

NEWS

Jock's back in the cockpit

BY KERRI-ANN HELLIER

WORLD War II veteran Jock Cassels was given the rare opportunity to relive distant memories on Sunday.

It was the first time in 66 years the former fighter pilot had seen the aircraft he had spent 1500 hours flying as an RAF instructor.

"To see the aircraft I spent a lot of my flying career on - now there's a bit of nostalgia," he said.

Sitting in the pilot seat of the North American T6 Texan "Miss Fire" at Camden airport, left the 93-year-old reminiscing.

"It took me back," he said. Then he reflected, nodded and repeated in a softer voice, "it took me back... that's all I can say".

Although Mr Cassels flew the British derivative of the T6, known as the "Harvard", he said "Miss Fire" was very similar to what he remembered only "shinier".

"Everything was where it should be," he said. "Just the radio was more modern."

Mr Cassels was with about 35 veterans from the Camden RSL Sub-Branch.



66 YEARS ON: Veteran Jock Cassels back in the cockpit six and a half decades later. Photos: Sean Maguire.

Also part of the group was Garry Robinson - a former sniper who barely survived the crash of a Black Hawk in Afghanistan in June 2010. It claimed the lives of four comrades and left him in

hospital for two years. He was calm in the presence of the aircraft because of extensive therapy but he couldn't help reflecting on his days in the Army. "It was very emotional for



Pilot David Currie tells Camden Sub-Branch members about the history of the North American T6 Texan.



Camden Sub-Branch member Garry Robinson with Norm Longfield and David Currie, operators of Southern Warbird Adventures.

me to see the veterans sitting in the cockpit reliving memories," he said. "It makes me think about work a lot too. Makes me want to be back at work around that military environment with the mate-

ship and comradery." Camden RSL Sub-Branch president Iain Richard-Evan was delighted members had a chance to "step back in time". "The day was what I

wanted...an outing for our members and to see something interesting," he said. "To have the opportunity to see these famous planes up-close is magical.

"At the end of the day, we made one man - Mr Cassels - very happy but we've also opened the eyes of other sub-branch members with a closer look at the aircraft."

The T6 was famous for training fighter pilots of the United States Army Air Forces and other air forces of the British Commonwealth during the Second World War.

"Miss Fire" is the flagship of Southern Warbird Adventures and was restored in 1999.

Pilots David Currie and Norm Longfield established Southern Warbird Adventures to give the public an opportunity to experience flight from a bygone era in a genuine wartime airplane.

Mr Currie said another aim of the organisation was to commemorate and honour the people who have served the nation.

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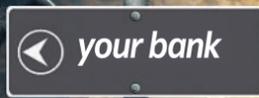
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