



NHILL ANSON NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 11. 10-05-2011

Highlights in this newsletter:

- An Evening with Roger Meyer
- Anzac Day Memorial Dedication
- Little desert Bombing Range
- Avro Restoration

Important Notice of future event

The NAHC is pleased to announce that it has been favoured with an offer from Roger Meyer, President of the Civil Aviation Historical Society, to give an illustrated talk about the history of Nhill's Aeradio building and its importance to the heritage of Australian Aviation. Roger is connected with the Essendon Aviation Museum and will be in Nhill for an evening at the Nhill Senior Citizen's Club room at 7.30 PM, July 14th.

It is also important that the Board of the NAHC has the opportunity to tell members of the public what is happening. We recognise the fact that most people have no idea what we do and this will be our chance to inform Nhill and district people of our work.

Anzac Day 2011

An important event was organised by the Nhill Branch of the RSL to coincide with the 10am Anzac Day service in Goldsworthy Park in Nhill. Discussion has for some time centred around the RAAF Base at Nhill from 1941 to 1946 and the unfortunate loss of life during training accidents while it was operational. Nhill RSL applied for a grant and this, along with some privately donated funds, was used to erect a suitable memorial near the WWI Cenotaph in the centre of town.



1. Merv Schneider addressing gathering. 2. Merv Schneider unveiling memorial assisted by Henry Berry.
3. Laurie Crouch admiring new memorial in Goldsworthy Park, Nhill.

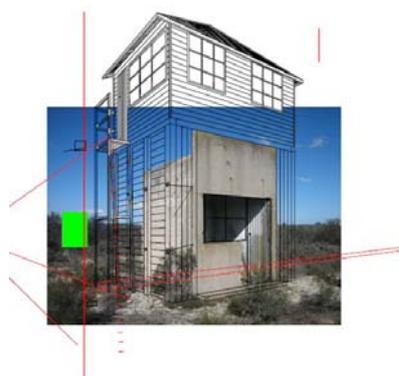
Cr. Gersch, representing the Hindmarsh hire, opened proceedings. He was followed by Kevin O'Reilly who spoke about the history of the base and the sacrifice of the men and women who gave of their time to train at Nhill and also of the people who lost their lives here and overseas. Merv Schneider, representing the RSL, told us how important it was to acknowledge the service of the men and women who trained at Nhill and to remember the eleven men who died while training here. Merv then unveiled

the new memorial, assisted by Henry Berry secretary of the RSL. Pastor Rob Morgan gave the dedication. It is interesting to note that Laurie Crouch, an instructor at Nhill during the last year of the war, is thought to have been the only representative of the men and women who served at Nhill to be present.

The Hindmarsh Shire Nhill Aerodrome Master Plan Advisory Committee:

A meeting was held last week and a report on the present situation is to be put to council. A plan for the development of the aerodrome has been prepared and a list of works drawn up for implementation, some short term, medium and long term.

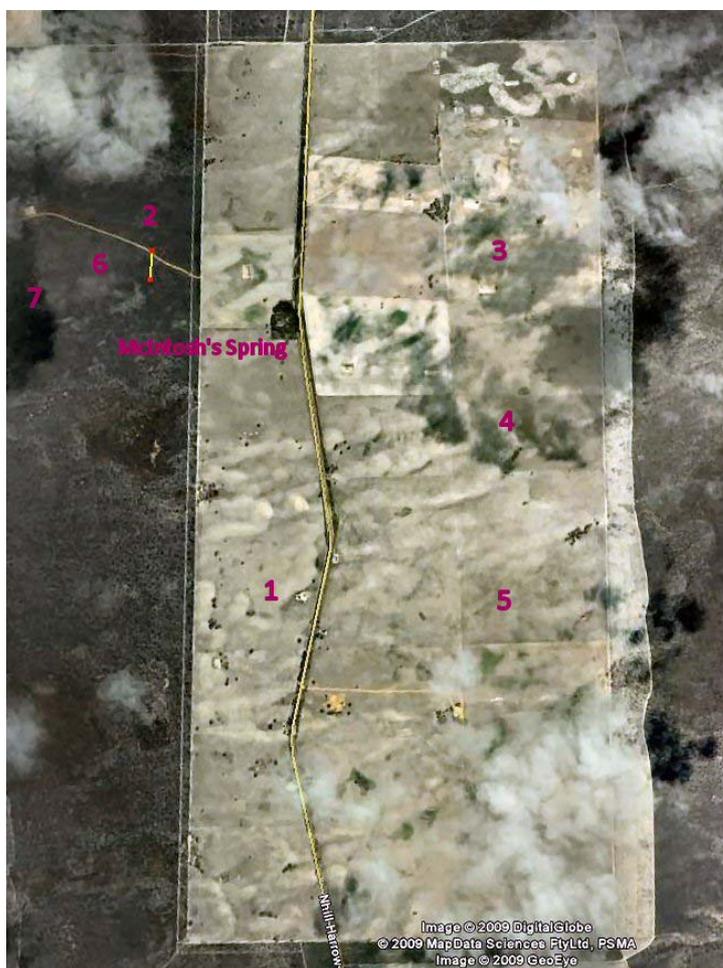
More on the Bombing Range by John Deckert



1. Existing concrete shelter. 2. Start of drawing. 3. Believed to be a very good likeness of the original building.

The Bombing Range has been an interest of mine since school days and then a few years later when I owned part of the property the range was on. Although I can remember the administration building that was adjacent to the road well clear of the bombing targets I cannot remember anything of the structures visible now. The first picture was taken a year or so ago and is what most people think of as being bomb shelters. This is not quite accurate. They were shelters not from bombs but from bullets.

There are two of these concrete structures still visible today and they are located about 180 metres apart and about a kilometre from the main bombing range target so even a very wayward navigator would have a lot of trouble accidentally dropping bombs on these shelters. While talking to Laurie Crouch, an ex-instructor at the base in 1945 (photographed above) I learned that these were part of observation towers used to accurately plot, by way of angles and mathematics, the exact point of impact of each bomb. This was relayed by the only private phone line in the



Bombing Range
 1. Administration Building. 2. Observation Buildings.
 3. Main Target. 4. Second Target. 5. Third Target.
 6. Gunnery Targets. 7. Approx. Pos wrecked planes.

district to the RAAF base in Nhill where the results were displayed for navigator/bomb-aimers to see upon their return.

It took me several years to find two people who could remember the observation towers and what had happened to them. It appears that at the end of the war almost everything was sold at auction. The building at the top was easily dismantled and sold (in fact parts of the buildings were stolen and found in the bush by Mal Bell's father who then reported it to the police). Remember Mal from the last Anson Newsletter? He is the only person who seems to be able to remember the buildings in detail having been there soon after the war ended. I was lucky to also find Austin Dahlenburg who had clear recollections as his uncle bought the timber surrounds of the concrete structures that are now visible.

I was keen to build up a picture because as far as is known no photographs of these buildings exist. There certainly does not seem to be any in the Nhill district so if anyone has a photo I would love to copy it. I contacted Murray Parker, an ex Nhill Resident with a strong association with his home town and whom I knew had a great gift for computer-aided drawing. So now the team was ready and I was only about two years into the project.

We had this information: The concrete shelters were each surrounded by red-gum timber 50mm thick, held in place by 25mm steel bolts with the timber about 600mm from the concrete and the space between filled with sand. (The holes where the sand was obtained and the mounds where it fell out when the timber was removed are still evident). At the top of this structure was the observation section, an almost square building with a row of windows facing the bombing range, a blackboard on the opposite wall and ladder access. Mal remembered a toilet and a water tank on a stand. (When Murray questioned Mal's recall about some strange feature of the toilet Mal said he knew exactly what it looked like because his father had purchased it at the auction and it had been an important part of his family's wellbeing for many years).

Murray produced several drawings that were sent around Australia by email, each time coming back with a few additions or changes. After the 2009 Fly-In when both Mal and Murray were in Nhill we decided to go out to the bombing range to see if all the recollections and the drawings fitted. We were puzzled to find a concrete floor of an extra building beside one of the shelters. After about an hour of wondering and walking in the bush talking about the operation of this building it suddenly dawned upon us that this was the building that the targets were stored in.

At this point it is important to tell the reader of the second use for this building because it was only while talking about this that we became aware of the need for this small building. These observation towers were also used as part of a gunnery range where planes flew in from the side of the buildings where the windows were and fired at targets set about 100 metres past the buildings and in line with the mid point between the two. The targets were set on wooden frames and it is assumed that during wet weather and on nights with heavy dew it would be necessary to put the targets in a sheltered place; the narrow building that was just the right size for about five or six targets.

Now everything was becoming clear. The photo with my grandchildren in it clearly shows where the window and door used to be. The window gives clear view of the target area and the 200mm of concrete, 600mm of sand and 50mm of red-gum timber gave plenty of protection from wayward .303 bullets. When the gunnery range was in operation observers of the bombing range would descend the ladder into the heavily protected lower part of the building to observe the accuracy of gunners flying past. Results were posted on bulletin boards in similar fashion to the bombing practice. It is interesting to note that Austin said particular attention was given to inspecting the timber as it was removed after the war and not one bullet hole was found.

There are a few more photos and some additional information that I will try to add to the next newsletter in an attempt to finish the story of the bombing range in use by trainee navigators and gunners operating from the Nhill RAAF Base during WWII.

Avro Anson Restoration

I have been advised that several parts have been donated to the restoration project. These are vital to the success of our project and we are very appreciative receivers of these donations. I have seen Mike Kingwill's eyes light up like a kid at Christmas when he has been opening a parcel containing bits for the Avro. I thought they looked like some beaten up bits of junk but Mike was overjoyed because he could see how they would look when he had restored and painted them.

Thanks to everyone who has helped with our search for parts. We appreciate every lead and contact. They all help.

Library

One of the numerous facets of the project to develop a Heritage Centre in Nhill is the possibility of creating a Library. Although we have no firm idea of the overall scope this should take it can be assumed that the main focus will be on aviation. It is likely that local histories will feature and possibly diaries, photographs and letters will be important. We recognise that any library will depend almost exclusively upon donations of information, copied or original material and books. The NAHC would welcome contact with anyone who is concerned that their collection or personal material is in danger of being lost. We will also appreciate gifts of surplus books and magazines. An email would be welcome:

admin@nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au

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

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 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. Such comments may be published in future newsletters if considered appropriate.