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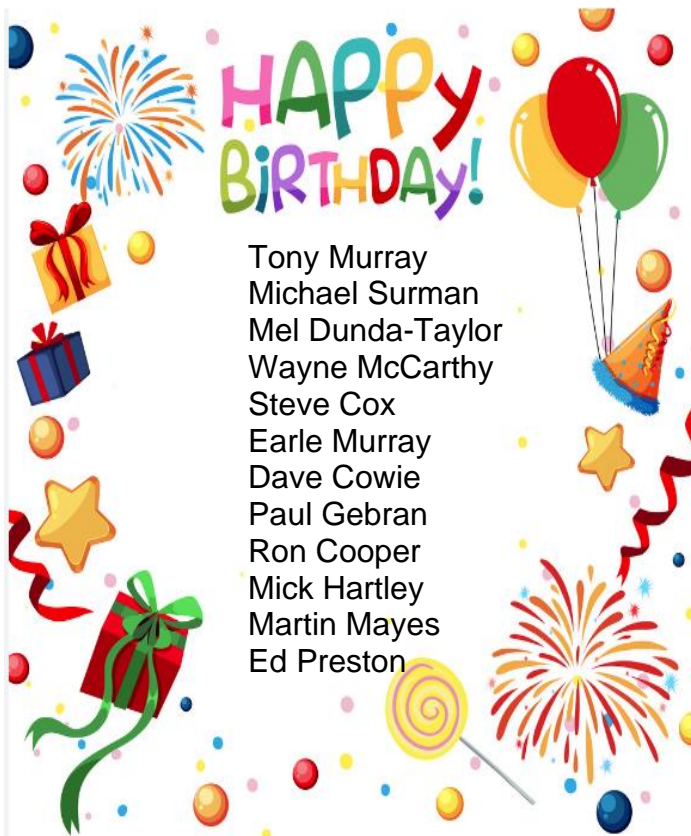
FLIGHTLINE

Volume 24 No. 1

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Tony Murray
Michael Surman
Mel Dunda-Taylor
Wayne McCarthy
Steve Cox
Earle Murray
Dave Cowie
Paul Gebran
Ron Cooper
Mick Hartley
Martin Mayes
Ed Preston

Next Branch Meetings

Sunday 10th March 2024

Monthly Meeting & AGM

1000 Hours

Bolton Clarke Community Centre, Rowes Bay

Upcoming Branch Events

Breakfast – Odyssey Café

The Strand

18FEB24 @ 0800 (bookings required).

Barefoot Bowls

Kirwan Sports Club

15MAR24 @ 1800.

Cowboys Raffle

Tuesday, 26MAR24 @ 1815-1930

15MAR24 @ 1800.

ARE YOU GOING INTO HOSPITAL?

Then read this

If you are admitted to any DVA contracted hospital (eg. The Mater Hospital Townsville & Townsville University Hospital)

Ask for a Veteran Liaison Officer (VLO)

These hospitals are being funded to supply a VLO trained in the requirements for veterans. A VLO can assist you with transport to and from hospital etc. They will also ensure that you are cared for when you get home or, if sending you home is not safe, they will make a case to keep you in hospital.

Remember to ask for a VLO & tick the box for a visitor if you would like an association member to visit you.

In helping yourself you may also help others.



Six crew members were killed and in addition eight Army Medical Corps (AAMC) personnel of the 2nd / 7th Australian General Hospital who were passengers on the Catalina, were missing believed killed. Two crew members were rescued. It was the largest fatality toll in regard to a Catalina crash during World War Two in Bowen.

CATALINA A24-24 MEMORIAL - BOWEN

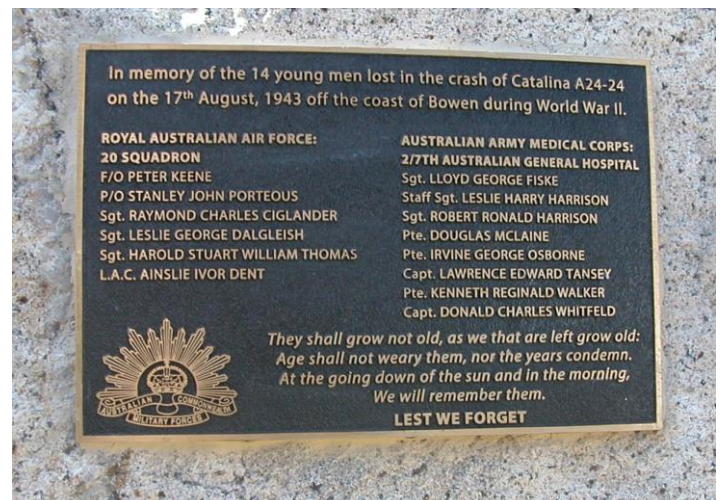


Catalina A24 24 Memorial Plaque

On 17 August 1943, Catalina, A24-24, of 20 Squadron RAAF, took off from Bowen on an air to sea gunnery training exercise flight. At the conclusion of firing practice, the aeroplane was

making a run across the wave tops over a choppy sea and it is assumed that the port wing hit the water and the aeroplane crashed into the sea and sank approximately 8 kilometres east of Bowen.

In 2013 our Branch conducted a dedication of the memorial. A plaque was unveiled on this 70th anniversary remembering those on board Catalina A24-24 who were killed when the aircraft crashed off Bowen.



Source:

1. *Monument Australia*
2. *OZATWAR*
3. *Townsville Branch archives*



Medication Information from Services Australia

Once you or your family spend a certain amount on PBS medicine you'll reach the PBS Safety Net threshold.

The PBS Safety Net is calculated in a calendar year. It usually resets at the beginning of each year.

On 1 January 2024, the PBS Safety Net thresholds were updated to:

- \$277.20 for concession card holders
- \$1,647.90 for general patients.

Before you meet the threshold, each medicine will cost up to:

- \$7.70 for concession card holders
- \$31.60 for general patients and some non-PBS medications

Once you reach the threshold, your Chemist should supply you with a [PBS Safety Net card](#) to get cheaper medicines from any pharmacy that you go to for your medications – if not then ask for one.

Your medicine will then either:

- be free for concession card holders
- cost up to \$7.70 for general patients.

When there are 2 or more brands of the same medicine, they may have different prices. If you choose a more expensive brand it may cost you more.

TOWNSVILLE'S DOUG MILLICAN HONOURED AS AUSTRALIA DAY AMBASSADOR

Air Force Association Townsville Branch Vice President Doug Millican has been appointed an Australia Day ambassador. On January 26, he will represent our nation's spirit in Charters Towers.



Australia Day ambassadors, including athletes, scientists, actors and past Australians of the Year, journey across the country each year, bringing inspiration to regional Australia Day events.

Doug Millican, a respected veteran from Townsville who served in the RAAF from 1967 to 1975, recently joined this distinguished group.

"I was unfamiliar with the Australia Day ambassador role until I received the invitation," Mr Millican shared.

Assigned to Charters Towers, Mr Millican has a special connection to this community from his time there in the 1990s. His diverse career includes roles in sales, radio, and numerous voluntary initiatives. "My time in Charters Towers taught me the unique nature of small towns," he remarked.

Mr Millican acknowledges the growing significance of Australia Day, reflecting on its evolution over the years.

"It's become a more prominent event, sparking a range of thoughts and emotions," he said.

He believes the day symbolises the unification of the states to form Australia.

While Australia Day was only officially recognised as a national public holiday in 1994, its historical roots vary across states.

Expressing humility and open-mindedness, Mr Millican said, "My views as an older Australian might differ from the younger generation, but I believe in time, we'll find common ground."

He advocates for an Australia Day that acknowledges all who have made Australia their home, including post-war immigrants and recent arrivals.

In 2022, Mr Millican's extensive volunteer work with Northern Queensland Legacy and the RAAF Association earned him the Townsville Citizen of the Year award, leading to his selection as an Australia Day ambassador.

Reflecting on national identity, Mr Millican observed, "Australians could do more to celebrate our achievements and the positive impact on those who join us from other cultures."

His ambassador role, facilitated by the Queensland Government's Department of Premier and Cabinet, is a testament to his enduring commitment to community and national spirit.

Congratulations Doug from us all.

Source: <https://raafa.org.au/townsvilles-doug-millican-honoured-as-australia-day-ambassador/>

THE PERFECT GIFT FOR PNGDF

Australia has gifted two new PAC-750XL aircraft to the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF), continuing to deepen its defence partnership.

The aircraft will increase the PNGDF's ability to support the PNG community and civil authorities through transport, search, rescue and surveillance. It is also an important training platform for new pilots, aircrew and maintenance personnel undergoing training through the Flights of Excellence program supported by RAAF.

The PNGDF selected the PAC-750XL for its ability to take off and land on shorter, less-prepared airfields, adding highly valued capability in PNG's diverse and challenging terrain.

The aircraft will work alongside a RAAF C-27J Spartan that regularly deploys to PNG under the Defence Pacific Air Program.

Defence Minister Richard Marles and PNG's Minister for Defence Win Bakri Daki announced the program in October. An official handover ceremony was held on November 2 at the Air Transport Wing, Jacksons International Airport, Port Moresby, and was attended by Australian Assistant Minister for Defence Matt Thistlethwaite and PNG Deputy Prime Minister John Rosso.

"Australia is pleased to be able to partner with the PNGDF to strengthen their aviation capability and to respond to the needs of the government and people of Papua New Guinea," Mr Thistlethwaite said. "The two aircraft will create new opportunities for our forces to work together, building on our longstanding defence partnership."

Australia successfully remediated PNG's existing PAC-750XL in 2021, with this acquisition bolstering the PNGDF's fleet to three aircraft.



Mr Rosso acknowledged and thanked Australia for its support.



(L-R) RAAF Squadron Leader David Thornton, PNGDF Lieutenant Colonel Doug Vavar, RAAF Group Captain Stephen Fielder, and in the front row, Wing Commander Tim Shaw stand with a PAC-750XL at the Air Transport Wing, Port Moresby.

"These two aircraft are very important platforms that will be brought into service in the PNGDF Air Transport Wing [ATW]. I would like to acknowledge and thank Australia for effectively supporting the Flights of Excellence program, as this pathway has laid the foundations for building PNGDF sovereign air operations," Mr Rosso said.

"I would also like to thank the Australian government for the refurbishment of the ATW hangar. This is a significant investment into building PNGDF's sovereign air capability. It is a significant contribution by Australia towards ensuring peace, security and stability in our region and provides opportunities for PNGDF and ADF to work together as partners."

Director PNG Sovereign Air Capability Group Captain Stephen Fielder has been an integral part of the Flights of Excellence program since its beginning in 2019.

"Walking alongside my PNGDF counterparts as together we rebuild and develop PNG's sovereign aviation capability continues to be a richly rewarding experience," Group Captain Fielder said. "Having been closely involved in the PAC-750XL acquisition and gifting project from inception to delivery, I am thrilled to finally see the aircraft now accepted into the PNGDF."

Source: www.defence.gov.au

Below is the summary of a paper on Royal Commission Veteran Suicide – Background Paper -Senior Veteran Suicide/My Aged Care. You can read the complete paper in the document attached to this newsletter's email.

SUMMARY

The Vietnam veterans are the group that presented with the most significant health challenges relating to treatment on return to country. Add to this the highest suicide risks specific to their theatre of war, their current age demographic, including the potential decades of self harm by some, trauma from community rejection, it is abhorrent to consider that they are the largest demographic group likely to be affected by this.

Personally, it was painful to see the Prime Minister apologising to our Vietnam Veterans for how they were treated on their return and the offer of a 50th year commemoration medallion. My late husband deserved care to help him live safely more than he needed commemoration before he died. It begs to question how the Prime Minister can apologise, when DOHAC and DVA allow Vietnam Veterans to suffer and in our case, die, while waiting for **essential** health care services. The Government are dishonouring their sacrifice through not enabling them access to priority care earned through their Gold or White Treatment cards. This apology for

some like me stings deeply, and an embarrassment to the Government, as on one hand there is an apology and on the other hand, they are forgotten about when placed in the general aged care pool. They did not demonstrate care when our Vietnam Veterans returned to Australia and they still do not care as they allow them to wait for care and in some cases, die before care delivered.

If you feel, as I do, that this issue is going to escalate as our veterans need greater care at home or placed in residential care, I ask that you **consider writing to the Minister of Veterans' Affairs, the Minister of Health and Aged Care and/or the Repatriation Commissioner** with something along the lines of:

'We are seeking a guarantee that all senior veterans with Gold and White treatment cards, receive accelerated access to services, through the utilisation of their Treatment cards, at home, or in residential aged care, irrespective of who delivers the service.'

I personally do not care who delivers the service and I am all for the integration of services to be more cost efficient, **as long as our veterans receive the services when needed, through the use of their Gold or White Treatment cards.**

On behalf of all senior veterans and the pain associated with my husband's premature passing, I am not giving in to this issue, especially as the Government is currently reviewing the VEA, MRCA, DRCA legislation, effective around July 2025. I fear that the Government will use delay tactics until the legislative changes commence.

This space has been left empty – can you fill it?

If you have a story that you would like to see in our newsletter please send it to tvlsec@raafaqlld.org

OR

If there is a particular topic you would like to see in here please let us know & we will do our best to include it.



Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

7 December 2023

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide has been granted a three-month extension by the Federal Government to complete its inquiries.

Commissioners Nick Kaldas (chair), Peggy Brown and James Douglas wrote to Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus in October to raise concerns the current timeframe continues to impact the ability of the Royal Commission to deliver a final report and recommendations to bring about long-lasting improvements for the wellbeing of our Defence and veteran communities.

The Royal Commission was due to present its final report and recommendations to the Governor-General by 17 June next year; however, the Commissioners stated that timeline was impacting key areas of work, including the:

- opportunity for comprehensive action on procedural fairness for all parties; and
- testing of recommendations with key stakeholders, such as the Australian Defence Force, Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs, and Defence and veterans' bodies, including ex-service organisations, to ensure the Royal Commission delivers implementable recommendations to Government.

The Royal Commission has previously expressed frustration at the slow response from Commonwealth agencies to requests for information, as well as claims of confidentiality, parliamentary privilege and public interest immunity.

Commissioner Kaldas has today welcomed the Government's decision.

"Regrettably, the latest AIHW data released last month confirms there has been no improvement in the high rates of suicide in our Defence and veteran community," Commissioner Kaldas said.

"This Royal Commission must be a call to action. We, as a nation, can no longer allow the preventable deaths of our serving and ex-serving Defence personnel to continue."

"This short, three-month extension will help to ensure our final report is robust, evidence-based and fair to all parties, and contains recommendations that are realistic, fit-for-purpose and implementable – to ensure Government is well equipped to address what is a national crisis once and for all," he said.

The Royal Commission's final report must now be delivered by **Monday 9 September 2024**.

Meanwhile, the Royal Commission is moving quickly to appoint a number of Assistant Commissioners to ensure hundreds of outstanding private sessions with people with lived experience can be completed before the end of the inquiry.

A recent legislative change allows for the appointment of Assistant Commissioners with the appropriate skills and experience to undertake private sessions alongside the three existing Commissioners.

Commissioners Kaldas, Brown and Douglas have so far completed 639 one-on-one confidential sittings to hear the often-harrowing stories of those impacted by suicide and suicidality. There are some 320 private sessions still to be held.

"We know how important these sessions are to veterans and their families, and the catharsis and validation they bring to so many people impacted by suicide and suicidality," Commissioner Kaldas said. "Equally, these sessions provide us real insight into the lived experience of serving and ex-serving members, and their families, and this knowledge is vital to our inquiries."

"We want to continue to ensure they have the opportunity to be heard and the appointment of Assistant Commissioners will achieve that."

The Royal Commission hopes to finalise the appointment of the Assistant Commissioners by the end of the year

DVA UPDATES

Permanent increase for the Work Bonus Bank

21 December 2023

Veterans and partners who receive the Service Pension, Income Support Supplement or Age Pension and are entitled to the Work Bonus will be able to earn more income from employment before it affects their pension entitlements.

From 1 January 2024, the maximum limit for Work Bonus Bank balances will be permanently increased. This includes an increase to the maximum allowed Work Bonus Bank balance from \$7,800 to \$11,800, and will provide all newly eligible Work Bonus Bank clients with a starting Work Bonus Bank balance of \$4,000.

In addition, beginning 1 July 2024, former Work Bonus Bank clients with a preserved Work Bonus Bank balance who are re-joining the scheme may be eligible to receive a top-up to ensure their balance is equal to \$4,000 upon recommencement.

These changes will allow pensioners the opportunity to earn more income without affecting their pension, which will improve the financial independence and wellbeing of veterans and families.

More information about the Work Bonus Bank is available on the [DVA website](#).

Claim processing times

Where things are at

In the month of December 2023 we:

- made 6,076 decisions on claims
- received claims from 4,478 veterans

As at 31 December 2023 we:

- were working on 65,960 claims
- had 9,842 active claims not yet allocated to an officer for processing (known as the claims backlog), lodged by 5,979 veterans

<https://www.dva.gov.au/claim-processing>

Men's Health Peer Education volunteers raise prostate cancer awareness

21 December 2023

Recently, a group of DVA's Men's Health Peer Education (MHPE) volunteers gathered at the DVA office in Adelaide for a training session to improve their understanding of common men's health issues. The session also detailed DVA and community supports and services available to veterans and families. The volunteers will pass on the information to their local veteran communities, and provide support.

The health awareness topic for the day was prostate cancer – the most commonly diagnosed cancer in Australian men. A prostate cancer specialist nurse from the Royal Adelaide Hospital and representatives from the Cancer Council SA delivered a comprehensive presentation on awareness, research and support. MHPE Volunteer John Hunter and his wife Sue then discussed their lived experience of the disease.

Our SA Deputy Commissioner Janice Silby along with Director of Strategic Programs Darrin Tyson and Community Support Adviser Neil Davies rounded out the session with important updates on DVA programs and supports, particularly those focusing on mental and social health.

Ex-service or veteran support organisations interested in prostate cancer information sessions can email COMMUNITYSUPPORT@dva.gov.au to find out more.

For more information on the MHPE program, visit the [Men's Health Peer Education program page](#) or email MensHealth@dva.gov.au.

DVA would also like to acknowledge information and support provided by [Man Up! Australia](#)