



South Australian Division

President's Report #8 2019

Meetings and Functions. Mess lunch 17th; ESO Consortium, P&G RSL 18th; Parliament House meeting with Tony Piccolo, Bill Denny 19th; Full ESO Forum with Tony Piccolo and Peter Malinauskas Monday 22nd; RAAFA Mitcham and "Unley's Own" 27th Bn talk Friday 26th; Elizabeth/Salisbury luncheon 28th (missed RGH meeting); Army Concert for Legacy Sunday 4th; Funeral for C K Bruhn 5th August; AFA Board video-conference 7th; VWM Lunch at SACA 8th; John Monash Dinner 9th; DCG 14th; VP Day 15th; Mental Health Seminar RSL Care Myrtlebank 16th.

The meeting on the 18th was to agree on the form of a **letter to Minister for VA, Darren Chester**, outlining our concerns over several of the recommendations from the Productivity Commission report, now before the Government. The final draft of this letter has been circulated to Council members. Copies were sent also to other relevant parliamentarians, Ministers and to Veterans SA. This letter, signed by leaders of 12 ESOs in SA, but drafted by Bill Denny and Bill Hignett, has criticised several of the PC recommendations. Two groups were highlighted. We objected to recommending replacement of the DVA with a Veterans' Service Commission, and to subsequent related recommendations. Criticism of the VRB was also rejected, noting that the scoping study on Advocacy (Cornall) had strongly supported retaining the VRB in its current form. The letter also criticised the PC's perceived problems with the Gold Card. It had clearly not understood that the Gold card was designed to replace the Repatriation Hospital system of veteran health service provision.

The opposition ESO Forum was another chance for ESO concerns to be taken up by the opposition. Its leader, Mr Peter Malinauskas, suggested that his purpose was not just point scoring at Budget estimates but to develop good policies for re-election. He was clearly enthusiastic about the problem of employment for those "transitioning" from the ADF. When asked about closure of the Repat he was almost wistful; regretting its closure (his father had died at its Hospice); but determined to ask why the Government had not fulfilled its pre-election promises, for example to return surgical services. The previous Friday Bill Denny and I had met Piccolo at Parliament House to ensure that the subsequent agenda included the problems of "gap" payments, transport e.g. at the TPG, and the proposed "Veteran Hub" at Daw Park (P&G RSL Veteran support Centre).

The Lunch with the **Elizabeth/Salisbury** branch was generous and enjoyable. I was prevented from speaking for too long by a score or more Ukelele strummers and singers. Its President Doug Waters and Lee Bowes were presented Distinguished Service Awards. I was impressed that one wall was occupied by framed photographs and documents commemorating the Epic Flight Centenary. It was sad to attend a funeral of, and to lose, yet another of those young men who had served in **Bomber Command. Keith Bruhn**, who recently received his decoration as Chevalier de la Legion d'honneur, was clearly a retiring and humble man. He had given his oral history to an official unit from the UK recording the service of surviving Bomber Command veterans. Through reading that testimony (on-line), some of his nearly 30 descendants learnt of his adventures for the first time. Returning, as a Navigator, from a raid in a 467 SQN Lancaster whose navigation was destroyed and one engine, later two, were shot up, he guided his pilot by a star. They bailed out a few kilometres from home when a wing burst into flames. I was one of just three ex-service folk who attended. He had not wanted publicity, so the funeral notice followed the service. Sad. But I was privileged to attend and was thanked for doing so.

The AFA Board meeting discussed the Open Letter regarding project High Eagle and Heads of Agreement, as drafted and circulated to Council members. The JBSG was explained as the Joint Board Steering Group, which will steer our way towards harmonisation (SA Rep Greg Weller). I informed the Board of our VP Day commemoration planned for the following week, and of the SA response to the Productivity Commission report, criticising its attack on the Gold card and of the DVA and VRB. An event will be planned on the 26th of February 2020 to mark the centenary of the genesis of our Association. It may be in Canberra rather than Melbourne if dignitaries such as the



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CAF are to attend. Should there be any problems identified progressing High Eagle we are invited to write to the National President.

Defence Consultative Group. I attended this meeting as deputy for Bob Macintosh. RSL President Cheryl Cates attended, an important precedent. The meeting noted the timely response and critique of the productivity Commission report from the "Consortium of ESOs". This response has been praised by the Minister. The roles and functions of the DCG are under review (Weller and Chair O'Hanlon). Member of the Defence Community Organisation gave an impressive presentation on the improved programs supporting those "transitioning" from the AD, including the preparation for civilian employment. Those medically or administratively discharged remain the difficult, and vulnerable, group.

Victory in the Pacific (VP) Day. The organisation for this, a "first off" was superbly orchestrated by Greg Weller and RAAF EDN. Presentations by COs of both 11 and 24 Squadrons reminded us of the WW2 contributions to the Pacific War effort by those Units, and of the sacrifices suffered. The two individual South Australian casualties presented were of PLTOFF Ted Quinn in the mission that might have completed his tour, and FLTSGT Arnold Lockyear, Aboriginal Airman, executed by his captors. There had been disappointing delay in responses. However, there was a good attendance, including six WW2 veterans. It was particularly disappointing that Dudley Mitchell, whose enthusiasm for a VP commemoration engendered this event, was in hospital and unable to attend. Annette, David Lyas and the Mess Committee are to be commended, together with RAAF Edinburgh participants. Veterans SA had included publicity in its regular email circulars. It will be expected to manage this event next year, the 75th Anniversary

The Virtual War Memorial. The fund-raising luncheon was well attended, the donated auction prizes well supported, and all presentations were excellent. Three young people spoke well of their VWM experience and Western Front tours. History teachers and Education Minister, the Hon John Gardner, praised the VWM as a resource. Brendan Nelson sent a video presentation, using once again his prop of a photograph of the first section, A Platoon, A Coy 10 Bn. He spoke of two men in it: Tom White, KIA 25/4/15, rowing ashore, and A S Blackburn VC. Its Section leader Sgt J R Gordon MC was later an "Ace" in the AFC. I sat with a 9RAR group, not with Legacy.
Robert Black August 2019.