



# AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH

Newsletter April 2020



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**ALL MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES OF OUR BRANCH REMAIN SUSPENDED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE**



With various restrictions in place due to the Coronavirus pandemic, this year's Anzac Day could not be observed in the traditional manner but there were a good variety of ways by which families and individuals could have the playing of the Last Post and Rouse to accompany their own 2020 Anzac Day tribute. Some members have provided photographs of how they observed this special day. Here they are:



Branch Secretary Rob Petty and wife Ann pictured at their front gate together with Sean (Bottom Left). Ann provided the following account of their 2020 Anzac Day morning :

**Our Anzac Dawn** ~ The Dawn broke not long after 6.30 am this morning in the year 2020 - on this ANZAC DAY the 25th April. My husband and I woke around 5.00 am to rise from our bed and ready ourselves for the coming service, a service that was being broadcast, to the nation, live from Canberra's Australian War Memorial. One that would end, as is the custom, with the sounding of The Last Post at 6.00 am. So at 5.45 am, we now being rugged up warm, ventured out into the darkness to stand at our gate. With wreath, flag and candles in hand we awaited the coming 'bugle call' and the 'moment of silence and remembrance'. To be standing now, on our street, in isolation, in the darkness with the rest of the nation was a very moving moment indeed. Covid-19 may have dictated how we honoured the fallen this Anzac morning but it has also now given us a new moment in history we should never forget. To look through the darkness, up and down the streets and the cross streets to see the 'lone candles flicker'. All of us standing separately but together in quietness and



in the blackness of the pre-dawn; how wonderful. This Anzac Day dawn will definitely be one that must now go down into our history book, being the morning that the nation united and remembered uniquely together. So thank you to all the men and women, down through the years, since 1914, for your lives given in service to your country, and to keeping us, truly the land of the free.....Lest we Forget. Ann Petty





Stan White pictured with his daughter Detective Senior Constable Mary White at their 2020 Anzac Day tribute



Left: Janet Bates' grandchildren Ava and Henry remember their Grandfather LAC Reg Barker. Above: Janet's wreath to RAAF No 1 Wireless Air Gunners School



Junior Vice-President Peter Schoutens pictured at his tribute



ANZAC DAY  
*Left us Forget*

Thank you to all members that did their bit to pause and remember on this Anzac Day and thank you to members who sent in the photos for this issue of our newsletter thus providing some photographic record of how our branch of the Air Force Association remembered on this very different Anzac Day.



**Above Left :** Member Phillip Farnell with wife Patty at the entrance drive to their Wellwood Wallace Walnut Farm. **Above Right :** Branch President Noel Hutchins at top of his drive. Yes ... same location, both the Farnell family and Noel reside on the walnut farm. Our tribute used the pre-recorded virtual Anzac service presented by Bruce Roberts. Sorry about poor quality images...very black at 6 am at Wallace, no urban or suburban lighting around here, *but a little ring-tailed possum joined us and watched our tribute.*



Stan and Kath Kellett's Anzac Tribute

Left and Right : Mother and daughter members Heather Browning & Alicia Sinbeck's driveway tribute & Gunfire Breakfast



Senior Librarian Stephen Brown with his Candle of Remembrance



## NO 5 AIRFIELD CONSTRUCTION SQUADRON ~ THE FLYING SHOVELS

A Ballarat lady by the name of Dinah Baker was redirected to me by Alistair Finlay, Editor of the Times News Group. Dinah wished to donate an RAAF WWII related document found in the possessions of her late father-in-Law. The Times News Group Editor also expressed an interest in having a photograph of any presentation to me of the document in order to run a story in the Ballarat Times paper.

While maintaining social distancing guidelines, arrangements were made to meet at our Airport Hut 48 rooms and Dinah brought along husband Terry, and Terry presented me with a most interesting historical document containing precise location and date details of the World War 2 work carried out by the RAAF's No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron, "The Flying Shovels", through New Guinea and Borneo during our "Battle for Australia" defensive war against the might of the Japanese forces.

This four foolscap page document was prepared in July 1945 by Flight Lieutenant T. Hennessy, Chief Security Officer of the 1st T.A.F., (Australia's First Tactical Air Force) and a copy given to each member of the squadron as a thank you and reminder record of where they had worked throughout New Guinea and Borneo, sometimes under Japanese bomber and fighter air attacks. He titled the document "Advancing the Bomber Line ~ Moresby to Borneo".

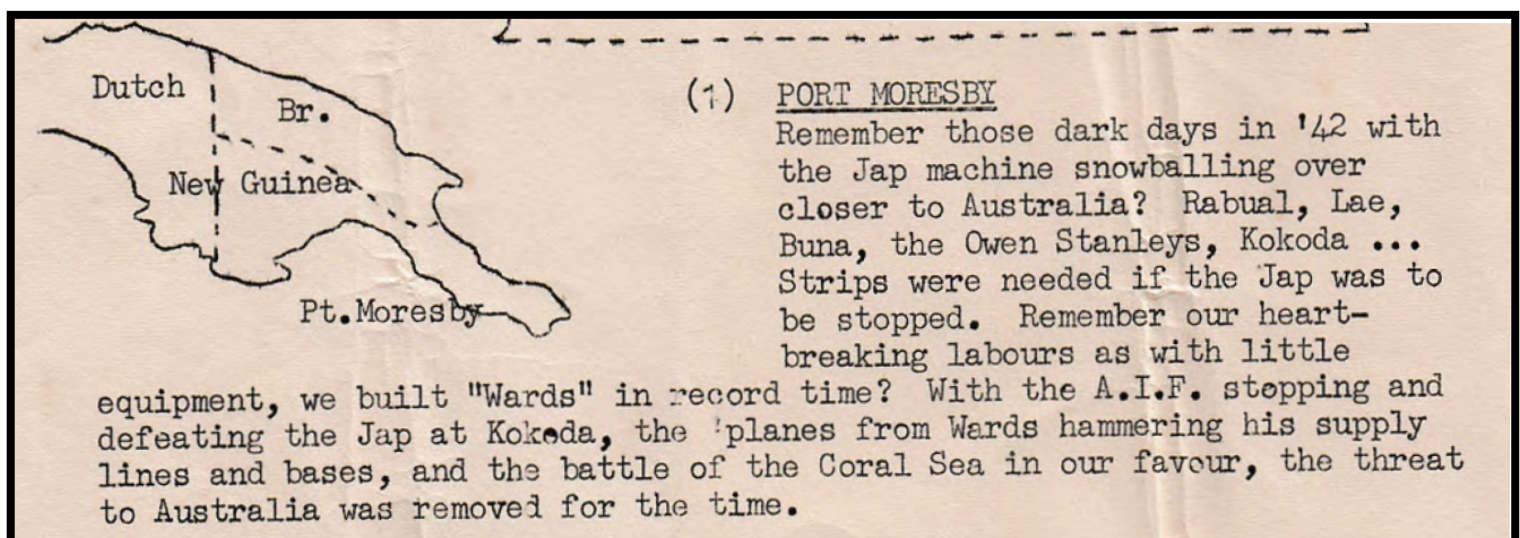
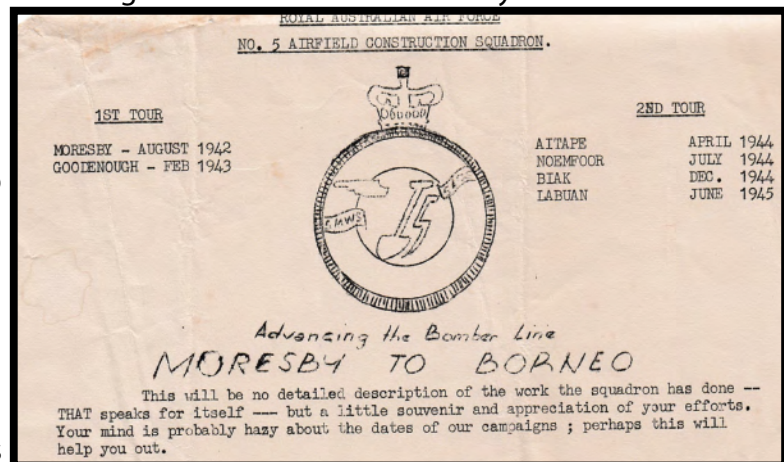
This documents was located among the belongings of Terry's father, World War 2 Veteran Corporal Charlie Baker who served with the RAAF from 26th June 1942 to 13th December 1945 and the presentation of these to the Air Force Association as a 2020 Anzac Day gift is most appropriate.

It was in 1942 that there became an urgent need for the creation of construction units capable of rapidly constructing advance military aerodromes or rehabilitating, improving and extending those existing, so units initially titled "Mobile Works Squadrons" and subsequently re titled as "Airfield Construction Squadrons" were formed. The longest standing of these was No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron whose Unit Crest was "The Flying Shovels" and the Motto : "Always First", because they had to go in first and prepare the aerodrome facilities for use by the RAAF Operational Squadrons and the United States Air Force.

Here is an extract from page 1 :



While observing social distancing, Terry Baker (left) presents the document to Noel Hutchins



Page four of the document shows : *"Approved for publication, subject to restricted issue to members of No 5 Airfield Construction Squadron"*.

This is a most important document. While it is shown that a copy was to be given to each member of No 5 ACS, who knows how many, if any, have been deposited for historical archiving. There may be several, there may be none. While I have scanned a copy of the document for our records here, this original copy of Cpl Baker's does not belong here but should be preserved in a more appropriate location. I will be asking our State President Max McGregor and our National President Carl Schiller if one of them would take possession and have it passed to the most appropriate person/group for archival retention. If another 5 ACS veteran's copy is not already held at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, then I think that is where Cpl Baker's copy should go. Terry and Dinah should be made aware as to where Charlie's copy is subsequently deposited. There are also some photographs and two 'flyers' in 'pidgin' or 'Tok Pisin', obviously dropped by the allies, (which I cannot translate), one bearing the Australian Coat of Arms and the other British.

While this document is interesting to me as an historical WWII RAAF document, it is also of interest for other reasons. As President of our Branch of the Air Force Association I have advocated for and introduced an annual Battle for Australia Commemorative event to be held at the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial and the RAAF's Airfield Construction Squadrons certainly played a big part in our ultimate victory over the Japanese. This year's commemoration will be held at 11 am on Sunday 30th August, and will be followed in the afternoon by a "Battle for Australia Afternoon Tea Dance".

It is also interesting to me as I served with No 5ACS as a 20/21 yo in 1960/61 in Darwin and loved our Flying Shovels Crest. The 'Plant Operator types' that I served with there were the roughest, toughest, hard drinking airmen that I ever met during my 20 years service. (NH, Pres.)

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**TELEPHONE TUESDAY** Tuesday 5th May would, under normal circumstances, be our May Social Lucheon Meeting. But of course, under our current situation that cannot be. So let us make that day **Telephone Tuesday**, a day when you make a few telephone calls to other members of our Branch. Just call up and say hello and see how other members are coping. In fact let us make **every Tuesday, Telephone Tuesday**. If any member feels in need to chat with somebody, the phone contact numbers for myself, Secretary Rob Petty and our Chaplain Keith Lanyon are on the top of page 1. If any member would like the contact number for any other member/members so that they can call them, just let me know. (NH, Pres)

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**Quick Quiz...Send me your answers & I will let you know how you go. (Answers in next months newsletter).**  
(NH, Pres.)

1. **Popular name given to the C47 Dakota Aircraft.**
2. **During WW2 Australians first inflicted defeat on the Japanese Army at ?**
3. **Later to be Australian Prime Minister, who crashed several fighters during WW2 and was badly burnt.**
4. **The rifle that replaced the .303 in the RAAF ? ( full name, not abbreviation).**
5. **The aircraft that replaced the Sabre for service with the RAAF in the 1960's.**
6. **What was the name of the Australian Navy Aircraft Carrier that served in Vietnam.**
7. **For how many years was Australia involved in the Vietnam war?**
8. **Full name of No 1 WAG who completed Course No 2 and is a member of our branch of the AFA.**
9. **RAAF Base WAGGA is located in what area of that town?**
10. **In the early days of settlement, a fort was built on Pinchgut Island in Botany Bay, to deter which country?**

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Quiet clearly our scheduled **MAY BUS TRIP** is further postponed to a later date to be fixed...**it will happen.**

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**1wags.org.au** Our hardworking 1wags website co-ordinator Janet Bates is still hard at it and is currently working with the web-developer to include a separate page listing those 1wags who became pow's during WW2. Janet is also spending time on the facebook page getting that fired up. If you have not yet been onto the site and the facebook page...have a look. As a result of the existence of our 1wags website there is interest from around the world. Janet has been contacted by the Bomber Command Association in Australia and has forwarded an excellent 1wags history article to their newsletter editor Geoff Raebel. For members who receive their newsletter by email, Janet's article will form pages 5, 6 and 7 of the newsletter. Due to printing costs and bulkiness for postage, those pages will not be included in the printed issue. (NH, Pres)



## NO. 1 WIRELESS AIR GUNNERS SCHOOL BALLARAT 1940-1945

Please Visit Our Newly Launched Website [www.1wags.org.au](http://www.1wags.org.au)

### THE EMPIRE TRAINING SCHEME

1wags.org.au No 1 Wireless Air Gunnery School [W.A.G.S] Ballarat was established on the 22nd April 1940 as part of the Empire Training Scheme. Its purpose was to train Wireless Operators and Air Gunners to form air crews for the RAF in their air war in Europe. Of the Australian EATS graduates, 13,000 served in RAF Bomber Command's strategic air offensive against Germany and Italy. Of these, 3486 lost their lives in skies over Europe- more than half of the total of all RAAF personnel killed in action, and almost 20% of all Australian combat deaths in WW2.

### NO. 1 W.A.G.S - THE BASE AND THE BALLARAT COMMUNITY

No 1 W.A.G.S. Ballarat was not only important to the RAAF during WW2 but also to Ballarat as a community.

The first trainees arrived on the 29th April 1940 and were based at the Ballarat Showgrounds. Wing Commander Charles Osborne Fairbairn was in charge of the school as well as the overall welfare of these young men.

The initial intake into Course 1 was 80 Wireless Air Gunners with approximately another 80 men arriving each month. The trainees came from all walks of life, where former clerks mingled with farm-hands, tailors and boiler-makers. Accommodation at the Showgrounds was in the large galvanised iron pavilion, with its concrete floor. The men slept on palliasse covered bed-boards, but later they would have camp stretchers. As more recruits arrive at the base accommodation was to be tents until the school was transferred to the Ballarat aerodrome.

The purpose of the school was to train RAAF recruits in all aspects of wireless operating including sending and receiving messages by Morse Code, setting up wireless equipment and eventually operating these skills from an aircraft back to a ground base. The trainees were expected to reach a level of proficiency of 18 WPM [words per minute] and by 1944 this word speed increased to 25 WPM. . The course would take 24 weeks to complete with another 4 weeks at Air Gunners School at either Evans Head NSW, Port Pirie S.A. and Sale Vic.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

VIC0055

In the mid to late 1940's No. 1 W.A.G.S was moved from the showgrounds to the Ballarat aerodrome. Trainees were accommodated in purpose-built P-Type huts which weren't intended to be permanent structures. They were prefabricated and erected on other military bases around Australia in response to the urgent need for semi-permanent accommodation for service personnel. Bellman hangers were erected to house aircraft on the bases in Sale, Victoria. By 1945 over 6000 trainees had been through the school.

**1,182 trainees died in action or on active service.**

The base, at its peak, required the services of many staff members to ensure the trainees were adequately provided for. These included, Fitters, Clerks, Electricians, Aircraft Hands, Nurses, Guards, Service Police, Drill Instructors, Pay Clerks, Shoe Makers, Dentists, Canteen Stewards, Butchers, Telegraphists, Cooks, Store Keepers, Drivers, Carpenters, Welders, Coppersmiths,



Flight Riggers, Fabric Workers, Chaplains and more. The 1 W.A.G.S. Personnel Occurrence Reports 1940-1945 give a detailed account of the movements of staff as well as the trainees.

In October 1940 four Avro Anson aircraft arrived at the base to enable trainees to gain valuable practical experience in sending and receiving messages in planes. The

men sat in the rear seat behind the pilot from where they communicated with ground stations. The Anson's arrived in time for trainees on Course No. 1 to train in before graduating. As this was the first time some recruits had flown in an aircraft it was soon apparent which ones were able or not to handle flying conditions.

Other aircraft to be used at the school included Tiger Moths, Dragons, Douglas DC2's, Oxfords and Wackett Trainers. The Wackett Trainers were originally designed to train pilots. However, the aircraft proved to be 'under powered' and the 'engine unreliable' so they were used by Wireless operators to train in and practice their new-found Wireless communicating skills. The Douglas DC2's was large enough to be used as "flying classrooms" allowing a few trainees at a time to man the wireless equipment.



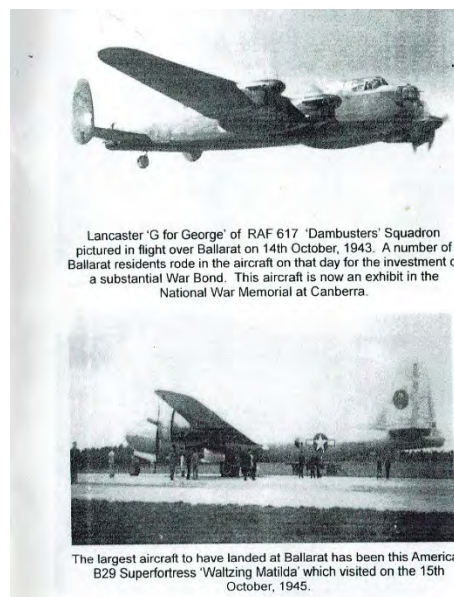
The needs of the War in the Pacific combined with the Invasion of Europe- the bombing of the German industrial heartland, saw 1 W.A.G.S training intensify to meet the ever-increasing demand for aircrew. At October 1943 1 W.A.G.S had 70 officers, 2 RAAF nursing sisters, 109 WAAAF, 1,568 airmen including 568 trainees, 4 civilian instructors and 7 civilian labourers. Aircraft consisted of 35 Wacketts, 7 DH 84 Dragons, 24 Avro Anson's and a lone Tiger Moth.

Ballarat became known for the

hospitality it showed to servicemen from all military units, including hosting for several months in 1943 several thousand US Marines. These troops were camped in the city on rest and recuperation from the Battle of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

The relationship between 1 W.A.G.S and the Ballarat Community also continued to thrive as the base grew in strength. There were many ways that the City of Ballarat and the RAAF base supported each other - fund-raising events, picture evenings, concerts, marches and Christmas dinners for trainees. A highlight in April 1945 was a visit by the Avro Lancaster 'G for George' in support of a Victory Loan Rally with a reward of a flight in it for anyone who subscribed over 100 pounds. A total of 9,300 pounds was raised.

With the development of Radar No. 1 W.A.G.S provided a new course for Navigators with a 'Wireless' qualification and together with Avro Anson's equipped with Air to Surface Vessel [ASV] radar, the Wireless Operator category was replaced with that of 'Signaller'. On the 20th November 1944 the Radar Training Wing was established and, on the 22nd March 1945, 'Signaller' half wings were awarded to 57 graduates. The last course for Wireless Operators was in April 1945.



Lancaster 'G for George' of RAF 617 'Dambusters' Squadron pictured in flight over Ballarat on 14th October, 1943. A number of Ballarat residents rode in the aircraft on that day for the investment of a substantial War Bond. This aircraft is now an exhibit in the National War Memorial at Canberra.

The largest aircraft to have landed at Ballarat has been this American B29 Superfortress 'Waltzing Matilda' which visited on the 15th October, 1945.



In total there were 58 Wireless Air Gunner Courses and 12 Navigator Courses conducted at the Ballarat base. By 1944 several trainees transferred to 1 W.A.G.S. from No. 2 W.A.G.S. in Parkes N.S.W and No. 3 W.A.G.S. in Maryborough QLD. after they had closed.

With the introduction into RAAF service of the long-range B24 Consolidated Liberator bomber, three new courses were required: radar courses for navigators, air bombers and wireless operators.

In May 1945 No. 1 W.A.G.S was put on a 'general stand-down' to observe victory in Europe- VE Day. By June 1945 all Wireless Operator training had ceased. Over 5,000 trainees had passed through the school with 1,500 being trained as straight Air Gunners.

#### **AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION BALLARAT BRANCH – President Mr Noel Hutchins**

The renovation of Hut 48 [Officers Mess] at the Ballarat Aerodrome was officially opened in 2019 by guest speaker Warrant Officer Jack Bell who completed COURSE 2 at 1 W.A.G.S. Jack served with No. 216 Sqn RAF. The Squadron flew Bristol Bombays, a medium sized transport aircraft, and moved stores, spare parts, medical supplies and personnel all over Egypt, Libya. Jack and his crew were shot down over Libya with the surviving crew taken Prisoners of War by the Germans. Jack's story is Featured on the 1 W.A.G.S. website [www.1wags.org.au](http://www.1wags.org.au) ..... Janet Bates - Website Coordinator.



Before restoration



After restoration



L to R: Branch Secretary Rob Petty and President Noel Hutchins look on as WW2 1WAG Jack Bell addresses the official opening attendance.



1WAGS courses and Navigator course lists on display in the 1 WAGS memorabilia area.