

War tragedy memorial at Museum

A display set up in Queensland and brought to Victoria for the purpose, was installed at the Foster Museum last Friday as a memorial to five people killed in a plane crash in the Strzelecki Ranges during World War 11.

The display was put together by Kevin Silcock, whose brother Geoff, a wireless operator, was one of those killed when the plane crashed at Mt. Lonely on August 23, 1943.

Another man who became very interested in this and many other plane crashes in Victoria during the war years, particularly involving Beaufort bomber planes, John Keane, has done a lot of research into the Mt. Lonely tragedy, obtaining the names and duties of the four RAAF personnel on board.

However, the identity or purpose of a fifth occupant of the plane remains a mystery today.

Mr. Keane, who plans to write a book from his research, told The Mirror that on August 23, 1943, five planes took off from East Sale on a dead reckoning exercise over Bass Strait. The exercise was completed, and the other four planes landed back at Sale.

The twin engined Beaufort A9 311 which crashed, radioed in from near Yarram reporting its position. By this time a cloud cover had descended over Sale, and the crew was redirected to land at the RAAF base at Bairnsdale.

About 20 minutes later the couple operating the post office at Christies, heard a plane fly over at about midnight, and expressed concern that it sounded very low. The next morning there was a heavy fog, which made a search difficult from both the ground and air. It was at 11 a.m. after the fog had lifted, that the wreckage was spotted from the air, and a foot

party was directed in to the scene.

The plane was found in heavy timber growth, and Mr. Keane said it appeared to have dived in, and the branches closed behind it.

The scene was off the top end of Devils Pinch Road, which at that time of the year was very slippery, and access was difficult. The rescue party had difficulty in bringing the bodies of the five victims to where they could be loaded into motor transport.

However, the difficult access did not prevent the Foster lads of that time from finding their way into the scene, and souveniring pieces from the wreckage.

When he was about 16 Claude Trenery found a propeller blade from the wreckage, which he dragged out onto the

Devils Pinch track, placed it onto the handlebars of his cycle and, with great difficulty, brought it home with him.

Claude had the propeller until he donated it to the Foster museum.

Kevin Silcock, who designed the display and transported it from Queensland, had contacted relatives of the other RAAF personnel on the ill-fated flight, and their photos are included in the display. However, the propeller forms the centrepiece.

The RAAF members killed were McQueen the pilot, Godfrey the navigator, Boys the air gunner, and Silcock the wireless operator. By the way, the Silcock family is no relation to the early pioneers of Toora after whom Silcocks Hill Road is named.

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MEMORIAL AT MUSEUM



• Kevin Silcock, who made the display (left), and researcher John Keane (right), pictured at the Foster Museum last Friday. See story page 3.