



454–459 SQUADRONS ASSOCIATION ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

Web site: <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/>

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APRIL 2020 BULLETIN

*It is with sadness that we advise the passing of our
Patron John 'Doover' MacMahon*

YOUR 2020 COMMITTEE

[this Bulletin is only available online]

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

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ANZAC DAY

Saturday, 25TH April 2020

Information provided by RSL:

Website: <http://rslnsw.org.au/commemoration/anzac/march>

Following further discussions with the NSW Government, RSL NSW has made the decision to cancel all public ANZAC Day commemoration services across the state. The risk to vulnerable people during the current health situation is simply too high for these events to continue in their traditional format.

Given the significant concerns around the spread of COVID-19, it would be irresponsible to allow such large gatherings as we see each year on ANZAC Day to go ahead. This is not a decision we have taken lightly. The RSL has a responsibility to act in the best interests of veterans and the general public. In these uncertain times we must follow the advice of medical experts and do everything we can to protect the community.

ANZAC Day as a marker of our respect and admiration for ANZACs past and present will still be observed. Exactly what form this will take will be different from previous years, but as custodians of commemoration, the RSL will still honour the service and sacrifice of our brave servicemen and women. In these challenging times, we will remember them.

Reunion – VENUE – Cancellation

This year we have **cancelled** our booking with our usual venue
The Kittyhawk – Officer's Mess – 16 Phillip Lane, Sydney.

Alternative Commemorations for the Nation

Australian War Memorial to broadcast Anzac Day ceremony to the nation

The Australian War Memorial will go ahead with a private, nationally **televised** Anzac Day commemorative service on **25 April 2020**. The traditional Dawn Service, National Ceremony and veterans' march will not take place. This revised ceremony will be held in the Commemorative Area and Hall of Memory of the Memorial at **5.30 am on Anzac Day**.

An assessment was made by the Memorial Executive and Council and the decision taken in conjunction with the RSL (ACT Branch). The event will not be open to the public but will be broadcast live across Australia by the **ABC** and streamed online.

Acting Memorial Director Anne Bennie said the Memorial is committed to providing an opportunity for Australians to commemorate Anzac Day through the televised ceremony. "Anzac Day is a symbolic day for Australians and New Zealanders, with the Australian War Memorial being the centre of Australia's national commemoration. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical that Anzac Day commemorations adhere to government advice on gatherings of large groups. The Memorial Council has approved a revised commemorative ceremony format, to be held within the heart of the Memorial," Ms. Bennie said.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/media/press-releases/anzacdayrevised>

An alternative way to commemorate Anzac Day that was recommended by the Queensland RSL State President Tony Ferris

*People can safely commemorate a different kind of dawn service by **standing on their driveway or balcony at 6am** and uniting in the Anzac spirit.*

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Association is thankful to all our members and descendants who have continued to provide financial support over the past years. This valuable support allowed the Association to

- Coordinate and commemorate ANZAC Day and its associated activities
- Create and update our newly designed website and promote the Squadron history and its members
- Produce and distribute the annual Squadron bulletin
- Support some of our veterans and families

Without the continued financial support, none of these initiatives would be possible.

The annual subscription fee of \$30 remains unchanged and can be made online at <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/subscription>

We respectfully request your continued financial support through regular subscription.

Naturally if you have any queries, please feel free to contact us through our website <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/contact>

Thank you once again for your support.

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions we ask that **no cheques or cash be posted**. If you could please use electronic banking.

- PayPal subscriptions: can be made by following this link <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/subscription> or
- 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".

Thank you.

ABSENT COMRADES



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

Date	Member	State	Sqdn	Notified By
14/05/1973	David V PAUL	NSW	454	Grand-niece Jane Ellul
28/04/2016	Mervin LOWIEN	QLD	459	Daughter Clare Hewston
11/01/2020	John MacMahon	NSW	454	Son-in-law Bill

TRIBUTES

Flying Officer John George James "Doover" MACMAHON

454 RAAF Squadron

Service No. 428818
Date of Birth: 27 Oct 1923
Place of Birth: Marrickville, NSW
Date of Enlistment: 10 Oct 1942
Date of Discharge: 27 Dec 1945
Date of Death: 11 Jan 2020



Crew

- Pilot – Geoffrey Levy
- Navigator – Alan L. McIntyre
- WAG – John A. Hughes
- WAG – John MacMahon

It is with great sadness that our Patron John MacMahon recently passed away. We have appreciated John's

contributions and encouragement over the past few years, it was an honour to have him lead our 454-459 Squadrons' Association. We pass on our sincere condolences to his family.

On the Associations' website, John has provided some of his wartime diary – it covers experiences during the period of 1 Aug 1944 through to 19 Nov 1944, which is a few months of the 3 years he served but it is a must to read as John describes his life, moving through Italy. Here are just a few snippets from his diary.

18/8/44 - Italy – The Rolled Truck

“Left for new drome at Falconara, 120 miles further north. Set off at 7.00 pm and as one of the bridges on the way had been broken - we had to detour. We got a bit lost and while trying to turn around on a narrow lane we rolled off the embankment onto our side. I was sleeping at the time and was woken by the jolt to find myself covered in kitbags and tents. Doc was in a worse position than either the rest of the chaps as he was unable to move at all. We got him free and luckily, he had no severe injuries. Camped the night in the overturned truck and it was pulled out the following morning by a Maintenance Unit heavy truck.”

23/8/44 – Two crews failed to return

“Today was a bad one for the squadron. Two crews failed to return from a raid on the Todt Labour Camp. Unfortunately, one crew was Flying Officer Howard's and they were good friends of ours. The plane (from eye-witness accounts) was hit by a direct burst of flak, both engines burst into flames and 3 chutes were seen to open. The probable survivors would be the navigator Wireless Operator Birtles, Wireless Operator Flight/Sergeant Murray and spare gunner Flight Lieutenant Litchfield. The pilot F/O Howard was probably killed but we may find out contrary information at a later date. We had been right through our training with Chris Murray, he was one of the best, and we met the other members of the crew at O.T.U. F/Sgt. McGrath, another of our friends who was a member of the crew was in hospital at the time – luckily for him and F/Lt. Litchfield was taking his place, twice before I had flown with this crew. The

other plane made a crash landing inside our own lines. The pilot, F/O Gray is presumed killed and the other 3 members are reported safe, although one was critically injured.”

3/9/44 – Conditions

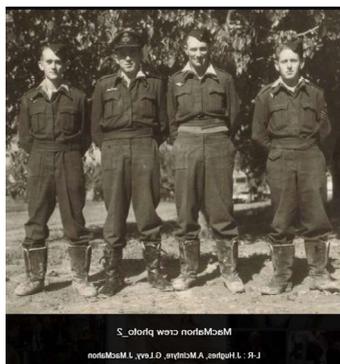
“Today is the 5th anniversary of the outbreak of war. We were supposed to go on a raid but a storm came up and we were stood down till it was over. I should have liked to do a trip to commemorate the occasion. Rained heavily and the ground soon turned to sticky mud and clay.”

14/10/44 – 9 trucks

“The Squadron was given a Stand-Down for 24 hours. Kev O'Brien, Doc and I took advantage of this and went exploring. We planned to have a look at the front line, but it was too far away. Left early in the morning and by lunchtime made Rimini. Although it had been occupied by our troops for 3 weeks, it was still in a terrible mess. The railway station was unrecognizable and by far the majority of the houses and buildings had been reduced to rubble. While looking for the YMCA to have a cup of tea, we met some Kiwis who invited us to have lunch with them. The food, although plain, was greatly appreciated. Upon leaving them, we returned part of the way home in one of their lorries. Then we got a lift in an army fire engine, next a jeep (Kiwis driving), next a D.A.F H.Q. gharry, next another jeep, next an Italian truck and lastly a South African drove us the last stage to camp. For the whole days journeying of 150 miles we hitch hiked on 9 trucks – 2 on the way up and 7 coming home. At Rimini we were about 15 miles from any activity.”



**John with his wife Charlotte
ANZAC Day 2006**



Flight Lieutenant David Valentine PAUL
454 RAAF Squadron

Service No. O210106 (403215)
Date of Birth: 10 Jun 1920
Place of Birth: North Sydney, NSW
Date of Enlistment: 4 Jan 1941
Date of Discharge: 29 Oct 1945



WW2 Honours and Gallantry: **Distinguished Flying Cross**
Date of death: 14 May 1973
(Recently notified by his Grand-Niece Jane Ellul)

Crew (Prisoners of War 4.12.43 - Rescued by Russians 23/4/45)

- Flight Lieutenant David Paul - Pilot
- Warrant Officer George Agg - Navigator (RAAF)
- Warrant Officer Jim Rennie (RAF- 645357) Wing Op/Air Gunner
- Warrant Officer Ralph Simpson - Wing Operator/ Air Gunner (RAAF)

The following additional information has been included with permission from Air/Commodore Mark Lax, from his book "[Alamein to the Alps](#)".

That the enemy fighters were using long-range tanks was also only known by a few. Wing Commander Coates later recalled how Group found out from....

.....the Enigma intelligence, which was not known at the time to myself or anyone who might become POW, and indeed to few others. In fact, most of our reconnaissance were planned on known information about the enemy intentions. There were what were known as Special Liaison Units at 201 Group, where we called them 'the girls on the roof', and at 247 Wing, Berka. The latter told me in very strict confidence about the Me-109's with

long-range tanks, so that we were able to vary our routes into the Aegean - fortunately they were also spotted by one of our crews which helped to hide the source of this information....

The next day, Flight Sergeant Dave Paul's crew were lost in FA548:R, shot down by another Me-109F fighter. With Paul were Warrant Officer George Agg, Warrant Officer Jim Rennie and Warrant Officer Ralph Simpson. It was to have been Paul's final trip on completion of his tour and Rennie was already extended. They were on a recce near Laurion harbour when attacked by two Me-109's. They ditched and were subsequently picked up by a pair of German Arado Ar-196 seaplanes. The Me-109's gun fire hit the starboard wing and the port fuel tank, which subsequently caught alight. Turret gunner Simpson had baled-out, but, was lost. After rescue and initial interrogation, the three were taken to Athens, then Salonika and finally into a Stalag in Germany. (Records show it was Luft 4B – see pictures below).

While 4 December was a tragedy for some it was cause for excitement for others. Warrant Officer Hugh Lloyd completed his tour - the first Squadron member to do so. together, the losses of Horsley and Paul, and the posting of Lloyd would have a profound effect. It was not so much that Horsley and Paul had gone on successive days, but they were both squadron originals and very experienced crews. When Joiner and Clarkson were lost previously, older members of the squadron reassured themselves by reflection that both were comparatively inexperienced. Now that Horsley and Paul had failed to return, that comfort was denied them."



Entrance to Stalag IV-B



Main street of the camp

Flying Officer Mervin (Snow) LOWIEN 459 RAAF Squadron

Service No. 425451
Date of Birth: 8 Jun 1921
Place of Birth: KILBURNIE, QLD
Date of Enlistment: 28 Feb 1942
Date of Discharge: 16 Jan 1946
Rank: Flying Officer
Date of death: 28 Apr 2016
Notified by: His daughter
Claire Hewston



We have located a photo of Flying Officer Mervin “Snow” Lowien, taken in Berka, Benghazi at the end of 1944, many in that photo **below** are from different Baltimore crews. We hope to receive more information about Flying Officer Mervin Lowien for our next edition of the bulletin.



459 Sqn. RAAF Benghazi - 1944 in its Baltimore role. l to r: Back row; Ken Crook, Spud Murphy, Mac McKinnon, Bob Kelly, Murray Weaver, Lofty Williams, Fred White, Mike Hunter, Cec. (Butch) Acton. Front row; Bill Webster, Kev Blanch, Dusty (with Chick) Potier, Snowy Lowien, Steve Brown, Bob Alexander.



We did however locate this photo (their ranks at the time)

*Warrant Officer M. 'Snowy' Lowien,
and Flying Officer Charles V.
Wesley - based at RAF Station
Chivenor, -
help to swing the compass of an
aircraft.*

Since then, we have established a page for F/O Wesley on our Squadrons website. <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/wesleycv>

The following tribute runs on from the chance finding of their picture together.

RAAF Flight Lieutenant Charles Victor WESLEY 459 RAAF Squadron

Service No. 408100
Date of Birth: 15 Oct 1916
Place of Birth: Taungs, South Africa
Date of Enlistment: 8 Nov 1940
Place of Enlistment: Hobart, Tasmania
Date of Discharge: 16 Jan 1946
Rank: Flight Lieutenant



Crew

- Flying Officer Colin Newton
- Pilot Officer Charles V. Wesley
- Flying Officer E.M. Orr
- Flying Officer R. Ryko

From the book "Desert Scorpions – A History of 459 Squadron RAAF 1942-1945" by Leon Kane-Maguire.

"On the morning of 21 September, three Baltimore crews took off from Berka for Aegean shipping reces [reconnaissance trips]. Flight Sergeant Cecil Acton and Flying Officer Arnold Jones had uneventful sorties except for meeting intense heavy flak at Melos harbour where two Siebel ferries and 'the usual concentration of small craft' were observed. The Melos gunners, by then well practiced, gave the third crew, that of Bob Norman in Baltimore 'A' FW537, a warmer welcome when they approached after their earlier inspection of Santorini. They received several hits from 88mm ack ack, one of which was observed by Norman to pass 'straight through the port wing and burst above us'. 'A for Apple' was holed in over twenty places. The navigator, Flying Officer Charles Wesley received a serious wound in the upper thigh when a piece of shrapnel (measuring six and a half centimetres) tore through his seat and parachute and lodged against a bone. It

was his first operational sortie with the Squadron – and almost his last.

The wireless operator, Jack Simmonds, recalled:

We had our usual flirtation with the waves, skimming low until we saw the island of Melos where Venus was unfortunate enough to lose both arms. Melos was not on our visiting list today and we kept at a reasonable distance but looking out my little window I could see that we were edging in a bit. Bob had seen something in the harbour that called for closer inspection and having a 'green' observer thought it best to have a sideways look himself rather than go full pelt over the target. We had, by that time, climbed to a few thousand feet.

Suddenly there was a sound like a tin dustbin falling down a flight of concrete steps, followed by another and another and yet another.

After the first sound of punctured metal the aircraft went into a steep dive and I measured my chances of getting hold of my parachute and reaching the hatch before we hit the sea. Trying to rise from my seat I soon realised that the force of gravity was holding me back and that I was not going to get out... I sat back, cursing my luck that I was about to die, shot down by deadly gunners in Melos.

Having decided that... I had 'had my chips' I did not feel half so terrified as I thought I would. I was highly pleased therefore to hear a long drawn out oath from Bob and realised that all was not lost. Bob seldom swore and there was no way he'd go to meet his maker with a four letter oath on his lips. When the aircraft nose came up again I knew that we were all right; both engines still running and although I could see daylight in places where daylight should not be it seemed that we had suffered no structural damage. As long as Bob was alive we were O.K.

He immediately called us up individually to see if we were in the land of the living. There was a grunt of assent from Cec [McKinnon] in the turret and I squeaked out an acknowledgement but from the observer there was silence. We eventually heard a moan over the intercom and knew at least that he was alive. Not knowing what state the observer was in and the impossibility of carrying out a reconnaissance without one, Bob turned for home.

We shot past Melos more quickly than we approached it. The normal procedure would now have been for the observer to code up a message to say that we were returning but as he had the coding machine and we couldn't get at it I had to get Bob's permission to send a plain language message for the first and last time in my career. "Returning early to Gambut, Aircraft damaged. Observer wounded".

The flight to Gambut, via the Kithera Strait, was considerably shorter than returning to Berka base but it would still be another two hours before they arrived back: *We had our shock when we clambered out and inspected our Baltimore and found that it was peppered with holes. I went back and saw that the radio had been hit in several places, some of which were uncomfortably close to my head. The armour-plated seat of the turret was well peppered with shrapnel.*

We were put into a hut and were given the inevitable cup of tea. If we'd been back on the squadron it would have been something stronger... we stood around in gloomy silence until we heard our pickup plane arriving. Our aircraft was completely unserviceable - and we were unable to fly it back to Berka.

Charles Wesley was hospitalised at Gambut. He made a full recovery, returning to the Squadron in November to complete a further ten, less traumatic, operational sorties. After repairs. 'A for Apple' also returned to operations with the Squadron by mid-October. Interspersed with the shipping recces, the Squadron continued to carry out the occasional convoy escort patrol.

THE ODE



"They shall grow not old,
as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them,
nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in
the morning
We will remember them."

NOTE FROM THE HONORARY SECRETARY

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 or our exclusive Facebook group.



Please 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.

I would also like to see more quality photos loaded on to the website that might give us further insight into the lives of survivors after the war. Scanning technology has improved dramatically in recent years and it could be a worthwhile exercise to revisit old photos and archives so as to select and scan [or rescan] to obtain higher quality images for loading up to the website together with relevant background names and relevant notes.

In reviewing this bulletin, I must thank on behalf of all of us the tireless work behind the scenes conducted by such a dedicated couple, Michael and Pamela Antonios, they are the backbone of this association and have done a wonderful job in pulling this altogether.

Lastly, although we are not able to gather to commemorate ANZAC Day, may I say on behalf of our Association's Committee how grateful we are for the wartime contribution of those who served our country - Lest We Forget.

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 Squadron 1942-1945" & Mark Lax's book "Alamein to the Alps" – 454 Squadron RAAF 1941-1945.

OUR WEBSITE

Our website <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/> is gaining popularity with over 200 daily visitors from many parts of the world. As you'd expect, most of the visitors are from Australia, UK, US, Italy, France and Greece

To keep the memories alive, we're constantly updating our website with new stories, pictures and memoirs from various members who have been kind enough to share this valuable content.

We encourage our members to check out our website and share any historical information you may have of the 454 and 459 Squadrons..

Facebook

Our social media channels on Facebook has been an amazing instrument that brought many of the descendants closer to each other. In case you want to check them out, we have

- A public Facebook page that is accessible to all Facebook users <https://www.facebook.com/454459squadrons/>
- A private and exclusive Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/groups/348000605705789/> accessible only to approved members and descendants of the 454 and 459 Squadrons (i.e. it's not viewable or accessible to the public). This private group has grown over the past year where we now have over 50 members and descendants who have joined. So, if you haven't signed up for this, we'd love for you to join us.

Reminder:

Since early 2018, the Email address for the Association thesecretary@454-459squadrons.org.au **no longer works**. If you need to contact us, please use the Contact Us page <https://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/contact>

PHOTOS FROM 2019 ANZAC DAY



John "Doover" MacMahon – 454 Squadron – leading the march



John MacMahon – at The Kittyhawk Restaurant with his family