

PRESS RELEASE

NEW WARBIRD ENTERS AUSTRALIAN SKIES TO HONOUR VIETNAM VETERANS

A new entry on the Australian register is former USAF Forward Air Controller (FAC) aircraft, a Cessna M337B Skymaster which was designated the O-2A in military service. The aircraft will be used as a working memorial to all ANZAC and American Vietnam veterans in general and to the Royal Australian Air Force pilots in particular who flew as FACs with the USAF, some in this type of aircraft.

The owner, former Australian Army Chinook and Black Hawk pilot and Official Army War Artist, Conway Bown (note: BOWN, not Brown) says that the aircraft will serve two key purposes:

“The M337B, or as it was usually called, ‘the Oh Two’ will be used to commemorate the service of Vietnam Veterans in Australia, New Zealand and the US as a flying memorial: educating young people, inspiring fledgling pilots and Air Force cadets and warming the hearts of aviation enthusiasts at air shows and so on. Secondly, it will be used in the charter and airwork roles, especially in support to the emergency services where the spirit of the FAC will be re-born by providing air support to natural disasters,” he said. *“My company’s role is to serve and commemorate those who serve or who have served the nation... and this is a practical means of doing so to complement my other activities.”*

“The O-2 was flown by Forward Air Controllers who would fly at extremely low level and coordinate air and artillery and support to troops doing battle with the enemy. This required extremely high situational awareness, flying skills and bravery and it is this remarkable skill set that I especially want to commemorate.”

With a serial number of M337 0420, it carried the USAF tail number of 69-7622 and served with the 21st Tactical Air Support Squadron of the USAF which operated in Nha Trang, Cam Ranh Bay and Tan Son Nhut air bases in South Vietnam. Taken off USAF charge in the 80s, it was restored in Oklahoma City and purchased by its new Australian owner who has also fitted it out with a Garmin glass cockpit, it is now IFR charter capable.

“Outside it’s 1970 except for a couple of extra antennae... but inside it is 21st century!” says Bown. *“Garmin glass cockpit with synthetic vision technology, an S-TEC autopilot coupled to a GNS430W GPS and an ADS-B transponder replace most of the instruments in front of the pilot but military cluster gauges have been retained on the right hand side for their higher accuracy. A cargo pod and five passenger seats will also be fitted when it’s not doing memorial-related flying... she will be a real pleasure to fly.”*

When the aircraft is not supporting the emergency services, it will be based in Townsville where it will conduct general charter and military historical flights.

“Townsville and the surrounding area has a rich military history going back to when Captain Cook sailed past Magnetic Island on his tour of discovery of Australia’s east coast, to the forts at Kissing Point and the numerous USAAF and RAAF airfields in the area from WW2. Townsville was also a key base supporting our efforts in Vietnam. The flights will encompass this historical aspect and be done in a genuine veteran of the Vietnam conflict,” said Bown. **END OF PRESS RELEASE**

For more information including high resolution images for use by printed media, visit www.ipas.com.au (navigate to ‘Aviation Services’ page). Conway Bown’s contact details available at that website.

For more background and quotes, see pages 2 and 3 below.

FURTHER INFORMATION

HISTORY OF THE 337 IN THE USAF

The Cessna 337 was designed in the 1960s as a businessman's aircraft that would alleviate the problem of asymmetric performance of standard twin-engined aircraft during engine failure. The centre-line thrust made handling this emergency easier for the average pilot.

The typical Cessna high-wing design and the unique placement of the engines, one in front and one behind the passenger compartment, gives the 337 remarkable visibility which caught the attention of the USAF.

During the Vietnam War, the USAF was awaiting the delivery of a purpose-built Forward Air Control aircraft in the OV-10 Bronco, but the new aircraft's delivery date was delayed by the manufacturer, North American. In an effort to find an interim aircraft, the USAF approached Cessna and asked to trial the 337 which was subsequently accepted onto the USAF inventory as the O-2A. Its two engines and high wing design coupled with its manoeuvrability made it highly suitable in the FAC role. The military version of the Cessna 337, the M337, was made even more suitable for FAC operations with strengthened wing spars, extra windows above the pilot and on the right hand side of the aircraft, bubble window for the pilot (later versions), tactical radio fitout and four weapons pylons. The weapons pylons were often fitted with 7.62mm miniguns and 2.75in white phosphorous smoke marking rockets. The latter was used by the FAC to mark points in the jungle, the smoke being used as a reference for fast moving fighter bombers who would deliver ordinance to support the ground troops.

BACKGROUND TO CONWAY BOWN AND IPAS

Independent Productions and Aviation Services is the business of ex-Australian Army pilot Conway Bown. A 20 year veteran of the Australian Army Aviation Corps, Conway Bown flew Black Hawks and Chinook helicopters, and served tours of duty in East Timor and the Middle East.

A well known military artist, he was chosen by the Chief of Army to be the first Australian Army War Artist since the Korean War and returned to the Middle East to record Australian Army activities during the war in Iraq.

"My main aim in life now that I have left the Army, is to honour those who serve the country... be it in military uniform or in the emergency services," says Bown. "I create artwork to honour this service for the Army and also for private commission and the acquisition of a warbird is another means of commemorating the service of Australian military personnel."

AIRCRAFT MARKINGS – Serial Number, Pilot Name, Aircraft Name and Registration

The aircraft's USAF **serial number** is 97622 indicating that the USAF signed the contract (no 7622) on the aircraft in 1969. The Cessna serial number is 337M0420. Conway Bown requested a variant on the serial number and so 80420 adorns the tail. The common practice of Australian pilots, sometimes to the frustration of maintenance personnel, was to paint a red kangaroo on the engine coaming of their aircraft. The red kangaroo is the central marking of the RAAF roundel and is sometimes referred to as the 'Red Rat'. Thus the name of the aircraft – to commemorate RAAF aircrew serving with the USAF.

The **pilot's rank and name** was usually applied to the engine coaming. Sergeant Paul McGinness joined the Australian Army in 1914 at the outbreak of World War One and was a member of the 8th Australian Light Horse Regiment who fought at Gallipoli where he charged the Turks at the Battle of the Nek, the final scene of Peter Weir's film 'Gallipoli'. After the withdrawal from the peninsula, he served with General Chauvel's Desert Column through Sinai and Palestine where he was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for leading a long distance assault against the enemy. He later transferred to the Australian Flying Corps where

he and his Observer, Lieutenant Wilmot Hudson Fysh, were credited with several kills and he was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. After the war, Captain McGinness saw the need for an aerial service to serve outback Australia and so he and his wartime observer, Fysh, founded the Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Service – QANTAS. McGinness was a modest man who lived a daring life. He later found the stringent rules that the QANTAS board was placing on its pilots to be too restrictive and – being an adventurous soul – left the airline five years after its founding. When World War Two erupted, he rejoined the service – this time with the RAAF as a Flight Lieutenant.

“McGinness is a personal hero of mine,” says Bown. “He was a remarkable man but no-one knows who he is. Everyone knows of Kingsford-Smith, but McGinness arguably did as much for Australia and Australian aviation as Kingsford-Smith. By allocating McGinness as the ‘pilot’ of ‘Red Rat’, this is my way of honouring him,” he said. “He’s sort of ‘the spiritual pilot’ of the aircraft,” joked Bown.

The ‘VH’ registration is OTU, pronounced ‘OH-TOO’ which was the pronunciation of the aircraft as ‘O-2’. There are two other O-2s (M337s) in Australia: VH-OTO (also OH TOO) and VH-OII (OH and Roman Numerals for Two).

IMAGES

For hi res images, go to www.ipas.com.au and navigate to ‘Aviation Services’ and click on the thumbnails.

The images below show VH-OTU displaying its replica rocket pods used for ground display only. It also shows the glass cockpit fitout and the aircraft in the container.



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