

SECOND CITY AIR SERVICES

A collection of reports and anecdotes associated with one of the many aviation ventures founded by demobilised military men in the early post-war years.

Compiled by Geoff Goodall



These two photographs are representative of the early postwar era covered by this article, when many RAAF Ansons were purchased by optimistic civil buyers with hopes of starting new airlines. They show MG530 at RAAF Port Pirie SA in June 1947 being collected by Jack Gillies, a partner in Air Operations Pty Ltd at Essendon. In the cheerful spirit of the times, daubed on the nose are names and "Pirie - Melbourne". This Anson became VH-BES, sister to VH-BET flown occasionally by Second City Air Services. Photos by Jack Gillies courtesy Maurice Austin.

Second City Air Services was founded in 1946 by partners John (Jack) Graham Willis of Thorpdale Vic and Noel Clausen to operate Avro Ansons on scheduled passenger services between Melbourne and Victorian towns of Warragul, Traralgon, Sale and Bairnsdale in the Gippsland district. The company name is believed to refer to an airline service to "second level" centres in Victoria.

Jack Willis' nephew John Willis, OAM, former CFI of Latrobe Valley Aero Club, Morwell, commented in January 2009: "Their operation would have been a gutsy effort as there were no proper landing grounds at either Warragul or Traralgon, or even at Sale as the RAAF were very territorial about both East and West Sale dromes in that era. Further the only radio navigation aid in Gippsland at that time, other than the commercial radio broadcast stations at Warragul and Sale,

was the East Sale NDB. Finally they would have faced atrocious weather at Warragul and frequent fog at Traralgon, Sale and Bairnsdale. Still they were a different breed in those days."

Noel Clausen had been a Leading Aircraftsman in RAAF. He had enlisted 15th June 1943 and was demobilised on 29 April 1946 at the age of 22.

Jack Willis had joined the Australian Military Forces Militia in February 1939, then enlisted in RAAF in November 1943 as a Leading Aircraftsman. He was formally discharged on 22 May 1947 from the RAAF Laverton Transit Departure and Reception Section. His RAAF service included being based in the Darwin area during 1944 with 13 Squadron operating Lockheed Venturas on bombing raids against Japanese positions on Timor, Java and Sumatra. The squadron was short of aircrew due to operational losses, and Jack Willis volunteered to fly as supplementary crew on a number of these raids. There was no record kept of these flights and no recognition. However the experience forged his desire to learn to fly after the war.

First record of Jack Willis' postwar plans came on 9 October 1945 when LAC J. Willis of Group 46, Darwin wrote to Department of Civil Aviation head office in Melbourne: *"As I hope to purchase a Wackett Trainer aircraft in the near future I should be glad if you could give me information concerning the granting of a CofA etc and the quantity of fuel which would be available."* DCA responded that a fuel ration allowance would be granted sufficient for a disposals aircraft to be ferried from the location of purchase to the location where CofA overhaul would be carried out, and enclosed a Commonwealth Disposals Commission information sheet on aircraft purchases.

His plans were no doubt influenced by this large format advertisement placed by the newly formed Commonwealth Disposals Commission in the Saturday edition of newspapers around the country on 29 September 1945: *"Sale of aircraft: as from Monday 1st October 1945 comprising:*

- 117 Wackett Trainers
- 97 spare Warner Super Scarab engines
- 36 DH84A Dragons
- Prices for Wackett Trainers including a spare engine range from 300 pounds downwards according to condition of each aircraft and of engine.

DH.84A Dragons are offered from 750 pounds downwards according to condition. Survey sheets may be inspected and price lists obtained at every State office of the Commonwealth Disposals Commission."

Willis did not acquire a RAAF Wackett Trainer in this Commonwealth Disposals Commission (CDC) auction, but soon afterwards he was able to select one from aircraft acquired by traders. These were being offered for sale "as is" in faded RAAF paintwork after collection from storage at RAAF stations and ferried to Essendon. Jack selected Wackett A3-70, which was one of 4 Wacketts and 4 Avro Cadets purchased from CDC by Jack H. Alessio, proprietor of Fawkner Park Service Station, Punt Road, South Yarra. Alessio had paid £170 for A3-70, which was ferried from storage at RAAF Narrandera to Essendon on 23 December 1945 in loose formation with two other of Alessio's Wacketts A3-147 & A3-138. The flight time to Essendon was recorded in A3-70's log book as 4 hrs 15 mins.

On 29 January 1946, Jack Willis submitted to DCA an application for civil registration for A3-70 and it was added to the Civil Register as VH-APD as of that date. While the Wackett was having its civil overhaul, behind the scenes there were problems, which resulted in Willis writing a letter to DCA on 14 March 1946 *"As I am not continuing with the purchase of Wackett A3-70 from Mr. J. H Alessio, I request registration in my name be cancelled."* VH-APD's ownership was changed to Alessio, its Certificate of Airworthiness issued 29 March, and sold to another Melbourne owner in August that year.

Meanwhile Jack Willis' private flying training was conducted by Flight Lieutenant Des Kelly, previously a RAAF flying instructor, who went on to fly Spitfires in Britain and the new Gloster Meteor jets before returning to Melbourne. By April 1946 Kelly pronounced Jack ready for a check flight with a DCA pilot examiner. However there was a significant delay at that time due lack of qualified examiners combined with the numbers of "demobbed" military pilots keen to gain civil licences to continue flying.

Jack Willis finally got his own Wackett in August 1946. He purchased VH-AIG (formerly A3-42) from Patrick J. Norris, who was serving with No.37 Squadron at Essendon. The aircraft had completed its civil conversion two months earlier at Essendon with CofA issued 23 May 1946. Norris had intended to fly the Wackett to his home in Perth but changed his plans. Willis, still in the RAAF at Laverton, heard that the aircraft might be available for sale and a deal was quickly struck. Ownership changed on 8 August 1946 to J. G. Willis, Thorpdale Victoria. Jack kept the Wackett at the family farm at Thorpdale, Gippsland and also at Essendon.



VH-AIG on Jack Willis' family farm at Thorpdale, circa 1946. Photo: Geoff Goodall Collection.

Jack was still with RAAF, based at RAAF Laverton on ground duties with the Fire Crew and Duty Crew. There he befriended Harvey Else, who shared his love of flying and the hope that despite the postwar wind down, there just might be a flying career for them in the air force. Harvey Else, who went on to a long civil flying career, recalls those Laverton days:

"Nobody seemed to know what to do with me, so I was finally sent to the fire crew who were located in the front of a hangar on the tarmac. On the other side of the building were the duty crew. They serviced the Dakotas in transit to Japan for BCOF (British Commonwealth Forces of Occupation). Occasionally an aircraft would unload some Japanese officers who were charged with war crimes, and we would surround the Dakota with headlights blazing on them, while the service police bundled them off."

Then things got more interesting for me. An airman by the name of Jack Willis arrived on the scene. We soon became friends and both had a love for flying. Jack was a quiet, softly spoken, unpretentious man and he taught me a lot of the aspects of flying.

On Sunday 20 April 1947, Jack told me that he had his Wackett Trainer parked at Essendon Aerodrome and that we should go there and fly a few circuits. We hitched a ride to Melbourne on the Princes Highway which runs past the air force base, and then by tram to Essendon Airport. On arrival we walked around the perimeter to the light aircraft parking area which was adjacent to the reservoir. I thought the Wackett VH-AIG was one of the most beautiful aircraft I had seen, and Jack was extremely thorough in his preflight inspection.

We taxied out to the holding position and commenced a pre-takeoff check. I was seated in the rear cockpit. A Percival Gull was approaching to land towards the East, from our right. Suddenly there was a thump, and the aircraft undercarriage collapsed as the left wing hit the ground and the Gull skidded past us and swung around churning up a cloud of dust. The aircraft came to rest about 80 yards away, the door opened, and four people scrambled out and ran from the machine. Almost immediately several DCA vehicles appeared on the scene followed by the fire tender. (Footnote 1)

Jack asked me to keep my head down, he didn't want to be seen carrying a passenger by the DCA officials at the accident site, as he only held a Student Pilot Licence. We became airborne and flew over the western side of Melbourne and rejoined the circuit on downwind leg. After landing, Jack took a wider track around the DCA personnel, while I ducked down again, and we taxied to the parking area. We decided we would leave more flying to another weekend, when we would have less audience."



Harvey Else with Jack Willis' Wackett Trainer VH-AIG at Essendon on 20 April 1947. Photo: Harvey Else.

Three days later VH-AIG received minor damage on landing at Essendon. On 23 April 1947 a runway landing light was struck, causing minor damage to the plywood on underside of port wing and the port flap, which was quickly repaired. At this time, Jack Willis was anxious to help on his family's dairy farm near Thorpdale in Gippsland because his father was ill. He flew VH-AIG from Essendon to Thorpdale for the weekend, in contravention of his Student Pilot Licence restriction to remain within the circuit area. His planned flight back to Essendon at first light on the Monday morning was delayed due fog and bad weather, so he flew to Laverton where he landed just in time to attend the Morning Parade. Unfortunately his

no-radio arrival was reported by a visiting DCA inspector. In May 1947 he faced DCA charges in the Werribee Courthouse, wearing a uniform loaned by Harvey Else. Jack mounted his own defence against the DCA barrister. A sympathetic Magistrate fined him 6 shillings and suggested he get his full pilot licence as soon as possible.

Only days later, Jack Willis' application for discharge from the RAAF came through, effective 22 May 1947. Harvey Else recalls:

"Towards the end of May, sadly our friendship came to an end, Jack quietly collected his gear, and we walked out to the front gate, across the Melbourne to Geelong railway tracks, and out to Princes Highway. A man in a ute pulled up, "Going to Melbourne mate?". Jack slung his kit bag in the back. he turned to me and shook my hand and thanked me for being a friend and hoped we would meet up again one day.

The Ute driver said "You going home?"

"Yes" Jack replied, "It's all over, I'm going home".

We never met again."

Friends Jack Willis and Noel Clauson now went ahead with their plans to establish an airline service to Gippsland towns, which at that time had no air links. They registered the company **Second City Air Services** and began looking for capital to finance their business. Avro Ansons were considered the best type because RAAF disposals Ansons were available in large numbers and were being civilianised with 7 passenger seats. The company commenced operations with Wackett joyrides across Gippsland, while looking for suitable sites for landing grounds for Ansons.

A second Wackett was needed. Jack Alessio had an unsold Wackett A3-147 which had been stored since it had been ferried from RAAF Narrandera in December 1945. It was in rough condition and had been damaged in a forced landing during its ferry flight (Footnote 2). The partners acquired this Wackett during 1947 and the civil overhaul was given to Air Operations Pty Ltd at Essendon, a maintenance business kept busy at that time with overhauls of various military disposals aircraft. When the Wackett was completed in early December, Noel Clauson submitted the civil registration application form to DCA in the name of Second City Air Services, 66 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy, Victoria. It was registered VH-BAW and C of A issued on 12 December 1947.



Second City Air Services had also just acquired a former RAAF Avro Anson. The aircraft they selected was LT784, one of 13 purchased from CDC sales by William T. Dyer, Melbourne who had commenced carrying seafood from the Bass Strait islands and Tasmanian towns to the Melbourne fish markets. Bill Dwyer had purchased LT784 for £150 on 11 February 1947, located at RAAF Station West Sale Victoria. He did not collect it until 19 May 1947 when it was ferried to Essendon

and parked in the open with a large collection of other disposals Ansons, waiting for civil conversions.

The civil conversion overhaul for Anson LT784 was commenced by Air Operations Pty Ltd at Essendon, to their DCA approved airliner modifications replacing the military cabin glass house with stylised individual passenger windows with curtains. On 20 February 1948, Noel Clausen submitted application forms for civil registration and Certificate of Airworthiness to DCA, in the name of Second City Air Services, 3 Eversham Road, Cheltenham Vic, the address changing a few weeks later to 16 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy Vic. The Anson was fitted with 7 passenger seats and the application gave no hint of their intention of its use for an airline service, instead stating "based Essendon for charter flying"



Second City Air Services Avro Anson VH-BKT at Essendon 1949. It was overall silver doped with red engine cowlings. Photo: Geoff Goodall Collection.

DCA allocated registration VH-BKT and advised that Certifications of Registration and Airworthiness would be issued when the aircraft's overhaul was completed.

In the meantime, in early 1948 Noel Clauson recalls flying a borrowed Anson VH-BET in preparation for the Second City Air Services routes to Gippsland. VH-BET (ex RAAF LV128) had completed its civil conversion by Air Operations at Essendon in December 1947 for Melbourne aircraft sales partnership W. R. Murphy & C. R. Rudd. The partnership had purchased 6 Ansons from CDC for resale on the civil market and by May 1948 were hoping to sell two of their Ansons VH-BES & -BET to the Department of Civil Aviation which was known to have decided to use a fleet of Ansons for Departmental flying. These two Ansons had been fitted with smooth Oxford cowlings and due to lack of available hangarage at Essendon, were ferried to Nhill in western Victoria during May and June 1948 for under-cover storage in one of the five wartime RAAF Bellman hangars. (Footnotes 3, 4)

Jack Willis and Noel Clausen had submitted their application for an airline licence in the name of Second City Air Services to DCA Head Office in Melbourne. Theirs was one of numerous airline licence applications submitted in the postwar years by ex-service airmen using military disposals aircraft. DCA was justifiably concerned that many of these planned operations lacked the financial backing and operational structure to maintain a safe scheduled operation. The Department adopted a policy not to refuse individual applications, but instead continually to defer consideration pending a review of local airline services - in some cases for years - until the companies ceased to exist.

Noel Clausen, when asked recently, remembered it more bluntly: his recollection was that DCA Director-General, Air Marshall Richard Williams, refused to grant an intra-state

airline licence to Second City Air Services, which forced them out of business.

The disappointed partners promptly sold the Wackett VH-BAW in April 1948. Jack Willis retained his own Wackett VH-AIG which he kept on his farm until April 1949 when its CofA expired. It was stored until sold in November 1951.

The lack of an airline licence was no doubt the reason for a lengthy delay in completing the overhaul of their Anson and it was not until 10 December that year that the aircraft, in all over silver finish and painted with registration VH-BKT made its first test flight at Essendon, flown by Jack Gillies, a partner in Air Operations Pty Ltd. Another local test flight was made by Gillies on 28 January 1949, and a week later on 4 February his pilot log book intriguingly quotes "BKT local flight from Moorabbin", well before the new Moorabbin Airport was declared operational in December 1949. The Anson was not civil registered, so these flights, and possibly others by other pilots were under the approval for local test flying after maintenance.

Finally, 18 months after their application to register the Anson, VH-BKT was granted its Certification of Airworthiness on 11 October 1949. In the DCA internal paperwork recording the certification, a memo dated 17 October states "owner of BKT states his intention of disposing of the aircraft immediately, and will not pay Air Navigation Charges pending sale. Thus no issue of Certificate of Registration. Aircraft may be ferried to Moorabbin." A change of ownership dated 5 December 1949 transferred VH-BKT to Air Operations Pty Ltd, in part settlement of the outstanding account to that company.

By January 1950 VH-BKT was stored in Hangar 8 at the newly opened Moorabbin Airport. Jack Gillies made a test flight from Moorabbin on 30 April 1950 before it went back into storage in the hangar while Air Operations tried to find a buyer for the aircraft. In September that year they began negotiations for its sale to a newly formed partnership of two former RAAF wartime pilots, Z. A. "Terry" Brain and W. L. "Bill" Brown. There must have been a problem in finalising the ownership paperwork to sell the Anson, because on 5 October 1950 Noel Clausen on behalf of Second City Air Services wrote to The Manager, Air Operations Ltd: "Reference Anson VH-BKT: in settlement of your account we wish to transfer the above aircraft and will sign any transfer which you may desire."

On 6 November 1950 its ownership was changed to simply Brain and Brown, Moorabbin. The operation was renamed Brain and Brown Airfreighters and continued in air cargo for the next 30 years. Theirs was the first commercial operation from the new Moorabbin Airport, and Anson VH-BKT was their first aircraft, put to work carrying freight and seafood between Melbourne, King Island, Finders Island and Tasmania.

The name Second City Air Services was now long forgotten.

APPENDIX: Aircraft used by Second City Air Services and its partners:

CA-6 Wackett Trainer VH-APD (c/n 304 ex A3-70)

5.10.45 A3-70 sold by Commonwealth Disposal Commission at RAAF Narrandera to J. H. Alessio, South Yarra Vic for £170.

23.12.45 A3-70 departed Narrandera on ferry to Essendon, in company with A3-147 & A3-138.

29.1.46 Registered VH-APD J. G. Willis, Thorpdale Vic



Anson VH-BKT at Moorabbin in 1952, now in freight service with Brain and Brown Airfreighters. Photo: The Collection p6525-0779.

14.3.46 J. G. Willis advises DCA he is not continuing with the purchase of A3-70.

29.3.46 CofA issued: J. H. Alessio, Melbourne

1.8.46 Leslie S. Nicholls, Melbourne. Based at Tul lamarine airfield near Essendon.

18.12.46 Walter D. Barrett, Orange NSW

2.10.50 Destroyed by fire during engine start, Ood nadatta SA

CA-6 Wackett Trainer VH-AIG (c/n 276 ex A3-42)

26.10.45 A3-42 sold by CDC at RAAF Narrandera to P. J. Norris c/o No.37 Squadron for £250

20.11.45 A3-42 collected by Norris ex RAAF Care & Maintenance Unit Narrandera.

23.5.46 Registered VH-AIG: P. J. Norris, Perth WA

23.5.46 CofA issued at Essendon

8.8.46 J. G. Willis, Thorpdale Vic

8.4.49 CofA expired

6.8.51 Struck off Register in DCA Census of unair worthy aircraft .

12.11.51 W. McMullen, Melbourne

5.6.52 Restored to Register: Margaret J. Davis, Albury NSW.

11.9.52 John McInerney c/- Greenfields Air Taxis, Albury.

5.6.53 CofA renewed

30.8.54 DCA inspection report: mainplane ply deteriorated between spars due water.

29.7.55 Struck off Register as Withdrawn from Service.

55 Dismantled at Bankstown, all silver scheme. Acquired by Kingsford Smith Aviation Services who held a large collection of Wackett Trainers to provide spare parts, as well as planned future conversion to agricultural aircraft.

CA-6 Wackett Trainer VH-BAW (c/n 381 ex A3-147)

5.10.45 A3-147 sold by CDC at RAAF Narrandera to J. H. Alessio, South Yarra Vic for £250.

23.12.45 A3-147 departed Narrandera on ferry to Essendon, pilot R.V. Miles, in company with A3-70 & A3-138. Damaged in forced landing Echuca. Later repaired and flown to Essendon.

9.12.47 Registered VH-BAW: **Second City Air Services, Melbourne.**

12.12.47 CofA issued

10.4.48 William N. Johns, Sydney

11.12.49 Crashed Donnybrook, Victoria

Avro Anson VH-BET (ex RAAF LV128)

6.5.47 LV128 sold by CDC at RAAF Port Pirie to Messrs Murphy and Rudd, Melbourne for £150.

2.12.47 Registered VH-BET: W. R. Murphy and C. R. Rudd, Melbourne

47/48 **Loaned to Second City Air Services**

5.6.48 Destroyed by fire in hangar at Nhill Vic, along with Ansons VH-BES & BGO

Avro Anson VH-BKT (ex RAAF LT784)

11.2.47 LT784 sold by CDC at RAAF West Sale to William T. Dwyer, Melbourne for £150.

19.5.47 LT784 collected by purchaser ex Care & Maintenance Unit West Sale

20.2.48 Civil Registration application VH-BKT: **Second City Air Services, Melbourne** CofA overhaul by Air Operations Pty Ltd, Essendon.

10.12.48 Test flown after civil conversion. Not delivered, stored.

11.10.49 CofA issued.

5.12.49 Air Operations Pty Ltd, Essendon: stored in hangar Moorabbin pending sale

6.11.50 Brain & Brown, Moorabbin, later renamed Brain & Brown Airfreighters

30.11.50 CofA renewed at Moorabbin

20.2.53 Crashed on landing Moorabbin, pilot Bill Brown unhurt. Main spar broken and starboard engine and prop damaged. Written off.

A RAAF Anson on Jack Willis' farm

After the war, potentially airworthy retired RAAF Avro Ansons were sold to civil owners by the Commonwealth Disposals Commission. But many hundreds of Ansons and Airspeed Oxfords in weathered condition were left parked on RAAF airfields across Australia. These were handed over to the Department of Aircraft Production for disposal, and sales of "aircraft remnants" were held, with complete aircraft (less some cockpit instruments and engine magnetos) at very low prices, usually £5. These aircraft were popular with farmers who hacked off the outer wings and towed them home where they were stripped for metal sheeting, electrical wiring, screws, wheels and many other components that could be used on a rural property during postwar austerity. Records of the purchasers at these wide spread "aircraft remnants" sales have never been found, and all the aircraft involved are listed on their RAAF airframe record cards by a standard term "Disposed of by DAP".

Jack Willis had one or possibly two Avro Ansons on his farm at Thorpdale South in Gippsland during the 1950s. His nephew John Willis recalls as a schoolboy playing with sections from more than one Anson and a number of Cheetah engines. He used at least one of his Anson Cheetah engines in a potato crop frost mitigation experiment at a property near the Narracan Falls, Gippsland.

By 1951 the Department of Supply inherited aircraft disposal responsibility. A series of Dept of Supply files held by National Archives of Australia cover the Department's attempts to tidy up outstanding examples of incompleting sales, payments outstanding and aircraft not collected by their purchasers from the earlier postwar CDC and DAP sales. From this source we learn that in 1952 the Department of Supply wrote to J. G. Willis instructing him to immediately arrange to collect two aircraft engines which were left at East Sale and not collected. A memo notes *"Anson MG125 with engines was sold to J. G. Willis, Fitzroy Vic at the aircraft remnants sale held at RAAF East Sale on 13 December 1947"*

Avro Anson MG125

11.10.43	Brought on RAAF charge at No.2 Aircraft Park, Bankstown after shipment from RAF
23.12.43	Received AGS, West Sale
6.8.45	AGS Stored Reserve: stored West Sale.
3.12.46	Received Station HQ East Sale ex Care & Maintenance Unit West Sale
26.10.47	Passed to DAP for disposal
13.12.47	Sold by DAP at East Sale to J. G. Willis, Thorpdale Vic
25.3.48	Struck off RAAF charge as "disposal by DAP".

Later in the 1950s when flying as an instructor with Latrobe Valley Aero Club, nephew John Willis retrieved Anson parts from Uncle Jack's farm - two Armstrong Siddeley Cheetah engines and two propellers. Both propellers now adorn the Aero Club veranda at Latrobe Valley Airport, Morwell. One Cheetah was sectioned as a training aid by club instructor Bob Foreman, later going to 26 Flight Air Training Corps to complete their sectioned Gipsy Major. It is now displayed in the Armed Forces Museum at West Sale aerodrome. John recalls that the second Cheetah engine spent some time as a garden ornament before being given to a group in Adelaide who planned to restore it.

A Moth Minor Postscript

Jack Willis owned one more aeroplane. On 15 August 1952 he purchased a DH.94 Moth Minor VH-AGL from Frank Shaw of Yinnar, Victoria and kept it on his farm at Thorpdale. Four months later in December 1952 Willis sold the aircraft to Kenneth Wylie of Melbourne.

Footnotes:

1. The Percival Gull that crashed at Essendon that day was Vega Gull VH-UVG owned by Melbourne aircraft dealer Fred Edwards who operated as Edwards Aero Service at Essendon. This Vega Gull had been impressed from a Queensland pastoralist in 1940 for the RAAF as A32-1, used on communications duties. It was included in the third Commonwealth Disposals Commission listing of aircraft available, bids closing on 21 December 1945. Edwards was the successful bidder and in January 1946 collected the aircraft, which was in damaged condition, from No.1 Central Recovery Depot at Werribee Vic. After an extensive rebuild at Essendon, its CofA was renewed on 11 April 1947. Only nine days later on 20 April 1947, VH-UVG was taken for a local flight by Edwards'

partner Mr. A. O. Kiellerup, with three passengers. Landing back at Essendon, the port wing dropped and struck the ground, causing the aircraft to swing violently, tearing off the port undercarriage. Despite extensive damage, nobody on board was hurt, and the wreck was moved to the Schutt Aircraft Sales and Service hangar where it was rebuilt, and was flying again later that year.



Percival Gull VH-UVG.

2. The Wackett Trainer A3-147 had in fact been in the same group of Wacketts delivered to Essendon from Narrandera as Jack Willis' first choice VH-APD. A3-70, -138 and -147 departed RAAF Station Narrandera on 23 December 1945 as a group ferry flight, all purchased by J. H. Alessio.

A3-147 was flown by volunteer Bob Miles who was a serving RAAF officer based at RAAF Bairnsdale. Approaching Echuca the propeller constant speed governor failed, causing the prop to wander between full fine and full coarse. He was forced to divert to land at the small prewar aerodrome at Echuca, close to the town. Only one approach was possible because of the propeller problem and the flaps were unserviceable. The aircraft tipped on to its nose during heavy braking to avoid the airfield fence, resulting in a bent propeller, damaged cowling and wingtip. A3-147 was repaired at Echuca using propeller and cowling from another Wackett owned by Alessio which had been left at Narrandera.

3. DCA did operate Avro Ansons, but in the interests of standardisation asked the Department of Air to nominate five Ansons in best condition available from RAAF disposal stocks, then invited tenders from civil companies to overhaul all five to the same civil specifications. The tender was won by Victorian & Interstate Airways at Essendon, where they become VH-CAB, CAC, CAD, CAK, CAL.



DCA Avro Anson VH-CAL.. Photo: CAHS.

4. Avro Ansons VH-BES and VH-BET had almost no time in storage at Nhill. They were destroyed in a disastrous hangar fire on 5 June 1948, which also claimed Adastra Aerial Surveys Anson VH-BGO.

Both were owned by Murphy & Rudd, one had been ferried to Nhill during May 1948, the other left Essendon on 1 June for Nhill but was forced back due to bad weather near Ballarat. A top fuselage hatch was blown off and a passenger clung to the fabric to prevent it tearing open. After repairs it was fer-

ried to Nhill on the morning of 5 June and landed uneventfully at 1pm and was pushed into a hangar with the other Murphy & Rudd Anson and Adastra's VH-BGO. The Adastra Anson was one of several Adastra aircraft engaged on a Victorian State Government photographic survey of western Victoria, flown by Adastra Captains Joe Linfoot, Tom Carpenter and John Howard.

It is believed an electrical short circuit in the recently arrived Anson started the fire. Linfoot had closed and locked the hangar doors and had driven away from the aerodrome in a car when smoke was seen and he immediately returned to unlock a side door of the hangar to find BES & BET well ablaze and his Anson BGO had started to burn. While trying to save valuable survey cameras and maps and specialist gear in the aircraft he was caught by a blast from exploding photographic film and hurled back through the hangar door. Exploding fuel tanks hampered efforts by the local fire brigade, and the hangar structure and the three Ansons were destroyed.

Adastra pilot Tom Carpenter adds to the story:

"On 5th June 1948, we were based at Nhill in Victoria, but as the weather was not suitable for aerial survey work, Johnny Howard and I decided to go to Hamilton in John's Tiger Moth VH-AVV for a football match and stay the night. Mid afternoon, the police located us at the football ground with the news that our survey aircraft had been totally destroyed by fire in the hangar at Nhill. We immediately headed back to Nhill and into a strong north wind late in the afternoon, but found that our ground speed was down to about 55 miles per hour. Soon it got dark, but that did not worry us, because Nhill aerodrome being on the Adelaide-Melbourne air route had a revolving beacon.

Eventually the light was seen but not where we expected it - we were about 30 miles off course. At last we were in the circuit area and saw the flare path that had been laid for us - but again things went wrong. Those days only big aerodromes had electric flare path lights, smaller aerodromes had tins filled with rags soaked in petrol and oil.

This night the wind was so strong that the flares kept blowing out. John Howard flew the return flight and said he dropped the aircraft from about 10 feet above the ground on landing, but I don't remember it happening. I was too busy watching the flares blowing out and the two men who caught our wing tips as we hit the ground.

Briefly the story was that another Avro Anson which had been converted into a passenger carrying aircraft had been parked in our hangar and joined by its sister aircraft shortly after John Howard and I had left for Hamilton.

Joe Linfoot's story was that he was still on the aerodrome and removed our aircraft to allow the new arrival to park in the back of our hangar for storage. Our aircraft was returned to the hangar and the doors locked. The owner and pilot were about to be driven to town in our car when the owner said he had left something in his aircraft and requested the keys to the hangar. Joe said that he and his two passengers had just arrived in town when he saw a cloud of smoke out towards the aerodrome. After depositing his passengers at the hotel he drove back to the airport to see smoke pouring from our hangar. Despite the heat he was able to open a small side door to see both stored aircraft ablaze and the nose area of our aircraft just starting to burn."

Joe Linfoot received minor injuries in the fire but continued with Adastra Aerial Surveys. He was killed on 24 June 1957 as captain of Adastra Lockheed Hudson VH-AGO which crashed at Horn Island during an emergency landing with port propeller feathered.

SOURCES:

- Original research by Jack Willis' nephew, John Willis who was CFI of Latrobe Valley Aero Club at Morwell, Vic for many years and is still active on the Latrobe Valley aviation scene.
- Australian Civil Aircraft register, Department of Civil Aviation and its successors.
- DCA files for the civil aircraft above, MP113 Accession, National Archives of Australia
- Department of Supply files, RAAF aircraft disposals, National Archives of Australia.
- Air Historical Branch, Department of Defence, Canberra: RAAF Status Cards
- Trove, newspaper archives, National Library of Australia
- *Planes destroyed in 20,000 pound fire*, The Age newspaper 7 June 1948
- *Three planes destroyed in Nhill Fire*, The Horsham Times newspaper 8 June 1948
- Adastra Aerial Surveys website, webmaster Ron Cuskelly: <http://www.adastra.adastron.com>
- *My short interval with Jack Willis* by Harvey Else: an account of his recollections of Jack Willis when they were both in RAAF, written at the request of John Willis
- * Jack Gillies' pilot log book, courtesy Maurice Austin, Airways Museum, Essendon



VH-AGO, the Adastra Hudson that crashed on Horn Island on 27 June 1957.