



NHILL ANSON NEWSLETTER

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Aviation in Nhill by Frank Bound

Introduction.

The establishment of an aerodrome in Nhill was greatly assisted by the continuing efforts of Fred. K McKenzie, Reporter and later Proprietor of the "Nhill Free Press". This tribute to McKenzie, written in 1978 by the late Frank Bound, a long-serving President of the Nhill Historical Society, reads:-

F K McKenzie was a journalist of high calibre, who during a great number of years used every endeavour within his journalistic capabilities to further the interests of Nhill. Probably his greatest foresight and ambition was typified by the endeavour he used to have Nhill established as an Aviation centre.

For many years F K was a "One man band" in this respect, and when Australia was first being "surveyed" for Aviation Defence purposes, and later for Civil Aviation, it was his constant urging of the local council, and his publication of newspaper articles that kept Nhill's claim to Aviation prominence, as the exact geographical centre point between Melbourne and Adelaide, well to the fore in the minds of everyone who was anyone as far as Aviation was concerned. It was as a result of his urgings that the first official landing field in Western Victoria was established in "Moll's Paddock", adjoining Nhill on the East.

F K then continued to "Badger" the Council to invite every Aviation celebrity to visit Nhill. It was as a result of these urgings that, at the invitation of the Lowan Shire council, Amy Johnson, Bert Hinkler and Jimmy Mollison, record breaking England to Australia flyers visited Nhill, and earlier than this, Ross and Keith Smith, (later Knighted), dropped Australia's first "Aerogram", right into Victoria Street, addressed to Mr F K McKenzie, C/o the "Nhill Free Press" as they flew over Nhill en-route to Adelaide.

During the 1930's the Department of Civil Aviation created an official DCA aerodrome at Nhill, with full time staff in radio contact with all aircraft operating in and out of Adelaide and Melbourne. The "Drome" was equipped with a radio beacon, and a revolving searchlight beacon, and when in 1942, the RAAF set up a wartime Navigation and Training school at the Nhill Aerodrome, F K considered this his

“greatest achievement”. His obituary records that throughout his long journalistic career, he never used his position to write adversely of anyone.

During the 1920s and 30s, F K published material relating to Aviation in some part of the world in practically every issue of the “Nhill Free Press”. Extracts from the “Nhill Free Press” detail the story of the Aerodrome:

Nov 11th 1919. First aircraft to land in Nhill, DeHavilland Sub Spotter, 100hp, piloted by Lieuts, Jones, Brearley and McKenzie, landed on the racecourse. Joy flights conducted for £5 and £3. The plane also carried out landings in J & T W Rintoule’s paddock at the rear of the Catholic Church. Top speed capability of 75 mph.



March 20th 1920. Keith and Ross Smith fly over Nhill in a Vickers Vimy dropping the first aerogram in Victoria, addressed to the Nhill Free Press.

March 1924. Some preparatory work for the establishment of an aerodrome commenced on Mr Moll’s paddock east of Nhill’s township, that area now including Glenferness Street to Nhill Motel & Dimboola Road, south into Dickinson’s paddock. Limestone North Eastern marker was still evident when motel constructed. After survey and inspection and protracted negotiations, Mr F K McKenzie of Nhill with Col, Brinsmead of the Defence Department, finally proclaimed Nhill as a Government Landing Ground, giving Nhill claim to the first official inland airport.

October 8th, 1925. First aircraft accident in Nhill is recorded.

September 9th 1926. Mr H L Bond leases aerodrome from Mr Moll.

September 18th. 1927. Subdivision of aerodrome site results in transfer of landing site to property of Young & Sutherland adjoining Halpin Park, now known as Blackwood’s paddock & adjoining Park Street, north of School.

November, 1927. Sees the arrival of RAAF aircraft and is the prelude of what becomes a regular activity by the RAAF as training flights from Point Cook are conducted.

April 18th 1928. Bert Hinkler arrived in Nhill. 1200 people gather to meet him.



March 4th to 7th 1929. Aero pageant for Nhill Back-to celebrations. 16 aircraft visit Nhill for the occasion including 11 RAAF planes.

June 6th 1929. Air service, Perth to Sydney planned with stop at Nhill to be included.

July 11th 1929. Junkers first all metal monoplane aircraft lands at Nhill, piloted by Capt. Mustard.

September 30th 1929. Radio link for Sydney to Perth aerial derby established in Nhill and operated by Mr H R Brown of Yanac.

October 1st 1929. First aircraft in the Sydney-Perth Derby arrive after a turbulent flight.

March 21st 1930. Adelaide-Nhill-Melbourne return air service established by “Direct Airways”. Ticket dated 11th April 1930 held by the late Mr Fred Stephen’s family.

June 26th 1930. Visit by renowned Lady flier, Amy Johnson, on her London to Australia Solo flight.

March. 1933. Second Air Pageant in Nhill.

November 1933. Charles Kingsford-Smith, visits Nhill on barnstorming tour.

1936/37. Radio beacon weather station established at present Government Aerodrome.

1938. Full perimeter lighting installed and regular refuelling carried out on regular Australian National Airline DC 3 flights.

1940. Commencement of RAAF flying school.

July 7th 1941. RAAF moves into Nhill to establish No. 2 Astro Navigation School with over 2,000 personnel.

1942. Air Training Corp, formed D Flight of Wimmera Squad.

1946. Wimmera Aero Club established in Nhill with 3 Tiger Moth Aircraft. Mr F J Williams, First President.

1948. Second Air Service established to Melbourne and Adelaide.

1950. Nhill branch of Airforce Association established as a result of many of the community having served with the RAAF, 3 of whom were decorated.

1950 onwards. Nhill Aerodrome continues to be active with Aero Club in operation. Private flying very popular, visits by Air Ambulance and regular fuelling service for light aircraft on Adelaide, Melbourne flights.

This Foreword and Information from the 1933 Air Pageant makes interesting reading:-

The distinction of being the first to take to the air belongs to a sheep, a cock and a duck, which were sent up in a Montgolfier Balloon from Versailles on September 18th 1783. The balloon descended eight minutes after the start, as the hot air cooled. The sheep and the duck were uninjured, but the cock was found to be unwell and his condition was attributed by the learned professors to the rarefied atmosphere above. Closer investigation however, indicated that it had been trampled on by the sheep.

The first actual controlled flight by a man-carrying power driven aeroplane was made by Orville Wright at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, USA, on December 17th 1903, a straight trip of 284 yards.

The training of pilots of aircraft is a work of truly national importance; for there is no doubt that a large number of competent pilots will be required to handle the future development of Aviation. Whilst in the event of a national disaster or emergency, they would form a reserve of partly trained personnel that would undoubtedly be of inestimable value.

Take an interest in Aviation and see that Australia is not behind any country in the world in its Aircraft, Personnel and facilities for operation.

Correspondence in the Aerodrome file at the Historical Society contains letters to F K McKenzie from the Lowan Shire and Parliament Members and make interesting reading.

A letter from the Shire of Lowan, dated 16th November 1938, signed by Percy Creswell, advises McKenzie that the Council will strongly support your action taken relating to the establishment of an Air Flying Training School and an Aircraft Factory in Nhill.

A letter to The Hon. T H Scholfield M.C. M.M. M.F. Parliament House Canberra, from Mr G A Street, Department of Defence, reads; In further to your representations at the insistence of Mr F K McKenzie, Free Press, Nhill, I now desire to inform you that the question of the selection of a site for the new flying school for the RAAF has received the careful consideration of the Government, and after the fullest examination of the matter from all its aspects, it has decided to establish the training school at Forest Hill, New South Wales, six and a half miles from Wagga.

Not to be dismayed, F K kept up his endeavours and a letter from the Hon. T H Scholfield to F K on the 4th, December 1939, states: I have your letter of the 1st Ins, and will get in touch with the Minister of Air straight away, and bring your suggestion with regard to the use of Nhill as a training centre before him.

I agree with you that Nhill has a very strong claim for consideration as an Air Training Centre, and you may rest assured of my strong representations that the matter should be fully investigated, with a view to approval being given to the establishment of such a centre there.

On the 12th December 1939, Mr Hole, Minister for Air, wrote to The Hon. Scholfield, saying: Further to your personal representations on behalf of Mr F K McKenzie of Nhill, I now find that the Air Board is fully aware of the facilities available at Nhill for the training of pilots and I can assure you that this particular aerodrome will be kept well in mind when considering the sites for any new Air Force units to be formed in conjunction with the Empire Air Scheme or other war developments.

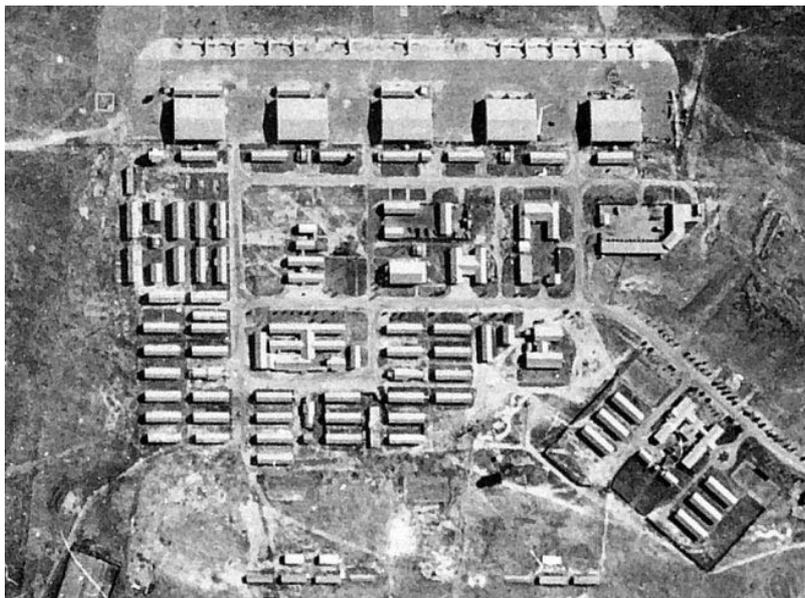
On the 1st, November 1940, a letter from the Minister for Air, was sent to the Hon. T Scholfield, and said: I am pleased to be able to supply some information as a result of representations which you made and which were also made by the local authorities regarding a proposal to establish an Air Force Training Unit at Nhill. I am glad to say that Nhill has been selected as the site for an Air Navigation School under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

Arrangements will be made as requisite for the planning of the necessary buildings and services at the local aerodrome to accommodate the aircraft and personnel. Training at this school is scheduled to commence in July 1941, and an advance party will arrive some time before that date in order that the necessary arrangements may be put in hand.

I have no doubt that in the organization of the school the local authorities will render every assistance to the commanding officer of the school.

A letter to F K from the Department of Air in January 1941 stating that: I am directed to inform you that under the Royal Australian Air Force Development Program, this unit is scheduled to form in July 1941, and will have an ultimate establishment of approximately 300 personnel.

It is anticipated that the advance party will arrive in June, but a definite date will not be available until the buildings are nearing completion. The school is responsible for the final stage in the training of Air observers and will conduct courses during a four week training period in Navigation.



Finally; a letter to F K from the Shire of Lowan, dated 21st November 1940. Reads;

Dear Sir,

At the last meeting of the Council held on the 19th inst, the communication was received from the Minister for Air advising that Nhill had been selected as a site for an Air Navigation School under the Empire Training Scheme.

Reference was made by several of the Councillors at the table to the many and excellent services rendered by you in connection with the establishment both of the landing ground at Nhill and also this decision of the Government's to establish this school at Nhill, and I am directed to express to you the hearty appreciation of the council of the efforts made with the above by you.

Signed. Percy Creswell. **Shire Secretary.**

Acknowledgement: This article, including photographs, are from the archives of the Nhill Historical Society whose members work closely with the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre to preserve Nhill's history.

Progress for the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre building.

A recent meeting was held between representatives of Ahrens Group Pty Ltd, The Hindmarsh Shire and the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre Board at the Nhill Aerodrome to discuss in detail the building of premises to house the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre. Funding is in hand to build the first stage; a building of approximately 25 x 30 metres.

We are at the serious stage where pegs are being positioned, power and drainage checked, levels and soil testing done. The conceptual drawings have been available for some time so now the detailed plans

are being prepared. The next step will be to start making the component parts ready for final construction on site at Nhill.

The NAHC members were made aware of the desirability of completing both first and second stages at the same time. It was suggested that there may be a saving of as much as \$50,000 if the whole project could be completed while construction crews, materials and machinery were on site. Somewhere between \$70,000 and \$100,000 needs to be raised within the next few months. This will be a massive task for the NAHC Board and any assistance will be greatly appreciated. As previously advised, the NAHC have now been granted tax deductibility status for any monetary gift of more than \$2. Any donations will be most welcome.

Donations may be made through our secure Pay Pal facility by following this link

<http://nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au/members-1.htm>



Current and future projects:

1. Construction of the Nhill Aviation Heritage Museum at the Nhill Aerodrome, funded by the Hindmarsh Shire Council, State Regional Growth Fund, and funds raised through Association activities and from donors and supporters. Ahrens Group Pty Ltd of Kingsford, SA, will construct the Museum – with completion scheduled for July 2013. The Museum will house the gifted and restored WW2 Avro Anson – currently being worked on in three separate Nhill sheds.

2. WW2 Avro Anson Restoration: Remarkable progress continues under the guiding hand of Project Manager Mick Kingwill. Mick's work is meticulous, with colleagues Len Creek and Wimpey Reichelt working on the tail plane and engine respectively. These three are doing a magnificent job of restoration. Tony Clark, aviation historian who has spent twenty years raising funds for a Beaufort restoration in Queensland, said that we have achieved in three years more than they have in twenty – and that the workmanship is of world class



3. Display of collected and donated Second World War artefacts relevant to the RAAF Air Base at the Nhill Aerodrome: Rooms and shop-front in Nelson Street, Nhill, have been generously provided free of charge by Mr Gary Driscoll and Mr Andrew McIllree, proprietors of the Commercial Hotel Nhill. As well as holding meetings there, collected and donated Second World War artefacts relevant to the RAAF Air Base at the Nhill Aerodrome are stored and displayed. These will eventually be securely housed and displayed in the Aviation Heritage Museum at the Nhill Aerodrome – under construction. This display maintains our public profile, and is a point of interest to locals and travellers alike.

4. Generous donations of artefacts and archives: Amongst many examples of generosity, we will highlight two. Rob Lynch (President) and Trevor Borgelt (Treasurer) travelled to the RAAF Air Base at Edinburgh (SA) to collect a donation of a WW2 cloud based searchlight. The second example happened in Nhill. Widow of Ivan Morrow, Mrs Bev Morrow, gave the Association a Military Power Plant similar to those used at the RAAF Air Base in WW2. Part of its history is its use as a backup generator at the Nhill Hospital. We are most grateful for all such donations.

5. History of Flight at Nhill: Beginning in 1919 when a 100 hp De Havilland aeroplane landed on the Nhill Racecourse, the history of flight in Nhill has involved the community as much as the aircraft and the people who flew them. From 1919 onwards, local visionary Mr. Fred McKenzie, owner of The Nhill Free

Press, successfully advocated for Nhill to become a refuelling place half way between Melbourne and Adelaide. This put Nhill on the aviation map. Several Nhill residents clearly recall aviation events of the 1920s, while others, descendants of pioneers who were part of Nhill's Aviation history, are now stewards of their stories and memorabilia. The focus of all planning is to celebrate the Centenary of flight at Nhill – 1919 to 2019: Two very successful 'Fly-ins' were held at the Nhill Aerodrome in 2009 and 2012 – with a third in the early stages of planning for 2015. An extensive photographic record is kept of these events.

6. The Nhill Aerodrome attained national significance during WW2 with the establishment of a Royal Australian Air Force Base – Nhill was initially the home of No. 2 Air Observers (Navigators) School. The War years forged numerous friendships between local people and Air Force personnel – most of whom were young men and women whose wartime service had taken them away from homes and families. Among The Nhill Historical Society's archives is a collection of The Nhill Free Press through these years, providing a valuable record life in Nhill through the War years. Many RAAF men and women did not survive the War, and many more have since passed away; and those who have since grown old, confess to a lasting fondness for Nhill and its people, and are eager to share their memories. Seven young Australian Airmen lost their lives while training at Nhill, and their remains lie in seven war graves in the Nhill Cemetery.

Free Newsletter

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.

Membership of the Nhill Aviation Heritage Centre Inc. is valid for a financial year: 1/7/2012 – 30/6/2013

Your support for this community organisation is highly valued and assists the Management Committee to continue with the projects aimed at preserving the aviation heritage of Nhill and District.

Join now for only \$30.00.

Click on this link to use our secure Pay Pal account:

<http://nhillaviationheritagecentre.com.au/members-1.htm>

OR BY Cheque payable to NAHC Inc. PO Box 42 Nhill Vic 3418.

Is this the first newsletter you have received?

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 or go to the bottom of this page and click on unsubscribe.

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.

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.