



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**March 2021**

### **HAMILTON AIR BASE VOLUNTEER TO BE HONOURED**

Volunteer fire fighting in the Hamilton and Dunkeld regions has lost one of its most dedicated supporters in Leighton Wraith but his legacy will live on.

Mr Wraith, the driving force behind the volunteer-run Hamilton CFA-EMV Air Base and a CFA volunteer for more than 40 years, has died at his home near Dunkeld, aged 81.

Earlier this year Mr Wraith was awarded an Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) to recognise his long and outstanding service to CFA and his local community. His contribution will be remembered with plans to name a loading facility at the airbase in his honour.

Mr Wraith, a farmer and licenced pilot, was a volunteer with Bochara and Dunkeld Fire Brigades for 40 years and more recently led the Hamilton CFA-EMV Air Base.

Long-time friend Don Robertson said that Mr Wraith had been a major contributor to the region over many years, highlighted by his efforts to establish and maintain the air base.

Mr Robertson, a former shire councillor and mayor, CFA Board member and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) district chair, accompanied Mr Wraith to Canberra and Melbourne to campaign for the base.

“Without Leighton, we wouldn’t have an air base here,” he said. “It wasn’t really a shire issue, but we could all see the need for it.”

CFA District 5 Airbase commander Brett Gladki said the decision to name the loading facility in honour of Mr Wraith was driven by his fellow volunteers and recognised his dedication to the facility.

“Leighton lobbied very hard to get this new loading facility which runs like a well-oiled machine,” Mr Gladki said. “Previously the gear and the operators were exposed to the elements but this encloses everything and makes the whole process of loading aircraft more efficient and more comfortable.”

Mr Gladki said naming the loading facility in honour of Leighton recognised his dedication to the airbase. “He really drove this project and was the number one person in getting it off the ground,” he said.

“The naming is very much driven by Leighton’s peers at the airbase and the volunteers who spent many years working with him.”

A sign is being created and will be unveiled at a later date.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) CEO Adam Barnett said Mr Wraith's commitment showed how CFA volunteers could contribute in different ways at different stages of their lives and the facility naming was well deserved.

"Leighton's dedication over 40 years with his local brigades and then with the air base was of huge benefit to his community and the region and he will be sadly missed. We pass on our best wishes to his family, friends and loved ones.

"Leighton has left an incredibly powerful legacy. The work he has done has saved countless lives and will continue to protect Victorians for decades to come."

There are 15 other air bases in Victoria run by DELWP. Located at the Hamilton airport, the air base has 40 volunteers whose main tasks are to have water, foam or retardant ready and to load planes. They are usually needed about 30-40 times each summer.

Two bomber aircraft are permanently based at Hamilton over summer, plus two support aircraft, and the base has access to bombers from Casterton and Stawell.

Volunteers come from different brigades around the Hamilton region, sometimes performing dual roles for their local brigade and the air base. Most are retired or mature-aged farmers. "We're so lucky; whatever needs fixing they can do it," Mr Wraith said in 2019. "These guys are old-fashioned farmers who can do anything and fix anything."

Mr Wraith had been recruited about eight years ago by the regional CFA operations manager to find volunteers to set up the base which is primarily responsible for a 22,000 square kilometre region stretching from Peterborough and Warrnambool, to near Balmoral and Glenthompson.

Mr Wraith said in 2019 that many of the volunteers had been active firefighters for decades but no longer wanted to be in the field.

"They've had a lifetime on the back of a truck and in strike teams," Mr Wraith said. "They've had enough of that but still want to be involved so this keeps them active and in the CFA. We firmly believe we are contributing to the bigger picture to protect not only our own patch but the whole of the west, south-west and north-west of Victoria."

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*Pictured: Leighton Wraith is second from left with fellow volunteers at the air base in 2018.*