in good hands.

Mickey and Marg Reid were approaching their 60th wedding anniversary in 2004 and have two children Bill and Kathy (Jean Jacque) and grand-daughter Tiffany. Mickey was instrumental in the early formation of the Canadian Flight and from the outset has remained a stalwart supporter and enthusiastic advocate of the 458 presence in Canada. In 2003 he was elected Canadian Vice President of the Squadron Association.

Mickey served with distinction with 458 Squadron during 1942-43 in Egypt, Malta, Algeria and Tunisia and became a Flight Commander under Bruce McKenzie. His crew included Aussies Ron Eggers, Bob Boulton, Tim O'Reilly and George Unitt, the latter now the only surviving crew-member. In postwar years Mickey remained devoted to his Aussie crew

and his reunion with them during a 1995 Australian visit was one of his most treasured memories. Postwar, Mickey became a highly respected print-media figure, retiring from his position as Account Executive in advertising sales with the Financial Times newspaper in October 1983. His friendly outgoing personality and consistent good humour made him beloved by all with whom he came in contact.

Peter and Mickey, we thank you both and you will be sorely missed. The words of the Poem of Remembrance may best express our feelings

"...at the going down of the sun
WE WILL REMEMBER THEM!"

SANDGROPPERS SAY from Bill Clues.

Just a few words on the passing of Peter Alexander a great 458 Squadron member.

Firstly our sincere condolences to Rita and family - only you Rita can be fully aware of all that Peter has done for the veteran community over his lifetime and for 458 Squadron from those early days when he and several other NSW members endeavoured to get the States together as one big family and succeeded so well that we have been together and enjoying each other's company for over 60 years. This is in no small measure due to Peter's untiring efforts to produce and print the Squadron Newsletter which always kept us in touch with the many members scattered throughout the world. I know in my case I have always been thrilled to receive the news and read of my many friends in Australia and overseas.

The writing and printing of "We Find and Destroy" was another outstanding achievement and the fact that it had two further editions speaks volumes for the work Peter put into it. As we all know we are only on this earth for a short span of time and what we do with that time is what really matters most. I believe Peter filled every minute of that time with 60 seconds worth of effort for his fellow man.

You will be sadly missed Peter by your many friends.
So-long Mate and well done.

BRITISH BULLETIN from Norm Duke

Norm writes "It is difficult to describe the sense of loss on hearing the news that Peter Alexander has died, although we knew he was very seriously ill, and that we shall no longer have the benefit of his experience at the centre of the Squadron's news and activities, and of his friendship even at such a long distance.

Strangely enough I had only met Peter twice in the past 24 years. The first time in Sydney at the very first

International reunion and again at our memorable reunion in the UK in 1982, in London and York (Holme on Spalding-Moor) and especially at Bruce and Christina McKenzies' house at Knowle in Surrey, where he demonstrated a 'safe pair of hands' as wicket keeper in the memorable England/Australia cricket test match on the lawn at Knowle.

In my opinion there is no doubt that he played a major part in the success of the 458 Association during the past 55 plus years, particularly through the medium of the Squadron newsletter and more notably by the tremendous task of the writing and publication of the Squadron History. In addition he dedicated a major part of his long and active life in public service to the cause of Veterans' Affairs in Australia and throughout the world with considerable success and was rightly recognised for his efforts.

We have lost a good friend and he will be sadly missed by all of us 'Poms'.

Our very sincere sympathy and greetings go out to Rita and to her family at this time.

CROWEATERS CATCHUP from Colin Hutchinson

Our Secretary, Pat Cribb, has been in hospital during the last couple of weeks but I am pleased to report that she is now at home being spoiled by her daughter, Cheryl. Jim Perry of Port Augusta too, has just left hospital. We wish both of them a complete and speedy recovery.

The family of the late Bert Oliver are celebrating great success in the wine industry. Their "Taranga Vineyard HJ Reserve McLaren Vale Shiraz 2000" was judged as the 2003 Champion Wine of Australasia. (How "HJ" - Bert - would have loved that!)

We noted with great sadness the end of the wonderful life of Peter Alexander. Everyone in 458 mourns him and acknowledges his unswerving devotion to the RAAF, to all service people and in particular to 458. He will be remembered while we live.

Our AGM at the Royal Hotel in December resulted in the return of the office-bearers Pat Cribb, Secretary; Rick Michell, Treasurer; Colin Hutchinson, President. Forty-one people enjoyed the following lunch.

Two important matters from the AGM were the position of the 'Next of Kin' of the members within the Anzac March and thoughts on the disposal of Flight archival material "when the time comes to disband". The meeting resolved that 'Next of Kin' continue marching under the Squadron banner and that we seek support from our national body and other squadrons. On that score, the SA RAAF Association have been approached for their support. Other Squadron Associations

will also be involved. The archival matter is still open, the only firm opinion being that we should not send our records to Canberra.

Our winter luncheon is planned for July 8th at the Kensington Hotel. The new management has agreed to serve a Seniors Lunch at the table for \$9.90 so remember to bring your Seniors cards if you wish to enjoy this advantage.

Q FLIGHT NEWS from Evelyn Lewis

Year 2004 off to a very hot and humid start that is why I am sure news from Q Flight is scarce - everybody trying to keep cool.

Talking to Earl Hetherington on the phone in December last, Earl had open heart surgery at the beginning of 2003 and came through well. At 92 he is still driving his Jaguar. Peter Baillie has not been well - spent a couple of weeks in hospital with emphysema then pneumonia set in. Cyril and Hattie Murray sold their property at Yandina, are now living at Buderim in a retirement village and have settled in very happily. President Eric and Kathy Kelly are enjoying holidays on the Gold Coast

Any snippets of news from members would be appreciated.

Vale

Len Netherway passed away 29 October 2003 - our thoughts are with Raebe.

Tribute to Peter Alexander from "O" Flight.

President Eric, members, wives and associates of "Q" Flight extend sympathy to Rita and family on the passing of Peter at the end of December 2003. We all remember him and we held him in high esteem. To one and all he was an approachable man, caring and ready to listen and help in many ways.

Peter will long be remembered for his dedication to his beloved 458 Squadron, his achievements in putting into print three editions of "We Find and Destroy", and his editing of the Squadron newsletter in 1950 which is still going. Every member of 458 Squadron Association looks forward to the newsletter every quarter and it was Peter's last wish to Eric Munkman and Pete Pettit to keep the news going. He started off the organisation of All States Reunions and Overseas Reunions during which many more bondings and friendships were made and he worked through Vet Affairs to help so many who sought advice.

May he rest in peace

KIWI CALL from Kevin George

With sadness and pride we join Veterans Associations in Australia and elsewhere in honouring the life of Peter Alexander. Beneath Peter's calm and dignified exterior was

a warm Australian heart. He was always interested to hear what each old Squadron member had been doing since the war and for most of his life he gave generously of his time and talent to promote the interests of our Squadron Association and other Veterans Associations world wide. 458 Squadron Association could not have achieved what it did so well, without Peter Alexander.

We have great sympathy for Rita and family and our Australian comrades, in the loss of a beloved husband, father and scribe.

VICTORIAN NEWS from Rupert Pearce

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Lunch at the Frankston RSL 27th October. Present were Ian and Val Alison, Harry and Nell Ashworth, John and Marjorie Bilney, Neil Dean, Jack and Margaret Ellis, Roy and Barbara Pearce, Rupert Pearce and June Schoppe.

Annual Pilgrimage Service, AFC Memorial, the RAAF Chapel and lunch at Pt. Cook 9th November. Present were Roy and Barbara Pearce, Rupert Pearce and Norma Pollard who represented the Squadron.

BBQ at the home of John and Marjorie Bilney 7th December. Present were Jim Anderson and Marcie, Harry and Nell Ashworth, Neil Dean, Jack and Margaret Ellis, Rupert Pearce and Norma Pollard. Apologies were received from Ian and Val Alison, Ken and Joan Hinton, Roy and Barbara Pearce and June Schoppe. John and Marjorie were excellent hosts, we were shown over their garden and it was an enjoyable day.

Australian Air Force Cadets Prize Giving Ceremony. Simpson Barracks, 14th December. Rupert Pearce presented the 458 Squadron prize to Cadet Corporal Kylie Walker.

Next meetings:

7th March. BBQ at the Ellis home, 5 Heales Street, Dromana
25th May. Annual General Meeting at the Waverley RSL.

POW Memorial at Ballarat.

Les Kennedy has been the driving force behind this for six years. It will be opened next month. There are approx. 30,000 names of Australian POWs on this memorial.

Remembrance Day in London.

Mick Singe returned safely and had a wonderful experience. There were several mentions in the newspapers and photos in the November issue of Vet Affairs enabled us to recognise our friend.

Personal

Rita Primrose will be 95 on February 22nd, Tom will be 91 on June 10th. As told in the November newsletter, Tom is spending more time in his bed. John Bilney is having more

medical tests but is feeling better. Harold Martin is now at the Salvation Army hostel, Weeroona, Malvern East, Cath bought him the Squadron book for his birthday. He really enjoyed it, especially the photos and said she could not have given him a better gift. Congratulations to those involved. Ken Hinton has to have a cataract operation on his eye. Don Granger had a spell in hospital over Christmas. Harry Ashworth is soldiering on. Our thoughts are with all our members who are not well and we hope the New Year will be better for us all.

The Passing of Peter Alexander.

The Victorian Flight members are saddened to be told of the passing of Peter. Some of our members served with Peter during war time and remember him. Post War all of our members feel that they know him from the great work he has done for the Squadron particularly with the Newsletter for over 50 years, for his writing of the "We Find and Destroy" books, for his service with the Air Force Association and other activities. Also others of us remember him more personally through attendance at the All States Reunions.

We send our sincere sympathy to Rita, Deborah, Julie and Melanie. He will be remembered by every 458 member.

DEDICATION OF AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL LONDON

11 Nov 2003

Norm Duke writes:

"On 11 November 2003 I had the rare privilege of an invitation to attend the dedication of the Australian War Memorial at Hyde Park Corner in London by HM Queen Elizabeth.

I had arranged to meet Bill McFadden at Brooklands Museum on October 29th to give him a guided tour of the Wimpey and the aircraft collection. During this visit I heard for the first time of the unveiling of the memorial and that Bill and his wife had tickets to attend the ceremony.

Due to the postal strike in London at this time, no mail was being accepted or despatched for the London area. I therefore faxed the Australian High Commission from a local office on October 31st, and requested permission to attend the dedication on November 11th as the official representative for 458 Squadron, in my capacity as President.

On Monday evening November 3rd I received a 'phone call from Australia House to inform me that I had been awarded a ticket.

The saga continued the following day with a phone call from Ken Mercer to tell me that Mick Singe had arrived in London as a member of the 28 strong Australian Veterans' group in order to attend the Memorial Dedication. This was also the first time I had heard of this trip. Nevertheless, not only

would I be attending the ceremony, I would also be meeting for a reunion with Mick at the same time.

November 11th itself is an historic blur in my mind still. The two minutes silence at 11 a.m. in the presence of the Royals and the two Prime Ministers, was even more symbolic than usual. After the official dedication by The Queen, John Howard made a very moving and sensitive tribute to all those who had been lost in conflict, followed by the laying of wreaths.

The War Memorial itself is a unique and very impressive tribute to Australia and to the Australian sacrifices, and there is no question in my mind that it is a Work of Art. Situated in a position next to Wellington Arch at Hyde Park Corner in what in effect is a small meadow in the middle of an enormous traffic island, it still manages to appear secluded. There is no doubt it will become a magnet for visitors, especially for all visitors from Australia.

The Australian Ceremonial Guard accompanying the ceremony performed with great style and polish.

After the ceremonials were completed, I located Mick and his group for our long awaited get-together and natter, and introductions to a number of the vets' group. By this time the Prime Minister, John Howard, and his wife were having a walkabout. I also had the opportunity to shake hands with John Howard after being introduced to him by Mick Singe - there is no doubt that Mick is quite at home in the 'corridors of power'!

Inevitably dispersal time arrived but the day was not yet over as Bill McFadden and I had been invited to a reception at Australia House for those at the dedication ceremony. John Howard was there too of course, and also Mick and his gang. A good time was had by all. That was definitely the 'gilt on the gingerbread'.

Altogether a memorable day, a wonderful experience, and a great honour for me to be a part of it.

In conclusion ... without my contacts with 458 mates - Bill, Ken and Mick - none of these events would have happened.

PETER ALEXANDER

Memorial Service 29 January 2004

As you may have seen in the press, a Memorial Service was held for Peter at All Saints Air Force Anglican Church in Lindfield where three Valedictory Eulogies were presented. The first was very ably given by AIRCDRE(Rtd) Geoff Michael, National President of the RAAF Association inc. who had known Peter for many years particularly during his time as Secretary of the RAAF Association.

Geoff was followed by The Honourable Danna Vale Minister for Veterans' Affairs who spoke highly of Peter and read the poem 'High Flight' by PLTOFF John Gillespie Magee jnr. Then followed an address in praise of Peter's efforts by Dr Neil Johnson, President of the Repatriation Commission and Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The hymn 'Abide With Me' was sung. The service was attended by bagpipes playing a 'Lament' and concluded with the sounding of the Last Post - a fitting tribute to a great human.