



## Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome

### Heritage Interpretation Plan – Final Report

February 2011

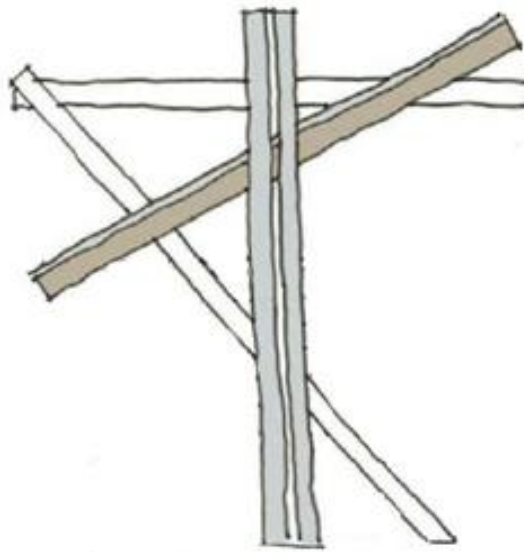
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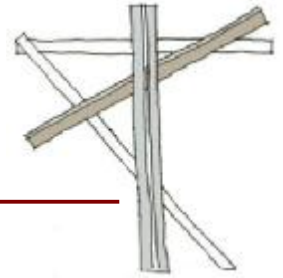
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**Section A:**  
**Project Background**







## 1 Introduction

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### 1.1 Preamble

In 2009, Richmond Valley Council (RVC) commissioned Converge Heritage + Community to undertake the first stage of a Heritage Interpretation Plan for Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome (the aerodrome). The subsequent draft Heritage Interpretation Plan outlined possible interpretative themes for the aerodrome and broad scale interpretative options for the style of interpretative signs. The Heritage Interpretation Plan, which was a Stage I study only, was in a draft form which set out an interpretative policy, or guideline, that provided an intellectual and conceptual framework for communicating the significance of the aerodrome.

Subsequently, RVC commissioned Ainsworth Heritage to review the draft Heritage Interpretation Plan and incorporate its findings into a robust Heritage Interpretation Strategy. This strategy, as well as refining and incorporating the earlier guidelines and approaches set out in the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan, also provides strategies and detailed advice for interpreting the aerodrome.

### 1.2 Aims

As such, the aims of the Heritage Interpretation Strategy are the following:

- Provide RVC with one complete Interpretation report which amalgamates the findings of the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan with subsequent detailed advice on the specific implementation of interpretative elements at the aerodrome;
- Review and, if necessary, revise the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan, the interpretive themes it identified and its recommendations;
- Use the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan as the framework for a Heritage Interpretation Strategy;
- In conjunction with RVC, select preferred interpretative signs style from the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan;
- Prepare the route for the recommended Heritage Memorial Walk;
- Prepare the content (both text and images) for all interpretative signs;
- Identify the location of signs (directional and educational) and the route of the walking tour;
- Prepare the content of walking tour pamphlet; and
- Provide any other necessary details to ensure RVC are able to immediately implement 'on-the-ground' interpretation at the aerodrome.

### 1.3 Report Structure

This report is broken into three distinct sections; the first section outlines the project background and discusses the how and why of interpretation, the second section discusses the framework for the interpretation of the aerodrome itself, as developed in the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan, and the final section sets out the interpretation methods for the site.

SECTION	CHAPTER	
Section A: Project Background	01	Introduction
	02	The Why & How of Interpretation
	03	The Aerodrome's Background
Section B: Interpretative Framework	04	Identifying Themes for Interpretation
	05	Identifying Who to Interpret For
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	09	Sign Design
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	11	On-Site Display
	12	Low Priority Interpretation

This Heritage Interpretation Strategy examines the following points in order to provide a practical document for RVC to implement heritage interpretation of the aerodrome:

- Considers potential audiences/site visitors and what their needs are;
- Examines information about the history and significance of the site and develops interpretation that aims to share the values of the place with visitors;
- Develops historical themes associated with the place and designs interpretation that communicates these themes; and
- Enhances the cultural values of the site by assisting with greater understanding of its importance.

### 1.4 Subject Site

Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome (the aerodrome) is a state heritage listed former World War II aerodrome, located on the northern edge of the town of Evans Head, on the Far North Coast of NSW, approximately 30kms south of Ballina. The former World War II aerodrome is listed on the NSW State Heritage Register. Figure 1.1 illustrates the location and heritage listed portion of the site.



The current aerodrome covers approximately 90 hectares and is bounded by Woodburn Road to the west, Currajong Street to the south, Broadwater Road to the east and the Evans Head Sewerage Treatment Plant and Broadwater National Park to the north. However, the base originally covered 27,000 hectares including the north and south bombing ranges, dispersal areas and a larger base area that covered some of what is now the village of Evans Head.



**Figure 1.2:** The location of Evans Head on the Far North Coast of NSW.



**Figure 1.2:** Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome State Heritage Register Curtilage. Note, this does not include the entirety of the former base, which was considerably larger (GHD. 2009. *Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome: Plan of Management*).

## 1.5 Community Consultation

Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome is particularly significant for its social value and is held in considerable esteem by the local community, veterans who trained at the site and other WWII veterans and their families. As such, consultation with key stakeholder groups was undertaken as part of the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan, where feedback was sought for information about the site and for preferred community options for interpretation approaches at the aerodrome.

The following individuals and stakeholder groups were consulted during the initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan and their feedback and assistance was amalgamated into the draft report:

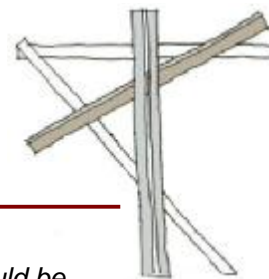
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- Richmond Valley Council;
- Veterans. Including Former RAAF and WAAAF service personnel;
- Evans Head Living Museum;
- Evans Head RSL Sub-branch;
- Great Eastern Fly In;
- Families of former service personnel; and
- Aviators and other current users of the aerodrome.

## **1.6 Author Identification**

This Heritage Interpretation Strategy was prepared by Jane Ainsworth and Matt Alexander, of Ainsworth Heritage, for Richmond Valley Council.





## 2 The Why & How of Interpretation

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*“The cultural significance of many places is not readily apparent, and should be explained by interpretation. Interpretation should enhance understanding and enjoyment and be culturally appropriate”<sup>1</sup>*

### 2.1 What is Heritage Interpretation?

Dr Linda Young put it best when she stated “Most people need extra information to understand heritage significance, and interpretation is a means of providing it.”<sup>2</sup>

Heritage interpretation involves communicating a site’s history and significance, through various means, to visitors to the place. Heritage interpretation can be as simple as visitor signs explaining the history of the site, or as complex as landscape design to aid understanding of a site’s layout, together with audio guides that visitors listen to. With today’s technology, heritage interpretation can also be provided via the internet for the ‘remote’ visitor (the cyberspace visitor).

The significance of some heritage items is easy to understand, however, the significance of others is not obvious and it is these latter sites in particular which require heritage interpretation. The NSW Heritage Branch confirms this approach:

*“Interpretation enhances understanding and enjoyment of heritage items by appealing to different audiences, different levels of experience and knowledge and different learning styles.”<sup>3</sup>*

### 2.2 How do we Provide Heritage Interpretation?

*“The first goal of heritage interpretation is to express the significance of a site or of an object in clear, explicit ways that are also compelling enough to attract the interest of visitors.”<sup>4</sup>*

Heritage Interpretation is based on a thorough understanding of the site’s history, values and role. This understanding forms the basis for any interpretation of a site. Understanding a site requires knowledge of:

- The physical site (its heritage fabric) and the relationship between the elements of the site;

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<sup>1</sup> Australia ICOMOS, 1999. *The Burra Charter*. Article 25.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Linda Young. 1995. Interpretation – Heritage Revealed. In *Historic Environment*, Vol 11 No 4. Australia ICOMOS, p.4.

<sup>3</sup> NSW Heritage Branch. 2005. *Interpreting Heritage Place and Items Guidelines*, p.6.

<sup>4</sup> Dr Linda Young, *op.cit.* p.4.

- The site's use and how this has changed through time;
- The setting, landscape and views of the site;
- Associations of people (past and present) with the place;
- The meanings and values of the site to people; and
- Important related places and related objects.

Because Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome has been the subject of many heritage and archaeological studies over the last five years, its history, physicality, social value and significance is now well known, understood and documented. This information provides an excellent resource for interpretation and provides an opportune time to plan and implement interpretation for the site.

### 2.3 What form Does Heritage Interpretation Take?

Heritage Interpretation can be undertaken in many forms, "*Interpretation encompasses all the ways in which an item can become known and appreciated.*"<sup>5</sup> These forms can include:

- The retention of significant components of the site;
- The use of the site for commemorative events;
- The use of the place for its original purpose or one very similar to its original purpose;
- The introduction of explanatory elements, such as information signs or walking tour brochures.

Importantly, heritage interpretation should not compromise either the value of the site, its elements or its setting. For example, introduced material (such as signs or landscape designs) should not interfere with, change the item, its context or put the item at risk.

### 2.4 Current Interpretation of the Aerodrome

There is currently very little heritage interpretation at the aerodrome itself. Interpretation to date has relied on:

- Retaining and reinstating, where possible, important elements and landscapes;
- Maintaining the use of the site as an aerodrome;
- One interpretative sign;
- A small memorial garden; and
- Information at off-site centres (such as the Evans Head Living Museum).

The retention of elements of the site which have been identified as important (such as the Bellman Hangar and the runway landscape) and maintaining the aerodrome as an

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<sup>5</sup> NSW Heritage Branch. 2005. *Interpreting Heritage Place and Items Guidelines*, p.12.  
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operational facility are very important to maintain the authenticity of the site, however, they are passive means of interpretation and can be difficult for an uninformed visitor to gain an understanding of the site's history and significance from them.

There is one interpretative sign and the south western end of the site, which can be viewed from Woodburn Road. However, the sign is not particularly accessible and simply states the site was a World War II aerodrome (including the type of aerodrome it functioned as during the war) and states the number of people who were stationed at the aerodrome. A small memorial garden by the Bellman Hangar within the aerodrome acts as an important emotive and commemorative feature of the site, which is an important contemporary function of the aerodrome.

The Evans Head Living Museum, a small museum located within the town of Evans Head, does contain extensive information, photos and artefacts associated with the aerodrome's history. However, there is no information at the aerodrome to let visitor's know that this additional, off-site, resource is available and that the museum has limited opening hours.



**Figure 2.1:** Current Interpretative sign at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome.



**Figure 2.2:** The retained Bellman Hangar at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome.



**Figure 2.3:** The aerodrome's runway landscape.

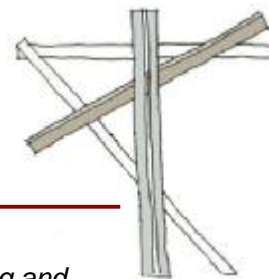


**Figure 2.4:** The Memorial Garden at the aerodrome.





### 3 The Aerodrome's Background



*"We quickly realised that [at Evans Head] we had one of the most natural bombing and air firing ranges in the world..."<sup>6</sup>*

#### 3.1 The Aerodrome's History

The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome Archaeological Management Plan (AMP) contains a thorough and comprehensive history of the aerodrome. As such, a full history will not be reproduced; rather an abridged and selective history will outline the historical development of the aerodrome in relation to this project. The following history is copied in part from the AMP.

##### 3.1.1 The Early Aerodrome

The original airfield at Evans Head was constructed in July and August 1936 as an Emergency Landing Ground (ELG) for Woodburn Shire Council. Emergency Landing Grounds were areas of land prepared for light aviation use and provided emergency aviation facilities for pilots. The Evans Head ELG was constructed by Chesterfield and Jenkins of Grafton at a cost of £3,860/6/2. However on 1 April 1937, the Commonwealth resumed the land from Woodburn Shire Council for 'defence purposes'.

In 1939, the RAAF was utilising the Department of Civil Aviation shed on the site for fuel storage and work was carried out to the aerodrome to mitigate airfield flood problems under the Defence Development Programme. Later that year, in October and November, further works were carried out by the RAAF using an Unemployment Relief Works Grant at a cost of £5,000. Further work was carried out by the RAAF in 1940 and the aerodrome was extended by sixty acres. However, the RAAF did not officially take control of the site until 22 January 1941.

##### 3.1.2 Selection and Establishment of No 1 BAGS

No 1 BAGS was the first Bombing and Gunnery School to be established in Australia under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS). The purpose of the school was to train Air Observers, Bomb Aimers and Air Gunners in the theory and practice of bombing and air-to-air gunnery. Enough land was needed to establish an airfield, aerodrome and camp area, Officer's accommodation and isolated bombing and gunnery ranges. Sir Valston Hancock, Director of Works and Buildings for the RAAF in 1939 and the initial inspector of Evans Head

<sup>6</sup> Haughton-James, J. et.al. *Wings at War: RAAF at Evans Head 1939-1945*. Evans Head Living Museum and Community Technology Centre, Evans Head NSW, p.7.  
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as a potential location for No 1 BAGS, described the land at Evans Head as 'one of the most natural bombing and air firing ranges in the world.'

Construction of the base was rapid; the base was ready to accept its first trainees seven months after construction was authorised. Substantial works were carried out to the aerodrome for the construction of No 1 BAGS, including the extension of the aerodrome in 1939 with the acquisition of an additional 600 acres. Extensive engineering works were required to establish roads, bridges, culverts, drainage and water supply and large gravel areas for aircraft use. Power was supplied from Ballina and water from a number of bores which were drilled to a depth of 20 – 50 feet.

When the RAAF was disposing of the site from 1945, they noted that Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome contained an area of approximately 27,000 acres of land, broken down as follows:

- Aerodrome and Camp: 344 acres of Commonwealth owned land (NB: 92 hectares of this land is the SHR listed portion of the aerodrome);
- Explosives Area: 243 acres of Commonwealth owned land; and
- North and South Bombing Ranges: c.26,413 acres of which 105 acres was Commonwealth owned land and the remainder was State Crown Land secured under provisions of National Security.

### *3.1.3 Operation of the Aerodrome - No 1 BAGS*

At its height, No 1 BAGS utilised 70 Fairey Battle aircraft with Wirraway and Anson aircraft arriving daily from Amberley RAAF base in Queensland for bombing practice. The time constraints of war resulted in each course only lasting for an intensive 4 weeks, in which time the trainees needed to be completely schooled in bombing and air gunnery practices.

In addition to the actual training of bombing and gunnery crew, a multitude of other duties were undertaken in order for No 1 BAGS to function; such as plane maintenance, armament maintenance (comprising test butts facilities, which were facilities to check the operational condition of aircraft armaments), plane fitting, fuelling, bomb maintenance, stores control, administration, payroll, housekeeping, cooking, grounds maintenance, parachute packers, fitters, armourers, clerks, cinefilm operators, smiths, transport drivers and many, many other occupations. By 1942, No 1 BAGS had become a completely self-contained village.

### *3.1.4 Operation of the Aerodrome - No 1 Air Observers School*

By March 1943, the British Air Ministry realised they had an oversupply of aircrew and consequently, in December 1943, No 1 BAGS was disbanded. On 9 December 1943, No 1

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Air Observers School (AOS) was relocated from Cootamundra to Evans Head with 1,496 personnel and trainees. The AOS was established to train Navigators, Bomb Aimers, Gunners and Air Observers. The AOS trained over 630 personnel during its operation, using Ryan, Tiger Moth, Wackett and Anson aircraft. The school was disbanded on VP (Victory in the Pacific) Day, 15 August 1945.

### 3.1.5 Prefabrication

The advent of World War II saw the need for mass produced, easily transportable buildings which could be erected with unskilled labour; prefabricated buildings were the perfect solution for this need. Prefabrication as a building method had been carried out for several hundred years prior to World War II, what was different about prefabrication during the war was the scale and methods of its production. Prefabrication in World War II utilised the methods of mass production-line construction which had been in use in America, thereby implementing a system which could produce huge quantities of buildings in a relatively small amount of time.

Gregory Nolan notes that the fall of Singapore and the entry of Japan into World War II resulted in:

*A frantic building effort followed where traditional design preferences and forms of construction were abandoned...They were unashamedly utilitarian buildings. Their design was driven by the need to use what was at hand to build in the defence of the nation.*

The use of prefabrication was driven by the Allied Works Council, who formed 28 February 1942, the Allied Works Council (AWC). The AWC essentially became the project and construction manager for national defence projects and created a number of building types which conformed to standardised national designs. The entire organisation was 'geared for utmost speed and efficiency' and by the wars end, the AWC had been producing the equivalent of 500 weatherboard cottages a week.

The AWC created a number of standardised designs for the production of:

- Huts;
- Warehouses;
- Stores;
- Hospitals; and
- Hangars.

These buildings were initially made from steel and timber; however wartime shortages necessitated the use of green timber, asbestos cement, corrugated iron and weatherboard.

The immense program of prefabrication resulted in military bases, depots, schools and camps of not just a standardised layout, but of standardised appearance. Further, World War II facilities were constructed using materials and techniques to produce buildings which would only last for the duration of the war. Accordingly, these military establishments are now often beset with complex maintenance issues.

Due to the prohibitive cost during war years of using durable materials such as brick, the majority of wartime buildings at the aerodrome were constructed using prefabricated timber. The hutted buildings at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome generally comprised standard prefabricated weatherboard and corrugated fibro buildings with corrugated asbestos cement roofs, all of 20 feet wide prefabricated construction of varying length.

#### *2.1.6 The Decommissioning of the Aerodrome*

In 1945, after the AOS was disbanded, the Care and Maintenance Unit was established at the aerodrome and operated until August 1947, when the responsibility of the aerodrome was passed to the Department of Civil Aviation, ending approximately 10 years of RAAF use and occupation. Throughout the late 1940s most of the aerodrome buildings were dismantled and destroyed or transferred to other locations.

From 1947, the aerodrome was used by Butler Air Transport for commercial aviation activities and in 1952, the Department of Defence handed over the aerodrome to the Department of Transport. Woodburn Shire Council gained control of the aerodrome under the Local Airport Agreement and subsequently, commercial activities ceased in the mid 1950s when the aerodrome was closed to commercial flights and its commercial aviation activities were transferred to Casino.

The aerodrome remained the property of the Department of Transport until 1992 when ownership was passed to Richmond River Shire Council. Council, in line with a Deed of Agreement for the site, subsequently downgraded the flying status of the aerodrome although it is still used by several types of aircraft for recreational aviation and as an ELG. In particular, Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome has been used for the Great Eastern Fly-In, an annual event for recreational aviators from around Australia. The aerodrome is also the focus for war commemorative events held in Evans Head.

In the late 1990s, a section of land comprising the extreme south portion of the aerodrome was subdivided and developed for residential housing. In August 2000, the aerodrome was listed in the NSW State Heritage Register.

### 3.2 The Site Today

The aerodrome currently operates as an aerodrome for light aircraft, in accordance with the recommendations outlined in the Plan of Management, though as an operational aerodrome the majority of the site is not accessible to the general public. A number of aviators use the aerodrome on a regular basis and the modern hangars (excluding the Bellman Hanger) located at the site are leased for this purpose.

A number of aviation and commemorative events are held at the aerodrome throughout the year, including ANZAC Day commemorations, Remembrance Day commemorations and the annual Great Eastern Fly-In. The Fly-In features the arrival of aviators, air displays and other operations relating to WWII use of the EHMA generally. Additionally, model aeroplane enthusiasts use the northern end of the northern runway for take off and landing of model aircraft and the local Mens' Shed utilises the annex of the Bellman Hangar. Nearby development includes the industrial estate to the east of the site and a proposed retirement village to the south west.

The EHMA receives visitors from the local Evans Head Community, tourist and family and friends of service personnel who were based at the site.

### 3.3 The Aerodrome's Significance

The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome is listed in the NSW State Heritage Register (SHR). This listing means that the site is significant to the development and history of NSW. The following statement of significance is based on that contained within the SHR citation, but was redrafted by GHD in 2009 (Plan of Management) to reflect the historical and physical analysis included in the Plan of Management.

*The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome has historical and social significance. The aerodrome was one of the largest bases established under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), and one of the largest operational RAAF bases in Australia during the World War II. The claim that it was the largest EATS training base in the Southern Hemisphere during World War II has not been confirmed. The scale of the base's operations is demonstrated by the four surviving runways and associated taxiways and tarred hangar aprons. The operations of the No 1 Bombing and Gunnery School (BAGS) and the No. 1 Air Observers School (AOS) played an important role in Australia's contribution of air crews to, initially, Britain's war effort, then to Australia's role in the Pacific war and home defence. The base also played a direct home defence role in providing local maritime surveillance and coastal defence.*

*The site contains one original Bellman Hangar of 17 originally built at Evans Head. The Bellman hangar, a British design, was introduced by Sir Valston Hancock, Director of Works, who later became the first commanding officer for the base, and modified for Australian conditions and manufactured in prefabricated sections by BHP. The Bellman hangar is a good example of an innovative approach to wartime needs, and represents the large number of hangars erected during wartime across Australia.<sup>7</sup>*

*The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was used after the war as a regional commercial aerodrome, and subsequently as a recreational aerodrome, a use that continues today. The continued association of the place with aviation activities is an integral part of its significance, and is a use that greatly enhances the recognition and understanding of its historical associations.*

*The site has social significance for the many ex RAAF and WAAAF service-men and -women who were associated with the aerodrome, civilian workers, local families and friends of people who served there and died during WWII. The site is used for ANZAC Day celebrations, and occasional reunions and celebrators events for those associated with the place's history. It is also significant to the people of the North Coast region, the residents of Evans Head and visitors who attend activities or are tourists. Moreover it is significant to the people of Evans Head because of the central role it played in the development of the village during and after the war, and because of the military presence in and above the village, which continues on a daily basis in the use of the Southern Bombing Range. The aerodrome is a substantial landmark in Evans Head, from the ground and from the air.*

*The aerodrome has aesthetic significance because of its landmark qualities. Its sheer size as an open grassland area crossed by runways gives it a powerful sense of place when viewed from elevated viewpoints or the air, and its proximity to the Evans Head village and the coastline emphasise its strategic location and the scale of the RAAF Base during the war. It is one of the few remaining large coastal sites that retains some sense of wartime operations.<sup>8</sup>*

### **3.4 Elements & Aspects of Significance**

A number of built, archaeological and landscape elements have been identified for their significance to the history and heritage of the aerodrome. These elements include:

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<sup>7</sup> The Bellman Hangar Conservation Management Plan (Ainsworth Heritage, 2007) contains a detailed Statement of Significance for the Bellman Hangar.

<sup>8</sup> GHD. 2009. *Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome: Plan of Management*. Unpublished report prepared for Richmond Valley Council.

Significant elements:

- Surviving Bellman Hangar;
- The runway landscape, which includes the four intersecting runways, their taxiways and the apron areas;
- Fuel and Oil Tank Footprints on the taxiways;
- Former Bellman Hangar footprints;
- Two in situ Ablutions Blocks (used on event days);
- Memorial Drive;
- Relocated Canteen Building;
- The pre-WWII Signal Building's Footprint;
- Former North Bombing Range Road;
- Dispersal Roads and areas;
- WWII Drainage system;
- Machine Gun Emplacement;
- Memorial Gardens; and
- Original WWII Aerodrome sign.

Movable heritage:

- Concrete Aircraft Anchors (known as Bollards);
- Pipes possibly associated with gas supply at the aerodrome;
- Concrete Target Bases from the 25 yard firing range; and
- Drain Grates.

Areas of archaeological resources:

- 25 yard firing range;
- Remnants of the Aircraft Test Butts;
- Former playing fields;
- Former bomb dump areas; and
- Area of the former WAAAF hutments.

### 3.5 Resources

The aerodrome has been subject to numerous books, heritage and archaeological investigations and management plans. In addition, there is a wealth of archival sources held at the Australian National Archives, the Evans Head Living Museum and within the internal collections of Ainsworth Heritage.

In summary, the following documents are useful starting points:

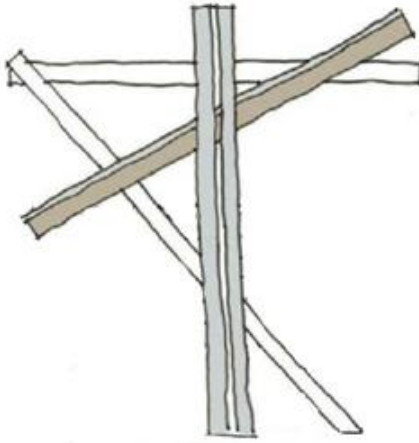
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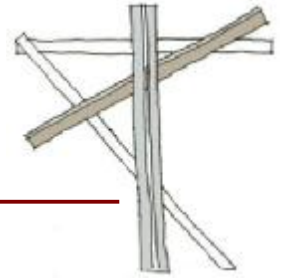
- Summary history: *Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome Plan of Management*, prepared by GHD in 2005 (updated in 2009);
- Detailed built history: *Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome Archaeological Management Plan*, prepared by Ainsworth Heritage in 2007;
- Detailed history of WWII hangars - *Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome Bellman Hangar Conservation Management Plan*, prepared by Ainsworth Heritage in 2008; and
- Detailed WWII oral histories: *Wings at War: RAAF at Evans Head 1939-1945*. Evans Head Living Museum and Community Technology Centre, Evans Head NSW.



**Section B:**  
**Interpretative Framework**







## 4 Identifying Themes for Interpretation

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### 4.1 Choosing the Themes

The initial draft Heritage Interpretation Plan identified a huge range of key themes and stories associated with the aerodrome. However, although each theme is important, it is not feasible to use all of themes for interpretation of the aerodrome. As such, the original list of themes has been analysed: in light of the aerodrome's statement of significance; important physical elements; and uses of the aerodrome, to provide an amended and amalgamated list of historic themes that can be used as the basis for interpretation of the aerodrome.

The historic themes are:

- The Heritage Significance of the Aerodrome;
- Commemoration and Memorialisation;
- The Empire Air Training Scheme;
- The Formation of Evans Head Aerodrome;
- The Aerodrome during the War (No.1 BAGS, No.1 AOS and No 3 CMU);
- Operations and Defence of Evans Head Aerodrome;
- Notable People and Incidents;
- Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF);
- Lifestyle, Recreation and Interaction with Evans Head Village;
- Aircraft and Air Warfare;
- WWII Technology: Made to last the Duration;
- Post War Use of the Aerodrome.

### 4.2 Theme 1: Heritage Significance at the Aerodrome

The Aerodrome's recognised significance is primarily associated with its history of operation during World War II (No.1 BAGS and No.1 AOS), its social value to the local community, to veterans who trained and worked at Evans Head and who then went on to see active wartime service, and the value of its wartime landscape.

The aerodrome is recognised for its historic, associative, social, research, aesthetic and representative significance. This significance and value has lead to the site's recognition on the State Heritage Register and it should be interpreted to visitors to assist them in:

- Gaining an understanding the importance of the site;
- Gaining an understanding of the value of the site's heritage listing in protecting the site; and

- Generating respect for the management controls in place at the site.



**Figure 4.1:** The aerodrome in 1940, soon after the construction of the Bombing and Gunnery School was completed.

### 4.3 Theme 2: Commemoration and Memorialisation

Any interpretation at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome must take into account and respect the fact that the Aerodrome is now a memorial and place of commemoration. This important facet of the aerodrome's ongoing use is oft times forgotten, but it must be considered as fundamentally important. 28 people were killed while in training at the aerodrome, out of the 56 lost during all Aerodrome operations at the site, and more died during the war after their training at the aerodrome. Interpretation must at all times seek to respect and value the solemn and deeply important memorial aspect of the aerodrome.

The Vimy Charter states that *"the vivid, visceral imagery of battlefields, cemeteries and memorial monuments has impressed itself on historical consciousness and on our cultural memory of war...the goal [when protecting and interpreting former war sites] is to protect the fabric and meaning of these complex cultural resources and in doing so to partly discharge the debt which the present owes the past."*<sup>9</sup>

Interpretation should communicate the commemorative and memorialisation value to site visitors and assist people to gain respect for this important and emotive aspect of the site's history and current use. It should also assist those who visit the site for commemoration or memorial purposes. Interpretation should also assist the visitor to be able to easily find the nearby war cemetery located within the Evans Head cemetery.

<sup>9</sup> ICOMOS. December 2001. *Vimy Declaration for the Conservation of Battlefield Terrain*. (Draft # 5). Ainsworth Heritage: EHMA Interpretation Plan – Final Report February 2011



**Figure 4.2:** A gun salute at the funeral of an airman who died while training at the aerodrome. The funeral was held at the Evans Head Cemetery.



**Figure 4.3:** The current Memorial Garden at the aerodrome, which is used as the focus for commemorative events.

#### 4.4 Theme 3: The Empire Air Training Scheme

The Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) was the single largest combined undertaking of the Commonwealth Air Forces' during World War II, and remains to this day an incredible example of global coordinated wartime efficiency and mobilisation.

Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was developed in direct response to the infrastructure requirements of the Empire Air Training Scheme. The scheme was an agreement reached between the governments of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in which these Dominions would train aircrew for service in their own squadrons and also in RAF squadrons during World War II. The draft agreement, signed on 17 December 1939, was pencilled over and never retyped – demonstrating the urgency of the EATS program. More than 200 hundred training bases were constructed throughout the Empire for this scheme, including Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome.

The development of the EATS included:

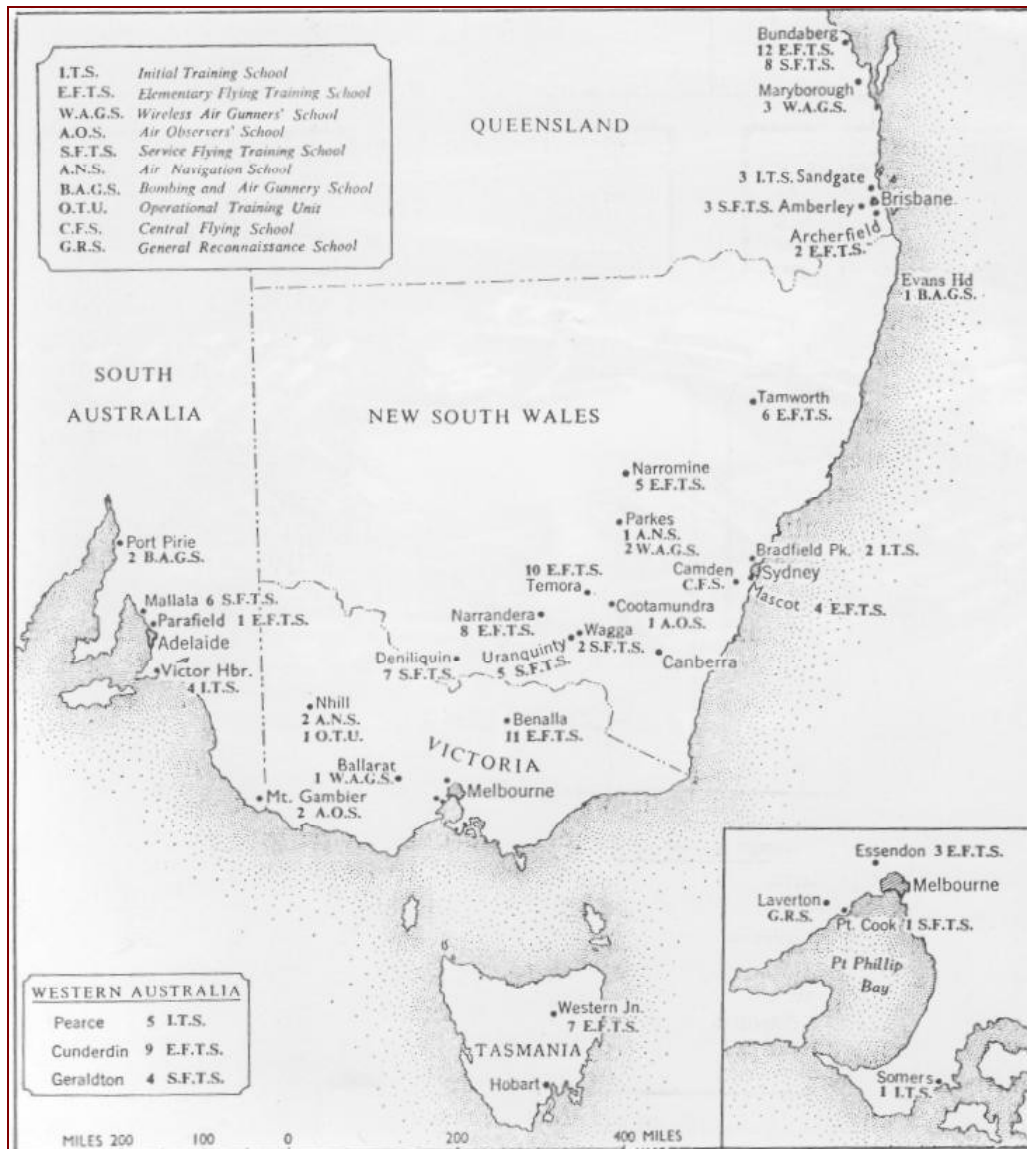
- Setting the EATS infrastructure up in safe pilot training areas in dominion countries; once their training was complete the pilots and air crew could assist both their own country's air force and the RAF;
- Basic training and specialist training was undertaken at separate airbases with some Australian recruits finishing training in Canada;
- 10 Australian EATS bases, including Evans Head, were initially constructed. In total 36 of the planned 41 aerodrome were eventually built in Australia during WWII to support the EATS program;
- Types of training bases in Australia included:
  - Initial Training Schools (5);

- Elementary Flying Training Schools (12);
  - Service Flying Training Schools (8);
  - Air Navigation Schools (3);
  - Air Observer Schools (2);
  - Bombing and Gunnery Schools (3); and
  - Wireless Air Gunnery Schools (3).
- Trainees were sent to a variety of RAF and RAAF squadrons, which involved them in all manner of air combat and support missions in theatres as varied as: the Middle East; North Africa; India; Burma; Pacific; Philippines; Darwin and across Europe; and
  - More than 27,000 aircrew were trained in Australia before being sent to Britain for employment with the British RAF; a further 10,000-plus partly-trained personnel completed their training in Canada, along with nearly 700 who received pilot training in Rhodesia (what is now Zimbabwe, in southern Africa), before being sent on: in total just short of 40,000 young Australians were trained under the scheme.

When discussing the EATS program, it is important to explain that one of its most significant aspects was the refusal of Australia in 1942 to continue sending EATS pilots to Europe, whilst the Pacific War was threatening the very existence of Australia. This pulled the ETAS into the forefront of Australian politics and is one of the earliest examples of Australia demonstrating its independence from Great Britain – a historic theme which continues to this day.



**Figure 4.4:** Empire Air Training Scheme trainees leaving Australia for advanced training in Canada.



**Figure 4.5:** Empire Air Training Scheme bases in Australia during World War II.

#### 4.5 Theme 4: Formation of the Aerodrome

In response to the Empire Air Training Scheme, RAAF training bases were built across Australia, including the No 1 Bombing and Gunnery School (BAGS) at Evans Head, which was the first Bombing and Gunnery School to be established in Australia under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

The BAGS needed very specific terrain: vast areas of open, flat space well isolated from any residential or commercial areas, for protection from ricocheting bullets and shrapnel, with sufficient hillocks required for the observation and plotting of the falling bombs. Enough land was needed to establish an airfield, aerodrome and camp area, and isolated bombing and



gunnery ranges. Sir Valston Hancock, Director of Works and Buildings for the RAAF in 1939 and the initial inspector of Evans Head as a potential location for No 1 BAGS, described the land at Evans Head as *'one of the most natural bombing and air firing ranges in the world.'*

Construction of the base was rapid; the first stage was completed before the official letter confirming resumption of the land for defence purposes was made on 22 January 1941 and the base was ready to accept its first trainees seven months after its construction was authorised.

Substantial works were carried out to the aerodrome to establish roads, bridges, culverts, drainage and water supply and large gravel areas for aircraft use, in addition to the aerodrome facilities, which included more than three hundred buildings including:

- Hangars and workshops;
- Lecture rooms, teachers rooms, instruction rooms, crew rooms and a library;
- Accommodation huts, messes and a meat house;
- Water tower, oil shed, pump sheds, petrol storage facilities and a boiler house;
- HQ offices, guard rooms, crew rooms, administration offices and flight offices;
- Observation towers;
- Latrines and laundries;
- Coppers Shop, blacksmith, boot makers shop and carpenters store;
- Bomb stores, armaments huts and stores;
- Recreation grounds, rugby pitch, sports oval, tennis area, car parks, gymnasium, and cinema;
- Parade Ground;
- Post office, dentist, canteen, bulk store a hairdresser; and
- Hospital and mortuary.

The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome contained an area of approximately 27,000 acres of land and the entire program of aerodrome construction cost of £558,385.10. It included:

- Aerodrome and camp area;
- Explosives Area;
- Marine Section;
- North Bombing Range; and
- South Bombing Range.





**Figure 4.6:** Photograph of early construction of the aerodrome in 1939.



**Figure 4.7:** Photograph of early construction of the aerodrome. Note the sandy soil and flat landscape.

#### **4.5 Theme 5: The Wartime Aerodrome (No.1 BAGS & No.1 AOS)**

The first 10 trainees arrived on 10 August 1940, several weeks before the first aircraft arrived on 7 September 1940. By March 1943, the British Air Ministry realised they had an oversupply of aircrew and consequently, in December 1943, No 1 BAGS was disbanded. However, No.1 Air Observers School was soon re-formed at Evans Head Aerodrome on the 9 December 1943, relocated from Cootamundra to Evans Head with 1,496 personnel and trainees.

In addition to the actual training of bombing crew, gunnery crew and air observers, a multitude of other duties were undertaken in order for No 1 BAGS to function, such as: plane maintenance; armament maintenance; (comprising test butts facilities, which were facilities to

check the operational condition of aircraft armaments); plane fitting; fuelling; bomb maintenance; stores control; administration; payroll; housekeeping; cooking; grounds maintenance; parachute packers; fitters; armourers; clerks; cinefilm operators; smiths; transport drivers; and many, many other occupations. By 1942, No 1 BAGS had become a completely self-contained village.

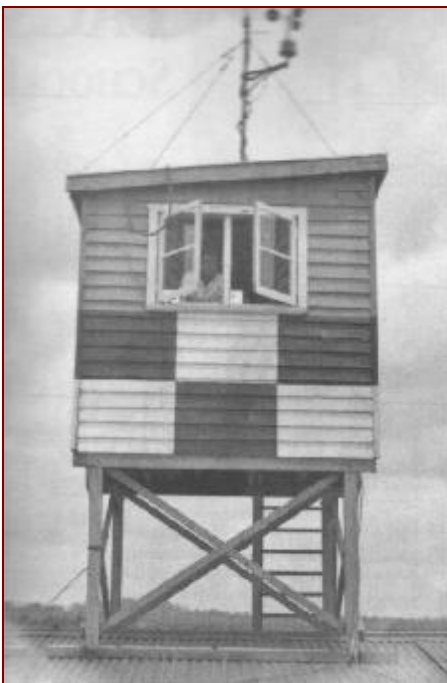
The actual training of airmen and crews consisted of the following:

- Wireless Operators / Air Gunners:
  - Firing at fixed ground targets from an aircraft (a series of square boards mounted on a frame 500 yards apart in a row); and
  - Air to Air Gunnery firing from one aircraft at a long canvas sleeve being towed behind a second aircraft. Markers would collect the results of the number of bullet holes in the wooden target or canvass sleeve and phone these through to the base where the trainees would return to have their results analysed.
- Air Observers / Bomb Aimers:
  - Bombing land targets in bomb ranges; and
  - Bombing sea targets.

Markers plot the fall of bombs from magnetic readings and visual observations taken from the bomb bursts. The two results would be phoned through to the Plotting Office, applied to a scaled chart of the range and analysed by the Armament Staff. The trainees would then return to the base and analyse these results and determine reasons for error.
- The AOS was established to train Navigators, Bomb Aimers, Gunners and Air Observers. The AOS trained over 630 personnel during its operation, using Ryan, Tiger Moth, Wackett and Anson aircraft. The school was disbanded on VP (Victory in the Pacific) day, 15 August 1945.



**Figure 4.8:** Photograph of Fairey Battles in line on the tarmac. The bombing and gunnery aircraft are on the left and the target towers are on the right.



**Figure 4.9:** A photograph of the all-important flight control tower, which was located on the roof of one of the Bellman Hangars.

#### 4.6 Theme 6: Defending the Aerodrome

Following the entry of Japan into World War II, the defence of Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was heightened with: the installation of AA defence; dispersal strategies; the commencement of night sea patrols; and the instalment of air raid shelters and rifle-gun emplacements. Additionally, Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) and Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) troops were stationed at the base for additional protection.

Additional operational requirements concentrated around the defence of the base and the nearby coastline and included:

- 19 machine gun emplacements fitted with .303 Vickers were built in strategic positions around the aerodrome;
- Slit trenches were also constructed and revetments built around essential buildings;
- Night sea patrols;
- RAAF of No.52 (Reserve) Squadron was formed with 12 of the base's Fairy Battles in December 1941. Each night, single Battles would fly anti-submarine patrols with two fifty pound bombs. No submarines were ever attacked but one false sighting occurred. The squadrons A Flight operated out of the surviving Bellman Hangar and the unit was disbanded in July 1942;
- An Observation Post was built on Goanna Headland;
- Standard dispersal strategies were put in place so as to minimise the chances of aircraft loss if the base was attacked – that is, aircraft could be 'dispersed' across a large area to make bombing them more difficult. The dispersal strategy included:
  - 12 dispersal hideouts built in the aerodrome's perimeters (gravel taxiways leading to hard surfaced areas for corralling aircraft); and
  - A dispersal Emergency Landing Ground was built at Coraki to house half the base's aircraft, should the need arise.



**Figure 4.10:** The existing remnant machine gun pit at the aerodrome



**Figure 4.11:** The remnants of the Observation Post at the high point on Evans Head-Broadwater Rd, approximately 10km north of the aerodrome.

#### **4.7 Theme 7: Notable People & Incidents**

There were many notable people and incidents at the aerodrome which highlight the day-to-day and personal stories associated with the place.

Notable people associated with the aerodrome include:

- Wing Commander (later Air marshal) Sir Valston Hancock;
- 'Chips' Rafferty (Australian actor) worked at the aerodrome as a camp cook;
- Leonard Fuller (Flying hero with a DFC)

In addition, there were many incidents involving both trainee and experienced pilots. Some of the more memorable were:

- Five United States Army Air Force (USAAF) B-25 Mitchell bombers of the 38<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group, en route across the Pacific, became lost and four crashed on the North Coast with one landing safely at Evans Head. It was later damaged on the airfield when a truck crashed into it;<sup>10</sup>
- Gordon Wellington Rees (Aircraftman Class 1) rescued three mates caught in a rip on Air Force Beach. After the rescue, he collapsed on the beach in exhaustion and died 6 weeks later of pneumonia, aged only 19;
- The loss of 56 trainees (one woman and 55 men) during operations at the aerodrome, 28 of these in training accidents;
- The arrival of the Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh, who flew into Evans Head in 1954 as part of her Australian tour. The aerodrome at this time was said to look "*tip top*";
- The brother of Nancy Bird Walton was rescued from a sinking ship off the coast of Evans Head; and
- Q for Queenie, the first Lancaster heavy bomber to arrive in Australia, crashed on the runway at Evans Head. It had just started its 4th Liberty Loan Tour of Tasmania, Victoria and NSW when it crashed, which promptly ended the tour.



**Figure 4.12:** Sir Valston Hancock



**Figure 4.13:** Q for Queenie, crashed at Evans Head Aerodrome.

<sup>10</sup> Converge Heritage + Community. 2009. *Draft Heritage Interpretation Plan Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome*. Uncompleted draft prepared for Richmond Valley Council.  
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In addition, there are numerous personal anecdotes, many humorous, of the aerodrome in the wartime (published in the book *Wings At War: RAAF at Evans Head 1939-1945*<sup>11</sup>). These stories personalise the aerodrome and are vital to its social significance. A selection of personal anecdotes from trainees and staff should be used throughout all interpretation at the aerodrome.

#### **4.8 Theme 8: The Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF)**

The formation of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) was hotly contested by some members of the War Cabinet, including C Thorby, the Minister for Defence, who stated that '*Aviation takes women out of their natural environment, the home and the training of the family*'. Nonetheless, the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) was established on the 4 February 1941.

Airwomen were accepted into 73 different musterings (trades), including highly skilled technical employment on aircraft. In addition to telegraphists, women became: armament workers; electricians; fitters; flight mechanics; fabric workers; instrument makers; and meteorological assistants, besides using skills in clerical, medical, transport, catering, equipment, signals and radar fields of employment.

Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome had its first WAAAF personnel arrive in 1942 and, like all defence establishments, the buildings at No 1 BAGS were segregated according to rank and sex. Once built, the WAAAF living area at the aerodrome was segregated by a 6 foot fence and their working areas were separate from the men's working area. However after hours, the WAAAF and RAAF personnel did socialise together forming lifetime friendships, marriages and many amusing anecdotes. The men were sternly warned prior to the WAAAFs arriving to clean their language up, with posters being placed around the aerodrome reminding them of this.

The WAAAFs played an integral role at aerodrome and indeed, throughout Australia during the war, when there was an acute shortage of men to fill vital roles. However, inequality was rife, with Airwomen paid only two-thirds of RAAF male pay for equivalent positions and female officers paid a good deal less than male officers of equal rank. Further, women were not allowed to remain in the WAAAF once they were married and although WAAAF personnel were allowed to muster into over 77% of positions within the RAAF by the end of

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<sup>11</sup> Haughten-James, J et al (eds). 2004. *Wings At War: RAAF at Evans Head 1939-1945*. Evans Head Living Museum, Evans Head NSW.

World War II, they were not allowed to serve overseas despite requests for their deployment as high up the chain of command as General Douglas MacArthur..<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 4.14:** WAAAF World War II recruitment poster.



**Figure 4.15:** WAAAFs on the Parade Ground at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome.

#### 4.9 Theme 9: Lifestyle, Recreation and Interaction with Evans Head Village

Although the base served a serious purpose with '*constant pressure to met unrelenting time table for our output of trainees*'<sup>13</sup> the natural off-set of this was that the base staff and trainees sought well deserved relaxation and entertainment during their time off. Valston Hancock emphasis the '*good relations which we enjoyed with the people of Evans Head*' and notes that when joint entertainment was often held '*we held social gatherings in our Messes to which the locals were invited...local members who had shown a close interest in our welfare were made honorary members of the Officers Mess or Sergeants Mess.*'<sup>14</sup>

This relationship between the base and the town was reciprocal, with local villagers remembering '*When the RAAF came it was good for the town*' and '*The airmen started coming to our dances and lots of them became part of our lives, some only briefly and others for quite a while.*'<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0400b.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Haughton-James, *op.cit.*, p.98.

<sup>14</sup> Haughton-James, *op.cit.*, p.98-99.

<sup>15</sup> Haughton-James, *op.cit.*, p.99.

- Recreation was provided through part of the aerodrome's facilities including:
  - Post office & library;
  - Hairdresser and canteen;
  - Cinema & gymnasium;
  - Various sports and playing fields (including tennis courts, cricket pitch and rugby oval).
- Interaction with the local community – staff were originally billeted with family in town whilst the base was being completed, joint sport activities, social events and many marriages occurred between base staff and locals;
- Establishment of the Evans Head RAAF Band, Life Saving Club and sports teams;
- Picnic and fishing trips were made to the surrounding beaches, river and bushlands;
- Localised daylight saving was implemented to provide staff with recreation time after work.



**Figure 4.16:** Games at the beach: RAAF and WAAF personnel at Air Force Beach, Evans Head.



**Figure 4.17:** RAAF personnel at Evans Head beach (image courtesy of Keith Dorrell).

#### 4.10 Theme 10: Aircraft & Air Warfare

Aerial warfare developed in the early 1900s as a new form of combat. As a facility for the training of pilots, air gunners and bombers, Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was directly affected by the development of aerial warfare and its consequences for twentieth century warfare. By the end of World War I in 1918, it was readily apparent that airpower was vital to the success of any military operation.



As World War II approached, the major, industrialised nations, began looking into various new designs for aircraft that were larger, faster and far more complex than before. In 1940, most aircraft were generally constructed of metal with engines of around 1000hp, retractable landing gear, fully enclosed cockpits with a myriad of controls and instruments – some of these aircraft were capable of speeds over 350mph. The larger heavy bombers then beginning trials were able to fly across much of Europe. By the end of World War II, super fast jet aircraft and long range bombers, which could fly thousands of miles were in service, each many times the size of earlier aircraft with a plethora of advanced systems, such as radar, that allowed the pilots of these aircraft to accomplish feats of airmanship which were unheard of just six years earlier.

Many aircraft were used for training at Evans Head or used the base as a stop over on their way to other destinations. Training aircraft included:

- Introductory flight trainers – Tiger Moths, Ryan Trainers, CAC Wackett trainers;
- Bomber training – Fairy Battles, Avro Ansons (flown down from Amberley on a daily basis for bombing practice).
- Gunnery Training – CAC Wirraways.
- Many aircraft also visited the site to make use of its training facilities, such as:
  - Consolidated PBY Catalina Flying Boats;
  - Avro Lancaster Heavy Bombers;
  - Avro Lincoln Heavy Bombers;
  - Supermarine Spitfires;
  - North American P-51 Mustang (often as part of No.23 City of Brisbane Squadron);
  - North American B-25 Mitchell Medium Bombers;
  - Consolidated B-24 Liberator Heavy Bombers; and
  - Douglas DC-4 Airliner/Transports.



**Figure 4.18:** Fairey Battle at Evans Head (Image courtesy of Keith Dorrell)



**Figure 4.19:** Wirraway at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome (Image courtesy of Keith Dorrell).

#### 4.11 Theme 11: WWII Technology

World War II saw the need for mass produced, easily transportable buildings which could be erected with unskilled labour; prefabricated buildings were the perfect solution for this need. Prefabrication in World War II utilised the methods of mass production-line construction which had been in use in America, thereby implementing a system which could produce huge quantities of buildings in a relatively small amount of time. Gregory Nolan notes that the fall of Singapore and the entry of Japan into World War II resulted in:

*“A frantic building effort followed where traditional design preferences and forms of construction were abandoned...They were unashamedly utilitarian buildings. Their design was driven by the need to use what was at hand to build in the defence of the nation.”<sup>16</sup>*

The use of prefabrication was driven by the Allied Works Council (AWC), who formed on 28 February 1942. The AWC essentially became the project and construction manager for national defence projects and created a number of building types which conformed to standardised national designs. The entire organisation was ‘*geared for utmost speed and efficiency*’ and by the wars end, the AWC had been producing the equivalent of 500 weatherboard cottages a week.<sup>17</sup>

The AWC created a number of standardised designs for the production of buildings which resulted in military bases, depots, schools and camps of not just a standardised layout, but of standardised appearance, including:

- Huts;
- Warehouses;
- Stores;
- Hospitals; and
- Hangars.

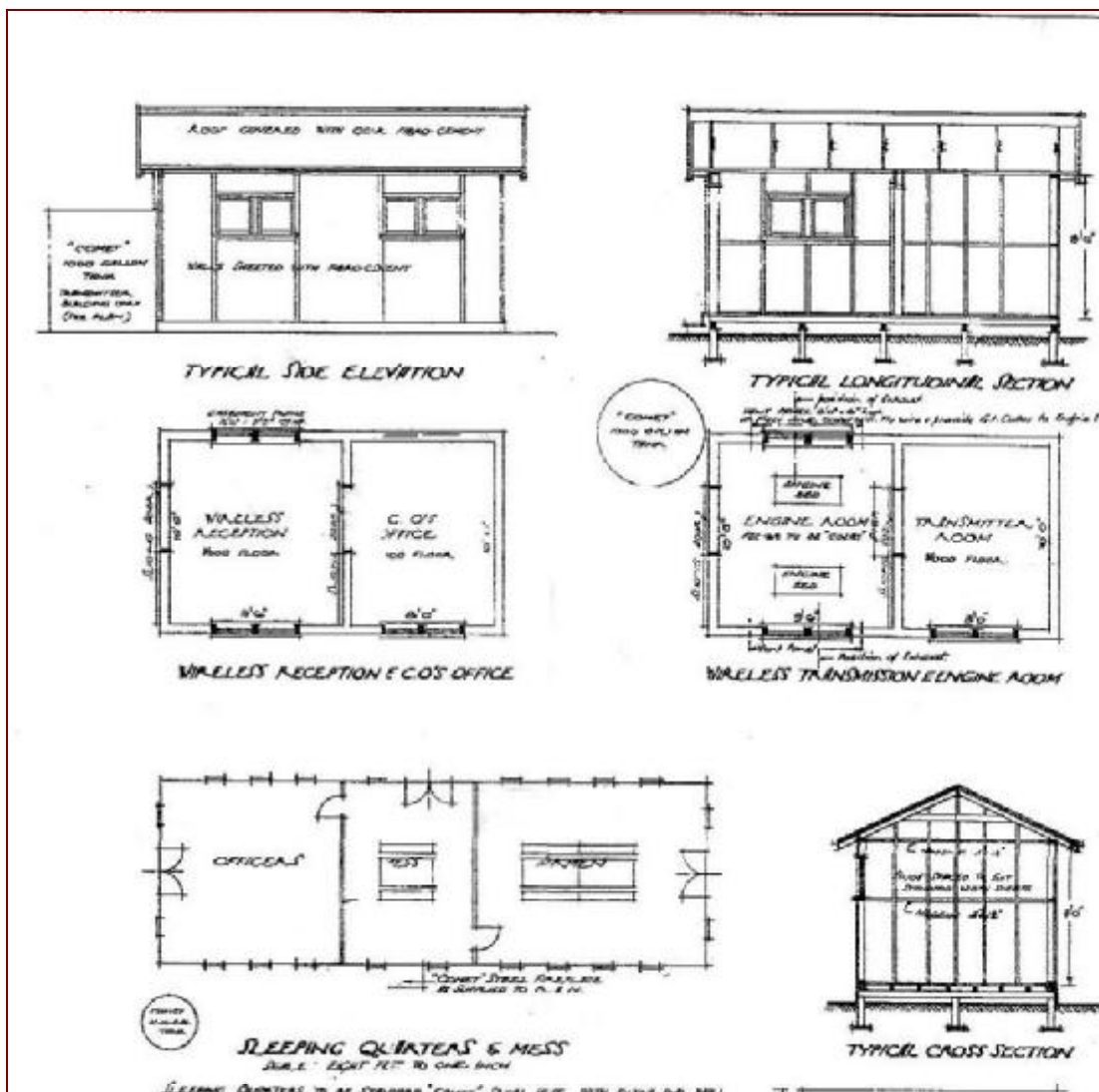
These buildings were initially made from steel and timber; however wartime shortages necessitated the use of green timber, asbestos cement, corrugated iron and weatherboard.

<sup>16</sup> Nolan, Gregory. 1996. Australian Timber Buildings of the Second World War, *Exedra Architecture, Art & Design*, Volume 6, No 2, pp. 44-57.

<sup>17</sup> Pullar, M. July 1997. *Prefabricated WWII Structures in Queensland*. Report prepared for the National Trust of Australia (QLD), p.4 and 7.



**Figure 4.20:** Photo of trainees in their accommodation hut at Evans Head Aerodrome. Note the exposed roof trusses, exposed wall and ceiling linings and temporary camp beds.



**Figure 4.21:** A WWII RAAF plan showing the standard design for hutments at aerodromes (NAA; SP155/1, DEF).

#### 4.12 Theme 12: Post War Use of the Aerodrome

At the end of World War II, the Department of Defence reviewed rationalised the immense amount of land it had accumulated during the War and subsequently disposed of all sites deemed surplus to post war operational requirements. Evans Head Aerodrome, after being used briefly as a Care and Maintenance Unit from 1945-1947, was disposed of and passed into the ownership of the Department of Civil Aviation.

- Many aircraft were burnt and salvaged for scrap metal;
- Most of the aerodrome's buildings were dismantled, destroyed or transferred to other locations – e.g. by 1955, only three of the 17 Bellman Hangars remained, many accommodation huts had been transferred to Camp Koinonia in Evans Head, the aerodrome's hospital building had been relocated to Lismore and the Wireless hut relocated and used as Scout Hall;

By 1955, most of the World War II infrastructure had disappeared. The aerodrome provided a base for commercial flights, training and occasional visits from the mid-1950s through to the 1990s, with ownership passing to the Department of Transport in 1952-1992, followed by Richmond River County Council and then Richmond Valley Council. During this time it has been used by and for the following:

- Butler Airways as a commercial aerodrome (ceased in the early 1980s);
- Bus storage depot;
- Emergency Landing Ground;
- Staging base for supplied during floods and for refuelling during bushfires;
- Southern Bombing Range still in use for RAAF practice; and
- Main aerodrome is maintained to support light private aviation.

The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome is currently used for emergency services, memorial and anniversary events, private aviators for light aircraft and special events such as annual Great Eastern Fly-In (with associated marquees, film nights, air displays and walks). The aerodrome still maintains its powerful sense of place through the landmark qualities of the four intersecting runways.



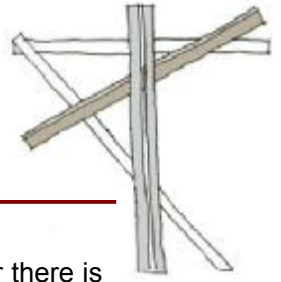
**Figure 4.22:** The entrance to the South Bombing Range, which is still owned and utilised by the RAAF.



**Figure 4.23:** Nancy Bird Walton and Jean Haughton James, one of the first women (WAAAF) at the Aerodrome.



## 5 Who We are Interpreting For



The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome is visited by a wide range of people, however there is very little data available on visitor numbers, types etc. There has been no visitor monitoring program to assess visitor trends and needs, which would be difficult as there is no permanent on-site staff at the aerodrome to undertake such data collection. The identification of current visitors has been established through an analysis of past heritage projects, and through discussions with RVC staff and aerodrome users.

### 5.1 Identifying On-Site Users and Visitors

Generally visitation to the aerodrome is low with small spikes which coincide with planned aviation and commemorative events such as the Great Eastern Fly-In and ANZAC day.

Of these visitors and users, those who visit on a regular basis, or visit to attend a special event, already have an established connection with the site, either by the need to use its facilities (as a site user) or (generally) due to an activity or event that brings them to the aerodrome, such as Fly-In events, commemorative events or community events. Whilst having a connection with the aerodrome, however, this does not necessarily always translate into an understanding of the site's heritage significance, its history or an appreciation of its value. Interpretation at the site needs to provide these regular visitors with an understanding and appreciation.

The regular visitors to the site include:

- RVC Staff;
- Aviators (generally of small, light planes);
- World War II Veterans;
- General members of the Evans Head Community;
- Mens' Shed members (who utilise the Bellman Hangar's annex) ;
- Evans Head / Woodburn RSL Club members;
- Model Plane Group;
- Industrial Estate workers and customers;
- Aircraft enthusiasts;
- Special event participants (including the annual Great Eastern Fly-In, commemorative events [ANZAC Day, personnel reunions, Remembrance Day etc]; and
- Ad hoc users (the aerodrome is also used for a variety of purposes such as Safe Driver Training, Blow Cart competitions etc).

## 5.2 Identifying the Target Users & Visitors

In addition to the current user and visitors, a range of potential visitors and users have been identified. These are people that the interpretation plan also needs to consider when planning its interpretative strategies; however, as well as interpretation on site to these groups, there needs to be awareness and information available about the site to encourage them to visit in the first place.

These users and visitors do not always have an established connection with the site, so interpretation and promotion needs to provide enough interest to draw them to the site. Such potential users and visitors include:

- Aviation enthusiasts & visiting pilots;
- World War II enthusiasts;
- School and educational groups;
- Family and descendants of RAAF personnel who were based at Evans Head;
- Heritage consultants, historians and archaeologists;
- Flora and fauna enthusiasts;
- Event organisers; and
- Tourists (Local, national and international).

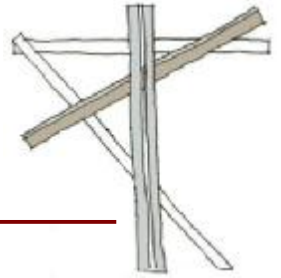
## 5.3 Identifying Remote Users

As well as providing on-site interpretation for visitors and users, remote (i.e. web based) interpretation is becoming more vital for heritage sites. Remote interpretation potentially allows more information about the site to be publicly available at a much lesser cost than on-site interpretation. It is also an ever increasing promotional tool in today's technological world; the ability to be 'found' or 'visible' on the internet is essential to increase public awareness and tempt people to visit a site. However, the information provided on the web needs to be carefully balanced and should not simply repeat what is provided on site: on-site visitors should be tempted to find further information about the site by using the web and potential visitors need to be able to gain a greater understanding by actual visiting the site, not just 'googling it'.

The remote audience includes:

- Historical and heritage researchers;
- World War II veterans and their families;
- Aviation enthusiasts;
- Pilots;
- Event organisers;
- Schools; and
- Tourists.





## 6 Interpretive Guidelines & Policies

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### 6.1 General Guidelines

The following general guidelines provide the framework for all interpretation of the aerodrome.

#### 6.1.1 Policy 1 – Purpose

The purpose of heritage interpretation of the EHMA is to communicate the heritage significance and values of the place to site visitors, whilst always respecting the site's memorialisation and commemorative role that the site has come to have.

#### 6.1.2 Policy 2 – Information

Interpretation should provide information to site visitors, which assists them to understand the significance of the site, and to gain an appreciation of its value.

#### 6.1.3 Policy 3 – Memorialisation

The aerodrome's interpretation must recognise its role in first and foremost respecting the memorial aspects of the site. Interpretation **must** use a style that respects and values the memory of the Veterans. The aerodrome now stands as a memorial to the Veterans and any modern interpretation must ensure that it is understated, simple and unobtrusive.

#### 6.1.4 Policy 4 – Attracting Visitors

Interpretation of the aerodrome should seek to provide information to current visitors and to attract new visitors to the site. It should be planned to assist the flow of visitors between the site, the town and the Evans Head museum.

### 6.2 Interpretation Policies

#### 6.2.1 Policy 5 – Adoption of Plan

The site owner, Richmond Valley Council, should formally adopt this Interpretation Plan for the aerodrome and prepare a timeline for implementing the Interpretative works. The historic themes, interpretative methods and priorities developed in this report should be used as the basis for the site's interpretation.

#### 6.2.2 Policy 6 – Aviation

Interpretation of the EHMA should always remember that the aerodrome is both an operational airfield as well as a heritage site. Any interpretation should not create

disturbances to the visual landscape, the airside operational requirements or the continued aviation use of the aerodrome.

#### **6.2.3 Policy 7 – Financial Viability**

Interpretation concepts should aim to be as financially viable as possible and should recognise the restricted budget that the aerodrome operates within. Following this, interpretation should be prioritised, with high priority works reflecting over-arching heritage themes which fulfil the needs of the greatest numbers of visitors.

#### **6.2.4 Policy 8 – Unobtrusive**

Interpretation should not overwhelm either the site or visitors. It should be subtle and should not detract from the existing sense of place. The aerodrome now stands as a memorial to the Veterans and any modern interpretation must ensure that it is understated, simple and does not add an element of modern design for modern design's sake.

#### **6.2.5 Policy 9 - Methods**

Interpretation should consist of a variety of methods to best communicate the value of the site. A mixture of retaining important site elements, retaining the aviation use of the aerodrome, interpretative signs, on-site displays, landscape treatments for a memorialisation area, remote web-based information sources and commemorative events will together provide a robust interpretative model to enhance visitor experience and understanding.

### **6.3 Implementation Policies**

The strategies outlined in the following section have been prioritised so that Richmond Valley Council can prepare a planned approach to the implementation of this Interpretation Plan, dependent on the availability of funds.

#### **6.3.1 Policy 10 – Priority 1**

The highest priority should be given to interpretation measures which provide information regarding the overall significance, history and value of the site to provide a general awareness, understanding and appreciation of the site.

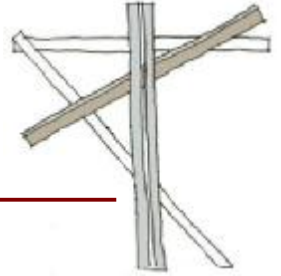
#### **6.3.2 Policy 11 – Priority 2**

The next priority should be given to interpretation that enhances site amenity (such as landscape treatments) and attracts new visitors to the site. Such interpretation should also seek to assist the flow of visitors between the aerodrome and the town.

### *6.3.3 Policy 12 – Priority 3*

The final priority should be to provide additional detailed information for visitors to access, such as a dedicated aerodrome website for web based access to heritage reports, detailed history available online and links to other WWII aerodrome.





## 7 Overview Plan of the Aerodrome's Interpretation

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### 7.1 Relevant Elements & Areas of the Aerodrome

Although there are many elements, areas and landscapes at the aerodrome, not all are suitable for interpretation. Some are inaccessible to the general public as they are located airside and therefore not safe for general public access, others are too remote for easy access and some are located outside of the current boundary of the state heritage listed site. This section identifies elements for interpretation of the aerodrome. To be considered, elements need to be:

- Significant to the aerodrome's history;
- Easily and safely accessible;
- Within the Aerodrome's present heritage curtilage; and
- Illustrate the chosen historic themes.

The following table summarises the historic themes and relationship to the significance of the site, and then sets out the related physical evidence at the site, the type of visitor likely to need information and appropriate interpretive methods.

Historic Theme	Priority	Related elements at the site	Visitor/User Type	Appropriate methods for interpreting the theme
The Heritage Significance of the Aerodrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The runway system;</li> <li>All in-situ buildings and elements;</li> <li>Continued Aviation use;</li> <li>Memorial Gardens; and</li> <li>Commemorative events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All types of current, potential and remote visitors could benefit from further information on the site's overall heritage value; and</li> <li>Site users need information on how the significance often defines management procedures at the site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors and users;</li> <li>Retention of significant site elements;</li> <li>Development of a heritage walk, which guides the visitor to the significant elements;</li> <li>Web-based information for potential visitors and researchers;</li> <li>Heritage awareness training for site managers and event organisers; and</li> <li>New development in keeping with PoM policies for sympathetic development.</li> </ul>
Commemoration and Memorialisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Memorial Gardens;</li> <li>Commemorative events; and</li> <li>Evans Head Cemetery (off-site).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students; and</li> <li>Evans Head/Woodburn RSL members.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retaining memorial gardens;</li> <li>Developing Memorial Walk;</li> <li>Continue to use the site for commemorative events;</li> <li>Develop online list of all aerodrome workers and trainees; and</li> <li>Direct visitors to Evans Head Cemetery.</li> </ul>
The Scheme! The Empire Air Training Scheme and the Formation of Evans Head Aerodrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The runway system;</li> <li>All in-situ buildings;</li> <li>Continued Aviation use;</li> <li>Bellman Hangar; and</li> <li>Bombing ranges (off-site).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pilots;</li> <li>Aviation enthusiast;</li> <li>World War II veterans;</li> <li>Historians/researchers;</li> <li>Schools; and</li> <li>Special events visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors;</li> <li>Retention of significant elements;</li> <li>Web based detailed information;</li> <li>Development of a heritage walk, which guides the visitor to the significant elements; and</li> <li>Links to other EATS training aerodromes in Australia.</li> </ul>

Historic Theme	Priority	Related elements at the site	Visitor/User Type	Appropriate methods for interpreting the theme
Formation of the Aerodrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The runway system and open space;</li> <li>All in-situ buildings;</li> <li>Continued Aviation use;</li> <li>Bellman Hangar;</li> <li>Firing Range &amp; Test butts; and</li> <li>Machine gun pit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students;</li> <li>Evans Head/Woodburn RSL members;</li> <li>Special events visitors; and</li> <li>Aviation enthusiasts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued aviation use;</li> <li>New development areas to conform to design guides in Plan of Management;</li> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors;</li> <li>Retention of significant elements;</li> <li>Web based detailed information;</li> <li>Development of a heritage walk, which guides the visitor to the significant elements; and</li> <li>Links to other EATS training aerodromes in Australia.</li> </ul>
The Wartime Aerodrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The runway system and open space;</li> <li>All in-situ buildings;</li> <li>Continued Aviation use;</li> <li>Bellman Hangar;</li> <li>Firing Range &amp; Test butts; and</li> <li>Machine gun pit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students;</li> <li>Evans Head/Woodburn RSL members;</li> <li>Special events visitors; and</li> <li>Aviation enthusiasts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued aviation use;</li> <li>New development areas to conform to design guides in Plan of Management;</li> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors;</li> <li>Retention of significant elements;</li> <li>Web based detailed information;</li> <li>Development of a heritage walk, which guides the visitor to the significant elements; and</li> <li>Links to other EATS training aerodromes in Australia.</li> </ul>
Defending the Aerodrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The runway system and open space;</li> <li>All in-situ buildings;</li> <li>Bellman Hangar;</li> <li>Firing Range &amp; Test butts;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students;</li> <li>Evans Head/Woodburn RSL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors;</li> <li>Retention of significant elements;</li> <li>Web based detailed information;</li> <li>Development of a heritage walk, which guides the visitor to the significant</li> </ul>

Historic Theme	Priority	Related elements at the site	Visitor/User Type	Appropriate methods for interpreting the theme
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Footings of original flight control tower;</li> <li>Dispersal taxiways;</li> <li>Machine gun pit;</li> <li>Target bases;</li> <li>Bomb storage area (off-site); and</li> <li>Observation tower footings (off-site).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>members;</li> <li>Special events visitors; and</li> <li>Aviation enthusiasts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>elements; and</li> <li>Links to other EATS training aerodromes in Australia.</li> </ul>
Notable People & Incidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bellman Hangar;</li> <li>Memorial gardens;</li> <li>Evans Head cemetery (off-site).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students; and</li> <li>Special events visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors;</li> <li>Web based detailed information;</li> <li>Retention of significant elements; and</li> <li>Links to off-site elements.</li> </ul>
The Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The WAAAF former accommodation area;</li> <li>All in-situ buildings;</li> <li>Continued Aviation use; and</li> <li>Memorial Gardens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students; and</li> <li>Special events visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors;</li> <li>Web based detailed information;</li> <li>Development of a heritage walk, which guides the visitor to the significant elements</li> <li>Retention of significant elements; and</li> <li>Links to off-site elements.</li> </ul>
Lifestyle, Recreation and Interaction with Evans Head Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visual landscape remains of aerodrome sports fields; and</li> <li>All other elements are located off-site.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community; and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors; and</li> <li>Links to off-site elements and interpretation at those places.</li> </ul>



Historic Theme	Priority	Related elements at the site	Visitor/User Type	Appropriate methods for interpreting the theme
Aircraft & Air Warfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The runway system;</li> <li>All in-situ buildings;</li> <li>Continued Aviation use; and</li> <li>Commemorative events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General Evans Head tourists.</li> <li>Aviation enthusiasts;</li> <li>Pilots;</li> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans; and</li> <li>Special events visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors; and</li> <li>Web based detailed information.</li> </ul>
WWII Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Moderate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ablutions' Buildings;</li> <li>Bellman Hangar; and</li> <li>Former Canteen Building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students; and</li> <li>Special events visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors;</li> <li>Development of a heritage walk which guides the visitor to the significant elements;</li> <li>Web based detailed information;</li> <li>Retention of significant elements; and</li> <li>Links to off-site elements.</li> </ul>
Post War Use of the Aerodrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The runway system;</li> <li>Continued Aviation use;</li> <li>Memorial Gardens; and</li> <li>Commemorative events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World War II Veterans;</li> <li>Descendents of Veterans;</li> <li>Local community;</li> <li>School students; and</li> <li>Special events visitors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpretative signs for visitors; and</li> <li>Web based detailed information.</li> </ul>

## **7.2 Interpretative Methods & Priority**

From the table above, a number of interpretive methods have been identified. The following summarises the methods and the priority of their implementation.

### **7.2.1 Priority 1:**

- Retention of significant elements (see section 3.4 for an overview of these elements);
- Continued aviation function of the aerodrome;
- Use of the site for commemorative events;
- New site development in accordance with the Plan of Management;
- Site signs for High Priority heritage themes (see table in section 7.1 for priorities of themes); and
- Establishment of a walking tour with directional signs and a walking tour brochure.

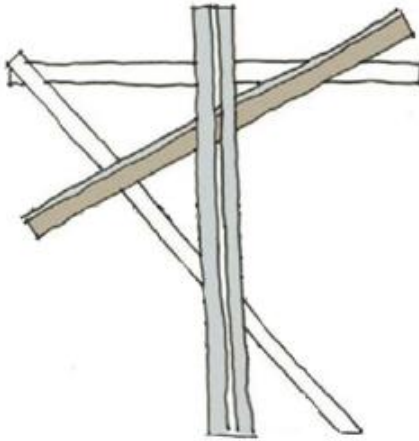
### **7.2.2 Priority 2:**

- Site signs for Moderate Priority heritage themes (see table in section 7.1 for priorities of themes);
- Establishment of Commemorative Area;
- Landscape treatment to enhance visitor amenity;
- On site displays in the Former Canteen building;
- TASAC / RTA 'Historic Place' signs from main roads to direct visitors to the site;
- Links to other off-site elements.

### **7.2.3 Priority 3:**

- Site signs for Low Priority heritage themes (see table in section 7.1 for priorities of themes);
- Development of a Memorial Walk;
- Dedicated website with detailed information;
- Informational Signs for individual elements of significance;
- Links to other off-site elements and associated sites.

**Section C:**  
**Interpretation Strategy**





## **8 Landscape Plan**

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An overall Landscape Plan has been developed for the aerodrome, to integrate the interpretation of the various key elements, draw a visitor into the site, link in with other Evans Head facilities (such as the cycleway) and to provide consistent approach to on-site interpretation. The Landscape Plan is consistent with the framework of the Interpretation Policies outlined above.

### **8.1 The Elements of the Landscape Plan**

The Landscape Plan consists of a number of elements, which together form cohesive interpretation of the aerodrome and presentation to the public. Broadly, the landscape plan (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2) includes:

- Formal entrance to the aerodrome on Memorial Airport Drive (located where the current gates are located). This should include a small welcome sign next to the gates stating:
  - The name of the site;
  - The overall heritage significance of the site;
  - The opening hours of the gated area; and
  - The main elements of the site and its interpretation.
- Definition of the former Bellman Hangar footprints (5 footprints) by installing thin, rammed steel edges around the perimeter of each footprint and filling each internally delineating them in a sympathetic manner;
- Definition of the former Flight Training hut footprints adjacent to the Bellman Hangar by installing thin, rammed steel edges around the perimeter of each footprint and filling each internally with annual native plants (however if the maintenance budget is pressed, perennial native plants would suffice);
- Constructing a light weight frame for a suitable creeping plant, that mimics the form and scale of the original huts size, within their footprint;
- Establishment of a Heritage Walking Trail linking in to the Evans Head cycleway (see chapter 10 for details on the Heritage Trail);
- Expansion of the Memorial Gardens into a precinct with a Remembrance Tree Avenue, of an appropriate native tree, seating underneath the trees, and expanded gardens (including a walkway with the World War II RAAF roundel in plantings).
- Ensure the expanded gardens are slightly shielded from the main aerodrome area – the plants chosen should ensure a balance between providing a small screen for the Memorial Garden to allow a quiet and contemplative space, and also

ensuring that the view scapes (from the Bellman Hangar across the aerodrome and from the Canteen to the airside area) not obscured. The two figures following (Figures 8.1 and 8.2) provide more detail on the garden design;

- Visitor access road – currently Airport Memorial Drive culminates in a dead-end. The design allows for it to loop back around to ensure better flow of traffic and echoes the original WWII road layout;
- Discrete visitor parking around the exterior of the looped roadway;
- Memorial Walk from the Main Entrance to the Memorial Gardens. The walk should be constructed of pavers which are wheelchair friendly and that can be individually inscribed with the names of men and women who served at the base; this can become an income-generating activity as families and organisations can pay for a paver to be inscribed (see Figure 8.3 below for an example of a similar walk at North Head Fort)<sup>18</sup>;
- Viewing platform on the Woodburn-Evans Head Road at the end of Runway 18-36. The platform should be located on the Evans Head cycleway (just off Woodburn-Evans Head Rd) to provide clear views down the main north-south runway. It should be constructed of timber and its shelter should be the same design as the other interpretation shelter sheds at the aerodrome (see Chapter 9 for details);
- Interpretative signs at key locations (see Chapter 9 for details), including:
  - In the Memorial Gardens;
  - At the viewing platform;
  - Near the machine gun pit; and
  - At the entryway.
- Where possible and feasible, realigning sections of aerodrome perimeter fencing to allow visitor access to important WWII aerodrome elements. The first priority would be to realign fencing near the machine-gun pit. to allow visitors to view the newly restored pit and its interpretation, plus to allow views down the nearby runway. Later realignments that should be considered include those to allow access to the test butts, target practice area and footings of the original flight control tower.

## 8.2 The Design Guidelines

The plans on the following pages (Figure 8.1 and 8.2) broadly outline the landscape plan for the aerodrome. Although this plan may need to be altered if future development occurs at the aerodrome (such as an extension of the Industrial Area or the development of an

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.northfort.org.au/memorials.htm> for further information.

Airpark), the broad plan and landscape elements should be adhered to where possible, even if details need to be changed. It is understood however; that Richmond Valley Council has excluded the Memorial area from future industrial and airpark development concept plans, so this Landscape Plan should not need to change greatly.

**Figure 8.1:**  
Conceptual  
Landscape Plan for  
Interpretation at  
Evans Head  
Memorial  
Aerodrome  
(GeoLINK).









**Figure 8.3:** The start of the Memorial Walk at North Head Fort – note the pavers on the walk that have been inscribed with the names of service men and women who served at North Head. Families and organisations pay (via a standardised order form submitted to North head Fort) for a paver to be inscribed; the costs cover the cost of the paver and inscription and additional funds that are used for conservation works.

## 9 Interpretative Signs Design & Types

### 9.1 Sign Guidelines

The signs at the aerodrome have been designed to reflect the main extant built element of the aerodrome (the runways) and to adaptively re-use elements of former WWII features (such as the target practice bases).

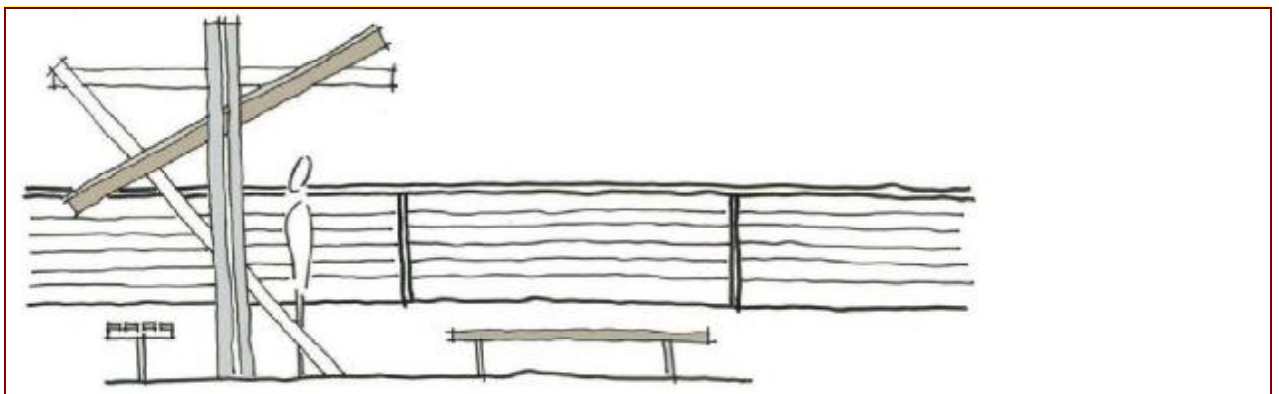
The location of the interpretative shelters and signs is outlined below; these locations have been selected for the following reasons:

- To ensure that they are easily accessible to visitors;
- To ensure they do not create aviation hazards;
- To ensure they do not impede important viewlines; and
- Located near significant historic elements of the site.

Additional signs may be added over time if it is deemed necessary to provide further detail; however they should ensure that they meet the points outlined above and are designed in the same style as that outlined below.

### 9.2 Interpretative Signs

The design for the interpretative signs is an abstract design based on the main extant built feature of the aerodrome – the runway system. The four intersecting runways create a dominant sense of place at the aerodrome and are protected in the site's Plan of Management. The interpretative signs have been designed to sit inside a Shelter Shed; each of which can protect a number of signs. The Shelter Shed (see Figure 9.1 below) reflects the four intersecting runways whilst also providing weather protection for the signs as well as seating for visitors.



**Figure 9.1:** The design of the Shelter Sheds which will house interpretative panels.

The Shelter Sheds will be located as follows:

1. In the commemorative precinct, adjacent to the Bellman Hangar and other in-situ buildings (including the former canteen which will be used for on-site displays).

This shelter shed will have panels with Aerodrome User information (i.e. information for pilots re: fees, safety, procedures etc) and interpretation of the following heritage themes:

- Heritage significance of the aerodrome; and
- Memorialisation and Commemoration.

2. On the Woodburn-Evans Head Road at the end of Runway 18-36. This location will be on the Evans Head cycleway and provides clear views down the main north-south runway.

It will have interpretation panels on the following heritage themes:

- The Empire Air Training Scheme;
- The Formation of Evans Head Aerodrome;
- Notable People and Incidents; and
- The WAAAFs.

3. On the Woodburn-Evans Head Road, adjacent to the recently restored machine-gun pit and allowing views down Runway 09-27.

It will have interpretation panels on the following heritage themes:

- The Wartime Aerodrome;
- Defending the Aerodrome;
- Air Warfare and Aircraft; and
- WWII Technology.

The above Shelter Sheds and interpretative panels are considered to cover all historic themes of high and moderate importance; if funds allow in the future, further shelter sheds can be constructed with additional signs. For example, if a retirement village is constructed in the southern portion of the aerodrome or an airpark in the central section, it would be ideal for these areas to continue the same style of interpretation to ensure continuity across the one historic site.

### **9.3 Directional Signs**

In addition to the Interpretative Signs within the Shelter Sheds, Directional signs will be placed within the aerodrome to guide the visitor through the site and its elements (to facilitate the Walking Trail). The directional signs will use the WWII target practice bases to provide the signs (which were found dumped in bushland at the aerodrome) – see image below. The target practice bases will be stood up and will have a steel band (marine grade steel)



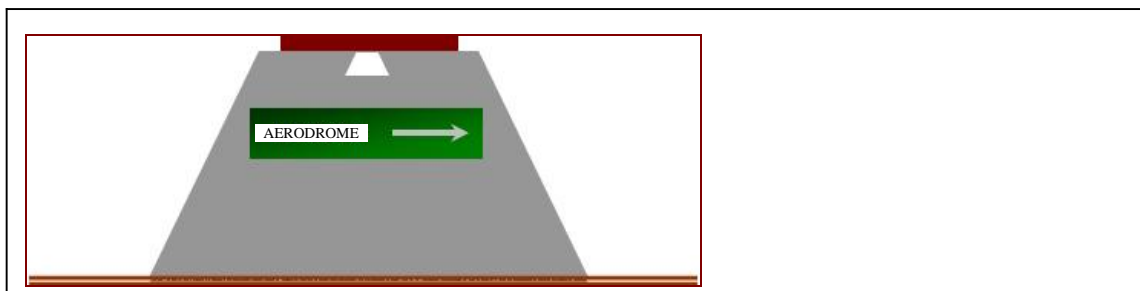


attached to them, with directional information inscribed on it. This will assist the visitor's interaction with the site and movement through its elements.

There are approximately 8 target bases and the following chapter (Chapter 10) outlines their location within the walking tour.



**Figure 9.2:** Target practice base (note that the



heaviness of the concrete will help deter vandals).

**Figure 9.3:** Concept sketch of target practices as directional signs.



## 10 Heritage Walking Trail

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### 10.1 Heritage Walking Trail Guidelines

The route of the Heritage Walking Trail has been developed within several parameters:

1. It must consider OH&S and therefore in its entirety must exclude all airside areas, which are not safe for pedestrian access;
2. It must respect the areas of natural significance and exclude pedestrian access to these areas (i.e. Pygmy Perch habitation areas);
3. It has been planned for the aerodrome **as it currently is** – proposed or potential developments (the retirement village, airpark, industrial area extension etc), or potential remediation have not been taken into account. This way the Walking Trail can be established independent of these factors and as soon as funds become available. If any of these proposals are approved and constructed, the walking trail can be enlarged at that time.

### 10.2 Route and Sign Locations

The following figure (Figure 10.1) illustrates the location and route of the Heritage Walking Trail within the aerodrome.

In brief, the Walking Trail should start at the Canteen building (adjacent to the Memorial Gardens), which will also house the on-site displays. It will feature two walking routes; one that focuses on the Interpretative precinct around the Bellman Hangar/Gardens and then those who have more time can continue on to walk around to the Machine-gun pit.

The initial trail will take the visitor past the Bellman Hangar, through the Memorial Gardens and Remembrance Avenue of trees, around the Canteen building and back up through the Memorial Walk; that is, one big loop around the Interpretative Precinct.

The longer trail will then guide the visitor south down Airport Memorial Drive to link in with the Evans Head cycleway on Currajong Street, where it will head west to Woodburn-Evans Head Road and the Interpretative panels at the end of Runway 18-36 and at the Machine-Gun pit.

The following figure (Figure 10.1) outlines the route. The directional signs should be placed in logical progression each time there is a major change in direction and should be in sync with the directions outlined on the Walking Trail brochure.

The Walking Trail brochure should be developed as a downloadable and printable document. It should have a clear main page with the route on one side and additional interpretative material on the other. It should also provide links to other relevant Evans Head sites, such as the Evans Head Living museum and the cemetery.







## 11 On Site Displays

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### 11.1 Objects & Images available for Display

There are a number of objects currently available for display at the aerodrome and it is likely that there are many more in private collections – the latter could be collected via calls for people to donate them back to the aerodrome.

Current objects include:

- Beer bottles;
- Bullet shells;
- Original lid from the machine-gun pit;
- WWII era plans of the aerodrome; and
- Historic photos.

The recently restored canteen building is well suited to being used for on-site displays, however, secure shelving with lockable glass doors would need to be funded and installed to protect the items from theft.

### 11.2 Curation & Care of Objects

- Initially, facilities for secure, lockable shelves/cabinets would be required to ensure that the items are protected from theft;
- Creating a catalogue of items related to the WWII history of the aerodrome (those owned by RVC and by other organisations and individuals, such as the RSL or the Evans Head Living Museum);
- Ensuring that items are not stored in direct sunlight;
- Ensuring that items are not affected by damp;
- Ensuring that material-specific conservation advice is sought on storage of items (i.e. advice specific to, for example, the care and conservation of metals or of photographs or of paper or fabric etc); and
- If a large or significant collection is likely, a Moveable Heritage Conservation Plan should be prepared to ensure that the items do not deteriorate and to provide practical advice for their care and maintenance.



## **12 Low Priority Interpretation**

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### **12.1 Preamble**

There are many ways and means that a site's importance can be interpreted for current and potential visitors. The above sections outlined the high and moderate priority works required, however, there are a number of ways that interpretation could be expanded if funds are available. These are briefly discussed below.

### **12.2 Website**

A dedicated website to the site would allow for interpretation to those unable to physically visit the site and to those who wish for more information than is available on-site. The website could include detailed information on the aerodrome's history, development and significance, including copies of archival records, plans, photographs, heritage studies/reports etc.

The website should also include practical visitor-information such as location, facilities, opening hours, on-site interpretation, events, promotional information etc, to encourage greater levels of visitation.

### **12.3 Schools Kit**

To encourage local and regional schools to utilise the site as part of their curriculum, a Schools Education Kit could be developed. It should be aimed to assist both primary and secondary schools to prepare for a visit to aerodrome by including information, ideas and resources to assist teachers in introducing students to site and its resources. It could, for example, include a Teacher's Manual and individual sections tailored to relevant curriculum areas.

### **12.4 Annual Heritage Tours**

Annual heritage tours of the site should be promoted to encourage greater visitation. They should be presented by someone knowledgeable of the site, its features, significance and history. Ideally, the tours should be planned to coincide with other festivals, such as Heritage Week, which is an annual event promoted by The National Trust of Australia (NSW), so that they are cross-promoted by RVC and the National Trust.

## **Appendix A: Text & Images for the Interpretation Signs**

Note:

- This text has been provided prior to the dimensions, material etc of the signs being available.
- The text may need to be altered, reduced or added to when the specifics of the signs are known.
- Font for the signs should be clear and legible and, if possible, mimic fonts used on WWII signs at the base (which can be gleaned from historic photos).

## **The Heritage Significance of the Aerodrome**

***Places of Cultural heritage are irreplaceable and precious, and should be conserved for present and future generations.***

On the 22 November 2002, the Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was listed on the NSW State Heritage Register. After several years of dedicated campaigning by the local community and with the support of the site's owner, Richmond Valley Council, this formal recognition of the aerodrome's significance was a positive step toward the long-term protection and conservation of this important site.

Places that are of cultural heritage significance are those which help us understand the past or enrich the present, and which will be of value to future generations. Places of cultural heritage, like Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome, are significant because they are historical records which are important as physical reminders of Australia's identity and experience.

Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome's state heritage listing means that it is a place of importance to the whole of NSW, in that it enriches our understanding of our history and identity.

About the Aerodrome:

- The aerodrome was one of the largest bases established under the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), and one of the largest operational RAAF bases in Australia during World War II;
- The Aerodrome played an important role in Australia's contribution of air crews to initially, Britain's war effort, then to Australia's role in the Pacific war and home defence;
- At its peak in 1942, the Aerodrome had over 300 buildings and 4,000 staff & trainees - the scale of the base's operations are demonstrated by the four surviving runways and associated taxiways, tarred hangar aprons, one surviving Bellman Hangar and archaeological features;
- The continued association of the aerodrome with aviation activities is an integral part of its significance, and is a use that greatly enhances the recognition and understanding of its historical associations;

- The site has social significance for many ex-RAAF and WAAAF service-men and – women who were associated with the aerodrome, civilian workers, local families and friends of people who served there and died during World War II – it is now a place of commemoration and memorialisation;
- The aerodrome is significant to the people of Evans Head because of the central role it played during and after the war, and because of the military presence in and around the village;
- The aerodrome has aesthetic significance because of its landmark qualities. Its sheer size as an open grassland area, crossed by runways, gives it a powerful sense of place when viewed from elevated viewpoints or the air. It is a substantial landmark in Evans Head, from either the ground or from the air; and
- It is one of the few remaining large World War II coastal sites which retains some sense of its wartime operations.



## Commemoration & Memorialisation

*The goal is to protect the fabric and meaning of war sites and in doing so to partly discharge the debt which the present owes the past.*

“Fellow Australians, it is my melancholy duty to inform you officially, that in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war. No harder task can fall to the lot of a democratic leader than to make such an announcement.”

[From the speech made by Prime Minister Robert Gordon Menzies, 3 September 1939].

Almost a million Australians, both men and women, served in World War II. 39,366 Australian military personnel and 735 Australian civilians died during the war. Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was established in 1941 as a major training base (No 1 Bombing & Gunnery School and then No 1 Air Observers School) of pilots and aircrew for RAAF and RAF World War II squadrons. During its five years of wartime operation, more than 28 people died while training at the aerodrome and more than 1,000 of its trainees were later killed in action during the war. Evans Head Aerodrome, its Memorial Garden and Remembrance features, have been designed to pay respect to all of those involved in Australia's many war efforts.

The site now commemorates the sacrifice made by these men and women; it is a sacred place of remembrance, respect, memorial and valorisation. Each year, veterans and their families, together with members of the local community, come together to pay tribute to those who lost their lives during World War II and to ensure our debt to them is not forgotten, *lest we forget*.

“Fellow citizens, the war is over...At this moment let us offer thanks to God. Let us remember those whose lives were given that we may enjoy this glorious moment and may look forward to a peace which they have won for us.”

[Prime Minister Ben Chifley announcing the end of the war against Japan, 15 August 1945]

The nearby Evans Head Cemetery (on Woodburn Street) contains the graves of the 27 servicemen who lost their lives whilst training at the aerodrome. The names of these men are listed below.

“Things I disliked most were when there was a crash...personal effects came to stores to be sorted out and private gear sent to their next-of-kin. It was always most upsetting, seeing photos of loved ones at home.” [Recollections of Claire Walker – Wings at War, p.124]

Surname	Given Name	Death Date	Age
Ahern	E J K	22 May 1944	26 yrs
Campbell	N J H	14 February 1943	20 yrs
Duckworth	B A	7 March 1944	21 years
Edwards	R C	11 September 1944	23 years
Ervin	W J	11 September 1944	29 years
Finch	G W	7 June 1943	24 years
Grimsey	D F	14 January 1944	18 years
Harrison	G H	14 January 1944	29 years
Hill	G	22 May 1944	21 years
Hodges	A G	10 November 1944	28 years
Holt	John Francis	29 September 1977	
Hopper	W W	14 January 1944	21 years
McCormack	J M	11 September 1944	22 years
Mooney	C L	7 June 1943	27 years
Noble	J I B	11 September 1944	30 years
Noordink	Adam Philip Winold	29 September 1977	
Osborne	W H	11 September 1944	22 years
Parker	N L	10 November 1944	26 years
Robertson	R T	7 March 1944	18 years
Scanlan	P J	7 March 1944	28 years
Self	N T	7 March 1944	19 years
Shackell	E A	22 May 1944	29 years
Strike-McClelland	B	7 March 1944	22 years
Tait	M A	14 February 1943	20 years
Tindall	R J B	5 July 1943	28 years
Tyack	N M	10 November 1944	19 years
Woodgate	T L	22 May 1944	26 years

They went with songs to the battle, they were young.  
Straight of limb, true of eyes, steady and aglow.  
They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,  
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:  
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,  
We will remember them.  
Lest We Forget.

## **The Empire Air Training Scheme**

***“Australia’s contribution to the Empire Air Training Scheme was quite remarkable when one considers her pre-war situation.”***

The Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), was the single largest combined undertaking of the Commonwealth Air Forces’ during World War II, and remains to this day an incredible example of global coordinated wartime efficiency and mobilisation.

Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was developed in direct response to the infrastructure requirements of the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS). The scheme was an agreement between the governments of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, in which these Dominions would train aircrew for service in RAF squadrons during World War II. The draft agreement, signed on 17 December 1939, had corrections pencilled over it and was never retyped – demonstrating the urgency of the EATS program.

Following the outbreak of the war on 1 September 1939, the British RAF quickly found that it had inadequate manpower resources to staff the required air squadrons and supply them with replacement personnel. In addition, the fall of France, the Low Countries and Norway, put many British RAF training establishments on the front line of conflict. The relative remoteness of the Dominion territories, their large undeveloped areas of land and combined populations made them ideal as recruitment and training grounds for Dominion and RAF aircrew.

“The training scheme has been the kernel of our airpower. Without it we would have been nowhere, with everything in the shop windows and no reserves on the shelves.”

[May 1944, Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Harris - AOC, RAF Bomber Command]

More than 200 hundred training bases were constructed throughout the Empire for this scheme, including 36 in Australia. Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was built in the initial batch of ten aerodromes; hastily constructed from 1941, with the first stage of the aerodrome being completed before the official letter confirming resumption of the land for defence purposes was made on 22 January 1941.

In Australia, more than 27,000 aircrew were trained for employment with the British RAF; a further 10,000-plus partly-trained personnel completed their advanced training in Canada,

and nearly 700 received pilot training in Rhodesia (what is now Zimbabwe): in total just short of 40,000 young Australians were trained under the EATS.

A series of 36 bases were built in Australia for this training - at Initial Training Schools (to which all recruits were first sent) the men were tested and then streamed into areas of training. Those who showed an aptitude for flying were trained as pilots; others with mathematical skills as navigators; etc. The recruits would then pass through a succession of increasingly more advanced training establishments before graduating from the scheme, which included bases such as:

- Initial Training Schools (5);
- Elementary Flying Training Schools (12);
- Service Flying Training Schools (8);
- Air Navigation Schools (3);
- Air Observer Schools (2);
- Bombing and Gunnery Schools (3); and
- Wireless Air Gunnery Schools (3).

Article XV of the Empire Air Training Scheme stated that aircrew who passed through the EATS would serve in distinct dominion units, as the dominions had no wish to see their forces absorbed wholesale into the British war machine. In reality, despite the wording of the document, only squadrons 450-467 were formed by the British RAF as RAAF units and by April 1945, only 1,488 of the total 12,020 RAAF servicemen in Europe were serving in these squadrons. More problems arose with the outbreak of the War in the Pacific; the EATS agreement had specified that EATS trained pilots could not be used for Australian RAAF units, nor held back for local defence. However, with the Pacific War threatening the very existence of Australia, in 1943 Australia refused to continue sending EATS pilots to Europe when they were needed for defence of the Pacific. This pulled the EATS into the forefront of Australian politics and is one of the earliest examples of Australia demonstrating its independence from Great Britain – a historic theme which continues to this day in Australia. This debt to Britain was acknowledged however:

*“The fact that Australia has been over here...some of their very best airmen, and the share they have taken in the Empire Air Training Scheme, leaves us heavily in their debt...”*

[Winston Churchill, 12 July 1943].

## The Formation of Evans Head Aerodrome

***“We quickly realised that [at Evans Head] we had one of the most natural bombing and air firing ranges in the world.”***

[Sir Valston Hancock]

In response to the Empire Air Training Scheme, RAAF training bases were built across Australia, including the No 1 Bombing and Gunnery School (BAGS) at Evans Head, which was the first Bombing and Gunnery School to be established in Australia under the Empire Air Training Scheme.

The BAGS needed very specific terrain: vast areas of open, flat space, well isolated from any residential or commercial areas for protection from ricocheting bullets and shrapnel, with sufficient hillocks required for the observation and plotting of the falling bombs. Enough land was needed to establish an airfield, aerodrome and camp area, and isolated bombing and gunnery ranges. Sir Valston Hancock, Director of Works and Buildings for the RAAF in 1939 and the initial inspector of Evans Head as a potential location for No 1 BAGS, described the land at Evans Head as *‘one of the most natural bombing and air firing ranges in the world.’*

Construction of the base was rapid; the first stage was completed before the official letter confirming resumption of the land for defence purposes was made on 22 January 1941 and the base was ready to accept its first trainees seven months after its construction was authorised. However, this did have repercussions:

*“I was at Evans Head...in December-January 1940-41. When I was there the place was new and in a pretty poor state. It was disorganised and mismanaged. Aircraft were usually unserviceable and the standard of instruction poor. It was the worst Station I was ever on in six years of service.”* [Recollections of Les Harvey – Wings at War, p.131].

Substantial works were carried out to the aerodrome to establish roads, bridges, culverts, drainage and water supply and large gravel areas for aircraft use, in addition to the aerodrome facilities, which included more than 300 buildings including:

- Hangars and workshops;
- Lecture rooms, teachers rooms, instruction rooms, crew rooms and a library;
- Accommodation huts, messes and a meat house;

- Water tower, oil shed, pump sheds, petrol storage facilities and a boiler house;
- HQ offices, guard rooms, crew rooms, administration offices and flight offices;
- Observation towers;
- Latrines and laundries;
- Coppers Shop, blacksmith, boot makers shop and carpenters store;
- Bomb stores, armaments huts and stores;
- Recreation grounds, rugby pitch, sports oval, tennis area, car parks, gymnasium, and cinema;
- Parade Ground;
- Post office, dentist, canteen, bulk store a hairdresser; and
- Hospital and mortuary.

The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome contained an area of approximately 27,000 acres of land and the entire program of aerodrome construction cost of £558,385.10. It included:

- Aerodrome and camp area;
- Explosives Area;
- Marine Section;
- North Bombing Range; and
- South Bombing Range.

## **The Aerodrome during the War**

### **(No.1 BAGS & No.1 AOS)**

***“Pressure on the School was high, as it was imperative that the training syllabus should be effectively completed in time to provide air crew for the next phase of training.”***

[Sir Valston Hancock]

From 1941 the aerodrome operated as the No 1 Bombing and Gunnery School, and from 1943 it became the No 1 Air Observers School.

On 13 August 1940, an advance party arrived to prepare the aerodrome for trainees, the first 10 of whom arrived 26 August 1940. The first aircraft (Fairey Battles) arrived several weeks later on 7 September 1940. At its height, No 1 BAGS utilised 70 Fairey Battle aircraft with Wirraway and Anson aircraft arriving daily from Amberley RAAF base in Queensland for bombing practice.

The primary purpose of the Bombing and Gunnery School was to train Air Observers, Bomb Aimers and Air Gunners in the theory and practice of bombing and air-to-air gunnery. The time constraints of war resulted in each course lasting an intensive 4 weeks only, in which time the trainees needed to be completely schooled in bombing and air gunnery practices.

The actual training of airmen and crews consisted of the following:

- Wireless Operators / Air Gunners:
  - Firing at fixed ground targets from an aircraft (a series of square boards mounted on a frame 500 yards apart in a row);
  - Air to Air Gunnery firing from one aircraft at a long canvas sleeve being towed behind a second aircraft; and

Markers would collect the results of the number of bullet holes in the wooden target or canvass sleeve and phone these through to the base where the trainees would return to have their results analysed.

- Air Observers / Bomb Aimers:
  - Bombing land targets in bomb ranges; and
  - Bombing sea targets.

Markers plotted the fall of bombs from magnetic readings and visual observations taken from the bomb bursts. The two results would be phoned through to the Plotting Office, applied to a scaled chart of the range and analysed by the Armament Staff. The trainees would then return to the base and analyse these results and determine reasons for error.

In addition to the actual training of bombing and gunnery crew, a multitude of other duties were undertaken in order for No 1 BAGS to function, such as:

- Plane maintenance,
- Armament maintenance  
(comprising test butts facilities,  
which were facilities to check the  
operational condition of aircraft  
armaments),
- Plane fitting,
- Fuelling,
- Bomb maintenance,
- Stores control,
- Administration,
- Payroll,
- Housekeeping,
- Cooking,
- Grounds maintenance,
- Parachute packers,
- Fitters,
- Armourers,
- Clerks,
- Cinefilm operators,
- Smiths,
- Transport drivers;
- And many, many other  
occupations.

By 1942, No 1 BAGS had become a completely self-contained village.

*“Here was a gathering of people from all walks of life with no experience of military affairs, supported by a handful of regular Air Force personnel. They all responded magnificently.”*

[Sir Valston Hancock]



## Defending the Aerodrome

***“[We] became involved in the spotting program....We reported to the Base all passing aircraft, ships, and any other movements, and became quite proficient at recognizing the various aircraft.”***

[Margaret Jeskie – Wings at War p.76]

Following the entry of Japan into World War II on the 7 December 1941, the defence of Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was heightened. The aerodrome was protected with many different types of defence, including:

- 19 Light Anti-Aircraft (AA) machine gun emplacements, fitted with .303 Vickers guns;
- Slit trenches were constructed around key aerodrome buildings. It is not known which buildings, but it was likely to be buildings such as the Headquarters (Buildings # 2 and 3), War Intelligence War (# 198), Range Control Building (No 166), or the Armament Headquarters (No 122);
- Observation Posts at Goanna Headland, Snapper Rock (dug-out) and another site north of the aerodrome;
- Instigation of night sea patrols;
- Formation of RAAF No.52 (Reserve) Squadron with 12 of the base's Fairy Battles in December 1941. Each night, single Fairy Battles would fly anti-submarine patrols with two, fifty-pound bombs. No submarines were ever attacked but one false sighting occurred.
- Standard dispersal strategies were put in place so as to minimise the chances of aircraft, equipment and building loss if the base was attacked – that is, key buildings and aircraft were not located centrally, instead they were 'dispersed' so that if the aerodrome was bombed, it was less likely that all critical infrastructure would be lost. The dispersal methods at Evans Head included:
  - 12 dispersal 'hideouts' were built in the aerodrome's perimeter areas for storage of aircraft (these were gravel taxiways leading to hard surfaced areas for corralling aircraft); and
  - A dispersal Emergency Landing Ground was built at Coraki (approximately 17 kms north-west of Evans Head) to house half the base's aircraft, should the need arise.

*“The people on the North Coast of NSW took the Japanese threat very seriously and introduced blackout measures at towns along the coast.”*

[Sir Valston Hancock – Wings at War]

The aerodrome still contains one of the 19 machine gun pits; it is a rare surviving example of a light AA machine-gun pit built for the defence of aerodromes in Australia during World War II. It was recently restored in 2010 with grant funding provided by the NSW Heritage Branch and Richmond Valley Council.

The central pivot (which supported the machine gun) within the pit is the type used to support a Lewis gun (an anti-aircraft [AA] machine gun). The Lewis gun, invented in the early twentieth century, was produced from 1915 onwards and during World War I, was the prominent light AA and ground defence machine gun used by the Allies. In World War II it had become somewhat obsolete, replaced by the Bren and Bofors AA machine guns. However, due to economic considerations, the Lewis gun continued to be used by the Allies in World War II, employed mostly for AA defence, sited on trucks or trains and in static emplacements.

At some point during the 1940s, the Lewis guns were replaced and Vickers machine guns were utilized in the machine guns pits (Wings at War). The Vickers 'K' Gas Operated Machine Gun was used extensively by the RAAF during the war, and many of their fighter-bombers and bombers were fitted with the Vickers guns in single free mountings and some turret mounting guns. The use of the Vickers gun may be an indicator of heightened security after the 1941 fall of Singapore and a higher likelihood of Japanese attack.

*“We were all taught to use the Vickers machine guns which were part of the aerodrome’s defence. Guard duty naturally was always part of our rostered duties, both on the aerodrome’s perimeters, and when rostered we had to man the machine gun pits along the beach in event of an alert.”*

[Recollections of Lionel Smith – Wings at War]

## Notable People & Incidents

*"We who served at Evans Head...still hold a great deal of affection for our old station, and like to drop in wherever possible. I...can truly say it was the best place I was stationed at.*

*Good old Evans Head."* [Recollections of Vera Brown – Wings at War, p.155]

Throughout its history, Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome has had more than its fair share of notable incidents and a host of well-known people have been associated with the site.

Some of the more notable people associated with the aerodrome include:

- Wing Commander (later Air Marshal of the RAAF) Sir Valston Hancock;
- 'Chips' Rafferty (Australian actor) worked at the aerodrome as a camp cook; and
- Leonard Fuller (Flying hero with a DFC).

There were many incidents involving both trainee and experienced pilots. The reminiscences of the wartime occupants are beautifully told in the book *"Wings at War – RAAF at Evans Head 1939-1945."* The aerodrome plays a major role in the wartime memories for these people and their stories range from day-to-day living at the aerodrome, the pressures of teaching and training, and the loss of comrades in training incidents.

*"I remember...trekking from the Base through the scrub to Air Force Beach, of the laughter and singing on the buses when we went on leave, the sight of the boys and girls saying goodnight at the Wailing Wall – there were quite a few romances, some lasted, some didn't."*

[Recollections of Lillian Gill – Wings at War, p.157]

*"The live bombing range always caused trouble, as a percentage of the trainees would forget to arm their bombs and consequently they would not explode on impact. This meant that bomb disposal had to be carried out subsequently by an Armament Officer – not a very likeable job."* [Recollections of D'Arcy Neil Cromer – Wings at War, p.134]

There were also many prominent incidents, such as when five United States Army Air Force (USAAF) B-25 Mitchell bombers of the 38th Bombardment Group, en route across the Pacific, became lost. Four crashed on the North Coast and one landed safely at Evans Head. It was later damaged on the airfield when a truck crashed into it – a sure case of bad luck. Some incidents were far more tragic; in 1941 Gordon Wellington Rees (Aircraftsman Class 1) rescued three mates who were caught in a rip on Air Force Beach. Tragically, after the

rescue, he collapsed on the beach in exhaustion and died 6 weeks later of pneumonia, aged only 19.

There are also many famous incidents that occurred at the aerodrome:

- Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness, the Duke of Edinburgh, flew into Evans Head in 1952 as part of their Australian tour. The aerodrome at this time was said to look “*tip top*”;
- The brother of Nancy Bird Walton was rescued from a sinking ship off the coast of Evans Head;
- Q for Queenie, the first Lancaster heavy bomber to arrive in Australia, crashed on the runway at Evans Head on 5th October 1943. It had just started its 4th Liberty Loan Tour of Tasmania, Victoria and NSW when it crashed, which promptly ended the tour!;
- Community support and sentiment resulted in the aerodrome being listed on the NSW State Heritage Register in 2002, providing protection for the site’s heritage values.

## **Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF)**

***"I am sure we all did take pride in our work, being in on one of the Services, and it was a time I shall never forget."***

The formation of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) was hotly contested by some members of the War Cabinet, including C Thorby, the Minister for Defence, who stated that '*Aviation takes women out of their natural environment, the home and the training of the family*'. Nonetheless, the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) was established on the 4 February 1941.

Airwomen were accepted into 73 different musterings (trades), from telegraphists to highly skilled technical employment on aircraft. Some of their positions were:

- Telegraphists;
- Armament Workers;
- Electricians;
- Fitters;
- Flight Mechanics;
- Fabric Workers;
- Instrument Makers; And
- Meteorological Assistants,
- Clerical Roles;
- Clerks;
- Medical Roles;
- Drivers;
- Cooks;
- Signaller; and
- Radar Operators.

Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome had its first WAAAF personnel arrive in 1942 and, like all defence establishments, the buildings at No 1 BAGS were segregated according to rank and sex. Once built, the WAAAF living area at the aerodrome was segregated by a 6 foot fence and their working areas were separate from the men's working area. However after hours, the WAAAF and RAAF personnel did socialise together forming lifetime friendships, marriages and their experiences provide many amusing anecdotes. Just prior to their arrival at the aerodrome, the men were sternly warned to clean their language up, with posters being placed around the aerodrome reminding them of this.

*"My first impression of the Base was that I had come to the end of the earth. You see, I had never been out of the big city...suddenly I was on a train heading for a place I had never heard of."* [Recollections of Lillian Gill, Wings at War, p.150.]

*"[we were] an eager group of newcomers, ready to tackle anything. However, we weren't prepared for the 'welcome' we got from O/C Transport. He was a permanent Air Force man and although he conceded that some mustering such as Cooks and Messing could absorb women, he did NOT consider Transport Section was one of them. He couldn't do anything about it but it was clear that he resented our intrusion into his all male domain."* [Recollections of Jean Haughton-James, Wings at War, p.151.]

*"The men had been lectured on the behaviour expected when the girls arrived. 'DO not Swear' signs had been erected everywhere."* [Recollections of Shirley Haigh, Wings at War, p.21]

*"Yes, lots of WAAAF and RAAF courted and several married, some very happily."* [Recollections of Claire McIlveen (Walker), Wings at War, p.158.]

The WAAAFs played an integral role at aerodrome and, indeed, throughout Australia during the war when there was an acute shortage of men to fill vital roles. However, inequality was rife, with Airwomen paid only two-thirds of RAAF male pay for equivalent positions and female officers paid a good deal less than male officers of equal rank. Further, women were not allowed to remain in the WAAAF once they were married and although WAAAF personnel were allowed to muster into over 77% of positions within the RAAF, by the end of World War II they were not allowed to serve overseas despite requests for their deployment as high up the chain of command as General Douglas MacArthur.

The WAAAFs were officially disbanded in December 1947 so that they would not be occupying a place that could be filled by a man.

*"We worked damn hard and long hours. Am sure the Union today would throw up their hands in horror. But what wonderful days they were."* [Recollections of Rita Dean, Wings at War, p.154-155.]

## **Lifestyle, Recreation & Interaction with Evans Head Village**

***“Evans Head held so many happy memories for us it was undoubtedly the most enjoyable posting of our Air Force service, and resulted in friendships we have treasured all our lives.”*** [Recollections of Bill Morris Dyer – Wings at War, p.101.]

Although the base served a serious purpose with *‘constant pressure to meet unrelenting time table for our output of trainees’* the natural off-set of this was that the base staff and trainees sought well deserved relaxation and entertainment during their time off. Valston Hancock emphasises the *‘good relations which we enjoyed with the people of Evans Head’* and notes that joint entertainment was often held *‘we held social gatherings in our Messes to which the locals were invited...local members who had shown a close interest in our welfare were made honorary members of the Officers Mess or Sergeants Mess.’*

This relationship between the base and the town was reciprocal, with local villagers remembering *‘The airmen started coming to our dances and lots of them became part of our lives, some only briefly and others for quite a while.’*

The Base itself had recreation facilities for staff and trainees, such as:

- Post office & library;
- Hairdresser and canteen;
- Cinema & gymnasium;
- Various sports and playing fields (including tennis courts, cricket pitch and rugby oval);
- Various messes provided for social gatherings, such as the Officers’ Mess, Sergeants’ Mess etc;
- Establishment of Evans Head RAAF Band, Life Saving Club and sports teams.

The staff of the Base regularly interacted with the local community – staff were originally billeted with family in town whilst the base was being completed, joint sport activities were organised, social events such as dances occurred and many marriages occurred between base staff and locals.

The location of the base, by the River and beach, provided the perfect opportunity for picnic, swimming and fishing trips, and localised daylight saving was implemented to provide staff with recreation time after work.

The interaction between the village and Base is remembered fondly by locals, who still hold the aerodrome in high terms.

*“When the RAAF came it was good for the town. They used to come to Johnny’s Café for their meals at night. They held dances in the huts at the aerodrome once a week, and play records to dance to. They would pick us up and take us to the dance and drop is home after they had given us supper.”* [Recollections of Claire Feros (civilian) – Wings at War, p.99.]

*“Another activity we enjoyed and trained diligently for was playing in the Rugby League competition both as a RAAF team and sometimes as a fill in for local teams in the competition when they were short of players.”* [Recollections of Bill Morris Dyer – Wings at War, p.101.]

*“Our recreational facilities at the Base were good. The beach was the main attraction, and we had pictures most nights and, of course, there was the ever popular sand scratching, and naturally fishing for those who liked it.”* [Recollections of Claire McIlveen (Walker) – Wings at War p. 109.]



## Aircraft & Air Warfare

***“In the aircraft we have a weapon...of such vast capacity for development that it must be of primary consideration in framing all future schemes of defence.”***

***[Sir John Salmond, 1936]***

Aerial warfare developed in the early 1900s as a new form of combat. As a facility for the training of pilots, air gunners and bombers, Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome was directly affected by the development of aerial warfare and its consequences for twentieth century warfare. By the end of World War I in 1918, it was readily apparent that airpower was vital to the success of any military operation.

As World War II approached, the major industrialised nations began looking into various new designs for aircraft that were larger, faster and far more complex than before. In 1940, most aircraft were generally constructed of metal with engines of around 1000hp, retractable landing gear, fully enclosed cockpits with a myriad of controls and instruments – some of these aircraft were capable of speeds over 350mph. The larger heavy bombers then beginning trials were able to fly across much of Europe. By the end of World War II, super fast jet aircraft and long range bombers, which could fly thousands of miles were in service, each many times the size of earlier aircraft with a plethora of advanced systems, such as radar, that allowed the pilots of these aircraft to accomplish feats of airmanship which were unheard of just six years earlier.

Many aircraft were used for training at Evans Head or used the base as a stop over on their way to other destinations. Training aircraft included:

- Introductory flight trainers – Tiger Moths, Ryan Trainers, CAC Wackett trainers;
- Bomber training – Fairy Battles, Avro Ansons (flown down from Amberley on a daily basis for bombing practice).
- Gunnery Training – CAC Wirraways.

*“The Fairey Battle aircraft were foul smelling machines and standing in an open cockpit, strapped to the fuselage, firing the guns, was a frightening experience.”* [Recollection of Lindsay

Harris – Wings at War, p.84.]

*"I remember I went up in a Fairey Battle on a test flight one day. When we got out of sight of the Base and high enough, he did all sorts of aerobatics, and a Fairey Battle is not for aerobatics. A real no no. Incidentally I was not real well when I got back. [Recollections of Alan Reeves – Wings at War, p.56-57].*

Many aircraft also visited the site to make use of its training facilities, such as:

- Consolidated PBY Catalina Flying Boats;
- Avro Lancaster Heavy Bombers;
- Avro Lincoln Heavy Bombers;
- Supermarine Spitfires;
- North American P-51 Mustang (often as part of No.23 City of Brisbane Squadron);
- North American B-25 Mitchell Medium Bombers;
- Consolidated B-24 Liberator Heavy Bombers; and
- Douglas DC-4 Airliner/Transports.

*"When we were converted to flying two engines we found the old Anson easy, if gutless....We often had trainees that got airsick and they were supposed to report to the M/O [medical officer]. One kept turning up and refused to report in case he was scrubbed off course. [Recollections of Vernon Charles (Charlie) King – Wings at War, p.167].*

*"However we soon ran into real trouble...for the sandy soil was being sucked up into the air intake by the large triple bladed propeller rotating just clear of the ground. The wear and tear on cylinder walls were incredibly severe and the life of the engine was in some cases reduced to as little as twelve hours." [Recollections of Sir Valston Hancock – Challenge, p.68].*

## WWII Technology: Made to last the Duration

*“A frantic building effort followed where traditional design preferences and forms of construction were abandoned...They were unashamedly utilitarian buildings. Their design was driven by the need to use what was at hand to build in the defence of the nation.”*

*[Gregory Nolan]*

The scale of World War II created the urgent need for mass produced, easily transportable buildings, which could be erected with unskilled labour; prefabricated buildings were the perfect solution for this need. Prefabrication as a building method had been carried out for several hundred years prior to World War II, however, what was different about prefabrication during the war was the scale and methods of its production. Prefabrication in World War II utilised the methods of mass production-line construction which had been in use in America, implementing a system which could produce huge quantities of buildings in a relatively small amount of time.

The use of prefabrication was driven by the Allied Works Council (AWC), which formed 28 February 1942. The AWC essentially became the project and construction manager for national defence projects and created a number of building types which conformed to standardised national designs. The entire organisation was *‘geared for utmost speed and efficiency’* and by the wars end, the AWC had been producing the equivalent of 500 weatherboard cottages a week.

The AWC created a number of standardised designs for the production of:

- Huts;
- Warehouses;
- Stores;
- Hospitals; and
- Hangars.

These buildings were initially made from steel and timber; however wartime shortages necessitated the use of green timber, asbestos cement, corrugated iron and weatherboard.

These prefabricated buildings became a staple of war buildings as they were cheap, easily and quickly assembled and easily adapted into various configurations of size and shape. The hutted buildings at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome represent this well, as with only a few exceptions the buildings comprised standard prefabricated weatherboard and corrugated

fibro buildings with galvanised steel roofs, all of 20 feet wide prefabricated construction of varying length. Most of these prefabricated buildings also used corrugated asbestos roofing, asbestos interior walls and lead/zinc based oil paints.

The surviving Bellman Hangar at Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome (one of originally 17 which were on site) is a classic example of wartime prefabrication and advancing technology. Designed by Norman Stuart Bellman in 1936 in England, it was built in bulk with over 400 alone being used in Great Britain, mainly in reserve and training aerodromes. Many were built overseas as well for the Dominion Air Forces in their own build up for war, including approximately 332 constructed by the Australian Department of Defence. Bellman also noted that the purpose of the hangar was

*“to provide an improved structural arrangement adapted for rapid and easy erection and dismantling and also allowing variation of size to suit requirements.”* [Norman Stuart Bellman,

Patent Documents, 1936].

It took 12 men approximately 500-man hours to erect a Bellman Hangar, including levelling the ground, laying door tracks, erecting steel work and fitting canvas doors. Despite being regarded as a temporary and transportable hangar the Bellman consisted of 3,872 separate parts, clad with 1,040 corrugated iron sheets and all held together with 31,810 nuts, bolts and washers. The parts, nuts, bolts and washers weighed forty seven tons with the sheeting adding another eleven tons.

*“Had it not been for the Bellman Hangar, which was used in hundreds, we could never have met the extremely tight schedule demanded by this ambitious training scheme.”* [Recollection

of Sir Valston Hancock – Challenge, p.58].

## **Post War Use of the Aerodrome**

At the end of World War II, the Department of Defence reviewed and rationalised the immense amount of land it had accumulated during the War and subsequently disposed of all sites deemed surplus to post war operational requirements. Evans Head Aerodrome, after being used briefly as a Care and Maintenance Unit from 1945-1947, was disposed of and passed into the ownership of the Department of Civil Aviation.

During its disposal, many aircraft were burnt and salvaged for scrap metal and most of the aerodrome's buildings were dismantled, destroyed or transferred to other locations –by 1955, only three of the 17 Bellman Hangars remained, many accommodation huts had been transferred to Camp Koinonia in Evans Head, the aerodrome's hospital building had been relocated to Lismore and the Wireless hut relocated and used as Scout Hall, with only the runway system remaining intact.

The aerodrome provided a base for commercial flights, training and occasional visits from the mid-1950s through to the 1990s, with ownership passing to the Department of Transport in 1952-1992 followed by Richmond River County Council and then Richmond Valley Council. During this time it has been used for various aviation needs such as:

- Butler Airways as a commercial aerodrome (ceased in the early 1980s);
- Bus storage depot;
- Emergency Landing Ground;
- Staging base for supplies during floods and for refueling during bushfires;
- Southern Bombing Range still in use for RAAF practice; and
- Main aerodrome is maintained to support light private aviation.

The Evans Head Memorial Aerodrome is currently used for emergency services, memorial and anniversary events, by private aviators for light aircraft use and special events such as annual Great Eastern Fly-In (with associated marquees, film nights, air displays and walks). The aerodrome still maintains its powerful sense of place through the landmark qualities of the four intersecting runways.