
Lakes Entrance Avro Anson Crash Site

Location

LAKES ENTRANCE, East Gippsland Shire

Municipality

EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE

Level of significance

-

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8422-0013

Heritage Listing

Vic. War Heritage Inventory

Hermes Number 125380

Property Number

Physical Description 1

Series number: A705

Control Symbol: 32-12-762

Veterans Description for Public

During the Second World War, an Avro Anson #W 1580 aircraft crashed at Lakes Entrance during a training exercise, remarkably the crew survived. The plane was piloted by F/Sgt. R. Stinton, taking off from Bairnsdale at

12.45pm on Tuesday May 30th 1944. The full crew were as follows:-

Flight Sergeant R. Stinton (pilot) from Swan Marsh near Colac
Flight Lieutenant S.H. "Hec" Gowing (navigator) from Willowtree, NSW
Sergeant K. Horne (wireless operator) from Warnambool
Flying Officer Jack Woodward (navigator instructor) from Cairns

It was a bitterly cold day with a 30 knot wind and the crew were on a "radius of action" training exercise commencing from Lakes Entrance. After about 20 minutes, the pilot reported engine problems due to a burst oil pipeline. They were 40 miles off the coast when the pilot headed back towards the mainland.

The wireless operator advised the base that they had problems and were returning to the coast. Not long after the engine seized. At that time they were at 1,500 feet and should have been able to return to base on the other engine. However the pilot advised that he was losing revs in the remaining engine and he was losing height as a result of the reduction in engine power.

Gowing and Woodward started jettisoning equipment at the rear of the aircraft but they continued to lose height. The wireless operator was then asked to issue an S.O.S. unfortunately he did not send this signal.

As it was getting obvious that they would not reach the shore, the pilot turned the aircraft into the wind, and ditched the aircraft. The waves were large (around 30 feet) and the Anson hit one wave at about 40 knots and bounced into another wave near its crest. The heavy seas made it difficult to exit the aircraft into their rubber dinghy. The wireless operator advised that he was unable to issue the S.O.S. before they ditched as he did not have time to cipher the message. He was only a fresh recruit out of the W.A.G. school.

Gowing and Woodward were on the wing controlling the dinghy by a rope tied around a stay wire while they clung desperately to the wing strut. As the aircraft appeared to be floating quite satisfactorily they decided to stay on the wing rather than enter the dinghy. Woodward, with the pilot's assistance, recovered the aircraft's clock. It later took pride of place on the wall of his study at home. The salt water had its revenge as it never worked correctly after this accident.

Their base had determined that they must be in trouble and the standby aircraft, piloted by Jake Bond, was dispatched to search for them. Bond found them almost immediately. They had been in the water for one and a half hours by that time. As they were sighted by the search aircraft, they had to evacuate the Anson in a hurry as it was showing signs of an imminent departure to the depths of the ocean.

Jake Bond advised base of their location and before long another aircraft was circling their location. Eventually there were four Ansons circling overhead. As the day went on those in the dinghy started to feel the cold. Woodward was lucky enough to be wearing long sleeve woollen singlet, long john woollen underpants, and woollen socks, under his long RAAF trousers and shirt plus a summer flying suit and fleecy wool lined flying boots. The others cut up a parachute and used the pieces of the chute to help keep themselves warm.

By 4.30 pm the circling aircraft lost visual contact with the dinghy in the gloomy conditions. They were continually bailing water out of the dinghy which had been blown in as sea spray in the blustery conditions.

At about 8.00pm they heard the engine of a distant boat. They started to yell but this was not no avail. Twenty minutes later the boat was within 100 yards of their dinghy. The engine stopped and they all gave a loud shout towards the boat. Unfortunately they had used all of their flares earlier to continue to alert the overhead aircraft of their position.

Just after 9.00pm the boat was within 20 yards of their dinghy, but still their shouting could not be heard. Fortunately a crew member on the boat shone a torch in their direction and spotted them. After over 8 hours at the mercy of the elements they were finally safe on board a fishing launch called the "Lily G."

The skipper of the "Lily G.", was Jack Gray, who had his two sons with him on the boat along with another two friends, Harold Broome and Vic Carstairs. Stinton, Gowing and Horne were sent below decks, huddled in blankets, to warm themselves in the engine room. The "Lily G." had no radio, so they were unable to advise their base that they had been rescued. Search aircraft continued to circle overhead.

It was more than half an hour before Jack Gray thought it was reasonably safe enough for the "Lil G." to cross the bar at Lakes Entrance. After searching for the right wave for about 10 minutes, he finally turned the boat around and called for full throttle from his son. The boat rode the wave for some time, but suddenly the wave passed the boat and it hit the bottom, and swung almost side on to the waves. Fortunately a smaller wave lifted them off the bottom of the bar and took them into deeper water.

The crew contacted their base on arrival at the jetty and within 15 minutes the Commanding Officer and the Doctor arrived at the jetty. They travelled back to Bairnsdale where Stinton, Gowing and Horne were put into hospital. Jack Woodward was made a member of the Goldfish club "by escaping death by the use of his Emergency Dinghy".

On 1st September 1944 The Melbourne Sun Newspaper reported;

"On the 31st August, 1944, John Gerald Gray, his two sons Norman Gray and Graeme Gray, Victor Keith Carstairs and Harold Broome received Royal Humane Society Awards at Government House, Melbourne. All received the Bronze Medal, except Vic Carstairs, who already held a Bronze Medal, and he was presented with a Bar to his previous award. The citation was for risking their lives in rescuing four airmen from drowning off the Ninety Mile Beach."

The A4 Avro 652 Anson, known affectionately as "Faithful Annie", has a special place in RAAF history as more of them - 1,028 - were operated by the service than any other type. It was also the RAAF's first low wing monoplane, the first with a retractable undercarriage and with a enclosed gun turret. First ordered in 1935 as part of the RAAF's modernisation programme, the Anson was conceived as a general reconnaissance bomber and was initially used for maritime patrol duties. Deliveries of the first order of 48 aircraft began in November 1936 and were completed in September 1938. Allocated serial number A4-1 to 48 these aircraft served with Nos 2, 4, 21, 22 and 23 Squadrons on maritime patrol work. Although already obsolete as a front line aircraft before the Second World War started, the lack of any suitable replacement led to a further 40 machines being chartered from the British Government and these were delivered during 1938 and 1939. These aircraft retained their British serial numbers. Upon replacement in the maritime reconnaissance role by the Lockheed Hudson in 1940, the Anson found a new lease of life as a trainer for Observers and Navigators under the Empire Air Training Scheme and no fewer than 937 Anson Mk. 1s were delivered to the RAAF between 1940 and 1944. These aircraft also flew with their original British serial numbers, and although most served with a variety of over 40 training units, some were fitted with ASV radar and patrolled the Eastern seaboard of Australia with Nos. 66, 67, 71 and 73 Squadrons.

Technical Data

(Avro 652 Anson)

Description: General Reconnaissance Bomber

Other Roles: Multi Engined Trainer

In Service: 1937 to 1950

Power Plant: 2 355 hp Armstrong Siddley Cheetah IX Radials

Weights: Empty 5,512 lbs (2,500 kg), Loaded 7,955 lbs (3,608 kg)

Dimensions: Wingspan 56 ft 6 in (17.22 m), Length 42 ft 3 in (12.88 m), Height 13 ft 1 in (3.99 m)

Performance: Max Speed 163 kts (302 kmh), Cruise 138 kts (256 kmh), Service Ceiling 19,500 ft (5,944 m),

Range 710 nm (1,315 km)

Armament: 20.303 machine guns, one fixed in nose, & one in Dorsal turret; Bomb Load 360 lbs

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