454–459 SQUADRONS ASSOCIATION

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

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YOUR 2018 COMMITTEE

Patron	FLGOFF John MacMahon - 454
Hon. Secretary – Rick Capel	Nephew of Cam Stephen - 459
Treasurer – Michael Antonios	Son-in-law of Bill East - 459
Julie Parsons	Daughter of Jim McHale - 459
Pamela Antonios	Daughter of Bill East - 459
Jenny Huxley	Daughter of Bill East – 459
Jill Lord	Daughter of George Gray - 454

APRIL 2018 BULLETIN

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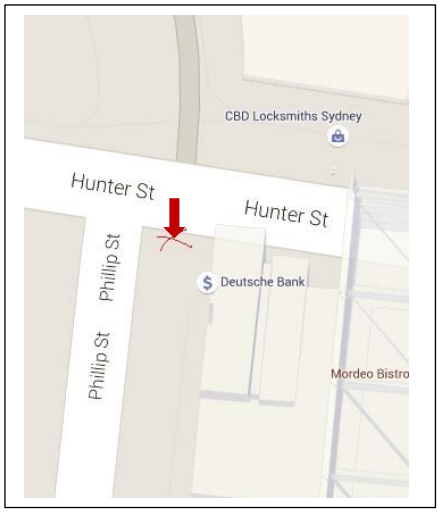
ANZAC DAY MARCH
WEDNESDAY, 25TH APRIL 2018

Leader: Flying Officer John 'Doover' MacMahon - 454 Squadron

8.30 am – RAAF 454-459 Squadrons FORM UP on the Corner of Hunter & Phillip streets, Sydney. Meet Hunter Street at the bottom of the Deutsche Bank. Across the road is the Chifley Plaza. Association Committee members will be there to assist John MacMahon and the Squadrons' banner will be raised. There will only be one march round, note, the March route will be same as 2017. Starting approx. 9 am.



Information provided by RSL: The Order of March - WWII Navy/WWII Army/ WWII Air Force-Navy/ Army/Air Force-Civilians in support of Australian Troops-Descendants of Australian Veterans-Commonwealth Troops-Allies.

ROUTE – general information for all participants of March

Due to the construction work in George Street for the light rail project, the March will commence at the intersection of Martin Place and Elizabeth Street, travel south on Elizabeth Street to Liverpool Street, where Marchers will wheel left for dispersal.

Website: http://rslnsw.org.au/commemoration/anzac

Descendants please remember to wear your deceased Veterans' medals on your **right** breast. Last year despite only having one surviving veteran, John MacMahon and his carer, descendants from the 454-459 Squadrons were able to march behind the banner. Please join us for the 2018 march – we look forward to seeing you there.

ANZAC DAY SYDNEY MARCH MAP 2017
Key
Band Chute
Participant Flow
Cenotaph
March Path
Veterans' Seating
Wheelchair Accessible Viewing Area
Contingent
1 Police Escort
2 Taxis And Buses
3 Australian National Flag Contingent
4 Mounted Police
5 March Leader
6 Senior ADF Officers
7 Victoria Cross Recipients
8 RSL of Australia (NSW Branch)
9 RSL Corps of Guards
10 Sth African Veterans Memorial Horse & Banner
11 WWI Veterans Memorial Horse
12 WWI Unit Flags
13 New Zealand Veterans
14 NSW Police
15 WWII Royal Australian Navy (incl Merchant Navy)
16 WWII Australian Army
17 WWII Royal Australian Air Force
18 Occupation Force (BCOF)
19 Fire & Rescue NSW
20 Post-WWII RAN Commander
21 Post-WWII Royal Australian Navy (RAN) (incl Merchant Navy)
22 State Rail & State Transit
23 Post-WWII Army Commander
24 Korean War
25 AATTV
26 Armour
27 Artillery
28 Engineers
29 Survey
30 Signals
31 Infantry
32 Special Forces
33 Army Aviation
34 Intelligence
35 RAEME
36 Chaplains
37 Transport
38 Medical
39 Dental
40 Ordnance
41 Catering
42 Military Police
43 Nursing
44 Psychology
45 WRAAC
46 United Nations & Peacekeeping Forces
47 Army Reserve
48 National Servicemen
49 Officer Training Unit
50 Post-WWII RAAF Commander
51 Post-WWII Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)
52 Post-WWII War Correspondents
53 Entertainers
54 SEATO
55 Australian Red Cross
56 Civilian Air Crews
57 Sydney Legacy
58 Descendants Of Boer War Veterans
59 Descendants Of WWI Veterans
60 Descendants Of WWII & Post WWII Veterans
61 UK & British Commonwealth Forces
62 Allied Troops
Bridge St
Young St
Bond St
Bent St
O'Connell St
Bligh St
Phillip St
George St
Hunter St
Martin Pl
Macquarie St
King St
Pitt St Mall
Market St
York St
Pitt St
Castlereagh St
Elizabeth St
Park St
Bathurst St
Liverpool St
Clarke St
Oxford St
College St
WYNYARD
MARTIN PLACE
ST JAMES
TOWN HALL
MUSEUM STATION
HYDE PARK NORTH
HYDE PARK SOUTH
ANZAC MEMORIAL
Act of Remembrance
dispersal area
MARCH START
MARCH FINISH

REUNION – NEW VENUE
"The Kittyhawk" – Officer's Mess
16 Phillip Lane, Sydney

The Committee is delighted to announce that we have decided to move to a new reunion venue, The Kittyhawk, located just below the corner of Macquarie and Bent Streets on the Circular Quay side. They are opening up for our exclusive use on Anzac Day and we are sure you will be impressed with the new facilities. The Officer's Mess is a separate function area occupying the whole of Level 1, for which there is 2-way lift access; internally, or externally directly onto the plaza forecourt to allow easy wheelchair access. Gerard, the owner of the venue and a WWII air-war history buff, will be on hand to welcome us and he has even very generously offered three of his large wall panels for us to hang some of our memorabilia on! It will be open from 11.30 am – 3pm – with a bar and bistro-style restaurant and children are most welcome. Set food and beverage menus are available. We do urge you and all of your extended family to attend and join in a special tribute that his family shall be making to our last remaining veteran at the Sydney march, Flying Officer John MacMahon.

As in previous years any 454-459 Veterans & their wives will have their meal and drinks provided at no cost – speak with Michael Antonios (Treasurer) on the day. Rick Capel will be our MC.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE AT THE KITTYHAWK

- ✈ Attendees can arrive from 11.30 am
- ✈ Write a name tag for yourself
- ✈ Lunch 12.30 to 3 pm
- ✈ 1 pm – Toast absent friends, tributes, notices.

TRANSPORT

Railway Stations: Nearest - Martin Place and Circular Quay
Buses: Run along Elizabeth Street.
Taxi Services: Taxis are available.
Parking & Rates: Suggested parking stations are; The Domain Carpark - St Mary's Rd, Sydney with a public holiday daily rate of $12 (6 am to 12 midnight) and there's also 131 Macquarie Street or 101 Phillip Street – very handy to the venue.

https://www.wilsonparking.com.au/park/2303_The-Domain-Car-Park_St-Marys-Road-Sydney

If on ANZAC day you cannot find the location for the start of the March, or if you are having any trouble locating the Venue for the Reunion, please do not hesitate to contact the following people from the Association by mobile for directions/assistance.

Rick Capel on 0421 054 757– Hon. Secretary; or
Michael Antonios on 0414 515 556 – Treasurer

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

To help us maintain the website, produce the annual Squadron Bulletin and arrange for the Anzac day gathering, a $20 contribution can be made to the Association as follows:

- ***PayPal subscriptions*:** can be made by following this link https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/subscription
- ***Electronic transfer to:*** St George Bank BSB: 112 879 Account Number: 067 706 091
  Please make sure you *enter your name* in the "Description field".
- ***Post:*** Bank or personal cheque would be appreciated, made payable to "454 459 Squadrons No.2 Account",
  C/- The Treasurer, 454 459 Squadrons Association,
  14 Driscoll Place, Barden Ridge, NSW 2234, Australia.

Please do not post Cash – thank you.

ABSENT COMRADES

It is with regret that we have been notified of the passing of the undermentioned members:

Date	Member	State	Sqdn
25.07.2011	Norm Gilham	VIC	454
24.09.2017	Charles Irvine	NZ	454

We say farewell to old friends and comrades, and extend our deepest sympathy to their families in their loss.

LEST WE FORGET

TRIBUTES

Flight Lieutenant Norm GILHAM

454 RAAF Squadron

Service No: 418265
Date of Birth: 3 Jul 1922
Place of Birth: Geelong, Victoria
Date of Enlistment: 15 May 1942
Date of Discharge: 25 Jan 1946
Rank: Flight Lieutenant
Date of Death: 25 Jul 2011

Crew:
Norm Gilham - Pilot
Geoff Wilkinson – Wing Operator Air Gunner
Ross Woodhead – Flight Lieutenant/Navigator
C.B. "Tommie" Tutin – Wing Operator Air Gunner

From the Book "Alamein to the Alps" written by Mark Lax – Norm Gilham recalled his crew's close shave on Anzac Day Eve for what was a one hour flight.

“I had been briefed for one of these intruder missions on the 24th of April 1945; but about 11 pm I was briefed for a special mission that required an experienced crew. The Army had a large number of Germans bottled up at a bend in the Adige River, and the Germans were busy building a temporary bridge, to escape during the night. Our job was to destroy the bridge and prevent their escape. It was a clear night, so I crossed the river clear of the target, and had a look at the situation. I continued north to gain the element of surprise. I turned around, dropped to 1,000ft (304 metres), and headed for the bridge. The anti-aircraft guns were a bit slow in their response, and as I turned away we could see that our bombs had badly damaged or destroyed the bridge and anyone working there. We also spotted two barges further up the river, so I quickly circled around, dropped even lower to 300ft (90 metres) and came back past them, with the turret and belly guns spraying them with bullets. The anti-aircraft guns were right onto us by now, and although I answered with my forward guns, we were badly hit. All the instruments and communications were put out of action. I had no contact with the rest of the crew, and I did not know if any of them were alive or dead - The crew knew I was OK because we were still flying! I flew clear of the area, and then gained height. I tried to call the crew without success. My nerves were totally on edge; and I nearly jumped out of the plane when something grabbed my foot. It was Ross, the navigator. He handed me a note to say he had been hit. He then reached up with another note with a course for base. Without instruments working, I did not know how high we were, or how fast we were going. I simply had to fly by my experience and understanding of the aircraft; by feeling and instinct. Tom and Geoff, the two wireless operator/air gunners were unhurt and did their jobs well. One sent a wireless message that we were in trouble and as we approached base, the other set off a double red flare, which meant an emergency landing. Just as well they did because I could not contact base at all. I landed the plane quite safely, but our troubles were not over. We had no brakes! Near the end of the runway, I turned the plane sharply with full right rudder, spinning it off to the side, leaving the runway clear. The three of us got Ross out, as his compartment hatch had jammed. Then the ambulance and fire crews took over. There was always the chance of fire with damaged aircraft so they played it safe. It was now about l am on the 25th April 1945, Anzac Day. We had certainly named our plane very well - “Eventful Eve” -

as we had taken off on Anzac Eve, and landed on Anzac Day. Our fortieth operational mission with 454 Squadron, and our last; because the war ended while Ross was in hospital."

Navigator, Flying Officer Ross Woodhead later recovered. However, *Corncob* rang the death knell of the German Army in Italy, with General von Senger, the German XIV Panzer Corps commander summing up the effect: "It was the bombing of the River Po crossings that finished us. We could have withdrawn successfully with normal rear-guard action despite the heavy pressure, but owing to the destruction of the ferries and river crossings, we lost all our equipment. North of the river we were no longer an army".

It was the end for Von Vietinghoff's Army Group 'C', and on 29 April he signed the surrender at Field Marshal Alexander's Headquarters in Caserta, with the cease fire coming into effect on 2 May 1945. The war in Italy thus ended and with it, the Squadron practically ceased work.

Flight Lieutenant Charles IRVINE

Service Number: 411409 (RNZAF)
Date of Birth: 12 July 1920
Place of Birth: Dargaville, New Zealand
Date of Death: 24 September 2017

Flight Crew:
Flying Officer C.A. Irvine, RNZAF - POW
Flying Officer A.F. Betteridge, RAAF - KIA
Flight Sergeant M.F. McLurg, RAAF - POW
Flight Sergeant D.W. Baker, RNZAF – POW

From the Book "Alamein to the Alps" written by Mark Lax – Flying Officer Charles Irvine was listed as POW, the story of his last flight, where he was leading flight FA409 in the worst tragedy in Squadron 454's history.

Black Friday - The Raid on Crete

In mid-1943, RAF authorities sought to both relieve German pressure from Operation Huskey - the Allied invasion of Sicily – and avenge the execution of 100 Cretans who had been shot after assisting a Commando raid on the island. The Sicily operation began on 10 July when the Allies' assault forces hit the beaches to begin the long push toward Germany's southern flank, while the Cretan Commando raid had limited success. Consequently, a retaliatory raid called Operation Thesis was ordered. There would be a massive combined air strike against various ports and military establishments on Crete. This would require careful planning. Three wings of Air Defence Eastern Mediterranean (ADEM) Hurricanes formed the main push, together with 227 Squadron Beaufighters and added to the formation was 454. In all, 93 Hurricanes, seven Beaufighters and eight Baltimores would take part. 80 Squadron's Spitfires would cover the withdrawal.

That 454 Squadron was to be used must have come as a surprise to all, since their training and prior tasks involved sea reconnaissance, not over land bombing. Squadron Leader Lionel Folkard, then the OC Flying, recalled in his published memoirs the jolt the unit received …

"It was not until July 1943 that the even tenor of our lives was disturbed, when a senior fighter command officer arrived from England (where he had been leading fighter sweeps over France) to organise a special attack on Crete – by two squadrons of fighters and the Baltimores of my squadron…"

That senior officer was Group Captain Max Aitken, at the time in charge of fighter tactics in the Eastern Mediterranean - Headquarters in Cairo. Max Aitken had come to fame as an ace in the Battle of Britain. He was the son of Lord Beaverbrook - the Newspaper magnate and British wartime Minister for Aircraft Production. He had been assigned the planning task for Operation Thesis with the objective of using the fighters to saturate enemy defences while the bombers conducted follow-on land and shipping strikes against Suda Bay, Heraklion and other targets of opportunity. The date for the raid was set at Friday, 23 July 1943.

Crete was a mountainous island that stood out clearly, even at low level. It also meant that the enemy held the advantage, the terrain masking many potential targets while allowing good cover and positioning for anti-aircraft guns, a fact already proven during the successful, but high casualty German parachute assault of 1941. For Thesis, the raid was planned as a coordinated strike by the fighters with the Beaufighters to sweep ahead of the bombers. The Hurricanes were intended for area defence against enemy fighters. The Baltimores were to attack factories, barracks, road traffic and other targets on the east end of the island. Altogether, 120 aircraft were involved. While simple in theory, it would require the utmost secrecy, radio silence, careful coordination and precise timing.

Eight crews were selected for the mission from those considered fully operational and it would be their first real bombing action. Excitement ran high as all prepared. 454 were to provide two box formations of four aircraft each. Each aircraft was armed with six 250 lb (114 kg) bombs. Folkard was subsequently detailed to lead the squadron's eight aircraft on the 230 mile (370 k) flight. The result was an absolute disaster with five aircraft lost over Crete, one crash landing on return and only two landing back at base – a 75% casualty rate. Flying in Baltimore AG995 at 200 feet (61 metres) to avoid alerting the defences, Folkard later described the episode that ensued …

We crossed the south coast near the eastern end of the island which was less mountainous and immediately the ground defences opened up on us. We had to climb to get over the central spine of mountains and I think it was at this time that the defences scored their first hits, although there were none on my own aircraft. Once over the mountains we came down to low-level again, and then went along the coast towards Suda Bay. We were now under 100 feet (30.5 metres) and the ground fire was intense. We had flown less than half way to the target before we suffered serious damage. My aircraft was the first to be hit. When I took stock, I found the port engine was on fire and I was wounded in the left leg, also my right arm was hanging by a shred, and I was losing a great deal of blood onto the cockpit floor.

Folkard somehow managed to crash land on a sandy beach near Heraklion after which he lost consciousness. It was amazing that anyone survived although the muster was not looking good. One of

his gunners was Doug Hutchinson, an Australian who had joined the unit just three weeks prior. Doug described what happened next…

The land had been mined, but we left most of the explosions behind us as we skated over the ground, finally coming to rest. I had been in the turret for this trip and when it was evident we were to crash I threw the turret round to face forward and threw my arms around my face. The turret broke and I was first out. I found the fuselage had broken open beneath the turret and I dragged Keith Wedgwood through this gap. I dragged him clear of the burning aircraft, but he appeared to be dead. I then turned my attention to the others and could see Jasper (Wally) Dyer the navigator who had taken Percy Wilson's place for the trip, in the nose of the plane bleeding profusely. The nose cone was broken and I helped him out and clear. The plane by this time was well on fire and I went to help Lionel, who was in a bad way. I managed to get him out and clear just before the plane blew up. We had a full load of bombs. We then took stock of ourselves and found we were in a mess. Wally had been badly hit in the forehead, Lionel badly hit in the left leg and his right arm was nearly off.

Only then did Doug realise part of his left foot was missing and he had other shrapnel injuries. They became Prisoners of War and were destined for Luft Stalag III at Sagan in Silesia. Sagan was the site of what became known as the 'Great Escape', but that is another story. With regards to forced landings in enemy territory, the Operations Order Book directed that aircraft 'not in any circumstances be destroyed even if it is certain they will fall into enemy hands'. Only the instrument panel, tyres or magnetos were to be rendered inoperable if possible (to prevent flight), but it was mandatory for the Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) equipment to be smashed. This secret device could be used by the enemy to track and identify allied aircraft, so would be a very valuable tool in the cat-and-mouse game of electronic warfare that had emerged during this conflict. The order was directed after several crew previously had been caught by the enemy after forced landings loitering at the site as they tried to destroy the aircraft equipment.

Three crews made it back – those skippered by Max McCrabb, Fred Morgan and Ray Akhurst. While McCrabb and Morgan had flak damage, they landed safely back at Gambut III.

But Akhurst didn't quite make it back – having a lucky escape, his plane salvaged.

Until recently (Jan 2017), the whereabouts of Flying Officer Charles Irvine was unknown. Thanks to one of our descendants, John Rich, who managed to locate Flying Officer Charles Irvine, living in NZ, aged 96. In Jan 2018, the association was advised by Alex's nephew, Ross Moon that Flight Lieutenant Charles Alexander Irvine had passed away 24 Sep 2017.

Note from the Honorary Secretary, Rick Capel

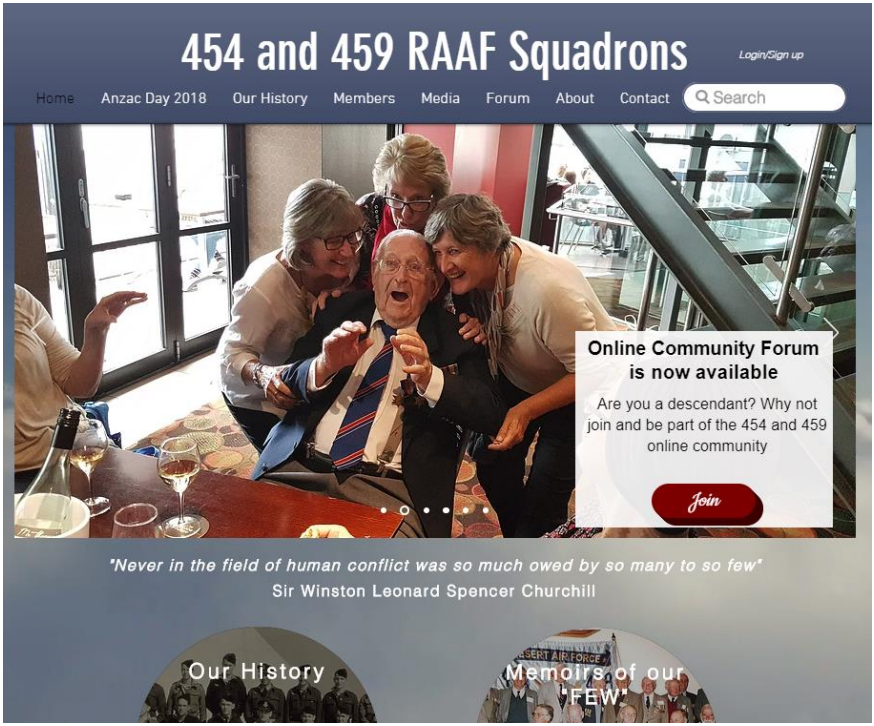
We are trying to ensure we have the most up-to-date information for any of our descendants of the 454 459 Squadrons. If you have access to the Internet, please go to our website and let us know your email address and to which member of the 454 459 Squadrons you are related. This information will help us keep ***all*** *of your descendants updated on the Association's activities, and in the future, may help descendants trace their genealogy. A very worthwhile exercise to complete, please.*

NEW WEBSITE

A new look and feel 454 and 459 RAAF Squadrons website was launched in Jan 2018. Here are some of the features;

- The new website is now mobile friendly and easier to use on mobile phones and tablets;
- A new and exclusive (private) Online Community Forum for our members and descendants to collaborate and share their stories with each other. https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/forum
- The Search bar now searches site pages, text, as well as pictures;
- The list of members and Roll of Honour pages now include member profile pictures to help put names to faces;
- New photo galleries are now included on most pages for easy viewing; and

- **IMPORTANT:** The Email address for the Association thesecretary@454-459squadrons.org.au will ***no longer work*** from April 2018.
  If you need to contact us, please use the Contact Us page https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/contact



Link to our Patron Flying Officer John MacMahon's page on the 454-459 Squadron's website:

https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/macmahonjg

PHOTOS FROM 2017 ANZAC DAY

John “Doover” MacMahon – 454 Squadron – leading the march

In compiling this bulletin the 454-459 Squadrons Association would like to express our gratitude for being able to research the late Professor Leon Kane-Maguire’s book “Desert Scorpions - A History of 459 Squadron1942-1945” & Mark Lax’s book “Alamein to the Alps” – 454 Squadron RAAF 1941-1945.