



NHILL ANSON NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 3. 28-08-2009

Highlights in this newsletter:

- Promotion for a new book.
- Memories of an Anson flight mechanic.
- Avro Anson restoration progress.
- Fly-In to WWII base in October.

NHILL - a “Forgotten” WW2 RAAF Base revisited.

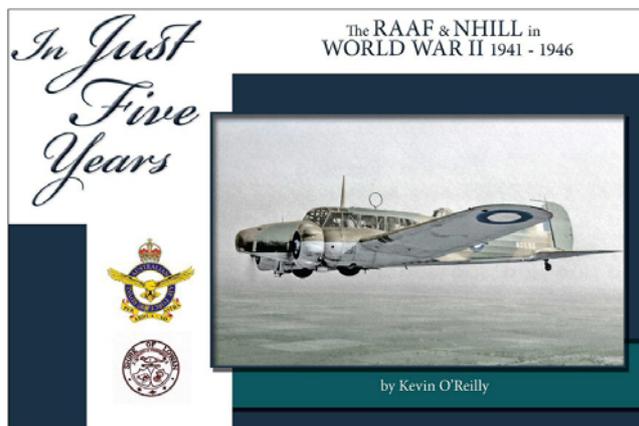
The Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre (NAHC) committee is determined that the story of the WW2 RAAF Base at Nhill (Victoria) will be told to modern generations and that a significant part of Australia’s wartime contribution will not fade from memory.

As Britain prepared for war it was quickly realised that insufficient resources were available to maintain the Royal Air Force at an adequate strength to confront Germany. The Empire Air Training Scheme was implemented in 1939 and Australia undertook to provide 10,000 aircrew per year to defend Britain and the Empire. One of many bases was built at Nhill where more than 2,000 Navigators were trained between 1941 and 1943. During the next two years almost 10,000 Armourers, Bomb Aimers, Chemical Warfare operators and Gunnery trainees passed through this unit, located half way between Melbourne and Adelaide. Trainees came from all states and territories of Australia and many lost their lives in operations over Europe.

During October 10 -18, the town of NHILL will be celebrating a “Back-To” for all who have some connection with the town. The Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre welcomes those involved with the RAAF base, and their families and friends, to visit and enjoy some special aviation related events happening during the week. The committee would also appreciate contact with any trainees or family or friends who are unable to join us in Nhill. It is important to recognise the contribution of as many as possible in the activities of the Nhill base so please use the contact details below.

On Monday Oct 12th a new book will be launched at Nhill about the history of the Base together with the experiences of many personnel and Nhill citizens. Included in the book are numerous photographs never before published. This 200-page book will be available through the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre at an expected cost of \$40 during the Back-to-Nhill week. People interested should pre-order as it is a limited publication that is expected to be very popular and the cost will almost certainly rise to \$45 after the Back-to-Nhill week. Postage is expected to be \$15. Please refer to the following website for additional information. www.injustfiveyears.com

An aircraft "fly-in" has been organised by the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre committee for Saturday Oct 17 when a wide variety of aircraft, including a WW2 Wirraway, are expected at the local airfield. Interested flyers are invited to contact John Deckert by email john@westprint.com.au or by phone on 03 5391 1466.



In Just Five Years

Available Mid October
Pre publication orders \$40
Plus Post
All sales after Oct. 18 will be at least
\$45.00

A Personal Reminiscence from an Avro Anson Flight Mechanic

I am an ex RAAF flight mechanic who serviced an Anson in Survey Flight in 1944/45. I was in 23 Squadron and was operating from Nabzab N G with Vultee Vengences. We were pulled out of N.G., the Squadron broken up and I was posted to Survey Flight at Lowood.

Survey Flight flew Ansons, Lowood being their home base and after a crash course on Cheetah engines I was sent out on detachment to north Qld. Survey Flight's role was to do aerial surveying of Australia at 1700ft. A camera was mounted in its belly also a periscope to see the approaching run. A photographer took photos with a big over-lap on each photo. Each Anson was serviced by one mechanic and one airframe serviceman.

Our first base was Mareeba NQ and we were shooting areas in the Gulf. Then we spent three months operating from a grass strip one mile out of Ingham, refuelling from 44gal drums with a hand pump. The Officers stayed at the Central hotel. We were at the Royal Hotel owned by Mrs Mullins. Often we use to shoot up the strip to chase the cattle off the strip so we could land. What a bludge. We looked out of the hotel window, clouds everywhere so no flying today, so down to the comfort home hut for a game of billiards or table tennis.

During one hair-raising trip we left Mareeba to fly to Townsville and were only in the air for a few minutes when it clouded over and heavy rain set in. Then No1 cylinder on the starboard engine oiled up; something it did on occasions. While running on 6 cylinders not 7, the old Anson tried shaking itself out of its frame. The photographer / navigator was on the radio for the next hour calling [SUS Anson calling Garbutt Tower please give us weather information]-----Silence. Finally the pilot said he would fly due east for 30 minutes out to sea to try to get under the weather. Ok now I'm bringing her down. Everyone keep a lookout for a hole through the clouds. Suddenly through the hole was the sea below us. A sharp bank or two to about 500ft and what a shock we got. We had entered the Hinchinbrook channel with towering mountains on each side. Now that we knew where we were we are not going up again on a sick donk. We flew out of the channel slowly gaining height and in a few minutes Garbutt Tower answered [Garbutt tower visibility 20 mile tem. 94f wind slight n ne]. My own theory is because of a sick engine on the starboard wing we slowly drifted to the right and were in central Qld when we altered course.

Our next base was Rockhampton for 3 months. Still no airforce base. Home was the Queensland Hotel. We were paid a living out allowance. I remember one day we tried starting the port engine on Mick's Anson in Ingham. It was a hot day and we took turns in cranking. Bond was our Co and I had never met him. He had his arm in a sling. Broke it in a truck rollover and so was a passenger in Mick's Anson. In Ingham was an RAAF push bike for the ground staff to travel to the strip for maintenance. After running out of puff trying to start the engine in the heat [no water on strip] I told Mick to peddle into town and sneak back a couple of bottles.

While he was away I dropped of the cowl to have a look at the starting magneto. These cheetah engines have a small magneto driven by a chain from the starting handle which sends a stream of retarded sparks to the cylinder after Top Dead Centre. The points on the magneto were stuck open. One drop of oil was all that was needed.

Concealing two bottles under my overalls I sat in the seat behind the pilot and much to my horror the Co boarded our kite and sat behind me. If I bent forward he could not see, so after 10 minutes I knocked the top off one. What a surprise. Because of the altitude it gushed up like an artesian bore spilling a third of its contents on a kit bag on the floor between my legs. The kit bag belonged to our photographer who was a teetotaller. Throwing caution to the wind I quickly passed the bottle behind me to the Co. He certainly knew what to do with it. When it came back I had enough to wet my lips.

I kept a flying log in survey flight. Here is an extract from the first two weeks:

Lowood to Rockhampton. Rockhampton to Bowen. Bowen to Ingham. Ingham to Innisfail. Innisfail to Mareeba. Mareeba to Townsville. Townsville to Macrossan. The RAAF had a big store there and I obtained sparkplugs.

Macrossan to Townsville. Townsville to Ingham. Ingham to Mareeba. Mareeba to Townsville. Townsville to Ingham. Ingham to Innisfail. Innisfail to Mareeba. This was my first 2 weeks on detachment. I certainly knew how to start an Anson after 6 months.

Survey Flight had been operating a few years before I joined them. One detachment would work W.A during the dry season and another in North Qld. I have no idea how many Ansons we had because they only turned up at Lowood for major servicing.

I hope this story tells a little more about Avro Ansons and I am pleased one is being restored.

P.S. Let me know when you want the engines started.

From 78213 L.A.C. Hall C.M. by email.

Clive (Nobby) Hall. 85 years young.

Avro Anson Restoration

The Avro Anson restoration is proceeding well under the guidance of Mike Kingwill, ably assisted by Len Creek. These two men are certainly putting in the lion's share of the work at present but it is hoped that others, who are helping in many different ways, will be inspired to continue with what is expected to be a long and difficult task.



Mike's plan was to start at the tail and work along the fuselage until he reached the nose.

Unfortunately, a complete section of about 3.5 metres between the cabin and the tail was missing. After the war steel was almost impossible to get so this section is thought to have been used for a tank stand. Most people would have given up when confronted with the prospect of having to

manufacture about 30% of the fuselage from scratch. But not Mike; he took hundreds of photos, dozens of measurements and just kept adding one piece of tubing after another until he had the cabin connected to the tail in 'as new' condition.

The Avro Anson rudder is made entirely of wood and after many years of exposure the rudder for this plane would not even make good firewood. However, Len Creek was of the opinion that an exact copy could be made by using what was left of the original for a pattern. Len's experience with model aircraft was invaluable while undertaking the task of manufacturing a new rudder. He has now spent about 70 hours getting the framework to the stage where it is ready for covering with a thin veneer of ply. Unfortunately, the normal type of ply available from local timber suppliers will not satisfy the need for this job but Len is hopeful that a recent contact within the antique aircraft owner's circles will be able to help.



The Nhill district has been the target of aircraft restorers for many years due to the number of planes that were purchased by locals at the end of the war. Although most were stripped and used for the valuable metals they contained, some survived in almost complete form for a long time and numerous parts also survived. However, about 30 years ago determined efforts to salvage all remaining planes and parts resulted in a thorough clean up of everything, or so we thought. It is amazing to find that bits and pieces are still coming to light around Nhill. We were delighted to be presented with a turret in excellent order. A repair manual came from Queensland and other parts have been given.

The committee of the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre is amazed at the support this project has received. We know we are facing huge problems as we strive to bring this project to a successful conclusion. I made the observation to Mike that an engine cowling was rather rotten and I had no idea how he was going to repair it. He just grinned and said that he didn't know either but it was going to be quite some time before he had to worry about that. His philosophy is to take one step at a time. It's much easier to cope with the enormity of the task.

Fly-In to Nhill on Saturday October 17

The Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre committee has arranged a Fly-In to the historic Nhill WWII air base. This event will be one of the highlights of the Back-To-Nhill being celebrated between the 11th and 18th of October. All pilots, aircraft owners or aviation enthusiasts are welcome to join members of the Nhill community on the 17th.

Owners of several antique planes have confirmed their intention to be at Nhill and many others have expressed their intention to be part of this event. Information is being sought about the participating planes so that we can adequately provide for the needs of pilots and aircraft; in particular fuel and food. Members of the Wimmera Aero Club are assisting with the marshalling of aircraft. The Horsham Air Cadets will be assisting with security as well as providing displays of their skills, both in the air and on the ground. For this event air cadets from as far away as Swan Hill and Mt Gambier will join the Horsham squadron.

Guided walks around the historic base will be part of the day's activities.

Memberships are due

This newsletter is free to anyone interested in the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre and any of its projects. However, this newsletter is also the only way the committee has of easily sending reminders to those who wish to support our cause by being a member.

Memberships run for a financial year and are \$20 per person. Payment can be made by cheque, money order or direct debit. Postal address is PO Box 42, Nhill, Vic, 3418. Direct debit may be made to the National Bank of Australia, BSB No 083-752, Account No 83-325-2480. Confirmation of payment will only be made if an email address is included with payment or if a notice of payment is made by email to Joan Bennett:

nariel@internode.on.net