



The Old Fliers' Group

Attached to the Royal Aero Club of WA (Inc).

Coordinator: Stephen Rogers – Email: henol@bigpond.net.au

Bulletin No 126 August 2015

NEXT MEETING

Friday August 28th

July Meeting Report

SHOT DOWN

About ninety members attended the July meeting to hear our *Speaker of the Day*, Alex Kerr. He took us back to 1940 when he joined the 16th Cameron Highlanders in Western Australia and later transferred to the RAAF. He was assigned to No1 EFTS at Cunderdin. Then it was off to Canada for further pilot training, and on to the UK, where after more training was assigned to Wellington bombers in No. 115 Squadron at Marham, Norfolk.

In May 1941 while on a mission over northern Germany his Wellington aircraft was hit by a BF 110 twin-engine night fighter near the Danish border. Alex was badly wounded and in a semi-conscious state when a fellow crew member pushed him out of the doomed aircraft, saying, "Alex, remember to pull the ripcord".



The Wellington Bomber.

Lucky to survive the descent, he was taken to a hospital at Schleswig where his recovery was took six months. When his health improved he was transferred to Stalag 111E, about 90 kilometres south of Berlin. The camp contained 185 POWs. Before long he was recruited to a group that began to dig an escape tunnel.

On a silent night in mid-1942 Alex was number 11 in a group of 58 who escaped via the tunnel. He had ten days of freedom before being recaptured.

He made two more escapes, the last of which was from the infamous 'Long March'. Later, he managed to secure a car for easy transport and to use as a trade for a quick flight back to England after VE Day.



The type of car used in the last escape.

Alex's recently published book *Shot Down* was available – it attracted good sales.

Mini-speaker

The *Mini-Speaker* for July was your editor who, continuing the theme of early incidents at Jandakot, related the story of a Club instructor and student who had a scare when it appeared that their Cessna 150 was on fire after take-off. With smoke and an acrid smell in the cockpit they carried out a forced landing on a firebreak on the perimeter of the aerodrome.

Their problem was caused by an error in maintenance when a degreasing fluid was accidentally sprayed into the cabin heater system.

Unfortunately, during the landing roll on the firebreak, the nose wheel dug into the soft sand and the aircraft overturned at low speed. The pair were unhurt, but it took well over half an hour for help to arrive.

It resulted in the instructor making the now-famous comment, "If you crash at Jandakot the ants will get to you before the fire truck."

Next Meeting

The next OFG meeting on Friday August 28th will feature Andy Anderson who will talk about his time as a Short Sunderland pilot engaged in German U-boat patrols and convoy escorts in the Bay of Biscay and in the Atlantic Ocean.

The usual parking arrangements will apply between 10.30 and 2.30 on the day of the meeting; so hope to see you at the Royal Aero Club just before noon for lunch.

Brian Hernan