



# AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA BALLARAT BRANCH



Newsletter July 2019

President : Noel Hutchins - 0439 929 322  
Vice President : Leigh Harvey OAM  
Junior Vice President : Peter Schoutens  
Secretary : Rob Petty - 0407 891 281  
Treasurer : Josie Reasons  
Chaplain : Rev. Keith Lanyon - 0411 512 160

REGULAR  
COMMITTEE MEMBERS  
Janet Bates  
Stephen Brown  
Michael Lake  
Ken Marsh  
Brian Reasons

ELDER STATESMEN  
Dr Tom Roberts OAM  
Gordon Jarvis  
Tom Jobling  
Keith Pitman  
Stan White  
Newsletter Editor  
Noel Hutchins

## MONTHLY SOCIAL MEETINGS

Our **Social Luncheon Meetings** are held on the **FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH, (except January)**, with **Arrival time by 11.45 am for a 12 Noon commencement**. All meetings are held at our rooms at Airport Hut 48, Airport Drive, Mitchell Park (ie : Ballarat Aerodrome).

## MONTHLY BUSINESS MEETINGS

Our **Business Meetings, open to all members**, are held at 3 pm on the second Monday of each month. These meetings immediately follow a monthly Committee meeting enabling members to be promptly aware of decisions taken by the committee, enabling members to ratify, or otherwise, decisions taken.

## A BLAST FROM THE PAST

There is a bit of history in this newspaper cutting from 2001. Yep, that's eighteen years ago. On the left is John Bennett who was President in the years 1999 and 2000. While John is no longer with us, his widow Margaret is a current member. The other two gentlemen are well know to us all, Gordon Jarvis in the centre and Stan White holding his **Certificate of Merit for having served as Secretary for a whole twelve years**. Well Stan didn't take presentation of that certificate as an indication that his job had been done...**he went on to more that double that serving another sixteen years. Yep, that's twenty eight years straight.**

Put it in your diary now, the first Tuesday of the month in August is **6th August**, Stan White Day. Be there for this very important Monthly Social Meeting and be part of our acknowledgement of that incredibly long period of service.

It had been intended to acknowledge Stan's service at our June Social meeting; however, Stan was not well enough to attend so we decided that we would hold it over until our next social meeting. Come and hear Stan's Story.

**Monthly Social Meeting Tuesday 6th August**



**Well served:** New president of the Ballarat branch of the Royal Australian Air Force Association Gordon Jarvis, centre, presents his predecessor John Bennett with a certificate as secretary Stan White holds his certificate of merit.

## Award for RAAFA dedication

The Ballarat branch of the Royal Australian Air Force Association honoured one of its hardest workers last week.

Branch secretary Stan White was presented with a certificate of merit for 12 years of dedication to his position.

The presentation was made during a busy agenda at the Ballarat RAAFA's 56th annual meeting, hosted by State president Bill Belton.

Election of office bearers was also finalised.

Mr White said the Ballarat branch

held a strong position in the RAAFA, with its members comprising 10 per cent of the Victorian division.

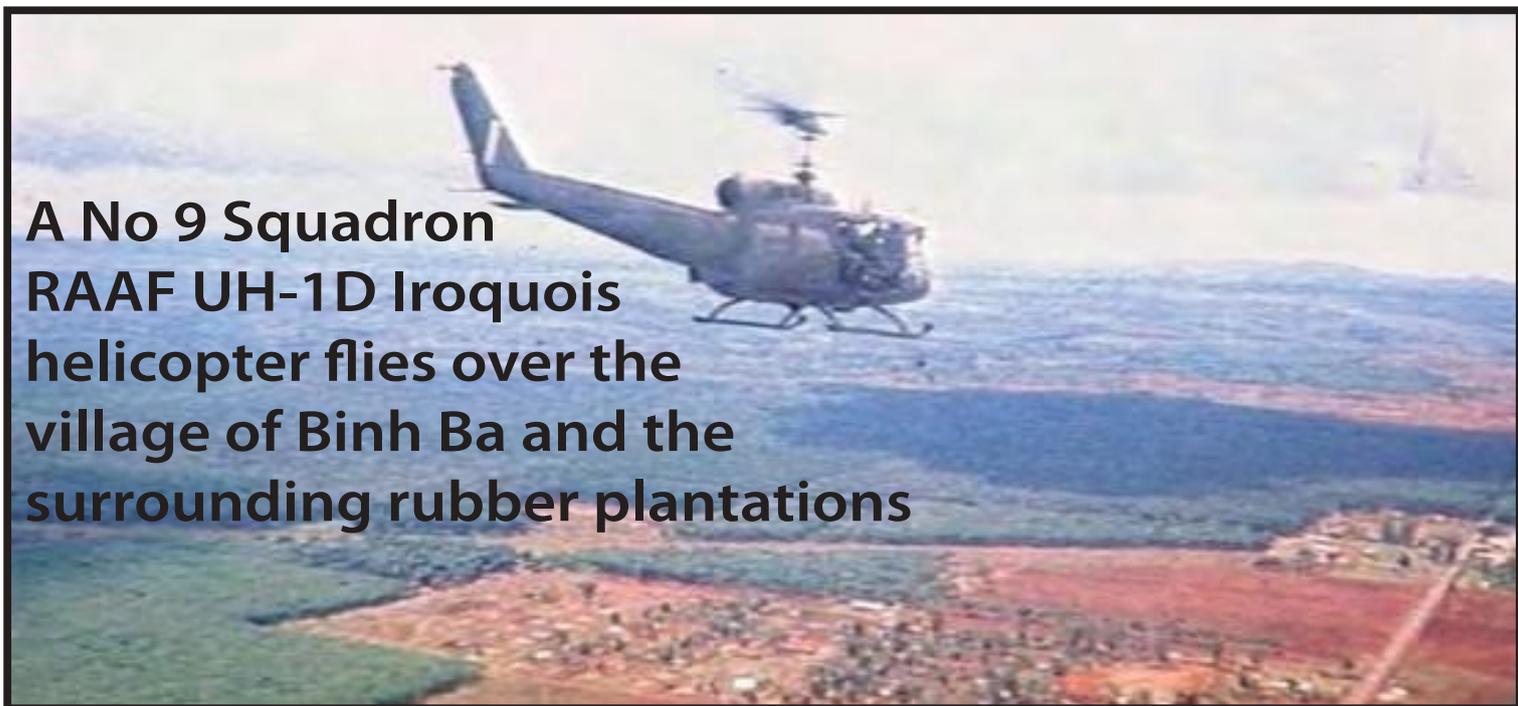
■ Office bearers for 2001: president Gordon Jarvis, senior vice-president Ben Graefe, junior vice-president Alan Akers, branch secretary Stan White, branch treasurer Max Beaumont. Executive: Margaret Beaver, Don Campbell, Beth Curnow, James Eedle, Mary Jones, Keith McMullin, Pat Phillips, Norm Pinney, Alwyn Roberts.

On 6th June this year we held a commemoration marking the 75th anniversary of D Day and acknowledged the WWII service of our member Margaret Wood.

Twenty five years after D Day, 50 years ago on 6th June this year, another military force was involved in a battle considered by many military historians to be a key moment in the history of Australian operations in Vietnam. **The Battle of Binh Ba.**

At our July social meeting we had a look at this significant battle of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war and acknowledged the military service of another of our members, Tom Jobling. Tom served in Vietnam for more than a full year with **161 (Independent) Reconnaissance Flight**, (i.e. an Australian Army aviation unit).

Binh Ba is a small rubber plantation village owned by French plantation managers which housed up to 1,300 people. Although the Australians originally felt they were winning over the town's population, it is said that by 1969 it was firmly sympathetic to the communist forces.



Binh Ba was less than 10 km from the Australian Task Force Base at Nui Dat.

Early on the morning of 6th June 1969, a Centurion tank and an armoured recovery vehicle were making their way moving north along the main route to the nearby Fire Support Patrol Base to replace and recover two tanks that had maintenance difficulties and bring them back to the Task Force base. This took them past the village of Binh Ba. It was here that a rocket propelled grenade was fired at them from a nearby house and struck the Centurion's turret wounding the operator and inviting retaliatory machine-gun fire from both vehicles after which they sent a contact report to the base at Nui Dat and continued their journey to the Fire Support Patrol Base.

Helicopter surveillance by 161 Independent Recce Squadron reported that it was likely that two platoons of Viet Cong were stationed in the town. A Ready Reaction Force comprising four different force elements: D company 5 RAR; four Centurion tanks; a troop of Armoured Personnel Carriers; and a battery of six M2A2 Howitzers in direct support, were prepared to respond.

It was decided that a sweep of the town was necessary in order to clear the enemy. At around 1120 hours the Ready Reaction Force formed up at Nui Dat. The South Vietnamese district chief gave permission for the Australians to attack the village, and ordered civilians to evacuate.

As the Australians advanced towards the village, they saw enemy soldiers moving to take up firing positions and soon came under rocket propelled grenade fire. The decision was made to conduct a sweep of the town from east to west.

The formation was slow-moving as it seemed the enemy was firing from just about every house. It soon became clear that there was more than just two platoons of Viet Cong. In reality, the village was being held by 1st Battalion, 33rd North Vietnamese Army Regiment which was well equipped with anti-armour weapons. Troops were soon ordered out of the village amid concerns they might be 'stuck in the middle of the village' and surrounded by the enemy. B Company 5RAR was mobilised from Nui Dat to support troops as they regrouped for a second sweep of the village.

During the action, air support and artillery support proved invaluable.

Reconnaissance from Army helicopters was able to identify enemy concentrations in the village and in the surrounding rubber plantations while a light fire team of two RAAF Bushrangers, (helicopter gunships), were very effective in providing air support as infantry and armour re-organised for the second sweep.

The RAAF crews did well to also cover the tanks which were immobilised by anti-armour fire and which were at risk of being overrun.

This second sweep was successful in neutralising most of the enemy forces, however the

Australians were still not satisfied that the village had been cleared and, totally exhausted, they harboured nearby for the night. Some enemy troops that tried to escape through the Australian lines under cover of darkness were neutralised.

The next morning a final sweep of Binh Ba was conducted at 0800 hours. The bodies of enemy dead were laid out in front of the schoolhouse upon the request of the Vietnamese district chief.



## SECOND SWEEP OF BINH BA VILLAGE



RAAF BUSHRANGER  
HELICOPTER GUNSHIP

The village of Binh Ba had suffered extensive damage as these images show. But action to restore was very swift.



By 0900 hours the Australian Civil Affairs Unit began assisting in the resettlement and rebuilding of the village. It was a task that would take four and a half months. The image on page 2 of the RAAF Iroquois flying over Binh Ba was taken several months after the battle and the village had been rebuilt.

The battle would constitute one of the major engagements for Australians in Vietnam. It was also one of the few examples of Australians engaging in urban warfare in Vietnam.

Following my presentation, Tom Jobling gave us a talk on his own and his unit's involvement in the Battle of Binh Ba.



Tom was an Australian Army Sergeant and the part that he played and what he saw from the 'choppers' was most interesting to hear. If you missed it, buy Tom a coffee and let him tell you himself. *(NH, Pres.)*

.....  
**VIETNAM VETERANS DAY ~ SUNDAY 11TH AUGUST 2019**

The Ballarat Sub-Branch of the Vietnam Veterans Association have advised that their 2019 Vietnam Veterans Day Service will be held at the Ballarat Cenotaph, Sturt Street Ballarat on Sunday 11th August commencing at 1030 hrs.

I will be attending the Service representing our Branch of the Air Force Association but have delegated the laying of our wreath to our Vice-President Leigh Harvey OAM who is a Vietnam Veteran.

The foregoing Battle of Binh Ba story above is just one example of Australian servicemen's involvement in the Vietnam War.

I would appreciate it if members who are able would attend this service to show our continued support of our Vietnam veterans as we do for veterans of all wars. We have at least three Vietnam veterans in our Branch of the Air Force Association, there may be more. Please attend if you are able, service medals should be worn. *(NH, Pres)*

.....  
**The Poppy Club** event at the Midlands Ballarat RSL Sports and Services Club was a most enjoyable night. All attending enjoyed a meal together. Ballarat RSL President Alan Douglas gave out a quantity of free raffle tickets to each person and proceeded to draw prizes of meat trays, bottles of wine and boxed chocolates. After the meal, those wishing to stay adjourned to the large lounge and enjoyed the live entertainment. The band on the night were excellent. Some attendees joined the dancing on the dance floor. During the night I was advised "we are going to do this every month". I will let members know when the next night is arranged. If you didn't go this time, don't miss the next one. *(NH, Ed)*

.....  
**VALE:** Elizabeth, (Betty or Beth), CURNOW passed away 21 July 2019. Betty served in the WAAAF from 15 June 1943 to 15 June 1945. She joined the Ballarat Branch of the Air Force Association on 10th January 1996. May she Rest in Peace.

## THE 'BATTLE OF BRITAIN' AND THE 'BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA'

Our Ballarat Branch has been commemorating the Battle of Britain annually on the Sunday closest to 15th September. This year, the 15th September *is* a Sunday, so the Skipton Street Church service will be on Sunday 15th September followed by our commemorative service and our B.O.B. Luncheon. Our State President Mr Max McGregor is confirmed as our Guest Speaker at the luncheon.

I am told that there has been 'some discussion' in recent years as to 'whether or not' to proceed with our Battle of Britain commemorative Service and luncheon. My preference would be for us to continue to do so but to combine it with a Battle for Australia Commemoration.

The Federal Government proclaims Australia's Commemoration Days. Among those for war, in order of significance, is The Battle for Australia Day, (the first Wednesday in September), in third place, only after Anzac Day and Remembrance Day.

When, in June 2008, the Federal Government announced that the first Wednesday of September each year would be the day that would be "Battle for Australia Day" it was said, inter alia, "*There will be a series of activities and commemorations occurring **around the date** which will be the first Wednesday in September each year to acknowledge the sacrifice and courage that was something we can all be proud of.*"

As we hold our B.O.B service on a Sunday in September, I am looking at having our **September Commemoration and Luncheon** as a combined **Battle of Britain and Battle for Australia Day** and maybe in future years making it the Sunday **before** 15th September, (rather than the Sunday **closest**), therefore putting it in **between** the **First Wednesday (Battle for Australia)** and **15th September, (Battle of Britain)**. As we know, neither the Battle of Britain nor the Battle for Australia was confined to a one day battle.

It is intended that the commemorative service will be moved from the Sebastopol Cenotaph to the Australian ex POW Memorial. A flypast will be provided by Branch member Stephen Carter in his Vintage Ryan aircraft.

A **Battle for Australia Commemoration** is really a commemoration of a series of battles fought much closer to home than the battles in which Australian servicemen were involved in Europe; the **Battle of the Coral Sea, Battle of Milne Bay** in which the RAAF's No 75 and 76 Kittyhawk Squadrons played such an important part, **Kokoda Track Campaign**. In fact a commemoration honouring all those that defended Australia against the Japanese. All of our Australian servicemen, Army, Navy and Air Force. The Americans and those of the Merchant Navy of all nationalities. Not to forget the suffering of the peoples of the Pacific region including our friends in New Guinea.

I therefore invite members who wish to, to give to me in writing either their support for this move or, again in writing, show reason why we should not move forward with this. Such submissions need to be to me on or before Tuesday 6th August, i.e. our August social meeting date. (NH, Pres.)

### **ARE YOU ATTENDING ??? Battle of Britain Luncheon ... or... Battle of Britain/Battle for Australia Luncheon**

Last year we held our Battle of Britain Luncheon at Barkly's Restaurant and, subject to acceptable pricing, will look at using the same venue. To enable us to obtain pricing and proceed with arrangements we need to have an idea of numbers. We will set the price for members to attend at \$34 per head for meal and one drink. If we need to pay a couple more dollars per head than that we will meet that from Branch funds.

So **PLEASE BRING TO OUR SOCIAL MEETING ON TUESDAY 6TH AUGUST YOUR \$34 PER HEAD** if you wish to attend the luncheon on Sunday 15th September. We will set up for members to be able to pay this at the end of our meeting on that day.

**NHILL CENTENARY AIR SHOW :** If you haven't yet booked your Nhill accommodation for the weekend 2nd/3rd November as advised, then you are probably too late. With some people wishing to stay just the Saturday night and others preferring to go for the Friday and Saturday night stays, transport will be in private vehicles. Nhill motels are now booked out as is a lot of accommodation in other towns in the area. However, Stephen Brown has a booking for a Cabin at the local caravan park with separate rooms should anyone wish to attend and share this accommodation. If interested, give Stephen a call on 0419 345 201.

**~DANGER CLOSE~  
THE BATTLE OF  
LONG TAN**

I was a little surprised at the small response I got from members for their chance to both support the Ballarat Ranger Museum and get to see the screening of this movie. I have purchased tickets for those interested. If you wish to go but did not get to let me know you will need to contact Bill Akell. I have raffle tickets as per poster if you wish to purchase and support the museum. You could win a prize.

**The Ballarat Ranger Museum is holding a fund raiser at the world wide premier of the film**

**Danger Close ~ The Battle of Long Tan.**  
 This will be on 8th August at the Regent Theatre commencing at 1835 hrs.  
 Tickets are \$16 each and a raffle will be held with 1st Prize a *framed movie poster* of the film signed by cast and crew, with the 2nd Prize The Book : "The Battle of Long Tan, as told by The Commanders to Bob Grandin "; the helicopter pilot during the ammo resupply.  
 Book signed by LTCOL Harry Smith and cast. Raffle tickets are \$1 each.  
**Tickets available through Bill Akell at, Email : [yank1200@bigpond.com](mailto:yank1200@bigpond.com)**

~~~~~  
 "Whoever said the pen is mightier than the sword obviously never encountered automatic weapons."  
 Douglas MacArthur

~~~~~  
**The EX RAAF MOTOR TRANSPORT DRIVERS ASSOCIATION** are having their AGM, convention and reunion in Ballarat this year. They are booked into convention and personal accommodation in Ballarat for 8th/11th November. It is intended to give an afternoon tea for them at Airport Hut 48 on the Saturday afternoon. Will advise further details later.

**REMINDERS**

**Tuesday 6th August** ~ Social Meeting.....*(bring your \$34 per head for 15th September luncheon).*

**Thursday 8th August** ~ Screening of Danger Close ~ The Battle of Long Tan.

**Sunday 11th August** ~ Vietnam Veterans Day Service.

**Monday 12th August** ~ 1400 hrs Committee Meeting for committee members.  
 1500 hrs General Business Meeting open for all members.

**Friday 16th August** ~ Meet-A-Mate Point Cook .... If you didn't register as advised, you are too late.

~~~~~  
 ARE YOU IN NEED OF TAXI TRANSPORT TO SOCIAL MEETING TUESDAY 6TH AUGUST ?  
 Advise Noel by Monday 5th August ~ 0439 929 322 or email : [noelhutch@bigpond.com](mailto:noelhutch@bigpond.com)