



MARCH 2023 NEWSLETTER

Dear Members, Family and Friends

Thank you for your ongoing interest and communications this past year that continue the legacy created by 31 Squadron's original servicemen, their families, friends, RAAF personnel and ex-RAAF service staff. Original 31 SQDN servicemen, their family, and friends and 31 (City of Wagga Wagga) Squadron participate in annual traditions, new experiences and remembrance ceremonies.

The association is supported by all members and followers including our...

Patron	Mark Binskin AC, Air Chief Marshal, Chief of the Australian Defence Force (Retired)
President (Retiring)	Ian Beasley son of FLTLT David Beasley RAAF 31 SQDN
Secretary (Retiring)	Gregory Mann nephew of WGCDR F.W.B. (Bill) Mann DFC CO RAAF 31 SQDN
Treasurer	Greg Blades , son of FLTLT Ron Blades RAAF 31 SQDN
Historian	Ian Madden , son of SQNLDR Jack Madden RAAF 31 SQDN
Honorary President	Ron Leckie , FLTLT RAAF 31 SQDN (Retired)
Honorary Patron	Doug Riding AO, Air Marshal DFC RAAF, son of WGCDR Douglas Riding RAAF 31 SQDN
Corporate Patron	Darren Pearson , supporter and sponsor of No.31 SQDN Beaufighter Association
Ambassador	Richard Luxton , owner of Coomalie Creek WWII Airstrip, Northern Territory
Ambassador	Joanna Elkington , GPCAPT & CO RAAF 31 SQN. Ret., Deputy Dir. Gen. RAAF Reserves

Monday 25th April 2023 is not only ANZAC DAY it also the opportunity of a new era for our association. After both serving the past 10 years on the association committee, Ian Beasley and myself, will be stepping aside from our respective rolls after ANZAC Day 2023. We now invite nominations for the role of President and role of Secretary for the Association. If you wish to nominate yourself or another person for those positions please contact Ian Beasley, Ian Madden, Greg Blades, Jo Elkington or myself before ANZAC Day.

Since the legendary Jack Anderson OAM handed me the Secretary role on ANZAC Day 2003, I am most thankful to have had the privilege of continuing his legacy for a decade. A huge thank you to Mark Binskin, Ron Leckie, Ian Beasley, Greg Blades, Ian Madden, Doug Riding, Darren Pearson, Richard Luxton, Jo Elkington and my family for all their support.

Yours faithfully

Gregory Mann, Secretary

No.31 SQDN Beaufighter Association

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No.31 SQDN. BEAUFIGHTER ASSOCIATION



N O N C I R C U M C O I M U S

PRESIDENT'S REPORT by Ian Beasley...

Warm wishes and heartiest greetings to all our 31 Squadron Beaufighter Association members, families and friends. I trust this newsletter finds you well and smoothly and successfully coping with the unusual weather patterns and the "new" post Covid era. "Are we there yet?"

Last year's luncheon saw the Association try a new location but still within Club York premises. Despite reduced numbers of diners, because of Covid, 10 of our group enjoyed a delicious lunch in light and roomy surroundings at the Primi Restaurant. Because of its success we have booked this venue again for this year's lunch. Arrangements for Anzac Day and the luncheon are virtually the same as last year and appear later in the newsletter.

Our Hon President Ron Leckie turned 100 on Anzac Day 2022. He was invited by the RSL organising Committee to lead the march with other World War 2 veterans and did so accompanied by members of his family.



You may have seen him interviewed on TV. Whilst Ron had indicated a wish to march with the Squadron banner, the Anzac Day Committee did not allow individual association banners at the front of the march. We did not have the pleasure of Ron's company at our lunch after the march because his family had organised a special 100th birthday celebration in his honour. As you are aware Ron is known for his untiring efforts as our President over many years and his continued interest in Association affairs.

This year will bring some changes to our Association executive team. I have decided to relinquish my position as President and Greg Mann has decided to step down from his secretary's role. Greg and I joined the team on Anzac Day 2013 with Greg taking on the Secretary's position and I became the treasurer. In 2017 I was nominated for the position of President and duly elected unopposed.

I have been fortunate to work with a great and supportive team. Greg Mann has maintained an excellent level of communication over the last 10 years particularly through his outstanding newsletters which enhanced the work developed by Jack Anderson OAM. Ian Madden continues to delve into every corner of the Squadron's history chasing up any leads which may add to the already vast amount of information he has already accumulated. He also continually liaises with the families of our veterans which has been invaluable for our Association. His knowledge of the Squadron's history is second to none. I also wish to acknowledge my sincere appreciation of the assistance from Group Captain Jo Ellington, our extremely useful link to the RAAF and Greg Blades our Treasurer and knowledgeable aviation source.

I hope that among our Association members there are those who are willing to fill these vacant positions so that our Association can continue to suitably honour our veterans.

Since Anzac Day last year we have been notified of the passing of four of our original Squadron members. Noel Shield (26th June 2022 aged 97), Reginald Bowden (18th October 2022 aged 97), Reginald Saxelby (7th December 2022 aged 98) and Kenneth Lyons (15th March 2023 aged 98). According to our historian Ian Madden this means that we now have only 3 original Squadron members left in Australia wide as far as we know.

I have always wondered how long it took to prepare an airman for combat. I decided to investigate my father's experience and discovered that his training from enlistment to combat posting was approximately 15 months.

Dad enlisted on 22nd April 1941 at Woolloomooloo. He then undertook 4 weeks rookie training at RAAF Richmond before progressing on to No 1 Wireless and Air Gunnery School at RAAF Ballarat. In August of that year he moved on to No 1 School of Technical Training at the Exhibition Building in Melbourne for a period of four months to complete the AWA Syllabus. The next posting was to RAAF Signals School at Point Cook. From there to No 1 Observers School at Cootamundra in April 1942. Here a series of day and night navigation exercises were undertaken in Avro Ansons. In August Dad was posted to No 1 Bombing and Gunnery School at Evans Head. The next posting was to 5 Operational Training Unit at Forest Hill (Wagga) to undertake No 1 Beaufighter Course from 2nd November 1942 until 19th November 1942. Eight of the 12 crews who completed this course were then posted to 30 Squadron. Dad and his pilot arrived at Wards strip, Port Moresby, 3 days before Christmas 1942 at last combat ready.

Dad served 2 tours with 30 Squadron then undertook further training and was posted to 31 Squadron at Coomalie Creek as Squadron Navigation Officer. He arrived at Coomalie creek on 2nd October 1944 and when 31 Squadron were then moved to Morotai via Noemfor Island Dad had only been at Coomalie Creek for 2 months.

As I am also member of 30 Squadron Beaufighter Association, on 2nd March, I attended the 80th Anniversary of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. My Dad fought in this Battle as a 20 year old only recently arrived at Wards strip. The President of 30 Squadron Beaufighter Association is Bruce Robertson, an original member of the Squadron formed at RAAF Richmond in 1942, who will turn 103 later this month. Bruce has become somewhat of a celebrity of recent times and you may have seen him interviewed on TV.

Despite being in Darwin three times in the last few years I have not had the opportunity to visit Coomalie Creek. However I did visit Batchelor and it's Museum in mid May last year during an organised tour of Litchfield Park. It was an interesting Museum but not a great deal of information about 31 Squadron. It did, however, give me some idea of the type of territory and terrain in which Coomalie Creek was situated.

Well folks that is all from me. Thank you all for your support during the last 10 years. Whilst I am leaving my current role I will continue my connection with the Association. See you all at the luncheon.

I would strongly recommend a visit to the 31 Beaufighter Squadron Association website with its plethora of memorabilia and other information lovingly and painstakingly gathered by our dedicated archivist Ian Madden and assisted by the web team of Peter Pleasance and Group Captain Joanna Elkington. Of particular interest is the forward to the No.31 Squadron Beaufighter Album written by Air Marshall Sir Charles Read KBM, CB, DFC, AFC as well as the rest of the album.

In March, this year, No.30 Beaufighter Squadron Association will celebrate two significant events. The 3rd March marks the 79th Anniversary of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea with a commemoration planned at RAAF Richmond Air Base. On 9th March the Association is hoping to celebrate the 80th Anniversary of the formation of the Squadron. Planning for this event is still being finalised. Whilst 30 Squadron was formed at Richmond in 1942, it has now reformed at East Sale RAAF Base in Victoria. In December 2021, 30 (City of Sale) Squadron had the honour of being presented with the Queen's Colours by His Excellency Governor General David Hurley.

Time to sign off. I think I have exhausted my supply of information and chewed your ears sufficiently.

I send warm wishes to you all.

Ian Beasley, President



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N O N C I R C U M C O I M U S

DARWIN AVIATION MUSEUM by Gregory Mann...

Located on the Stuart Highway at Winnellie, Darwin, Northern Territory and near the Darwin International Airport and RAAF Base Darwin is a sensational military aviation museum... Darwin Aviation Museum. As I am fortunate to go to Darwin a few times a year it's always a pleasure to take others with an interest in aviation and 31 Squadron WWII history to see what is on display.

Last year I had the pleasure of taking my friend Peter who I've known for 57 years. He has a wealth of knowledge about WWII and both his father and grandfather were in Australian forces. On another occasion with my niece, Carol, who is most interested in 31 Squadron and the Mann connection.

Sitting underneath the wing and two engines of a B52 bomber is a section dedicated to 31 Squadron. On display amongst many items is a full cockpit of a Beaufighter and one of the updated 31 Squadron honour boards.

I'll let some pictures tell the rest of the story...



LEST WE FORGET by Ian Beasley, Gregory Mann and Ian Madden...

Another four RAAF 31 Squadron WWII veterans have passed leaving us with appreciation of the brave young men they were by answering their country's call and contributing significantly to the war effort in Australia and the South-West Pacific, with distinction. We are very thankful for their service and involvement in the association.

Reginald Ernest Bowden Reginald William Saxelby Noel Joseph Shield Kenneth Lyons OAM.

Noel Shield, Service Number 79984. Passed away 26th June 2022 aged 97. He was an Aircraftsman and one of the original members of 31 Squadron formed under the leadership of CO Read. After the war he moved back to his hometown of Mackay, Queensland and maintained his association with aircraft working with Ansett Airlines.

Reg Bowden, Service Number 124628. Passed away 18th October 2022 aged 97. He was an Armourer with 31 Squadron and regular participant in 31 Squadron Beaufighter Association events. He marched in Sydney on ANZAC Day and also at Wagga Wagga in more recent years. His home was in Berridale, New South Wales.

Reg Saxelby, Service Number 72268. Passed away 7th December 2022 aged 98. He served as a Mechanic 2E with 31 Squadron. As an active participant in association events, he was at our last ANZAC Day luncheon at the Royal Automobile Club, Sydney in 2019. He accompanied Ron Leckie in the wreath laying ceremony on the day.

Ken Lyons OAM, Service Number 120269. Passed away 19th March 2023 aged 98. He is listed as a Signals, Telegraphist and Navigator with 31 Squadron at Coomalie Creek, Northern Territory. Ken was an active association and committee member and always contributed to his community including community radio and fun runs raising money for charities.



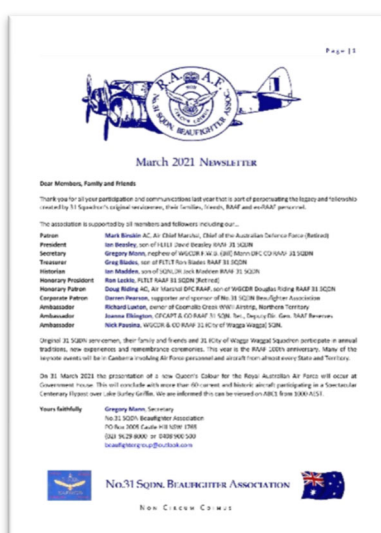
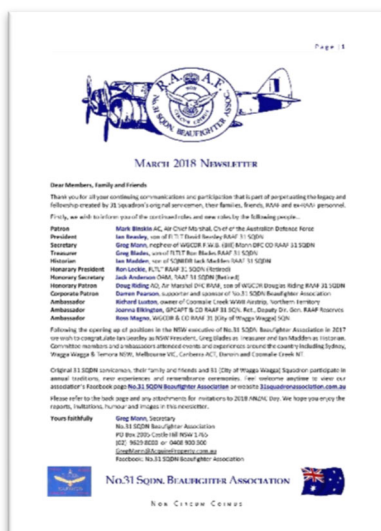
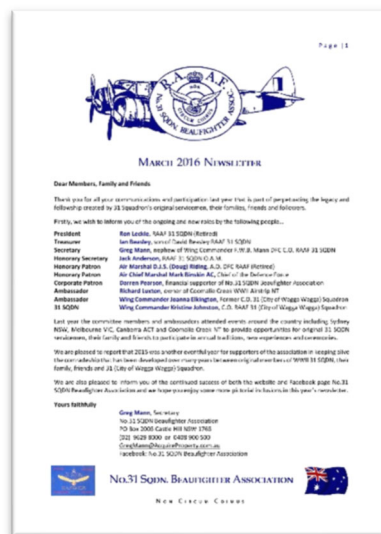
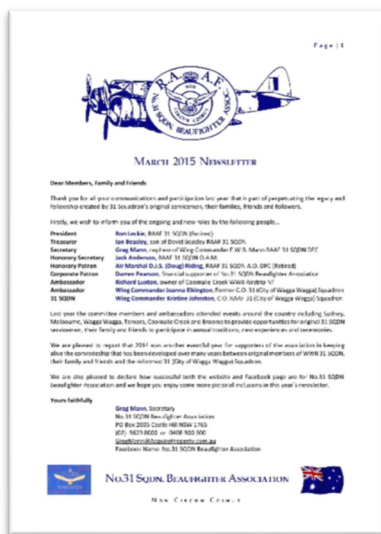
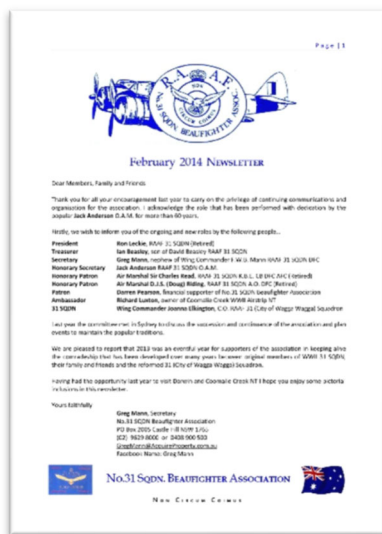
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NON CIRCUM COIMUS

PAST NEWSLETTERS by Gregory Mann...

Feel welcome to request a copy of any newsletters from previous years 2014 to 2022...



HISTORIAN'S REPORT by Ian Madden...

Hi everyone, time to look at what's been happening since our last Newsletter in February 2022.

Last year we weren't able to travel for our usual 4-5 months away and visit any of our 31 Squadron Beaufighter Association friends due to the rain and flooding of the various places that we needed to travel through to get to Coomalie.

No prizes for guessing we are headed to COOMALIE this year, weather permitting.

Last year the RAAF Air Force base at Wagga Wagga finalised and celebrated the unveiling of a Mural painted on one of its water towers depicting VC winner FLTLT William Newton and SQLDR Norman Parry. William Newton lost his life after being captured by the Japanese in March 1943 after an heroic mission he performed when attacking the Japanese. SQLDR Norman Parry proved himself to be an instructor of exceptional ability whose untiring devotion saw him awarded the Air Force Cross.



We were invited to the Wagga Wagga Base for the unveiling of the Mural, Story boards, New aircraft displays, and Memorial gardens at the Heritage Centre.



Local Government minister, The Honourable Michael McCormack member for Riverina was invited to officiate at the unveiling as did several Air Force dignitaries.

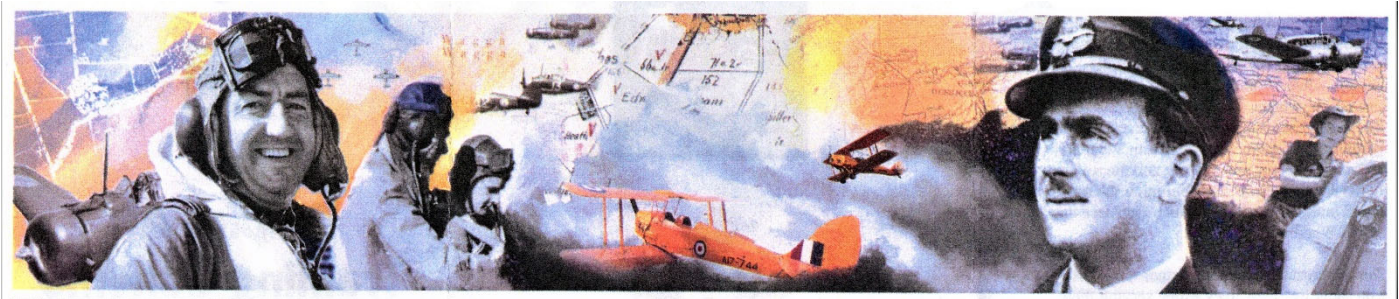


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Mural depicts the story of the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) that trained our RAAF aircrew during the war in the Pacific in WW2.



Two of the Aircraft exhibits...



The official opening of the replica Coomalie Chapel also planned for the day, was not to be at this particular event as there were several minor obstacles that prevented this from happening. We still however managed to get some group photos of some who are friends of Coomalie and Richard Luxton, in front of the mostly completed Chapel. As of writing this the Chapel is now open.



Some of those attending the function were; Richard Luxton, Peter Pleasance and his wife Elaine, (31Sqn) GPCAPT, Jo Elkington, Doug and Sabine Nicholas, (87 Sqn) Pam and Wayne Bagshaw 31Sqn (Jack Andersons daughter Pam) and Terry Bourke (87Sqn) Sorry if I missed anyone.



The CO's 31Sqn Airbase Executive Officers, WgCdr Lisa Macnaughtan and GPCAPT Jeffrey Howard and their staff, were very attentive to all of us for this momentous event. There were also dignitaries attending from all over the region. We were treated to a finger food luncheon after being taken by bus to the Mess which was a great privilege.

It was just sensational to see the Chapel almost completed and Richard Luxton said he was so happy to see his Chapel recreated at Wagga Wagga Base, the place where 31 Squadron started.



Special mention to SQNLDR Nigel Webster, who is in charge of the Aviation Heritage Centre at the Base, was also very generous in his support of us while there.

THAT HITLER SEAT.

I know you have all seen my story on the Hitler Seat but there is a little more to report.



On our visit for the unveiling of the Mural and Story Boards at Wagga Wagga, I had taken it upon myself to replicate the seat and had an opportunity to present it to The Heritage Centre so that all visitors can see it and read the story.

Note that the person standing on the left of the above photo, is none other than the VC winner Bill Newton depicted in the Mural, who along with my father John Madden (seated right), played a significant part in the Hitler seat story.



CO Lisa Macnaughtan accepting the Hitler Seat from myself with the photo of my father on the wall in the middle.

That's as much as I have for now folks. Hoping you all stay safe and well.

Ian Madden, Historian



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COOMALIE CREEK RAAF BASE CHAPEL by Gregory Mann...

To follow on from the report of the recently opened chapel at RAAF Air Force base at Wagga Wagga this is a repeat of the article written for the 2014 newsletter about the history of the original chapel built at 31 Squadron's Coomalie Creek NT RAAF Base in 1943 and rebuilt in 1992.

"It is said that one of the first tasks to look after the welfare of the servicemen at Coomalie Creek was the creation of a Beer Garden.



The next was to upgrade the Base Chapel from a canvas tent to a designed building in time for Christmas 1943. That year the members of 31 SQDN built a Chapel from materials sourced from a prearranged falling off the back of a truck from defence supplies.

*The story we have been told is that the new CO **Bill Mann** had flowers growing outside the headquarters (canvas tent).*

Early on a Sunday morning he heard someone chopping the flowers outside his tent.

Upon investigating who was "stealing" the flowers, he found the Chaplain wanting the flowers to cheer and brighten up the chapel (canvas tent) before the service that day.

Bill had a look at the chapel with the Chaplain and was surprised the chapel was only a canvas tent. After the Chaplain said there was no way to get materials to build a decent chapel, Bill arranged to have a truck from supplies stop over a hole in the ground near the base and "lose" its load off with the right materials to build a new chapel. That same night some men opened the base security fence and retrieved the materials. The design and building of a new chapel commenced.

After the War the building was abandoned and over time termites and fire reduced it to ground level.

In 1992 Northern Territory University staff and students researched and rebuilt the Chapel over the original foundations (post holes). The Chapel has been recognised with both Territory and National Architecture Awards and has featured in Australian and International Journals."



A Remembrance Service gathering at the Coomalie Creek Chapel NT August 2013

FACEBOOK POSTS by Gregory Mann...

www.facebook.com/31SQDNBeaufighterAssociation

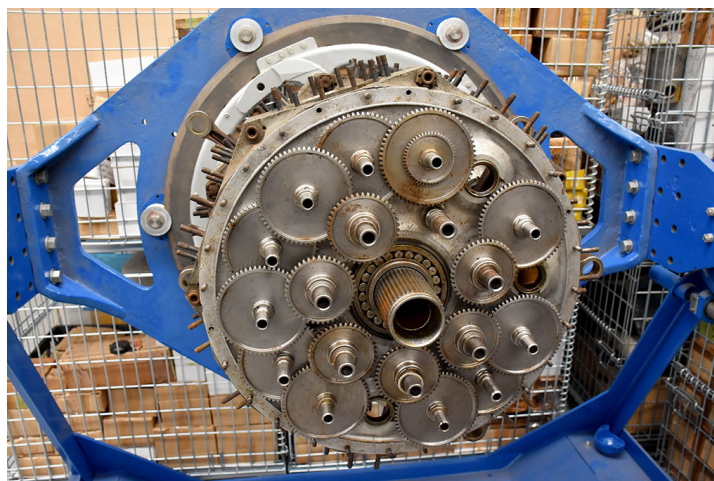
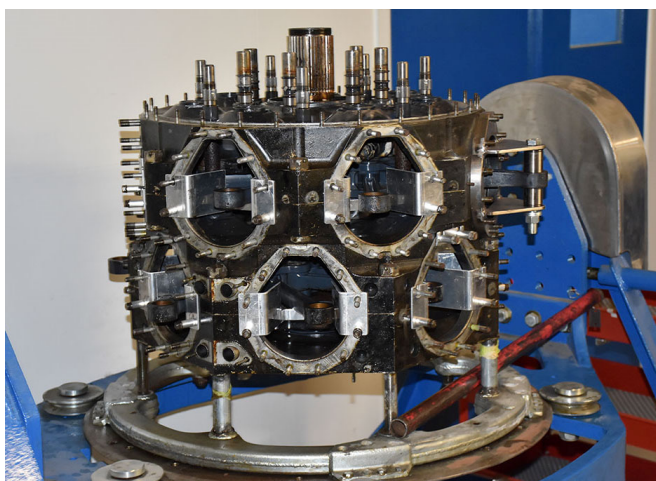
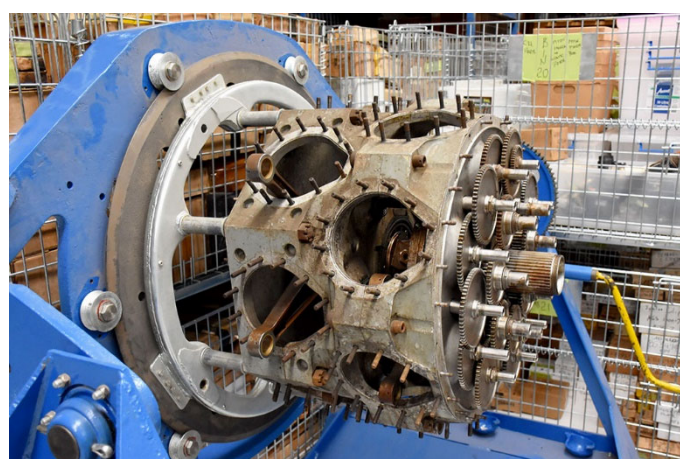
The Facebook page continues to be maintained by myself for No.31 SQDN Beaufighter Association in recognition of the Australian RAAF No.31 SQDN Beaufighter Servicemen who helped restore peace to the Asia Pacific and top end of Australia during WWII. The No.31 SQDN Beaufighter Association Facebook Page now has over 2,400 followers. As many members are not Facebook subscribers here are some of the images shared on our page in the last year. Reproduced with thanks to The Leckie family, Warbirds Online, ADF Serials Military Aircraft Group, Mile Pegs NT and Moorabin Air Museum and many other sources...

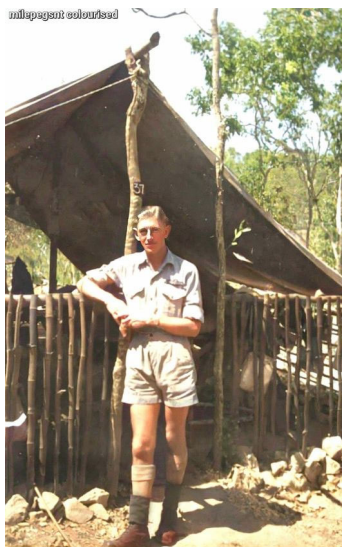


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2023 ANZAC DAY MARCH in SYDNEY for No.31 SQDN...

- On 25th April 2023 President Ian Beasley will have the Squadron Banner positioned by 0830hrs.
- Veterans and carers will need to be ready for step off between 0900hrs and 0930hrs.
- The form up point will be in Hunter Street, east of the intersection with Elizabeth Street.
- The march will be south along Elizabeth Street then turn east into Liverpool Street and into Hyde Park.
- The ANZAC Day Lunch starts at 12noon.
- This year it will be at **Primi Restaurant, Club York, York Street Conference and Function Centre, 95-99 York Street, Sydney** (formerly the Bowlers' Club).
- The venue is located on the western side of York Street between Market Street and King Street and accessible by train from either Wynyard Rail Station or Town Hall Rail Station.
- If walking to Club York after the end of march from Hyde Park at Elizabeth Street the best direction is west along Park Street then north along York Street.

2023 ANZAC DAY LUNCH & DRINKS in SYDNEY...

**No.31 SQDN Beaufighter Association invites you to attend
The 2023 ANZAC DAY LUNCH & DRINKS at CLUB YORK, 95-99 York Street, Sydney**

"RAAF No.31 Beaufighter Squadron"

12:00 noon at Primi Restaurant, Club York, York Street Conference and Function Centre, 95-99 York Street, Sydney

Formal Dress Code: Gentlemen in collared dress shirt, long trousers and covered footwear
 Ladies in conservative dress commensurate with the formality of the occasion
 All children, grandchildren and great grandchildren are welcome

Please bring your 31 SQDN and Beaufighter Prints, Photographs, Uniforms and Memorabilia for display.

The traditional get-together on ANZAC Day is land-based again this year at **Club York**. The lunch & drinks event is to cater for everyone who wants to meet up with "the 31 family". All family, friends and supporters of No.31 SQDN Beaufighter Association including ex-servicemen, spouses, descendants, relatives and active service people of 31 SQDN (City of Wagga Wagga) are welcome.

There will be no charge for attending the lunch this year.

**For reservation and catering purposes please
RSVP by Monday, 3rd April 2023**

RSVP: **Ian Beasley, President**

idtbeasley@bigpond.com

and

Gregory Mann, Secretary

beaufightergroup@outlook.com



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N O N C I R C U M C O I M U S