

criminal, that these wonderful aircraft that served Australia so well during the war should be treated in such a way. So they decided purely for posterity they should get one of them, a brand new one in a crate, dig a hole in the ground, cover it up and leave it for future generations; for someone to find."

The problem is, no one has. Even Nev Marshall, when he returned to the base as an old man before his death about 10 years ago, couldn't locate the spot where he insisted the plane was buried.

These days, the base is home to the army's aviation training centre, with a focus on helicopter training, and many of the old landmarks from World War II are gone. Brian Reardon, curator of the Museum of Australian Army Flying at the base, says Marshall had become distressed by the changes. Now, Reardon thinks, they misunderstood his directions which centred on a water tower.

"There was another water tower of sorts, on the other side of the base," he says. "We haven't investigated that area at all." Like Carter and von Moller, with whom he shares information, Reardon thinks there's something to the claim. "I think it's a distinct possibility," he says. "Germany had capitulated. The US dropped the Bomb, and the war stopped. So they started disposing of stuff ... we know the old coalmines under Oakey, a lot of stuff was dumped in it, but they collapsed the entry to it."

So the digging goes on. Just a few weeks ago, with the consent of the army, Reardon used a bobcat to excavate an area alongside an old hanger where – in a different case to Nev Marshall's – some workers had commandeered a bulldozer and supposedly buried a plane. That search found nothing.



FLYBOYS

Post-war action at Oakey, above, and, left, von Moller and Carter with a Spitfire manifold found in the area

“ So these guys, these five men, are watching the planes being chopped up and they decide this was almost criminal ”

JAMES CARTER ADMAN TURNED SPITFIRE HUNTER

Carter thinks there are at least one or two planes, and that others have been thrown down mine shafts. There could be a dozen, he thinks. His research has shown some discrepancies between the number of planes disposed of and those that were on the base at the end of the war.

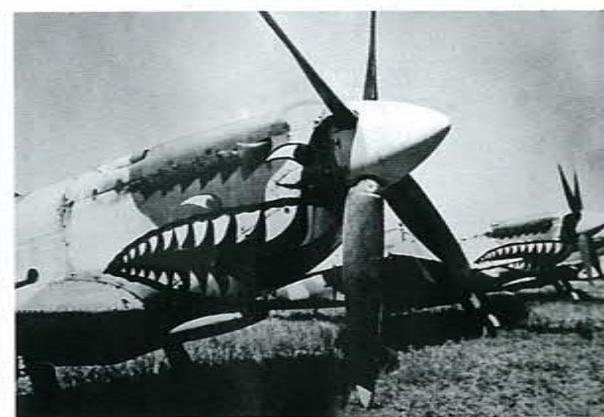
Reardon, Carter and von Moller now think they have narrowed the area down, and are hoping to persuade a mining company with ground-penetrating airborne radar to help put the matter to bed. The radar works best in dry soils and can be tuned to pick up the frequency of different metals at a depth of several metres.

Many others have looked for the planes over the years. In January, the local Jondaryan Shire Council approved a request from a couple of locals to drill holes on council property in their hunt for six Spitfires, although it noted a previous excavation had turned up nothing.

It's a hard story to kill off. John Marshall says he's about sick of it, and has consigned his papers on the subject to the shed. He thinks there's a chance one of his dad's partners secretly returned and dug up the box.

Reardon wants to settle the question and hopes to secure a radar survey by the end of the year. "It's credible, but there's nothing there until we dig it up," he says. "We'd at least like to go to the areas where we believe they are, and even if we prove they're not there, then we'll all sleep at night." ●

Anyone with information can email Carter and von Moller at info@brokenwings.com.au



BURIED TREASURE
Rusting Spitfires at the Oakey base and sections of Spitfires the hunters have turned up

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