



454–459 SQUADRONS ASSOCIATION ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

e-mail : thesecretary@454-459squadrons.org.au

Web site: www.454-459squadrons.org.au



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/454459squadrons>

YOUR 2017 COMMITTEE

Patron	FLGOFF John MacMahon 454
Hon. Secretary – Rick Capel	Nephew of Cam Stephen - 459
Treasurer – Michael Antonios	Son-in-law of Bill East - 459
Julie Parsons	Daughter of Jim McHale - 459
Pamela Antonios	Daughter of Bill East - 459
Jenny Huxley	Daughter of Bill East – 459
Jill Lord	Daughter of George Gray - 454
Steve Lysaght	Son of Jim Lysaght - 454

APRIL 2017 BULLETIN

Page(s)	Contents
2-3	2017 ANZAC Day March
4	Reunion
5	Subscriptions & Absent Comrades
6-13	Tributes
14	Photos of Anzac Day 2016

ANZAC DAY MARCH

TUESDAY, 25TH APRIL 2017

Leader: FLGOFF John 'Doover' MacMahon – RAAF 454 Squadron

**9.00 am – 454-459 Squadrons
FORM UP on the Corner of
Hunter & Phillip Streets, Sydney.**
Meet Hunter Street at the bottom
of the Deutsche Bank. Across the
road is the Chifley Plaza. [See
map to right & on page....]. →

Association Committee members
will be there to assist John
MacMahon and the Squadrons'
banner will be raised. There will
only be one march round, note,
the March route will be same as
2016.



Information provided by RSL: The Order of March - WWII Navy/WWII Army/ WWII Air Force-Navy/ Army/Air Force-Civilians in support of Australian Troops-Descendants of Australian Veterans-Commonwealth Troops-Allies.

ROUTE – general information for all participants of March

Due to the construction work in George Street for the light rail project, the March will commence at the intersection of Martin Place and Elizabeth Street, travel south on Elizabeth Street to Liverpool Street, where Marchers will wheel left for dispersal.

Website: <http://rslnsw.org.au/commemoration/anzac>

Descendants please remember to wear your deceased Veteran's medals on your **right** breast. Last year despite only having one surviving Veteran John MacMahon and his carer, descendants from the 454-459 Squadrons were able to march behind the banner. Please join us for the 2017 march – we look forward to seeing you there.



ANZAC DAY SYDNEY MARCH MAP 2017



Key

- Band Chute
- Participant Flow
- Cenotaph
- March Path
- Veterans' Seating
- Wheelchair Accessible Viewing Area

Contingent

- Police Escort
- Taxis And Buses
- Australian National Flag Contingent
- Mounted Police
- March Leader
- Senior ADF Officers
- Victoria Cross Recipients
- RSL of Australia (NSW Branch)
- RSL Corps of Guards
- StH African Veterans Memorial Horse & Banner
- WWI Veterans Memorial Horse
- WWI Unit Flags
- New Zealand Veterans
- NSW Police
- WWII Royal Australian Navy (incl Merchant Navy)
- WWII Australian Army
- WWII Royal Australian Air Force
- Occupation Force (BCOF)
- Fire & Rescue NSW
- Post-WWII RAN Commander
- Post-WWII Royal Australian Navy (RAN) (incl Merchant Navy)
- State Rail & State Transit
- Post-WWII Army Commander
- Korean War
- AATV
- Armour
- Artillery
- Engineers
- Survey
- Signals
- Infantry
- Special Forces
- Army Aviation
- Intelligence
- RAEME
- Chaplains
- Transport
- Medical
- Dental
- Ordnance
- Catering
- Military Police
- Nursing
- Psychology
- WRAAC
- United Nations & Peacekeeping Forces
- Army Reserve
- National Servicemen
- Officer Training Unit
- Post-WWII RAAF Commander
- Post-WWII Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)
- Post-WWII War Correspondents
- Entertainers
- SEATO
- Australian Red Cross
- Civilian Air Crews
- Sydney Legacy
- Descendants Of Boer War Veterans
- Descendants Of WWI Veterans
- Descendants Of WWII & Post WWII Veterans
- UK & British Commonwealth Forces
- Allied Troops



REUNION

“The Aurora Hotel” Kippax Cocktail Lounge

Level 1, Function Room [with lift access]
324 Elizabeth Street - Surry Hills, NSW 2010
[across the road from Central Station]

Web : <http://aurorahotel.com.au/bars/kippax-cocktail-lounge>

Email : aurora@thomashotels.com.au **Phone:** 02 9211 3462

The Kippax Lounge will be open from 11.30 am – lunch from 12 – 3pm – with bar and bistro-style restaurant and children are welcome. Last year the outdoor covered balcony with seating for 60 proved popular. This Venue also provides connections from the ending of the Anzac March. It is located across the road from Central Station. *As in previous years any 454-459 Veterans & their wives will have their meal and drinks provided at no cost – speak with Michael Antonios [Treasurer] on the day.* Rick Capel will be our MC.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE AT THE AURORA HOTEL

- ➔ Attendees can arrive from 11.30 am
- ➔ Write a name tag for yourself
- ➔ Lunch 12-3 pm
- ➔ 1 pm – Toast absent friends, tributes, notices.
- ➔ With this Venue you can leave when you feel like it.

Railway: Trains run from St James to Central Railway Station.

Buses: Run along Elizabeth Street to Central Railway Station.

Taxi Services : Taxis are available out front regularly.

Parking & Rates : It might be possible to park in Kippax Street.

55 Holt Street Parking Station – [6 am – 5 pm]

Flat rate on weekends @ \$12.00 or book before you go secure a spot
- via their website @ \$10.00.

<http://www.secureparking.com.au/car-parks/australia/nsw/sydney/55-holt-street>

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

To help us maintain the website, produce the annual Squadron Bulletin and arrange for the Anzac day gathering, a \$20 contribution can be made to the Association as follows:

PayPal subscriptions: can be made by following this link
<http://www.454-459squadrons.org.au/subscription.html>

Electronic transfer to: St.George Bank BSB: 112879
Account Number: 067706091 --
Please make sure you *enter your name* in the "Description field".

Post to: Bank or personal cheque would be appreciated, made payable to: "454 459 Squadrons No.2 Account",
C/- The Treasurer, 454 459 Squadrons Association,
14 Driscoll Place, Barden Ridge, NSW 2234, Australia.
Please do not post Cash.



ABSENT COMRADES

It is with regret that we have been notified of the passing of the undermentioned member:

Date	Member	State	Sqdn	Notified by
11.04.2016	Fred Thompson	UK	459	Brian Thompson

We say farewell to old friends and comrades, and extend our deepest sympathy to their families in their loss.

LEST WE FORGET

TRIBUTES

Flight Sergeant Fred THOMPSON

RAAF 459 Squadron

RAF Service Number: 1135126

Date of Enlistment: 12 May 1943

Date of Discharge: August 1944

Place of Birth: Middlesborough, UK

Died: 11 April 2016 aged 95

Notified by his son Brian Thompson

Flight Crew:

F/Officer : A.G. Storman, RAAF

F/Sergeant D.S. Noble, RAF

F/Sergeant F. Thompson, RAF

F/Sergeant J.H. Raw, RAF



From the Book “Desert Scorpions – a History of 459 Squadron RAAF – 1942 – 1945” written by the late Professor Leon Kane-Maguire

A major anti-shipping operation was mounted by the Squadron on the night of 12-13 October, with eight Hudsons taking part in offensive patrols in the Leros and eastern Aegean area. They took off from base at ten-minute intervals commencing at 17.25 hrs. Four crews carried out attacks.

Allan Storman subsequently described his attack in correspondence with David Vincent: *“There was no illumination except the moonlight and we made three runs over it before getting an accurate run with the bombsight. In the meantime, we were getting a fair bit of light anti-aircraft fire and plenty of tracer as we passed over. My navigator David Noble, a Scotsman in the RAF, reported the last two bombs in the stick hit the ship amidships and the later intelligence reports said the ship sank and survivors came ashore on the Turkish coast. That was a trip of six hours twenty minutes, all but fifty minutes being logged as night flying.”*

Wireless Operator/Air Gunner in the crew, Sergeant Fred Thompson still recalls the attack vividly, *“It being the most dramatic event of my operation tour with the Squadron. It was a beautiful moonlit night.....*

I was in the upper turret and at our height of a few thousand feet, I could see numerous small islands silhouetted in sharp focus. We had just turned for home when I spotted the ship in the moon-path – it looked too straight to be an island. I told Allan to turn to starboard to have a look and sure enough it was a ship. We made three runs over it – on the first two we couldn't get in a good bombing position and David Noble, who was on the bombsight in the nose, told Allan to go around again.

By the time we came in on our third run, anti-aircraft fire from our target and nearby vessel was intense, with tracer coming up like a cone towards us. We were also receiving fire from the nearby Kos coast. Johnny Raw [the other WOP/AG] had wound down the trap door for the belly gun to get a better look. From the turret I could see down through his window and saw the ship slide past below us, as if in slow motion – the sight is still fixed in my mind. I did not see the bombs explode. Not wishing to stretch our luck any further, we headed back to base without circling back for another look.”

Adverse weather restricted operations over the next several days. However, on the night of 15 October - All Storman and his crew found a concentration of small enemy vessels sheltering near the jetty at Port Calino - on the south coast of Kaylmos (an island between Kos and Leros). Bomb bursts from the low-level attack were observed in the harbour and on the foreshore. Wireless operator Fred Thompson again recalled: *“We were flying at less than a thousand feet and in the moonlight we spotted three or more small vessels tied up at the jetty. We received no anti-aircraft fire on passing over the first time, so we went back again at low level to bomb. Light ‘ack ack’ opened up on us from the end of the jetty but fortunately we were not hit.*

The next night a 2,000 ton merchant vessel was discovered in the same location by the Squadron Leader Roy Shaw and attacked. But the bombs overshot, with some falling on nearby warehouses. An early morning raid by eight Hudsons on 18 October saw the Squadron return to the bombing of enemy aerodromes – Heraklion airfield on Crete. Although all aircraft bombed the target as tasked, results were difficult to assess due to the cloudy conditions. The formation leader, Squadron Leader Roy Shaw, made four runs over the target in the face of intense and accurate flak in order to observe the bombing. In early 1944, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his typically determined and

courageous leadership. Remarkably, he and his crew were unscathed. However, one aircraft (R'FH428) flown by Allan Storman was struck in the wings and fuselage by 'ack ack' fire but no injuries were sustained.

Fred Thompson in the upper turret had a lucky escape: *"As we dived away after bombing, a piece of shrapnel came through the Perspex cupola, passing over my right shoulder before striking the right-hand machine-gun, curling back to the top of the breach block cover. Its force spent by the impact, the piece of shrapnel ended up lying on the inner ring of the turret. I kept it for several months before misplacing it."*

We pay tribute to Syd Wickham - Absent Comrade [2016].

Flight Lieutenant Sydney (Syd) Thomas WICKHAM

RAAF 459 Squadron

RAAF Service Number: 402268

Date of Enlistment: 22 Jul 1940

Date of Discharge: 24 Dec 1945

Died: 9 September 2015

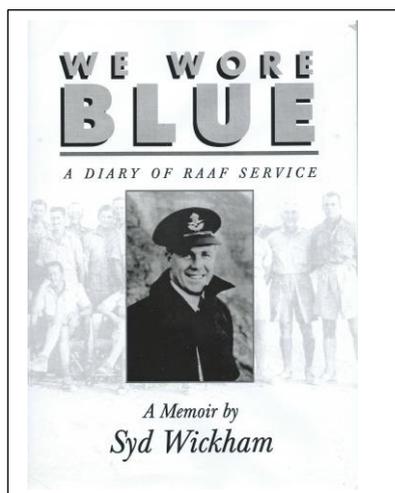
Flight Crew:

F/Officer : S.T. Wickham, RAAF

F/Sergeant: Fred Sturt, RAAF

F/Sergeant: Jack Evans, RAAF

F/Sergeant: Ron Godfrey, RAAF KIA



The following extract is from the book Syd Wickham wrote called "We Wore Blue – A Diary of RAAF Service" – published in the year 2000."

"On the 28th July 1942, (in Egypt) while lying in our tent waiting for something to happen, I was alerted for an immediate strike. The aircraft were already laden with depth charges as these were used against submarines and at that time against 'F' boats – tank landing craft, which were large landing craft used to carry tanks but were now used for fuel and other supplies to the Africa Corps at El Alamein as the road transport was being battered by our aircraft.

We took off at 11.10 am and the other 3 planes formed a tight 'V' formation for we were going well behind the enemy lines and in close to the coast and although we were promised fighter escort they did not appear till we were attacking.

Near Sidi Barrani in the Bay of Salum and about one mile from the shore I saw 2 'F' boats and circled to attack with the flight falling in the almost line astern. With bomb doors open, I made a diving approach slightly on their port bow which would give us a run to seaward after attacking and allow stick bombing on both craft.

I saw cannon shells hitting the water off on my portside as I levelled out at about 30 feet, then all hell broke loose. Suddenly, the aircraft received a number of hits in the port engine, the nose and underneath. I circled the forward gun platform in my gun sight and held the firing button down. The tracer clearly visible sprayed across the platform and bounced off the deck. Ron was sitting beside me on the Dickie seat and he hit my arm as an indication to go no lower or leave out because at this stage in an attack I was always firing the front guns. We received more hits and Ron was blown through the seat. He must have died instantly. I released the depth charges. I could smell petrol and flames were sweeping up the open front. Oil, soot, flame and blood covered everything and I couldn't see through the windscreen. The motors were dying, more throttle had no effect. I had released the depth charges as the ships disappeared under our nose and didn't know whether they had cleared the bomb bay. Then knowing it had to be a wet tail, I selected bomb doors closed and released my escape hatch.

The aircraft was losing height, but there was no way of knowing where the water was. I tried to slip one side of my shoulder harness with the thought of looking above the windscreen, but I don't know if any of this happened for I was experiencing a violent spinning sensation and suddenly everything was black. The thought went through my mind '**so this is what it is like to die**'. I opened my eyes and vomited salt water, then slowly my brain started to function and I could see water, only water. I realised the flotation material in my Mae West was keeping my mouth just above water level and with each wavelet I was sucking some in. I inflated the jacket and it raised me chest high.

I slowly turned around to see the aircraft about 50 feet away with Fred and Jack at the open rear door.

The immersion switch to inflate the dinghy in the door had failed to operate so Fred who had had his boots ripped off when his feet were jammed getting out of the gun turret, climbed back inside and released the dinghy manually. It was hopelessly perished and immediately sank.

Jack then went inside and collected two 'one-man' dinghies and swam them over to me. All this time, not knowing the depth charges had released I was yelling 'get away from the aircraft' in case the charges somehow or other exploded. The aircraft 'R' for Robyn slowly stood up on her nose as if in a final salute, then settled back and sank tail first beneath the sea. I waited for the dreadful percussion that I knew would crush us.

Nothing happened and slowly my head cleared and sanity returned. I was quiet, very quiet except for the lapping sound of the water against my Mae West and a faint sound of the last of the flight vanishing in the distance. Suddenly, I felt abandoned.

They, Fred and Jack, handed me a one-man dinghy which I couldn't inflate, so let it sink. Three of us with a one-man dinghy?

At this point I had to make a correction to my original script, the first and only one.

I clearly remember being in the water and thought that is where I stayed during this incident but I have been assured by both Fred and Jack that they put me in the dinghy. I have no recollection of the fact. Yet I have a recollection of people in the one-man dinghy, little realising all these years that I was the only one. Fred with one shoe and lacerated leg stayed in the water along with Jack. However, I do remember the vibrations of the German boat and lifting my head up from a slumped forward position looking down the muzzle of a gun and seeing the high grey side of the boat as it pulled alongside. This would tend to confirm their assurances. In any case, I have no reason to doubt their word, never have, and thank them for their assistance then, and for correcting this and reminding me of other details.

We floated for one and a half hours, then I could feel the vibrations of a vessel becoming more pronounced and there above us was the one that got away. We had split the plates on one boat and it had been beached in deepish water. The other somehow survived the four aircraft attack, took the crew from the stricken vessel and came out to

collect us. The crew on its forward gun platform had the 20mm cannon aimed squarely at us and I wanted to say 'Good luck, this could be it', but I doubt the words were ever uttered. However, our captors behaved in a very humane manner by assisting us up the Jacobs ladder with a couple of boat hooks. We were **Prisoners of War!**

As for the crew and myself, the only consolation we 3 have for the loss of our friend and compatriot Sergeant Ron Godfrey, the best navigator in our Squadron and nearly 3 years as prisoners of war (Stalag Luft III) was that we 'R' had made a good attack and with the rest of the flight can claim success.

Recently some 46 years after the event, I learnt that Sgt Ron Godfrey was unhappy about making that fateful flight because we had been forward for our one week stint and were due to be relieved the previous day. History records that after discussing his feelings with Fred and Jack and regardless of any premonitions he may have had he performed his duty as always.

**Flight Sergeant Campbell
STEPHEN - RAAF 459 Squadron**

RAAF Service Number: 402888

Date of Enlistment: 11 Nov 1940

Killed in Action: 1 June 1942

Died Aged: **21**

Buried: El Alamein, Egypt

Place of Birth: Woolahra, NSW

Flight Crew – Roll of Honour

Flight/Sergeant Frank Leavey, RAAF

F/Sgt Oliver Osborne, RAAF

F/Sgt Campbell Stephen, RAAF

F/Sgt Stanley Unger, RAAF

Ground Crew – Roll of Honour

F/Sgt Arthur Chirnside, RAAF

LAC Robert Aitken, RAAF

LAC Wallace Reid, RAAF



The tragic accident as detailed in Professor Leon Kane-Maguire's book "Desert Scorpions" – reads as follows: The honour of flying the Squadron's first regular operational sortie from LG-40 fell to

Don Beaton and his crew; Pilot Officer Norman Pottie (Navigator), Sergeants Ray Heathwood and Doug Maddess (WOP/AGs) in Hudson 'D' (V9052). They took off at midday on the 1 June for an anti-submarine patrol along the Cyrenaica coast between Mersa Matruh and Sidi Barrani. The uneventful four and a half hour sortie, together with a similar patrol two hours later by Ian Campbell's crew in Hudson 'C'(V9187), marked the effective commencement of independent operations by 459 Squadron.

Unfortunately, the squadron's satisfaction at finally operating from its own airfield was marred by a tragic accident that claimed seven lives. A horrified witness was Syd Wickham who was Acting 'B' Flight Commander at the time: *"I heard an aircraft on the circuit, picked up the field glasses to read off the identification letters and walked outside the Flight tent. I focused the glasses and in trying to read the letter I realised my body was twisting over sideways. I thought, this is odd, I stood up straight and dropped the glasses in horror, as the aircraft rolled completely over and crashed at the end of the runway. There was no hope for anyone to survive the crash, much less the instantaneous inferno that followed. The pilot was Sergeant Leavey and a good pilot too. In a tight steep turn the aircraft appeared to have done a high-speed stall. The fire tender was slow getting to the scene, but it couldn't be effective and I was too devastated to complain."*

Sergeant Frank Leavey was returning Hudson (V8997) from No 107 MU at Kasfareet where modifications had been carried out on its Wright Cyclone engines to improve oil consumption. Three of those killed when the aircraft crashed on its return were ground crew fitters who had been taken to 107 MU to assist with the modifications. Understandably, there was considerable concern as to what had caused the tragedy, as it did not appear that an engine had cut. Another fitter, Stan Charington, who had been waiting at the airfield for the return of his friend Bob Aitken who was on board, gave a similar explanation to that of Syd Wickham: *"The pilot overshot the strip, then on banking with the large wing flaps extended, turned into the wind for the second approach. According to those watching, at 150 feet that was inviting disaster. The port wing stalled, the nose dropped and it was all over."* Ray Heathwood described the grim aftermath, *"Instantly we knew no one would get out of that alive. Don [Beaton] jumped on one of the trucks racing to the crash site. Later I was told a hand was seen reaching up through the flames. In the afternoon we are grave digging."* Those killed in the accident were

buried with full military honours the following day. Present were two very fortunate fitters, 'Gunner' Gaunt and his friend John Cosgrove, who had also been at Kasfareet and would have been on the fatal flight but for their decision to accept a truck ride back to base. The pathos of the desert burials is captured in Ian Campbell's diary: *"Today at 1000 hours, the usual scene was re-enacted. The grave with freshly-dug earth each side and the Padre wearing his clerical robes standing at the head. One side stand the firing party stiffly, whilst on the other side the officers and airman are lined up in two parties. At the other end of the grave on the ground lie the seven bodies, a pathetic heap covered by the Union Jack. I know the words of the service by heart now. The bodies are lowered reverently into the grave, the firing party's three volleys ring out across the quietness of the sand and between them you could hear a pin drop. Then the 'Last Post', which is the saddest bugle call of all, followed by 'Stand to'. The latter seems to have a note of challenge and somehow expresses still a spirit of defiance. We file up one by one and salute the grave, so it finishes. Once again the Last Post echoes in my ears and as I walk back my mind goes back to all the other times and all the other fellows. The best chaps one could ever wish to meet and they're going like flies".* That evening Ray Heathwood sadly noted, *"The crew we buried today are missed in the mess tonight. They made up a poker school and were the centre of a lot of bright backchat. Now with the tragedy on everyone's mind there is a hushed quietness".*



Picture of Rick Capel [Campbell Stephen's nephew] with his niece Emma, attending the Squadron's Reunion in 2007 - Rick is now our Association's Honorary Secretary

Note from the Honorary Secretary Rick Capel

We are trying to ensure we have the up-to-date information for any of the descendants of the 454 459 Squadrons. If you have access to the Internet, please go to our website and let us know your Email and to which member of the 454 459 Squadrons you are related. This information will help us keep descendant updated on the Association's activities, and in the future help descendants trace their genealogy.

PHOTOS FROM 2016 ANZAC DAY



March Leader Flying Officer John 'Doover' MacMahon – 454 Squadron



In compiling this bulletin the 454-459 Squadrons Association are would like to express our gratitude for being able to research the late Professor Leon Kane-Maquire's book "Desert Scorpions - A History of 459 Squadron 1942-1945" & Mark Lax's book "Alamein to the Alps" – 454 Squadron RAAF 1941-1945