



JOURNAL OF THE 458 Squadron Council

C/- Rob Wilkinson
36 Finch Ave.
East Ryde
NSW 2113

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*** Post communications for Squadron Secretary to David Longhurst (address above), and for the Squadron (and NSW Flight) Treasurer to John Gibbins (address above)*

*** Have you notified Rob Wilkinson, 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 address and e-mail details above.

***** Contributions for the next Newsletter are due to the Editor by 27 November**

VALE

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

Alf RUBIDGE

Brian WOODHEAD **see SA Flight Report**

**** STOP PRESS **** – *Very sad to report the sudden death of 458'er BOB SMITH (Committee Member NSW Flight and regular Reunion and Anzac Day participant) on 1 August 2009. Heartfelt condolences to his wife Dorothy and family....Ed.*

R1785 - A RING CYCLE **by Rob Forgan**

At 0435 hours on the 9th January, deep in the winter of 1942, Wellington R1785 of 458 Squadron, RAAF took off from the Holme-on-Spalding Moor air base in East Yorkshire.

Their mission was to join with 30 other bombers to bomb the port of Cherbourg in occupied France, to mount a diversion for a larger group of 131 RAF bombers that were assembled and dispatched to the French harbour of Brest to find and destroy the German pocket battleships, the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau.

On board Wellington R1785 were flying officer Bernard (Peter) Hickey, a 28 year old from Brisbane; his 24 year old co-pilot, Vic Johnstone from Lockington, Victoria; front gunner, William Wallace (Wally) Forgan, a 22 year old from Crystal Brook in South Australia; and, Robert (Bob) Birnie, 24, bomb aimer and observer from Auckland, New Zealand. In addition to these flying ANZACS were 2 RAF airmen, Fred Hinton, a 21 year old rear gunner from Leicester, and Albert Austin, wireless operator from Birmingham in the UK.

Weather conditions over the Normandy peninsula that January morning were appalling, snow was falling, visibility was negligible and to make matters worse the German flak was particularly active. Only three of the 31 aircraft were able to drop their bombs and many were forced to turn back. Of the three Wellingtons from 458 Squadron that left Yorkshire, only one returned home to base. Wellington Z1312 was hit by flak but managed to reach England with its load of bombs intact but crashed in Dorset after hitting high tension lines, killing 4 of its Australian crew with only the pilot and co-pilot surviving.

Wellington R1785 disappeared completely. The log books of the crew were signed off in red ink with the notation *“Operations as ordered, but failed to return”*.

The fate of R1785 and the crew remained a mystery to relatives for over 66 years until Georges Dennebouy, an Air France captain, began researching a war time incident on his family's farm at Colomby in Normandy. In time, Georges teamed up with three other researchers, Mickael Simon, Claire and Claude Letallier who had started to unravel the mystery a decade earlier by interviewing and recording the accounts of eye witnesses of hundreds of pre D-Day aircraft crashes over Cotentin in the department of La Manche.

It was in the winter of 1942 that Georges' grandmother, along with other locals, saw a plane in flames flying at low altitude before it crashed into a snow covered orchard before dawn. Together with other inhabitants they were on the scene before the Germans, but were powerless to do anything as the aircraft was on fire, except for the tail section, and were not helped when German soldiers roughly made them leave the scene.

Two days later the Germans requisitioned 2 local farmers, a teenager, Joseph Anquetil and Mr. Auguste Mulet, a veteran of The Great War, to recover the bodies, and place them in coffins provided by the occupying forces. The bodies were awfully calcined except for the young

blond haired tail gunner who remained trapped in his turret, the floor strewn with lolly wrappers, testament to the loneliness of a rear gunner's station. Joseph Anquetil remembered very well the military honours given to the victims by the German soldiers who presented arms and who also filmed the scene.

A few days later, a group of Germans began to salvage parts of the plane, but to their horror they discovered that the plane still carried its 8 bombs of 250lbs! Bomb disposal experts were called in to detonate the bombs and the enormous explosion volatilized the Wellington with one of its engines leaping well over 100 metres.

The Germans then made a macabre discovery when they found a sixth body under a wing and ordered yet another inhabitant, a youthful Roger Blestel, to remove the seriously mutilated body and place it in a coffin. This proved to be the body of Wally Forgan, the front gunner, who is presumed to have attempted a parachute jump, as he was hung on the wing at the end of his suspending rods, that somehow snagged the wing as the plane made its fiery descent.

In 2005, the group of amateur aviation historians undertook a ground search of the Breul farm crash site to confirm that the wreck was indeed a Wellington, and to match the crash to the graves of 6 allied airmen buried in the old Cherbourg cemetery. Using a metal detector Claude Letallier recovered various fragments of aircraft and located a part of the airframe's distinctive geodetic design bearing a serial number which was sent to the British Aviation Archaeology Council. The BAAC confirmed that it was from a Vickers Armstrong Wellington.

Their search took a new twist when amongst the innumerable boils of recovered twisted metal there was a silver ring. It was clearly not a French ring but a Sterling silver ring of the Commonwealth, bearing what appeared to be the initials of one of the unfortunate crew. But the initials in flowing script *LMM* did not match those of R1785 crew members; maybe it bore the initials of a girlfriend or fiancé? For three months emails and letters flowed between France, Australia and the UK trying to solve the riddle, when one day Mickael Simon reversed the piece of contorted metal and saw the initials of "WWF". Overcome with adrenalin and emotion, they had found the proof they were looking for. The ring once worn on the right hand of William Wallace Forgan confirmed that this was the crash site of the 6 airmen whose remains lay in Cherbourg.

Emotions ran high on the other side of the world when the Forgan family was contacted in Mount Gambier, South Australia and were sent photographs of the ring.

Georges and his colleagues in turn, were also surprised to learn that David Johnstone, a nephew of Vic Johnstone and Nick Hayes, a great nephew of Wally Forgan had flown together in skies far less hostile for an aviation company in the Northern Territory, completely unaware that 60 years earlier, their relatives had also forged friendship in the skies over Europe.

In March 2006 Georges Dennebouy and his wife Liliane flew to Australia with the express purpose of visiting the Hickey family in Brisbane, the Forgan family in Mount Gambier and Adelaide and the Johnstone family in Lockington, Victoria.

At an emotional gathering in Adelaide, Georges returned the ring back home to the Forgan family and it was here that yet another coincidence occurred. Fred Hinton's (the RAF air gunner) late sister had migrated to Adelaide after WWII, and a nephew and a niece of Fred from Leicester were also very much a part of the occasion.

The dedicated work of Georges, Mickael, Claire and Claude gave closure to a number of families in Australia, NZ and the UK. It rekindled contact between the families of the air crew and brought back the times when the parents of the lost crew corresponded together in hope, refusing to believe that their sons were lost until they failed to return home to Australia after hostilities ceased. This correspondence continued until this grieving generation died out.

In Adelaide, Georges said that their work was unfinished. *“It is out of respect and gratitude to these young people who came from far away lands we carried out this research.” “We hope that a memorial to the crew of R1785 and for the many pilots and crews who perished in the air, and on the ground of Cotentin, will be raised to honour those who died to return our freedom to us”.*

In early October 2008, a magnificent granite stele was erected in the heart of the tiny village of Golleville (population 160). Relatives of the Australian airmen and Fred Hinton (RAF) made the pilgrimage to France to attend the unveiling of the stunning memorial in the shape of the Wellington’s tail plane. On a Saturday afternoon, what appeared to be the entire village, local school children and visitors from neighbouring towns and villages attended a moving ceremony that drew Members of the French National Assembly, Squadron Leader Tramter, RAF, Mayors past and present and other dignitaries to pay their respects to those young men who gave their lives for freedom.

Some of us who listen to the Australia All Over program, on a Sunday morning with Ian McNamara, may have heard members of the Australian contingent ring in with their emotional account of the day. Tribute was paid to the persistence of the amateur research team, the genuine gratitude of the French, their overwhelming hospitality and organizational skills that would equal or surpass the International Olympic Organizing Committee.

The memorial has received other relatives since its dedication and as Georges Dennebouy stated, “This memorial will serve to remind following generations of the enormous sacrifices made by those who came to our aid so far from their own homes, family and country”

Thank you Rob for this great story. If anyone would like more details, please contact me.... Ed. See relevant photos on the insert page.

REMINDER - Do you have any old 458 Newsletters stashed away?

Wendy Whitem-Trunz is collecting all of the 458 Newsletters for archival purposes purposes. The following numbered (& especially early) newsletters are currently missing: #2 - 47, 52-54, 59, 62, 63, 65, 66, 68, 134, and 217. Please contact Wendy if you can assist on 0411-848111. Please note that Wendy’s email address has changed to wendy@cape3.com

FLIGHT REPORTS

South Australia Flight by Pat Cribb

It is with regret that we advise of the death of our Member and friend, **Brian Woodhead**, on June 15. Brian and Joan lived at Goolwa for many years, and could not attend the Anzac Day March or our functions, owing to distance, but always kept in touch. We send our condolences to Joan and family.

Anzac Day saw a small contingent marching, followed by lunch at the Hackney Hotel, with 20 present, enjoying the company of old friends.

We remember the S.A. Reunion here in 1981, and the trip to Renmark to dedicate the site in Meander Avenue donated by Ian Showell, as a memorial to 458 Squadron. For many years, flags flew on Anzac Day, and it was a place to pause and reflect. Regrettably, over the years, this land has become untenable.

S.A. Flight, with the help of the local Council and Renmark RSL, has pursued the option of transferring the memorial to a site adjacent to the Tower Tavern, in close sight of the River Murray. This option has been agreed upon by the Board of the Renmark Hotel, and Renmark RSL has agreed to organise the work involved in the transfer. Bevan Schiller, who has attended the Meander Avenue flags for many years, has generously agreed to continue to serve this function at the new site. We believe we speak on behalf of the whole of 458 when we thank all those people who have assisted with the Squadron's Renmark commemoration over the years.

Our best wishes to you all for good health.

Canada Flight by Bryan Quinlan

I do not know whether your Aussie media provides coverage of Canadian weather conditions, however, British Columbia is currently experiencing an unprecedented heatwave, with persistent temperatures of 30 to 40 deg C and unusual high humidity levels. We seem to have traded weather with eastern Canada which is undergoing cool and very wet weather. There is a mad rush on fans and air conditioners and everyone is pretty frazzled. As a result there has been very little contact or news from our small ex-458 group as everyone is concentrating on trying to keep cool. As a result this report will be the abbreviated version. Against my better judgement and my wife's stern warnings, I decided to participate in our old boy's over-80 golf tournament, on what turned out to be a record hot day, so it was no fun at all and my score reflected the self-imposed torture.

A few weeks ago I received a call from Sid Winchester's son Chris, wife is also Chris, who reported that his parents were comfortable and receiving excellent care in a care centre in Nanaimo, Vancouver Island, with no major change in their health situation. He then advised that he had some photos for me from their trip to Europe and the Mediterranean, which I mentioned in the April report, including Italy, Malta and Gibraltar, and offered to deliver them to me. We met a few days later and he very kindly presented me with a small album of photos taken at Malta and Gibraltar, which included the Bell Tower, the WWII monument, various shots of the old Luqa airfield and several very recognizable views at Gibraltar.

I was surprised to learn that Luqa had been transformed into an industrial park, and that the main airfield was now located north of Luqa running east-west. Chris advised that they were unable to gain access to Luqa, and the photos had to be taken through the chain link boundary fence. I wonder if the well known drop-off at the end of the one runway, which claimed quite a few aircraft, has since been filled-in? Chris and his wife are planning another such journey abroad, I believe, later this year.

I did receive a welcome phone call from Tom Rowan and was, at last, able to establish a successful exchange of e-mails with David and Judy Westgarth, (at least I did not get a failed delivery message to my reply), and happy to hear that everything is going as well as the advancing years allow. My old pal Colin Fereday very kindly sent me some enlarged photos of the St. Clement Danes plaque dedication ceremony, and I will send copies out to our members with the next edition. I have since written Colin with my appreciation for his thoughtfulness and hope that all is well with him.

Other than occasionally bumping into Tom Lindsay in the mall there has been no other "sightings" or news. Very best wishes from all to all.

Queensland Flight by Evelyn Lewis

Evelyn has sent her report by telephone from a hospital bed at Greenslopes, in Brisbane, where she has been for the past six weeks. I'm sure I speak on behalf of all 458'ers in wishing Evelyn all the best, and hoping she is out of there before too long. She just had a few snippets to report...Ed

This year, Eric Kelly was unable to march on Anzac Day, due to a fall, and is now in a nursing home. Dud and Enid Mackay have moved into a new home at Pelican Waters. Isla Garland is doing well, following the death of her husband Bert.

NSW flight by David Longhurst

Not only did we have excellent weather for this year's March, but we had a magnificent turnout. Keith Cousins led the 458 contingent. The other "locals" Tom Ridgway, Bob Smith, Harry Baines, Don Bitmead and NSW President Eric Munkman were joined by Laurie Crowley, who travelled up from the Riverina and Wal Archbold who came down from the Hunter region. A number of 458ers opted for an armchair ride (they are NOT wheelchairs!) around the track, as the distance is just a bit beyond some of the 90 year old legs. We are on a winner here, as it certainly made it an enjoyable experience for those who did so, with smiles all round confirming this fact from most, who would not have otherwise been there.

After the March, we adjourned to the Royal Exchange Club where we enjoyed the company of RAFES (RAF Escaping Society) members and friends for lunch and a couple of beers.

Once again, Rob Wilkinson and I were accorded the honour of carrying the 458 Banner. Apart from families and friends of the eight marching 458'ers, we were joined, amongst others, by Len Best's (458'er from the UK) grandsons, James and Simon Wardle; Tom Phillis' son Rob and grandson Michael; W/O Henry Shying's nephew Ian Snook; and Lane Albany Wood's son David.

This year, the March organisation was without the controversy which occurred last year, through the RSL's re-organisation. It has now reverted to the original format. Surprisingly, it still took just as long, with quite a delay, after a false start, before we got going, which mirrored last year. The bonus was that we weren't standing around in the rain.

Victoria Flight by Roland Orchard

A great day was had by all for Anzac Day 2009. Those who marched were Fred Ayres, Howard and Sally Bertram, Brian Paroissien, Nigel Paroissien, Jane Foster, Colin Dean, Dave



Prideaux & son Caleb (thanks to Caleb for holding the picture of the Wellington :) & daughter, Georgia, Roland Orchard, Jeremy Orchard. Those who saw us off were Eric Foster and Christine Sindt. Thanks also to the 4 cadets who held the banner: Justin Rogan, Beijia Sun, Glen Brown and Ryan Hutchison. Apologies from Stan Cartledge, Ken Fleming, Peter Hedgcock, Eric Jewell, Laurie Kew, Ted Love, Roy and Barbara Pearce, Jack Ramsay, Harry Ashworth, Mrs. Margaret

Ellis, Mrs. Marjorie Bilney, Mrs. Beryl Giles, Mrs Beryl Orchard, Mrs. J Hinton, Mrs. Shirley Grainger, Mr.R.Rabone, Mr.W. Flentje, Mrs. Enid Dowling, Ms Cecelia Temple, Mr. L. Kennedy.

Here we are marching up the forecourt of The Shrine of Remembrance. Well done to Caleb Prideaux who carried the picture of the Wellington for the entire March.

And at the completion of the March, we all then adjourned to the Melbourne Bowling Club in Windsor for light refreshments.



In attendance were Roy and Barbara Pearce, Linda and James Lyon, Fred Ayres, Howard and Sally Bertram, Brian Paroissien, Christine Sindt, Nigel Paroissien, Jane and Eric Foster, David Foster, Rebecca Foster, Sarah Foster, Colin Dean, Bronwyn Millington, Roland Orchard, Jeremy Orchard.

AGM was called and new Victorian Flight office bearers were elected.

Victoria Flight President - Roland Orchard
Senior Vice-President - Colin Dean
Junior Vice-president - Fred Ayres
Secretary/Treasurer - Jeremy Orchard

Chris Orchard has been doing some research into acquiring some embroidered 458 Squadron patches. The cost would be about AU\$14 each depending on how many we order. This price is quoted on an order of 100 patches.



Dave Prideaux has been doing the same but with the 458 Squadron Crest on a polo shirt. Enquires are still being made about this one so we are still unsure of pricing.

If anyone is interested in either or both of the above items please feel free to email me at rjorch@bigpond.net.au or mail to my address (see Page 1).

We would love for all to attend the activity on Sunday November 15th at 11am to visit the B24 Liberator Restoration project in Werribee, followed by a luncheon (at the same venue). Free for veterans & widows (transport will also be organized for you). Please let the Secretary know, by email: jgonewday@yahoo.com phone call (9801-3891) or regular mail (70 Gateshead Drive, Wantirna South 3152) if you plan on attending. Thank-you! RSVP no later than Sept 15th.thanks Brian Paroissien for organizing this activity.

If you have any questions comments or concerns don't hesitate to contact me on 9727-0106 or e-mail / mail as detailed above. I welcome any calls, letters or emails from all members.

It has also been great to meet and speak to a lot of members in person, by phone or letter and look forward to more in the future.

Thank you all.

No reports from WA or NZ – so we trust all continues to go well... Ed

UK flight by Keith Wilkinson

Is there to be an annual reunion for the 458 UK flight this year? Well, it looks like there will be. There seems to be no stopping it, despite dwindling numbers and the worst recession in years in Britain. As we went to press, there was still no date or location fixed. In the recent past, it has been held at Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, and at Grange-over-Sands in Cumbria, and, best of all, at Alghero, on the Mediterranean island of Sardinia, where the squadron was based in 1944.

This year the aim was to find somewhere significant to the squadron, somewhere not too expensive, and somewhere that's worth visiting: a major tourist attraction.

At the moment, the UK flight is looking into a revisit to the place where it all started in September 1941: Holme-on-Spalding Moor in Yorkshire. There have been a number of reunions here, but not for some time. The plan – which still isn't confirmed – is to visit the historic city of York, which isn't too far away. We are checking out an Elizabethan hotel called The Feathers, an old posting and market inn at Pocklington. The hotel's own website reports there is a "friendly" ghost there called Charlotte. Let's hope she likes us!

The National Collection of Waterlilies at Burnby Hall Gardens is only a five-minute walk away from the hotel. Also nearby is the Eden Camp, a World War Two museum on a former prisoner of war camp. It's a popular place with veterans groups.

So, this idea has a lot going for it. There are still one or two people around who can recall being at Holme-on-Spalding Moor and there is a monument and tree to commemorate the squadron's time there.

Among those who were there in 1941 is Reg Fletcher. Now aged 86 and living in Gloucestershire, Reg originally trained as a wireless operator/rear gunner, but became a clerk in the orderly room at Holme before moving on to Egypt. Later, he joined the Air Ministry Experimental Station.

He told me he remembers Australian Sgt Maloney as being in charge of him in Yorkshire. He worked alongside another Ozzy known as "Pop" Hanlon, a fellow LAC. Does anyone have any connections to these guys?

If the reunion does go to Yorkshire, it is likely to be in October. Members should get further details about this in the near future, but if you feel you would like to join the meeting, either to stay overnight, or just to visit for the day, please let us know. There are a number of people with links to that part of northern England, so it could be quite handy.

Congratulations to former 458 pilot Jack Christianson (my dad's skipper) and his wife Audrey. They have just celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. A number of us (including family from Australia) joined them for their celebrations at a rather nice hotel on a golf course near Newbury in the south of England. Jack and Audrey met soon after Jack returned to England after leaving the squadron and they married in London. Jack confessed to telling a little fib to Audrey earlier this year – saying he had to meet a former wartime buddy. In fact, he was going off to secretly choose a present for her!

458 Squadron Newsletter # 235 - Photo Insert

Photos on this page refer to our feature article “R1785 - A Ring Cycle” – see Page 2



R 1785 Flight crew L-R: Fred Hinton, Bob Birnie, Peter Hickey, Albert Austin, Vic Johnstone, Wally Forgan

*Golleville
Ceremony*



Laying the wreath



More pictures from London - St Clements Danes Ceremony – March 2009



and



Squadron members at the Bowral Reunion, March 2009

*Back L-R – Bob Smith, John Ringwood (behind), George Unitt, Laurie Crowley, Eric Munkman, Ron Houghton (bomber Command), Jim Whitem, Jack Hamilton
Front L-R – Colin Fereday, Don Bitmead, Harry Baines, Bill Kelliher, David Westgarth, Tom Ridgway
Missed the photo-call Keith Cousins, Bill Johnson*