
RAAF Association (ACT Division)

Patron: Air Marshal David Evans AC DSO AFC (Retd)

President: Peter McDermott AM CSC

www.act.raafa.org.au



NEWSLETTER

April 2009



AIMS: *To foster friendships based on sharing Air Force and aviation experience; to support commemorative activities, heritage and records of history; and to provide for the welfare of members through advice, liaison and representation.*

Activities Ahead for 2009

Monday 20 April 2009 - GM

1300 Southern Cross Club - no lunch.

Saturday 25 April - ANZAC Day lunch

1230 for 1300 Southern Cross Club

Monday 15 June 2009 - GM

1230 Southern Cross Club

Guest speaker: TBA

Report on the 16 March 2009 Annual General Meeting.

The following office bearers were elected at the AGM:

President: Peter McDermott
Secretary: John Magro
Treasurer: Tony Wilkinson
Vice President: Arthur Skimin
Vice President: Doug Hurst
Director: Mark Lax
Director: Lance Halvorson
Director: Gwen Kirk
Director: Jim Elsbury
Director: Geoff Roberts

New faces. Three new committee members may need introduction to some members. They are:

Peter McDermott, a recently retired Air Commodore navigator with a strong maritime and computing background who, since retirement from the Permanent Air Force, has worked as a reservist as DG

Reserves & Cadets AF. Peter is also President of RUSI.

John Magro, a serving Squadron Leader legal officer currently working in Defence Law, in the Directorate of Military Administrative Law, who brings with him a serving member's perspective and a welcome entrée into the day to day RAAF.

Jim Elsbury, a recently retired Wing Commander who has a strong interest in aged care and health of veterans.

Other significant committee changes are the return of Mark Lax, a retired Air Commodore navigator, with a strike and transport background and a number of books on RAAF history to his credit; and Past-President Lance Halvorson staying on the committee as webmaster and to look after the video & presentation system.

The RAAF - Now and the Future. After lunch Air Commodore Peter Brennan - Director General, Logistics Assurance, Joint Logistics Command - gave a most interesting talk on behalf of CAF, discussing the current RAAF and outlining where the RAAF is heading with respect to equipment and personnel.

Put simply, the current RAAF is very busy, with deployments since 2002 to places like East Timor, Pakistan, Lebanon, Solomon Islands and the Middle East (for operations in and around Iraq and Afghanistan).

Permanent detachments to the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) provide an example of the impact on the RAAF, especially its people. These MEAO detachments include 2 x P3 Orions with 178 people, 3 x C130 Hercules with 138 people, and a total of 425 people always in the MEAO. The majority on MEAO detachment are specialists and so

do repeat tours, often well after any novelty has worn off.

The otherwise welcome news that every major platform is being replaced or will be replaced in the next ten years has a down side - it also puts pressure on the uniformed force who must transition to these new aircraft while maintaining operational capability throughout - in other words, maintain skills with the old while learning about the new.

RAAF uniformed strength is about 14 000, with just under 9 000 in the operational component. While the operational folks will bear the brunt of change, it will be felt almost everywhere.

Some feel for the challenge is provided by the list of planned changes in the next decade includes:

- * F-111 to Super Hornets;
- * introduction of the JSF;
- * introduction of the Wedgetail AEW&C aircraft;
- * B707 tankers to KC30As;
- * the C130H phase out;
- * the Caribou replacement;
- * the P3 Orion replacement with a new aircraft and an unmanned aerial surveillance system; and
- * PC9 replacement with a new pilot trainer.

Maintaining operational capability everywhere during transition to the new equipment and related skill sets will be no easy task. The RAAF is clearly in for a very busy decade.

In preparation, increased emphasis is being placed on leadership and communications at all levels, from the senior leadership team down to individuals taking responsibility for their own outcomes.

In this regard, CAF's guidance to his commanders is 'to stay out of the weeds', to keep the strategic picture clear in their minds so they can guide and empower their teams to work towards common goals and get on and get the job done.

One thing is for certain - the RAAF today is a very different organisation from the one most members served in and it will be even more so in the years ahead. That said, the next decade will be exciting times for those involved with all the new kit - even if all the change poses problems just keeping up for some retirees grappling with senior moments and reduced attention spans (though I can't think who they could be).

National Council News

The National Council is continuing efforts to get appropriate recognition for Ubon service through a Ubon Recognition Group that is planning to brief the Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Support early this year.

Following negotiations, the publishers of *Wings* have agreed to share \$6000 of advertising revenue each year with the Association. While this is a relatively small percentage of total revenue, it is \$6000 more than in past years.

Lance Halvorson continues on the National Council as VP Communications and Media, and Editor of *Wings*. In addition he is the Executive Officer of The Williams foundation (www.williamsfoundation.org.au) and is Webmaster of the National Council, ACT Division and Williams Foundation web sites.

Veterans Information

RESTORATION OF DFRDB WIDOWS [SPOUSE] PENSIONS

From the inception of the contributory DFRB/DFRDB Superannuation Schemes until mid 1977 widows or widowers of Australian Defence Force Personnel who were killed in Australia or overseas were granted a pension from the contributory Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefit Fund. Until 1977 the Commonwealth Government Legislation required that if a spouse remarried the pension be cancelled.

In 1977 a Federal Government policy change meant that widows/widowers pensions were no longer cancelled on remarriage. However, those spouses who had lost their partners before this date did not

have their pensions reinstated, unless there was a compelling case of financial hardship.

Following strong representation to and subsequent support from senior Government Ministers of the last Coalition Government [The Hon Mal Brough, The Hon Nic Minchin and The Hon Bruce Billson], the Pre 1977 DFRDB Spouse Pensions have been reinstated prospectively, on application, with effect 1 January 2008.

The term used by the present Government through Comsuper is 'Reversionary Pensions'. Regrettably, it is a term that not many understand.

The reinstatement of the DFRDB Widows [Spouse] pensions needs wide dissemination to all Military Associations of the three Services and the wider community.

This initiative covers the widows of all Australian Defence Force personnel who contributed to the DFRB/DFRDB Scheme and who died as a result of natural causes, accidents, disease or in other circumstances in peace in Australia or overseas as well as all those who lost their lives on Active Service.

It is stressed that the reinstatement of DFRB/DFRDB pensions will only be made prospectively from the date of application.

Contact: Comsuper DFRDB Scheme	Released by: Mrs Sara Ferguson & Major General David Ferguson AM CSC [R] Tel 07 5497 5519
PO Box 22 Belconnen 2616 TEL 1300 001 887	

Getting By With Failing Vision

When vision loss occurs, the way in which you use light, size and colour contrast becomes very important for reading, seeing detail and doing everyday tasks. Using other senses such as touch, hearing, taste and smell can also help people experiencing vision loss.

Brighter Environments Allow Better Vision

Improving general and focused lighting can make objects and printed material easier to see. An adjustable desk lamp can be useful for specific tasks. It should be bent down very close, sometimes only 30cm (12 inches) away from your work, the light should shine directly onto what you are looking at (without glare) and should be below eye level. Natural light is also useful. Keep windows as clean as possible to transmit the greatest amount of light. Work with your back to the window in order to minimise glare.

Big is Easier to See Than Small

- Move closer to what you are looking at, e.g. the television.
- Whenever possible, choose large print, e.g. calendar, clock, books.
- Use a photocopier to enlarge crosswords or recipes.
- A magnifier or magnifier light can help with tasks such as reading and sewing.

Standout

Make an object stand out visually from its background. Black on white or white on black produces the best contrast for many people, but sometimes just putting light colours against dark backgrounds is enough to see more clearly. Here are some suggestions:

- Use a black felt tipped pen for writing.
- Put a white cup and plate on a dark coloured placemat (avoid patterns), or vice versa.
- Have a chopping board that contrasts to your kitchen bench or your food. You may like to have two chopping boards; a dark one to contrast with lighter foods, and a light one to contrast with darker foods.
- In work areas, like garages, have a white plastic placemat so you can place small dark objects on it, and vice versa.
- Paint the edge of difficult steps with a 1-inch wide strip of contrasting paint. Paint the riser as well, so that the step can be seen when ascending and descending. Paint handrails darker, or lighter, to contrast with the wall.
- Use a contrasting towel or cloth when doing handicrafts.
- Place white electrical tape, coloured stickers or a dab of liquid paper on the buttons of your TV remote, cassette player or other appliances. Only mark a couple of buttons on each appliance, as too many markings can be confusing.

Most people actually use a combination of senses to complete everyday tasks.

Learning to recognise this will assist with performing these tasks. Remember to give yourself time to practice and build up your confidence in new ways of doing things.

Some ideas of how to use other senses to do everyday tasks include:

- When peeling vegetables, use touch to feel if there is still skin left.
- Identify coins by their shape, size and milling.
- Use touch when fitting keys into locks.

The 'bolder' contrast principle can be applied to tactile (feeling) contrast. Put simply, make something stand out from its background by making it feel different. Tactile markings such as Polymark or Velcro can be put onto appliances to locate the various settings. Mark only the settings you use all the time.

Pour liquid into a container and listen to the change in sound as it fills.

Listen to how vigorously something is cooking - is it simmering or boiling?.

Listen for the clicks of switches as you turn an appliance on and off.

Use talking and audible devices such as clocks and kitchen scales.

- Check for freshness of fruit and vegetables or other foods.
- Is your food cooked or burning? What does the smell indicate?

So, if you have vision problems and are faced with everyday tasks, try thinking:

BRIGHTER: Is there enough close light?

BIGGER: Can the detail be made bigger?

BOLDER: Is there enough contrast?

OTHER SENSES: Can I use my other senses?

Learning to trust your other senses may require some practice but can lead to feeling safer and more confident on a daily basis. If you are concerned about your eyesight see your doctor or optometrist. Regular eye checks can also identify early onset of visual health problems, such as glaucoma or cataract.

[Source: Vision Australia factsheet: "Making the Best of your Vision and Other Senses"; 2007; www.visionaustralia.org.au/info

The Importance of That Sense of Engagement

People who work with the veteran community are nearly always impressed by the strong culture of 'mateship' that exists amongst veteran groups. As well as the culture instilled by military training, perhaps it's the harsh Australian environment which has caused men to look out for others through times of hardship such as drought, floods and fires. The current economic downturn will also certainly challenge our own wellbeing and others. Regardless, this culture of mateship is a critical factor in maintaining wellbeing throughout our entire lives.

Our sense of wellbeing comes from a range of factors in our lives including our state of health, family and friendships, religious beliefs or spirituality, work or volunteering, financial and physical security. A key element running through each of these factors is obviously being actively connected and engaged; being active in relationships with others and having a variety of interests to give meaning to our lives.

It is important to remember that wellbeing is not only a goal, but also a consequence of how we live. Those people who do engage and give of their time often report much higher levels of wellbeing than people who are 'time-poor' and unable to develop strong links to family, friends and community. While people like author Sara Henderson have recognised the 'generosity of your time being the most valuable gift you can give', statistics from research reinforces the fact that people who are engaged with life are many times more likely to live longer. Being engaged directly affects our physical and mental health positively through benefits to our immune system, our exercise patterns, a move from a self-focus through supporting or listening to others in need and other positive lifestyle behaviours.

A strong sense of engagement helps decrease worry and stress, and improves our enjoyment of life - that can't be a bad thing for anybody. So encourage all your mates to be generous with their time, with family, friends and in the community and they will in turn benefit significantly.

Veterans articles are reproduced from *Men's Health Peer Education Magazine*; courtesy Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Ageing Eye

Many of us become aware of the deterioration of our eyesight as we begin to age. Most individuals over the age of 50 require reading glasses as the lenses in our eyes stiffen and lose their ability to change shape to focus on near objects.

This deterioration in vision is called presbyopia and is not a disease but just a reflection of ageing. Fortunately, it is easily remedied with reading glasses.

A common condition affecting the eyes as we age is cataract. In this condition, the lenses in the eyes lose their transparency and gradually become opaque. Vision becomes dimmer and it is sometimes described as 'like looking through tissue paper'. Cataract surgery has now become quite sophisticated and the cataracts can be removed through a very small incision in the eye and a replacement lens inserted through the same incision. Preoperative measurement of the eye will allow a lens with the appropriate correction to be inserted. As a result, many individuals can often get by with minimal correction after cataract replacement surgery, while a few are fortunate to get by without any glasses at all. However, although there has been improvement in surgery, prevention of cataract is important by avoiding ultraviolet light. Wearing of hats and sunglasses is now recommended even for children to protect the eyes.

Another eye disease associated with ageing is called age related macular degeneration (ARMD). The macular is the part of the retina at the back of the eye which is used for best or central vision. We use peripheral vision mainly to identify moving objects and then look at fine detail with our good central vision such as when reading, writing, watching television and recognising faces. ARMD is now the most common cause of permanent visual loss in Australia. It usually appears as a gradual decline in the ability to see objects clearly, distorted vision, dark or empty spaces blocking the central field of vision and dimming of colour vision. The associated visual impairment affects healthy and independent ageing and is associated with a risk of falls, depression, hip fractures, and earlier admission to nursing homes.

ARMD affects one in seven Australians over the age of 50: this varies from less than one percent in people of retiring age to nearly 20 percent in people over 85. It is about three times more common in smokers and appears at an earlier age, whilst ceasing smoking for 20 years reduces this risk to about normal.

'Wet' ARMD is twice as common as the 'dry' type and is associated with an increase in new blood vessels in the retina. These can leak or bleed, destroying the cells in the retina. The exciting news about macular degeneration is that there is now a treatment which appears to stop or reduce the progression of the 'wet' form of this disease. This consists of injections into the eye to reduce the growth of new blood vessels in ARMD. This injection is similar to a substance used to destroy the blood supply to some bowel cancers; it is expensive but is now subsidised by the government. There is still much research to be done to determine the optimum treatment required, but at last there is a treatment which shows considerable promise to stop the progress of this disabling condition.

Article by Dr Warren K Harrex, Senior Medical Adviser, Department of Veterans Affairs

VETERANS' AND WAR WIDOWS' PENSIONS INCREASED

Indexation will deliver Veteran and War Widow pensioners up to an extra \$14.10 a fortnight, Minister for Veterans' Affairs Alan Griffin announced today. Some 365,000 veterans, their partners and war widows will benefit.

Minister Griffin said pensions will increase from 20 March, paid from pension day 26 March.

"For the first time, the Special Rate (TPI) Pension is more than \$1,000 a fortnight at \$1,011.90," Mr Griffin said.

The increases are based on a movement of 0.9 per cent in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and a top-up of \$2.60 per fortnight to bring the single Service Pension rate to 25 per cent of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE). All disability pensions are indexed by reference to both CPI and MTAWE. This resulted in a 1.4 per cent increase.

Pension	Old fortnightly rate	New fortnightly rate
Special Rate (TPI) Pension/	\$997.80	\$1,011.90

MRCA Special Rate Disability Pension		
Extreme Disablement Adjustment	\$550.70	\$558.50
100 per cent General Rate of Disability Pension	\$354.50	\$359.50
Intermediate Rate Disability Pension	\$677.00	\$686.60
Service Pension – single	\$562.10	\$569.80
Service Pension – couples	\$469.50 each. \$939.00 couple	\$475.90 each. \$951.80 couple
War Widows/ers Pension	\$598.70	\$607.00
Income Support Supplement	\$167.80	\$170.20

For more information on the new pension rates visit www.dva.gov.au or call 133 254. Voluntary work and the VEA, SRCA and MRCA

A number of people have expressed concerns about how the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) treats voluntary work with community and welfare organisations under the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA), the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (SRCA) and the Military, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (MRCA).

There appears to be a belief that voluntary work is treated differently under SRCA and MRCA than it is under the VEA. Some people are concerned that undertaking voluntary work will trigger a review of incapacity payments. This is not the case.

To clarify the issue and reassure veterans wanting to do voluntary work, the Repatriation Commissioner, Brigadier Bill Rolfe AO (Retd), has written to a number of ex-service organisations and the Training and Information Program Committee Chairs to state:

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- * DVA is supportive of veterans undertaking voluntary work;
- * Voluntary work is treated the same under all three Acts; and
- * Undertaking voluntary work will not trigger a review of pension or incapacity payments.

A copy of Brigadier Rolfe's letter and policy statement is attached in the weblinks below.

I would urge any veteran or veterans' representative to refer to this statement should they have any issues with the way such matters are being interpreted.

Alan Griffin
Minister for Veterans' Affairs

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