



## South Australian Division

### President's Report to Council 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.

**Meetings and Functions.** AFA Board, 17<sup>th</sup>; Mess lunch cancelled 18<sup>th</sup>; Mitcham branch meeting cancelled 20<sup>th</sup>; (Vietnam disabled Veterans' Association AGM cancelled, 21<sup>st</sup> WR); Mitcham committee 27<sup>th</sup>; Zoom meeting with Blair Boyer, opposition spokesman 30<sup>th</sup>; AF2021 vidcon 2<sup>nd</sup> of December; R Ae Soc Smith dinner with Premier and Governor 5<sup>th</sup>; VHAC 7<sup>th</sup>; Insurance review ? 9<sup>th</sup>; Mitcham Yuletide meeting with AF 2021 presentation by Greg Weller 11<sup>th</sup>; SADFO Farewell on the 9<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> postponed; AFA Board 15<sup>th</sup>; Xmas CESM lunch 16<sup>th</sup>.

**The AFA Board National** "met" by vidcon the day after our last Council meeting and will meet again tomorrow. Among matters for discussion have been: **Wings**, its production, profitability, future distribution (free); ESORT agenda items concerning the problems associated with "transition" and the Govt responses to it, and suicide; review of dental services accessed by the Gold or White Card; the confidentiality of Board Minutes; cancellation of the "Magpie 91" fly-past and VVAA meeting on Phillip Island in lieu; its interest as to how ACNC views our **Constitution** amendments, as it (Peter McDermott) prepares to draft a new one for AFA National; and the NSW President. There will probably not be a combined AFA Board/JBSG meeting in Canberra next year on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, so Greg and I will be available for local events in SA.

The **Joint Transition Authority**, JTA, as recommended by the Productivity Commission, PC, report has been established, Director BRIG Wayne Stoddard, in People's Capability section (MAJGEN Natasha Fox) and funded in the Budget.

The sudden **COVID-19 lockdown** commencing the day we last met resulted in a few cancellations, including a mess lunch and a branch meeting at Mitcham. That meeting was to hear/see Greg's AF 2021 presentation. Fortunately for all he delivered it at the branch's traditional, though drastically amended, "Yuletide" event. It was held at the Colonel Light Gardens RSL sub-branch with a lunch that would have been impractical at Mitcham. This co-operation and assistance from CLG President Hank Dirksen BM is greatly appreciated.

Warwick Raymont was to have attended a Dinner/AGM with our Vietnamese kindred organisation on the 21<sup>st</sup>. It was cancelled later. Perhaps the other Vietnamese ESOs' meetings have also been casualties of the pandemic.

The Zoom meeting with **Blair Boyer** and a dozen or more ESO reps included several important, and in some cases controversial, matters.

One was the **Brereton report**. It was also discussed at the VHAC. Many speakers have felt that official comments had been unhelpful, most were keen to wait and see what happens: whether prosecutions will be successful; whether those unrelated to allegations had been tainted by association, and whether reactions eg withdrawal of the Unit citation from was fair. As it is such a multifaceted matter, of which my personal knowledge is and will remain incomplete, I have felt disinclined to comment on behalf of the AFA. But psychological and



## South Australian Division

Mental Health support has been offered (Secretary DVA, DC DVA, Open Arms) and we should be aware that those affected will include RAAF veterans who may need our support.

The meeting discussed the fact that the Premier's Town Hall event was unimpressive in its focus, not on veterans but on homelessness. Yet the post-budget questioning had exposed (as alerted to us by Bill Hignett) the fact that the **SA veteran employment program** had failed, as a result of which it was excised from the budget! Later it was withdrawn from the website. I mentioned the JTA (slow) developments. I also expressed my (unofficial) view that referring to SA's latest cases of COVID-19 as "The Parafield cluster" is misleading, inaccurate and potentially offensive to the citizens of Parafield. (Blair's electorate is close!) It was an agenda item.

**The proposed farewell function** for retiring SADFO, Air Commodore Brendan Rogers CSC CSM, was reluctantly postponed after Annette, Greg and I had prepared a guest list. It is intended that this function (if not COVID cancelled again) will be rescheduled for the 18<sup>th</sup> of January. It will follow our next Council meeting, to be held, if agreeable in the afternoon. By then Air Commodore Bender will have arrived and Air Commodore Rogers will have become a civilian in our midst.

The Royal Aeronautical Society annual **Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith Dinner** on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December was held at the Convention Centre in the presence of His Excellency the Governor and the Premier Hon Steven Marshall. Both the Premier and Greg gave excellent speeches on SA's future and significant past in aviation and the events that next year will commemorate the centenary of the formation of the RAAF. Greg did not allow that evening to pass without mentioning that Sir Richard Williams's memorial sculpture for Moonta required funding. The ears of industry, one hopes, were listening.

Dr Gordon Cable AM, formerly of the Institute of Aviation Medicine, Edinburgh, addressed the Naval Military and Air Force Club at its equivalent dinner on the 10<sup>th</sup>. His subject was "Aerospace Medicine".

**Board Subcommittees.** I am very pleased to see that Lawrence Ng and Greg Weller have prepared excellent Terms of Reference for the Finance and Governance subcommittees. My ToR for the By-laws subcommittee is more modestly expressed. I believe that our By-laws, an initiative identified during our Constitutional review, will evolve over time as determined by Council.

The anticipated **Instrument of Agreement** for Annette's Employment is hopefully one that we can now endorse. It is a surprise that we got along so well without one, but its absence was potentially damaging, as reported in July. Some of the previous drafts reflected views around our relationship with the CESM that I do not share. That relationship is important for us all to consider as we hopefully ratify this document. If accepted it will become a prelude to negotiating a new MOU with the CESM.

At the beginning of our meeting we are to hear from **SQNLDR Robyn Evans**, a Member Support Group Officer at Edinburgh. She will inform us of its role with Defence Force



## South Australian Division

members and perhaps particularly in the process of transition to civilian life. She may talk on how it works in relation to other agencies such as DCO, the Families of Veterans, the Military Transition Officers, whether it will become involved with the JTA as it evolves, and indeed with ESOs such as ourselves. Another is the **Defence Force Welfare Association**, DFWA, a worthy group with an active and communicative National President Kell Ryan, a member of ESORT and ADSO. It was through the DFWA that I became aware of the problem being tackled by Robyn and Leah. I was not asked to do anything; yet criticised for not “stepping up”. Perhaps at another time we might have someone from DFWA address us. Both VP Dave Helman and past Councillor Lee Bowes are active in SA with DFWA.

**VHAC meeting** on the 7<sup>th</sup> included discussion on the Brereton report (v.s.), the naming recommendations for buildings, rooms, walkways etc at the Repat precinct, the Veterans’ Wellbeing Centre steering committee and the “Interim **Government response to the PC report ‘A better way to support Veterans’** “, dated October 2020.

It is pleasing that the Government will not implement some of the **PC recommendations**: restrictions to Gold card eligibility; an annual “insurance” levy on Defence; replacement of the DVA. It has commenced the JTA, with Director BRIG Stoddard under the Peoples’ Capability group (MAJGEN Fox), formalised Defence responsibility to ADF members, recommended more reports, reviews and research/data; and there is a great emphasis on Mental Health and veteran suicide. A Veteran Family Advocate, Mrs Gwen Cherne, has been appointed and a “Prime Minister’s Employment Program” initiated (?). It is disappointing to me that legislative harmonisation with respect to SoPs and appeal pathways have not been implemented but will be “considered in incremental steps over time.”

I shall defer to Greg to report on **AF2021**. Meetings for an hour each month have progressed many ideas and dates are starting to firm up. There is very wide enthusiasm within the community for events planned in 2021. With respect to the shortfall of funds to pay for the proposed **Sir Richard Williams Park Sculpture**, I would like the Council to debate whether we will make Donation to the Moonta fund, and if so, how much.

Robert Black

President AFA SA 14<sup>th</sup> of December 2020.