

Vandals deface WWII heritage site

REBEKAH CAVANAGH

July 21st, 2009

VANDALS have spray-painted graffiti over signs at a WWII memorial site in the Territory.

One of the three life-size aluminium cut-out fighter planes and other signage that form part of the heritage-listed Strauss airstrip memorial along the Stuart Highway, about 60km south of Darwin, were defaced by the culprits.

The graffiti includes the words "Terra Nullius" and "White Man Big Lia" (sic).

Independent Member for Nelson Gerry Wood said it was "lousy" to see the graffiti that had been written.

"I think the family of Strauss would be really upset over this," he said.

"This memorial was built to remember the many soldiers and airmen from many nations who fought and in many cases gave their lives to defend our country.

"This is obviously someone trying to make a grand political statement - there's a racial overtone in this, too.

"Whoever did it obviously has no idea about history or the sacrifice these people made.

"They've ridiculed the very people who gave them the right to freedom of speech by defacing this monument.

"There are ways to protest but this is just wrong."

Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts media spokeswoman Shannon McRae said it was an offence to interfere with a heritage-listed site and vandals could face fines of up to \$10,000 or up to 12 months imprisonment under the Heritage Act.

The airfield - named after United States Captain Allison Strauss who was killed when his P-40 Kittyhawk crashed into Darwin Harbour during a Japanese air raid - was built in 1942 in response to the threat of a Japanese invasion.

It is believed the monuments were defaced some time over the weekend.

Anyone with information about the vandalism or any suspicious activity in the area is urged to call police on 131 444.



OUTRAGE: Gerry Wood is disgusted that vandals have defaced the WWII heritage listed Strauss Airstrip. Picture: BRAD FLEET