



## JOURNAL OF THE 458 SQUADRON COUNCIL

Year 72 No. 267 March 2021

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Jim Browne – Australia



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**QLD, TAS, NT, ACT and New Zealand** – Looking for volunteers.

**\* 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](mailto:editor@458raafsquadron.org)**

***Contributions and reports for the next Newsletter #268 are due to The Editor by 31<sup>st</sup> July, 2021.***

## **VALE –**

Jack Christiansen.....UK  
Leon Armstrong.....UK  
Bob Springall.....UK  
Harry Baines..... NSW  
Joan Clues.....WA

## **FLIGHT REPORTS**



### **United Kingdom Flight Report by Keith Wilkinson**

The past few weeks have been among the worst in 458 Squadron's post-war history. We have seen the loss of three of the four remaining veteran members of the squadron association in the UK. It's with great sadness that I must report the deaths of our President Leon Armstrong, aged 101; and Vice-Presidents Jack Christianson, aged 98, and Robert Springall, aged 99. This means that, as far as we know from our current records, 99-year-old Vice-President Charles Humbles is the last remaining 458 Squadron veteran in Great Britain. Although Covid-19 has been a very serious problem in the UK, none of the deaths was due to the worldwide pandemic. All three, however, were affected by the emergency. The numbers of people able to safely attend their funerals were limited by national Lockdown restrictions. It's fair to say that in each case, far more people would have been there to pay their last respects in normal circumstances.

### **LEON ARMSTRONG**



Leon, who was a pilot with 458 Squadron, died peacefully in his sleep on January 25<sup>th</sup> this year. He was in isolation at his care home in the West Midlands but he had no serious illness. His funeral was held at the Robin Hood Crematorium near Birmingham. Many people from around the world watched the ceremony, which was live streamed by a video link.

Leon had two children, six grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. His grandson Matthew spoke at the service in tribute. He said his grandad's experiences in the war were "such a significant factor in his life". He was not only President of 458 Squadron, he was also a founder of the Pensacola Veterans Association – the place in the USA where he learned to fly. Matthew said: "Grandad had a remarkable life both in terms of content and length. It has included challenges, danger, excitement and it has been a life that most people would have been honoured to live for themselves." Leon's coffin was carried into the crematorium to the orchestral music of Edward Elgar – Nimrod – a favourite of many RAF veterans. A poem was read by granddaughter Jane Armstrong. This was "High Flight", written in 1941 by John Gillespie Magee, of the Royal Canadian Air Force, who was killed while flying a Spitfire in England. Leon's granddaughter Laura closed the ceremony by playing Vivaldi's "Winter" on her violin. His family says donations can be made in Leon's memory to <https://www.justgiving.com/primrosehospice>. Leon, who was born on Boxing Day 1919, had a distinguished RAF wartime career. He'd originally failed to get into the air force at the age of 18 after being told he had a "dicky heart". But he went on to notch-up more than 1,000 flying hours in two tours and completed 61 operational sorties. He flew many night sorties with 458 Squadron, most notably bombing oil installations - the smoke and flames from which could be seen for miles around. He was also lucky to escape from a Wellington crash at Luqa in Malta on what became known as "Black Thursday" when four squadron aircraft were wrecked in a single day. In later life, Leon was very much an active member of the squadron association into his nineties. I drove Leon to numerous reunions around the country and listened to his often-funny and sometimes hair-raising stories. He attended our reunion at Alghero on the island of Sardinia and was the life and soul of the party. Leon was a member of the prestigious RAF Club in London and we went with him there on occasions for meals and drinks. He was instrumental in

getting the squadron plaque officially recognised and in getting the club to display it in their impressive collection. Sadly, because of the Covid lockdowns, the last time many of us saw Leon was for his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. The birthday party was packed with family members and he had a great time.



## JACK CHRISTIANSON



Jack was the pilot of my dad's 458 Wellington bomber crew and I would proudly describe him as my best friend. Even though he was considerably older than me, we had many fun times together, often involving bottles of beer and wine.

Jack attended every squadron reunion in the UK in recent years, including the one in Sardinia. In his eighties he took up flying again and flew me along the coast of Kent – allowing me to become the second generation to experience his pilot skills! Jack was born in Hampstead, London, in 1922 and was a lifelong Civil Servant. He had two tours as a pilot with the RAF and, before joining 458 Squadron, took part in a depth-charge attack on a U-boat in the Bay of Biscay when he was co-pilot of a Whitley. For his role in the Liberation of France, he was recently awarded the Legion of Honour, which he immediately dedicated to all his crew. Jack was the crew's last surviving member. Probably due to his skills as a pilot, he walked



away from two serious accidents in Wellington bombers. He always spoke fondly of Wellingtons and, despite his health issues, in 2018 we went on a visit to see the Wellington currently being restored in a private hangar at RAF Museum Cosford in Shropshire.



Jack died in hospital on December 16<sup>th</sup>. He had poor health in recent times and he and his wife Audrey had been self-isolating because of the Covid restrictions. Jack was taken to hospital in Woolwich by ambulance after developing a serious chest infection (but

not Covid). Sadly, he deteriorated rapidly. His funeral couldn't take place at Beckenham Crematorium until January 14<sup>th</sup> and only a small group of close family were able to attend. The poignant song Autumn Leaves by Eva Cassidy was played at the start of the service. A poem was read – A Silent Tear. Then there were memories of Jack from his family. His daughter Jill said afterwards: "We spoke about the Man, the Husband, the Dad, the Grandpa/Grandad and the Friend. The four of us shared our thoughts and I read out some of the memories I'd been sent from the family in Australia and recollections others had spoken about during phone calls I've had over the last few weeks." Then there was another poem, As We Look Back, and a time for reflection during the musical work of Glenn Miller, Moonlight Serenade, another favourite of war-veterans. Jill said: "Mum said she and dad danced to this when they were first together, so it was good to listen and imagine that moment." The service ended with What a Wonderful World by Louis Armstrong. The family have asked for any donations to be made to [www.rafmuseum.org.uk](http://www.rafmuseum.org.uk) or to [www.prostatecanceruk.org](http://www.prostatecanceruk.org)

Jack and Audrey spent many holidays on the Isles of Scilly and his family are hoping to have a memorial plaque there, mentioning that he had flown over in his Wellington bomber during the war.

### **ROBERT SPRINGALL**



Robert “Bob” Springall, born and raised in South London, died on January 30<sup>th</sup>, just 11 days after his 99<sup>th</sup> birthday. His son Tony told me that his father had “slipped away peacefully” in his sleep at home in bed. Last November he had been in hospital after a couple of falls. The squadron association meant a lot to him and he had attended many reunions in the past. When he was in hospital, he was given the squadron’s calendar, which he loved. It was passed to him through the hospital window.

“He relished getting the 458 Squadron newsletter,” said Tony. “He was registered blind and used to read it with a magnifying glass with a light. It took him about a week to read it.”

This, I think, really brings home how important the squadron association and its correspondence over the years has been to our veterans. Robert Springall’s funeral was on February 23<sup>rd</sup> at Easthampstead Park Crematorium. It was attended by 15 people and was watched by a wider audience on video livestream. The service was conducted by Father Danny McAvoy who had been with Mr Springall in his final days when there was snow on the ground. At the start of the service, he said: “I’m looking at the camera to welcome those who have joined us from Australia.” The Order of Service featured photos of Wellington bombers, illustrating the significance of them to him in his life. The service began with In a Monastery Garden by Albert Ketelbey. Appropriately, the psalm was The Airman’s Prayer. Again, the exit music was Glenn Miller’s Moonlight Serenade. An Appreciation was read out by Tony Springall. He said his dad was an instrument maker and he was in a reserved

occupation. But, undeterred by this, he joined the RAF and was posted to the RAAF and 458 Squadron. He spent three years overseas maintaining the instrumentation on Wellingtons. Tony said his dad bore the challenges of old age with humour and dignity. He was a very special man and part of a very special generation. He said he was a gentle man who was devoted to his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. "One of the true blessings we all had was that despite becoming increasingly frail in recent years he retained his warmth, memory, wits and humour and was able to pass away peacefully at home." The family says donations can be made, in his memory, to the Gurkha Welfare Trust. They say he has made a bequest of 346 dollars to the squadron association.



**CHARLES HUMBLE'S UPDATE:** I spoke on the phone to Charles to wish him a happy 99<sup>th</sup> birthday. The good news was that he and his wife Joyce had now both had their first Covid vaccinations at home. The not-so-good news was that Joyce, who will be 101 in July, has had an accident with boiling water on her leg. She was taken to hospital for treatment and is now back home recovering. We wish both of them all the very best and hope that Joyce's injury heals quickly.





### **Victoria Flight Report by Roland Orchard**

It was with great sadness that we learned of the passing in quick succession of our Squadron President Leon Armstrong and Vice Presidents Jack Christiansen and Bob Springall. In February of this year, I also received notice from an unknown source that Harry Baines had passed away as well. No details given of his passing. If any of his family read this, I hope they will contact me with these details. I also received the sad news of the passing of Joan Clues wife of Bill and mother of Vicki Ham. On behalf of all 458ers we send our sympathies to all of these 458 families.

### **ANZAC DAY 2021 – Victoria**

#### **MELBOURNE CBD and Local ANZAC Day Activity**

Please visit the [ANZAC Day- Melbourne CBD \(rslvic.com.au\)](http://rslvic.com.au) website for all information concerning Melbourne CBD and Local Regional 2021 ANZAC Day Activities.

*‘RSL Victoria has been working closely with the Victorian Government and the ANZAC Day Commemoration Council to ensure that ANZAC Day commemorations in Melbourne will be both appropriate and conducted under the state government’s COVID-Safe events framework. The health, wellbeing and safety of veterans and all of those in attendance at the Melbourne Dawn Service and march is paramount.’*

If you plan on participating in the Melbourne CBD march you will have to register with the RSLVIC on the following link

[ANZAC Day March 2021 Registration \(snapforms.com.au\)](http://snapforms.com.au)

Or visit [rslvic.com.au](http://rslvic.com.au) website and follow the ANZAC Day 2021 “Learn More” link. At this stage RSL Victoria have not passed on information as to whether the RAAF units will be stepping off first due to the RAAF Centenary year so those who are intent on marching, please be prepared to form up at 8:45am for a 9am step off time. Please look for the 458 Squadron Banner near the corner of Flinders and Swanston Streets. Also keep an eye on our website for further updates on the Melbourne CBD march. [www.458raafsquadron.org](http://www.458raafsquadron.org)





### **New South Wales Flight Report by Stephen Bruce**

We held a meeting of members on 9th March at North Ryde RSL. In attendance B& P Bitmead, R Munkman, B Dodds, R Wilkinson, D Longhurst and myself. The purpose being to discuss proposed Anzac Day march and update all on our upcoming reunion plans and arrangements on the weekend as from 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2021. At that stage we were unsure of a way forward for the march in Sydney with no real guidelines. Out of the blue, 12 days later, we find that we can march without real restrictions other than a supposed spreadsheet to RAFFA with attendees etc. There always seems to be a change year on year covering WW2 veterans and eligibility to march but we seem to overcome and just turn up behind the fabled 458 Banner. In this the 100th Anniversary of the RAAF and 80th Anniversary of 458 it is only fitting that the RAAF will lead the march and we (supposedly will need to form up by 8:45am.) Hopefully the weather is kind to us! We will plan around a morning tea at The Castlereagh Boutique Hotel as waiting for lunch around noon leaves a large gap in arrival at hotel a meal. Whilst at lunch Bev Bitmead, quite out of the blue, related that she and Peter had just returned from Manildra in central NSW where Bev and Peter finally interred the ashes of Bev's mother next to Bev's father's grave. According to Bev Husband Don's ashes are still in her bedroom cupboard awaiting internment. Bev stated jovially that she is still punishing Don for his previous indiscretions. To make matters more interesting it was advised that their deceased pet dog still holds pride of place on their mantelpiece at home in the lounge room. **Regards, Stephen**



### **South Australia Flight Report by Rick Michell**

No report from SA. Wishing everyone well in SA



### **West Australia Flight Report by Nick Bertram**

No report from WA. Wishing everyone well in WA.

## **SALUTE TO A FALLEN HERO OF 458 SQUADRON**



### **Warrant Officer Leonard Ancliff Pearce**

David Pearce, a pilot with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), made contact with 458 in November 2020, to continue a journey of discovery - the story of his great uncle, Leonard Ancliff Pearce (service no. 401049), who served with 458 and other Squadrons. Leonard Pearce was born 14<sup>th</sup> August 1909 in Burnley, Victoria. On 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1940, at 31 years of age, he enlisted at No 1 Recruitment Centre in Melbourne. He trained at Somers, Ballarat, Port Pirie, then left Australian shores from Sydney on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1941, bound for the UK. Sgt Pearce arrived at Malta on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1943 (extract from page 94, 458 Unit History below)

Sgt. Pearce.	Headquarters, Malta Air Command advise that the following crews are posted to this Squadron from No. 38 Squadron, Middle East.
NZ.411431.	Sgt. Moncur. C. Pilot. R.93647. P/Sgt. Gruenwald. B. Pilot.
1392330.	Sgt. Thompson. A.I. Pilot. 856954. Sgt. Harris. Pilot.
1395415.	Sgt. Heilhatton. Nav.(B). J.9599. P/O. Mahoney. CV. Nav.(B).
A.496389.	Sgt. Clark. R.F. W/Ag. R.79015. Sgt. Courchesne. R. W.OP.AG.
1295239.	Sgt. Baker. F.E. W/Ag. 1579586. Sgt. Barnes. J.L. W.OP.AG.
A.401049.	Sgt. Pearce. L.A. W/Ag. R.85444. Sgt. Geddes. O.C. W.OP.AG.
Aus.496332.	Sgt. A.E.O. Barras. M.M. Pilot left by air for the Middle East.

And his first night operation with 458, 10 days later:

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK						APPENDIX
DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT						
By No. 458 (R.A.A.F.) Squadron.						SECRET
FOR THE MONTH OF March, 1943.						
DATE	AIRCRAFT TYPE & NUMBER	CREW	DUTY	TIME		DETAILS OF SORTIE OR FLIGHT
				UP	DOWN	
15th Mar.	Wellington.8. H.X.789."N"	NZ.411431. Sgt. Moncur. C. 1392330. Sgt. Thompson.M. 1395415. Sgt. Heilhatton.J. Aus.496389. Sgt. Clarke. R.F. 1295239. Sgt. Baker. F.E. Aus.401049. Sgt. Pearce. L.A.	Captain. 2nd Pilot. Navigator. W./Optr. S.E./Optr. R./gunner.	2244.	0359.	Shipping Strike. N.W. of Sicily.

Tragically, he did not survive an operation on the night of 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1943. One of that generation's heroes, gone too soon, but never forgotten.

Fast forward to January 2021, and a delightful meeting of afternoon tea, with some of Leonard Ancliff Pearce's descendants.

Grandnephew, David had had to leave and return to Alice Springs with the risk of border closures, but Jeremy and Chris Orchard were able to attend afternoon tea in Melton on Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, with David's father, Len, and David's brother, Stephen. So much interesting discussion ensued, including a facetime session with David at his stopover location of Beachport, South Australia, en route to his and family's final destination. We learnt that "Len" or "Leonard" is a name held in high esteem. We had time to dig into one another's life's work, given our "middle-age" statuses, reflecting on those who had gone before us who had not had such luxury of years.

Another remarkable coincidence: one of three Padres of 458, SQNLDR Fred McKay, a Presbyterian minister, became successor to Reverend John Flynn OBE, the founder of what became the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). Fred McKay is well remembered as the spiritual leader of the RFDS, and has the *Fred McKay Medical Student Scholarship* named in his honour.



L to R: Jeremy and Stephen



L to R: Stephen, David, Len, Jeremy



L to R: Len, Jeremy, Stephen



L to R: Len and his son, David



From the Virtual War Memorial Australia website

<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/642984>

## PEARCE, Leonard Ancliff World War 2 Service



3 Sep 1939: **Involvement** Warrant Officer, SN 401049  
8 Dec 1940: **Enlisted** Royal Australian Air Force, Aircraftman 2, SN 401049, [No. 1 Initial Training School](#)  
22 Aug 1941: **Promoted** Royal Australian Air Force, Sergeant  
16 Oct 1941: **Embarked** Royal Australian Air Force, Sergeant, SN 401049, Emb. Sydney  
22 Feb 1942: **Promoted** Royal Australian Air Force, Flight Sergeant  
22 Feb 1943: **Promoted** Royal Australian Air Force, Warrant Officer  
3 Mar 1943: **Involvement** Royal Australian Air Force, Warrant Officer, SN 401049, [No. 458 Squadron \(RAAF\)](#), [Middle East / Mediterranean Theatre](#)

## **Flight Lieutenant Brian Winspear. No. 2 Squadron RAAF from Rob Wilkinson**



A mate of my Dad – Brian Winspear. Don't know if you've heard of him, but he does get a lot of media attention these days, around the time of Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and other commemorations – e.g. Darwin. You can Google him for further information. (see website links below) Brian was in 2 Squadron RAAF and present during the bombing of Darwin. He turned 100 back in September, still lives on his own in a big house overlooking the Derwent River; still drives; plays bowls and visits his wife who is in a nearby nursing home. See photo attached. He was quite chuffed to get the 458 Squadron Calendar.

<https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/resources/brian-winspear-served-royal-australian-air-force-witness-bombing-darwin>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnLmu7eXpPk>

## **ERIC J JEWELL AWARD FOR 2021 – UPDATE**



An application from a Victorian Squadron is aligned to this theme. If you or someone you know has a 13 to 17 year-old son or daughter aspiring to become an Air Force Cadet, then please go to the 458 Squadron website and collect the application form (<https://www.458raafsquadron.org/eric-j-jewell-award>). Applications close the day after Anzac Day 2021, and the winner will be announced on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2021.

**AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE CADETS**  
REACH FOR THE STARS



### **458 Squadron Association 2021 Reunion. 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> July.**

It's not too late to register for the 2021 Reunion however we need to hear from you **NOW!** We have 60+ attendees to date and are in for great few days.

Contact Rob Wilkinson on 0418 969 241 or email [robwilk@bigpond.net.au](mailto:robwilk@bigpond.net.au)

For your last-minute registration.



## **458 SQUADRON CAPS AND POLO SHIRTS**

### **NOW AVAILABLE**

Baseball style caps and Polo shirts with embroidered 458 Squadron Crest. The embroidery is high quality with 22,000 stitches for each badge. The cap is one size fits all and many sizes available for the polos. See example photos and size details below. 7 colours available. Royal Blue, Navy, White, Red, Maroon, Bottle(green) & Black. Example colour given here is Royal Blue. Thanks to our model Peter Hedgcock, Victoria Flight Historian.



Caps – AUD \$45:00 plus Packaging & Postage

Shirts - AUD\$55:00 plus Packaging & Postage.

**PLEASE NOTE-PACKAGING & POSTAGE/SHIPPING COSTS MAY VARY DEPENDING ON DELIVERY LOCATIONS.**

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

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

### **DONATIONS.**

Thanks for the very kind and generous donations to 458 Squadron Association. 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, projects such as the recent 458 Cap & Polo Shirt & 458 Website management by [\\*Potentweb](#)