



Mysteries of Aviation - De Havilland DH82A "Tiger Moth" VH – AQL

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The Mystery

On the 8th September 1972, a De Havilland DH82A Tiger Moth aircraft registered VH – AQL departed Cambridge Airport, Hobart for Flinders Island. No trace of the aircraft or its passenger has ever been found.

The Flight

The pilot, Maxwell Price, held a valid commercial licence, was endorsed on the aircraft, and had some 1,968 hours of flying experience, of which 962 hours were on this aircraft type. The only passenger on board was Brenda Hean, who occupied the rear cockpit.

The aircraft's Certificate of Airworthiness was valid until 9th November 1975. There was no evidence to suggest that the gross weight of the aircraft or its Centre of Gravity were not within safe limits.

The aircraft was fitted with an auxiliary fuel tank and had approval to install a smoke generating system for use in sky writing operations. However, the owner/pilot had integrated these two systems in a way which was not approved, due to the potential hazards of an undetected fuel loss or of fire in-flight. No evidence exists that these, or any other hazardous flight situations, could be related or contributed to the aircraft's disappearance.



A De Havilland DH82A Tiger Moth similar to VH - AQL



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

MYSTERIES OF AVIATION DE HAVILLAND "TIGER MOTH" VH – AQL

The pilot submitted a flight plan to Hobart Flight Service Unit for a departure at 1030 hours from Cambridge to Yarram, Victoria, with an intermediate stop at Flinders Island. The flight plan indicated the flight would be made in accordance to VFR flight rules at altitudes below 5,000 feet with an estimated time interval of 160 minutes and an endurance of 250 minutes. The flight plan indicated the carriage of life jackets, first aid equipment and a VHF survival beacon.

Whilst the pilot advised he did not intend to report his progress by radio en-route, he did indicate that he would report to Flinders Island Flight Service Unit before 1400 hours EST. Although the pilot did not obtain a Met forecast, there was nothing to suggest that the weather would have any bearing on the flight.

The aircraft departed Cambridge at 1016 hours and one minute later the pilot made an on-course radio report to Hobart Control Tower. No further transmissions were heard from the aircraft. The last reported sighting of the plane was at Eddystone Point, when a witness indicated the aircraft was flying at an altitude of about 2,000 feet and appeared to be operating normally.

At 1400 hours, when the pilot had not reported his arrival at Flinders Island, an intense air, sea and land search was commenced that would continue for some twenty days. No trace of the aircraft, pilot or passenger was ever found.



Departure point - Cambridge Airport



What Happened to VH_AQL?

In Tasmania, following the aircraft's disappearance, theories grew wild. Reports indicate that Price suspected an attempt was made on his life the week before the fatal flight, when the Tiger Moth suffered an engine failure en-route to Maria Island due, to his belief, that water had been put in the aircraft's engine oil. At the time, Price was in conflict with a business partner, and allegations of embezzlement were brewing.

His passenger, Brenda Hean, was campaigning against the plans to flood Lake Pedder, at the time a very sensitive and emotive topic, which would drown its 3km long alpine beach. With Price, she was bound for Canberra to lobby federal MPs and sky-write "Save Lake Pedder" over the nation's capital.

It was further reported that both Price and Hean had received death threats prior to the flight's departure and the aircraft's hangar was broken into the night before the flight. The plane's emergency beacon was later found hidden behind some fuel drums

Despite some evidence pointing to potential sabotage of the aircraft, a police investigation went nowhere, and authorities rejected calls for a public inquiry.

In the forty-eight years since the disappearance of the aircraft conspiracy, theories continue to surround this intriguing story. But with no bodies or wreckage found, no coronial inquest was ever held although the police have never declared the case closed.

