Laurence Wackett

In the mid 1930's Lawrence Wackett worked for one of the companies that were soon to amalgamate with Australian National Airways Pty Ltd. He made a significant contribution by designing, amongst other things, an enclosed cockpit for the Avro Xs and tail wheels to replace skids. He did not have blue-prints for his ideas but would get his ruler and a piece of chalk and then draw the design on the concrete floor of the hangar. This normally worked well although on one occasion, the cleaner swept an important plan off the floor. When Wackett found out he "did his block", expressing his anger by taking off his hat, throwing it to the floor and jumping on it! (from "The Forgotten Giant of Australian Aviation" (ANA) by Peter Yule – a book well worth reading).

An EHV Member responded to the mention of Lawrence Wackett in a later edition of the EHV Newsletter by providing a copy of an article in the RSL Newsletter "Mufti" (September 2006 edition)....

General Sir John Monash (an engineer, soldier and lawyer – later to become the Chairman of the State Electricity Commission of Victoria) was the Australian (AIF) commander during the Battle of Hamel on 4 July 1918. A little known (or acknowledged) aside to this battle was the first airborne drop of ammunition by parachute – an action which contributed largely to the success of the engagement.

…. "It was Captain Lawrence J Wackett, B Flight Commander of 3 Squadron Australian Flying Corps (AFC) who was responsible for this first ever parachute drop to supply ground forces. Both Monash and General Rawlinson (Commander of the Fourth Army) knew of Wackett's expertise for mechanical innovation and put this 22 year old officer to work to devise a suitable airborne operation. By the evening of 3 July all was ready with 20 RE8 Aircraft from No 9 Squadron RAF. On 4 July 1918 the aircraft dropped a consignment of about 100 000 rounds of ammunition from about 1000 feet - with great accuracy".

One of the parachutes used is in the Australian War Memorial. Lawrence Wackett was a one of our nations leading aeronautical engineers and became the head of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) in Melbourne. He was knighted in 1954 and died on 18 March 1982 aged 86.