



JOURNAL OF THE 458 Squadron Council

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*** Have you notified Rob Wilkinson if you prefer to receive your newsletter by email?
Are there others in your family who would like to receive a copy by e-mail ?
Please advise the Editor – see address and e-mail details above.*

With sadness, we record the passing of the following members and family of 458.

Peter Baillie	QLD	see "Q" flight report
Reggie Bullen	UK	see UK Flight report
Bill Fordyce	VIC	see VIC Flight report (and article below)
Peg Holliday	QLD	see "Q" flight report
Bill Hull	NSW	see NSW Flight report
Cyril Murray	QLD	see "Q" Flight report

BILL FORDYCE – forwarded by Mike Netherway

Horace Spencer Wills (Bill) Fordyce, died aged 93 on 8th February. Bill was born at home in Black Rock, Victoria, and educated at Melbourne High School, where his artistic ability shone. He went on to art school and qualified as a commercial artist.

A memorial service was held at Leonda Reception Centre in Hawthorn on February 22nd to celebrate Bills' life. 458 Squadron, along with approximately 300 people from all walks of life, heard what seemed to be several chapters from an early Biggles story or something out of the Boy's Own Annual.

Bill began training with the RAAF on Tiger Moths at Essendon and Wagga Wagga, and then travelled to Canada as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. On route to Britain after gaining his wings, his ship struck an iceberg but was able to be towed back to Canada. He transferred to another convoy and his ship successfully completed the crossing (although several others were sunk by U-boats). After completing his training on Wellingtons, Bill was posted to Malta, then to Egypt, when he and his crew found time between the serious business of war to have fun "buzzing" the caretakers of the pyramids, often blowing their tents away.

He returned to Britain in the battleship Archer. In May 1942, while returning to the Middle East via Gibraltar and flying at low level at night off Egypt, his Wellington was attacked by two Me-109s. One of these was shot down by his tail-gunner, but then he was killed and the Wellington shot down. The rest of the crew clambered into their dinghy about 8 kilometres from shore, but the remaining Me-109 returned and strafed them, sinking the dinghy and injuring some of the crew. The survivors swam to shore, where they were captured and made prisoners of war. Bill was separated from his crew, all of whom were later killed when the ship they were on was sunk by the RAF on route to Italy.

Bill was sent to POW camp CC78 at Sulmona in Italy, where he met up with John Douglas and Len Netherway, following their capture in August 1943. Together they were transferred in October 1943 to Stalag Luft III near Sagan, (now Zagan) in Poland, 160 kilometres south-east of Berlin.

There, Bill used his artistic skills to make maps, forge documents and sew guards' clothing to be used by escapees in the planned Great Escape. He entered the camp ballot that determined the 200 who were to make the escape and drew No 86. Soon after entering the tunnel, he found himself trapped. By now it was about 5am on March 25, and a guard had noticed escaper No. 77 bobbing up out of the escape shaft; the tunnel having fallen short of the adjoining forest. Bill was the last man back out of the tunnel. The team in the escape hut at the entrance were surprised to see him, but he was quickly dusted down and returned to his hut; his captors never knew he had been on his way out.

After the war Bill rebuilt his life as a commercial airline pilot with Australian National Airways, flying international services mainly to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and then carving

out a business career as a marketing manager for a number of companies. He also became deeply involved in social work, including some time as chief executive of the Melbourne Lord Mayor's Charitable Fund.

Fordyce was separated from his wife June, whom he met on the ship returning to Australia in 1945, and whom he married in 1946. He is survived by his son Christopher, who lives in France with his wife Violette and their son Ugo, and his daughter Jane in Melbourne and her daughter Lily.

2008 REUNION AT PORT STEPHENS, NSW – by Wendy Whitem-Trunz

In March, 37 squadron members, family members, and friends from WA, Qld, Vic, ACT and of course NSW very much enjoyed the 458 reunion. It was held at the Oaks Pacific Blue Resort in Salamander Bay, Port Stephens. This luxury resort was encircled by a very attractive lagoon pool. The weather was perfect all week and the resort staff looked after us very well. Food and accommodation were of a very high standard too.

The celebration began with our traditional Meet Your Mates dinner which featured huge seafood platters and a wonderful buffet, accompanied by a large quantity of wine and beer.

On day one, we boarded a bus with our very friendly and knowledgeable driver Steve. We toured the Hunter Valley and set down for morning tea at the Hunter Valley Gardens. Most folk elected to ride the Buggy for a guided tour. They enjoyed the colours and fragrances of twelve feature gardens, including the Rose Garden, a 10 metre waterfall, the Oriental garden, and favourite fairytale characters in the Storybook Garden.



Then we lunched at FLAVOURS restaurant, where some of us also enjoyed a wine tasting.

Dinner that evening was back at the resort.

On the day two, we enjoyed a wonderful trip around Port Stephens on a Nelson Bay ocean sailing catamaran. We were very lucky to encounter a large group of dolphins that played around the boat for an extended period. After disembarking, we had lunch at the Soldier's Point Bowling Club, where many had a flutter on the poker machines, or a quick snooze.



Then, we returned to Apex Park, on the Nelson Bay foreshore, for our moving memorial and wreath laying service. It was made even more special by Malcolm, our bagpiper, who drove all the way from Newcastle to play for us.

That night we celebrated our formal dinner. It was a wonderful evening with family and friends, historical mementos on display, speeches, old-time singing, conversation, a slide show, and lots of fun.



On day three, our bus first took us to Griffith Park in Stockton for morning tea, and then to our tour boat. It took us around Newcastle Harbour and past the city, and then circled the industrial Port sights, including the container wharves and dry docks. Finally, we toured up the Hunter River and anchored for a lovely lunch. It was a well earned relaxing day.



That evening we relaxed together for the last time over a buffet dinner.

Wendy gave everyone a CD containing the Port Stephens' reunion photos. This CD also contains photos from the Canberra and Wollongong reunions, and 2006 Sydney ANZAC day. Please remember that this is a 'data' CD to be accessed from a computer CD drive, not a CD music player. Favourite pictures can be selected and printed at photo outlets, or even at Harvey Norman. Grandchildren can assist. Additional CDs are available from Rob.

Lastly and most importantly, we must again thank Rob and David for all the planning and hard work to make this reunion such a success. Without them it wouldn't have happened. I hear there are already requests for a 2009 reunion.

FLIGHT REPORTS

Canada Flight by Bryan Quinlan

Continuing the wartime memory stories, this report features one by Jack Reynolds, and I know that he has a truckload of memorable experiences. Jack's association with 458 at Malta in early 1943 was brief and, as he has noted, his story is only peripherally related to 458. Accordingly it requires an explanatory foreword and, I will emphasize at the start, that even this much-abbreviated account would never be authored by the modest Jack. It is only through some diligent research and judicious questioning that I am able to present it now.

Jack joined 69 Squadron SDF in Oct. 42 and ended his first tour with a brief stint under Winco Johnson in Mar. 43 when SDF was absorbed into 458. He had numerous enemy ship sightings with SDF and on one attack his aircraft was heavily damaged by flak, from a destroyer escort, and one of his crew was wounded. With no hydraulics, he was able to return to Malta and with great presence of mind make a safe night belly-landing off the runway, thereby not interrupting other landings and ongoing operations. His ops with SDF earned him the DFC.

He resumed ops from the UK in 1944 on RNZAF Squadron 489 on torp. Beaufighters as part of the Anzac Strike Wing with RAAF Squadron 455, flying low-level day strikes against shipping and coastal defenses along the coasts of Holland and Norway. It was a period of continuous, intense activity with numerous sinkings but with heavy losses. Jack became a Flight Commander, ending the war as a S/Ldr and was awarded a bar to his DFC.

Now to his story during his time on 489 at Langham. It could be titled "NIGHT OPS ON A HILLMAN MINX":

Our Station Commander was G/C A.E. Clouston, AFC, a prewar RAF long-distance flight record holder. The Norfolk country-side was gently rolling farm land with numerous copses, hedgerows and game cover which abounded with grouse, rabbits, hares and pheasants, including a large area within the station perimeter. Clouston's staff car was a Hillman Minx with sunroof, and a windshield which opened forward. On the front bumper he had mounted a powerful unmasked driving light. Occasionally the G/C would feel the need of some relaxation and would gather two or three bods for a hunt. After dark the safari would take-off from the Ops room and head to the armoury for supplies. After equipping all with shotguns and ammo, we would head-off for the open fields. Windscreen up, sunroof open, Clou and whoever had the Nav seat, loaded and readied the front guns through the windscreen. The "tail gunners" took up position ahead of the rear seat with guns pointing out of the sunroof so our field of vision covered at least 180 degrees. Favourite game was rabbit as it provided the major challenge. Clou was expert at shifting, steering and firing with one hand, at whatever speed was necessary. Any unlucky victim pinned in the beam stood little chance and the result was tossed in the boot. The ride was not the smoothest, but exhilarating and noisy. When the "op" was over the results were usually laid out on the hardstand in front of the ops room and a Tannoy announcement made for living-out members to supplement their rations. Oh yes - the peripheral connection to 458, aside from the regional National aspect of 489 and 455, the latter's adjutant was none other than the irrepressible Wally Baird!

Briefly, other news of note. Before, during and after Christmas, it was great to enjoy telephone chats with Col Fereday, George and Grace Unitt, George Dunmore (UK) and locally Ernie Ireland, Tom Rowan and Bert Markland, plus a tel. message from Sid and Joyce Winchester. And now, on with 2008, very best wishes to all.

UK flight by Keith Wilkinson

I'm sad to report the death of a truly remarkable member of this squadron - Air Vice-Marshall **Reggie Bullen**, who was 87. Mr Bullen had stayed very active into his eighties but his health deteriorated early in the year, after he had a fall and what's believed to have been a slight stroke. He has been buried in the local churchyard at Hemingford Grey near Cambridge. He leaves a wife, Christiane, two children - Danielle and Michael - and grandson Freddie.

Mrs Bullen - who'd been married to Reggie since 1952 - tells me: "He had a fantastic life. In the war, he was a navigator with the squadron, suffering serious burns and injuries after his Wellington crashed and burst into flames at Malta airfield. Four other members of the crew were killed, but Reggie was thrown clear. Despite having fractures to his back, arm and leg, despite the fact that the aircraft was on fire - ammunition exploding, with the risk of eight depth charges blowing up - he went back into the aeroplane to pull out the wireless operator. For this act of amazing heroism, he was awarded the George Medal by the King". The citation said "*His brave and gallant action, performed when suffering such intense pain from his own injuries, undoubtedly saved the life of the wireless operator*".

A few years ago, Reggie gave me this account: "The weather was awful. I was stood up in the astrodome. The crash blew me out. I finished up in hospital for three or four months. They then loaded me off in a Dakota, and flew me back to near Bristol. I was in hospital for nine or ten months altogether, but I have had an active life ever since."

Mrs Bullen said he had gone out to visit the graves of the other crew men about ten years ago. "It was extraordinarily sad", she said. He rarely talked about his actions, she said. "He was such a modest man."

It was the war that brought Mrs Bullen to England. As a young French girl, she and her family fled from the south of France as the Germans advanced. "We got a boat to Gibraltar and I was taken to England by troop ship. I was 13 and had mumps at the time."

After the Wellington crash, Reggie was unable to return to flying duties, but his career path then most certainly went skyward! He worked in the Air Ministry, and instructed at the RAF College in Cranwell. He later worked in intelligence in the USA. Back in the UK he became the personal staff officer to the Chief of the Air Staff before being appointed as adjutant general at HQ Allied Air Forces Central Europe. Later he was director of personnel, then HQ Training Command Air Officer Administration and head of the RAF administrative branch.

No putting his feet up after retirement - he became senior bursar at a Cambridge college - Gonville and Caius - where he was described as "a paragon among bursars". His portrait now hangs in the college's senior parlour. On top of this achievement, he also became chairman of a health authority and oversaw the building of a new hospital.

A Memorial Service is to be held for him by the college later in the year.

Discussions are still underway here in the UK over our next flight reunion, probably in September. The key question remains: where shall we hold it? The favourite still seems to be York, as it's handy for a trip to Holme upon Spalding Moor airfield and the local pub with its 458 memorabilia. York also has the advantage of having some nice tourist sights, and it might draw in some 458-ers living in the north of England. Grange over Sands in Cumbria was great last year. However, should we go back to the old faithful - Stratford on Avon? It's right in the middle of England and so it's easier to reach for many people. The general feeling seems to be that continuing the reunions is a good idea, keeping alive a tradition for as long as possible, even though the numbers are sadly dwindling. If you have any thoughts about this, please do drop us a line. Also if you have any personal news and views, do let us know.

Queensland Flight by Evelyn Lewis

I received a phone call from Hettie Murray on 12 February, advising that **Cyril** had passed away on the previous Sunday, following a period of poor health. Our condolences go to Hettie, who recently attended the Reunion at Port Stephens, and drew great comfort from the many Squadron friends present.

It is with regret that I also report the passing of our dear friend **Peg Holliday**, on 5 December 2007, following a massive stroke. Peg will be missed, and was a wonderful friend, and close to everyone she knew. Peg was her husband's right hand, helping him with his work for the Squadron. Condolences and flowers sent to Richard and Jill and their family.

And, sadly, **Peter Baillie** passed away recently, after suffering a long illness. Our sympathy is extended to Jean and family, at their sad loss.

I heard from Kitty Baxter around Xmas time with news that all is well. She is now in a retirement village at Banora Point. It would be nice to hear from more of our Squadron ladies.

President Eric is still backwards and forwards to his doctors, and has now lost sight in one eye.

ANZAC Day – sadly we have no one in “Q” flight fit to march, and others in the country centres will join in at their local clubs.

Congratulations to NSW for staging another reunion this year.

N.S.W. Flight by Eric Munkman

ANZAC Day – we will assemble in Elizabeth Street, 50 metres south of King Street – look for the banner ! This year, after the march, we will be joining the RAF Escape Association for lunch, at the Royal Exchange of Sydney Club (corner of Bridge and Gresham Streets). Cost of lunch is \$40 per head. We need to know numbers before 14 April, so please advise David Longhurst (9810-4416) if you will be attending. Wheelchairs will be available if required – please advise.

Our REUNION at Salamander Bay was just as good as on previous occasions, and the only losers were those who didn't attend. We had 37 attendees (members and friends), and all States were represented except South Australia and Tasmania. The accommodation and meals were excellent; the day outings were very good, especially the visit to Hunter Valley Gardens – I recommend it. I was amazed to see how much Nelson Bay had grown since our earlier Reunion in 1987. A wonderful job was done by Rob Wilkinson, assisted by David Longhurst, John Gibbins, Wendy Whitem-Trunz and Peter Bitmead. Above all, the weather was superb – and Rob, your knees must be very sore from praying !

It is with sadness that I report the passing of **Bill Hull**, who had suffered from emphysema for some time. We will miss his cheery face. Our deepest sympathy is extended to Peg and family.

South Australia Flight by Pat Cribb.

It was good to chat with Eric Munkman recently about our Anzac Day March arrangements. Why our RSL is trying to enforce the separating of next-of-kin from Units, and herding them to the rear of the March, is beyond reason. They say it is following a decision made in 1920 by the Diggers. We've had several wars since then, and times have changed. Anyway, our President, Col Hutchinson, had me type a very wordy letter of dissent for the whole arrangement. Thought you'd be interested.

We have a very strong following of next-of-kin, who appreciate the newsletter. They come to our lunches and several march with us.

Now, here we are with a new year spread before us. We hope you all fare well, especially with good health.

Our Christmas lunch at the Kensington Hotel, on December 2, went well, and was attended by 22. Apologies from Pat and Syd Bartram, Verna Riseley, Trish Cosh, Isla Shepherd, Joan Dickson and Lyne Skinner.

Brian & Joan Woodhead have moved from Goolwa to be with their daughter in Mosman, NSW. Hope the move went well – all the best to you both.

Next get-together will be for lunch following the Anzac Day March. See you at the Kensington Hotel.

Western Australia Flight by Ted Jewell

This newsletter has come around so fast - I almost missed the mail. Since the last edition, I have not been very well, so my Doctor arranged for me to have a scan at the hospital, and I was found to have diverticulitis, plus a few other complaints. I was told that it is quite common – 1 in 3 people could have it.

We had our usual Xmas lunch at Miss Maud's in Perth, and had 18 people turn up for a great lunch and an odd drink. Members of 458 Squadron were Ted Jewell, Nobby Nobbs & Esme, Bill Kelliher, Joan Clues and daughters Vickie & Jennifer, Vera Etherton, Margaret Gannaway and family and friends.

I have been lent a very interesting book called "Chronicle of Aviation", which covers the period 1900 – 1992. The Germans tested a jet-powered plane in 1939. Britain had a jet plane, the Gloster, in 1941, but the jet planes only saw service in the latter part of the war. It was unknown to me.

I have not seen or heard from any members since Xmas, but have arranged, for who ever can make it to my home in Mandurah, for a BBQ lunch on April 6. I am hoping there will be a good roll up – the promise of a feed of crabs may help. I am about an hours drive from Perth. All the best.

Victoria Flight by Neil Dean

Joyce Reeves and I attended the Squadron Reunion, held at Port Stephens, NSW, from 9-13 March. We would like to congratulate Rob Wilkinson, and his assistant David Longhurst, for all their wonderful organising and catering to our needs. The accommodation was first class and the venues and trips were just wonderful.

We were saddened by the passing of **Bill Fordyce** last month, aged 93. Bill was a pilot in 458, and was shot down in the Mediterranean. He was in the "Great Escape" and was next in line in the tunnel to move out, when the escape was discovered. He was extremely fortunate, as 50 of the captured escapees were shot on the orders of Hitler. Joyce and I attended the funeral service, and displayed the Squadron banner.

After all his illness John Bilney has gone through, he has now suffered a stroke. I am in touch with his wife Marjorie to ascertain his condition.

A BBQ, at the home of Margaret Ellis, in Dromana, was held on Sunday 30 March.

I have been contacted by Squadron Leader Gordon Stanley Orchard's two sons, Roland and Chris, who are wishing to march with us on Anzac Day. Also, they are anxious to hear from any 458'ers who knew their father, or flew with him as part of his crew. If you have any information, please contact the Editor.

New Zealand flight by Kevin George

Ron Verity, Jack Pryde and myself are all in reasonable shape. After 67 years of flying, I'm thinking of possibly not renewing my pilot's licence this year. As the oldest private pilot in NZ, it's not a bad note to finish flying on. Regards to all.