



# AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH

## Newsletter



Winter 2025

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

As presaged in our last Newsletter, the weekend of May 17 and 18 saw the Ballarat Heritage Week headline event at the airport: "Entertainment of the Air". See the full article on the following pages.

The event was as successful as was hoped and ran smoothly, notwithstanding the blast of wintry weather that visited for the weekend.

I'd like to particularly acknowledge a small but incredibly dedicated group of people who are working as a sub-committee of the Ballarat Branch AFA - Steve Carter, Mark Pilkington, Sharon Carpenter and Leigh Edmonds. This group has a strong interest in the Ballarat Airport and air history. With a view to creating ongoing interest in our heritage aspects of the airport, this year's "Entertainment of the Air" is hoped to showcase possible annual events leading to the 100th anniversary of the airport.

This year's event could not have been achieved without them.

I'd also like to acknowledge Louise Humble and Bob Brown from the Aviation museum, who provided space for the 1WAGS exhibit in the museum.

I'd also particularly like to acknowledge the huge support Ballarat branch receives from John Clarkson, Barb Stallard and the Board of AFA Victoria, which allows us to support activities of benefit to our members.

*Peter Dowling*

*President*



## IMPORTANT DATES COMING UP

### Aviator's Ball

Saturday 23 August

7:30 - Midnight

Brown Hill Hall

375 Humffray Street North

Ballarat



### Social Luncheons

Social luncheons will continue throughout the year on every second Tuesday, commencing 12 midday.

## **Ballarat Heritage Week - Events at the airport precinct May 17 & 18**

With a tight timeline leading up to the event, Ballarat Council, the Air Force Association Ballarat and the Commercial Manager of the Aerodrome worked to provide an event at the airport celebrating its history.

It was determined that the headline act would be the chartering of the “Gooney Bird” DC-3 bringing aviation enthusiasts out of Essendon Airport.



The event was promoted by Ballarat Council with a huge billboard in Victoria Street displaying the DC-3 to traffic approaching Ballarat from the east prior to the event.

There was tireless activity and organisation by Air Force members Steve Carter, Mark Pilkington, Sharon Carpenter, Leigh Edmonds and Peter Dowling, in conjunction with Jonnie Wilshire, the Commercial Manager of the airport.

Closer to the date in May, it became apparent that the event needed more support and Ballarat Council provided funds and Events Manager Nicole Bartlett to plan and co-ordinate activities within the precinct.

Following an almost unprecedented period of warm, dry weather in Ballarat, the weekend of the event was cold, wet and windy. With a nail-biting wait in Essendon for icy conditions to clear, the Gooney Bird was finally in the air and on its way to Ballarat, nearly an hour late.

Joy flights on the DC-3 were sold out for both Saturday and Sunday afternoons, with several air force members and friends and family taking the opportunity. A tiger moth and trainer arrived from Lethbridge Airfield to complement the flying excitement.

For this inaugural event, it was estimated there was in excess of 4000 attendees over the 2 days, as well as those who booked the return flights from Melbourne.

As well as Council-organised events, entertainment and food/drink stations, most of the tenants at the airport took the opportunity to showcase their interest groups and associations. The Air Force Association Ballarat rents space in Hut 48 and provided a continuous loop video of the history of the airport as a Wireless Air Gunner Training School (1WAGS). Feature posters of historical 1WAGS personnel, including a tribute to Frederick Spafford of “Dam Busters” fame and a banner were provided to the Airport Aviation Museum for display in that space, presaging the opportunity for greater co-ordination of the history of the airport.

A theatre group, Legends of the Sky, provided two performances of the great 1934 air race on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon in Hut 48 and Neil Leckie provided a service in the air force rooms to assist people to find the military history of their friends and relatives.

The Engineers ran a café in Hut 48 and ran out of goodies on both days and the Rotary Club nearby kept a willing public supplied through their sausage sizzle. Many visitors were seen with books purchased from the Rotary Club.

The museum experienced great interest from the Ballarat public, both at the weekend of the airport display and the following weekend marking the end of Heritage week.

Visitors came from further afield: the Air Force Association Bendigo, Friends of the RAAF Museum Point Cook and pilots and planes from Lethbridge.

One of the most impressive details was the determination of some to experience the DC-3 flight. Two nonagenarian members of the Air Force Association Ballarat experience flights. One friend of an association member was so enthusiastic, she managed to board the plane even with substantial mobility issues. She later reported that it was an amazing highlight of her life and she would not have missed it for anything.

Over page is a photographic tribute to the weekend.

## The Arrival of the DC-3





## Hut 48 Activities



Shout out to Janet Bates who raised nearly \$400 for the Air Force Association with sales of her colourful beanies



Mark Pilkington excelling with tape



Neil Leckie researching military history



Veronica and Steve Carter in WWII period costume





## Events in the hangars



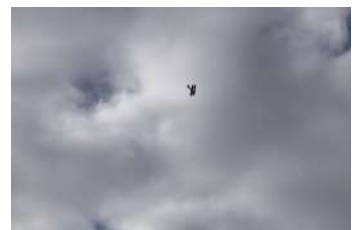


Around the Airport Precinct





## Preparing for the flight



Peter Dowling, Sue Alexander, Kevin Grundell, Peter Bandy and Bob McDonald preparing to fly.





## On Board the DC-3 flight—Ballarat, Snake Valley, Beaufort, Miners Rest







## 1 WAGS REPORT

Sponsored by APCO Alfredton



We would like to thank the Aviation Museum at the Ballarat Airport for purchasing easels for their permanent display of the 1 WAGS posters of 'Born in Ballarat' trainees, the History of 1 WAGS and those trainees who played a vital part in the 'Dambusters' raid.

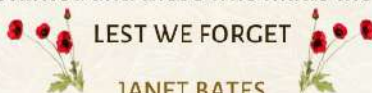


# Thank You 1,400,000

It is with great appreciation that the 1 WAGS Memorial Website has reached a significant milestone as of July 2025

**1,400,000 individual browsers worldwide!**

As it is 85 years since the commencement of training at No. 1 Wireless Air Gunners School 1940-45 and 80 years since the end of WW2 it is a fitting tribute to those who served and returned and those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

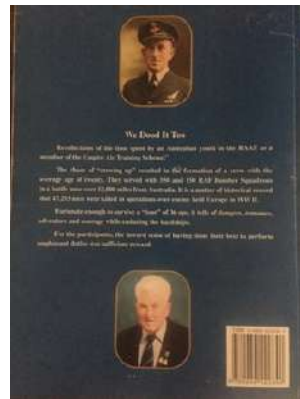


LEST WE FORGET

JANET BATES

Website Coordinator

## Flying Officer John Francis WOODS



John Francis Woods (1924 - 1999) joined the RAAF 20 August 1942 – 18 years & 2 months old. He trained at Somers Victoria, Parkes NSW (2 WAGS), Port Pirie South Australia (BAGS), Shepparton Victoria and Cowra NSW with a friend Frank Petch (Author of the Book – “We Dood It Too”) in which John is mentioned numerous times. John Woods was a qualified and efficient Pilot but was allocated to the RAF 12th Squadron (a combined RAAF & RAF squadron) as a Wireless Operator due to his superior Morse code abilities (35wpm+) of which he said you never forget it! He completed a tour of 33 operational missions over Germany where the average was 5 missions. After being discharged John took up the post of policeman serving at Bungaree (5 miles East of Ballarat) for 25 years. The crew from 12 Squadron had a reunion at the Bungaree pub where many a tale of flying operations over Germany were told.

Many thanks to John's son Paul for the information and photos.



Janet Bates - IWAGS Co-ordinator

## A New Book: Callsign ‘N for Nuts’ Against Overwhelming Odds - George Edmunds

George Edmunds is a British aviation enthusiast, in particular of the Battle of Britain. Through this interest, he came across Pembroke Dock Flying Boat Station in Wales, where he first read of how the Sunderland Flying Boat ‘N for Nuts’ survived its battle with the Luftwaffe. This lone aircraft and Coastal Command defied all odds to (just) make it home.

He decided the story had to be told and the public should know of this incredible story of WW2, mostly hidden in old and official musty records.

Of the crew on board, Flight Officer Wilbur (Bill Dowling), 1st pilot, was the uncle of Peter Dowling, the current president of Air Force Association Ballarat branch.

The book provides extensive history and background to the Sunderland flying boat and WW2 Coastal Command activities. The following report of the attack on ‘N for Nuts’ by 8 Ju88s provides riveting reading:

*“N/461 at 1900 hours on 2nd June, flying at 2000 feet, course 090°T, speed 110 knots, in position 45° 54’N 10° 20’W, \* sighted 8 Ju88s flying in three formations, one of 4, and two of 2, on course of approximately 180°T, height 3000 feet.*

*N/461, thinking it had not been observed by E/A, immediately made for cloud cover in an easterly direction. Cloud was 3/10 stratus, height 2000 feet, and about 200 feet thick. However, E/A gave chase, and as an attack became imminent N/461 jettisoned bombs and D/C’s safe. E/A formed up to attack, 3 on either beam 1500 yards distant and 15 ft up, and one on either quarter some distance and height from “N”. “N” was unable to make cloud cover for the first Ju 88 on the port side dived to attack from approximately 16° on the port bow. In this attack E/A scored a direct hit on the port outer engine which burst into flames, and also a direct hit with incendiary bullet in the P.4 Compass. The alcohol in the compass caught fire and started a fire in the Captain’s clothing and in the forrard part of the aircraft. The fire in the port outer engine was extinguished with the Graviner switch, but dense white smoke continued to pour*



from the engine, which became U/S. The fire in the A/C was put out with fire extinguishers, and also the fire in the Captain's clothing. While these fires were being extinguished the first pilot (F/O Dowling) took over control and carried out evasive tactics from the 2nd pilot's seat. E/A continued their attacks, peeling off and diving from port and starboard bow alternatively. At the same time the A/C on the port and starboard quarters continued their attacks. E/A continued their attack persistently, making at least 20 attacks in this manner. With the fires extinguished, the Captain resumed control, but found he was unable to carry out evasive action without the assistance of the first pilot, owing to the fact that one engine was U/S, and both the rudder and the elevator trimming tabs had been shot away. During the first attack the JU 88 attacking from the starboard bow broke away and passed over the midships gunner, who fired a long burst at point blank range scoring hits on the engines and cock pit. This E/A immediately burst into flames, crashed into the sea, and disintegrated. The E/A now made another two attacks, during which the hydraulics of the tail turret of N/461 were shot away and the hull received numerous hits. The rear gunner was rendered temporarily unconscious through striking his head on the side of the turret, owing to the very violent evasive action being taken and the hydraulics of gunners when it attacked from the port side. It dived towards the sea on fire, but attempted to ditch. The E/A hit the water, bounced, stalled, and dived vertically into the sea where it broke up.

Simultaneously, another E/A, coming up from below N/461 in a climbing attack from the starboard quarter, shot the starboard galley gunner in the stomach and leg, the wounds proved fatal, and the gunner (Sgt E. Miles, R.A.F.) died twenty minutes later. This gun position was then manned by another member of the crew and with the assistance of the port galley gunner numerous climbing attacks from either quarter of N/461 were ward off and hits scored on the enemy E/A.

Conditions were now completely chaotic. The remaining E/A pressed home their attacks

consistently and the inter-communication became U/S, and the fire controller was hit in the leg by a piece of shrapnel. This wound was bound up by another member of the crew while the fire controller continued with hand signals to direct the evasion of N/461.

The evasive tactics were now controlled by hand signals, previously practiced, passed from the fire controller to the 2nd pilot and thence to the Captain and 1st pilot. The gunners realising that the inter-communication was U/S and that no form of fire control could be given to them, fired independently on all attacking A/C.

The third JU88 was shot down by the midships and tail gunners, the tail gunner firing his guns in very short bursts by depressing the gears with his fingers.

The radio received a direct hit by cannon shell and became U/S. In this attack also the Air Speed Indicators ceased to function.

The remaining five E/A continued to press home their attacks and one coming in from the starboard bow received a long burst of fire from the nose gunner. It was last seen with its port engine ablaze and smoke pouring from the cock pit.

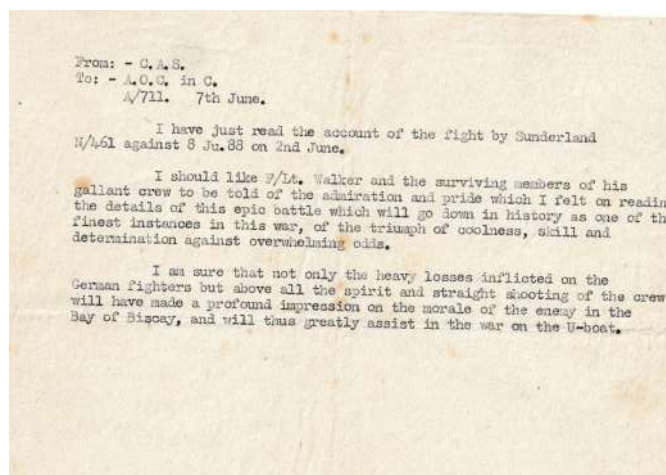
The E/A which remained continued to attack, mainly from the bow, until 1945 hours, during which time hits were scored on all A/C as they attacked. At 1945 two E/A remained flying about 2 miles away from N/461, one on either beam. The E/A on the port beam turned into attack but at a distance of about 1500 yards, without firing a shot, it turned away and was last seen heading in an easterly direction with the E/A which had been on the starboard beam. N/461 then, position unknown, set course 030°T and the Captain inspected damage to A/C. N/461 had received numerous cannon shell hits and innumerable holes from machine gun bullets. At 1950 hours the port outer engine seized and the airscrew fell off. Owing to the difficulty of maintaining height at an unknown air speed, the Captain gave orders to jettison everything possible on the boat. This was done, and a course of approximately 065°T for the Scillies.

*It was necessary for both the Captain and the pilots to fly the A/C together on the home journey, owing to the condition of the A/C. At 2229 hours, land was sighted on the port bow, which eventually proved to be the Lizard. Owing to the terrific damage to the A/C it was decided to ditch at last light and at 2300 hours A/C was waterborne at Praa Sands 1" O.S. Sheet 146. Grid Position 005510, A/C "N" was filling with water rapidly, so it was decided to run N/461 on the beach. This was done and at 23100 hours N/461 was aground and the crew waded ashore. The galley guns proved invaluable throughout this combat."*



Crew of N461 (Bill Dowling on right)

N/461 shot down at least four of the attacking Ju 88s. The story was widely reported in the press and on radio and the BBC interviewed members of the crew about the battle. The action was officially recognised by the immediate award of the DSO to Captain Col Walker, 'for his gallantry displayed in flying operations' and the DFC to the navigator Ken Simpson. The DFM went to the Rear and Midship gunners: Ray Goode and Eric Fuller. Ted Miles, the gunner who died, received a posthumous commission and Jim Amiss (2nd pilot) a MID.



Wreckage of N461 on the beach at Praa Sands Cornwall



Memorial to N461 at Praa Sands



# THE MITFORD SISTERS

I was looking through the reviews for upcoming shows to stream, to discover there is a new miniseries concerning the lives of the famous Mitford sisters (Outrageous - Britbox and Prime Video).

Coincidentally, at our monthly lunch in July, we watched a fascinating documentary on the Daily Motion platform: A Tale of Two Sisters: The Mitfords Episode 4).

(<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8d5ze4>)

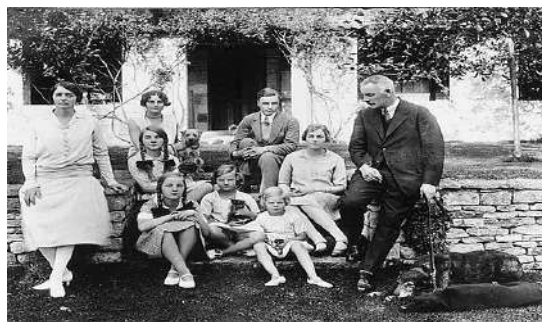
The Mitford sisters (Nancy, Pamela, Diana, Unity, Jessica, and Deborah) were perhaps the most famous siblings of 20th Century Britain. Born between 1904 and 1920, these six aristocratic women were witty, eccentric, beautiful – and always controversial, only a few years in age, but poles apart in ideology.

They were the daughters of David Freeman-Mitford, 2nd Baron Redesdale, and his wife, Sydney Bowles, celebrated and sometimes scandalous figures. One journalist described them as "Diana the Fascist, Jessica the Communist, Unity the Hitler-lover; Nancy the Novelist; Deborah the Duchess and Pamela the unobtrusive poultry connoisseur".<sup>[1]</sup>

The siblings grew up in an aristocratic country house in Oxfordshire, largely self-educated and fiercely individualistic with emotionally distant parents known as "Farve" and "Muv", respectively and a large household with numerous servants. This family dynamic was not unusual for upper-class families of the time. The parents disregarded formal education of women of the family, and they were expected to marry at a young age to a financially well-off husband. The children had a private language called "Boudledidge", and each had a different nickname for the others.

They grew up in a divided Europe at the beginning of the 20th Century, a place and time full of great political tension. Old regimes were clinging on to power and new ones were eager to establish themselves.

<sup>1</sup>. Macintyre, Ben (12 October 2007). "Those utterly maddening Mitford girls | Ben Macintyre - Times Online"



The Mitford family in 1928

Many citizens of Europe were forced to decide which moral compass they wished to adopt, and both Jessica and Diana were quick to make that decision. Both fiercely competitive, each sister sought out her own distinct identity and clashed with the other siblings as a result. Like so many others of their era, their personal and political lives became so entwined that they ultimately shattered the once strong and loving bonds of sisterhood.

After the Nazi Regime started the Invasion of Poland, the Second World War began and their political views came into sharper relief. "Farve" remained a conservative who had long favoured Neville Chamberlain's approach of appeasing Nazi Germany. Once Britain declared war on Germany, he returned to being an anti-German British patriot. "Muv" continued her fascist sympathies and usually supported her fascist children. The couple separated in 1943 as a result of this conflict.

Their lives spanned the ideological spectrum—from fascism to communism—and their personal choices often mirrored the seismic shifts of the 20th century. Together, they remain a fascinating study in contrast, charisma, and controversy.

## Nancy Mitford (28 Nov 1904-30 Jun 1973)



Nancy Mitford was witty, sharp-tongued, and unapologetically aristocratic. She married Peter Rodd, though the union was unhappy and ended in divorce. Her lifelong love was Gaston Palewski, a French diplomat, although they never married.

She is best known for her semi-autobiographical novels *The Pursuit of Love* (1945) and *Love in a Cold Climate* (1949), which satirize upper-class English life with biting humour and affection.

Her characters - like the irascible Uncle Matthew - were often thinly veiled portraits of her own family.

She also wrote acclaimed biographies of French figures such as Madame de Pompadour, Voltaire, and Louis XIV, reflecting her deep Francophilia.

Mitford popularized the concept of “U” (upper-class) and “non-U” language in her essay *Noblesse Oblige*, sparking a national debate on class and manners.

Her writing style combined elegance with irreverence, making her a darling of literary salons and a feared critic of pretension.

She spent her later years in France, maintaining a lively correspondence with friends like Evelyn Waugh.

### **Pamela Mitford (25 Nov 1907-12 Apr 1994)**



Pamela Mitford, the second of the six famously unconventional Mitford sisters, was often dubbed “the forgotten sister” or “the country girl”.

Pamela preferred a quieter, rural existence. She managed farms and estates, including Biddesden in Wiltshire, where she met poet John Betjeman, who was deeply in love with her.

She married Derek Jackson, a wealthy and eccentric physicist, in 1936. Their marriage ended in divorce in 1951, and was widely considered a marriage of convenience.

Afterward, she spent two decades with Giuditta Tommasi, an Italian horsewoman, in Gloucestershire. Their companionship led to speculation about a romantic relationship, though Pamela remained private about it.

Unlike her sisters, Pamela avoided politics and public controversy. She was known for her

stoicism, generosity, and domestic talents - reportedly the only sister who learned to cook. She acted as a stabilizing force in the family, often caring for nieces and nephews during turbulent times.

She passed away in 1994, having lived a life marked more by quiet dignity than scandal or fame.

### **Diana Mitford (17 Jun 1910-11 Aug 2003)**



Diana Mitford - later known as Lady Mosley - was first married to Bryan Guinness, heir to the Guinness brewing fortune and was part of the “Bright Young Things” social set.

She later left Guinness for Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists. Their 1936 wedding was held at the home of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels - with Adolf Hitler as a guest of honour.

Diana was a vocal supporter of fascism and maintained a personal friendship with Hitler.

During WWII, she and Mosley were interned in Britain under Defence Regulation 18B due to their political affiliations. She remained unrepentant about her views throughout her life, which made her a deeply polarizing figure.

After the war, Diana lived in Paris and became a writer and editor. Her autobiography, *A Life of Contrasts*, was published in 1977 and offers insight into her unapologetic worldview.

She died in 2003 at the age of 93.

### **Unity Mitford (8 Aug 1914-28 May 1948)**



Unity Mitford was one of the most controversial



figures among the famous Mitford sisters as she became infamous for her obsession with Adolf Hitler and her open support for Nazism.

She moved to Munich in 1934 to be near Hitler and stalked him at his favourite restaurant until he invited her to his table. She became part of Hitler's inner circle, attending rallies and state events and wrote virulently antisemitic letters, being described by MI5 as "more Nazi than the Nazis".

Unity attempted suicide in 1939 after Britain declared war on Germany. She survived with a bullet lodged in her brain, causing permanent damage. She returned to England and lived as an invalid until her death in 1948 from meningitis.

Speculation persists that she may have had a child with Hitler, though this was never proven.

Her diaries and letters continue to spark debate about her motivations and mental state.

### **Jessica Mitford (11 Sep 1917-23 Jul 1996)**



Jessica Mitford was anything but conventional and became the rebellious "red sheep" of the famous Mitford sisters.

She was a committed communist and civil rights activist who eloped at 19 with her second cousin

Esmond Romilly to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War. They moved to the U.S. in 1939 and later, following Esmond's death, she married American lawyer Robert Treuhaft.

She joined the Communist Party USA, later resigning in 1958 to pursue activism independently.

Jessica's writing was sharp, witty, and fearless. She refused to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee during McCarthyism and participated in civil rights protests, including witnessing KKK-led violence in Montgomery, Alabama.

Her muckraking journalism led to Congressional hearings and reforms.

### **Deborah Mitford (31 Mar 1920 – 24 Sep 2014)**



Deborah Mitford - later known as Deborah Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire - was the youngest and arguably the most grounded of the six famously eccentric Mitford sisters. Born in 1920, she lived a life that blended aristocratic tradition with entrepreneurial flair and unexpected pop culture affection (she adored Elvis Presley!).

She became Lady Andrew Cavendish upon marrying the younger son of the 10th Duke of Devonshire in 1941. After her brother-in-law was killed in WWII, her husband inherited the dukedom, and she became Duchess of Devonshire in 1950. She later held the title Dowager Duchess of Devonshire after her husband's death in 2004.

Deborah played a pivotal role in restoring and revitalizing Chatsworth House, one of England's grandest estates, after the war years. She transformed it into a thriving public attraction, launching ventures like the Chatsworth Farm Shop, gift shops, and even personally selling tickets.

She wrote several books.

Deborah, often called "Debo," was the family's peacemaker and pragmatist. She managed to preserve tradition while embracing modernity - her funeral even featured Elvis songs.