



## South Australian Division

### President's Report to Council Friday 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2022.

**Meetings and Attendances**, 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, RVNAFVA Luncheon, Pooraka; 27<sup>th</sup> Consortium meeting; 29<sup>th</sup> DEW Tenants' Meeting; Teleconference with Invictus Australia; pm Mitcham Committee; 1<sup>st</sup> of August meeting re Vietnam Veterans' commemoration 21<sup>st</sup> of August; 2-3 August AFA National Board meeting, Canberra; 4<sup>th</sup> Commemorative service for deceased veteran, Gawler RSL, funeral for Mitcham member (Kevin); 5<sup>th</sup> funeral at Burra for Bomber Command veteran (Warwick); 10<sup>th</sup> CESM Committee, visit to 100 yo WAAF veteran postponed; 12<sup>th</sup> VWMA lunch Adelaide Oval, visit to 100 yo veteran at War Vets' Home postponed; 15<sup>th</sup> VP Day, Thailand paver "unveiling"; 17<sup>th</sup> Mess lunch with Peacekeepers; 19<sup>th</sup> Mitcham branch meeting.

**RVN Air Force Veterans' Association, SA.** This thriving, busy and energetic association has invited us for many years to its annual luncheon, commemorating the RVNAF formation 68 years ago. Warwick and I both attended last month. Members wear military uniforms, banners are paraded, songs are sung led by a choir of 20 with male and female voices, and speeches made in two languages. Mine, in English, was enthusiastically received. At its height the RVNAF was the world's 6<sup>th</sup> largest with over 2,000 aircraft and 65 Squadrons. The food was excellent! There are 31 members who served during the Vietnam war. Are there as many South Australian RAAF Vietnam Veterans? Could this association become affiliated? Greg Weller asked whether RAAF members had ever been invited. It is an interesting question. SA Parliamentarians attend; But Hieu Van Le never did.

The meeting of several **Consortium** leaders was at the Veteran Wellbeing Centre, Daw Park Repat. It was to discuss the recent meetings with Minister Brock and the difficulty that might be experienced by suitable members accessing the online means of submitting an **"Expression of Interest"** in being appointed to the **VAC**. We were particularly concerned that even the Chair was asked to apply rather than being appointed, and that it is all being done through a civilian firm Stillwells. At the urging of Warwick and Greg I have applied. (I found a hurdle that prevented my online application; sent it direct to Minister Brock). I did so on the presumption that my successor as President will be found by October the 8<sup>th</sup>.

The **DEW Management meeting** on the 29<sup>th</sup> was well attended. We were represented by Warwick, myself (and Annette). It was a friendly meeting. Matters discussed included security, possible future changes to access cards/PINs; Lease renewals by this year's end (non threatening); the disruption in the move out by HTSA and entry of Legacy; and a second newsletter, to be anticipated. Following a grant from the previous Government a number of IT improvements are anticipated including TV/white board screens.

A short time later we had a teleconference with **Michael Hartung, Invictus Australia** and Mark Reidy about the use of rooms and Internet. It is clear that Invictus Australia is keen to use the room etc. for appropriate purposes and to pay accordingly. However no promise was made. Letters had previously been sent to both Michael and Paul Flynn, HRFG, asking each to inform us of their anticipated use of the rooms in question. Replies from both would be helpful for the Council to make a decision.

At the **Mitcham Committee** we were disappointed to receive the resignation of Vice-President Jeff Mustard, who will move to Townsville to assist with his family following his daughter's death. Bob and Jenny Macintosh's book "Living on a Wing and a Prayer" is to be



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launched on 11 September at Living Choice, Fullarton. Nathan Klinge, RSL Care SA's CEO, and a long standing VAC member, will be speaker at the branch meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> (this morning). The Mitcham Council has been approached regarding acts of petty vandalism and will install an automatic light. Staff from the council will meet members to discuss preservation of the club rooms, which it owns. There had been high fences and a locked gate until a few years ago when the Brownhill Creek surrounds were revegetated and developed.

**AFA Board Meeting in Canberra**, 2-3 August. The meeting's main focus was on the restructure of our "federation" model for the Association. In fact it is a Federation (central authority for a group of independent sub-units) for a Charitable Company, limited by guarantee. Although national President Carl Schiller CSM OAM, has hinted at the changes anticipated in both "Wings" and our Newsletter, much "explanatory: documentation" (to Board Directors) has been marked "Board in Confidence", so has not been previously discussed. I did, however, outline the matter very briefly in May.

A draft for a **revised Constitution** (amended in several places in Canberra on the 4<sup>th</sup>), is to be forwarded for open discussion. I do not find it offensive. But there will be a two committee structure at the central guidance level: an Advisory "Federal Council" with delegates from the seven Company Members (Divisions) and a Board of Directors with "special", that is presumably professional Director-type, skills. I wonder how many of our members (small m) have the post nominal qualification MICD, Member of the Institute of Company Directors.

Agenda items included reports (not very expansive) on an intended Foundation, the so called "Alumni" project; correspondence in support of recognition for RAAF transport to Vietnam (Operation "Trimdon"); veteran homelessness and suicide; and a Ministerial proposal for a Vietnam medallion for which little enthusiasm was expressed. I shall table illustrations for comment.

**Funerals.** We lost four WW2 veterans in the last month.

101 year old 36 SQN veteran **Hugh Bower** was recognised at the RSL Gawler where he had been a member and where several serving RAAF members had met him. He had enlisted the day that the squadron was formed and served as a Clerk until war's end. He then trained as an accountant formed a company, retired early, bought an ocean going ketch, married a second wife and with her formed a Company in Gawler aged 90. Greg Weller had presented him with a CAF certificate and gift last year.

**Frank Percival Crowe** was a member at Mitcham and served for several years on the branch committee. He was its first librarian following the gift from Hugh Kennare AM of an extensive Air Force library. Frank served as an Aircraft Hand in Australia, PNG and the Netherlands East Indies from 1943 to 1946 contracting Malaria. Kevin Gogler attended his funeral while I was at Gawler.

**Leonard Bence** was a pilot in 106 SQN RAF, Bomber Command, and had lived most of his life in Burra both before and after the war. He had not been an Association member and was "unknown" as a Bomber Command veteran until shortly before his death. Bill Denny and another had visited him a few months ago to get his oral history. Warwick drove to attend his funeral at St Mary's Anglican Church Burra. Please see Greg Weller's splendid Facebook profile, with contribution from David Lascelles.



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**Ralph Harding Holmes** was the last, and at 102 the second oldest, of our four recent WW2 veteran deaths. He lived in Laura but we never saw him at Mitcham where he had been a member. Almost certainly he was “enlisted” by Brian Hall OAM who was a country representative for BP and looked out for ex-RAAF veterans in his travels. He probably made more claims for Disability pensions than any other (367 in 1997) and got two signatures. The second was an application to become a RAAFA member at Mitcham. Warwick returned to his birthplace, Jamestown, and attended on our behalf last Friday the 12<sup>th</sup>. He met two daughters who were appreciative of the AFA recognition

Their brief obituaries will appear in our next AFA Quarterly newsletter. Frank’s and Ralph’s may be seen earlier in the Mitcham newsletter.

**Virtual War Memorial** lunch, Magarey room, SACA. The annual “Don’t forget me cobber!” fundraiser was another successful event. The Governor and Mr Buntin attended but did not stay for the auction. It raised approximately \$16,000. At our table a RAN veteran spent \$3k on 100 year old port and a barrel for more of the same. Apart from an address by Sir Peter Cosgrove and the VWMA Chairman we heard two excellent talks on women in War. Sandra Kearney, with an accent as Irish as her name spoke on the Unley women who, in WW1, supported the Red Cross in relation to the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion (“Unley’s own”). The latter was also important in developing what is now the War Veterans’ Home at Myrtlebank. Professor of Art history Dr Speck gave a splendid illustrated presentation of women and women artists in war. The grief and pathos was evident from their stories and works of art. I suspect that some attendants, who appeared more interested in their mobile phones, did not share my feminist views. It is an expensive lunch. But I wonder if the AFA might consider funding a ticket or two next year for deserving applicants.

**Thailand Pavers.** Ian Smith organised a remarkable event on D day, 15<sup>th</sup> of August in the presence of the Governor, Premier, parliamentarians of all shades, Defence Force members and a score or more RAAF Ubon veterans. 101 year old Keith “Chook” Fowler ex- 2/3rd machine gun Battalion former POW cut the ribbon. In his explanatory words on the service sheet Ian paid tribute to Bill Chappell and the Ubon veterans who were the first to raise the issue of the absence of “Thailand” on the pavement stones. They were also acknowledged twice in speeches by the Minister and MC. This issue (campaign) had been vigorously pursued by our Association but only achieved success after the Consortium combined forces united and there was a change of Government. There are approximately 80 South Australians buried in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, War Cemetery. Over 100 family members attended.

**Mitcham Branch meeting.** This morning’s meeting was addressed by Nathan Klinge, CEO of RSL Care SA. The War Veterans’ Home at Myrtlebank is now the home of many Mitcham members and the favoured destination for many others, He had hoped to host a CAF presentation to 100 year old Terry Lawrence on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup>. Greg and I would have attended, But Covid struck the War Vets’ Home as it has struck too many Residential Care facilities.

Robert Black Division President, Friday the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 2022.