



JOURNAL OF THE 458 SQUADRON COUNCIL
Year 73 No. 270 April 2022

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Charles Humbles- United Kingdom
Bill Wake - United Kingdom
Bev Bitmead - 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**
Contributions and reports for the next Newsletter #271 are due to The Editor by 30th July, 2022.

VALE -

Thomas Henwood Hicks..... W.A. Flight.



It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our Co President Tom Hicks. Tom was to attend our 80th Anniversary Reunion however it was not meant to be as he passed away early December 2021.

Bev Bitmead..... N.S.W Flight



It is with equal sadness that we announce the passing of our newly proclaimed Co-President Bev Bitmead on the 3rd April, 2022. Bev was looking forward to attend the Reunion however was too ill to join us.

FLIGHT REPORTS

United Kingdom Flight Report by Keith Wilkinson



Delighted to say that squadron co-president Charles Humbles had a great 100th birthday in the UK.

"What a surprise!" he said later. "It was a lovely day."

My wife and I joined members of his family at his home north of London for his centenary celebrations. Alongside him was his wife Joyce who will be 102 later this year. The couple married during the London Blitz and have lived in their current house since the 1950s.



Charles was in good form, laughing a lot and clearly enjoying himself. Just a few days later he was back in hospital, having a new battery for his pacemaker. All went well. One of the highlights of the birthday was his card from The Queen.

"I send my congratulations and best wishes to you on such a special occasion," said the royal card. Charles found time to record some heart-warming video messages for the 458 Squadron Association reunion in Australia. "To everyone in Australia - a very good reunion," said Charles. "And let's hope everyone's in a good position, and no longer got this virus about us."

Luckily, by the time of the birthday all Covid restrictions had been lifted in England. Charles and Joyce had spent many months during the pandemic under Lockdowns with visits only from close family members who brought shopping and helped with cleaning. It was a tough time for them but they got through it stoically. As a present, I gave Charles a large bottle of his favourite gin. He and Joyce like a small G&T every lunchtime. It seems to have done them no harm! In another message, he said: "Best wishes to all in Australia and 458 Squadron, especially to all the people who are associated with the squadron, all the states, and also Roland Orchard...Keith Wilkinson looks after us very well in England. He keeps in touch with me all the time so he knows exactly what's going on with the squadron."



Charles gave a little insight into his time with 458. He said he joined the squadron, then part of Bomber Command at Holme-on-Spalding-Moor in Northern England, in August 1941 when he looked after the Wellington of Australian Wing Commander Mulholland (who was later killed).

"Several times we ran into trouble, especially when it was foggy at Holme-on-Spalding Moor. And I had to run in front of the aircraft with two torches to make sure he kept on the perimeter track. I had to stop the aircraft half-way round the perimeter track because it was too foggy."

In the darkness, the fog and in the torchlight the Wing Commander, still in his pilot's seat, looked angrily at Charles because he objected to being brought to a halt in such a spot.

"When he came down and realised how bad this fog was, he apologised," said Charles.



Our other UK co-president Bill Wake will be 100 this year too. With the help of his friend, Keith Davis, he also recorded some delightful video messages. With a big smile on his face and looking like a man of much younger years, Bill said to everyone Down Under: "Good luck Cobbers!"

He went on: "Shortly after my existence was discovered by your UK flight correspondent Keith Wilkinson, I was elevated from a non-entity to that of a 458 Squadron Association co-president. It is from that exalted position that I send my very best wishes to all members in Australia on the occasion of your forthcoming meeting."

Bill, a wireless operator/air gunner with 458, said he had clear memories of his times with the squadron.

"How could I forget Colonel McKenzie's tailor-made Wimpy. Squadron Leader Orchard - a lovely man who was not too fussy about discipline."

He also spoke of his own pilot Flying Officer "Brush" Downs, who lost his life at the age of 21 - "a Canadian pilot who I had absolute faith in but who sadly died of malaria half-way through his tour."

It was good to see Charles and Bill in such high spirits.

Bill tells me his squadron t-shirt has now arrived from Australia and he is looking forward to wearing it out and about when the weather gets warmer.

The squadron association means a lot to them. Never take our little newsletter for granted. The value of what we do with this publication was brought home to me when one of Charles's relatives said to me on his birthday that he always shows the latest edition to her when she visits and he reads it out. Its arrival through his letterbox is one of his cherished moments.



New South Wales Flight Report by Stephen Bruce & Rob Wilkinson

Dear 458 family,

With much sadness, I would like to inform you that our fellow 458er, Bev Bitmead, passed away at 1.30am 3rd April. As I mentioned at the Reunion, Bev was so disappointed that she couldn't make the Reunion, due to her hospitalisation following a fall. But we were blessed that her children Peter and Jenny (Higgs) could join us at Williamtown, and fly the flag on Bev's behalf, whilst Lesley stayed back in Sydney to keep an eye on Bev. You'll recall that Stephen Bruce announced, at Saturday's Reunion Dinner, that the various 458 Committees had voted unanimously to elect Bev as the Squadron President for Australia. You'll be pleased to know that Jenny visited Bev in hospital last Sunday, with the good news, and Bev was thrilled, and humbled, by that acknowledgement. Apparently, she even told hospital staff and visitors that she was the 458 President!!

So, I'm really glad that she was well aware of her new role in the Squadron, as I feel it was richly deserved, given her unstinting loyalty, commitment and support of all things 458 for many, many years. Bev was widowed, just over 6 years ago, following the death of her husband, Don (Acting Flight Lieutenant Don Bitmead).

Personally, I'm glad that Carolin and I (Rob) were able to spend 15 minutes with Bev, yesterday evening, and I was able to let her know how valued she was, within 458, and how much we all loved her! Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Jenny, Lesley and Pete, and to Bev's grandchildren and great grandchildren.

May Bev Rest in peace.

ANZAC Day 2022 (Sydney CBD)

Pleased to advise upcoming arrangements for this year's march and our march reunion to be held at Castlereagh Boutique Hotel following our fallout. The RAAF will march off later this year at 11.00am. We should assemble in Castlereagh St. between Hunter St. and King St. at around 10:45am. As usual our position in the line-up will probably change better to just look out for our

banner, I would hazard to guess at Martin Place to be halfway in field. It will be great to catch up with everyone after last week's 80th celebrations at Williamstown which was a fabulous event which will live long in our memories honouring the service of our veterans. Please advise of your intention to attend march and /or function following in order that we can cater accordingly.



South Australia Flight Report by Rick Michell

Rick is currently on holiday. All the best to Rick and all South Australian 458ers.....ed.



West Australia Flight Report by Nick Bertram



Tom Hicks & Nick Bertram

Vale Tom Hicks

Almost 12 months ago to the day we received an email from Richard Hicks (Tom's son in the UK) informing us that his father was a 458'er and living in Perth, WA. It was with great excitement that I met Tom (and daughter Jane) a few days later at the Swan Care facility at Bentley Park. Tom had just reached the centenary milestone in January and still lived independently. Tom told me a few stories about his time in the 458 Sqn & amongst

other postings. One story stood out about CO McKenzie teaching Tom how to "REALLY low fly" in a wellington - quite a funny story and worth a read (Full story on the website! - along with Toms life story)

<https://www.458raafsquadron.org/honour-roll/servicemens-stories/hicks-th>



Tom Hicks standing 2nd from left with Crew

Deepest condolences to Clare, Jane, Richard, Keith and families
CO McKenzie may have taught you how to low fly, but now it's time to fly high pilot
Rest in Peace Tom, it was a pleasure to have met you.

ANZAC Day 2022 (Kings Park WA)

It would appear the Kings Park ANZAC Day service for 2022 will be capped due to the ongoing Covid-19 situation in WA. Kyran Bromilow's request to lay a wreath on behalf of great uncle Kingston Leslie Nobbs (Nobby) & the 458 Sqn may have to wait until 2023. I'm still trying to get the official word Kyran.

Regards, Nick



Victoria Flight Report by Roland Orchard

ANZAC Day 2022 (Melbourne CBD).

Form up south east corner of Collins & Swanston St. at 10:30am sharp. Please look out for our 458 Banner. We will have our luncheon & AGM at Jardin Tan Café, Royal Botanic Gardens, Birdwood Ave, South Yarra VIC 3141, opposite the eastern entrance to The Shrine of Remembrance.

80th Anniversary Reunion, Williamtown, NSW. 26-28th March, 2022.



Rob Wilkinson. Our heartfelt thanks to you for such a great job in organising the Reunion.

I would like to start by passing on our greatest thanks to Rob Wilkinson and Stephen Bruce for doing all of the ground work in organising this memorable function.



Stephen Bruce.



Rob & Roland presenting the Mercure Head Housekeeper Anne with flowers for her thoughtful gesture.

Upon arrival at the Williamtown Airport Mercure Hotel, we were all



Ian & Beryl registering 458ers as they arrive.

surprised to find in our rooms a welcome note which included a copy of the very first edition of the 458 Squadron Association Newsletter dated "Year 1948". On investigation, we found out that the Head Housekeeper Anne had done

some research on 458 Squadron, found the 1st Newsletter on our website and printed out copies as a welcome surprise for us all. How thoughtful!

The Reunion kicked off with registration headed by Beryl and Ian Dodds in the hotel foyer and the setting up of the 'Memorabilia Room' located in one of the hotel's Conference Rooms.

Those who attended the Reunion were Charles & Pat Baker, Chris Baker & Carla McBride, Howard & Sally Bertram, Jenny Higgs (nee Bitmead), Peter Bitmead, John & Sue Boydell, Stephen & Anita Bruce, Adam Bruce, Janet (nee Hamilton) & Norm Butt, Beryl (nee Munkman) & Ian Dodds, Margaret Farrell (nee Jollow) & Sean Farrell, Neil Flentje, Rob Forgan, Orion & Katerina Forgan, Jane Gordon (nee Hicks) & Clare Croucher (nee Hicks) Lureen (nee Baker) & Gary Kirkman, Jan Kuplis (nee Wilkinson), David & Robyn Longhurst, Dianne (nee Ridgway) & Frank Marik, John & Thomas Merino, Ron & Adam Munkman, Jeremy Orchard, Chris Orchard & Roland Orchard, Chris & Sue Sherrah, Wendy Whitem-Trunz, Rob & Carolin Wilkinson, David & Allana Wood, Matt & Cooper Wuillemin, Chris & Heather Wurr.



Howard Bertram studies the many interesting artifacts on display in the Memorabilia Room



Memorabilia Room.



Memorabilia Room.



FO Edwin 'Red Jack' Baker's uniform displayed by Lureen (nee Baker) and Gary Kirkman

There were many interesting items on display as seen in these photos. As our 458

Squadron Photo Album was on a constant loop on the big screen TV, all of the members walked through admiring, reminiscing and even discovering photos of their beloved Veteran they hadn't seen before. Our store was also open, selling many of the 458 items available for sale, including a new look polo shirt thanks to Ron Munkman.

The 80th Anniversary 458 Squadron Reunion Dinner.



Video Messages from our Co Presidents (left) Charles Humbles and Bill Wake (right) both from the UK were met with rousing applause.



Victoria Flight Banner displayed at the 458 Reunion Dinner at Fighterworld, Williamtown Saturday 26/03/2022

The official 458 Squadron 80th Anniversary Reunion Dinner was

held 'under the wings' at Fighterworld Museum adjacent to Williamtown RAAF Air Base on **Saturday evening 26th March, 2022.** Our host for the dinner was General Manager of Fighterworld, Bernie Nebenfuhr. He and his catering staff served a wonderful 3 course meal. Our MC for the evening was event organiser, the multi-talented Rob Wilkinson. Many heartfelt and emotional speeches were made to honour our brave fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, uncles, great uncles who served with 458 Squadron. One highlight was the announcement by Stephen Bruce of the unanimous vote for Bev Bitmead as Co-President for Australia. Jenny Higgs (nee Bitmead) and Peter Bitmead accepted the nomination on behalf of Bev, who was not well enough to attend. Sadly, Bev passed away a week later.



458 Group photo at the 458 Reunion Dinner at Fighterworld, Williamtown, NSW, Saturday 26/03/2022



The Ode was magnificently recited by young Connor Wullemin, Great Grandson of 458er WOFF Mervin Lee.



Jenny Higgs (nee Bitmead) & Peter Bitmead reading a message from our newly announced Co President Bev Bitmead who sadly passed one week later.



Seated from Left going clockwise around the table – Matt & Connor Wullemin, Sally & Howard Bertram, Rob Forgan, Orion & Katerina Forgan. Matt and Orion are both serving RAAF.



Seated from Left going clockwise around the table – Frank Marik, Adam Munkman, Ron Munkman, Heather Wurr, Dianne Marik (nee Ridgway)



Seated from Left going clockwise around the table – Sue Sherrah, Janet Butt (nee Hamilton), Norm Butt, John Boydell, Sue Boydell, Chris Sherrah.



Father and son Charles Baker(R) & Chris Baker. Son and Grandson to 'Black' Jack Baker.



Our MC, Rob Wilkinson, starts the evening off with a memorable welcome speech. This sets the night off with wonderful memories and sense of family.



General Manager of Fighterworld Bernie Nebenfuhr & Rob Wilkinson enjoy drinks and a chat.



Orchard brothers L-R. Roland, Jeremy & Chris. John & Thomas Merino. Intently listening to SQDLDR Chris Baker. Chris Bakers Grandfather 'Black Jack Baker was on Gordon Orchard's crew.



Jan Kuplis (nee Wilkinson), Lureen Kirkman (nee Baker-'Red Jack') & Gary Kirkman.



From Left – Peter Bitmead, Anita, Adam & Stephen Bruce.



Sean Farrell & his mum Margaret (nee Jollow)



From Left. Carolin Wilkinson, Beryl Dodds (nee Munkman) & Ian Dodds.



From Left. Clockwise -Ron Munkman, Heather Wurr, Dianne Marik (nee Ridgway) Chris Wurr (one of our photographers for the evening-Thanks Chris!), Adam Munkman.



David & Robyn Longhurst. In his speech, David delivered the messages from the Governor General and Minister of Defence.



Wendy Whittem-Trunz supplied poppies for the wreath laying ceremony.



Neil Flentje. One of our photographers behind his camera for most of the evening. Thanks Neil!

Sunday 27th March 2022. Nelson Bay Dolphin Watching Tour.



Moonshadow V

On board Moonshadow V, we enjoyed a 2-hour cruise seeing many dolphins and other wildlife around the Port Stephens area. After the tour we had a wreath

laying ceremony at the Nelson Bay Memorial presided over by Chaplain Frank Duffy. Jenny Higgs and Peter Bitmead laying a wreath on behalf of all 458 Squadron Veterans and Association members. During the



Jenny Higgs (nee Bitmead) and Peter Bitmead lay a wreath. On the left is Chaplain Frank Duffy who presided over the ceremony. Port Nelson, NSW.



Wendy Whittam-Trunz with Piper Malcom Goodfellow-Port Nelson Memorial. Malcom played during the wreath laying.

ceremony 'Piper' Malcolm Goodfellow played two laments enhancing the reverence of the occasion. Just as the ceremony concluded, the heavens opened up. Luckily our coach was parked close by and most avoided a drenching.

After the ceremony we went to the Wests Diggers RSL, Nelson Bay for a

terrific luncheon and refreshments. Afterwards it was back to the Hotel for a free afternoon.

Monday 28th March 2022. Fighterworld Breakfast and RAAF Williamtown Base Commander Welcome & Aircraft Activity.



Group Captain Anthony Stainton, RAAF Williamtown Base Commander gives a speech and presents Certificates of Recognition from the RAAF to 458ers. Fighterworld. Williamtown, NSW. 27/04/2022

Our Reunion concluded with a breakfast at Fighterworld followed by a speech by RAAF Williamtown Base Commander, Group Captain Anthony Stainton. GPCAPT Stainton gave a welcome speech explaining the role of the RAAF Base and the importance of its frontline status. He then

presented members with Certificates of Recognition on behalf of the RAAF to 458 Squadron families who attended the reunion. Rob Wilkinson presented GPCAPT Stainton with a plaque thanking him and RAAF Williamtown Personnel for their support.



L-Clare Croucher (nee Hicks)
R-Jane Gordon (nee Hicks)
Certificate of Recognition for their father
Tom Hicks



L-R. SQDLDR Matt Wullemin (currently serving in the RAAF and 458 Squadron Association member), GPCAPT Anthony Stainton (Base Commander RAAF Williamtown) and WOFF (Ret) John Boydell (Former Warrant Officer of the Air Force and 458 Squadron Association member.)



L-Copy of Commemorative Plaque presented to GPCAPT Stainton and RAAF Williamtown on the occasion of the 80th Anniversary of the formation of 458 Squadron RAAF on 10th July, 1941. Reads- "In appreciation to RAAF Williamtown, Base Commander and Personnel, for their support of The 458 Squadron RAAF Association for this 80th Anniversary Reunion. 28th March, 2022.

Our 458 members were then witness to an awesome display of our RAAF front line fighters and support aircraft. This included many take off and landings of the following aircraft. F-35A Lightning II, Hawk 127, F/A-18A/B Hornet, E-7A Wedgetail airborne early warning and control aircraft and more. Members made sad farewells from Fighterworld as they made their way home, concluding a most memorable Reunion.



Pre-launch checks of F-35s and a single FA-18 Superhornet. RAAF Williamtown



L-R Rob Forgan, Roland Orchard, Ron Munkman, Rob Wilkinson
Please read the R1785 - A RING CYCLE by Rob Forgan on our website. It is very moving



Sally Bertram meets two USAF fighter pilots who were on exchange to RAAF Williamtown.



A copy of the placemats set up at the Reunion Dinner Tables designed by Alana Kethel (nee Wilkinson)



Click on link below for Rob Wilkinson's production of the 458 Tribute Movie.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VJEGgVH5_4

458 Emails

Fri 25/03/2022 1:00 PM

From Kristen Alexander

Alexander Fax Booksellers alexfax@alexanderfaxbooks.com.au

Hallo family, friends, and family and friends of the **Australian airmen of Stalag Luft III**.

Yesterday, I was awarded the Australian War Memorial's Bryan Gandevia Prize for Australian military-medical history for my PhD thesis 'Emotions of Captivity: Australian Airmen Prisoners of Stalag Luft III and their Families'.

The judging panel wrote: Rated outstanding by examiners, this work demonstrates a masterful command of the Australian and international literature related to captivity and prisoners of war. Richly researched and well written, its descriptions of life in captivity and its impact is wide-ranging and comprehensive. As well as tackling taboo subjects such as sexuality and suicide, the post-war experience of prisoners is followed to address contemporary understandings of ongoing trauma, including PTSD, moral injury, and intergenerational trauma.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/blog/2021bryan-gandevia-prize>

I am deeply honoured to have won this award.

As many of the POWs' families know, the traumatic residue of European captivity, especially among airmen prisoners, has been little recognised. Through this award, I hope to highlight the wartime, life-long, and intergenerational challenges of captivity.

Thank you all who helped me along the way, to those who shared their stories and archives, and to those who supported me when things got 'tuff'.

best wishes Kristen Alexander

NOTE FROM ED. – Kristen interviewed 458ers who were POWs in Stalag Luft III for her PhD Thesis.

From: Janet Butt (nee Hamilton)

Sent: Sunday, 3 April 2022 10:17 PM

To: robwilk@bigpond.net.au

Subject: 458 Reunion

Dear Rob. Thank you for letting us know about Bev. I am sure Dad and Mum would have known her. It was lovely that you were able to visit Bev just before she passed away. It sounds like she was quite lucid in her last week of life, being so appreciative of the honour of being Australian 458 president.

I also wanted to thank you again for all the effort you put into the reunion last weekend. We both enjoyed it very much. I was a little apprehensive initially, not knowing anyone but everyone was so friendly and welcoming. I hope we meet again sometime. I may even be able to interest my brother and I have told our sons they are going to have to be involved in time to come! **Cheers for now,**

Norm and Janet.

From: Dianne Marik (nee Ridgway)

Sent: Tuesday, 5 April 2022 10:46 AM

To: Rob Wilkinson <robwilk@bigpond.net.au>

Subject: Thank you!!

Dear Rob, Just to say how much we enjoyed the dinner and reunion at Fighterworld. You had gone to so much trouble to make it a memorable occasion. We really enjoyed the video of all the men who were in 458 and I found myself with tears as dad's photo went on the screen. It was so generous of the Orchard brothers to donate the wines and their expertise to help the association's reunion. The placemats were excellent and we have 1 for David and Katherine. How clever is your daughter to do that and it will be a great item for our grandson, Xavier, to take to tell his classmates in the future about his wonderful, great grandfather, Tom Ridgway.

I hope you and all the members have a good Anzac Day and dinner after. We will think of you then.

Fondest regards, Dianne

From: John Boydell

Sent: Thursday, 31 March 2022 7:28 AM

To: robwilk@bigpond.net.au

Subject: 458 REUNION

Good morning Rob. A quick email to say thank you so much for the wonderful 458 Reunion and to finally meet. Both Sue and I thoroughly enjoyed ourselves and met up with so many wonderful people. Further, we both commented on how well we all got on and the many laughs we all had. I have downloaded my pictures and will put on a USB and give to Roland when we meet for the Melbourne march on ANZAC Day. Once again, thanks so much for the wonderful organization of this special event. Kind regards, John and Sue.

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 to everyone 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 & 458 Website management by [*Potentweb](#)

Note from Editor

On behalf of all 458 families who attended the Reunion, I would like to thank Rob Wilkinson for his tireless organisation of the Reunion. Stephen Bruce for his work and donation of the superb 458 labelled and other wines. Beryl Dodds for the lanyard name tags. Vic Flight for the bus hire. Alana Kethel (nee Wilkinson) for designing and producing the 458 Placemat. Many thanks also go to our photographers Neil Flentje and Chris Wurr. With special mentions to the Bitmead Family for the wreath, Wendy Whittem-Trunz for the poppies and Ron Munkman for the new designed polo shirts.