

JOURNAL OF THE 458 SQUADRON COUNCIL.

C/- Jim Whitem
P.O. Box 239, Port Macquarie
NSW 2444, Australia

Year 56 No. 221 February 2005

President: Tom Moore, (NSW) *Tom was elected Junior Vice-President in Orange; and automatically becomes President following the death of Norman Duke, and Peter Pettit. Ed.*

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Canada Tom Lindsay
U.K. Leon Armstrong

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VALE, PETE PETTIT

We very much regret to announce the death of Pete Pettit, 458 Squadron Pilot, Vice President, newsletter editor, and co-author of 3rd edition of “We Find and Destroy”.

Pete died peacefully in his sleep at his home at Roseville, early on 2 January. Some twenty squadron members and wives including Squadron and NSW Flight office-bearers attended the farewell service on 6 January. Eric Munkman spoke on behalf of 458 Squadron. An obituary follows.

Peter William Pettit 28.1.24 – 2.1.05

Pete, as he was always known on the squadron and its post-war Association, joined the RAAF on 9 October 1942. He had been educated at North Sydney Boys High School and had been a Scout in a Cremorne troop. In the RAAF, he trained at Bradfield Park, Narrandera and Bundaberg, won his wings and was then posted to the U.K., to Kidlington.

Thence, he joined 458 Squadron in Alghero, Sardinia, as second pilot to Wing Commander Robbie Mackay, DFC, the Squadron Commanding Officer, and remained with the Squadron until it was disbanded in Gibraltar on 9 June 1945, at the conclusion of hostilities in Europe.

An undoubted highlight of his wartime experience occurred over the Northern Adriatic Sea on 14 September 1944, on a very dark night, when, flying with Mel Priest, they attacked a convoy of enemy shipping. They bombed it, and then waited around as long as prudence dictated, to observe the results. So did I, as skipper of the next aircraft on patrol. We were at five thousand feet over a bombed, loaded tanker when it blew up, causing us, suddenly enough, to reach ten thousand feet. Priest was awarded DFC for that operation. Pete and I recalled the event many years later when he had commissioned an oil painting of the event, (reproduced in part on the cover of the 3rd edition of the squadron history) and I had written of it as an introduction to my autobiography.

War over, we both returned to the UK, where I had the pleasure of his company for a ten-day motoring trip around England and Wales. We both returned to Australia, I to a teaching post at the University of Sydney, Pete as a dentistry student at the same place. We saw a little of one another during the next few years, then Pete returned to UK as a qualified dentist, where he worked in the National Health Service. There, he played a role in formation of the UK flight of the 458 Squadron Association.

On his return to Australia he joined the squadron council, and after retirement gave more time to squadron affairs, becoming its secretary, running reunions, taking over the newsletter from Peter Alexander in turn. Most importantly, he collected, edited and illustrated for the third edition of the squadron history, many recollections of members of unofficial wartime activities. In my opinion, Pete's contribution to the squadron history turned a rather impersonal chronicle of the activities of us all during the war into an eminently readable and enjoyable volume. Presciently enough, he called one chapter 'Tall Tales and True', and another "And Afterwards, The Long Post-war Years", unfortunately now coming to an end.

In conclusion, may I offer to June and her children and grandchildren the heartfelt sympathy of all newsletter readers for their sad loss. Jim Whitem



458 Final All States Reunion - 2005

When: **30 October – 04 November 2005**
Where: **Canberra - Rydges Lakeside Hotel**

The reunion is structured to avoid any 'long days and tedious trips', so please come and share in this **Final Reunion of the 458 Squadron**.

<u>Date/Time</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Cost</u>
Sunday 30th October 12 noon onwards Evening (2 hours to be advised)	Arrival & Meet Your Mates Arrive and book into the Lakeside Hotel. Meet your mates" Reunion in conference room on the Mezzanine floor. Drinks and platters of finger food	Hotel details - see below \$37.00 per person
Monday 31st October Approximately 9.30am 	Canberra Exhibition & Luncheon Cruise Buses will transport us to the Canberra Exhibition at Regatta Point . We will break into two smaller groups to be shown around the exhibition on how Canberra was founded. Through exciting interactive displays, the Exhibition illustrates Canberra's vital role as a symbol of federation, featuring people, events, history and design. This will be followed by a short walk down to Lake Burley Griffin for a two-hour luncheon cruise . A bus will collect us at the end of the cruise to bring us back to the hotel.	 \$38.00 per person, incl. coach
Tuesday 1st November Approximately 10.00am  Australian War Memorial http://w	Memorial Service Day – Australian War Memorial Buses will take us past various memorials on Anzac Parade and then on to the Australian War Memorial for our Memorial Service . Following the service we may choose to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lunch at the Memorial's Café After the service, we can partake lunch at the Memorial Café - either at your 	Cost is \$5.00 per person, incl. coach

<p>www.awm.gov.au/</p>	<p>own cost, or we can arrange a group luncheon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • view the sight and sound displays of G for George and the mini sub attack on Sydney - just outside the café. • tour the Australian War Memorial complex at our leisure. Conducted tours can be organized. • return to the Hotel by Maxi Taxi for those wishing to leave immediately after lunch. 	
<p>Wednesday 2nd November 10.00am</p> 	<p><i>Squadron Plaque Dedication & Maltese High Commission Reception</i></p> <p>We will travel by two buses to the RAAF Memorial Grove for the unveiling/dedication of our Squadron Plaque. It is anticipated that we will then have a reception at the Maltese High Commission, as guests of the High Commissioner.</p>	<p>Coach Transport \$15.00 per person</p>
<p>Thursday 3rd November Group 1 - 9.30am Group 2 - 10.00am</p> <p>http://www.oph.gov.au/</p> <p>Thursday Evening</p> 	<p><i>Old Parliament House & 458's Final Dinner</i></p> <p>Today we travel in two groups to Old Parliament House (OPH). Tour guides will show us the memorabilia of yesteryear. The days of old will be brought to the fore with these extremely interesting displays. Morning tea &/or lunch can be purchased at the Café within the complex.</p>  <p>Buses will return us to the hotel to rest up for tonight's Final Dinner. Maxi taxis can be arranged for those wishing to stay longer.</p> <p><i>Final Squadron Dinner</i></p> <p>Tonight, the 458's Final Dinner will be held in the elegant 15th floor restaurant with magnificent views to be enjoyed whilst listening to our guest speaker and enjoy the ambience of fellow veterans. This promises to be a most memorable evening.</p> <p>No selection of their 'Australian cuisine' menu has been made to date.</p>	<p>OPH tour \$7.00 per person, incl. coach</p> <p>We expect the meal, exclusive of wine etc, to average at \$40.00 per person</p>

<p>Friday 4th November 2005 10.00am</p>	<p><i>The Final Squadron Conference or Free Day</i> Delegates will attend conference.</p> <p>Those not attending the conference are free to visit other highlights of the city, or spend time with their mates. For ideas see: http://www.nationalcapital.gov.au/experience/attractions/OPH.htm</p>	
<p>Friday Evening</p>	<p><i>Sea Food Buffet Dinner (optional)</i> At the 15th floor restaurant – a popular Friday dinner for Canberrans. The hotel will arrange reserved tables for Friday dinner so you can sit together.</p>	<p>\$48 per person</p>

Rydges Lakeside – Our Conference Hotel



London Circuit, Canberra City is situated on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin. It is a multi storey Hotel, all rooms have views of either the Lake or City. Lifts service every facility we will utilize in the hotel – so no problems with stairs or luggage. Breakfast will be served in “Bobby McGee’s” Restaurant located on the ground floor. You can dine in for evening meals or visit the many surrounding clubs and restaurants. Most evening meals & lunches will be at your own expense. This will allow you to eat with friends at either the Hotel or surrounding restaurants. The hotel will supply a secure suite for Memorabilia and final delegate’s conference. Rydges Lakeside has hosted several other Squadron Reunions.

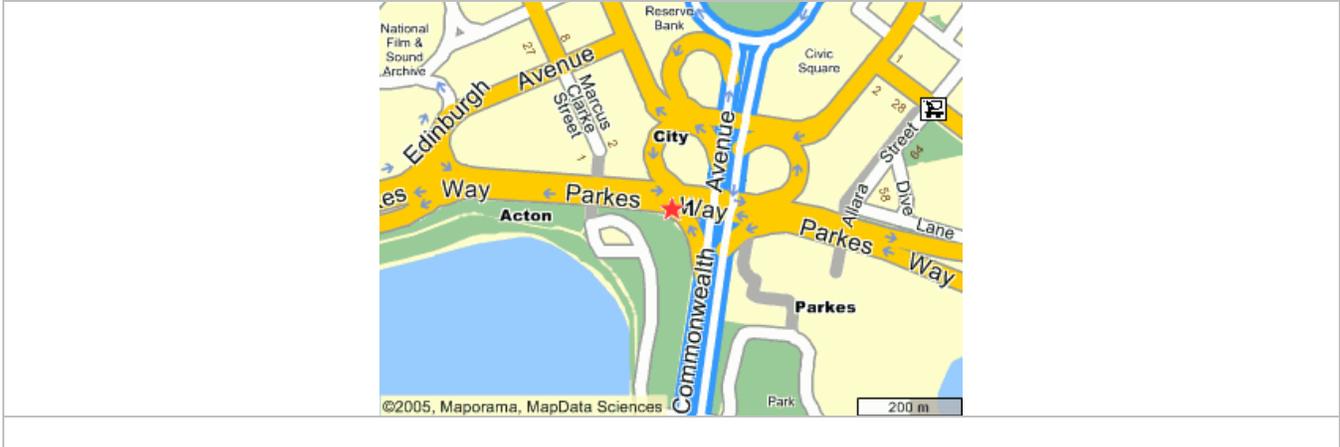
Accommodation \$160.00 per room per night (twin-double or single); Breakfast included

Directions

Rydges Lakeside is located at the Star on the map. You can take an airport bus if flying in, for \$7, with drop off at Rydges.

Editorial note.

Thanks are due to John Gibbins and Wendy Whittem-Trunz for providing the copy regarding the reunion. JHW



Acceptance and Deposit

Would members expecting to attend the reunion please complete the tear-off sheet and forward it with a cheque for **\$200 (deposit) made out to 458 Squadron Reunion Account**, to Frank Ward, NSW Flight Treasurer, at 50 Castle Hill Rd, West Pennant Hills, NSW 2125. **It would assist planning if acceptances are received by mid-April. This will help us get our reservation preferences.** A list of acceptors will be published in the May and August Newsletters. Your deposit of \$200.00 per member will include one night’s accommodation, which will be deducted from your individual Hotel account.

458 Final Reunion – Canberra, Acceptance Form

Member Name Total people coming with me: ...
 Accompanying person..... Accompanying person.....
 I am a single delegate & would like to share a twin room. **Yes / No.** (Please circle correct answer) with? (We’ll try to put you with your mate if you can tell us who.)
 My special dietary requirement is:
 \$200 cheque for deposit attached herewith. **Signed** **Date:**

last reunion.

Flight reports. *These appear in the order that they were received – Ed.*

UK Flight- by Keith Wilkinson.

First, a few words about your new UK flight correspondent. My dad was Wop/air gunner Ken Wilkinson from Lancaster, England, who flew with 458 in Bone, Corsica and Sardinia. I'm now treading in the distinguished footsteps of our good friend, Norman Duke, who passed away last year. Norman is an impossible act to follow, but he did attempt to educate me about the squadron in recent years – escorting me on trips to inspect the Wellington bomber at Brooklands, and to study squadron records at the National Archives in London.

It was a very sad start to 2005 with news of the death of Peter Pettit. Among his friends in the UK was ex-458 pilot Leon Armstrong, who said Pete would be greatly missed here. Leon knew Pete on the squadron, and after the war they had an unexpected re-union. Pete took up dentistry in London – and helped fix Leon's teeth!

Meanwhile Leon, who was 85 on Boxing Day, has been doing his bit in the long-running battle to get the squadron's badge officially displayed and recognized. He rounded up a few people for lunch at the Royal Air Force Club in London – where he wants the 458 crest put on show. Leon says Bill McFadden had come especially from Australia to take up the case and he was joined by ex-pilots George McKendrick and Jack Christianson. So far – they've had no joy. Leon says: "It's a load of old cobblers that we can't get recognition! A crying ruddy shame!"

But for Jack Christianson – my dad's old squadron pilot – things have literally been taking off. Sixty years on from his Wellington bomber days, he's learning to fly again. And on his last flight, he took me for a spin along the south coast of England – fittingly, I sat in the rather cramped back seat. Jack said: "Who'd have thought, 60 years after flying your dad in the rear turret, I'd be taking his son up."

Jack who seemed like a born-flyer made a perfect touch-down on to the tarmac with the words: "Any landing you walk away from is a good one!"

What I'd like to know from you 458-ers out there...how many more of you are still flying? How many of your sons and daughters have taken up flying? Let us know!

Queensland Flight. – by Evelyn Lewis

Year 2004 has slipped by and we sit back and ponder what 2005 has in store for us. We look forward to the Squadron Reunion in Canberra at end of year. Hard to realise it will be the last one. What great times had by so many at all past reunions. Friendships made and never forgotten.

I have been trying to contact some members. No result with Bernie Hughes. The phone may be disconnected or he may have moved. His name is still on newsletter list. I managed to contact

Charles and Hazel Ruthven. Both are in poor health, approaching their ninetieth birthdays. I spoke only to Hazel as Charles was not up to it. Both were very appreciative of my call. Peter and Jean Bailie are keeping well; I hope to see them in March at our next luncheon (date to be arranged). Enquiries about Joan Foote: there is little change. Sel and family bring Joan to the unit for a couple of hours a day – these family visits may help her recovery. I spoke to Sel who seemed stronger in his speech, and he asked for news. Their unit is part of the Canossa complex.

I received a letter from Alan (Snowy) Atherton beginning of December; he apologized for not writing sooner. He lost his wife Mavis towards the end of August. They had set out on a round Australia trip, full of joy and anticipation. They reached Darwin, with much interesting sightseeing. One evening Mavis collapsed, without warning, and passed away the next day – a brain tumour. Alan has moved back to his old hometown, and asked me to pass on the news. I have written an extended sympathy letter on behalf of the Squadron.

Joe Bartlett Jnr phoned me to say that his father Joe Sr. had passed away on 20 November. He had not long been settled into the Adventist nursing home at Victoria Point after moving from Lake Sherrin, where there was no on-going care. Joe was 92 years of age.

I intend to call others to say hello, a couple at a time especially those we have not heard from.

Editor's note. I am in touch with Mike Netherway, who had been unable to contact Evelyn. He wrote as follows:

Dear Jim,

As promised, please find attached the obit for my Dad. Would you also, (when the dust settles and you find time) see if you can track down Cec Ryan, Sailor Wheatley and W McClellan (RCAF), crew members on MP713 when it went into the drink.

Email: netherwm@rcc.qld.gov.au

and the obit:

"I regret to inform you that my Father, Len Netherway passed away in Rockhampton on 30th October 2003.

Dad trained under the Empire Air Training Scheme at Victor Harbour, Parafield and Bradfield Park before embarking for Canada where, as a member of Group 55, he received his "Wings" on 28th August 1942.

He joined the squadron in April 1943 and operated for a short time out of Protville, before co-piloting John "Dougie" Douglas on the fateful flight on 2nd August 1943. At around 4:15 am, as Dougie banked MP713 to attack a destroyer off the coast of Sardinia the a/c crashed and sank at once, leaving burning fuel all over the sea. Dad and Dougie (and maybe Sgt. Cec Ryan) exited via the overhead hatch and Sgts "Sailor" Wheatley and W McClellan from further back in the a/c. There was no sign of the rear gunner, Sgt Herbert Konzie, a Canadian from Manitoba.

After capture Dad and Dougie were taken to Rome for interrogation before being sent on 28th September to the POW camp at Bologna where they met up with Bill Fordyce, also of 458 who'd "gone in the bag" over a year earlier. However, the stay was only short as Italy capitulated and custody of the prisoners was taken over by the Germans on 9th September. Sgts McClellan and Wheatley escaped from Camp 54 at Fara Sabina early in August and were liberated by the advancing Canadians on 2nd November (see "Wings" 31 Oct 1944). Dad, Dougie and Bill were transported by cattle truck to Strasburg and then on to Stalag Luft 3 at Sagan.

Dad had a fine tenor voice and sang First Tenor in the camp choir's Christmas 1944 concert in the Camp Theatre (the theatre's under floor space had been greatly reduced by the amount of tunnel sand excavated for the "Great Escape", earlier that year) and also carried out sand dumping and "stooge duty", as did many POWs assisting in the escape effort. Bill, of course, was involved in the escape and is now Australia's sole survivor of the Great Escape - he still lives in Canterbury, Victoria. Dougie was running the "Foodacca" co-op that provided the "Kriegies" with a diversity of food and goods. He continued in the RAF after the war and died in England in 2002.

The POWs were expelled from the camp on the 28th January 1945 in front of the Russian advance. They marched overland, hauling roughly made sleds made from chairs, beds or whatever across the winter landscape. A number were killed in strafing attacks by allied a/c and Dad ruefully commented many years later on his astonishing faith in the ability of a 6 inch birch tree trunk stopping a 20mm cannon shell. After many stops and starts and 76 days on the road, they were finally liberated by British forces on 4th April 1945.

He was discharged on 6th October 1945 and returned to his wife, Mavis, at Quantong (outside Horsham, Victoria) where he'd grown up. They raised 4 children over the years, but Mum died in 1984 and he married Reabie Maxwell in 1989. He and Reabie lived for a short time in Melbourne before moving to Tallangatta, where they lived for about 10 years before moving to Yeppoon early in 2001. He is survived by Reabie and his 4 children."

(Mike Netherway. 656 Scenic Highway Mulambin Beach Qld 4703,(07) 4933 6862)

South Australian Flight by Pat Cribb

Here we are in 2005, so we send our sincere wishes to everyone for a happy, healthy year ahead, with compassion and hope for the survivors of the recent world tragedy. Perhaps, in an unexpected way, this will unite people and they will set aside their differences. -

We had a very successful Christmas lunch after our Annual General Meeting on Sunday, 5 December, 2004, at the Adelaide Bowling Club, with 35 guests. Our next lunch will be on April 25 after the Anzac Day March, again at the Adelaide Bowling Club, as we all enjoyed it there.

Re-elected as South Australia Flight president was Colin Hutchinson; he and Yvonne still enjoy their Scottish country dancing and croquet. Also reelected were secretary Pat Cribb and treasurer Rick Michell.

We send greetings to those unable to attend - Brian & Joan Woodhead, Marjory Oliver, Jean & Max Barnes, Barbara Riley, Joyce Austin, Pat Carey, Glen Forgan, and the family of Margaret Harden, daughter of the late John Excell.. Best wishes, too, to Monica Thom, still in Ananda Nursing Home awaiting further treatment on her knee

We appreciate Jim Whitem taking over the position of Newsletter Editor from Pete Pettit .

Canadian Flight by Bryan Quinlan

Very sorry to report yet another loss in our ranks with the passing of Frank Laughlin on 9 Dec 2004 which I learned about when Peg Laughlin telephoned me before Christmas after receiving our Christmas greetings. Our deepest sympathies are extended to Peg and all family members. I had no earlier inkling that he had been unwell so the news came as a considerable shock. As some of you will remember, Frank and Peg visited Australia in March 2003 and Frank had lunch with several of his Aussie counterparts in Sydney, which was a highlight of his holiday. Frank was a W/AG and served with 458 at Malta in Feb - March 1943 with "Red" Keith's crew, surviving an off-field crash during an air test with a full load of fuel, one torp, flares and ammo., all managing to escape before the kite blew up. Frank was an ardent supporter of all things 458 and he will be sadly missed

On behalf of Tom Lindsay and all Canadian members we extend our sincere condolences to the Pettit family on their sad and sudden loss. Peter was so active in sustaining the 458 presence and its continued existence into the future through his work with Peter Alexander on the updated Squadron history and numerous other executive roles. On a personal level, I will miss his always-helpful attitude on the many occasions I e-mailed him for assistance on a variety of matters. Yet another name to be added to the growing list of those dedicated personalities who were so important to the 458 story, sadly and inevitably, far too many during the past two years.

On a happier note, Tom Rowan reported in from Saskatchewan and is still very active with curling (Aussies of Scottish descent may know what this is). Sid Winchester stays in touch fairly regularly from Vancouver Island and provides updates on his and Joyce's status.

Jack and Dorothy Reynolds have just returned from an enjoyable Christmas visit with their daughter's family in the Gulf Islands. Jack advised that Frank Laughlin flew one trip with him as an alternate. Had an enjoyable chat on the phone over Christmas with George Dunmore, U.K., who is recovering from a couple of hip surgeries and hospital sessions and so is not too mobile at present. Canadian Flight wishes everyone a healthy, productive and enjoyable 2005,

rather belatedly, but none the less most sincerely.

Editorial note. Bryan sent me a photograph taken at the luncheon for Frank Laughlin, held in Sydney in March 2003. Pictured are Bill Laughlin, Frank Laughlin, Eric Munkman, Bob Bruce, and Pete Pettit. It is not possible to get this group together again, sadly three of them Frank, Bob, and Pete) are no longer with us. Here is the photo, JHW.



Frank Laughlin Lunch, Sydney, 2003

New South Wales Flight – by Eric Munkman.

The Squadron Tafe Luncheon was another success. Unfortunately it was not as well attended as previous ones due to sickness of members but it was most enjoyable and voted the best yet. The next luncheon will be in March, date to be arranged.

Fay advised that her father, Victor Charles Bartlett, better known on the Squadron as 'Goldie', passed away on 30 November 2004. He was a loveable larrikin.

June Stone, OAM, BEM, life vice-president of the RAAF Association passed away on 14.1.05 after a long illness. Just as Vera Lynne was the sweetheart of the forces during WW2, June was the sweetheart of the post-war RAAF forces. She worked for the Association unselfishly. Eric and Dorothy Munkman represented 458 at the funeral.

Bob Lyndon writes.

Does anyone remember a young P/O, Alan Wharton who joined the squadron at Moreton-in-the-Marsh in late 1941 and flew bombing missions with 458? In 1942 he, along with many others, ferried a Wellington to North Africa via Malta, then completed a bombing tour with 148 RAF Sqdn, and returned to UK. Later as C.O. of 466 RAAF Sqdn – W/C Wharton, DSO, DFC & Bar, m.i.d he completed a second tour. He had a post-war career with Qantas as a pilot, entered management, and was awarded an O.B. E. He died early this year.

Victorian flight by Rupert Pearce

We enjoyed the hospitality of Marjorie and John Bilney at their home in Ferny Creek on 28 November. The day was fine and the BBQ in the lovely garden setting could not have been better. Those present were Nell and Harry Ashworth, Jim Anderson and friend Marcee, Marjorie and John Bilney, Neil Dean, Margaret and Jack Ellis, Barbara and Roy Pearce, Rupert Pearce and Norma Pollard. There was a lot of conversation and shared companionship. Apologies were received from Val and Ian Alison and June Schoppe. Thank you Marjorie and John.

The next social activity will be at the home of Margaret and Jack Ellis, 5 Heales Street, Dromana on 6. March

VALE

Harry Godfrey passed away on 21, January. We will report further in the May issue.

We regret to have to report that that Ken Hinton died on 29 January. Our prayers and thoughts are with Joan and Mandy at this difficult time.

We regret that our member Bruce Prideaux has passed away after a long period of indifferent health. Neil Dean and Rupert Pearce attended his funeral service at Kilmore on January 21st. The service was well attended as he and Gloria had a large family that was prominent in the town. Following a service at the Uniting Church the RSL conducted a service at the graveside.

Bruce, Ken Hinton and Bruce McDonald of the NSW flight, with other re-inforcements, joined the Squadron on 19th. February 1945 at Gibraltar. After the Squadron was disbanded, Bruce was sent to England, posted to 467 Squadron and sent to Germany before returning to Australia and discharge in 1946.

The Grangers are still having their medical problems, and no doubt there are other members under care.

RAAF Association Victoria Division: We have had no further advice of the future plans.

W.A. Flight- by Ted Jewell

Christmas has come and gone and we are well into the New Year already. As we have done in other years W.A. flight members met at Miss Maud's in Perth for our Christmas Lunch and drinks. I see that not many members drink a lot these days! We all had a great lunch - as much as you could eat. There were twenty people; five members with wives and friends

We are still able to hold several functions a year but our numbers are not very healthy these days,

Quite a few members are looking forward to the reunion in Canberra in October, but a lot depends on their health at the time.

Mick Singe has invited us all to a barbecue lunch at his son's home in Nedlands some time this month. We are looking forward to it as we had a great day there last year.

Since Mick came home from his trip to England for the Remembrance Service he has been invited to give talks to schoolchildren on service life, and he was asked many questions.

He gave talks at three State schools about wartime experiences and he said that he sold \$1,100 worth of poppies for the Claremont R.S.L. for Remembrance Day. Our president has also been asked by the RSL to give talks at several schools - the boys and girls want to know so much about what it was like during the war years.

I don't know what will happen on Anzac Day this year, as most members are unable to march or to come to lunch after it. I am now starting to feel old with my newest great-grandchild. I have nine of them with more to come.

Wishing you all the best for 2005 – Ted Jewell.

New Zealand Flight.

Your editor called Kevin George to collect the NZ news. There is no news. Our NZ flight is now reduced to four members – average age in the high eighties. Kevin told me that he had just renewed his license to fly, and that there will be no news worth reporting until they refuse to renew it again. Ed.

And finally, your new editor wishes you good health, and good reading. Jim Whitem

Publisher's comments: Well done Jim for an excellent edition on your first newsletter. Keep up the good work.

Eric