

Mercy Flight to Disaster.

By Peter Finlay

On the evening of Good Friday, 8th April 1955, the Commanding Officer of RAAF 10 Squadron (Marine Reconnaissance), Wing Commander John (Bluey) Peter Costello MID received a telephone call from the superintendent of Townsville Hospital requesting that a RAAF aircraft be made available to transport a new-born baby to Brisbane for an urgent blood transfusion.

The standby aircraft was GAF Lincoln GR 31, A73-64, one of the last of the long-nosed versions to be delivered to the RAAF. Wing Commander Costello roused his crew from their homes and they gathered at RAAF Garbutt base to carry out their duties. WCDR Costello declined a plea from the duty pilot (now AVM (retired) Alan Read) who was present before take off for him to lead the flight instead of WCDR Costello.

As crew to the commanding officer, each person was a senior officer in charge of his particular field of operation.

The co-pilot was Squadron Leader Charles Surtees Mason MBE, the unit's Engineering Officer. He was an experienced Lincoln co-pilot and had served with the RAAF in Malaya and had been decorated for bravery in rescuing members of the crew of a crashed aircraft.

Number Ten Squadron's signals officer was Flight Lieutenant William George Stanley Cater who was to operate the aircraft's radio equipment on the flight.

My father, Squadron Leader John (Jack) Watson Finlay was the Navigation

officer of 10 Squadron. He had recently been promoted to the rank of Squadron Leader after completing an advanced navigation course with high graduation marks in England during 1953/4. His task was to file the flight plan and navigate A73-64 to Brisbane, a flight expected to take about 4 hours.

He had spent the evening working at home on plans for a forthcoming RAAF exercise and was about to retire for the night when the call came to report for duty.

RAAF superior officers required the crew to take along a civilian nurse or Doctor to tend the baby, Andrea Robyn Huxley. Sister Mafalda Stanis Gray had resigned her position at Townsville hospital on the Friday and took the opportunity to travel south to Brisbane while caring for the critically ill child.

The aircraft took off normally at 12.30am and the flight proceeded at relatively low altitude in order to accommodate the requirements of warmth and comfort for the baby. An oxygen bottle was strapped to the aircraft in front of the pilot's position in order to provide her with her needs in the nose of the Lincoln.

The weather was fine at the beginning of the flight but conditions deteriorated until late in the trip, at about 4 am, the Lincoln was flying in cloud. Brisbane air traffic control last heard from the pilot at 4.00 am when he advised that he was landing in 10 minutes. He was given clearance to descend to 5,000 and thence to 4,000 feet.

At 9.23 am, a searching RAAF Canberra reported sighting wreckage of a Lincoln in the vicinity of Mount Superbus in south eastern Queensland, almost on the border of NSW. At 9.35

the Canberra confirmed that the Lincoln was at position 28 0 12'S 152 0 23E on the western slope of the mountain, the highest point in the whole SE Queensland area.

Some 5 hours later a ground party of civilians from Emu Vale near Warwick reached the crash site and found that there were no survivors.

One of the crew had been ejected from the crashing aircraft either during the initial impact or by the force of the subsequent explosions. His body was found suspended in a tree.

Another crew member was found forward of the main wreckage, brutally disfigured but virtually untouched by the fires which followed the collision with the solid granite of Mount Superbus.

All other occupants were almost completely incinerated when the fuel tanks containing several hours' flight capacity blew up some 12 minutes after impact.

The Merlin-engined aircraft was heavily damaged with the complete section of the fuselage forward of the wings reduced to a molten mass of aluminium. Only the throttle quadrant stood erect with all power levers fully forward, suggesting that the pilot had seen the slope ahead through the cloud and rain. In a vain attempt to lift his aircraft over the last remaining 200 feet of ground, the pilot prevented the nose from concertinering into the slope and the Lincoln "splurged" through the trees, still with enough force at about 180 Knots to rip it apart

I was 12 years old at the time of the crash. I lived with our family of my

brother Warwick, sister Margaret, mother Mildred and, of course, my father. Our house was in the RAAF officer's "married patch" and I was chums with Brian Costello who was about my age. We were planning an Easter trip north to Ingham before Dad's departure.

I remember a Catholic priest walking up to the front gate on Easter Saturday. This was pretty unusual as our family was of the Church of England faith and I suppose I sensed alarm. Mother burst into tears when she was told that Dad's aircraft was missing. We were sent of to "the pictures" in Townsville later in the day. I remembered well for many years that we saw "The Creature from the Black Lagoon".

On our return home we learned the news that the Lincoln had been found and that there were no survivors of the crash.

Stunned and lonely, I had to console my brother and sister while Mother flew to Brisbane for the funeral. I wandered over to the RAAF base and spent long hours talking with a pilot working on a Tiger Moth. He let me sit in the front cockpit while he swung the prop; I'll never forget the thrill as the Gypsy Major burst into life.

Similarly, I go all misty-eyed when I hear the sound of a Merlin engine in flight as I was brought up to the sound of them powering Lincolns, Mosquitoes and Mustangs from the various RAAF bases at which my father served. It wasn't until 1976 that I yielded to a childhood desire to learn to fly for myself. I had to be content with the mundane Cessnas, Pipers and even a few hours at the controls of Beech Barons and Piper Aerostars rather than

in military aircraft, but at least, I was airborne.

The Lincoln lay on the slopes of Mount Superbus for many years after the crash. I did not even know where Mount Superbus was other than being generally in the Warwick area. A road trip to Brisbane in 1985 carried me past the general area and started me thinking that I'd like to try to walk to the wreck. I had no knowledge of how much of the Lincoln remained, if it were possible to get to it, how long would it take to find? Did I have enough bushwalking experience to tackle such an adventure?

Little by little pieces of information came to light. Dad's sister, Winifred, gave me a cutting from the front page of the Brisbane Sunday Mail of 10th April 1955. This featured the crash and a picture which showed the Lincoln remains on Mount Superbus with Wilson's Peak and Mount Lindesay in the background.

I read the account of how bushwalkers in the area at Easter in 1955 had heard the sound of the aircraft flying low and the subsequent impact in the early hours of the Saturday morning and how they and others had braved flooded creeks to reach the crash site in the vain hope of helping survivors.

The first route attempted along Emu Creek proved to have too many flooded sections for even a 4-wheel drive vehicle to negotiate so another attack was launched from the southern side using Killarney Vale as a stepping off point.

Although there were logging tracks to the Superbus region, the area was heavily timbered and it was very difficult for the searchers to know where the Lincoln lay. A second RAAF

Lincoln, one of two which joined in the search for -64, circled the crashed aircraft to aid the walkers and at 2.24 pm the crew saw the first rescuers reach the crash site after scrambling up muddy, 60° slopes. The ground party found that none of the crew or passengers had survived the crash. Later, a RAAF party of men reached the scene and on the following day, they carried the remains of the occupants down the mountain and on to Brisbane and Townsville for burial.

As part of my research into the fatal flight, I was able to obtain a copy of the proceedings of the RAAF Court of Enquiry into the crash of A73-64. This document became available under the Archives Act of 1983 which allows freedom of access to hitherto confidential information after a certain period of time has elapsed (30 years I believe). It is not my intention in this story to try to analyse the report, however there three main points are relevant. The aircraft had several unserviceabilities relating to compass swings and the non-availability of radar. The track of the flight was considerably west of that planned and that the crew let down through cloud without a descent aid. How or why these things happened to a crew of the calibre of those on board has baffled RAAF personnel. Perhaps the single greatest contributing factor was the effect that fatigue has on human performance, especially when we remember that this flight was begun just after midnight after a normal day's routine work. That aircraft crashed a little after 4 am, the darkest hour before dawn when human biological systems are at their least effective levels.

Early in 1988, I had reason to travel to Brisbane on business and arranged to spend a weekend with my brother's

family. I brought some 1:100,000 scale maps of the Mount Superbus region and by some clever transposition from the photograph published in the Brisbane Sunday Mail mentioned earlier, I was able to draw a line on the map joining the tops of Mount Lindesay, Wilson's Peak and Mount Superbus to give us some idea of the position of the wreck.

Meanwhile, my brother, Warwick, had gone one better with the purchase of a 1:25,000 scale map which actually had the exact position of the Lincoln marked. (My estimations were correct to within 100 metres or so).

I visited a Brisbane bushwalking shop on the Saturday morning before the expedition and brought a copy of a detailed book on walks in SE Queensland. In it I found precise directions to find the Lincoln wreck site from the township of Emu Vale

The very helpful proprietor of the shop also told me that an article has appeared recently in the Courier Mail telling of a walk to the Lincoln. I drove eagerly to the offices of the newspaper and eventually purchased a copy published on 24th December 1987 (my birthday). Tearing at the pages of the paper with barely-controlled excitement, I found only a story on a walk to a much later light-aircraft accident on Mount Glorious. An interesting tale but, sadly, not much help in our quest.

On the Sunday morning, Warwick and I, his youngest of three sons, Paul, and one of his 10 year old mates piled into Warwick's 4-wheel drive Nissan Patrol and set off along the Cunningham Highway from Brisbane towards Emu Vale. A little local navigation took us off the main road after 2 hours or so and we moved into the undulating

countryside with the ominous mountains approaching.

Although this trip was seen as a reconnaissance for a later, better equipped trip, we were filled with a great sense of adventure as we drove along the country roads towards our goal. The Nissan took us past Emu Vale and through several creek crossings with ease before we could drive no further. The old logging road had been rendered unusable by the forestry people to prevent excessive erosion by natural and man-made forces.

We ate lunch, dressed with light, water-repellent clothing and set off up the slopes. Where we left the car there was a sign indicating that the walk to the Lincoln wreck would take 4 hours to return. It seemed just a little strange that while we knew so little of the way to the Lincoln all these years, the local bushwalkers had such a large sign to guide them.

The climb up the former road was not too difficult even for two 40-45 year olds. The kids scrambled up the hill easily and I know that my energy came from the burning desire to find the aircraft. After about 45 minutes, the track became almost level and it was as easy as walking along a made road.

We crossed a fresh mountain stream guarded by two freshwater "Yabbies" then strode along, unable to navigate accurately because of the dense sub-tropical rain forest canopy. I was leading the party when ahead I saw the unmistakable shape of a V12 Rolls-Royce Merlin aero engine. I stopped to wait for Warwick and the boys for I wanted to take a photograph of the expression on their faces when they first saw the engine.

Stunned.

We walked forward to view this first piece of the Lincoln we had last seen 33 years previously.

The engine had been stripped of all removable items including cylinder heads and sump. Only some of the pistons and con-rods remained attached to the crankshaft.

The front of the V12 showed that the gearbox bolts were still in place even though the crankshaft was bent downwards about 10°.

It was possible to see that two webs of the crankshaft were almost touching. There were no gouge marks to indicate that the supercharged Rolls-Royce Merlin 102, turning at some 3,000 RPM and developing 1,750 BHP rotated at all after the impact with the solid granite of Mount Superbus.

Where then did all that energy go? I can only surmise that the inertia wrenched the 790Kg engine, gearbox and 13 foot, 4 bladed propeller from their mountings and sent them spinning away from the nacelle.

It would appear that this engine has been moved to its present position by people trying to carry it away for a souvenir, for it is nearly a kilometre from the site of the remainder of the wreckage.

I did not know at the time that the aircraft lay some 750 metres horizontally and 200 metres vertically from where we stood. We tried to climb straight up the slope above the engine but found the hill too steep and the undergrowth too dense for the small boys to penetrate.

The walk to the Lincoln would have to wait for another day. Erroneously, we decided to walk further along the track but only succeeded in descending towards Killarney Vale. At least the exercise showed us the type of country the searchers had traversed so long ago.

We retraced our path back to the Merlin, took some photographs in the dim light of the jungle and returned to the Nissan after a 5 hour trek. We were elated at having come so close to finding the Lincoln and determined to plan another trip right to the wreck.

Just before we reached the car, we met two chaps on their way to the crash site. One of them told us that he had been to the site previously with a RAAF serviceman and confirmed that the way to the wreck was via a creek near the engine. Warwick and I discussed the plan of attack on the drive home to Brisbane and decided that we would need to move soon to avoid a trip in winter with its attendant shorter days and the risk of colder weather.

The Easter school holidays provided the ideal opportunity for the second climb and we made plans to travel with my family to stay with Warwick then.

Warwick had obtained further information through friends in the RAAF about the crash of A73-64. One item was a cutting from Airforce News of 1977, which detailed the retrieval of part of the tail-plane of the Lincoln by an RAAF Iroquois helicopter. We had known about this exercise for some time and both of us had made enquiries to several RAAF bases as to the whereabouts of the section.

Personnel at the RAAF Museum at Point Cook had emphatically denied any knowledge of such parts, saying that

they held only some skin panels and a propeller blade from that particular aircraft. Yet the article said that the parts were retrieved in order that they might be preserved in the Point Cook Museum. Even a trip there in 1986 failed to shed any light on the "missing" parts.

Subsequently, the curator of the museum wrote me a letter advising that the tail plane was held in storage for the museum at the Dubbo (NSW) base. At least that part of the mystery was solved. I have since seen and photographed the parts held there.

To be better equipped for the return climb to Mount Superbus I brought a pair of sturdy hiking boots with deep treads to help traction on the muddy climbs. A pair of overalls was chosen to ward off the stinging nettles plagued us on the first trip and I packed a bottle of "Stingose" to relieve the irritation of any which succeeded in penetrating our clothing.

Warwick, who is a professional TV sound technician, obtained a Video 8 camera to record our climb on tape and also selected his own style of protective clothing. Easter 1988 arrived and we duly drove to Brisbane and were soon swapping Lincoln information which we had both gathered since the first trip.

I had been sent a descriptive manual on GAF Lincolns by Alan Charnley of ASTA and this was to prove invaluable later as a source of identification of parts of the crashed aircraft.

We boarded the Nissan at 5 am on Easter Saturday and set off to retrace our drive to Emu Vale. This time Warwick and I were accompanied by his two elder sons, Scott and Gavin, as well as my eldest son, Simon. The boys were aged between 14 and 16, the

younger children and wives stayed behind as there was not enough room in the car and the walk was considered too hard for them.

There had been a lot of rain during the days prior to the trip and we expected to have problems with crossing the many creeks along Emu Creek Road. In fact, the weather was very similar to that which prevailed 33 years ago on the same day. At the first creek crossing we stopped to check the depth of water. Scott was "volunteered" to walk the creek, so we tied a rope around his waist and he waded into the steadily flowing waters. The level came to the edge of his shorts and he continued across safely.

Warwick prepared the Nissan by covering the radiator intake with a mat, tying a cord around the viscous coupling of the fan and covered the electrics with a plastic bag. He edged his way across the creek and the Nissan responded beautifully. This procedure was repeated several more times much to the delight of the small boys on board (all 5 of them!). Much of the road was quite muddy and Warwick's skilful handling of the 4-wheel drive had mud flinging from the front wheels. More whoops of glee from the excited crew. The final ascent to the "Lincoln Wreck Walk" sign was quite steep and we growled along in low range.

After packing our equipment for the second time in 3 months at this site, we "leach-proofed" ourselves with wide cloth tape by strapping our trousers into our boots. Warwick shot off a few metres of video while I said a few words describing the scene.

My new boots helped immeasurably on the muddy climb. I was able to walk straight up most of the embankments

while the others still had a few problems gaining traction. When we reached the creek crossing on the mountain where we had been accosted by the "Yabbies" (they were still there), we paused to film our efforts at crossing the very flooded creek. The water was really flowing and we had to "rock-hop" our way across. The boy's sharp eyes spotted something we had missed on the previous excursion – the 50 mm thick steel, bullet-proof plate from the pilot's seat of the Lincoln. It must have been carried this far by souvenir hunters.

Further along the track at the Merlin engine, now lying in a torrent of water, we paused again to record some more video before setting off straight up the hill to the east. The climb was difficult on the route we chose. The incline was about 60°, the vegetation fairly thick and tangled and the ground was quite slippery. Several times we stopped to gain our bearings and to catch our breath.

At one stage I felt a little light-headed and almost overbalanced. I am reasonably fit but the combination of zero horizon due to cloud, the steep slope, fogged spectacles and 4,000 foot altitude combined to disorient me somewhat for a while. I noticed that the young lads also stopped several times to draw breath so I didn't feel too perturbed.

Eventually, after about an hour's climb, the jungle cleared as the slope changed for level ground. Again we paused to try to orientate ourselves. The compass needle showed that North was behind us from the direction we had started and I had some trouble rotating my mind.

We walked straight ahead for a short time until Warwick echoed all our sentiments that we might become lost

and still not find our goal. We retraced our steps to a known position and decided to carry out a search 90° either side of our former path. Warwick stayed in the centre while I walked left. Scott, Gavin and Simon walked to the right. We kept within hailing distance and I found little other than some bushwalker's trail marks and the odd blaze on a tree.

As I began my return to Warwick's position I could hear him hailing the boys. "Something's up." I thought. "Yes." He called, "They've found a campsite and some bits of aluminium cowling. They've found a track.. like Pitt Street." I joined Warwick to walk to a point where we rounded a corner in the track and came face to face with the gaping front end of the broken fuselage of the Lincoln.

I followed the boys to the remains of the aircraft while Warwick shot off some photographic atmospherics of the bush scene. My friends have since asked me if the trip to the Lincoln was very emotional for me. I felt almost nothing when coming face to face with the aircraft I had last seen intact at Townsville's Garbutt RAAF Base so long ago.

Dad used to take us for visits to the field on open days and we had climbed into various Lincolns. They used to be parked near to the officer's Mess like almost silent sentinels in readiness. Vast monsters to a 12 year old, serving the nation as watchdogs in their maritime search and rescue role. I said almost silent for, even as they sat waiting patiently, their systems were kept at a slow heart-beat by auxiliary motors which pressurised their pneumatic accumulators.

Now A73-64 sat shattered and lifeless, still foreign amongst the entwining vines of the rainforest. We wandered around. The boys were excited, Warwick told Simon, who was slipping and sliding all over the place, that the aircraft wasn't going to go away now having been here for 33 years. The fuselage is reasonably intact from the flapjack rearwards. It still retains its cross sectional shape and is unburned. Yet a mattress, lying at the forward open end has pieces of molten aluminium moulded around its exposed wires. It appears that ground staff had slept on the aircraft at Townsville while working to make it serviceable as the duty aircraft. The RAAF roundel is still visible on the starboard side and the silver lacquer still covers the aircraft's aluminium skin.

Inside, the airframe is protected by green anti-oxidant paint. The names of many bushwalkers are tattooed onto almost every square inch of available space and the surrounding countryside shows that many people have been there over the years. The main-spar is ahead of the remaining fuselage, cut through by souvenir hunters.

Because of the fires which raged through the forward part of the aircraft after the impact, little remains of the cockpit. Yet I picked up an 18 inch section of the frame which made up the windscreen and Perspex cockpit assembly. A charred radio here, bent and twisted oleo legs there litter the area. The bomb bay doors, about in their correct relative positions, seem miraculously undamaged and could be carried away by if one had the desire or equipment to lift them.

To the left, facing down the hill in the direction the aircraft had come from, lays the starboard inner wing. On the

top is the exposed fuel tank, its outer covering burned away, yet the undersides virtually undamaged despite the fearsome heat of the fires. Underneath this part of the wing is the starboard flap. This is very much in the down position and resting against a rock. Despite the fact that the crash report indicates that the flaps were up at the time of impact, I imagine that the force of the wing breaking away from the control tubes must have allowed the flap to fall. Further away lays a substantial portion of the same wing. Although damaged, it is one of the larger sections of aircraft remaining at the site.

In the same area are two tubular steel engine frames, now rusted and very twisted, embracing the trees which felled the Lincoln and stripped them of their charges.

Further down the hill I spied the unmistakable shape of the extreme rear of the fuselage where the Boulton-Paul gun turret was mounted. The turret itself lay in the RAAF store at Dubbo (NSW) having been removed along with the tail surfaces in 1977. The tail plane actually twisted itself free during the impact and landed on top of the main fuselage and contained the only part considered to be salvageable by the crash analysis team, the tail wheel and tyre. Current information advises that these components have returned to the RAAF Museum at Point Cook.

Simon picked up a fairly large section of the rear fuselage which contained a door frame. The paint work was immaculate and still bore a dashed red line stencilled upon it. We were later able to identify this as the area of the rear crew door and the red line indicated the external access to the first aid box.

None of the engines was seen at the crash site. We understand that one is on display at the Darling Downs air Museum at Oakey and we know that one other is at the foot of the final climb.

As it happens, we later found a third engine sitting in the creek quite some distance from the main site where it, too, has been moved by would-be collectors.

After our walk around and the shooting of some colour 35mm film for prints we assembled in the main fuselage section to mount a plaque which I had had made. We chose a spot in the mid upper gun turret opening and drilled holes for "pop" rivets with a portable electric drill I had carried for this purpose. We took some stills and video of the operation and I said a few words to dedicate the plaque.

The brass plate bears the inscription: " Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth In honour of Sqn.Ldr. J.W.Finlay RAAF. Warwick and Peter visited this site Easter 1988." I recited the whole poem and said how proud I was that we had chosen to make the trip. It was hard to say the words for the floods of emotion kept sweeping over me. This was, to me, the purpose for which we had been guided to this place and I was glad that we had achieved our goal.

We gathered up a few parts of the aircraft, Warwick treasured a section of aluminium with part of a roundel still upon it and Simon determined to carry the 1 metre square section of rear fuselage down the mountain with him. Not desecration of the site, just loving memory. In time there will be nothing left on Mount Superbus.

We paused to read a brass plaque which has been re-affixed to a rock by the Ipswich Venturer Scouts in 1974 to replace the original which had been stolen.

Our descent was by way of a well-marked creek which provided a rather easier path than our upwards route. On the way we found many parts of the Lincoln. A supercharger from one of the Merlins looked very tempting but it was far too heavy to carry so we left it in place. The boys were forced to allow Simon's fuselage section to free fall much of the way and many times Scott tried to dissuade Simon from carrying it further. To his credit, Simon refused to be swayed in his determination and I nodded with satisfaction at his will.

About half way down the creek, we came across the second Merlin mentioned earlier. It, too, has been stripped of the cylinder heads and sump. This one is not structurally- damaged like the first we found.... probably a starboard engine, the other probably a port unit which may have borne the brunt of the initial impact. After a very wet hour of climbing down through the running creek, we came to the old road at a point just south of the first Merlin. From here we made our way along the track to the Nissan, Simon finally allowing me to help him with his prize. Lovely to be with my son.

Back at the Nissan we changed out of our wet clothing. We ate some nourishing food packed by our ever-thoughtful wives and headed towards home through the flooded creeks again. The trip was punctuated with rounds of boy's jokes as we came down from the "high" we had all experienced. Home at last at about 10 pm; we were able to tell of our exploits

with the aid of an instant video of the trip.

On the following day we completed our pilgrimage by visiting the lawn graves in Lutwyche cemetery in Brisbane.

The graves of my father as well as John Costello, William Cater and Charles Mason lie here in a row.

They are not the only RAAF crew to be interred here. Twelve of the 16 occupants of Lincoln A73-11 were buried in a mass grave after the aircraft crashed at Amberley on 18th February 1948. This flight had been from Victoria and the aircraft was carrying a number of Merlin engines as well as large quantities of paint thinners. After a missed approach, the aircraft climbed to about 500 feet over the airfield, stalled and plunged into the ground. A possible cause of the crash was the movement of the load during the go-round.

The following is quoted from "Lincoln at War" by Garbett and Goulding.

"The remains of the medical evacuees on board A73-64, baby Robyn Huxley and Sister Mafalda Gray, were flown by direction of the RAAF in accordance with family wishes to Townsville for burial.

However, several events were to ensue before they were to rest. A Lincoln (piloted by John Laming who I have since met and have regular correspondence with) was despatched from Townsville to return the bodies from Brisbane. When the Lincoln was started for the return journey, the booster pumps were inadvertently switched on, flooding the engines and preventing start up. Several hours were lost attempting to cure this problem. When the aircraft eventually taxied out

for a second attempt to take off, the G3 compass spun erratically and would not stabilise. With bad weather forecast, the crew did not want to risk a second accident.

Since no replacement Lincoln was available from Amberley, the coffins were transferred to a Butler Airlines DC 3 which was due to leave at midnight. This aircraft also suffered an engine malfunction during run up and had to return to the terminal.

Finally, in the early hours of the morning of the funeral the caskets were loaded onto an Ansett DC3 which eventually arrived at Townsville, it, too, having suffered complete HF/VHF radio failure during the flight. When the crew of the Lincoln attempted to return to Townsville on the following day, the aircraft performed normally and the seven members flew safely back, wondering at the string of coincidences which had conspired to follow certain souls."

The remains of A73-64 constitute the bulk of Lincoln parts still in existence in Australia. Only the cockpit section of A73-27 is preserved at the Camden Air Museum. Harold Thomas, owner of the museum worked at the Chullora railway yards where the cockpit sections of Lincolns were manufactured. He was able to save his specimen from total destruction after the aircraft was used as a fire-fighting unit at Mascot on the site of the present international air terminal.

Harold also has a control column and a full set of instruments which he plans to install in the refurbished cockpit. The latter items came home to roost in their original position after a chap, whose sons had removed these items from the aircraft as lads, decided to donate them to Harold Thomas.

A tyre and wheel from a Lincoln is preserved somewhere in Victoria while Harold Thomas received a full set of cockpit Plexiglas still in its original container from a friend in Queensland.

It is said that a propeller and part of a rudder of A73-64 are on display at Caboulture Aviation Museum but my visit there on 24th March 2005 did not reveal any parts from that particular aircraft.

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