



**KING ISLAND RSL SUB-BRANCH
Commemoration Service 11 July 2023
King Island Cemetery
80th Anniversary of RAAF Beaufort Bomber Crash
11 July 1943**

11:00 am

President – Tom Shaw - Opening Address.

Apart from our RAAF Flight Coordinator, please place your mobile phones on silent and ensure you do not stand on a grave. There will be a flypast around 1135 and we will pause the service so you can observe it. The flight will come in from the west and will also fly over the crash site as a mark of respect. Please note we are recording this service so our elderly citizens can view it live.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our distinguished guests:

- Our guests of honour are the descendants of the members of the RAAF who died serving their nation during World War Two:
 - From the mainland – Ms Leigh Edwards, Doctor Jeff Kildea, Mr Michael Snell, and Mrs Bronwyn Anderson, accompanied by partners and family members.
 - From King Island – The Lancaster Family.
- The Acting Mayor of King Island – Councillor Vernon Philbey and his wife, Rosemary
- The Chief Executive Officer, Returned and Services League Tasmania – Mr John Hardy - accompanied by staff members.
- RSL Director North West – Mr John Findlater.
- Wing Commander Andrew Johnson, Commanding Officer 29 (City of Hobart Squadron) Tasmania, and Warrant Officer Stephen Zantuck.
- Squadron Leader Robert Hayman – Chaplain, 30 Squadron RAAF Base East Sale.
- Squadron Leader Scott Tavasci, 32 Squadron RAAF Base East Sale and flight crews.

- Ms Katherine Morris representing Mr Luke Brown, Deputy Commissioner Department of Veteran Affairs Tasmania.

We also have three apologies:

- The Leesue family from South Australia.
- Councillor Marcus Blackie, Mayor of King Island, and Mrs Blackie.
- Ms Coral Stubbs, of Tasmania and late of King Island.

Acknowledgement of Country

If you are able to, please stand.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Please resume your seats.

Distinguished guests, Veterans, Service members of the forces, Ladies and Gentlemen, girls and boys, on behalf of the King Island RSL Sub-Branch I welcome you, to our 80th Anniversary Commemoration of the crash of Beaufort Bomber A9-352 on 11 July 1943 that claimed the lives of the four crew members. We also remember the three Islanders who died while serving in the RAAF during World War 2.

We remember all who have served, those who have sacrificed and the contribution they have made to our country.

Opening Prayer

I invite Chaplain Hayman to lead us in prayer:

Almighty God, we come today to remember with thanks the sacrifice of all those who have yielded up their lives in the defence of our country and for the freedom of the world. As we gather today and remember the sacrifice of these four Airmen and their families paid during the defence of our nation, may we not forget that even though it was 80 years ago we stand on the shoulders of such sacrifices.

God of peace, help us to overcome the barriers that divide people and nations. Bless every effort to bring peace and understanding to the world. Hasten the day when nation shall not lift up sword against nation or make war anymore.

O Lord, we pray for all those who suffer as a result of war, by loss of home facilities, by loss of friends or loved ones, by loss of happiness, security, or freedom. We pray for those whose hearts have become bitter and find it difficult to forgive. May they know your pardon, comfort and strength and grant them peace through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

President – I now invite the Sub branch Vice President, Gary Barker, to deliver the Opening Address

Good morning. For Australia, 1943 was a turning point in World War 2 as the Japanese were no longer considered invincible. However, military training and operations continued and we tend to overlook the non-battle losses. Accidents and incidents continued to claim lives and still do.

We are gathered at the graves of four airmen who perished when their Beaufort Bomber A9 – 352 crashed approximately three kilometres, east north east of the King Island Aerodrome. The date was Sunday 11 July 1943 and the time around two AM. The plane was taking part in a formation training exercise from East Sale in Victoria with two other Beaufort's over Bass Strait and then to King Island. Why or how the crash occurred is unknown, and the RAAF classified the reason as 100% obscure. When I read this, I was relieved that the option of 'pilot error' was not mentioned.

This was not the first RAAF plane crash on or near King Island but the tragedy had the most effect on the Islanders. Although close to the airport, the site was in a timbered area adjacent to marshy ground and remote from access tracks. We know through oral history that the locals were on site doing what they could but the crew had all died instantly. Brothers Jim and Dick Chitts, local freight operators, were involved in the recovery and their Fargo truck became the hearse.

East Sale responded rapidly and on Monday 12 July 1943 a contingent arrived, including Chaplain Victor Deakin and officers who became the pall bearers.

King Island is still isolated and it is remarkable that the father of Pilot Officer John Kildea was able to attend the funeral on Tuesday 13 July. You may be pondering why the remains were not returned to the mainland. The policy was to bury as soon as practical in the locality of the death.

But Pilot Officers Edwards, Kildea, Leesue, and Snell have never been forgotten by King Islanders and they rest adjacent to 36 others who also lie in War Graves.

The Island lost 17 people during World War 2 and today we also remember three who died while serving in the RAAF. They were:

- Sergeant William Desmond Cheese better known as 'Buff' who died on the 20th of July 1942, while a Prisoner of War in the Netherlands after his plane from 460 Squadron was shot down.
- Flying Officer John Goulburn Lancaster, known as Jack, who died on the 8th of April 1943 when his plane crashed in the Gulf of Carpentaria.
- Aircraftwoman Nancy Jean Morrison, died on the 21st of November 1945 on the mainland as the result of an illness.

The tragic similarity of the seven people is that they were all in their twenties. Only two were married and one had just conceived a child but did not know when he died; neither did his wife.

I now invite Leigh Edwards, Jeff Kildea, and Michael Snell to speak about their relatives who died on 11 July 1943.

Ms Leigh Edwards

Neville William Allan Edwards - my Uncle Bill - was born in Horsham on the 9th November 1918. Bill was 14 years old when his father Harry Edwards was killed in a car accident in Swan Hill, and four years later his mother Ethel passed away, leaving my father Ron, the eldest brother, to raise both Bill and Geoffrey.

At that time they lived in East Melbourne where Bill attended the National Gallery of Victoria Art School. Some of his documents display talent as a cartoonist, he often used satire to reflect a difficult situation and always smiled. This was

all interrupted with the start of war and this led to Bill enlisting in the RAAF in March 1941.

In October 1941, Bill graduated from the Number 1 Wireless Air Gunners School Ballarat and he continued to serve with the Number 1 Operational Training Unit at the RAAF Station East Sale.

Unfortunately, members of the Edwards family were unable to attend the funeral on King Island, or to honour the other men who lost their lives that day in 1943.

But as a family, and also in remembrance of my late father Ron, we are so privileged to be here today, and to acknowledge the people of King Island and the staff of Australian War Graves who have honoured and tendered to these graves for a remarkable eighty years.

In addition I would like to take this opportunity to thank the RAAF, and in particular the RSL and Gary Barker for his tremendous effort in organising this memorable occasion.

Doctor Jeff Kildea

On behalf of the Kildea family, I wish to express my gratitude to the King Island RSL Sub-branch for organising this commemoration marking the 80th anniversary of the crash on King Island of the RAAF Beaufort bomber in which four young men were killed, including my cousin John Alexander Kildea.

While we may be inspired by the selflessness of those we remember today who gave their lives that others might live in peace and justice, surely it would have been better had they been able to pursue the peace and justice they sought through the contributions of their lives rather than the inspiration of their deaths.

When 19-year-old John enlisted in the RAAF on 19 June 1942, just six months after the Pacific War broke out, he was a bank clerk not long out of school. His

father Joe also worked in a bank and the family had moved from town to town in rural Victoria until 1937 when Joe was transferred to the bank's Melbourne head office.

On enlistment John trained as a navigator and on 4 March 1943 he was commissioned as a pilot officer. Four months later, three weeks short of his 21st birthday, he would die in the flying accident we recall today.

Those left to mourn included his father Joe, who died ten months later aged just 49, his mother Dorothy, who in 1980 would herself die in a tragic accident, this time involving a tram, and his sister Beryl, who lived to the ripe age of 85.

John's loss was also mourned by the wider Kildea family. John's grandfather Jeremiah had emigrated from Ireland in the 1860s and settled on the land outside of Rochester in northern Victoria. Jeremiah and his wife Bridget had 13 children, John's father Joe being the ninth. John's death was felt by his many aunts and uncles and by his many cousins, including my father Syd Kildea.

Dad enlisted in the RAAF a year before John and served in New Guinea. It was through him I learned about John and his death on King Island. Fortunately for me, dad survived the war. So too, his brother Bill, who also enlisted in the RAAF.

Mindful that the loss of life in war is always personal, always tragic, and always has consequences, it is right that we remember today these four airmen who lost their lives 80 years ago and their families who were left with long mourning and deep grief.

Mr Michael Snell

Pilot Officer Harold Roy Snell died many years before my birth. I have some feeling for the man he was, from things I heard from older family members, particularly my mother, and from other things I have since discovered.

As Delivered

Harold's parents were English. His father Josiah came from Castle Combe, a village in Wiltshire in the Cotswolds, and his mother Catherine came from Reigate. The family emigrated from England and arrived in Australia in 1912. Harold was the youngest, born on 27 February 1921 with three older siblings, Leslie, Kenneth and Dorothy. The family settled in Sydney, initially in Campsie, where Harold was born. The family then settled in Castle Hill, which at the time was semi-rural. Harold's father ran a general store and grocer's shop in Castle Hill. The family was devout; they were members of the Methodist Church at Castle Hill.

My mother spoke of Harold, her brother-in-law, in glowing terms, as a young man who was nice looking, popular and seemed able to do anything. He had a very good singing voice and had success singing in eisteddfods.

Harold enlisted on 1 February 1942. The tragic accident which took his life, and the other crew members of the Beaufort, occurred on 11 July 1943. Harold was 22.

I know my father wanted to attend Harold's funeral. My mother described my father packing a bag and heading to Central station in Sydney to travel down to Melbourne, in the hope of then travelling to King Island. My mother said that my father came home after being told at Central station in Sydney that he was wasting his time, he would not be able to get to King Island. It seems this was poor advice as there was one family member present at the funeral service.

My wife and I first visited Harold's grave at Currie Cemetery in January 1997 while we were holidaying. We were struck, on a brilliant summer's day, by what a quiet, beautiful and peaceful place it was.

We would like to thank those responsible for today, organising the ceremony and the surrounding events. It is a sad privilege to be here, to remember and honour the men who gave their young lives.

Dianna McCue could not attend today and the family has asked me to speak about her grandfather Clarence Leesue.

Firstly, a big thank you to the team at King Island for honouring my grandfather and his fellow servicemen in such a special way today. Apologies that we are unable to attend in person, but please know we are there with you in spirit. Clarence Leesue, born in Melrose and raised in Gladstone, South Australia was an active member in his community with him and his brothers most famous for winning several championships for the Gladstone cricket club. He met his wife Gwen who was nursing at the local Burra hospital, and they married soon after he signed up to join the Air Force. Sadly, Clarence never knew the legacy he left, not knowing his new bride Gwen Leesue, nee McMahon, was pregnant with a daughter Marilyn.

Raised in Broken Hill by her mother Gwen, Aunt Florence, and a large extended family, Marilyn was supported by legacy throughout her childhood and won a scholarship to study teaching in Adelaide. It was there she met with Roger Smith, married, and moved to Millicent having two children Michael and Dianna.

Gwen later moved to Millicent with her sister Alice, and they cared for Marilyn whose life was cut short by cancer at the age of 54. Roger still lives in Millicent and Michael and Dianna in Adelaide. Dianna is married to Paul McCue, and they have two boys, Campbell, and Flynn McCue. Flynn's middle name is Clarence named after his Great Grandfather who we honour today.

Marilyn was immensely proud being the daughter of a serviceman and was chosen on behalf of the Broken Hill RSL to give a posy to Queen Elizabeth when she visited Broken Hill in 1954. Marilyn's experience of being cared for by legacy and the servicemen and women in the community was honoured through her own charitable work in Millicent; including the establishment of a Child Care Centre and raising funds for the local hospital, so families could access care from the community like she had experienced. Once again, we thank you all for honouring Clarence today and may him and all the service men on King Island, Rest in Peace.

You may have noted a faded photograph on Pilot Officer Leesue's grave of his wife Gwen. Fortunately, with the assistance of the Leesue family we have a replacement and this will be installed at a later date.

I now welcome Sarah Lancaster to speak about her relatives Buff Cheese and Jack Lancaster.

Sarah Lancaster

My family has been on King Island for over 100 years and I am very proud to honour Buff Cheese and Jack Lancaster. Fortunately, before my grandfather Colin Lancaster passed away, Gary Barker interviewed him and I am going to read his words. Buff was grandad's cousin and Jack was his eldest brother.

Buff was born on the 13th of July 1921 and grew up in Naracoopa where his father was the Post Master. He was very keen on fishing, and swimming of course as he lived close to the sea. He started school there but was sent to a boarding school in Hobart around the age of 10.

When Buff completed his schooling, he farmed on King Island for a while. When war broke out in 1939, he joined the Island's Volunteer Defence Corps and was stationed at the Cable Station near the mouth of the Fraser River at Naracoopa. The Station was important because of communications as this is where the undersea cable to the Tasmanian mainland came in.

Buff then enlisted in the RAAF and I am sure my parents would have known that Buff had become a prisoner. When the news came through of his death, it was a shock as he had just turned 21 the week before. Buff was a trustworthy person, who didn't get into too much mischief and tried to do his best.

Now a few of grandad's memories on his brother Jack, who was 11 years older. He liked going shooting and fishing, and went to Pagarah School. In his early teens he went to a school in Melbourne and from then on, I only saw him over the Christmas break. I had a lot of time for him because he was my hero.

After finishing high school, he was employed by a bank in Melbourne as a clerk. He enlisted in the Citizen Military Forces in 1939 and transferred to the RAAF a year later.

As Delivered

I don't remember my parents expressing any concern that he was now involved in the war, but I do remember him bringing his future wife, Mary, to King Island after the war started. They married on the 20th of January 1943 and it was in April 1943 that he was reported missing. Because Jack's plane was never found, he does not have a grave.

I can't remember what the reaction of my parents was, however, I felt very angry about it as I had lost my eldest brother and Buff was gone as well. Something terrible was happening and when I look back, I think I was fortunate that I was young.

Today, I am very proud to have read my grandfather's memories of two relatives who served their nation, but tragically lost their lives when they were so young. Lest we forget.

I invite our President Mr Tom Shaw to speak about Aircraftwoman Nancy Morrison.

Thank you, it is my honour to speak on behalf of the Morrison family. For those that don't know, Barbara Morrison is my step mother and she asked me to speak on behalf of her three children Tina, Sally and Nick.

Nancy Jean Morison was born here in Currie on the 20th of August 1922, to Ernest and Margaret Morrison. On the 16th of June 1943, at the age of 21 she enlisted into the RAAF with the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, and served at Number 3 RAAF Hospital located at what is now RAAF Base Richmond north west of Sydney.

3 RAAF Hospital started small, but by 1945 it had grown to over 500 beds caring for those brought back from the conflict in New Guinea and the Pacific. Sadly, the troops brought back all kinds of illness, and through her service, Aircraftwoman 4th Class Nancy Jean Morrison also became ill and passed away on the 21st of November 1945. She was 23 years old.

For the Morrison family and the King Island community to lose one of our young daughters, who was serving only to help others, was incredibly sad, and deeply felt in this community. Nancy was so dearly loved; so sadly missed.

Our final speaker is Wing Commander Andrew Johnson.

When I was putting this speech together, I wrote to the Air Force History Branch to request information that would help me write it. In response they sent me a number of documents that were not only useful but also fascinating to read and I spent way too long delving into than I should have. I certainly don't consider myself an expert in military history but today I will share with you some of what I discovered in those documents.

Back in 1943 military aviation was a very dangerous pastime. World War Two saw the first mass application of air power in conflict and the techniques and procedures, as well as the machinery and weaponry, was still being developed. There were a number of smart, brave aviators that were at the forefront of developing these tactics so that we could gain the ascendancy in the air war (just look at the Dambusters as one prominent and amazing example of this).

The application of national power and sheer exertion of effort to the war effort was extraordinary. The Beaufort Bomber that crashed here 80 years ago was a part of No. 1 Operational Training Unit (OTU) and was formed on 8th December 1941. I'd like to paint you a picture of the Unit to highlight some of the challenges faced by these aviators and also to highlight the sacrifices made by those that willingly supported the war effort.

No. 1 OTU was originally formed in its temporary location of Nhill in Western Victoria before moving to Sale in Gippsland where the Base still resides today. Its function was to "provide advanced operational flying training and instruction". The role of this Training Unit, and others like it, was to prepare and qualify aircrew, including pilots, navigators, bombers and gunners, to deploy overseas in direct support of the war effort.

From the Units Operations Record Book, a document that was meticulously maintained and filled out every month, we know that upon formation No 1 OTU

had three Wirraway aircraft and a total of 33 personnel. By the end of its first month that number had already grown to 252 personnel.

Over the course of the next year the Unit continued to grow at a staggering rate and by the end of December 1942 there were 1979 personnel posted to the Unit including 93 from the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF). The Unit operated and maintained 92 aircraft across 5 different aircraft types including 47 Beauforts. By June 1943, the month prior to the accident, the personnel strength was 2577, the Unit owned 128 aircraft, including 55 Beauforts, and they flew a staggering 5391 hours for the month.

To put this into context, No 1 OTU had 6 times more personnel than our current largest Air Force Squadron, flew as many hours in one month as 34 Squadron does in a year and had approximately half the number of aircraft as our entire Air Force does today.

The growth, size and rate of effort of this Unit by modern day standards is staggering and this presented many challenges and induced many safety risks. Crews back then received far less training before embarking on dangerous real life missions. Aircrews had less flying hours, less experience, the training was not as good as it is now, there were no simulators, less emergency training, worse maps, weather forecasts were far less accurate and navigation equipment was far more rudimentary. From the records it was stated that one pilot who had no previous flying experience went solo after only 6 hours of flying! These factors contributed to numerous aircraft crashes.

The number of crashes listed in the Operations Record are too many to cover but some of the comments include:

- Undercarriage collapsed immediately after touchdown – crew uninjured
- Beaufort crash - lost to seaward, 4 missing presumed dead.
- Aircraft overshot and ground looped at end of runway – crew uninjured

Between the 27th and 31st of October 1942 there were three separate accidents in four days leading to four fatalities. The records from the Beaufort Bomber crash that occurred here on the night of 11 July 1943 reads:

AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT: Beaufort Aircraft A9-352 whilst engaged on formation flying training exercise crashed and burned at approximately 0200K hours on the 11th of July 1943, 1 ½ miles east of Currie Aerodrome, King island. The aircraft was totally destroyed. The crew all of whom were killed was as follows... I apologise for the blunt wording but it characterises the mindset of the day and shows the horrendous regulatory with which such accidents occurred.

Similar accidents – Beaufort A9-034 whilst flying in night formation exercise was seen to slip towards the sea to starboard. Nothing further was seen of the aircraft and it is presumed to have struck the sea.

As I read through the records, I noted that a disproportionate number of the crashes occurred at night and whilst flying formation. This comes as no surprise to me as I know just how difficult these two skill sets are. This was a dangerous business and the members of No 1 OTU were well aware of this and still chose to serve their nation.

The men of this unit were preparing for war. In fact, part of their day-to-day role was to conduct patrols off the coast of Victoria and New South Wales in search of submarines and they also partook in flights over the Owen Stanley Ranges in Papua New Guinea so they did have an operational mindset. Upon completion of their training, they would be dispersed out amongst the flying Squadrons based on their attributes and I quote from a book called *The Empire has an Answer* “if the trainee were skilled at navigation, a good leader, with a cool and steady demeanor, he was probably best suited for multi-engine aircraft. This decision could have a dramatic impact on the trainee’s future survivability. All pilots were aware of the life expectancy of bomber crews flying missions over Europe, not that fighter pilots fared much better”.

I reflect on the commitment that these men and women made to their nation and the fact that so many readily gave their life in service of the nation is something that I will forever be grateful for. I acknowledge the impact that this had on their families and the generations to follow who never got to know their dads, granddads and great-granddads.

I applaud the efforts made from the people here today to commemorate events such as this. The contributions of the RSL to arrange services like this, the commitments of the families to be here, and the support from the community allows the memories and legacy of those who fought for us to endure. It's important and fitting that we continue to do so.

Hymn – Abide with Me

by Kelly and Sarah Lancaster

President

We will now commence the wreath laying by distinguished guests and kindred organisations. Please proceed when your name is announced to the foot of a grave.

Mr Michael Snell, Ms Leigh Edwards, Mr Gary Barker on behalf of the Leesue family, and Doctor Jeff Kildea.

Wing Commander Andrew Johnson on behalf of the Royal Australian Air Force.

Mr John Hardy CEO RSL Tasmania, Chris and Tracey Richards, RAAF veterans, on behalf of the King Island RSL Sub branch and the Richards family.

Cr Vernon Philbey, Acting Mayor of King Island, Ms Cathy Starling, Mates for Mates, Ms Katherine Morris, Department of Veteran Affairs Tasmania, and Mrs Irene Robbins and Mrs Karen Muir on behalf of the Historical Society.

Until the late 1990s school children placed a posie on each grave, every 11 July. I now invite Roger and Zac Clemons and Madge and Logan Shaw to lay the flowers.

President

If you are able to, please stand for the **Ode of Remembrance**, men should remove hats and caps

I invite the members of the Airforce to take up your positions at the foot of each grave. Flag monitors please take up your positions.

I will now recite the Ode:

Ode of Remembrance

They shall grow not old,
As we who 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.

ALL: We will remember them

Last Post is sounded by Bugler CPL Willcox

Minute Silence

Rouse is sounded by Bugler CPL Willcox

(Flags raised to Masthead slowly over the call)

President: Lest We Forget

ALL: Lest we forget

I invite Chaplain Hayman to recite the closing prayer:

Benediction

We have taken some moments aside from the business of our lives to reflect,
to remember the fallen, and to give thanks for their sacrifice.

Now it is time to go back into the world.

May God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest,

To all the world, peace and concord;

May your hearts be open to the deeper questions of life.

May the gratitude of this day remain with you.

May the words of Jesus to love one another encourage and inspire you.

And may the Spirit of God be your companion as you walk gently upon the
earth.

Go now in peace. Amen.

President

If you are able to, please remain standing for the **Australian National Anthem**

President

Closing Address

On behalf of the King Island RSL Sub-Branch I thank you for your attendance and participation.

I particularly would like to acknowledge the support we have received from the Australian Defence Force: Australian Army Band Tasmania, and the Royal Australian Air Force - 29 Squadron Hobart and 32 Squadron East Sale. To all members of the ADF present today, I sincerely congratulate you and thank you for your ongoing service to our nation.

The King Island RSL Sub-Branch would also like to thank our guests and the volunteers who gave up their time to support this ceremony.

I would like to thank our speakers and all those who have travelled to be here.

A special thank you to King Island Community Radio and Television for all your assistance and support for our Commemoration Ceremony.

I look forward to seeing you this evening at 7.30pm in the Town Hall for a very special community event commemorating the King Island World War 2 Comforts Fund.

Let me close with the final words that Mustafa Kemal Ataturk – Founding President of Turkey – wrote in 1934 to the mothers of our Gallipoli Veterans. We believe they truly reflect King Island's feelings for the crew of Beaufort Bomber A9-352.

‘After having lost their lives on this land they have become our sons as well’.

Copyright Owner: King Island RSL Sub branch 15 July 2023

No part may be copied or used for any other purpose without the written approval of the Copyright Owner. Contact Gary Barker 0409 446 475