



South Australian Division

SA Division Report to Air Force Association AGM Melbourne, 5th of May 2022.

Membership. Numbers are steady. Our recruitment rate slightly exceeds our rate of attrition. But continual loss of WW2 stalwarts is disappointing. At 103 former Spitfire pilot Fred Riley was one whom we lost, just after the Air Force birthday, 31 March. when his biography was launched.

AF2021 and other Commemorations. Greg Weller deserves great praise for his leadership of both a wide ranging committee and of commemorative services and events across the State. Since last AGM we have enjoyed many memorable functions, including: Freedom of entry marches for 24 SQN (Adelaide, May) and 92 Wing (Salisbury, November); Moonta events with the Cornish Festival (May) and unveiling of the Sir Richard Williams sculpture (November); Port Pirie (June); Mallala (September); Torrens Parade Ground Commemorations for Indigenous veterans (May), Bomber Command (June), Battle of Britain (September), Remembrance Day and Darwin Bombing (February). The final event for the Centenary was the Air Force Birthday Commemoration on the 31st of March this year. It was much less Covid restricted than in the last two years, Unfortunately the host Air Commodore Ross Bender was a contact casualty. His members from RAAF Edinburgh nevertheless did us proud. The SA Aviator wines have been a great success (labels to be shown).

SA has a **new Government** since March. The State has had a Minister for Veterans Affairs for over a decade, and both a Veterans Advisory Council, VAC, and a Veterans Health Advisory Council. VHAC. The Public Service department responsible is Veterans SA, whose directorship and decisions have not always been appreciated by the veteran community. Premier Marshall was the relevant Minister before March. Advice from VAC or Veterans SA was heeded despite warnings from AFA and others. On the other hand the Shadow Minister had regular meetings (often virtual) with ESO groups including Consortium members (v.i) and took advice from those meetings. The shadow Minister was not, however, appointed Minister. Our new **Minister for Veterans Affairs** is the Hon Geoff Brock former Port Pirie Mayor and independent member for Stuart (most of the State). We have met him. He is no Labor party puppet. He will assess each matter on its merits. He announced that the Thailand project (v.i.) would go ahead in a communique the day after our meeting. An example of discordance between the VAC, Veterans SA and ESO plans occurred on the 31st of March. A Veterans SA staff member booked "The Mess", actually AFA leased space, for a VAC meeting on the same morning that the Air Force Anniversary commemoration was held on the Parade Ground.

SA also has a **new Governor**, HE Frances Adamson AC, a career diplomat. One of her first official functions was to unveil Sir Richard's sculpture at Moonta in November. She has since worn her uniform of Honorary Air Commodore to 24 SQN at two recent commemorative events (see Photos from newsletter).

Relationship with **Kindred Organisations.** We continue to enjoy cordial and co-operative relationships with other ESOs and organisations with shared interest. The informal but effective "Voice of the Veterans" group, the so-called **Consortium** of ESOs, continues to be active. It has submitted important advice and recommendations on such matters as: award of the National Emergency Medal to bushfire fighters; future funding for the Repat Veterans Wellbeing Centre and more recently on the omission of the name Thailand on pavement stones of the Anzac Centenary Walkway (2015). Despite assurances that this oversight might



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be corrected it did not happen. The former Premier and Minister for Veterans Affairs broke his promise so a postcard campaign resulted in an avalanche of 1500 cards reaching him by the date of the election that rejected him.

We have been looking into how some of those **organisations with shared interests** might be brought into a closer relationship. The 24SQN Association is represented on our Council but is not a branch. The South Australian Aviation Museum and the AFA have members who belong to both. Greg Weller and I are on its historical group. Its former secretary, Gary Petts, is now editor of the “AFA-SA Quarterly” newsletter, recently enhanced by our National President’s contribution. An informal group, “The Friends and Family of 460 Squadron”, has recently formed for occasional dinners. AFA donated to it a banner from a past Anzac Day march. It returned the compliment giving us a RAAF ensign acquired, via sons of a deceased veteran, through undisclosed means. More recently the Vietnam Air Force Veterans Association, which has invited an AFA office bearer to its annual commemorations, has considered how it might develop a closer link with us.

These considerations need further development. Corporate membership is not appropriate. However we have recently appointed two new **Honorary Members**. We had a most interesting year in SA in 2019 the Epic Flight Centenary. It depended on Greg Weller’s organisation and Committee chairmanship to a great extent. But one outside member of the committee was journalist **Lainie Anderson**, who had tracked the route of the flight from London to Australia with a Churchill Fellowship. She became the Ambassador for the EFC and wrote a book “Long Flight Home” from the point of view of Wally Shiers. She retains a passion about the flight and the **Vickers Vimy** Aircraft which is soon to have a new home for viewing at the Adelaide airport. Lainie has not yet received her Certificate for reasons of travel and SARS-Cov, 2.

The second award was presented on the 31st of March, at the evening reception, to **Robyn Knight** whose energetic effort contributed significantly to ensure the success of AF 2021. Robyn retired to Moonta, delved into genealogy and “discovered” the story of local lad Richard Williams which had been largely overlooked in the “Copper Triangle” region. Her talk at an annual Cornish Festival (Kernewek Lowendar) awakened local interest; community groups including VVA and RSL joined her in planning and our Association was pleased to assist in the fundraising for **Sir Richard’s memorial**, unveiled last November.

Vickers Vimy and Smith Memorabilia. The historic aircraft will soon have an air conditioned, temperature controlled new viewing platform after being moved at great expense with government grants. A permanent exhibition is proposed after much effort to restore items and collate memorabilia. We have not yet been invited to the opening but I attended a previous briefing. The AFA has a significant number of items of historical interest but we have yet to show them. A magneto and part of a propeller are in our possession, together with photographs and a miniature of the Sir Ross Smith statue in Cresswell Gardens. More recently our “librarian” Bill Chappell, who was awarded an OAM on Australia Day, discovered a photo album of Wally Shiers and five flags or banners marked 1920 commemorating the Vimy landing at Northfield. Each is signed by the four aviators. They will be inspected by a conservator, Fortunately these century old fabric artefacts were wrapped and unseen, protected from deterioration by sunlight.



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The future of AFA **occupancy of the Torrens Training Depot** is fairly secure. But the future of the whole precinct, connected to Memorials, the Parade Ground and linked to the Anzac centenary walk, the AWM, Boer War memorial, Women's Memorial gardens, Cross of Sacrifice and Simpson and his donkey, Health Services Memorial are all subject to a recent Steering Committee report and recommendations. We live in interesting times. The first recommendation, to call the whole parcel "The Torrens Commemorative Precinct", is acceptable. Nor are the other four particularly threatening. But we anticipate new occupants; Legacy in November.

SA Division Council Membership now includes four serving members of the RAAF.

Robert Black President Air Force Association, SA Division.