



## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

### WESTERN JUNCTION FLYING SCHOOL 1941 - 1945

#### Western Junction Flying School 1941 - 1945

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[R.A.A.F. Training School at Western Junction, Tasmania]<sup>1</sup>

Shows recruits attending lectures, wearing flying suits.<sup>2</sup>

In May 1940, the Minister for Air, Mr Fairbairn, announced from Canberra that two more elementary flying training schools were to be formed. One, at Western Junction (Launceston), would be formed in August and the other at Narrandera NSW in October. Western Junction was the first R.A.A.F. training establishment to be located at the Civil aerodrome.

The day following the announcement, the Tasmanian Aero Club reported their exuberance at the decision to make Western Junction a site for an elementary flying training school under the Empire air scheme. The Secretary, Mr W. J. Manthei, said the club would offer itself to the Federal Government, and he assumed the club staff would be asked to co-operate, and that its machines would be made available.<sup>3</sup>

There was a flurry of activity with the construction of the necessary buildings to accommodate the aircraft and personnel.<sup>4</sup> The Minister for the Interior, Senator Foll, accepted the tender of T. C. Denholm to erect 43 hutments for the flying training school at Western Junction.<sup>5</sup>

By August 1941 hundreds of men were working day and night building a small city at Western Junction aerodrome to house the No. 7 Elementary Flying School. The buildings being erected

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<sup>1</sup> Burrow's Photo Studio & Argus (Melbourne, Vic.) (1941). [R.A.A.F. Training School at Western Junction, Tasmania].

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Friday 10 May 1940.

<sup>4</sup> *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Thursday 9 May 1940, p. 7

<sup>5</sup> *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Tuesday 6 August 1940, p. 4



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at the aerodrome, included workshops, offices, recreation and canteen huts, sleeping and messing accommodation, laundry and boiler house, garages, stores, armoury and a special hut for wireless telegraphy instruction and link-trainer courses.

A large number, of men were also engaged in extending the water supply from Evandale to Western Junction to serve the school.

The training courses extended over eight weeks for 48 pupils, after which trainees from Tasmania would then enter a service flying training school on the mainland to commence their intermediate training on heavier and more powerful aircraft.

Training commenced in September 1941 with the first contingent of 21 pupils arriving, who were initially billeted in the city. They were quickly followed by a second contingent of about 100. The capacity of the school was about 300. In mid-September the *Evening News* reported a mass flight across Bass Strait of 11 Tiger Moths

#### TRAINING PLANES FOR NEW FLYING SCHOOL

For use at the new Western Junction elementary flying training school 11 Tiger Moth planes were flown from Laverton to Tasmania by Royal Australian Air Force pilots on Tuesday. It was the first mass flight by training aircraft over Bass Strait. The pilots returned to Laverton on Wednesday in three service machines acting as transports, and set out with 11 more Moths for Western Junction yesterday. Two twin-engine aircraft, equipped with radio and carrying expert navigators, accompanied each batch, of Moths, and two surface vessels were posted in Bass Strait as an extra safety measure. Eight of the pilots will remain at Western Junction as Instructors<sup>6</sup>

The Advocate reported:

The function of the establishment will be to initiate pilot trainees into the art of flying. They will be at Western Junction for two months, and in that time will complete 50 hours flying (25 hours dual and 5 hours solo). In addition, their instruction will include lectures and ground studies such as administration, airmanship, air frames and armament, aero engines, theory of flight, navigation, parachutes and signals. On graduation the trainees will pass through a service flying training school for more advanced training.

Hr. J. T. Harrison, public relations officer of the Air Board, arrived with the flight to-day. He said that with Western Junction as a half-school two flights of planes would be at the aerodrome, that was 18 planes, in addition to several emergency machines.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Evening News* (Rockhampton, Qld. : 1924 - 1941), Friday 13 September 1940, p. 1

<sup>7</sup> *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Wednesday 18 September 1940, p. 5



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There were certain characters who stood out from the crowd. One of these was Walter Campbell who displayed a natural aptitude at the controls of an aircraft. He was soon commissioned and posted to Central Flying School at Camden in New South Wales to do a flying instructor's course. Achieving this status quickly, he was posted to No 7 Elementary Flying School, Launceston, Tasmania, where he would start training others. It was there — as Angus Innes, former Queensland Liberal Leader, notes — that Campbell struck up a lifelong friendship with author and poet Geoffrey Dutton, also a flying instructor. In his autobiography *Out in the Open*, Dutton pays tribute to “Wally” as a former “student radical who loved to argue, with such skill and anticipation that it did not surprise me when he rose to the top of his profession, later knighted, 1979 and became Governor General of Queensland in 1985-1992.

The Launceston press welcomed the Campbell's to Tasmania in the style of the day: “A lovely newcomer to our city is Mrs Campbell, whose husband, Pilot Officer Campbell, is stationed at Western Junction.” For parts of 1942 and 1943, Walter was busy training young pilots in fabric covered Tiger Moth aeroplanes, while Georgina went teaching.

This ended when Walter's training aircraft crashed spectacularly. Campbell was in the front seat in the biplane, a flying student behind him. They were practising forced landings when, in the student's hands, the plane ploughed into the landing strip, destroying the machine. The student was relatively unscathed, but Campbell was badly injured. He shattered the tibia and fibula at the knee joint of his right knee, injuries that practically ended his sports capacity and affected his general mobility for the rest of his life. Georgina was phoned at school by the Commanding Officer. At the hospital she found her new husband trussed up in bed, blackened from oil and petrol — he had been trapped under the wrecked plane — and grass-stained from his impact with the landing strip. His nose was broken and his leg shattered. The surgeon, Doctor Craig, called at Campbell's bedside after the operation on the knee. He told the young man that, fit and healthy as he was, he would never bend the knee again. Certainly, he would not fly again.

Campbell defied both predictions. He worked hard at restoring his mobility and piled on the physiotherapy. Little by little mobility returned, though the foot nerves had been severed and the foot was practically paralyzed. In due course, with unrelenting drive, he regained his freedom of movement. He was even able to run again.

He was 11 months recuperating. Making best use of the time, he resumed his studies — he had attended the University of Queensland for one year in 1940 — and took Bachelor of Arts exams, from his hospital bed. He graduated and was back flying by the end of 1943.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Geoff Barlow and Jim Corkery. (2013) "WALTER CAMPBELL: A DISTINGUISHED LIFE" Owen Dixon Society eJournal,, .



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In December 1944 it was announced that the Western Junction Flying School would close.<sup>9</sup> The following year and as the Second World War was coming to an end, the R.A.A.F. training units were closed. It is interesting to note the number of schools. The *Age* Newspaper reported.

Ten Initial training and flying schools of the R.A.A.F. have closed down. The latest to close is Bradfield Park (Sydney), and Somers, Benalla (V.), and Temora (N.S.W.) schools will soon cease to function.-

The Minister for Air (Mr Drakeford), announcing this development yesterday, said the surplus air crew in Australia and the imminent return of R.A.A.F. members from the European side had determined the closure of basic training schools. Bradfield Park would be used as a personnel depot. The following other schools had closed:— Initial Training: Kingaroy (Q.), Clontarf (W.A.) and Victor Harbor (S.A.), the last named now accommodating the R.A.A.F. School of Administration. Flying Schools: Western Junction (Tas.), Narrandera and Evan's Head (N.S.W.), Cunderdin and Geraldton (W.A.) and Bundaberg (Qld). Mr Drakeford added that the following school would be used as refresher pools for trained air crew, each undergoing a graded reduction in size:— West Sale and Ballarat (V.), Uranquinty (N.S.W.), Mallala, Port Pirie and Mount Gambier (S.A.).<sup>10</sup>

In April 1946 it was announced that the first auction sale of service aircraft in Australia would be held at the former R.A.A.F. flying school at Western Junction on May 18.<sup>11</sup> Altogether, 51 Tiger Moth aircraft in fly-away condition were offered, as well as 21 Gipsy Major engines.

More than 70 Tiger Moths were sold privately by the Disposals Commission at prices between £300 and £500 to aero clubs, pastoralists and private flyers.<sup>12</sup> My grandfather Artie Grimes a well-known and respected hotelier in Launceston purchased one of the Tiger Moths. However, on learning the cost of housing, servicing and general maintenance of the aircraft he quickly off-loaded his acquisition.

Having closure to WW11 and the R.A.A.F. activities at Western Junction and after being in recess for 7+ years the Tasmanian Aero Club resumed flying at Western Junction. It was marked with 125 pilots trained to 'A' or private licences with many proceeding to 'B' commercial licences with the majority of these pilots playing a vital role in the Empire Air Training Scheme which proved of such tremendous value to the Allies.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Saturday 9 December 1944, p. 2

<sup>10</sup> *Age* (Melbourne, Vic. : 1854 - 1954), Thursday 19 July 1945, p. 8

<sup>11</sup> *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Thursday 25 April 1946, p. 2

<sup>12</sup> *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Thursday 25 April 1946, p. 6

<sup>13</sup> *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Saturday 13 April 1946, p. 7



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MAKING AIRMEN AT WESTERN JUNCTION, TASMANIA



PUPILS RECEIVING INSTRUCTION FROM THEIR FLIGHT COMMANDER.



TRAINEES being taught the uses of the Aldis lamp.

