

Gems Reunion.

On the 4th, 5th and 6th September 2015, about a hundred people from the GEMS mustering group (GEMS = Ground Equipment Mustering Association) and their ladies got together in Wagga Wagga for their second biennial reunion.



The event was planned by Greg "Jacko" Lyons and Ken McLeod, with a little help from their mate Gary Cochrane.



Since day one of Flying Operations, there has always been a requirement for Ground Equipment Maintenance to repair, overhaul or manufacture ground support items associated with the Aircraft of the RAAF. In the early days, Mustering's were formed under their individual Squadron banner before being grouped into Motor Transport Repair Squadrons or Motor Transport Maintenance Squadrons. In the late 1960's, these were part of Aircraft Depots and through the years became Ground Equipment Maintenance Squadrons or Flights and stayed that way until the 2000's when the units became Mechanical Equipment Operation and Maintenance Sections (MEOMS). Flying or bigger non flying Squadrons had Ground Support Equipment or Ground Equipment Sections as part of the unit or Squadron. Mustering's were wide and varied in these units from Engineering Officers to Motor Transport Fitters, Works Fitters, Motor Body Builders both Wood and Metal, Carpenters, Metal Machinists, General Fitters, GSE Fitters, Motor Trimmers, Surface Finishers, Wood Machinists, Electroplaters, Welders, Electrical Fitters as the bulk of the mustering's but also included in the units could be Clerk Admin, Aircraft Welders, Clerk Supply, Supplier, Vulcanizers, Engine Fitters, Airframe Fitters, Armament Fitters, Radio Technician's Ground, Draftsmen, NDI Tech to name a few of the smaller groupings of mustering's.



Basically they repaired, overhauled or manufactured a huge variety of items for use within the RAAF, from all types of Motor Vehicles including Cars, Trucks, Forklifts, Cranes, Refuelling, Sweepers, Fire and Rescue Vehicles, Ground Power and Air Conditioning Carts, Mobile Aircraft Stairs, Aircraft Loading Equipment, Air Transportable Cabins, RAG Hangers, Specialist Vehicles including Mobile Air Traffic Control and Recruiting Vehicles, Radar Equipment and some aircraft parts like F111 Wing Pivots and 707 Cargo Panel Covers and in

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general they worked with Motors, Wood, Steel, Aluminium, Plastic Sheeting, Stainless Steel, Fibreglass, Glass, Perspex, Canvas, Cloth, Rubber and many other products.

When Aircraft trades wanted something built that they couldn't, it was requested to a GEMS unit. Many a presento has been produced by a GEMS Section as many a CO has been impressed by what they could produce in those days.

In 1923 a young FLTLT George Jones was appointed OIC of the MTRS at Pt Cook, he of course went on to become AVM George Jones Chief of Air Staff in 1942 and The current DCAS AVM Warren McDonald started his RAAF Career as an Apprentice MT Fitter in GEMS units.

These days sadly, many jobs that have been done by GEMS Units is now done by contractors externally or simply not done anymore.

The idea was to hold a "Meet and Greet" on the Friday night, at the Wagga Rugby League club rooms, (part of the Equeox Centre) followed by a dinner at the Mercure Hotel on Saturday night and finish up with a "Sick Parade" breakfast on the Sunday morning.



The weekend went off exceedingly well, with everyone enjoying being back in Wagga. Most had done their training at the Base at Wagga and many had not been back since being posted out all those years ago. Although a lot of the landmarks were familiar, the town had grown considerably in the intervening years, and for some it was like being there for the first time. Wagga's population in 1971 was only 30,000, today it is in excess of 65,000 – and still growing. "Jacko" invited us along and as it had been many years since we had been there, we couldn't resist the invite.

(These pics have been crunched to allow them to open faster.
You can click most of them to get a better copy which you can download and/or print)



The GEMS at play!!



These are some of the people who were at the Meet and Greet. All names left to right.

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Barry Coad, Wendy Minner, Robyn Nordheim.



Barry Kennedy, Tex Ewans, Bill Sanderson.

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Brian Hare, Ron Robertson, Mick Ryan.



Chris Osborne, Allan Arthars.

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Dave and Sue Ryan, Rae Greaves, Brenda Turner.



Gail and Bruce Ryan.

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Garry Dalton, Bob Laurie, Trevor Prior.



Chris Osborne, David and Heather Pearson, John and Norma Haskew.

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Garry Mason, Janice and Ralph Feige.



Gerry Noonan, Bob Laurie, Peter Fahey.

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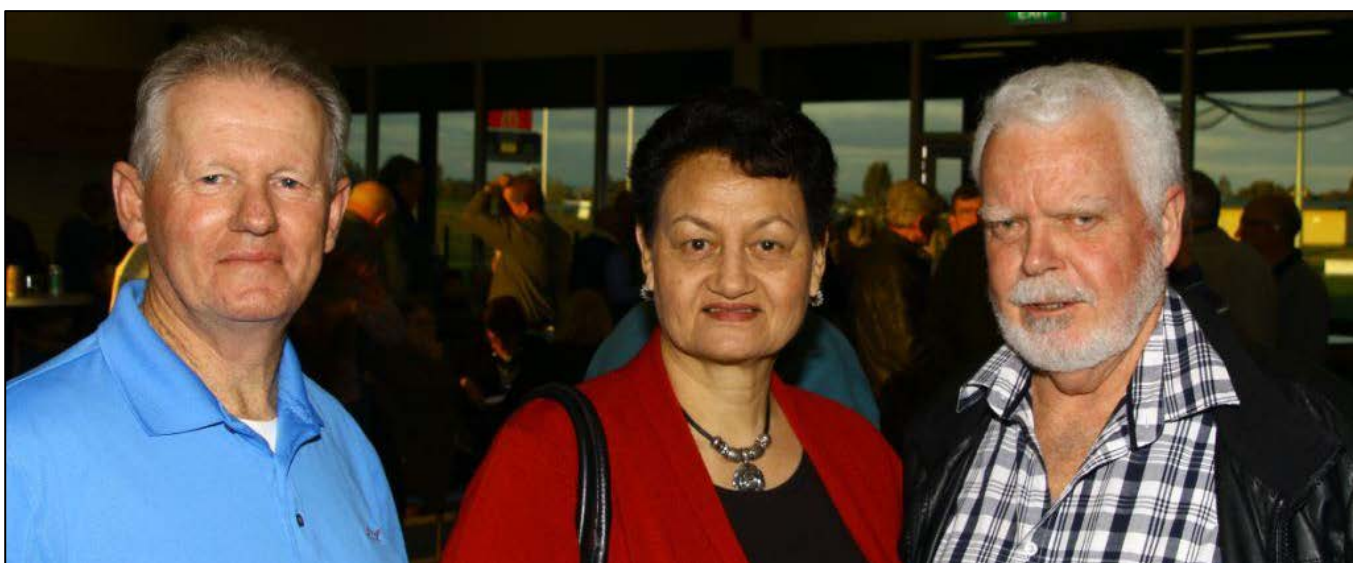


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Garry Mason, Slim Williams.



Graeme Bell, Lorraine Shea, Russell Robertson.

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Jeff Smith, Kerry Thomas, Don Watt.



Jim Sheridan, Glenn McLean, Ray Reichard.

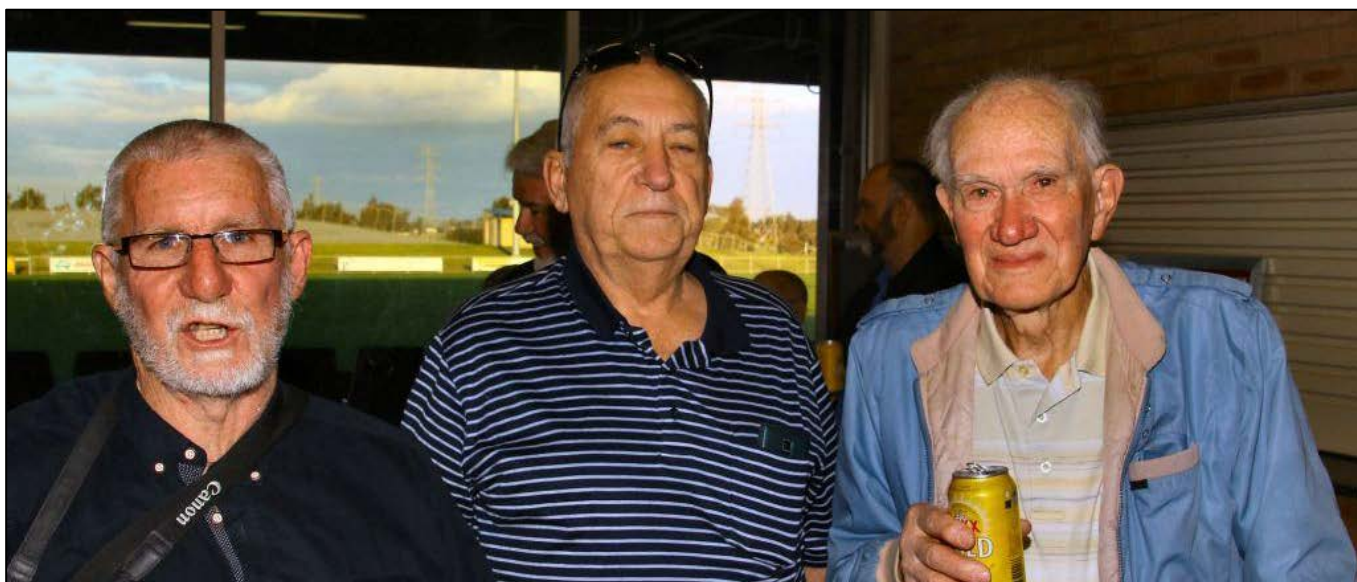
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Ken McLeod, Ken Robinson, Jim Skelton.



Kev and Evelyn Robinson.

K

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Leanne Greenacre, Dennis Jones, Henry and Sandra Jones.



Margaret Sheridan, Alison Reichard.

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Max "Hawkeye" and Sandra Hawkins.



Paul "Zeke" Wood, Lee and Snow O'Connell, Allan Murray.

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Willie Millar, Liz Mason, Barbara Robertson – the sexy Sale girls!!



Steve and Sheila Bower, Laurie and Peter Cutten.

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Sue Pepper and Kara Prior.

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After the Friday night's festivities, it was decided to leave Saturday morning 'blank' for people to come and go as they please, have a look around at some of the sites and for the ladies to hit the shops.



Wagga Railway Station, a familiar site for a lot of blokes who would have started their stay at Wagga via the station, has had a facelift and is now a wonderful old building sitting pride of place overlooking the City. Wagga is on the main Sydney – Melbourne line and is served by two NSW TrainLink XPT services each way each day. It was opened in September 1879.



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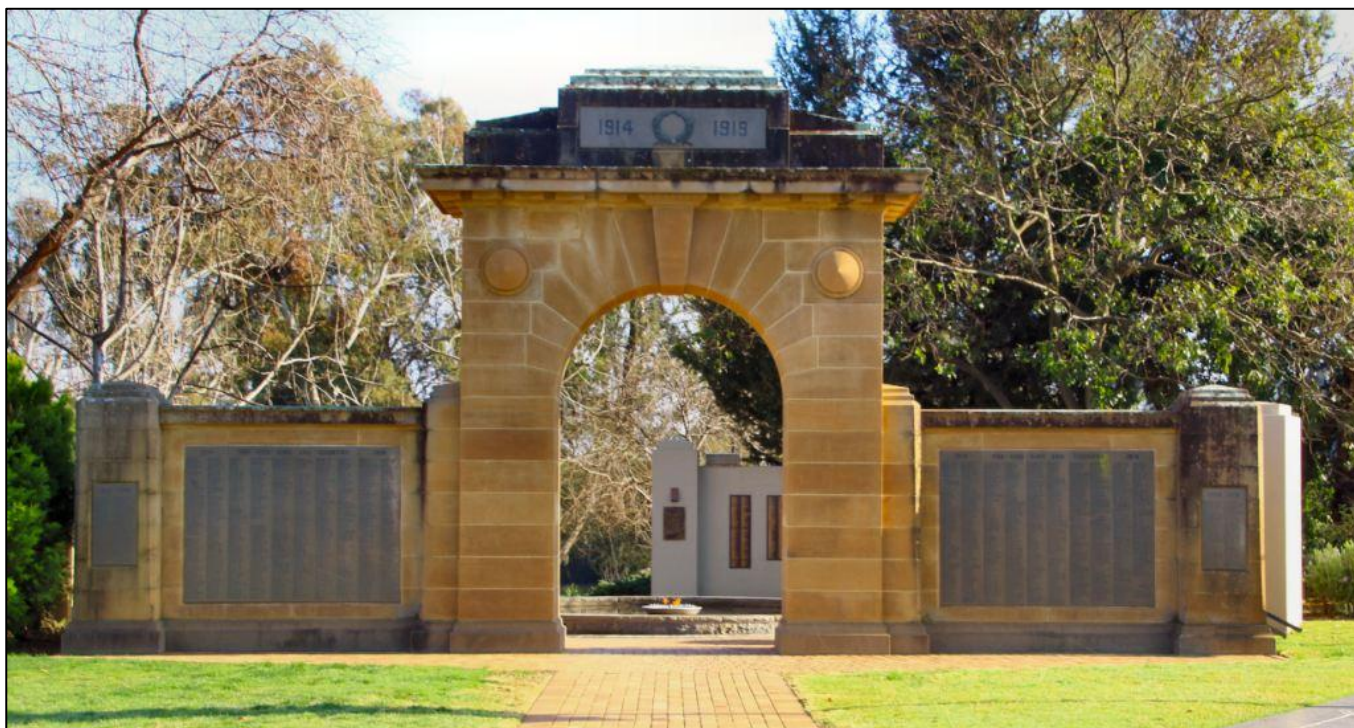
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Wagga's main street has undergone a lot of changes too since most blokes were into the books at the Base. A lot of the "High St" shops have gone, to be replaced by Shopping Malls with their majors and familiar (and boring?) franchised outlets.





The Wagga Wagga Victory Memorial Gardens are still there and are well kept and in excellent condition. The Cenotaph, which was built in 1962 in the memory of the men of Wagga Wagga and District who fell in the Great War 1914-1918, World War 2 1939/45 and Vietnam 1962 – 1972, sits pride of place in the gardens.



As does the monument commemorating the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Base at Forest Hill. Group Captain Kev Griffin was the OC at the time. Kev is also well known to a lot of blokes who worked on the Caribou, he was EngO at 38Sqn and also 35Sqn in Vung Tau from June 1969 to June 1970 – making him part of the [A Team](#)!!





The Saturday just happened to be the day the Kangaroo March Re-enactment took place, starting from outside the Victory Memorial Gardens in Wagga so Saturday morning was taken up watching the event.

100 years ago, men of rural Australia signed up for what was then known as King, Country and Empire, to fight in a war that threatened to end the way of life Aussies and others in the British Empire held so very dear. They were away for 3 more years; some never came home, some came home permanently scarred, maimed or poisoned with mustard gas, or damaged mentally having witnessed the horrors of mates being killed before their eyes. Mothers, fiancées, wives, sisters, daughters all said goodbye to their menfolk, not knowing what the outcome would be, not hearing for weeks if their son, husband, or brother was alive or not, dreading, but so often receiving, the soulless telegram: "Missing in Action, or Killed in Action".

On the 1st December, 1915, 88 blokes set off on foot, amidst much fanfare and marched across the Riverina from Wagga down to Campbelltown south of Sydney, a march of 350 miles (565 klms). The route took them via Junee, Cootamundra, Bowning, Yass, Goulburn, Mittagong then Camden onto Campbelltown, recruiting all the way. By the time they reached Campbelltown, their number exceeded 220.



A committee was formed to re-enact the march to commemorate the 88 brave young men who left home and families to join the Australian Imperial Force to fight for the King and Country. The Committee had Dr Brendan Nelson, Director, Australian War Memorial, as its patron and had the full support of Michael McCormack MP, the Federal Member for Riverina.

A well-attended ceremony and service was held on the forecourt of the Wagga Wagga City Council building at which the head speaker was Dr Brendan Nelson. The service included wreath laying and sounding of The Last Post at the Cenotaph in the Memorial Gardens before the re-enactment march left, retracing the steps of the original 88 Kangaroos.



The marchers, decked out in dress of the day, were led by 4 horsemen in period costume of the WW1 Light Horse.

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Then on the Saturday night, the GEMS and their ladies got together again for their reunion dinner, which was held at the Mercure Hotel conference rooms.



“Macca” and “Jacko” welcomed everyone to the evening, thanked them for making the effort to get to Wagga, some had come quite a distance and promised to hold reunion number 3 in 2017. Jacko was seen taking bribes, though the reason why is, at the moment, unknown!!!

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Some of the faces in the crowd include: (Click each pic for a bigger view)



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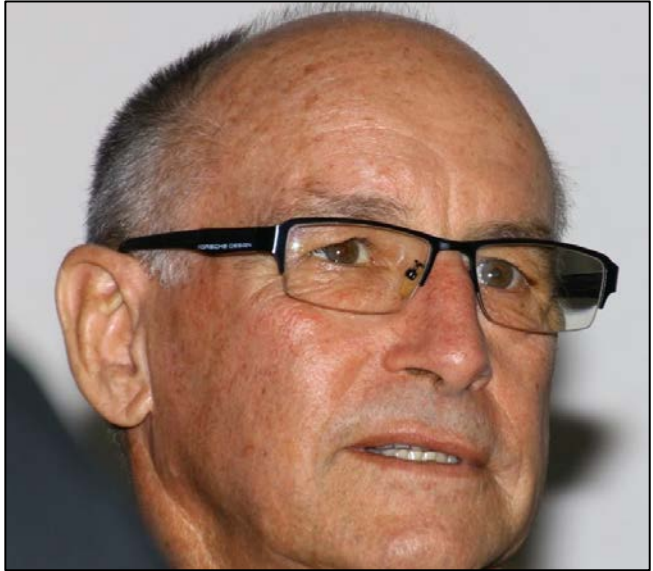
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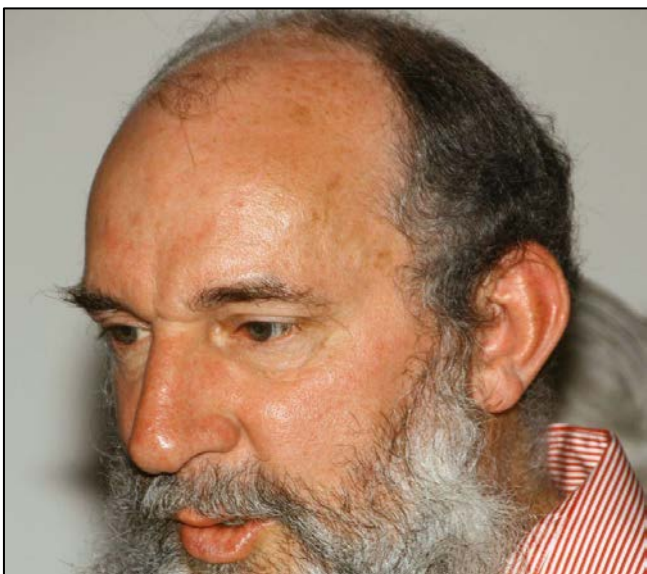
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BB

And while the people partied, Michael Anschaw from [Marshalls Mobile Discos](#) provided the music. If you live around Wagga and need music for an event, you could not do better than to contact Marshalls.



Rumour had it that while the music played, Jacko was spied out in the car park practicing his Pride of Erin steps.

After everyone had been suitably primed on Fourex's finest, it was time to bring on the food. The Mercure did themselves proud as their offering was excellent!!



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When the food was made available, years of Mess practice kicked in and without being barked at or bossed around, the troops lined up in an orderly fashion, all in a single line and quietly filed past the food line helping themselves as they went.

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Suddenly the conversations went dead and the troops got down to some serious Messing..





A special thanks must go to the 5 lovely girls who looked after the troops and their ladies, they kept the fluid flowing to feed the tall stories, handed out the nibbles to soak up some of that golden fluid then set up the main meal – after which they hopped in and cleaned up afterwards, a helluva job, one that was appreciated by everyone - thank you!!



Tes, Katherine, Izzy, Lee and Allana.