

458 SPEECH – ADAM

Good morning. I'm Adam Bruce!

Some people might wonder why 47 of us would travel from across the world – from Australia, Canada and the UK – to spend a week in Malta!

In my case, it's an easy, three-fold answer – to stand tall among the descendants, family and friends of our 458 heroes as we honour our grandfathers, fathers, fathers-in-law, uncles and great uncles for their Service; to keep the 458 Banner flying; and, to encourage our children and young relatives to continue doing so.

I am incredibly proud to stand here, as the grandson of Warrant Officer Stanley Robert Bruce – known as Bob – along with my sister Samantha, and 7 other third-generation 458ers.

The Squadron first formed in 1941, in Williamstown, NSW. Some headed to Holme on Spalding Moor. Others joined over the next couple of years in various places – Canada, UK and Middle East – to complete the multi-national tapestry of 458.

My Grandpa – Bob – joined 458 in early 1943 and, following enlistment, embarked to Calgary in Canada. He was then deployed to North Africa, The Middle East and finally Italy, as a wireless operator and rear gunner in our flagship Wellington Mark4 Torpedo Bombers.

At the cessation of WW2 conflicts in Europe – 80 years ago – Warrant Officer Bob headed to London, took some leave, met my grandmother Betty, and got married. He returned to Australia soon after, with Betty close on his heels, early in 1946. What a great example of true love!

They settled in New South Wales, where grandpa was employed by the Department of Social Services setting up Government run Rehabilitation Centres for the injured and disabled – first of all at Jervis Bay and then a few years later in Sydney.

Our father, Stephen, was the only son of Bob & Betty Bruce and, in 1973, married Anita. I was born in 1979, with Samantha following in 1981.

Sadly, grandma succumbed to cancer in 1986. Grandpa moved into our home in Hornsby and we had the pleasure of his loving company for 20

years, during which time he imparted his daily opinions and endless questions on all matter of things, be it school, social or work activities. By then, Sam and I had completed school, and were into the world of employment opportunities.

I must say that, from a relatively early age in the 1980's, we knew of the exploits of 458 due to the involvement of Grandpa (or "Gunner" to his friends) with the NSW Flight of 458 Squadron. We also made great, lifelong friends, forged during WW2, with some of those descendants who are with us today.

The annual Anzac Day reunions in Sydney were legendary, to say the least, especially as veterans aired memoirs of their times in the Air Force, gently washed down with an ale or two, along with the odd unsuccessful plunge on the races thanks to the likes of Eric Munkman, Sam Barlow, Harry Baines and the rest of the Anzac Day rogues in attendance.

Dad commenced marching, with Grandpa and 458, in Sydney in the late 1990's as it became obvious that age was diminishing the veteran's ability to march and attend the after-march meetings.

Nowadays, Samantha, Ben and I regularly attend the Anzac Day March along with our Mum, Anita, whose father also served in 3 Squadron as a fighter pilot in North Africa, Middle East and Southern Europe, flying Hawker Hurricanes and P51 Mustangs. It's interesting to note No. 3 Squadron is still active, flying F-35's out of their base in Williamstown, where 458 was formed.

Grandpa sadly passed away in 2004 and, at his celebration of life, there was a moving tribute by his surviving squadron mates who have all now passed on.

We are all gathered here today because of the incredible bond that had its beginnings in a global conflict, and which required a huge commitment and ultimate sacrifices in the defence of our allies in World War 2, especially here in Malta, where our squadron lost so many young airmen.

We all have our own stories, but we're closely linked, and all genuinely feel those close ties, as members of the 458 "family". 280 Editions of our

Squadron Newsletter, an incomparable Squadron Website and regular Reunions speak volumes for the time and effort, and the enjoyment, that we all get from our 458 association.

In closing, I highlight the two extremes of 458! There are two surviving 458 veterans – Charlie Humbles and Bill Wake – both living in the UK, in their early 100's, albeit with some medical challenges.

At the other end of the scale, and at this year's Anzac Day March in Sydney, we had some great grand-children – nearly 100 years younger than Charles and Bill – marching with us, behind the 458 Banner.

Long may that banner be carried aloft, generation after generation. Given the turnout at those Anzac Day marches, I'm confident the young brigade will proudly take the baton, and make sure that the tradition, and the memories, continue.

It's a great privilege to be here this morning, honouring Grandpa Bob, and the 15 other 458 Veterans, represented by family members. May they all rest in peace, safe in the knowledge that they played their own heroic part in allowing us to live in a largely, peaceful world.