



South Australian Division

President's Report to SA Division Council 17th of May 2021.

Meetings and Functions. 18th of April, 10 am launch of Repat Veterans' Wellbeing Centre; 6 pm Macclesfield RSL Anzac Twilight Service; 21st CESM AGM and luncheon; 24th Legacy function, McLaren Flat; 25th Dawn Service at Repat, March ahead of RAAF, UN Peacekeepers lunch; 27th 10 am Zoom meeting with opposition spokesman, Blair Boyer; 1pm Veteran SA meeting at TTD on "Veteran support Ecosystem"; 2nd of May Coral Sea Battle commemorative service and luncheon; 3rd RUSI lunch, speaker Mark Matthews, Legacy EO; 5th, discussion with RSL, CESM, VWM re Veterans SA and meeting on the 11th; 7th 24 SQN Freedom of Entry parade and Lord Mayor reception; 8th VE Day; 11th and 12th AFA Board and AGM Canberra; 14th Coral and Balmoral Commemoration VVFA. Funerals of two Mitcham members, Legacy past President and two others. Feedback to AFA re Royal Commission on Veteran suicide.

The Health Minister Stephen Wade opened the **Wellbeing Centre** as a "one stop shop" for veterans. It will be in a "Health precinct" which at present deals with non-veteran related rehab, dementia, transition and radiology. Surgery has been promised. Its refurbishment together with the SPF Hall and future café has been funded by the Commonwealth which also funds "Open Arms". The P&G RSL veteran service will be there with "Soldier On" both voluntary. SA Health seems to claim credit; so too Nicolle Flint, Member for Boothby and Carolyn Power State Member for Elder.

The Macclesfield RSL hosted its annual service a week before Anzac Day as it has for decades. It was well conducted, involved local schools, young people, community figures and invited RAAF and AFA representatives. The RAAF centenary was well acknowledged. Images of those who did not return were projected, including Boer War Captain Samuel Grau Hübbe. His widow was a cousin of my paternal grandmother; later formed a private school at which my father and his sisters attended for their early education.

At the CESM AGM Lawrence Ng replaced Warwick Raymont as our appointment. There were no controversial matters. Effie was made a Life Member to acclamation. New Treasurer is Chris Luong. The luncheon was treated to an excellent presentation by Police Commissioner Grant Stevens. He dealt with the COVID problem, police exposure to claims of brutality and its low incidence in SA.



South Australian Division

Dawn Services had been subject to COVID restrictions, muddled media messages, variable council financial support and changes of venue. But the RSL sub-branches appear to have coped. The AFA and branches were well represented at several services in suburbs and at the National War Memorial North Terrace (Dave Helman). Warwick Raymont's excellent speech at Playford has been circulated. He emphasized the RAAF Centenary as did Ian Smith at the AWM.

The Anzac Day March had an impressive large "RAAF Centenary Guard" to lead Navy and Army this year, but it was not commented on in the "Advertiser". There were some who had been disappointed, even outraged, that Air Force Veterans did not also precede their Navy and Army colleagues. I was privileged to occupy a spot at the head of the Guard and invited others to join me. Dave, Warwick, John Gazeley took this up, with Ron Biddell propelled by his two RAAF sons. The pace was difficult but without marching bands we did not have to cope with music with differing tempo. At the AFA Board it was clear that there was wide interpretation of the policy "RAAF will lead". In Melbourne it was described as a shambles.

Blair Boyer's regular Zoom meeting allows us to hear problems and opinions from colleagues, other ESOs, RSL Care etc but its messages might be more helpful if a similar meeting was set up by our Minister for Veterans, the Premier. The agenda included Anzac Day newsletters, AF2021, the reversal, by Dutton, of the CDF suggestion to withdraw Unit citations from Afghanistan veterans, and Thailand pavers.

We sent a letter to Senator Fawcett expressing our disappointment that his newsletter omitted any reference to the RAAF Centenary.

The Veterans SA "Community Consultation", with speakers from SA Health, Adam Monkhouse, DEW, Bev Voigt and Catherine, was unhelpful and uninformative, muddled by having three separate Departments involved. It heightened the concerns of the three principal Leaseholders about the future of the proposed veterans' Hub/TTD/TPG/Drill Hall etc. A conference between AFA, RSL, VWM and CESM on the 5th of May later formulated a consensus and agenda suggestions for a later meeting with Ms Walsh on the 11th. Greg and Dave attended and will be asked to report on this meeting as I had been in Canberra.



South Australian Division

The Coral Sea Battle commemoration was again well organised by Navy and the Australian/American Association. An informal and inexpensive lunch followed. The Governor and Mrs Le attended along with other dignitaries and Senior Service Officers; excellent addresses were made by Commander Alastair Cooper and US Marine Corps LTCOL Mark Weinrich.

The RUSI lunch on the 3rd was addressed by Mark Matthews. He recounted his time as Military Attache in Fiji during another coup, but stayed for 15 years after retirement from the Army.

24 SQN Freedom of Entry parade and march on the 7th of May were followed by a Town Hall reception by Lord Mayor Ms Sandy Verschoor. It was an excellent event, well managed and organized, from the Governor's inspection on the TPG to the handover of the RAAF Ensign to the Lord Mayor at the Town Hall. The indigenous challenge, smoking ceremony and subsequent welcome to country were very well received initiatives. CO was WGCDR Alison Tinker. As our RSL President and Deputy Commissioner and Director, Veterans SA, are also women it was a great occasion for that gender, but the media missed it.

This had been another splendid initiative of the **AF2021** Committee with Greg Weller's profound influence. Other events are to follow soon. There are four days in Moonta this week (v.i.) and commemorative events in early June. The **Bomber Command** Commemoration will be here at the TPG on Saturday the 5th, followed by a formal dinner at the NMAF Club. On the 16th I have accepted an invitation to attend RSL organized events in **Port Pirie**, recognizing WW2 training, and the many lost lives, at number 2 Bombing and Gunnery School.

AFA Board meeting and AGM. The agenda included matters commented or reported on elsewhere, e.g. the RAAF centenary, Moonta sculpture, now fully funded, "Poppy Services", the Royal Commission, death notice costs and awards for WIA ("purple Heart") etc. I have previously forwarded letters and reports to Councillors, for example from the "Consortium". Other agenda items will require **further consideration by our Council** including the proposed **Foundation**, the **AFA Alumni**, "Linked-in", Community engagement and the JBSG to neither of which we contribute. I will be looking for volunteers. President Carl had given support to CAF on his suggestion, announced to gasps at a dinner on 31 March, that all those serving in the RAAF will be called "**aviators**". Support was not given by Board Directors. Carl also suggested a



South Australian Division

new tie, with military aircraft on it! Vice President Sharon Bown has resigned; replaced by Peter McDermott AM CSC.

Coral and Balmoral Commemoration at VVFA headquarters Marion on Sunday the 14th will be commented on orally.

Controversies associated with the Royal Commission into **Veteran suicide** were discussed at local and interstate meetings. Council members will have seen my circulated correspondence. I will be pleased to receive comments from any member, particularly if any of my expressed views are felt to be unhelpful or prejudicial. I would also appreciate any feedback on my correspondence with respect to awards for wounds and death in action, the “Poppy” service, the term “aviator” etc.

I have attended several **funerals** in the last month, almost all of veterans. Council members will have seen a paper from Victoria about a proposed universal AFA “**Poppy Service**”. It is an idea that has been floated previously and performed frequently interstate. We have not adopted it in SA but it may be used here by RSL. I would value feed-back, and further discussion. A few copies are available for study. At the AFA Board it was left to the discretion of Divisions as to what extent such services might be promoted and used. The majority of funeral directors, and celebrants at Centennial Park seem to be very familiar with the concepts as described in the “Poppy Service”. Councillors will have seen recent correspondence about a RAAF veteran whose service at Hamley Bridge will be assisted by RSL. It seems that families do not often think of asking for AFA assistance, or they may ask for it too late. I feel that we must “advertise” our availability and preparedness to assist in, for example, a eulogy, a chaplain, recitation of the Ode and the RAAF Ensign, even pall bearers. RAAF representation and assistance is more important on occasions. I do not see that provision of poppies is our role.

I shall leave for **Moonta** and other Copper triangle venues soon after this meeting to take part in four commemorative events at cemeteries at which the graves of RAAF ex- servicemen will be “dressed”. I shall remain in Moonta until Thursday to hear Robyn Knight’s address on Sir Richard Williams, but will be unable to stay for the remainder of the Kernewek Lowender, the Cornish Festival. That evening I have accepted an invitation to a formal dinner of the Royal Society of St George. I have a question for us to consider:

Will SAAM and 24SQN Association wish to become AFA Branches?



South Australian Division

Robert Black

State President, Monday May the 17th 2021.