



NHILL ANSON NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 1. 27-04-2009

Highlights in this newsletter:

- First public meeting
- Committee meetings
- The Avro Anson in Nhill

At a public meeting, members of the Nhill community elected a committee of 12 and directed them to focus their efforts on developing a suitable memorial to recognise the impact of the WWII Air School on the township of Nhill.

Members of the committee are quickly recognising the complexity of this enormous task. What constitutes a "suitable memorial"? Numerous ideas have been volunteered ranging from a simple plaque within the centre of town through to photo galleries, museums, workshops, and the collection of historical records and memorabilia.

The enormity of this project has prompted the committee to contact as many people as possible for support and it is our intention to keep supporters informed of the progress via email. Naturally we would like to receive comments from as many of our contacts as possible so that we can gauge the community reaction to our ideas.

We need your support for this project and to keep you informed, ask that you please advise us of your email address or the email address of a close friend or relative who can easily pass our communications on to you.

The following is an abbreviated report of the first few meetings of our group:

Don Kube was elected President. Don has an interesting history in aviation. He was in his middle teens, living in Nhill during the time the RAAF base was functioning at the Nhill aerodrome. His desire to fly was keenly influenced by the many planes continually flying over town. Don went on to qualify as a commercial pilot, also studied for the ministry and flew extensively in Outback Australia, both as a commercial pilot and a flying Padre within the Uniting Church. Don is now the oldest active flying member of the Wimmera Aero Club and possibly the most suitable person for the position of president.

Jo Ussing was elected Secretary – Treasurer. Jo claims that she knows absolutely nothing about the Air School but we know she has a very good record as an administrator and has

many good skills in computers and communications so we know her assistance in the secretarial area will be invaluable.

John Deckert is Assistant Secretary and Newsletter Editor. John has adequate computer skills and some experience with electronic communication so he hopes to communicate with a large group of supporters. John has also had a long interest in Nhill history and is especially interested in hearing about any photographs of Nhill that people have in their possession.

Other members of the committee are: Joan Bennett, Len Creek, Mike Kingwill, Rob Lynch, Chris Weeks, Nathan Wheeler, Max Carland, Graeme Drage and Mervyn Schneider. Information about the skills of these members will be part of later newsletters.

The following information relates to meetings held during the last four months:

Name for the Group: Much discussion was had regarding names, especially whether or not to use the initials RAAF in the title of the group. Some suggestions included Nhill RAAF Memorial Committee, Nhill Air Base Memorial Committee, Nhill Aviation Historical Society, Project Wings, Wings & War, Wings over Nhill and Flypast. It was finally agreed that the organization would be called the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre.

Finance: The need for incorporation was discussed, as was membership to belong to the group. It is hoped that membership would be offered to the wider community via the internet. In order to do this we need to have a clear idea of what the group is trying to achieve, the structure of the group and the structure of a committee of management. The need for a future membership drive was also discussed. It was decided that an electronic newsletter should be part of our connection with the wider public.

Motion: That membership be set at \$20 per person per year.

Discussion about the aims for this committee resulted in a motion that the group initially focus on the RAAF Air School in Nhill from 1941 to 1946 within the broader context of Nhill's aviation history.

Research. All members approved a motion recognising the valuable work done by other groups and individuals prior to the formation of this committee.

A quantity of memorabilia is being displayed at 103 Nelson Street, part of the Commercial Hotel building.

Constitution and Incorporation. Don Kube, Joan Bennett and Chris Weeks have been working on a constitution that has passed through the first reading and should be finalised soon. Incorporation will follow.

Fly-In. Don Kube suggested that we hold a Fly-In as part of the Back-to-Nhill Celebrations in October. A special meeting was held with the Back-to-Nhill committee and much progress has been made. More information will be available later.

Avro Anson. Much debate about a suitable memorial always resulted in everyone wishing we could get an Avro Anson aeroplane for display. These planes are extremely difficult to find but through the efforts of our president we now have the makings of one. There will be much more information about this plane in the next edition of The Nhill Anson Newsletter.

It is intended that committee meetings will be held at 8.00 pm on the second Thursday of each month.

The Avro Anson in Nhill

Why is the Avro Anson aircraft important to Nhill?

A shortage of all types of air force personnel encouraged the Dominions of the Commonwealth, which included Australia and Canada, to establish a co-ordinated scheme to train 28,000 air crew each year to help England fight the war in Europe. Australia had about 30 Air Training Schools and trained almost 28,000 men. The No. 1 OTU (Operational Training Unit) Nhill, began on September the 19th 1941. Twelve Avro Anson aircraft arrived from Mt Gambier on this day.

The Operational Training Unit No. 1 ANS (Air Navigation School) Nhill started in January 1943, and used Avro Anson aircraft for day and night training for navigational purposes. The official RAAF website reads:

Nhill was a training station for the RAAF during WW2, as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, initially as No.1 OTU from December 1941 until June 1942 when the unit was moved first to Bairnsdale and finally to East Sale. 1 OTU trained Pilots, Air Observers and Wireless Operator/Air Gunners for multi-engine squadrons. After their preliminary training, pilots went through a six week conversion to Hudsons and Beauforts, while Air Observers and Wireless Operator/Air Gunners received instruction in Oxford and Anson aircraft. Training tested bombing and gunnery, shipping recognition and reconnaissance, navigation and searchlight evasion skills.

Nhill was also from September 1941 the location for Navigators, being designated as No.2 Air Navigation School until December 1943. In December 1943 the RAAF Armament School moved to Nhill from Hamilton. Renamed as the Air Armament School in January 1944, it later became the Air Armament and Gas School.

At its peak the base had 35 Ansons and about 800 personnel. During the month of January total flying hours were: day 708, night 891; February day 613, night 964; April day 627 night 737, these average monthly training hours continued until December 9, 1943, when No 2 ANS was disbanded. A total of 1935 flying hours were logged for the Ansons and a total of 2002 Navigators had completed training. The majority of the Anson's were transported to other bases.

April 1944 the base became the AA&GS (Air Armament and Gas School) Nhill. The planes at Nhill base were: Beaufort 3, Avro Anson 6, Wirraway 3, and Moth Minor 1. The Anson was again used for air armament training. The Mk 1 Anson had an Armstrong-Whitworth gun turret (later model Ansons had a Bristol turret) and Vickers Gas Operated gun; also the forward mounted Browning Mk II machine gun was used for training with armourers and gunners.

In January 1946 the AA&GS was renamed CMU (Care and Maintenance Unit) Nhill and again Ansons were to be stored and maintained at the Nhill Base for future allocation. The Ansons came mainly from Mallala in batches of 6 to 10 at a time. This was disbanded in October 1946, thus ending the life of the RAAF Air Base at Nhill.

Research by Mike Kingwill, Nhill.

An Avro Anson flying over Nhill. The RAAF Base is in the bottom left hand corner and the town immediately below the tail of the plane.

