



# NZ Warbirds Association Visitor Centre now open

**Contributed by Frank Parker**

*As well as being a regular warbirds correspondent for KiwiFlyer and a pilot of all things rotary and fixed wing, Frank Parker is Vice President of the NZ Warbirds Association. This month, Frank profiles the development of the new Warbirds Library and Visitor Centre at Ardmore Airport.*

On November 8th, the Executive of the NZ Warbirds Association invited members to their opening of the newly completed 'Visitors Centre' at the Association's Hangar at Ardmore Airfield.

This was the culmination of many months of work by a small group of members and press-ganged associates to develop previous empty office spaces of the hangar mezzanine area. This project had been mooted for some time and with a change in Executive its time had come

**Raison d'être**

Established in 1978 as an incorporated society, NZ Warbirds Association raison d'être is to maintain and fly historic vintage and ex-military aircraft. The Executive wished to create a Visitors Centre to compliment the operational activities. There were many reasons for this, among them;

- By the nature of our operations, we attract some considerable public interest. This ranges from casual visitors on most weekends, 'just taking a look', organised parties from the local area, and overseas groups wishing to view the aircraft.

- The Association wished to raise its public profile and be in a position to accept visitor groups to view what is a unique collection of aircraft, unparalleled outside of static museum environs in the Australasian region. We needed more than just the 'hangar' to make this attractive.

an appropriate environment

- There was a desire to provide an educational facility for groups of school children (and others) that regularly visit the Association's hangar facility.

- There was a wish to help make Ardmore Airport a Destination with an attraction worth making a detour from the southern motorway.

The first task in this project was to empty the mezzanine area of 15 years of accumulated 'Treasures'. Once accomplished a design concept was turned into a build project followed by a paint project and finally furnish and display projects.

**With thanks to**

Many volunteer hours from many individuals went into this project over a period of 12 months. I should list the many, however, special mention must go to Micky Neal and Tony Millar for their numerous weeks of voluntary toil. I also wish to acknowledge Rosanne Wood for her efforts in turning a pile of books into a catalogued library, a task of 12 months or more dedication, Allan Coubray for his assistance

in the construction of the 'walkway' and Chris Snelson for his landscaping expertise. Thanks also to the business supporters for financial assistance to sustain this project.

**The achievements**

And so, what has been achieved. Firstly a presentable entrance and mini shop with bathroom facilities; A small classroom or briefing area and approximately 100 meters

- Over the years of the Associations activity, we have been donated many books, memorabilia and aircraft models from both well-wishers and members estates. Some of these books are historical technical volumes, autographed copies and other unique editions. The models are world-class examples of important military and civil aircraft of the 'Warbird' era. The Association had a 'Duty' to present these in



The new visitors centre, with sponsors signage (including KiwiFlyer). Two viewing balconies and a mezzanine library also containing memorabilia and aircraft models, as well as a visitor lounge area complete a very attractive environment.



A hangar view from the mezzanine floor: Spitfire, Mustang, Trojan, Harvards, Beaver, Birddog, Chipmunk and more.

of library display; and Two elevated viewing areas of the aircraft hangar and a display area of aircraft models and dioramas.

Worthy of mention are the aircraft

on display. Firstly there are regularly six Harvard's in the hangar. I am not aware of any other facility anywhere where there are six of these historic aircraft in one place. There is the ever popular P-51 Mustang with its stable mate (both North American Aviation aircraft) T-28 Trojan which was the US Military Harvard replacement. Other significant aircraft in the hangar include the DeHavilland - Canada (DHC) Beaver in Antarctic livery, DH Chipmunk in RAF livery, Cessna Birddog in Vietnam guise and NZAESL built Airtourer and Airtrainer prototype.

It is important to note that these are

airworthy aircraft, flown on a regular basis, not static museum exhibits.

Under development is a display of aircraft engines including a RR Ghost core (DH Vampire), RR Dart turbo-prop (Friendship, Viscount etc), Alvis Leonardes, and DH Gypsy Queen (DH Heron and Devon).

This is of course a project under development. We have achieved phase one, a presentable 'Front Door' to the aircraft hangar. Plans for the future include further hangar refurbishment, continued development of the display areas, audio visual presentations and inter-active displays to enhance

the overall package.

All this of course requires a team of volunteers to 'man (or indeed woman) the boats'. If you are in the Auckland area,



The new library in the NZ Warbirds Visitor Centre is dedicated to Association Founder President Trevor "TT" Bland, pictured with Kathy Bland.



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