



## NHILL ANSON NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 10. 20-04-2011

### Highlights in this newsletter:

- Master Plan Report
- Evening with Kevin O'Reilly
- Little Desert Bombing Range
- Avro Restoration

Christmas and New Year have come and gone and now even summer has officially ended although, like many other places Nhill has not seen much of summer. This has been the wettest summer season I have ever seen with rain every two or three weeks. However, Nhill has been fortunate that only temporary flooding of farmland has occurred. The Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre and the Avro Anson have not been affected.

The NAHC Board has been active throughout the summer with many important issues of an administrative nature to be attended to. Of course there have been other important issues such as scrounging for parts and attending the Avalon Air Show.

I wish I could adequately write about the discussion between the two WWII airmen who are members of our Board. They warmed to the subject and concluded by saying it was one of the best days they could remember for many years. Merv, who was a navigator in a Liberator, said how he enjoyed watching the Catalina flying and how he remembered the relief airmen felt when they saw the Catalina out in the middle of the ocean waiting to shepherd home any failing bombers badly shot up during a mission over enemy territory.

Merv also arranged for the group to see the Liberator he has been helping rebuild. He mentioned that it had taken almost twenty years to get it to its advanced state of restoration. Max, who flew Kittyhawks and Mustangs, was very impressed with the restoration but mentioned that he had recently seen a documentary about the Ford factory in the US building Liberators during WWII using mainly female labour and turning out one aircraft every 55 minutes. He was roundly rebuked when he asked what Merv and his mob had been doing for the last 20 years.

### **The Hindmarsh Shire Nhill Aerodrome Master Plan Advisory Committee:**

Unfortunately, progress to develop a Master Plan for the Nhill Aerodrome has been interrupted due to a member of the Hindmarsh Shire staff changing jobs. The NAHC President and Vice President have been in regular contact with Shire representatives in an endeavour to keep the Master Plan consultation process moving. The importance of this project was aptly described by one of our Board members thus:

*This project is absolutely vital for bringing tourists to Nhill as well as engendering community pride. I suppose the NAHC people could be likened to the early pioneers – the NAHC is breaking new ground by building on our proud history to create something new for future generations. The vision I can cope with, but it is the hard slog involved in building a solid foundation, and persevering with the various tiers of Government that stretch my ageing brain and sometimes pushes me to the brink. However, as long as*

our Board and volunteers continue to work together for the good of the project, I am not fearful for the future. I am reminded of the biblical phrase – From those to whom much is given, much will be required.

### **Report: Evenings With Kevin O'Reilly.**

Kevin is continuing with his research into the history of aviation at Nhill. However, he had found that there is a large amount of aviation history for the Wimmera that also links with Nhill so his research is filling files intended to eventually be two books; one about Nhill and one about the Wimmera. As part of this research Kevin has accepted a number of invitations to speak to local groups within the Wimmera. His interest has helped unearth many leads for further investigation, some not directly related to aviation, such as his interest in Motor Rail Cars that used to run on light rail lines to Yanac and Carpolac as well as on the main line through Nhill.

### **Recollections of the Bombing Range by Mal Bell**



1. Bombing Range Target in the Little Desert about 1980.

2. Bomb tails blown off upon detonation.

3. All that is left of the Range Observation Tower. (More about that in a later issue.)

During World War II an RAAF training school was based in Nhill and part of the training included aerial bombing practice on a range established on Norm Bound's Scrub Block south of Winiam. Bombs weighing 8 1/4 lbs (3.75 kg) were used on two ranges and a third range was used for a much larger bomb. The large bombs would rattle the windows of our home when they exploded.

The remains of two concrete shelters still exist on site. These shelters were fitted with observation decks on top of the heavy concrete base structure. Several other buildings were further to the south but everything that could be dismantled was auctioned shortly after the end of the war.

I have a recollection that someone, I think from Mildura, tendered for the scrap metal salvage rights and upon inspection of the sites denounced the locals as "A mob of thieving b—". I know that many locals managed to souvenir a few spent bombs and as they contained about four and a half pounds of lead they were very handy for making into fishing sinkers.

After the salvage man had declared there was nothing worth salvaging, my dad decided we should try our hand at finding some bombs. We had one of the early Land Rover four-wheel-drive utilities and would drive through the scrub behind Winiam East to the bombing range, fully equipped with some sandwiches, a water bag and a shovel each. We would dig up the bombs and load them on the ute until we had 100. This was twice the normal load limit and we reckoned it was enough for the old Land Rover. Dad would very carefully drive the ute home to be unloaded.

With this method we managed to locate a few thousand bombs and we were not the only ones collecting them at that time. The area has now been cleared for farming but I believe that a few bombs are still occasionally turned up as the paddocks are cultivated. Most of the bombs collected were smashed on an anvil with a sledge hammer, the lead, brass, cast iron and steel separated, bagged and sent to a scrap merchant. Several local people made good pocket money from this pastime.

During our fossicking expeditions we unearthed several 'live' bombs encrusted with rust and dirt. These bombs were treated with a certain amount of caution. After disassembling, cleaning and reassembling, a lengthy piece of binder twine thrown over a branch of a tall tree was used to haul the bombs skywards. We took refuge behind a near-by barn, released the twine and the bomb hurtled to the ground, erupting in a large cloud of yellow smoke and providing us with great amusement.

Several aircraft wrecks were dumped in various locations in the scrub and I believe used for navigational training. They also proved to be a bonanza for locals who stripped the aluminum sheeting, tubing and various other parts. Gas canisters still containing gas, live .303 ammunition and various other buried treasures were also found by locals.

I recall planes flying over the south scrub towing targets behind them on a long cable and a number of other planes firing at these targets. One of the targets became detached from the towing aircraft and a search in the scrub by the RAAF failed to find it. Sometime later my father located it and the prized silken material went to make household goods.

Numerous other stories could be told about the history of the bombing range and its contribution to the war effort but for me the most important recollections are about those days when we went 'bomb' prospecting.

### **Avro Anson Restoration**

Although work on the Avro Anson appears to have slowed down this is in some ways only an illusion. Mike Kingwill is busy putting numerous small parts together especially within the cabin area. Quite a few instruments and gauges have now been fitted, the control columns installed and some radio equipment fitted. The framework of the fuselage and cabin are almost complete and are waiting for some expert advice on attaching the fabric. Unfortunately, even a lack of small parts will often hold up progress and I noticed this morning that Mike had parts for the bomb doors laid out on the floor so I imagine him moving on with another part of the aircraft while waiting for more instruments.



1. Instrument Panel taking shape.
2. Brake Air Tank fitted in the nose of the Avro. (We still need a brake control unit as shown. This one is unserviceable.)
3. Nose Cone awaiting restoration and fitting. (The Brake Control Unit needs fitting first.)

### **Web Site**

Work on the website has also suffered during the summer while I have taken a months holiday. [www.nhillavationheritagecentre.com.au](http://www.nhillavationheritagecentre.com.au) It still needs plenty of work. I will try to make an effort to put up more information soon.

### **Membership of the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre.**

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 \$30 per person. Payment can be made by cheque, money order or internet transfer. 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 the treasurer:

[treasurer@nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au](mailto:treasurer@nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au)

### **A message to our supporters**

Do you have a friend who would appreciate receiving this free newsletter? Just click on FORWARD and type in as many email addresses as you like then click SEND.

This newsletter is free. However, support for this important historical project is greatly appreciated and comes in many forms including phone numbers and email addresses, contact details of former WWII trainees, parts for the Avro Anson and general memorabilia, photos etc. as well as donations of cash and labour. Although it is our intention to recognise and acknowledge this assistance through the newsletter, specific details will not be published.

New email addresses are constantly being added to our list. If you do not wish to be part of our group then please contact [admin@nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au](mailto:admin@nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au) and make your request known.

Persons who wish to make comment about the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre or any other related issue should also contact [admin@nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au](mailto:admin@nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au). Such comments may be published in future newsletters if considered appropriate.