

JOURNAL OF THE 458 Squadron Council

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

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Squadron President		Keith Cousins (NSW)
Squadron Vice-presidents	Canada	Tom Lindsay
	New Zealand	Kevin George
	U.K.	Leon Armstrong

Squadron Treasurer: Frank Ward, 50 Castle Hill Rd. West Pennant Hills, NSW 2125

Squadron Secretary Jim Whitem P.O.Box 239, Port Macquarie, NSW 2444

Squadron Newsletter:

Editor:	Jim Whitem	Phone (02) 6583 8311; email < haslett@aapt.net.au >
Asst. Editor	Rob Wilkinson	email < robwilk@bigpond.net.au >
Publisher:	Eric Munkman	Phone (02) 9972 0641

Flight Correspondents:

UK	Keith Wilkinson,	23 Ferndale Pk, Tedmore, Stourbridge, W. Midlands. DY90RB
NSW	Eric Munkman,	722 Lantana Lodge, Lantana Av. Collaroy Plateau, NSW 2097
Qld	Evelyn Lewis,	5 Cupania St. Victoria Point, Qld 4165
WA	Ted Jewell,	61 Wyaree Rd. Mandurah, WA. 6210
NZ	Kevin George,	20 Kowhai Av. Kaikohe, N.Z. 0400
SA	Pat Cribb,	2/20 Rochester St., Leabrook, SA 5068
Vic	Neil Dean	6 Margate Cres., Glen Waverley. 3150
Canada	Bryan Quinlan,	1460 Haywood Cres. W. Vancouver, B.C. Canada.

Post communications for Squadron Secretary to Jim Whitem, P.O. Box 239, Port Macquarie, NSW 2444, and for the Squadron (and NSW Flight) Treasurer to Frank Ward, 50 Castle Hill Rd, W. Pennant Hills, NSW 2125

A circumnavigation



Wendy and Jim leaving Sydney



Tracks and Ports visited



Pacific Princess off Cooktown, Queensland
[See P.7]

Flight Reports

UK flight by Keith Wilkinson.

I'm sad to report the death of David "Taff" James Davies, aged 85, who had been suffering from heart problems. David - or Dewi as he was known in his native Wales - was with 458 Squadron from 1942 to 1945: from Holme-on-Spalding Moor to Gibraltar. Mount Elim Baptist Chapel in his home town of Pontardawe, near Swansea, was full for the funeral service. The son of a Baptist minister, the Rev William Davies, Taff leaves a widow, Kathleen, aged 79, a son and two daughters and six grandchildren.

At a time when the Swansea area had just been bombed three days in a row, Taff went off to volunteer for the RAF in 1940 with his pal from next door, theology student David Meurig Thomas. Both grew up together, both played in the town orchestra, both wanted nothing more than to fly and take on the enemy in the sky. Taff, however, was told he had Grade 2 eyesight, so trained instead as ground staff. His mate learned to fly in Rhodesia. Tragically, his war was soon over. He died on a training flight after receiving his wings. Twenty years old, he was buried far from the valleys - in Bulawayo Cemetery.

Taff did his signals training and square bashing on the seafront at Blackpool, and passed out at Compton Basset, receiving Morse at 25 wpm and sending it at 18. He was among the 458 men who marched to the station at Holme, singing *Waltzing Matilda*. A memory that stuck with him was "the barman of a nearby pub trying to reach as many as he could with half-pints".

He spoke affectionately of his time with the squadron, and of the comradeship. In the Signals Section, he became friends of Frank Baggott (now 85 and also a veteran from the Holme days), and the late Peter Alexander who wrote *"We Find and Destroy"*.

Taff was fuelled with passion about all he'd seen and experienced in so many parts of the world with the RAF, recalling things in his wonderful Welsh voice, ending many a sentence with the characteristic "you see". There was the time when he parked up for

the night in the desert and started knocking tent pegs in to the ground, only to be told they were right in the middle of a minefield.

He remembered well the squadron character who poured grog over the Adj - the same man whose party trick was to chew glass with his teeth!

There weren't many Welshmen on the squadron, but they'd formed a Welsh Club in Bone and Foggia, meeting fellow countrymen once a week from the army and air force.

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Haifa, Ismailia were among the historic locations he saw. In 1999, he told me: "Brought up in the Christian faith, to actually visit these places, which previously were only Biblical names, was an unforgettable pilgrimage. I well remember the excitement of writing home and my wish then that my dad had seen these places."

Although a member of the ground staff, Taff had spent many an hour flying in Wellingtons, air testing the wireless gear, and going off on detachment. "The part I didn't like in the Wellies was checking the intercom in the rear turret. I had a job to get in there - and I'm not a big guy". Years later, he said he hadn't flown since 1946, and had no intention of leaving terra firma again in a hurry. "I am not enamoured by it, you see!"

It's that time of the year when the 458 UK Flight think about the autumn reunion plans. And the plan is to meet at Grange-over-Sands in South Cumbria, overlooking Morecambe Bay, on October 19th and 20th.

The venue is the Graythwaite Manor Hotel, a rather posh looking country house with sea views and six acres of woodland and private gardens, laid out in 1899. There's a log fire, a wine cellar, a four-course dinner...for example, "*grilled pink bream in a crayfish beurre noisette*"...or for starters "*pan-fried pigeon breast set on Parsnip Puree with a rich pea and Brandy sauce*".

Dinner, bed and full English breakfast starts at £77.50 per person per night. Anyone seeking more information on the reunion plans should contact Jack Christianson at: 46, Bowness Road, Bexleyheath, Kent, DA7 5AA. We should have more detail by the time this Squadron News is in circulation.

458 people living in the north of England, but who don't want to stay overnight at the hotel, might consider joining us for a meal, or for a day trip, maybe. We are thinking of taking a boat ride on Lake Windermere and a steam railway excursion on the Lakeside and Haverthwaite preserved line.

Hopefully, Grange is much better these days than when my godfather, 458 WOP/AG Fred Briggs, went on honeymoon to the resort just after the war. The happy couple returned to their somewhat more humble lodgings after a day trip - to find their battleaxe landlady had unceremoniously dumped all their belongings on to the promenade!

Western Australia Flight by Ted Jewell.

We were all in shock with the sudden death of our president, Bill Clues, on 29 December,. Bill went into hospital for a knee replacement but developed heart trouble and passed away. He ws W.A. Flight President for over thirty years and kept the flight operating over many of them. He will be sadly missed, and I extend my personal sympathy to Joan and family.

Our Christmas dinner was held, as usual, at Miss Maud's restaurant in Perth, but sadly numbers ere poor, with only twelve present These were Bill and Joan Clues, Ted Jewell and friend, Henry and Vera Etherton, Bill Kelliher, Margaret Gannaway, plus friends. We all had a great day with a wonderful lunch and an odd beer.

I had a spell in hospital a few weeks ago for a cataract operation. It went wrong and I was rushed from Mandurah ti Perth for a second operation.. I wont know for some time if everything is all right. At present I am restricted to driving my car to the shop

I was told that Norm Carpenter passed away last year; we had not herd from him for years. Bill Kelliher's wife, Flip, passed away before Christmas; she had been ill for some time.

458'ers in W.A. that we know of are: Henry Etherton, Ted Jewell, Jim Palmer, Jack Cobb, Nobby Nobbs, Les Lockhart, and Bill Kelliher. Jim Palmer is in a nursing home, Jack Cobb is not in the best of health, Nobby Nobbs had surgery before Christmas and is taking things easy. We haven't seen Les Lockhart in years. It doesn't leave many of us on deck.

I am having a BBQ at my home in Mandurah on 1 April, for those who can make it; each year they are fewer in number.

New South Wales Flight by Eric Munkman

Sadly, I have to report that Bob Lyndon has lost his courageous battle against his serious illness. Bob passed away on 25 November; there was a private funeral to which I, Bob Smith, Harry Baines, our wives, and June Pettit, were invited. Bob had served on the flight committee and as vice-president for many years. He was a great bloke who will be remembered always. We of 458 extend our deepest sympathy to Pat and family.

News was received from Tasmania that that Harold C. Stevens passed away in December; we extend our condolences to the family.

Tom Moore was admitted to North Shore Private Hospital last December for a triple by-pass surgery. It was successful and he is now home again, designing and painting. Val, however, is not enjoying the best of health.

Luncheon at the Ambassador Room, Ryde Tafe has been arranged for 27.March; contact Eric at 9972 0641 for bookings; cost \$25 including drinks other than spirits

Anzac day arrangements, 2007. The Squadron will assemble at the usual place – Elizabeth St. south. of King St, Sydney, at 10.30. Look for the banner. We have a new venue for the post-march luncheon and get-together. It is the Mandarin Club Chinese Restaurant, corner Pitt & Goulbourn Sts, 1st floor mezzanine. Cost \$25, drinks at bar prices. Chicken salad instead of Chinese food can be arranged by calling David Longhurst at 9801 4416, at least five days in advance.

We have 30 starters for the NSW flight reunion at Wollongong and arrangements are under control. I am sure we will all have an enjoyable time.

Queensland Flight by Evelyn Lewis

I inform with much sadness the passing away of one of our very close members, Bernie McLoughlin. Bernie passed away on 10 January after a fall causing brain damage. Doctors could not operate. Sympathy, thoughts and love are extended to Helen and family

At last I made contact with Peg Holliday and visited her. We had a delightful three hours having a cuppa and chatting over catch-up news. Peg is still in her own home and keeping fairly well but with many visits to her G.P. It was good to see you, Peg, and I enjoyed my day.

President Eric is still not fully fit, with many visits to Greenslopes and his doctor. Dud McKay is over his back surgery, which was major, and recovered slowly. Bert Garland has yet to face major back surgery. Sel Foote had a fall last year, resulting in a broken hip and other injuries. He ended up in Canossa Hospital, where Joan is. Charles Ruthven is going quietly along after a spell in hospital, with his wife Hazel in hospital after a fall. Both are 92.. I talked to Arthur Jones by telephone; he likes to keep up with the news.

NSW flight has had a good response for a reunion at Wollongong. Its like a second home for me as I make a couple of trips a year to visit my sister there. It will be nice to catch up with 458 friends again. I am a bit slow this time around but I get there. Congratulations to NSW for staging this event and to the younger generation for making it possible for the oldies. Great to see.

New Zealand Flight

A week or so ago I had a telephone call from Kevin. George, N.Z. Flight president, who wished to apologise for non-attendance at the forthcoming NSW reunion, due to an unavoidable clash in activities., While he had no up-to-date information about the other surviving Kiwi squadron members, I believe that all of them are reasonably well at present. Ed.

Canada Flight by Bryan Quinlan

As our total Canadian membership now stands at eight, which for anyone interested in useless information, works out to 1 for every 481,500 sq. miles, news from home sources is rather in short supply.. I maintain periodic telephone contact with Sid Winchester, Ernie Ireland, Tom Rowan and Jack Reynolds, all soldiering on with

various health problems. Ernie had a session in hospital in late 2006 but is back home in Cranbrook as at last report. I have direct contact with Tom Lindsay as he lives close-by; our Canadian VP remains relatively active. The Christmas mail had a corresponding drop-off but greetings were received from Bert Markland, who proudly listed off an impressive growing family, consisting of two sons, five grand-daughters, four great grand-daughters and two great grandsons. Bert advised that he had heard from his old 458 skipper Leon Armstrong, describing the 2006 UK Flight's trip to Malta and Sardinia. Also had cards from Marg Reid (Mickey) and Peggy Laughlin (Frank). Norm Duke's daughter Tina and husband Ralph, who reside in Vancouver, sent an interesting Xmas newsletter with news of the Duke's UK family activities. Tina and Ralph usually visit the UK at least yearly.

Christmas also brings the welcome renewal of contact with our far-flung 458 international membership. I enjoyed the usual Xmas telephone chat with George Dunmore. George and I were crewed together at Limavady OTU in 1942 and made the flight from Portreath to Egypt via Gibraltar. Also, newsy letters from Col Fereday, George and Grace Unitt, Kevin and Dawn George, David and Judy Westgarth, Eric and Dorothy Munkman, Evelyn Lewis and greeting from Editor Jim. Hope I have't missed anyone - my humble apologies if I have.

Best wishes from "the few" to our Aussie comrades. Keep smiling and stay healthy.

South Australian Flight by Pat Cribb.

Our Christmas get-together, A.G.M and luncheon on 3 December 2006, was a happy occasion with 25 members present. Col Hutchinson Pat Cribb and Rick Michell were re-elected as president, secretary and treasurer, respectively. Apologies were received from Joan and Brian Woodhead, Monica Thom, Mattie Baker, David Cosh, Jean and Max Barnes. We have been in touch with Jean and Max, Marjorie Oliver, and Mattie Baker, who send their best wishes. We are pleased to report that Rick Michell is on top again and he sends thanks for all enquiries.

It was so sad to hear that Mick Singe had died in WA. Mick was always there at reunions with his great sense of humour.

The RAAFA Airport Memorial Service will be held on Sunday, 22 April, at 1030 for 1100. We look forward to meeting some of you there. We meet again for lunch on 25 April following the Anzac Day march, at the usual venue – the Kensington Hotel, 23 Regent St, Kensington.

We are in touch with the Renmark Council regarding the memorial site, though action will probably be delayed due to major storm damage in the town

Victorian Flight- by Neil Dean

Our Christmas BBQ at the home of John and Margaret Bilney at Ferny Creek was enjoyed by the Bilneys, Jack and Margaret Ellis, Ian and Val Allison, Harry and Nell Ashworth, Roy and Barbara Pearce, and June Shoppe.

Coming events are: 4 March, BBQ at the Ellis Home at Dromana, Anzac day lunch at Melbourne Bowling Club and 28 May lunch and AGM at the Bentleigh Club.

Barbara Pearce had a nasty fall but is slowly recovering; John Bilney is not well and has doubts about the Anzac Day march. Due to ageing and illness we are wondering if we can muster enough members to march. Personally, I have spent four months in hospital for surgery and unfortunately many things went wrong. I am now in a rehabilitation centre and hope to be home shortly.

Recently I had a call from Nigel Paulet of Hamilton, Vic. (telephone 03 5527 9237) informing me of the death, on 21 February, after a short illness, of his father, Forbes Paulet. Forbes was a fitter 2e on the Squadron in the Middle East. I learned that Nigel and my son Ted had shared a flat in Melbourne during their university days. I doubt they realised that both fathers had served on 458. Ed.

Editorial.

In terms of squadron families' welfare, this is the saddest newsletter I have had to put together. So I decided to lighten the atmosphere a little by letting you all know that some of us, at least, are still fit. My daughter Wendy and I, last November, circumnavigated Australia in the cruise ship 'Pacific Princess', a magnificent 28 days, especially, perhaps, to an old airman trained in coastal command navigation. Wendy made a CD of the voyage's highlights, and I have selected a couple of frames to adorn the front pages of this newsletter. The CD itself is available upon request.

Bless all you survivors. Jim