



AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH



Newsletter March 2019

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Vice President : Leigh Harvey OAM
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Secretary : Rob Petty - 0407 891 281
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Tom Jobling
Keith Pitman
Stan White
**Newsletter Editor
Noel Hutchins**

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Our monthly meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month, **(except January)**, commencing at 1200 hours at the Lakers Football Club Rooms in Wendouree. Due to some redevelopment/ construction works, entry is currently off Dowling Street through the previous car park.

FROM THE PRESIDENT At our March monthly meeting I did a presentation on the LCVP landing craft. This was the first of a series of presentations planned for each of our monthly meetings leading up to D Day the 6th of June which this year marks the 75th anniversary of that operation. I have decided to include that presentation as part of this month's newsletter so that members who were not able to be at that meeting are able to read it and also to have it recorded as we lead up to this significant anniversary of D Day.

I would like to thank members for their congratulations and kind words and messages in respect to my handling of our first meeting as president. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. *(Noel Hutchins, President)*

2019 IS THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF D DAY THE WWII ALLIED INVASION OF NORMANDY OPERATION OVERLORD

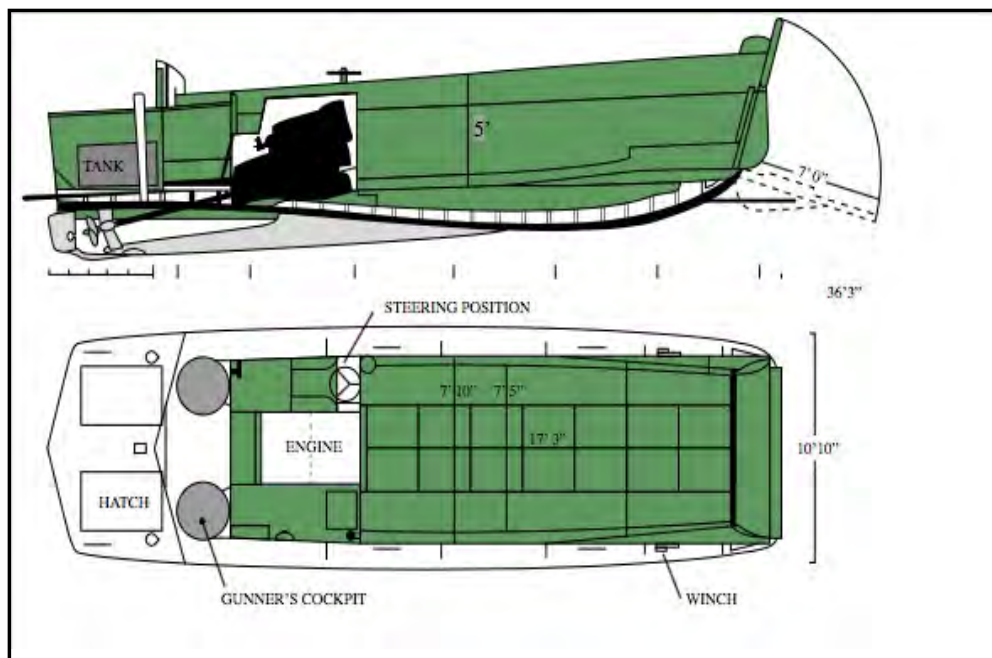
Over the few months leading up to D Day, 6th June this year, let us take the opportunity to talk about a variety of things relating to D Day. Of course this massive operation wasn't conceived and acted upon in haste in 1944. This was something which was planned and organised over a period of years, not days or months.

This month, let us look at just one of the type of landing craft that ultimately proved to be so important to the success of Operation Overlord.

This was the LCVP. The "Landing Craft Vehicle & Personnel".

The LCVP was designed and built by an American named Andrew Higgins, and this is why the LCVP was sometimes referred to as the 'Higgins boat'.

The story of Andrew Higgins himself, is an interesting one.



Andrew Higgins was an American entrepreneur. Originally in timber milling, he moved into timber boat making and went on to develop boats suitable to operate in swamps and marshes and with an ability to land on unimproved landing areas.

With the outbreak of WWII hostilities it was Higgins, with his 'Higgins' Eureka' boat which surpassed the performance of the US Navy's own design that became the larger landing craft used in the D Day Landings, the LCP(L) or "Landing Craft Personnel Large". The LCP(L) was supplied to Britain from October 1940 and well before D Day were used for commando raids. The big drawback with this larger vessel was that the men had to clamber over the sides to disembark.



Some Japanese landing craft with a steel ramp at the front had come under intense scrutiny of the US Navy and Marine Corps and when Higgins was shown a picture, Higgins started his designers working on a version of a ramped craft and then, at his own expense, had three of the craft built.

On May 26, 1941, US Navy and Marine Corps officials witnessed the testing of the three craft. One involved off-loading a truck; another the embarking and disembarking of 36 of Higgins' employees, simulating troops. This craft was later designated Landing Craft Vehicle & Personnel. **LCVP.**

At just over 36 ft (11 m) long and just under 11 ft (3.4 m) wide, the LCVP was not a large craft. Powered by a 225-horsepower Diesel engine, at 12 knots it would sway in choppy seas, causing seasickness. Since its sides and rear were made of plywood, it offered limited protection from enemy fire but it reduced cost and saved steel. The LCVP could hold either 36 troops, (or) a jeep and a 12-man squad, (or) 8,000 lb (3.6 t) of cargo. Its shallow draft (3 feet aft and 2 feet, 2 inches forward) enabled it to run up onto the shoreline, and a semi-tunnel built into its hull protected the propeller from sand and other debris.

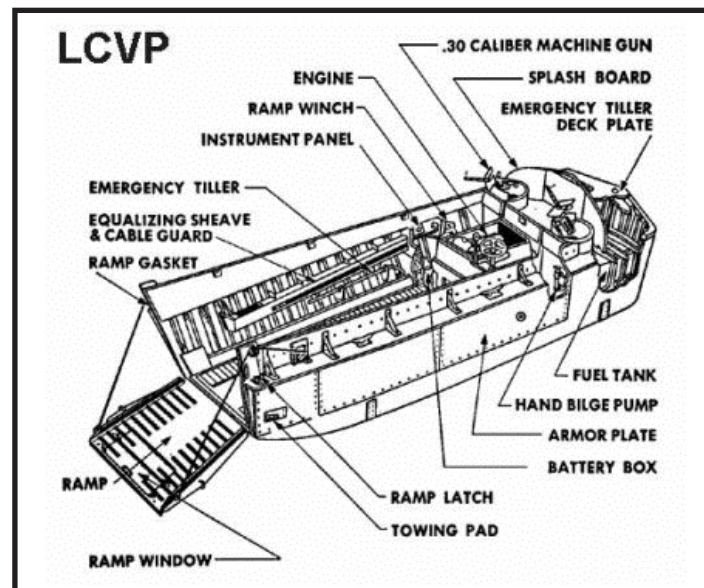
The steel ramp at the front could be lowered quickly. It was possible for the Higgins boat to swiftly disembark men and supplies, reverse itself off the beach, and head back out to the supply ship for another load within three to four minutes.

The Higgins LCVP was built in New Orleans and all workers, white, black, male, female, were paid the same wage based on their job position. Higgins is said to have been idolised by his workers for the way that he treated them. Higgins, although not long previously having been a bankrupt, stated that he did not believe that he or anyone else should get wealthy in contributing to the war effort.

Before the war Higgins employed as few as 75 workers at a single plant, but by 1943 was employing 20,000 people over seven separate plants. Higgins produced 23,398 LCVPs during the War.

Built of oak, pine, and mahogany, they weighed fifteen thousand pounds empty. Their light weight and powerful engines drove them at twelve knots. Each craft had a three-man crew of coxswain, engineer, and crewman. The latter could man one of two .30 calibre machine guns that were often mounted.

Developed in 1941, "Love Charlie Victor Peters" arrived in the fleet the following year and were produced in vast numbers.



On D-Day the U.S. Navy had 1,089 LCVPs in the United Kingdom, of which 839 were used to shuttle Allied soldiers from the invasion transports to the Normandy beaches.

Eighty-one were lost on D-Day or shortly afterward, including fifty-five at Omaha Beach. At the same time the U.S. Navy had nearly four hundred in the Mediterranean and 2,300 throughout the Pacific.

In the movie, 'Saving Private Ryan', Captain Miller's, (Tom Hanks), initial appearance in the movie is aboard an LCVP.

Now while these craft were being built in these large numbers in New Orleans, back in Britain arrangements were being made to receive these craft and a work force was being put together to assemble these craft which would be arriving in kit form.

It was at Birdham in 1942 that the British Navy established HMS Sea Serpent where a team of young British WRENS would be stationed to be trained for the important top-secret task of assembling the LCVP craft. A two-and-a-half year Top-Secret operation.

Birdham is a village and civil parish in the Chichester District of West Sussex, England. It is located on the Manhood Peninsula, about five miles (8 km) south-west of the city of Chichester.

The village sits on the shores of Chichester Harbour and is home to a locked marina on the site of a former tide mill pond. The tide mill building itself still exists. In between it and Chichester marina are the lock gates to the now the disused Chichester Canal opened in 1822.



In addition to Sea Serpent there were another two groups each of 30 WRENS along the coast working on other types of landing craft.

In March 1941 three Spitfire squadrons were established at nearby RAF Tangmere under the command of non-other than Wing Commander Douglas Bader, later Sir Douglas Bader, the famous RAF "legless fighter ace", the subject of Paul Brickhill's book, "Reach for the Sky", and also the movie of the same title released in 1956 starring Kenneth More and Murial Pavlow in the lead roles of Douglas and Thelma Bader. One of the tasks of these squadrons was to protect these top-secret landing craft building locations.

What a very special task these teenage British WRENS were given. The LCVP's would arrive like a big Meccano set and needed to be assembled on the water. Not only did these girls need to assemble the craft but had to paint them, instal motors, learn how to tune the motors and then learn how to operate the craft.

One of those teenage British WRENS was Ballarat resident and member of the Ballarat branch of the Air Force Association, Margaret WOOD.

The image showing Margaret and two of her co-workers cleaning LCVP No 1002 was taken approximately 8 to 10 days after D Day. Note the damage to the ramp of the craft.



The contribution of these girls to the war effort cannot be overstated.



The effect on these girls when their LCVP's returned after the D Day operation full of severely wounded men must have been horrendous.

While one can find an amazing amount of information on the internet relating to the D Day operation, there is nothing to be found about these young teenage girls that were tasked with this very special job.

How important these craft were in the Allies' WWII victory was stated by General Eisenhower.

THE BOATS THAT WON THE WAR

The Supreme Allied commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, declared the Higgins boat to have been crucial to the Allied victory on the European Western Front.

"Andrew Higgins ... is the man who won the war for us. ... If Higgins had not designed and built those LCVPs, we never could have landed over an open beach....."

"The whole strategy of the war would have been different."
General Dwight D. Eisenhower



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### PRECIS OF MARCH MONTHLY SOCIAL MEETING MINUTES AFA BALLARAT BRANCH

Date: 5/3/2019

At Lakers Club Rooms

Attendance: As per the Attendance List (28 attendees). Apologies, in addition to long standing apologies for members no longer able to attend : Tom & Penelope Roberts and Stan Pickford.

#### 1200 Introduction

- a. Meeting opened by Branch President & welcome to new members/guests Brian & Bev Voak, Peter Dowling & Steve Carter.
- b. Video of flowers & gift presentation to the Roberts by Branch President.
- c. Ode & National Anthem.
- d. Quiz paper competition.
- e. Grace led by Branch Chaplain, and a tribute to the late Lachie McBean including the playing of the song : *The ballad of Lachie McBean* which had been written for, and performed at, Lachie's memorial service by a family member who had travelled from the UK for the service, Mr Lachie Chapman.
- f. Lunch

#### 1245 Peter Schoutens segment

- a. WIN News video of Ballarat Council hand over of AFA Rooms.
- b. Update on 1 WAGS data base development.

#### 1300 General Business

- a. Motion to ratify Peter Schoutens elevation to Junior Vice-President and Janet Bates onto committee as a General Committee . Member moved by Keith Lanyon & seconded by Tom Nunn; motion vote by members carried.
- b. Motion for an increase in General Committee Members from four to six, moved by John Harley & seconded by Ken Marsh; motion vote by members carried.
- c. Treasurers Report to be presented monthly as of our next monthly AFA meeting 2 April 2019.
- d. Branch President invited all members to inspect the new rooms at the Ballarat Airfield on completion of meeting.
- e. Official opening of new rooms to be held at 2pm on Thursday 28 March 2019. AFA and local dignitary's invited.

**1315 : D-Day & LCVP (Higgins Boat) presentation by Branch President**

- a. Still photo and talk presentation starring Margaret Wood (nee Cook).
- b. Higgins Boat video presentation.
- c. Recognition of Margaret Woods WWII D-Day service by members led by Branch President. Members expressed a need to research into getting information onto the Internet regarding LCVP's and British use thereof and stories such as the Birdham Girls at HMS Sea Serpent.

**1345**

- a. Air Show presentation by Tom Jobling.
- b. Raffle held.

**1400** Meeting closed.

**MONTHLY QUIZ :** Well, the written quiz that was based on information included in our February newsletter caught a few people short but, on the other hand, some did very well. The winner will be presented with a prize at our April meeting. So, it might be a good idea to have a very good read of this month's newsletter and maybe commit a few things to memory, **because the answer to every question in next month quiz is right here in this newsletter.** ..... and the winner is : **Leigh Harvey with an excellent 7 out of 10.** well done Leigh. Now there are no prizes for second and third, but second was Rob Petty with 5/10 and equal third was Margaret Wood and Brian Reasons with 4/10.

**VALE ~ Lachlan William (Lachie) McBean**



**It is with sadness that we record the passing of esteemed member, WWII Lancaster pilot, Lachie McBean. A thorough gentleman, he will be missed.**

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 Per Ardua Ad Astra Lachie
 May you Rest in Peace
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(NH, Pres.)



**WE ARE GROWING :** We welcome three new members this month. Peter Dowling has joined us having relocated from Sydney to Ballarat. Peter is also Secretary of the Sunderland Branch of AFA NSW. Stephen Carter, a retired Boeing 737 commercial pilot has also signed up with us, as has Stephen Brown, an experienced librarian who I am looking to get on to our committee to fill that particular role with our library to be set up at our new rooms as "The Tom Roberts Library". (NH, Pres.)

**CITY COUNCIL MARKS COMPLETION OF RESTORATION OF AIRPORT HUT 48**

On Tuesday 26th February the Ballarat City Council held a fairly informal luncheon at Airport Hut 48 to mark the completion of the current round of restoration works on Airport Huts 48, 50 and 52. The function was held in the larger of the two rooms which have been allocated for our use. Ballarat Mayor Cr Samantha McIntosh addressed the gathering. Two ladies from Heritage Victoria, Evelina Ericsson and Zoe Guthrie also attended. The Ballarat City Council and Heritage Victoria should be congratulated for enabling this restoration and Ballarat City Council Project Officer Michael O'Connell should be congratulated in respect of the high standard of restoration that has been achieved. (NH, Pres.)

**DID YOU KNOW :**

- (1) The RAAF will celebrate it's 98th birthday on 31st March this year. The **big one** is coming up on 31st March 2021.
- (2) Early versions of the WWI B.E.2 aircraft entered squadron service with the Royal Flying Corps in 1912; the type continued to serve throughout the First World War. A full sized replica of a BE2 which is on display at the Point Cook Aviation Museum was built by our member Andrew Willox. Andrew is currently on an extended visit to the UK.



# OFFICIAL OPENING ~ AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION BALLARAT BRANCH ROOMS AT AIRPORT HUT 48

An event to mark the official opening of rooms allocated for our use at Airport Hut 48 will be held on **Thursday 28th March 2019 ... Arrive before 1.40 pm ... for a 2 pm commencement**

The event will include an afternoon tea to be served in the South Wing, (the dining hall of the former RAAF Base Ballarat Officers' Mess). Ballarat Mayor Cr Samantha McIntosh will attend as will representatives of other Ballarat ex-service organisations. It is also anticipated that representatives from Heritage Victoria will confirm their ability to attend.

Guest speaker will be our 101 year old member Mr Jack Bell who resides in Melbourne. Jack completed Course No 2 at No 1 Wireless Air Gunners School at RAAF Base Ballarat before embarking for overseas for WWII service.

Some local persons with connection to the former RAAF Base Ballarat are also being invited to attend.

To assist with seating and afternoon tea catering, would each member please confirm to me their intention to attend or not. **A simple call to me, (Noel Hutchins), on 0439 929 322 will be appreciated. Please advise me as soon as possible and preferably by Friday 22nd March**, assuming you have received your newsletter by that date. (Emailed copies no problem, but mailed copies rely on AusPost).

If you need transport assistance to enable you to attend and return home, **please do not hesitate to ask**. There are welfare funds provided for this purpose to enable us to provide taxi transport for those members in need of it.

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No 1 WAGS Memorial Website : Following a lot of dedicated work by Janet Bates, our funding application has been formally submitted for a grant of funds to meet the cost of establishment of the No 1 WAGS Memorial Website. Success with this application would enable us to make use of the massive amount of 1 WAGS research work done initially by Tom Roberts over a long period and then assisted by Peter Schoutens and, more recently, joined by Janet Bates. Thank you for all your dedicated work. (NH, Pres.)
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## DID YOU KNOW :

(1) The Ballarat Branch of the Air Force Association has been going since 1945. Of all the Presidents that have served over that time, Tom Roberts set the record of "number of years as President" with a total of nine years. Six straight, then a two year period and then a one year service in 2018.

## RAAF Ex-POW's

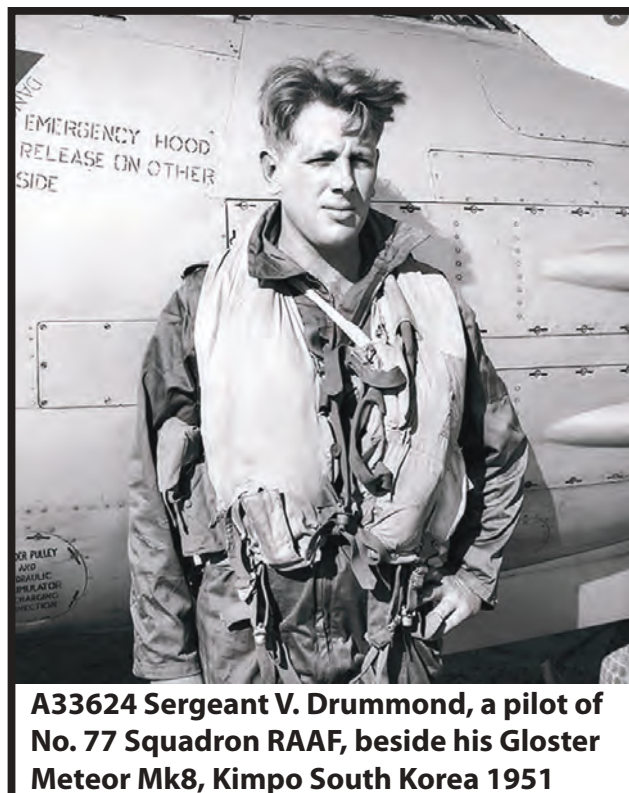
With Ballarat being the location of the National ex-POW Memorial, let us have a look at the stories of some of the RAAF ex-POW's listed on the memorial. This month I will start with the story of a man that I knew when he was a Squadron Leader at No 75 Squadron Williamtown when I was there in 1962/1964, although I was not aware of his past POW experience at that time.

Vance Drummond, a New Zealander, enlisted in the RAAF in 1949 and was posted to No 77 Squadron. One of three pilots shot down by Russian MiG's on 1 Dec 1951, Drummond survived to become a POW.

Held at Pinchon-ni, Drummond and four other POW's tried to escape. With stolen food, compasses and water bottles they donned North Korean outfits and fled the camp. Soon recaptured, Drummond and the others were beaten and returned to Pinchon-ni.

After his release, Drummond continued his flying career. After I knew him he served in Vietnam where he flew as a forward controller and returned to Williamtown and was promoted to Wing Commander. I was at Butterworth, Malaysia in 1967 when I heard the news that Wing Commander Vance Drummond was killed when his Mirage aircraft

inexplicably dived into the ocean off Newcastle NSW. (NH Ed.)



**A33624 Sergeant V. Drummond, a pilot of No. 77 Squadron RAAF, beside his Gloster Meteor Mk8, Kimpo South Korea 1951**