



Article #2 - The RAAF Land at Ocean Grove

In 1949/50, just the second season of the newly formed Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club, almost nothing is known of its activities and whether the club was able to patrol the beach. With the loss of Doug Yensch from the town and Colin Monroe the only other member to gain their surf bronze in the two seasons, it's hard to imagine that the club was effectively operational.

It's not known how the following activities came about but correspondence from the 13th October 1950, documented that a meeting had occurred between Royal Australian Air Force (R.A.A.F.) personnel based at Point Cook and the Victorian Centre. The R.A.A.F. staff indicated an interest in starting a surf lifesaving club and patrolling the beach at Ocean Grove in the absence of the local club. With air force staff and cadets from all over Australia, it was not unusual that surf lifesavers from other States, especially NSW where surf lifesaving was well established, would be present in numbers and be keen to patrol a beach.

Ocean Grove was ready for the picking!



RAAFC SLSC letterhead

This was approved by the Victorian Centre on the 11th November 1950 and the R.A.A.F. College Surf Life Saving Club (RAAFC SLSC) was affiliated with the Surf Life Saving Association of Australia (SLSA of A).

It is of interest to note in that in a letter dated the 29th November 1950 the Victorian Centre writes to the Ocean Grove Progress Association to thank them for the support they have given to the RAAFC SLSC's patrolling of the Ocean Grove beach. The letter also mentions *"and as the Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club appears at present to be unable through lack of members to carry out a patrol, we are grateful that you have seen fit to allow the R.A.A.F. College Surf Life Saving Club to carry on the patrol, at least until your own Ocean Grove Club becomes strong again. We sincerely trust that everything will be done in an endeavour to build up your own Ocean Grove Club and that they will be on the job again."*

The RAAFC SLSC arrive at Ocean Grove to begin patrols early in December 1950, bringing with them tents and supplies for the weekend. They do however mention that the college is on vacation for most of December/January which becomes an issue later.



RAAFC SLSC "colours"¹



RAAFC "clubhouse" with Peter Scully 1950s¹

¹Photos from *50 Years and More. A History of Surf Life Saving Victoria*



RAAFC SLSC training on Ocean Grove main beach 1951

Today there are eight clubs on Victorian surf beaches, at Point Lonsdale, Portsea, Torquay, Lorne, Warrnambool, Portland, Port Fairy, and a R.A.A.F. club which operates at Ocean Grove.

The Argus newspaper 4 January 1952

In February 1951, the RAAFC SLSC apply to the Victorian Centre for the loan of equipment from the Ocean Grove club that they know is stored at the Ocean Grove Fire Brigade Hall. The following month they have secured a reel, Eve Rocker and a trestle. Patrols by the RAAFC SLSC appear to have continued over the 1951/52 summer season.

In the early 1950s, a young teenage Noel Emselle, now a club Life Member and 70 year club veteran, noticed the RAAFC SLSC on the main beach and struck up a conversation with its members who stated that they were keen to see the Ocean Grove club reformed.

We're Back.....

The Ocean Grove club reformed in March 1953 and became "active" around November 1953 (more on this next article).

It's not clear how the newly reformed Ocean Grove club interacted with the RAAFC club but it is likely that the RAAFC club was on vacation for December/January and the Ocean Grove club is patrolling, presumably the main beach.

Now with two surf clubs set up to patrol the Ocean Grove main beach, on 17th June 1954 the (now) Victorian State Centre asks the Ocean Grove SLSC if they have any objection to the RAAFC SLSC patrolling the beach approximately one mile (1.6km) to the west of Ocean Grove. There was no objection and in August 1954 the RAAFC SLSC is advised to patrol the western end of the Ocean Grove beach, an area one half mile to one mile west of the area patrolled by the Ocean Grove SLSC.

This places the RAAFC SLSC's patrol area in the vicinity of 19W and what we presently refer to as RAAF's. Red line is ½ mile and blue line is 1 mile from the Ocean Grove main beach.



Photo Google Earth

In early November 1955, the Ocean Grove SLSC “dob in” the RAAFC SLSC for not providing a regular patrol on their allocated (RAAF’s) beach. Nothing comes of it but the patrolling of RAAF’s is inconsistent.

By March 1957 the RAAFC SLSC is still operating and had recently conducted a Surf Bronze exam at Ocean Grove. According to Victorian State Centre, this was the last Surf Bronze exam for the RAAFC SLSC and sometime later it ceased patrolling RAAF’s beach.

And therein lies the tale of how RAAF’s got its name!



RAAFs Beach 2020