



## South Australian Division

### President' Report to Council 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2021.

**Meetings and Functions.** AFA Board vidcon 16<sup>th</sup> of February; pm meeting with Bill Denny and Ian Smith re Thailand; Mess lunch 17<sup>th</sup>; RAAFA Mitcham and Darwin Defenders Day 19<sup>th</sup>; CAF presentation to 100 yo Mrs Howells 22<sup>nd</sup>; Premier's "morning tea" Drill Hall 24<sup>th</sup>; Urgent extra AFA Board meeting 25<sup>th</sup>; RUSI address from Senator Patrick 1<sup>st</sup> of March, pm VHAC; meeting, with Greg Weller and Bishop Denise Ferguson 2<sup>nd</sup>; AF 2021 telecon 3<sup>rd</sup>, visit by Mrs Mary Jose ; Loxton launch of "Full Circle", biography of Howard Hendrick DFC 14<sup>th</sup> of March.

**The AFA Board** has had two meetings by "Blue jeans" video conferencing. At its planned meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February the following matters were included for discussion: the need for Divisions to have delegates for the Joint Board Steering Group JBSG, and Community Engagement committee. We must be involved and supply both a delegate and a deputy. Greg Weller cannot take on everything especially in AF 2021. President Carl Schiller expressed enthusiasm to support the Moonta sculpture funding, asked all Divisions to contribute and would double up from the National Board. We learnt of an enquiry from the Defence Honours and Awards Tribunal as to interest in medallic or badge recognition of WIA and KIA. (This is also a matter being considered by the Consortium). Once more our Constitution was lauded but Board members were anxious to hear when it has ACNC Approval. I appraised the Board of SA's AF2021 program plans including the commemorative wines, the two new books by Peter Ingman and Greg Weller and the various community commemorations. I mentioned our, probably unique, SA Bangka Day Service of Remembrance.

The **urgent meeting** on the 25<sup>th</sup> was convened to discuss the ongoing lack of co-operation and collaboration by the NSW Division which was not represented at either meeting. The NSW President, recently awarded an OAM, had written an intemperate letter to CAF complaining about a fly-past cancellation. President Carl had apologised. But a letter would be sent reminding NSW of its need to show appropriate courtesy and respect.

The **Combined Mess** lunch on the 17<sup>th</sup> was treated to another Weller extravaganza on AF 2021. It impressed guests including those organising RUSI meetings, so he is booked for that group on the 29<sup>th</sup> of this month.

Chief of Air Force recognition of **Veterans turning 100** this centenary year. Greg Weller invited me to join him and a female RAAF WOFF to meet former WAAAF Mrs Mrs Betty Howells at a Grange aged care facility, with her family, as she turned 100. She received a most impressive framed Certificate and medallions from CAF. Her photogenic great granddaughter, LAC in uniform, had been released from duty and sent from Richmond for the occasion. An excellent Advertiser article with photo appeared a few days later. It is possible that a similar visit to Jamestown will be needed on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> when I shall be in Loxton.

**Darwin Defenders Day** 19<sup>th</sup> of February, has been commemorated at Salisbury in recent years but we in the Division have not been invited. I have attended the Repat previously. At the Mitcham branch meeting that day, the first since October, the Darwin Defenders flag was raised by Wal Beale, one of those qualified to be a member. Catastrophic events in that month in 1942, following Singapore's collapse, included the torpedo sinking of HMAS Perth and of the Vynner Brooke, followed by the Bangka atrocity on the 16<sup>th</sup>.



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The Veterans SA Premier's morning tea on the 24<sup>th</sup> had little structure and imparted minimal knowledge. But we did manage to encourage Defence Industry to think of supporting the Sir Richard Williams sculpture.

**Senator Patrick** is an independent SA Senator previously aligned with Nick Xenophon. He gave a somewhat disturbing presentation at the RUSI lunch meeting on the disconnect between Defence procurement processes and support of Australia's industry. He highlighted the problem with ongoing immense expenditure that may make future procurement decisions impossible. Martin Hamilton-Smith's recent Advertiser article would appear to confirm this view and emphasized the need for Australian ownership of the construction and maintenance of defence assets.

Greg and I with WOFF Scott Brown had a very cordial meeting with **Bishop Denise Ferguson** on Tuesday the 2<sup>nd</sup>. She is Assistant Bishop to Archbishop Geoffrey Smith. She comes from New Zealand where her husband served in the Army and both had "veteran" associated tasks. She is enthusiastic about the planned **Cathedral service** on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August, the "Royal" centenary. Scott Brown and Chaplain Barwise looked around the Cathedral, with us and considered placement of Unit Colours, Catafalque party etc. They also noted the RAAF Ensign, laid up in Air Force Week in 1949 alongside several other Guidons, Colours and Banners of SA Associations, Regiments and Battalions.

Conservator Mrs Mary Jose visited us to inspect **the Battle of Britain lace** on Wednesday the 3<sup>rd</sup> while Annette, Greg and I were taking a telecon with others on AF2021. That meeting will be dealt with in Greg's summary. Warwick looked after Mrs Jose who will send her report (and invoice) advising on the panel's care and management. She did not offer to value it, felt that its position was suitable but confirmed Warwick's observation last meeting that strip LEDs should replace fluorescent tubes. Annette sent a note to Bev Voigt of DEW. Such replacement, by LEDs of fluorescent lighting, is under consideration by the Department and will occur.

I have had very helpful advice and support from Bill Denny and Ian Smith in our quest to have **Thailand** recognised on the **Anzac memorial Walk** pavement. Shortly a letter to the Premier will be considered by members of Bill's Consortium. It is in its third draft and Bill Chappell is delighted with its wording. Since our meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February and discussion since I have written to two men in Thailand. Andrew Snow is a researcher and Terry Manttan General Manager of the Thai-Burma Railway Centre in Kanchanaburi. They have identified at least 80 names of men in that cemetery who served in SA units. We still have two living survivors of the Railway in SA.

**Howard Hendrick DFC OAM Leg Hon (Fr)** is a delightful 98 year-old ex-460 SQN Lancaster pilot. He has been a long-standing Mitcham branch member. When I rang him a decade ago he was not interested in claiming an increase in his disability Pension. He was still driving - and flying! He was not flying solo, certainly, but has only recently relinquished that licence. His daughter Margaret Davis whom I met at an ex-460 SQN informal dinner organised by Richard Munro, (refer to my February report) has written his biography "Full Circle". It will be launched at Loxton on the 14<sup>th</sup>. The "full circle" refers to his English born father became a "blocker" at Renmark after service in WW1; then Howard returned from the UK to Loxton as a post WW2 "blocker".

We are about to enter a busy phase of events and commemorations in this the **Centenary year of our Air Force**. I would ask all Councillors to do what you can to enhance the importance of our heritage and of our Association and encouraging others also to take part.



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Greg Weller and the AF2021 have set up an exciting programme Please get involved. Our first chance is on the 31<sup>st</sup>, just over two weeks away.

Robert Black

President, Air Force Association, SA. 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2021.