NANCY BIRD

Source: Australian Museum website

Famous for: (1) outback ambulance services

(2) started the Australian Women’s Pilots Association.

Born into the Bird family on 16 October 1915, they lived in Kew, NSW.

At 13, she went for a flight in a de Havilland Gipsy Moth (a plane) at a local fair and she loved it. She took flying lessons from Kingsford Smith, gaining her class A flying licence when 17 years old.
Soon, Nancy bought her first plane, a Gipsy Moth. With that, she took off on a tour of Australia, giving joyrides at country fairs to people who had never seen a plane before. Many people were surprised a little woman could fly the plane! - Nancy was only 1.5 metres tall!

Nancy was asked to help set up a remote air ambulance service based in Bourke (NSW), and so in 1935 she began flying for the Royal Far West Children’s Health Scheme.

To find her way, she often used road maps, and made many landings in grassy area dotted with dangerous rabbit holes. Despite this, she never had an accident in all of her flying career. In 1936 Nancy won the Ladies Trophy in an air race from Brisbane to Adelaide.
When she was 24, Nancy married Charles Walton, who liked to call her Nancy-Bird. During World War II, Walton set up and was commandant of an Australian Women’s Air Training Corps.

She founded the Australian Women Pilots’ Association in 1950, and remained its president until 1990. In 1966 she was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 1990.

Walton held her pilots license until three years before her death, aged 93, in Sydney in 2009. The airport terminal at Bourke Airport is named after her.

Nancy Bird Walton’s achievements are remarkable in an era when women were discouraged from wearing pants, let alone flying planes. Her autobiography, published in 1990, is not surprisingly called My God, It's A Woman!