



## South Australian Division

### President's report to Division Council, Monday 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2021.

**Meetings and Functions.** 17<sup>th</sup> of August meeting with War Widows' Guild; 18<sup>th</sup> CESM lunch; 19<sup>th</sup> visit to Graham Leicester; 20<sup>th</sup> Mitcham branch meeting, DVD; 23<sup>rd</sup> Legacy meeting; 25<sup>th</sup> CAF presentation to veteran, Gawler RSL; 27<sup>th</sup> Mallala visit, afternoon meeting re TTD; 30<sup>th</sup> VHAC meeting to farewell chairman; 1<sup>st</sup> of September CAF presentation to veteran, Brighton; 2<sup>nd</sup> AFA Board meeting; 3<sup>rd</sup> Mallala meeting 11 am, Premier's farewell dinner for Governor; 6.30 pm; 5<sup>th</sup> Dardanelles Cenotaph (WR); 6<sup>th</sup> RUSI lunch meeting; 7<sup>th</sup> Mallala Commemorative Services 10am and 11 am; 8<sup>th</sup> AF 2021 meeting; 10<sup>th</sup> Encounter bay commemoration for Bomber Command veteran; 11<sup>th</sup> "Battle of Britain" dinner; 12<sup>th</sup> UN Peacekeepers service TTD; 13<sup>th</sup> meeting at Repat Wellbeing centre; 13<sup>th</sup> Ardrossan funeral of Mitcham member (KG); 14<sup>th</sup> Mess lunch; 17<sup>th</sup> Mitcham branch meeting with speaker; 18<sup>th</sup> Battle of Britain Commemoration Service, Air Force Memorial.

On the 17<sup>th</sup> I was invited by Mrs Jan Milham, State President of the **War Widows Guild**, which recently changed its name to **Australian War Widows**, to morning tea. I felt honoured to join the gathering to commemorate the life and to mourn the death of long serving Secretary Colleen Fowler and to talk with Colleen's family.

Next day I enjoyed both the CESM lunch and an excellent talk by Christine Goodfellow, state President of another important women's organisation, the **Partners of Veterans' Association**. I congratulated Chris on her recently awarded OAM. Actually I believe that the PVA includes male members. Kabul fell to the Taliban that day.

Graham Leicester is the son of David DFC and bar OAM L deH, Bomber Command and Pathfinder veteran who has asked Legacy to become involved with his disabled son. Graham, who is a passionate Panther fan, will be pleased with SANFL results. Regrettably David's health has seriously deteriorated since I spoke to him last and he attended the Bomber Command Commemoration, but see below.

**Mitcham** has resumed regular branch meetings. Attendance has not exceeded 20 since the Covid lid was lifted. But it is rising. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of September we have asked Dr Rachel Swift to speak on her life as a medical researcher and epidemiologist. She is also a Rhodes scholar and the Liberal candidate for Boothby but has been asked to avoid politics. Indeed, broaching that



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controversial subject resulted in heated acrimony at a recent Friday “Sundowner”.

**Centenarian Veterans.** Hugh Bower is another veteran sharing his centenary with the RAAF. He served in 36 SQN and met its current CO at the very hospitable Gawler RSL on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Greg had organised the CAF presentation of medallions and framed certificate. He also received a copy of “SA Eagles” from me and his second wife promised to read it to him.

There was a second veteran centenarian to receive similar gifts the following week. John Roach and his family were visited at his Brighton Aged care facility on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. WGCDR Jones and WOFF Scott Brown joined me on this occasion. His wife and another ex-WAAF proved to be lively and interesting conversationalists.

Greg Weller and Kevin Gogler also visited an ex-WAAF centenarian during this month for a third presentation, at Coromandel Valley.

The “Blue Jeans” virtual meeting of the **AFA Board**, on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, was non-controversial. It was agreed that the Transition seminars, as presently conducted, are disappointing and unsatisfactory. It sympathised with Dave Pyatt’s frustration when attempting to represent us recently. Since that meeting the President has requested feedback on the current debate between Minister Tudge, and revisionary curricular authorities wishing to “contest” the Anzac Day story. RSL and ADSO media releases have been circulated,

**The Premier’s Farewell Dinner** for our gracious Vice-Regal couple was a generous and well attended affair at the Convention Centre. Speeches were laudatory and witty. My table companions, with Tania, included a Mayor and a Pakistani couple who work for the Government. Mrs Le left the official table to greet us personally. I shall attend another farewell dinner after the Legacy AGM on Thursday the 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Warwick Raymont represented us at the **Dardanelles Cenotaph** service on the 5<sup>th</sup>. Veterans SA would appear to have asked Legacy to host it. The Cenotaph is Australia’s oldest WW1 monument, funded by South Australian women and unveiled in September 1915 while the Gallipoli campaign continued. Neither “Gallipoli” nor “Anzac” is to be seen on it.

The two commemorative services at **Mallala** on the 7<sup>th</sup> were a great success, thanks to Greg’s organisation and to the diligence of a local RSL/Community



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group, represented at the AF2021 committee by Laura Parsons. The RAAF base (1941 to 1960) trained thousands of aviators including Secretary Warwick Raymont and Bomber Command veteran Ern Milde, both of whom attended. Two other veterans, Lyall Ellers and Ray Merrill were also present with local council representatives and State and Commonwealth parliamentarians. Senator Faulkner, AIRCDRE Bender, Mallala RSL President Ray Coleman and I were privileged to place poppies beside 12 headstones in a superbly well-kept local **War Grave cemetery**. The 12, who were killed there in training are of 39, most of whose bodies lie elsewhere. It was fitting to have RAAF Chaplain Sharene Fechner lead us. The second ceremony was in the town at a plaque opened in the 1950s by retired AIRCDRE Lyall Klaffer AFC OAM, Mitcham member, whose urgent medical procedure prevented his attendance. At the lunch later the RAAF Ensign was presented to Ray Coleman by AIRCDRE Bender. There is a notable recognition of the RAAF, and the significance of the former base, within the RSL club rooms.

I was invited to attend a commemorative event at **Encounter Bay** and to recite the Ode on the 10<sup>th</sup>. Leslie Gilbert was a 466 SQN Halifax pilot who was not a member, nor an Adelaide resident. He tried gliding in his 80s; Bob Foreman was his instructor and gave a eulogy. He was also an excellent bowler and water colourist, as his self-portrait showed.

**A Battle of Britain Dinner** at the NMAF Club on the 11<sup>th</sup>, emphasized the contribution of women to the RAAF. It was, as it happened, the anniversary of the twin towers terrorist attack in USA. We look forward as I write to a more relevant commemoration on Saturday the 18<sup>th</sup>. I have been honoured with an invitation to a Dining in Night at RAAF Edinburgh on the 30<sup>th</sup> and have accepted with pleasure.

The annual UN Peacekeepers Service was held indoors on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The address by Mark Dickson recounted his service in Namibia in 1989.

We have learnt since a meeting with DEW and Veterans SA officers that the VAC has appointed a **TPG Steering Committee**. As a Strategic plan for the (Torrens Training Depot, Parade Ground and Memorial) Precinct has been manifestly lacking, this sounded like good news. But there will be no lessee or tenant representation, a disappointment. I met Bill Denny, Bill Hignett and Ian Smith at the Repat on the 13<sup>th</sup> to discuss this and other matters. We had intended to attempt a consensus submission. However, I and presumably



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others, have been asked to give a ten-minute presentation to the Steering Committee on the 27<sup>th</sup>. Our Council executive will meet to prepare our submission later this week. We hope to see the Terms of Reference before preparing our submission.

I have circulated to you all much information and my thoughts about the **Link Trainer** that lies idle downstairs and for which we pay rent. Despite repeated requests to two eventually identified responsible RAAF Wing Commanders we have never received any official advice as to what decision was made about the decommissioning of the many Link trainers, nor why it was made, when and by whom. I was surprised, therefore, to be invited to discuss this matter at a MS teams virtual meeting on Thursday the 16<sup>th</sup> with Bev Voigt (DEW), Chantelle Bohan (Veterans SA) and WGCDR Peter Callow. I shall report to Council verbally on the outcome of this meeting.

Stop Press. I have learnt and reported the recent death of heroic Bomber Command and Pathfinder veteran David Leicester DFC and bar OAM LdeH. One hopes that COVID-19 will not prevent a fittingly large attendance at his Centennial Park funeral.

Robert Black Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> of September 2021.