

By ROSS
BRUNDRETT

ME folks in the La-
Valley town of Moe
George Toye an
ntic.

t because he turned his
rty, smack in the middle
vn, into a sort of jungle...
has his very own bomber
hidden in the backyard.
just any old bomber, but
ctically priceless US-
B-24 Liberator, the last
kind in Australia.

actly how much it is worth
ossible to say.
s, like valuing a Van
i," said one aviation ex-
How much one is worth
nds on how much some-
is prepared to pay.
could bring \$1 million or
000, you can't give an
rate estimate.

d George reckons it's all a
fa giggle. He scratches his
ar-old chin, shows off his
remaining teeth and says:
lot of fellas are after it,
no one wants to give me
money for it!"

at the bomber is definitely
sale, along with the two
es that George built, his
cars (all collectors' items)
the thousands of plants,
s, ferns and the like that
alf the one acre (.4 ha)
erty.

George is selling up, wants to
e on. How long has he been
oo bloody long," he says.
riously.

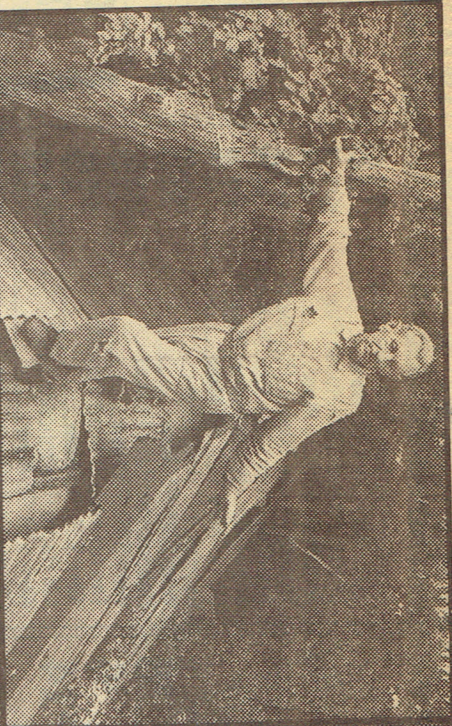
Oh, 50 years, I reckon."
nd where is he heading?
lither up there (pointing to
heavens) or down below,
tell me."
eriously.

"m going to Buggery?"

told ya, I'm going to
rger. Mt Buggery — it's
far from here."

George doesn't expect a
ck sale of his place.

It's been on the market for
years and so far we've only
one offer."



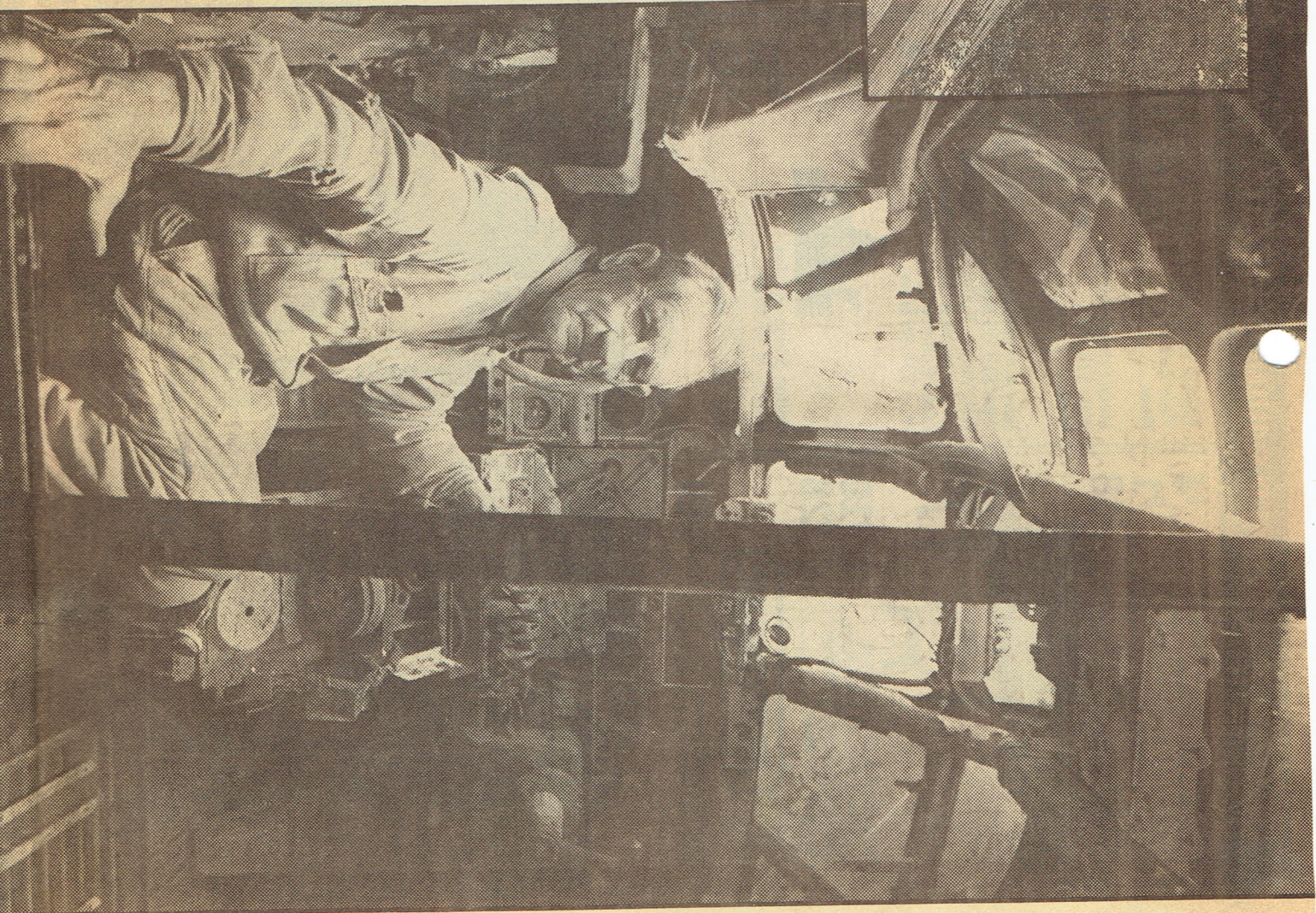
The only access to the bomber hangar at George's place is a hole in the tin roof.

What

pricee

one

man's



Leigh Dodd, of Jolly Real Estate (who are now listing the property), is that George won't let anyone inside his houses, not even the agents.

"That makes things a bit difficult, but it is a prime piece of real estate," he said.

A hard case, supposedly, is George. Locals warned us he'd already told other reporters to leave, or words to that effect.

But we must have caught him on a good day. Gave us a guided tour of the place, he did, although we didn't make it inside the houses.

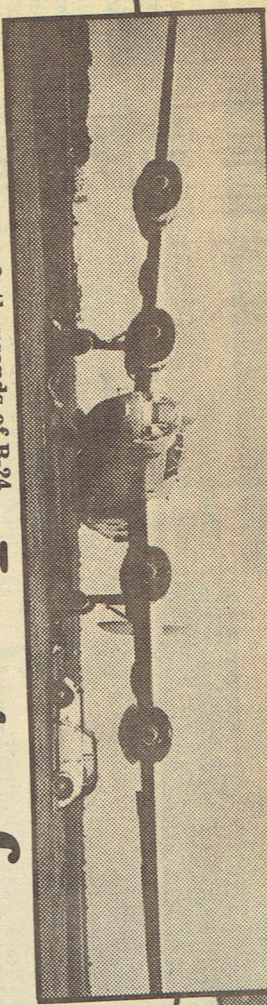
He led us around the maze of trails, ducking branches and vines most of the way until we finally came to a rundown shed made of galvanised iron.

"She's under there," been there for 40 years," he says. Up the ladder he climbs, hauling himself to the rooftop by a rope attached to a gum tree.

"You have to be like Tarzan to get to it," he apologises, before disappearing down a black hole.

One second you're standing on a tin roof, surrounded by terrain that looks like some-

Lib?



DURING World War 2, thousands of B-24 Liberator bombers rolled off the production lines in Detroit, the second largest production run of an American bomber.

Together with the B-17 Flying Fortress, they were the most common and successful of bombers used in the South Pacific region.

But after the war they virtually disappeared. Most were wrecked for scrap or dismantled for parts.

Last of thousands

which is arguably a better plane, can sell for maybe \$250,000. It's a matter of supply and

George Toye in the cockpit of his prize possession which, LEFT, he saved from the wrecker's axe at the RAAF's East Sale airfield 40 years ago.

Pictures: LES O'ROURKE



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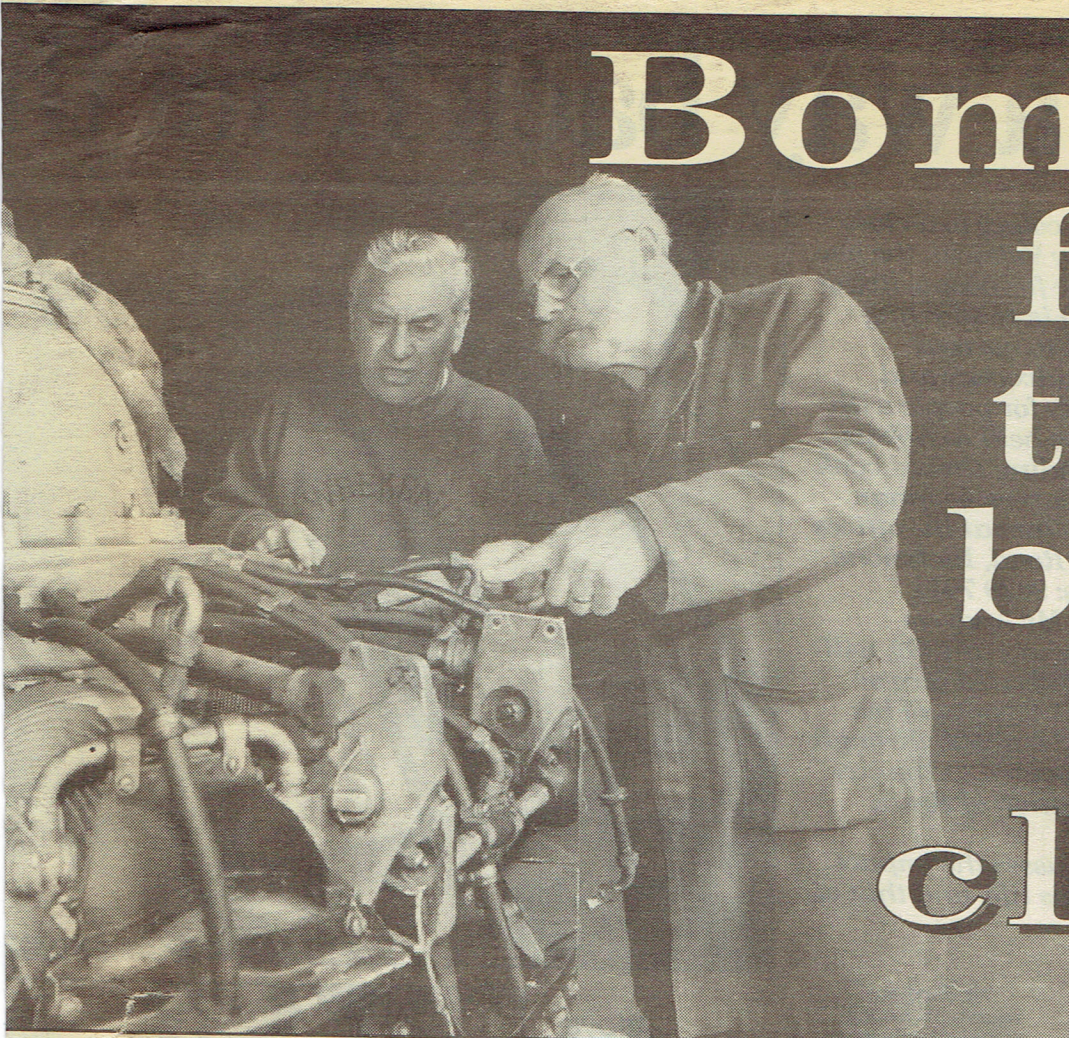
to buy the fuse-
 sent owner, Mr.
 Lee.
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 er a tarpaulin
 arty.
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 id over seven
 special flights
 l training unit
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Bomber fans turn back the clock

Nat Eichler (left) and Gordon Griffiths begin repairing the 1830 horse power Twin Row Wasp engine of the B-24 Liberator. Photo: JOSEPH MASTROIANNI.

By DAVID ADAMSON

A GROUP of local aircraft enthusiasts are hoping to turn back the clock and give Werribee a glimpse of its aviation history when they finish restoring one of only five B-24 Liberator bombers left in the world.

For the past 18 months, members of the B-24 Liberator Memorial Fund Incorporated have been scouring the world in search of parts and they have finally succeeded in obtaining all the important components.

The only job left now is to repair all of the parts and then rebuild the bomber for use as a historical display. That task is expected to take the group until the turn of the century to complete if all goes according to plan.

The last time a B-24 was seen in Werribee was during World War II when land adjacent to the Melbourne Parks and Waterways Treatment Complex on the corner of Farms and Old Geelong Roads, Werribee, was used as an active airfield.

Liberator bombers once flew in and out of the area around the clock on a daily basis, flying missions that were significant to Australia's defence when the Japanese army gathered in Java, threatening to invade.

Work on the \$1 million restoration project began in January 1994 when Melbourne Parks and Waterways allowed free use of hangers at the site. The next 12 months were spent building scaffolding and jigs that will support the plane, and the group has been gathering and repairing parts since January this year.

Werribee resident and member of the

to taxi down a runway, it will remain a static display and will not be restored to flight condition.

"There are only two of these planes that are capable of flight in world, and it would have been far too expensive to restore this one to flight capabilities," Ms Fryer said. "We are restoring the plane using only old pictures and technical manuals and the work includes repairing parts that have bullet holes in them from the war."

Ms Fryer said the group had just acquired all the major components for the plane, including the fuselage which was found on a property in Moe. She said people from across Australia had contacted the group to donate parts they had found lying around their homes.

"It is truly amazing what people have stored away in their backyards," Ms Fryer said. "We received the engine case for the plane from a person who was using it as a kennel for their dog. The dog wasn't happy about us taking his home, but it was a very important find."

The B-24 Liberator Memorial Fund Incorporated will be holding a celebration of the end of World War II on Saturday 30 September at the the Number Two Hanger, Corner Farm Road and Old Geelong Road, Werribee.

The celebration will include a tour of the restoration, period films and photographs, military vehicle displays and music and dancing of the 1940's. The celebration will start at 11am is open to the public and admission is by donation.

There will also be a dinner/dance later in the evening for which admission



Air Commodore Kingwell, left, and Bob Butler in the cockpit of the B-24 Liberator

11.4.90

AUSTRALIAN

IT was a reunion with a difference.

At the recent gathering of the 32 Hudson Squadron at the Royal Australian Air Force's East Sale base, Air Commodore Deryck Kingwell (retired) caught-up with an old friend he had not seen for 44 years.

The Air Commodore's "friend" was the last remaining B-24 Liberator bomber left in Australia.

He also used the bomber as his personal aircraft when he commanded both the Tocumwal and East Sale air force bases in 1946-1947.

Air Commodore Kingwell travelled from his home in Kenmore, Queensland, to Moe in Victoria for the reunion.

Both Air Commodore Kingwell and a fellow Liberator pilot and friend, Mr Bob Butler, are head-

ing a campaign to buy the fuselage from its present owner, Mr George Toye, of Moe.

He is also seeking the wings of the Liberator, which are believed to be in Alaska, to complete a restoration project.

Once this is done the plane will be put on display at an aviation museum.

The Liberator, known as Kingwell's Kite, has spent most of its post-war life under a tarpaulin on Mr Toye's property.

The RAAF used 290 B-24 Liberators during World War II.

They were spread over seven squadrons, two special flights and an operational training unit at Tocumwal in NSW.

The 32 Hudson Squadron is conducting a nationwide appeal to restore the plane.