



## JOURNAL OF THE 458 SQUADRON COUNCIL

Year 72 No. 269 December 2021

### Squadron Co-Presidents:

Charles Humbles- U.K

Tom Hicks – Western Australia

Bill Wake – U.K



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

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

**Newsletter Editor and Publisher:** Roland Orchard. 78 Edward Road, Chirnside Park. Vic. 3116. email: [editor@458raafsquadron.org](mailto:editor@458raafsquadron.org)

### Flight Correspondents:

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

UK- Keith Wilkinson

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 #270 are due to The Editor by 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.*

# **FLIGHT REPORTS**



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

Really pleased to hear that our squadron president Charles Humbles and his wife Joyce are now doing fine after a bit of a troubling year. Charles, who is 99, told me: “I’m coming round now – I nearly bit the dust!” Charles fell in the living room of his house and was taken to hospital where doctors treated him for numerous issues. He’s back home again and appeared to be doing well and was certainly in good spirits when I last chatted with him and his wife on the phone. Joyce too has been “in the wars”. She is 101, a survivor of the Blitz, and still has plenty of that fighting spirit epitomised by her generation. Joyce was taken to hospital by ambulance when she fell over in the garden and hit her head against a fence. Luckily, their gardener was there at the time and went to her aid. She was given a check-up and was soon back home. Not long earlier she’d been treated for a scalded leg, but that’s now also on the mend.

When Charles was with 458 squadron, and working on Wellington maintenance, he was tee-total. But these days Charles and Joyce carry on with their own little daily tradition – a small gin and tonic just before lunch. Not sure if that’s their secret of longevity but we’re glad to hear it’s keeping their spirits up.

Squadron president Bill Wake tells me he too is doing fine. He is also 99 and in good health. Bill said he was delighted with the news that money he sent over to the squadron association in Australia got through okay. The squadron means a lot to him. He’s requested a squadron shirt and says when the warmer weather returns, he’ll

wear it with pride on his regular trips down town. He has many fond memories of life in the squadron.

As for memories...we have been contacted by Mike Swann, son of the late Flt Sgt William “Bill” Heslop Swann (pictured). Bill Swann had written up some of his many experiences in the



RAF since 1930. This included his time with 458 Squadron where, like Charles, he worked with ground crews on aircraft engine maintenance.

Among his notes is a fascinating account of his journey in a convoy of ships after the Squadron left Holme-on-Spalding-Moor in England for service overseas. He was a passenger first on the Mataroa. The sea journey is well documented in the book Find and Destroy, but Mr Swann's account offers further insight, from one man's viewpoint, into conditions on the vessel back in 1942.

He writes: "Accommodation on board was terrific for the officers: two to a cabin, silver service and waiters and lovely food in their dining rooms. They also had some of the upper decks for their exclusive perambulation and amusement.

"The Senior NCOs were four to a cabin, a reasonable messing area, but our food was the same as the troops – something awful. A typical lunch was a spud baked in its jacket or a sausage, and that was the main meal of the day; no wonder the canteen flourished! Because of the change of latitude (the clocks went back) everyone was getting up earlier in the morning and I have a recollection of long queues outside the canteen at 4 am, everyone gasping for a mug of char.

"The holds which accommodated the airmen were unbelievable and when we arrived in the tropics, absolutely untenable, so it was not surprising that the Australians decided to sleep on the upper decks, normally reserved for Commissioned ranks. I reckon there would have been a mutiny if any action had been taken against them.

"After a few days at sea (absolutely calm) I was going up from one deck to another when a ship's officer on the descending companionway yelled at me, calling me by name. At first, I wondered what it was all about, but managed to contact him and learned that it was Tommy Stokell who was an old school friend from South Shields and was the Second Engineer.

"This was great as he invited two or three of us up to his cabin when he wasn't on duty in the evening and we drank a few beers in

comfort. We were the only airmen to be shown round the engine room and the thing that sticks in my mind is the knotted rope which was suspended from one of the upper decks and was the engine room staff's only means of escape from the engine room in case of the ship being torpedoed.

"Fresh water was very scarce on the ship and I think we had half an hour in the morning and afternoon so we had to get cracking washing our smalls as there were four of us to one small hand basin. Once we were in warm waters there was a daily free ration of two bottles of lemonade, which made life a bit more comfortable.

"There was very little entertainment on board; a little housey housey and an old portable gramophone which churned out Chattanooga Choo Choo from morning to night..."



Sadly, Bill Swann died in November 2000, aged 86. We are grateful to his son Mike for painstakingly transcribing these notes from extremely tiny writing and letting us use the amazing extract. I think you'll agree that what's described here is a little bit of history.



### **New South Wales Flight Report by Rob Wilkinson**

Good afternoon to the 458 family!

Here we are, not long after Remembrance Day, and it seems a very suitable time to not only remember all those of our family members, who served with 458, but also to update you on plans for our re-scheduled 80th Anniversary Reunion. May it be third time lucky! Dare any of us assume that all State borders will be open, but I think the chances are pretty good if we allow another 4 months! So, we are now planning to hold the re-scheduled-July 2021 Reunion as follows:

**Where: Williamtown, NSW**

**When: SAT 26 – MON 28 MARCH, 2022**

Please make a note in your diary, and let me know if you plan to participate. I certainly hope that we can once again look forward to all 71 original attendees fronting up again! All arrangements are going to be similar to what was planned for July:

**SAT 26 MAR** Arrive in Williamstown

Afternoon at leisure

80th Anniversary Dinner in the evening, at Fighterworld

**SUN 27 MAR** A Day in and around Nelson Bay, with a Remembrance / Wreath-laying Service at their War Memorial, and lunch close by

Casual dinner back at the hotel

**MON 28 MAR** Early start at Fighterworld to view the fighter aircraft take-offs

I'm HOPING we can organise a brief tour of the RAAF Base

Afternoon – fall out!

So, first step is to confirm your attendance, and advise the number of nights' accommodation you will require at the Mercure, Williamstown. For a number of you, I have retained deposits and payments, and I will be in touch with you separately to reconcile that. For others, who requested a refund, I'll also advise what's required as regards a new deposit etc. Let's try and re-create the great occasion we had planned for 10-12 July 2020, and finally get to honour our Dads and heroes!

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

With best regards, Rob

Rob Wilkinson

ph: (02) 9888-3625

mobile: 0418-969241

e-mail: [robwilk@bigpond.net.au](mailto:robwilk@bigpond.net.au)

**For those wishing to register for the 2022 458 Squadron Reunion please fill out the registration form on the last page of this Newsletter and forward it to Rob as soon as possible**





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

All 458ers wish Rick well and hope he is on the road to recovery. We send our very best, Rick. *Ed*



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

Kyran Bromilow contacted the squadron (Kyran is the great nephew of 458er Kingston Leslie Nobbs) I never met Kingston but did have the pleasure of meeting his wife Esme Nobbs at a few of the 458 functions about a decade ago.

Kyran is interested to find out more about Kingston and is keen to lay a wreath on behalf of the 458 squadron at the 2022 Anzac Day

Dawn Service in Kings Park

Kyran found the attached photo in the family collection and would like to identify the crew in this photo and potentially where/when it was taken

If anyone can help out please let us know



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

We very much hope that our 458 Squadron 80<sup>th</sup> Reunion at Williamstown NSW, in March of next year, will go ahead as planned. Don't they say 3<sup>rd</sup> time lucky? Looking forward to meeting everyone there. I would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. 2021 was certainly a challenging and devastating time for many. Here's hoping for a much happier and healthier 2022 for everyone around the world. *Joy to the World.*

## 458 Emails

From Brad Reynolds

**Subject: My dedication to my great-uncle and 458 Squadron.**

Hello there, just thought I would share with you a recent model I built as a memorial to my great uncle Robert (Bob) Ellis and his fellow crewmen who died in Italy in 1944.

Warrant Officer Patrick John Farrell (427504) (Wireless and Radar Operator)

Flight Sergeant Kenneth James Leslie (419785) (Second Pilot)

Warrant Officer Henry Samuel Shying (420068) (Wireless and Radar Operator)

Warrant Officer Gordon George Simons (416371) (Pilot)

Warrant Officer John Hendry Maurice Watson (425388) (Navigator)

They died just out of Jesi on 13/14 December 1944 when their Wellington crashed into a hillside on a go-around after overshooting the runway during bad weather.

**I would also like to think of it as a dedication to all members of 458 Squadron.**

The kit is the Trumpeter 1/72 Wellington Mk XIV (which is supplied with 458 markings) and the base is an older one from the 1980s which I purchased from the Association at the time, with the incorrect Queen's crown. I also installed some crew members from some other kits that I have. **Cheers, Brad Reynolds**

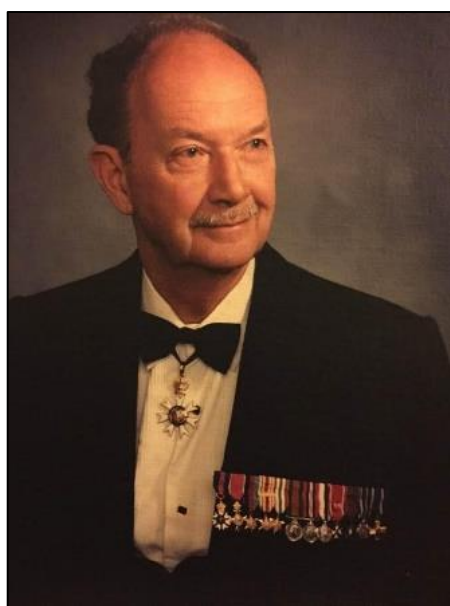


From Melanie Alexander

**Subject: Story for 458 news re Peter Alexander**



Here's a story from the war letters 1940 when dad (Peter Alexander, pictured) was in a training camp in Cardington, UK, not yet having done any service. "Have just been going to bed amid the usual blare of voices, beds half made, wireless going – there being no raid on – men writing, reading, shaving, talking poking fires, laughing, joking or sleeping through it. We get next to no planes here: far fewer than Burpham we largely ignore the sirens – which we have – there being a special 'take over' signal – the blowing of a whistle. The order used to be to get up and go to our shelters when the whistles went at night – a dreadful prospect which never happened fortunately. The whistles have gone off once since. It came in the morning... there was the nearest approach to panic I've seen in this war, men running in all directions, N.C.O's screaming hysterically etc. All the shelters were found to be full of water, so we lay scattered in the fields in our green gas proof clothing. We saw no planes."



Peter Alexander CMG, OBE, OAM  
Author of *We Find & Destroy*  
A History of 458 RAAF Squadron



## A WAAAF's TALE



Mary with war medals c 2008

Written by Mary's daughter, Jan Kuplis

Just over one hundred years ago, on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1921, a little girl named Mary Gerrard, was born in Launceston, Tasmania. At the same time, the Australian Air Force was going through the final stages of its birth as it awaited the King's 'Royal' consent. King George V approved the prefix "Royal" in June 1921 (becoming effective on 31 August 1921). Both births were on a trajectory, destined to intersect, and, for Mary, such a meeting was to influence the course of her life.

In September 1939, Mary recalls her father waking her up to tell her that war had been declared. "I can remember the feeling of awe there was; but we did not know what it was all to mean," she said.

Like many young women at the time, Mary got involved with local functions to raise money for comforts for soldiers and, after giving thought as to how she might be personally useful, she did a First Aid Home Nursing course.

In 1941, with the theatre of war expanding, the Air Force was having staffing problems and despite the establishment of the Air Training Corps for young men, the only immediate solution to the staffing problem was to employ women. Thus emerged the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF). It was what Mary had been waiting for. Seeing the opportunity to get more involved, she made the decision to leave her secure secretarial position and join the newly formed WAAAF.

"I was sent to Melbourne for training for a month, then posted to Laverton about 14 miles from Melbourne, and went into the Accounting Office to carry on with my usual work. I was soon made a corporal and had to march a squad of WAAAFs to work each morning (imagine it!) The WAAAF lived in two-storey brick

barracks where the permanent Air Force men used to live. They had been relegated to tin huts, and the ladies moved in.”

Meanwhile, nineteen-year-old Bill Wilkinson had joined the RAAF. Bill had been Mary’s boyfriend for a couple of years and although neither had told the other at first that they were joining the Air Force, both were soon proudly wearing their uniforms.

While Mary was at Laverton, Bill was at Sale in Victoria doing a Wireless Operator’s course and they would meet up in Melbourne on occasions. 6 months later they were engaged and as soon as Bill finished his course they married, in April 1943.

Bill left Australia a couple of months later and spent the next two years with 458 squadron in the Mediterranean region.

Wanting to be closer to her parents, Mary asked for a posting to Western Junction airfield, near Launceston.

“I enjoyed being at Western Junction as it was such a beautiful spot, and the people in Accounting were fun. I was in charge of Stores Accounting and had a staff of two. At the end of 1944, they stopped training pilots and the place closed, so I went to Sale in Victoria for 9 months. We lived in tin huts with about 16 to a hut, with a bed, small wardrobe, and about three feet between beds. There was great excitement when Victory was declared. I heard it on the wireless, and as I was late going to work, I grabbed someone’s bicycle and tore off to work yelling at the top of my

voice. I remember one of the chaps saying I had stars in my eyes; I guess I was so thrilled.”

Mary and Bill eventually settled in Hobart and raised their family. In 1956, Bill was elected State President of the Air Force Association. He continued his associations with the men of 458 and with the local returned servicemen in Hobart.

When Bill died in 1987, Mary’s contact with the Air Force began to wane until this year (2021) when the merging of their paths found her the centre of



With a selection of the books from DVA.

attention in Hobart.

Because Mary's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday coincided with the centenary of the RAAF, she became the grateful recipient of a selection of books from the Department of Veterans Affairs and also a plaque, made especially for the occasion, which recognised Mary as a centenarian veteran. This was presented to her by Wing Commander Dion Wright, Commanding Officer of 29 Squadron in Hobart, together with Squadron Leader Paul Gough, Acting Executive Officer with 29 Squadron.

Mary accepted the award with typical humility and when asked about her days in the WAAAF she replied:

"They were good years; but we really didn't think too much about whether we liked it or not because we just did our duty."



Mary receiving her plaque from Wing Commander Dion Wright.



## **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)



WELLINGTON PRINTS BY ARTIST DES KNOCK



WELLINGTON PRINTS BY ARTIST DES KNOCK

## **DONATIONS.**

Thanks for the very kind and generous donations to 458 Squadron Association.

**In particular, we would like to thank our Co President Bill Wake (UK) for his very generous donation.**

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 Website management by [\\*Potentweb](#)







## **458 Squadron Association 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion**

### **Registration Form**

#### **Dates –**

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March – Monday 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2022.

#### **Location-**

Williamstown, New South Wales.

Staying at the Mercure Hotel, Williamstown Airport.

#### **RSVP – 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2022**

#### **I would like to attend the 458 Squadron Association 2022 Reunion**

Name/s of attendees- \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Details (phone/mobile)- \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address- \_\_\_\_\_

I require \_\_\_\_ night's stay at the Mercure Hotel

I require a Single Room / Twin Share Room / Double Room (please circle)

From - Dates...../...../2022 to ...../...../2022

Scan/copy and email or post replies to [robwilk@bigpond.net.au](mailto:robwilk@bigpond.net.au)

Postal Address – Rob Wilkinson. 36 Finch Avenue, East Ryde. NSW 2113

#### **Payment Options- \*(\$100 DEPOSIT PER PERSON REQUIRED)**

**Online** - ACRA Pty Ltd trading as Group Travel Management

BSB: 633000

ACCT: 127479830

**Cheque** - replies with cheque made payable to Group Travel Management.

Mail to – Mr. Rob Wilkinson. 36 Finch Ave. East Ryde. NSW. 2113

**Credit Card**- Please contact Rob Wilkinson on 0418 969 241. Credit Card payments will incur a 1% Visa & Mastercard merchant fee

\*Please note that all deposits are refundable up to 30 days prior to the Reunion as 50% deposits have to be made to Mercure Hotel 30 days prior to check in.

If there are any further questions re payments contact Rob Wilkinson on 0418 969 241

**PLEASE NOTE – THOSE WHO HAVE PREVIOUSLY PAID & REGISTERED PLEASE EMAIL OR CALL ROB TO CONFIRM REGISTRATION FOR THE NEW DATES IN NOVEMBER.**