

Air Force Association

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Moving Forward: Advocacy, Support and Connection



John Clarkson – President, AFA Victoria.

AFA Victoria President, John Clarkson, talks about the future direction for AFA Victoria

In June of this year the new AFA Victoria Board sat down to consider the health of the Association and where we should be directing our energies.

The first matter we considered was what we envisaged as useful purposes of the AFA in the decades ahead given a diminishing membership. Fellowship will remain important but no longer the main activity.

Two themes emerged, bearing in mind our limited paid and volunteer resources:

- To advocate for the Air Force family on issues of importance to them; and
- To provide of facilities for associates to collect casually and conduct whatever events may be appropriate to them.

An example discussed was the notion of creating a Vets' Shed along the lines of the Men's Shed principle but more broadly interpreted. We resolved we needed to be more visible to current Air Force members hence being adjacent to or collocated with a major Air Force establishment in Victoria needed to be our goal. Williams Base is the obvious choice. An advantage of this is that we would be more likely to attract volunteers to help administer AFA business.

The second matter was recognition of the deteriorating state of our commercial investment in Hawthorn East. Quite simply our costs are increasing. So, we need to prepare for ultimate sale and shift, probably within a ten-year time frame. This will demand our continuing attention for the decisions we take.

The third matter was progress with our Homelessness Project. We resolved to remain with our preference to focus on transition accommodation for individuals in need of support but not having complicated social issues to deal with, i.e., veterans who can resolve most of their own issues provided they have a roof over their heads. Our current experience and available resources preclude taking on crisis accommodation and high demand cases. We also see little additional benefit to the wider air force family of getting into the longer-term affordable housing market. Our dilemma is defining a sustainable business model and we are having trouble finding an already successfully operator in this sector. The principal sticking point is confidence in assured revenue streams to support year in/year out activities.

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At present we are busy arranging our annual Pilgrimage to Point Cook which will be held on 5th November. There will be a separate notice to all members on details. One pleasing aspect is that I believe this activity is helping us build a valuable and sustainable relationship with the current Air Force which is so very different from what most of us can remember.

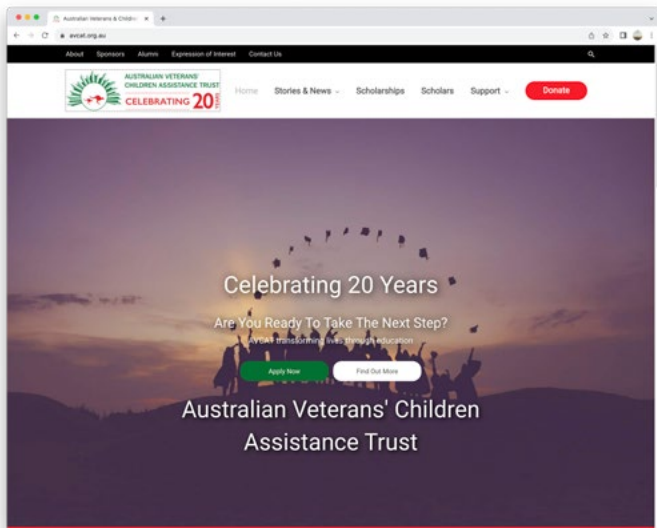
Stay well.

John Clarkson

President, AFA Victoria

AVCAT SCHOLARSHIPS – APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

The Australian Veterans' Children Assistance Trust (AVCAT) has been supporting the children & grandchildren of Australian Veterans with the cost of tertiary education for 20 years.



[AVCAT scholarships](#), including the [Long Tan Bursary](#) (which is administered by VCAT on behalf of the Department of Veterans' Affairs), are tertiary scholarships for those children and grandchildren of Australian ex-serving veterans. Scholarships are \$4000–\$6000 per year, for up to three years.

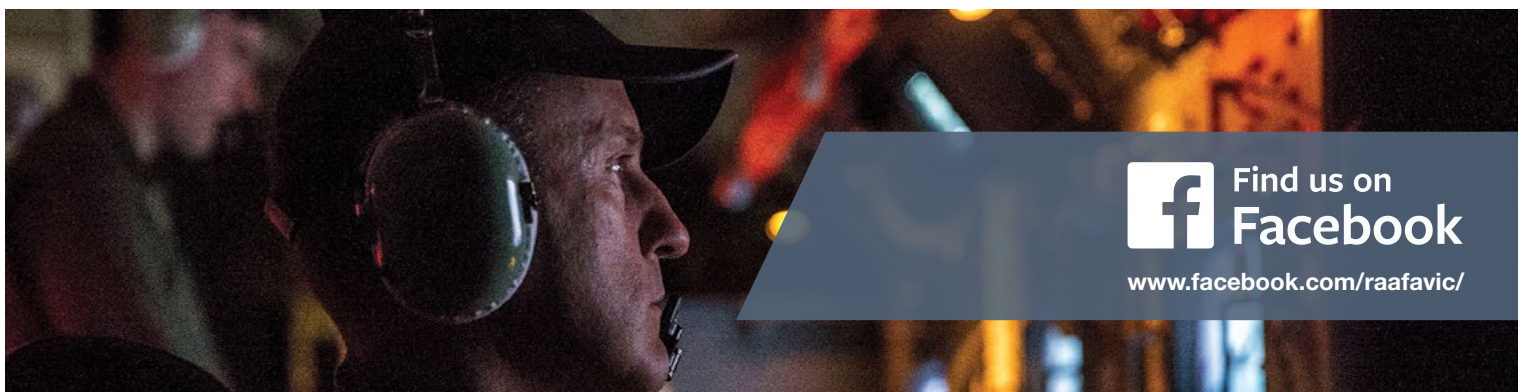
Applications close at midnight AEDT on 31 October 2023.

Applicants must be:

- Enrolled or planning to enrol in a full-time course for one or more academic year's duration at a university, TAFE, or RTO in 2024;
- The child, stepchild, foster child, or grandchild of an Australian ex-serving veteran
- An Australian citizen or permanent resident;
- In receipt of, or eligible to receive, a means-tested Commonwealth educational payment – Youth Allowance, ABSTUDY, Austudy or Veterans' Children Education Scheme (VCES) in 2024.

Each year 37 bursaries are awarded to successful applicants across Australia under the [Long Tan Bursary](#) program, with each bursary is worth up to \$12,000 over 3 years of continuous full-time study.

For further information about the application process or scholarship eligibility, please visit at avcat.org.au.



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www.facebook.com/raafavic/



AFA Victoria has been offering personalised eulogy services for our members for the last two years, with four services for five veterans or members during this time. Immediate Past President Max McGregor explains more about this valuable service.

The latest eulogy service conducted by AFA Victoria was for WW2 veterans and married couple, Les and Joan Sullivan who passed within two days of each other, with the family electing to hold a joint service. This development created challenges in how to incorporate the two elements of our service into one. While challenging, the end result was what the family wanted.

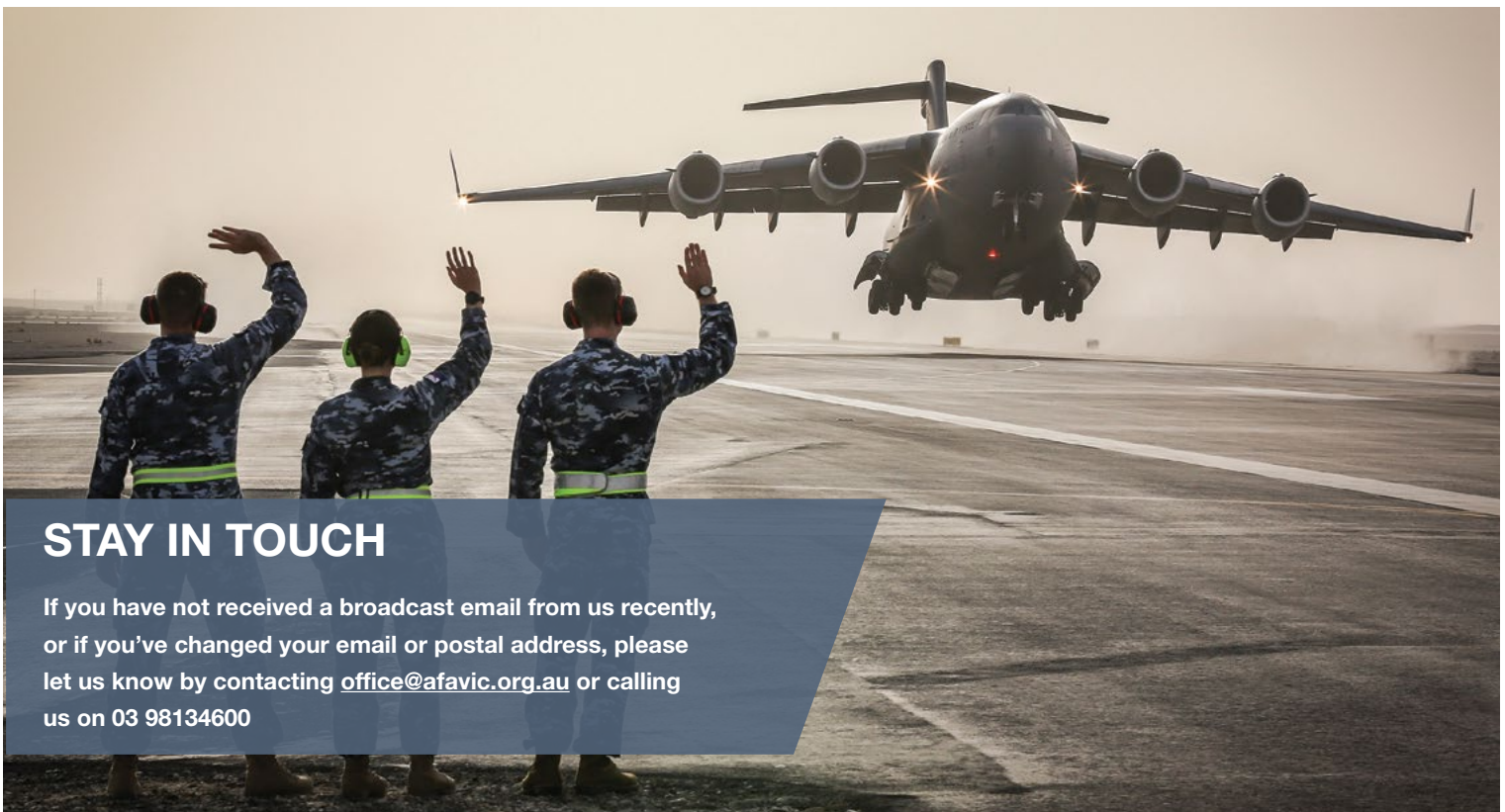
From our experience one thing has become clear; there is no such thing as a standard service. No matter where the service is held there will be variations to what we have as a standard service. From small things like draping or not draping flags over a coffin, to the full Last Post with 1-minute silence and Rouse, to only the Last Post, or even none - all have been experienced.

I am particularly pleased to say that we have been able to meet all the special requirements requested by the families and that the final result has been what they have wanted for their loved ones. At the end of the day, it is our role to comply as much as we possibly can with the wishes of the family. The tributes and feedback from the families has been more than positive and I thank those who have been involved for their meaningful contributions.

We are looking for more volunteers, especially in the Melbourne area, so if you are interested in getting involved, please contact Barb Stallard at our office or me directly. Training and a light lunch provided.

Finally, I'd like to thank all those who have offered their time to support our eulogy services initiative and being part of a most meaningful acknowledgement of our veterans and members.

Max McGregor



STAY IN TOUCH

If you have not received a broadcast email from us recently, or if you've changed your email or postal address, please let us know by contacting office@afavic.org.au or calling us on 03 98134600

REMEMBERING KOREA – ‘THE FORGOTTEN WAR’

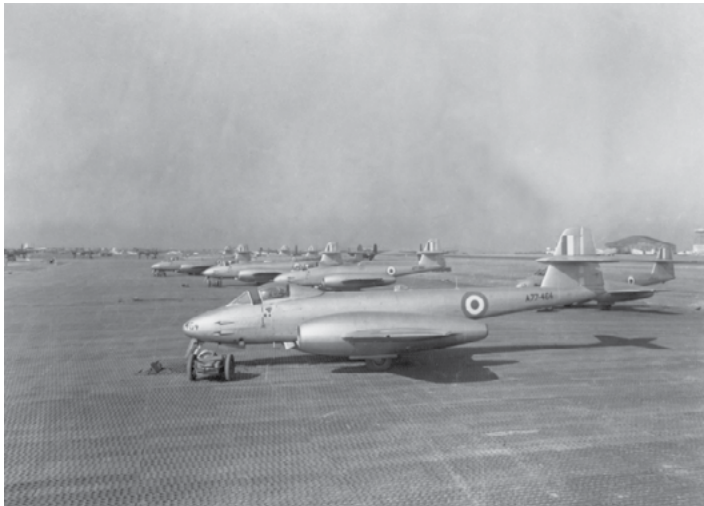
On 27 July, we marked the 70th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice to commemorate the sacrifice of the Australians who served.

The Australian Government was one of 21 member countries to send personnel in support of the South in an attempt to unify the country between 1950 and 1953.

Approximately 18,000 Australian military personnel served during the Korean War and the post-armistice phase, including the RAAF, RAN and Royal Australian Army. Following the signing of the armistice to end the fighting in 1953, Australian forces remained in Korea in a peacekeeping role until 1957.

It was also the last time the RAAF engaged in air-to-air combat.

In 3 years of operations, No 77 Squadron pilots flew almost 19,000 sorties and shot down five MiGs. Despite their successes, losses were heavy; 40 pilots were killed, seven were captured, and of the squadron's 90 Meteors, 54 were lost.



No 77 Squadron Meteor aircraft on the tarmac at a forward airbase in South Korea (Image courtesy Australian War Memorial)

In all, more than 350 Australians lost their lives, more than 1,200 were wounded and 30 taken prisoner. More than 40 Australians are still listed as missing in action in Korea.

The Korean War, called the ‘Forgotten War’ by many, was largely overshadowed by the WWII and subsequent Cold War events. Its significance though is still remembered by those who took part and the sacrifices made by many.

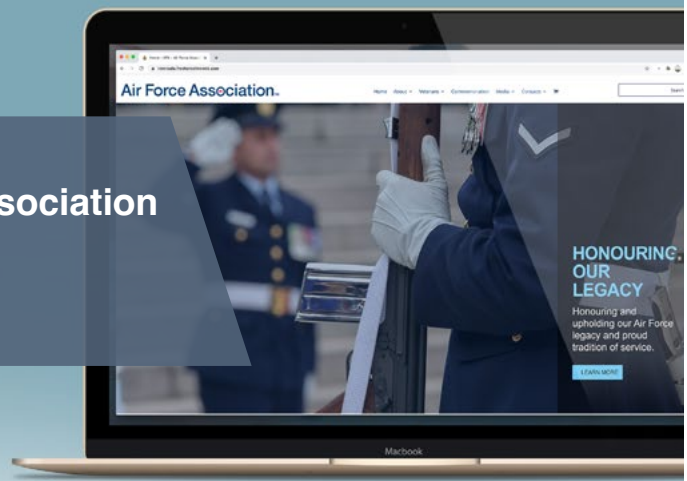


SGT George Hale with his Meteor Mk 8 after a brush with MiG-15s over North Korea in March 1953. (Image courtesy Australian War Memorial)

WWW

For all national Air Force Association news visit our website!

www.raafa.org.au



AFA Victoria President, John Clarkson attended a Roundtable session in Melbourne on 21 August hosted by the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. He shares a summary of the meeting.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide roundtable was convened to provide ESO's with a situation report on progress to date. The Commissioner presented the following statistics:

- Between 1997 and 2020, there were 1600 odd confirmed veteran suicides, which is 20 times more than the number killed in action or in training during that period.
- Despite publicity on those with suicide potential, 80+% of veterans are robust and return readily to civilian life as positive contributors to society. Arguably even higher for Air Force.
- Over the past 20 years or so, 57 widespread enquiries in related areas have made 700 recommendations but the progress towards completion of the recommendations that were accepted is lost. The inference is that many opportunities to learn have been wasted.

The Commissioner then outlined the themes that are unfolding:

- A bullying culture within the ADF is reasonably widespread.
- There is a culture of hazing for trainees and newly posted junior personnel.
- Percentage wise, women are affected to a far greater degree than men.
- The military justice system often fails to deliver justice.
- There are too many occasions of a failure of leadership, especially with the mantra being lauded that "people are the ADF's greatest asset".
- Lip service seems to be applied to many internal reform initiatives.
- The DVA claims process, more often than not, adds to individual trauma.

Considering these themes, the likely focus of the Royal Commission findings will be:

- Inclusion of families in any policy framework is critical.
- An accommodating culture is essential to success.
- Transition is a critical phase for those with potential to suicide, especially those with medical and other short notice discharges.
- Poor data collection is a hindrance to good decision making.
- State Governments have a crucial role to play for individual cases that present as vulnerable.
- ESO advocacy and clear messaging is very important to achieving good outcomes and to keep the general public aware of and engaged in ADF personnel and veteran's issues.
- A form of independent authority is necessary to ensure accepted recommendations are followed thru to completion.
- For individuals, staying connected in some form after separation is a critical mitigator to mental issues manifesting.
- Full-time and part-time members should be treated with equal empathy.

The Royal Commission hands up its report to the Governor-General in June 2024 and the Commissioner's sign off. There will be a role for ESOs from that point on to ensure attention is maintained on closing out the recommendations.

John Clarkson

President – AFA Victoria

BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA – HONOURING THOSE WHO STOOD TALL

On the 6 September, we remembered the brave Australians who stood tall and defended our nation by land, sea and air during WWII.

War reached Australia's shores on 19 February 1942, with the bombing of Darwin, killing more than 250 Australians, Allied service personnel and civilians. By the end of the war, northern Australia had endured 97 air raids, 64 of which targeted Darwin.

We commemorate the Battle for Australia on the first Wednesday in September. This day represents a defeat of Japanese forces on land during the Battle of Milne Bay.

After campaigning by the RSL and Battle for Australia Commemoration Committee, the first official service took place in 2008. Since then, school students have come to lay a wreath to honour the service and sacrifice of Australians and their allies.



The bombing of Darwin, on 19 February 1942, was the largest single attack ever mounted by a foreign power on Australia during WWII. (Image courtesy Library and Archives NT)



Darwin air raid – 19 February 1942. (image courtesy Australian War Memorial)

ASTRA AVIATOR PODCASTS



An initiative by AFA and AFA NSW to capture the recollections and experiences of both retired and serving Air Force personnel.

Listen to former and current Australian aviators share their stories of life in the Air Force with interviewer Gareth McCray OAM.

Click on the link below to listen.

[AD ASTRA PODCASTS](https://raafa.org.au/media/#videos) or visit <https://raafa.org.au/media/#videos>

GENERAL INFORMATION

AFA VICTORIA BRANCH CONTACTS

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Catalina	Ronald Kirk	03 98193527
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Fighter SQN	(contact AFA Vic)	03 98134600
Geelong	John Delia	0408 054 122
Gippsland	(contact AFA Vic)	03 98134600
Melbourne WAAAF (3xA)	(contact AFA Vic)	03 98134600
RAAF Radar	Chris Harnath	0425 770 011
RAF	Val Boyd	0428 174 070
Sunderland SQNs	Ricky Hattam	0418 994 759
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Williams	(contact AFA Vic)	03 98134600

CONTACT: EDITORIAL DATES

SUMMER 2023

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AUTUMN 2024

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WINTER 2024

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SPRING 2024

Contributions by: 26 August 2024

Publication: 16 September 2024

HAVE YOU READ THE LATEST EDITION OF WINGS?

[Click here to access the online version](#)

Wings is the official publication of the Air Force Association



BATTLE OF BRITAIN REMEMBERED

This year marked 83 years since the Battle of Britain campaign which took place during World War 2 between 10 July 1940 and 31 October 1940. Pilots from many countries fought in the Battle of Britain. 537 fighter pilots died during the prolonged air battle, including 10 of the 35 Australians.

RAFA COMMEMORATES BATTLE OF BRITAIN AT THE SHRINE OF REMEMBRANCE

On 17 September the Royal Air Forces Association (RAFA) held a service and wreath laying to honour the service and sacrifice of those who fought in the Battle of Britain and the Commonwealth contribution to this historic victory.

Shrine Governor Air Commodore – and AFA Victoria Board member - Rowan Story AM RFD (Retd) was in attendance as the Shrine's representative, and RAFA President, Ted Hayes OAM gave the keynote address. Below is an excerpt of that speech.

“Although very young, only six, I remember witnessing the start of the Normandy Invasion. I lived near an airfield in Devon which had been built specifically for transport. I was walking to school at about 08:00 on 6th June 1944 and looked up to see the sky full of C47 Skytrains towing gliders. This departure is recorded on a plaque at one of the old airfield entrances. I still find myself grieving occasionally for the men who would have been killed at the end of that short flight.

I would like to conclude by referring to Winston Churchill's speech in the House of Commons to the Parliament of the day in June 1940:

“What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect the Battle Britain to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation. Upon it depends our own British life and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire.

The whole fury and might of the enemy must soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in

this island or lose the war.

If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be freed, and the life of the world may move into broad sunlit uplands.

But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, and all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the dark abyss of a new Dark Age, made more sinister and perhaps more prolonged by the light of perverted science.

Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that if the British Empire and Commonwealth lasts for a thousand years, men will still say:

*“This was their finest hour.
Never in the field of human conflict was so
much owed to by so many to so few.”
We will remember them.”*



President of the Royal Air Forces Association, Ted Hayes OAM delivers the keynote address at the Shrine of Remembrance Battle of Britain Commemoration Service

RAF BRANCH HOSTS ANNUAL BATTLE OF BRITAIN LUNCHEON



On 15 September our RAF Branch hosted its annual Battle of Britain Memorial Lunch at which RAF Pilot and Flying Instructor, and RAF Branch member, Brian Surtees gave this keynote address adding a personal encounter during the filming of the movie ‘The Battle of Britain’.

Eighty-three years ago, the UK stood alone geographically against the all-conquering German forces. Although the Commonwealth was in support the fact remains that the enemy was a scant 21 miles away, held back for the moment by the English Channel.

In the preceding 12 months the Germans had defeated and invaded Poland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and France. The tactics were the same, defeat the enemy's

During a training flight, former RAF pilot, Brian Surtees found himself in the midst of a World War II air battle being filmed for “The Battle of Britain” movie.

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Air Force in the air and on the ground and a blitzkrieg invasion with the Luftwaffe supporting the army.

By the time the Germans reached the Channel coast they were experienced, and battle hardened. The Luftwaffe refined its tactics in the Spanish Civil War and was confident of defeating the RAF. The only doubt was caused by the confrontation with the RAF Fighters sent to France where the Luftwaffe came up against modern fighters, Hurricanes, for the first time and they lost some 147 aircraft to French and RAF Fighters. The RAF lost many light bombers, 36 fighters and some 30 experienced fighter pilots. Although the RAF refined its tactics e.g. adopting the Luftwaffe loose pair instead of the inflexible vic formation the campaign was doomed, and it is to Dowding's credit that he refused Churchill's demands to send more squadrons to France.

You fight with what you have, not what you wish you had. After Dunkirk the British Army was disorganised and ill equipped and had the Germans been able to invade, they would have won. However, the Channel was in the way and if an invasion was to succeed against the opposition of the Royal Navy Air, supremacy was essential. The Luftwaffe vastly outnumbered the RAF and started a campaign to defeat it and destroy its airfields. However, the RAF had several advantages, it was fighting over home ground and was assisted by the world's first fully integrated detection, reporting and control air defence system.

Detection was by the Chain Home Radar system and the Royal Observer Corps; reporting was by an efficient communications system and control was exercised by Operations rooms staffed by mostly women map markers and senior Controllers who allocated squadrons to confront the threat. The bombing campaign switched to the cities just as the RAF ground facilities were in extremis, thanks to Goering and Hitler's faulty decision. Thus, the battle was finally won by courageous young pilots supported by an efficient servicing and supply system and an operational control system that put them in the right place at the right time, to the dismay of the Luftwaffe. This was the first defeat for Hitler, and it saved the UK from Nazism. It also preserved the UK as a future base for allied air operations and the Normandy Invasion.

Most of you will have seen the film "The Battle of Britain" made in the late 1960's. This is an excellent film that accurately reflects what happened. The flying scenes are very good and were filmed using real aircraft and pilots. No significant computer graphics in those days. The aircraft fleet were based at RAF Duxford and comprised Me.109's and Heinkel 111's of the Spanish Air Force and a collection of Spitfires and Hurricanes flown by RAF Pilots. In addition, there was a B25 camera ship painted a lurid red colour on the port side and green on the starboard side. This was presumably to help pilots tell their left from their right!

On filming days there would be a notice to airmen (NOTAM) indicating where the filming would take place. Inevitably they would stray all over the place, usually chasing good cloudscapes for background. One day they were filming in the middle of the letdown lane for RAF Bassingbourn where I was based, flying Canberra aircraft.

On the day in question, I and my student pilot and navigator descended, unsuspecting, out of cloud at about 10,000ft to find ourselves in the middle of a World War II air battle! With Me.109's to the left of us, Spitfires and Hurricanes to the right of us and Heinkels ahead of us. Onwards we rode into the valley of death and were not shot down. That sequence would have ended up on the cutting room floor. (apologies to Alfred Lord Tennyson for mangling his poem).

Apparently, after the first practice filming session the Director called all the pilots together for a debrief and said words to the effect that the aircraft were so far away, he could hardly see them and consequently useless for filming. The pilots needed to do better. The second session was very different with everyone queuing up to almost chew the tail off the camera ship and the result was evident in the final product.

Brian Surtees



The Supermarine Spitfire was Britain's first line of defence in the Battle of Britain in 1940 (Image credit: Warfare History Network)



Photo credit: International War Museum

COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF AUSTRALIAN COMBAT OPERATION IN VIETNAM

On the 18th August, we paused to mark Vietnam Veterans' Day and the Battle of Long Tan, and also the national commemoration of 50 years since the proclamation of the end of Australian combat operations in South Vietnam.

On 18 August 1966, Australians and New Zealanders were outnumbered 10 to one in the battle of Long Tan. It was the single greatest loss of life Australia suffered during the Vietnam War - 18 Australians were killed and 24 were wounded.

In the years that followed, Vietnam veterans gathered to commemorate those lost at Long Tan and now we gather on 18 August each year to mark Vietnam Veterans' Day, paying tribute to all those who served in Australia's longest conflict of the 20th century.

A national commemoration was held at the Vietnam Forces Memorial in Canberra where National AFA President Carl Schiller, accompanied by Lance Halvorson laid a wreath on behalf of all RAAF Vietnam Veterans at the National Vietnam War Memorial on Anzac Avenue.

In Melbourne, on this 50th anniversary, veterans gathered at the Shrine of Remembrance to honour the service and sacrifice of all Vietnam veterans.

Members of the Vietnam Veterans Branch gathered for the service, followed by their customary annual VV Day commemoration at their RAAF Vietnam Veterans plaque adjacent to the Shrine. In recognition of the decision by the VVAA to end large-scale Vietnam Veterans' Day

commemoration services two banners and around 150 to 200 people gathered at the forecourt of the Eternal Flame. After MC, Peter Meehan OAM welcomed all in attendance, the former Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews spoke and the President of the Victorian branch of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia Bob Elworthy AM, came forward to read his poem, '**Green - The Only Colour That Mattered**'.

On completion of the official Commemoration Service, Vietnam Veterans Branch members gathered at the RAAF Vietnam Tree and Plaque where Chris Hudnott, RAAFVVA and Vietnam Veterans Branch President, conducted the short service.

Of special note was the presence of the late WGCDR Nick LeRay's son, Tony and grand-daughter Elise, who both reside in England, and came to Australia to attend their father's private family cremation service. Tony and Elise were given the honour of placing the wreath at the base of the plaque.

With special acknowledgment to Geoff Rose, Vietnam Veterans' Branch for all photos and details of the Vietnam Veterans' Day Commemoration.



Veterans gather on a cold and wet day at the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance for the Vietnam Veterans' Day commemoration service.

COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF AUSTRALIAN COMBAT OPERATION IN VIETNAM



L-R: Tony LeRay-Meyer (son of the late Nick LeRay Meyer), Dave Grierson, Elise LeRay-Meyer (Nick's grand-daughter), Max McGregor and Chris Hudnott at the commemoration service.



Peter Clemmens and Rick Holmes hold the RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association banner at the RAAF VVA plaque



Tony LeRay-Meyer (son of the late Nick LeRay Meyer) and Elise LeRay-Meyer (Nick's grand-daughter) place the wreath at the base of the RAAF VVA plaque.



Chris Hudnott, RAAFVVA and Vietnam Veterans Branch President (far right), conducted a brief service at the RAAF VVA plaque adjacent to the Shrine.

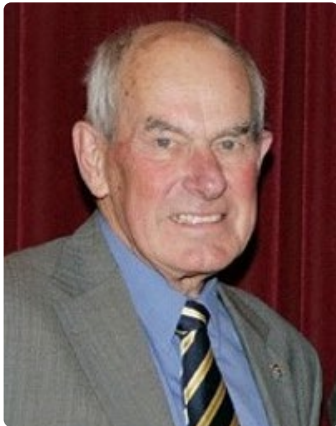


An array of wreaths laid by the Eternal Flame at the Commemoration Service.

Since our last editon of Contact, we have lost a number of notable aviators and significant contributors to the Air Force Association.

In this special 'In Memoriam', AFA Victoria President, John Clarkson, Vietnam Veterans Branch President, Chris Hudnott and RAAF Radar Branch President, Chris Harnath pay tribute to four of these men – AIRCDR William John (Bill) Belton AM (Ret), WGCDR Nick LeRay_Meyer AM (Retd), William Penfold, Radar Operator and WGCDR Richard Orr.

AIRCDRE WILLIAM JOHN (BILL) BELTON AM (RET) – A LIFETIME DEDICATED TO AEROSPACE ENGINEERING



AIRCDRE William John (Bill) Belton AM (Ret) – 29 September 1937 – 28 August 2023

Bill Belton has a notable place in the history of the Air Force Association Victoria Division.

Bill was President during the period when our premises at 4 Cromwell Rd, South Yarra became beyond our ability to sustain, thus resulting in its sale and the purchase of our current premises in Hawthorn East. I found compiling an account of Bill's achievements to be a daunting task and hope I have done him justice.

William John Belton was born in Wagga, NSW and joined the Air Force with the 9th Apprentice Intake (Mangoes) in 1956. On completion of the trade course, he was posted to Laverton to undertake mechanical engineering studies at Royal Melbourne Technical College. He graduated at the end of 1960 and was commissioned into the Engineer (Mechanical) Branch. Before too long, Bill met and married his life partner Hilery and headed off to Paris on the Mirage acquisition project.

After a posting as SENGO at 76Sqn in the early 70s, he was soon packing his bags for a posting to London as Staff Officer Engineering followed by the RAF Staff Course. After a couple of staff postings back in Australia, the Air Force realised some blank pages remained in his passport so posted him to the US as part of the Hornet acquisition team. He returned to Melbourne for his final two Air Force appointments within Support Command and its successor Logistics Command. It was in these posts that he was a principal advocate for what is perhaps his greatest legacy within Air Force, the creation of Weapons Systems Logistics Management Units collocated with the principal operational units of the various Air Force aircraft platforms.

Bill retired from the Air Force at the end of 1992 but his engagement with the Engineering and Aerospace industries didn't end there. Fundamentally, he was the most active promoter of aerospace engineering within Australia as evidenced by:

- Membership of Aerospace Maritime and Defence Australia (AMDA);
- Member, and ultimately life member, of the organising foundation that convened the Australian International Airshow and Aerospace Exposition (Avalon) for 20 years, including 10 years on the Board;
- Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS) Australian Division councillor for 20 years - and Life Member - including two years as President;
- Principal proponent for establishing the Joint Board for Aerospace Engineering (RAeS and Engineers Australia) which includes sponsoring the biennial Australian International Aerospace Congress that has been held in conjunction with the Avalon Airshow since 2005; and
- For a period, Chairman of RMIT University Wackett Centre Advisory Board after which he was recognised by the award of an Honorary Doctorate of Engineering.

His award of Member of the Order of Australia recognised his long-time commitment to the advancement of aerospace engineering.

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As if he didn't have enough to do, for twenty years he also immersed himself in cattle breeding on the Mornington Peninsular and for a time served as President of the Lowline Stud Association, Mornington Peninsular.

Bill and Hilery were married for 60 years; they raised and nurtured a wonderful family of four children and six grandchildren.

Rest in Peace Bill. A true gentleman who was never flustered.

John Clarkson
President, AFA Victoria

FADED ECHOES: ERIC WILLIAM PENFOLD (15 JULY 1923-5 MAY 2023) – RADAR OPERATOR



AIRCDRE William John (Bill)
Belton AM (Ret) – 29 September
1937 – 28 August 2023

This Faded Echo Tribute for Eric Penfold is based on Eric's recall of his life experiences recorded in his written memoirs, which provide a particularly graphic account of his WWII RAAF Radar service with 323 RS, (Radar Station), in Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya) from August 1943 to September 1944.

Eric was the sixth of 10 children born in north west Victoria, attending Cope Cope Primary and Donald Higher Elementary schools before commencing Primary School teacher training in March 1942.

Eric's teaching career was put on hold when he volunteered for RAAF service, commencing on 25 February 1943, where he completed his rookie training and graduated as a Radar Operator at Richmond RAAF Base in May 1943.

In May 1943 Eric was posted to Mascot Aerodrome where 323 RS was forming up. His unit left Townsville on 16 July 1943 with their Radar equipment on several Douglas C47s, finally landing at Merauke, Dutch New Guinea (DNG), the following day. The 323 RS Unit then travelled by army barge for 3 days to the chosen site for the Radar Station, close to the native village of Boepel on the Merauke River, some 200 river miles from Merauke. 323 RS was initially operational at ground level but soon after the radar equipment was moved to a 15-foot stand built nearby with the plotting room beneath that stand. Eric was promoted to Leading Aircraftsman on 30 November 1943.

After some 9 months of operations and with the Japanese forces retreating back along the coast, the 323 RS was no longer required to cover Hollandia (Jayapura), which was taken by the Allies on 22 February 1944. In March 1944 Eric was part of an advance party to relocate 323 RS to Mappi Post, on the Deogel River, which included the first Catalina landing on that river. The Mappi Post location was less hospitable and more isolated, low swampy, mosquito-ridden terrain, devoid of animal/bird life, (except crocs), with active head hunter tribes that 'objected' to all 'newcomers'. With the rest of the unit arriving by mid-June, the 323 RS LW-AW Radar set became operational on 2 July 1944, established on a log stand 25-feet high.

Eric's was posted back to Australia on 30 August 1944, being some "... of the best news that I had heard for over 12 months". Leaving Mappi Post on 31 August 1944 via a three-day boat trip, through the Marianna Straits and the Arafura Sea, he took a DC3 Douglas transport on 2 September 1944, to land at Jacky Jacky (Higginsfield) Airfield Cape York, kissing the "Aussie soil ... what a feeling to be home again!" Eric finally reported to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (No.1 Personnel Depot) on 11 September 1944.

Although DNG was classified as a six-month service area, due to the poor conditions of service experienced, Eric had actually served 13.5 months, all before turning 21. From

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that time until his discharge on 28 July 1945, Eric was posted to several Victorian RAAF depots, including No.1 Flying Boat Repair at Lake Boga where he worked on Catalina Radar equipment.

In mid-1945 he applied for a re-mustering as a Radar Mechanic, as well as a discharge 'to resume civil occupation' as a teacher. Offered both, Eric chose discharge, and returned to both teaching and university - teaching at various Melbourne high schools until retiring as Scoresby High School Principal in 1983, but he continued in casual roles until he was 72.

Eric married Florence Beer on 13 May 1950. They had two children, Lynette and Ross. In his memoirs, he observes he was "...lucky to have had 44 years of a very happy marriage", until Florence's passing in May 1994.

In his memoirs Eric also reflects on his WWII RAAF Radar service: "The comradeship and bonding that existed between servicemen is something that never wanes. It is great just to meet up with old mates and relive some of the past, in conversation".

Eric Penfold has been a longstanding Veteran Member of the Victorian RAAF Radar Association and more recently the AFAV RAAF Radar Branch. He regularly attended Melbourne Anzac Day Marches with his long-time mate Terry McMahon, whom he first met during rookie training in 1943 and trained with in course MO72 for Radar Operators at RAAF Base Richmond. Whenever a social occasion arose, such as gathering following ANZAC Day Marches, Eric and Terry would sing their rendition of "The Song of the RDF Boys", (tune: Bless Them All), composed during their MO72 Radar Operators Course. (note: RDF is Radio Direction Finding which is what Radar was first named & renamed Radar later in 1943).

As a tribute to Eric, and with the support of Eric's family, a copy of his memoirs will be placed in the W/C Pete Smith RAAF Radar Collection at the RAAF Museum, Point Cook. Vale Eric Penfold.

Chris Harnath

President, RAAF Radar Branch



Eric Penfold and his great mate Terry McMahon at the ANZAC Day March in 2013.



After their ANZAC Day March, Eric Penfold & Terry McMahon singing "The Song of the R.D.F. Boys" to the tune of "Bless Them All", composed during Eric & Terry's Radar Operators Course No OM72 in May 1943.

NICK LERAY-MEYER – A MIRAGE COURSE WAS JUST A MIRAGE!



Nick LeRay Meyer AM speaking at the unveiling of the RAAF Vietnam Veterans Association plaque at the Melbourne Shrine's Garden of Reflection on 18 August, 2008.

WGCDR Nick LeRay-Meyer AM (retd) passed away on 22 July 2023. He was President of the AFA Vietnam Veterans Branch in 2008 and 2009 and current AFA VV President Chris Hudnott shares some of Nick's reflections about his Air Force career.

Nicholas (Nick) LeRay-Meyer was born on 4 July 1940 in Brighton, South Australia and at only 5 years of age, committed himself to a career in aviation after watching a magpie land on the back porch of his home. He joined the local Air Training Corps and at the age of 16, enlisted in the RAAF as an Apprentice Instrument Fitter. After 3 years at Wagga, he was posted to 1 Aircraft Depot at Laverton and a year later moved to Point Cook to continue training his apprentice training, but instead was successful in applying for No 43 Pilot's Course.

Initial training required some 125 hours in Winjeel aircraft and Nick recalled that on his 75-hour progress test he returned to Point Cook above cloud and finding only a small hole suggested to the testing officer that he would need to conduct an instrument approach. The testing officer said that he should enter a spin and descend through the hole. Nick thought that this was a test of his airmanship and suggested this was against the rules. 'Just do it' was the reply and back on the ground Nick was reprimanded for questioning the testing officer but received a 'tick' for doing so.

After completing the final test on the Winjeel, Nick travelled to Pearce for advanced training on the Vampire aircraft and after impressing the testing officer during the final 'wings' test, he was posted to fly fighter aircraft.

Prior to conversion to the F86 Sabre, further training on the Vampire was carried out at Williamstown using the aircraft as a weapons platform, where Nick recalled he found that the ground attack role was 'his forte'. He successfully completed the training at No 2 Operational Conversion Unit and was posted to No 76 Squadron.

Nick adjusted quickly to squadron operational flying enjoying both the Air Combat Manoeuvres and the Ground Attack roles of Sabre aircraft. On 14 November 1964 he was involved in 'a serious problem' when his aircraft suddenly lost power and the engine fire light illuminated whilst in cloud at 16,000 over Bathurst during a return flight to Williamstown. Navigating by radio compass and clearing the cloud at 9,000 feet, he decided against ejecting fearing the aircraft would impact the ground in the Richmond/Windsor built up area. He successfully landed at Richmond but overshot the end of the runway as the hydraulic boost for the brakes was inoperative. Later inspection of the aircraft showed that the tailpipe had become disconnected using incorrect locking wire. Later, seven other aircraft were discovered with the same problem.

Hoping for a conversion to the Mirage, in 1967 Nick was instead assigned to the Flight Instructors Course on the Vampire aircraft at East Sale, followed by a posting to No 2 Flying Training School at Pearce. Nick became known as a 'balanced instructor' who would go out of his way to encourage students 'to work hard, ask for extra help when they thought they needed it, and offered the same when they were silent'. He was also involved in the introduction of the all-through jet training with the Macchi aircraft.

After almost two years at Pearce, Nick returned to Williamstown and naturally expected to undertake a Mirage conversion. However, instead he was selected to be part of a team of 4 Sabre instructors to train RMAF pilots to fly the 12 Sabre aircraft that the Australian Government had presented to Malaysia. He recalled two significant events including a birdstrike which resulted in a glide approach to land at Butterworth and achieving a score of 64 hits on the towed banner during an air-to-air gunnery exercise, which not only exceeded his previous best of 28 but was one of the highest scores ever.

Expecting to return to Williamtown for a Mirage conversion after this assignment, to his surprise, Nick was posted for a helicopter conversion and an anticipated 12 month's active service in Vietnam on helicopter gunships.

Nick found the conversion from fixed wing to rotary wing aircraft somewhat challenging, but he soon overcame the difference, travelling to Vietnam to join No 9 SQN in June 1971. His transition course to the 'slick' or transport helicopter and then to the 'gunship' aircraft was compressed into some 4 months. After successfully completing the 'in-country' training, Nick engaged in active operations until the end of 1971 when 9 SQN redeployed to Australia and Nick returned to 5 SQN as Training Flight Commander.

In 1977, following Staff College training and a promotion to WGCDR, Nick was posted to Department of Air (Air Force Materiel) but was soon posted back to 9 SQN (RAAF Amberley) following a series of helicopter accidents including crew fatalities. Morale at the squadron was low and it had also failed to gain a satisfactory rating at an inspection by Operational Command in 1978. A subsequent visit from the OCI team in late 1979 saw the Squadron receive gain its rating with congratulatory remarks on the 'turn round' from the 1978 result. Nick ensured the entire squadron heard this feedback from the Inspection Team leader and together with his own

congratulations. In June 1980, Nick was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for outstanding leadership as Commanding Officer of No 9 SQN.

Nick was appointed to the Directing Staff of RAAF Staff College in 1981. In November after hearing the RAAF had been requested to provide a helicopter detachment to a new Peacekeeping effort in the Sinai, he expressed interest in participating. In early 1982, he was attached to Department of Defence for initial planning and subsequently posted to Washington to join the Force Commander's staff as the principal Air Advisor.

In late 1982, he was that he would be posted to Joint Services Staff College from early 1983, a course usually a prerequisite before promotion to Group Captain (for which he would become eligible in late 1983/1984). Since this could not be guaranteed and with a desire to keep flying, Nick submitted his resignation from the Air Force in November 1982, which was not welcomed by the Chief of Air Force. CAF's personal entreaty didn't change Nick's decision and he left the RAAF in December 1982.

(Who knows, maybe the offer of a Mirage conversion course may have changed his mind!).

Rest in Peace, Nick.



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WING COMMANDER RICHARD ORR – A RESPECTED COLLEAGUE!



Richard Orr – Former Treasurer,
Air Force Association – Victoria

In February of this year, we were saddened by the news of the passing of our long standing and respected colleague – and former AFA Victoria Treasurer - Richard Orr.

Richard was born on 25th July 1940 and hailed from Western Australia. In 1956, at the age of 15, he joined the Air Force as a radio trade apprentice and attended Royal Melbourne Technical College from RAAF Frognall and was awarded the Governor General's Medal in his third year as the most outstanding RAAF apprentice. On completion of his apprenticeship, he was accepted to undertake a fellowship diploma at (by now the renamed) RMIT. On successful completion in December 1960, he was commissioned into the Engineer (Radio) Branch.

Richard enjoyed a number of ground radio postings, including No 1 Control and Reporting Unit and 114 Mobile Control and Reporting Unit (Butterworth), Base Squadrons Darwin and Laverton, and staff appointments within Telecommunications Engineering Directorate in Support Command. These jobs were interspersed with successive attachments to RAAFWASH for five weeks then on to RAAFLOON for 14 months (1965/6) on project work.

On his promotion to Wing Commander, Richard spent ten years in HQ Support Command in the 70s and 80s which concluded his 26 years of dedicated and valued service and left the Air Force on 3rd of August 1984.

At this point Richard embarked on a second career as a financial advisor working in Melbourne for Retire Invest and contributing to his local community as a member of the Rotary Club of Melbourne. But he retained strong ties with his former colleagues and in 1997 Richard joined the inaugural committee of the RAAF Engineer Officers Association as Treasurer. He remained actively on that committee for the better part of 20 years. He also held the position of Treasurer on the Air Force Association – Victorian Division board for 10 years from 2006-2016.

Richard was meticulous with his figures, true to his values and worked tirelessly in support of his colleagues. His loyalty could not be questioned and his commitment to the Air Force family and its values resonated with all who had the privilege of knowing him. His memory remains a source of inspiration to his Air Force colleagues.

Rest in Peace Richard.

SAVE THE DATES!

SUNDAY 5 NOVEMBER

ANNUAL PILGRIMAGE TO RAAF POINT COOK

Commemorative Service at 1100 hrs followed by a light luncheon.

SUNDAY 3 DECEMBER

CHRISTMAS GET TOGETHER & OPEN DAY

Open Day between 1000 hrs – 1500 hrs gather with colleagues for light refreshments and a chat.

Event details to follow.





AROUND THE BRANCHES

ATC/AAFC

Greetings to all members and Branches.

It's been good to see that our Branch's monthly luncheon attendances have continued to be relatively well attended despite the extensive building project which is currently taking place at the Box Hill RSL.

It was originally thought that with such large areas of the parking facilities being closed, it was going to have a detrimental effect on our members' numbers, but it would appear that we have been lucky enough to avoid this situation as we tend to arrive slightly earlier than the majority of other groups. We've still got enough room for a few more if they'd like to join us some time.

On Sunday the 6th of August, along with John McCrystal, I was honoured to be an invited guest at RAAF Point Cook for the 4 Wing Memorial Parade and Medal Presentation for the late FLTLT (AAFC) Jack Beever who, along with his wife Marg, was a dedicated member of the AirTC / AAFC for well over 25 years. The Reviewing Officer was Jack and Marg's son, FLTLT (AAFC) Chris Beever and Host Officer WGCdr (AAFC) Kylie Walker, O.C. of 4 Wing AAFC. In addition to Jack's award, Marg was also presented with her Cadet Forces Service Medals during the parade.

Congratulations to all for a very moving and well-

earned tribute and our Branch's belated and deepest sympathy to Marg and the family on their sad loss.

Since I will not be available to attend the forthcoming 4 Wing Annual Parade on Sunday, the 8th of October, I take this opportunity to lodge my apology and thank John McCrystal for kindly consenting to act as presenter of any awards on my behalf and representing the ATC/AAFC Branch on the day.

In closing, would all ATC/AAFC members please note: Due to the above-mentioned building works, the formerly planned and advised date of Friday, 1st December for

our proposed Branch Christmas Luncheon in the Bistro at Box Hill RSL has had to be changed to Friday, 8th December and will be held in the Upton Room, Basement Level. Negotiations and details are presently underway and once finalised, members will be contacted, asking for Expressions of Interest to obtain numbers to make the function viable.

Laurie Bell.

President

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE ATC/AAFC BRANCH?

VISIT OUR BRANCH PAGE ON THE AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION VICTORIA WEBSITE

VIETNAM VETERANS

I'm penning (typing) this President's Report on Vietnam Veterans Day having just survived the wind, the showers and 12 degrees at the Shrine of Remembrance.

On a sad note, members would have heard that our former President, Nick LeRay-Meyer, passed away after a long illness. I last

visited him in the Royal Melbourne Hospital on his 83rd birthday (4 July) and he died a couple of weeks later. Nick had an active and fulfilling career in the RAAF, flying both fighters and rotary wing aircraft and you can read a full summary of his extraordinary Air Force career in this edition of Contact.

Our Branch sent condolences and flowers to his widow, Joyce, and I have since spoken with his sons, Tony and Simon who returned from the UK to attend a family cremation service on 15 August. I mentioned to Tony that we would be holding our annual Vietnam Veterans Day commemoration at the Shrine and it was great

to meet him there wearing Nick's medals, cap and tie, accompanied by his daughter Elise, wearing Nick's VVAA scarf.

This year on Vietnam Veteran's Day (18 August 2023) we commemorated the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. You can also find a full

article from Geoff Rose on this year's commemoration.

We held our customary annual VV Day commemoration at our plaque and tree and although the cold wind was bracing it fortunately didn't rain on our parade.

Tony and Elise laid the new AFA wreath on behalf of our Branch – marking the 15th anniversary of the dedication of the plaque at a ceremony led by Nick in 2008.

For our latest Vietnam Veterans Branch newsletter,

please follow [this link](#) or go to our Vietnam Veterans Branch page on afavic.org.au

Chris Hudnott
President

WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE VIETNAM VETERANS' BRANCH?

VISIT OUR BRANCH PAGE ON THE AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION VICTORIA WEBSITE

VALE

It is with the greatest respect and fond memories, we remember our colleagues who have passed on before us.

The following members have passed away since our last publication. May they rest in peace.

Mrs Glenis Gordon <i>Bendigo Branch</i>	29/06/2023
Mr Nick LeRay-Meyer AM <i>Vietnam Veterans</i>	21/07/2023
Mrs Norma Robins <i>WAAAF</i>	08/08/2023
Mr Bill Belton AM <i>Technical</i>	28/08/2023 Life Member
Mr Les Sullivan <i>Headquarters</i>	29/08/2023

Let Us Not Forget

Air Force Association

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