



## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

### TASMANIAN AVIATION GIANTS – VICTOR CLIVE HOLYMAN

#### Tasmanian Aviation Giants – The Holyman Family

#### Victor Clive Holyman (1894 – 1934)

*Author: w. Dearing, March 2021*

Born on the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1894 in Devonport Tasmania, one of thirteen children of William junior and Honora Holyman, he was the grandson of William Holyman, the founder of the shipping firm William Holyman and Sons.

Educated at Launceston Church Grammar School, he followed in his father's footsteps and went to sea at the age of 16 years apprenticed on the Barque *CJS* of 720 tons trading between Australia and Mauritius.

When World War 1 broke out, Victor already had his mate's ticket and transferred to the British owned *SS Aragaz* as a second mate. On this ship he eventually sailed to Lemnos the jumping off point for the Gallipoli landing. In June 1916 he joined the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), the aerial wing of the Royal Navy, as a Temporary Flight Sub Lieutenant. Serving in France in 1916 and 1917 he was subsequently promoted to Flight Lieutenant. According to the family history it was reported that Victor "*was an airman of rare ability*" and in 1917 he returned to the UK as a test pilot at Maartlesham Heath.

In early 1918 he took six months special leave to return to Australia, during which time he was transferred to the Royal Air Force (RAF) when it was formed from the RNAS and the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). At the end of his leave, he was seconded to the Royal Australian Navy South Eastern Area (Victoria) with the rank of Acting Flight Lieutenant, Royal Air Force. He returned to England in 1920 to resign and then joined the Holyman shipping line, his first command being the *SS Hall Caine*.

Over the next decade he was Master of a number of Holyman ships, including the *Koomeela*, *Koringa*, *Wariatea* and the *Laranah*, however, he retained his interest in flying and was known, when laying over in Melbourne, to take to the air. In 1927, with fellow WW 1 pilot C. W. B. Martin, he was instrumental in the formation of the Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Division) and the establishment of Launceston airport at Western Junction.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1922 Victor married Hazel Gaunt from Launceston at Christ Church, Longford.

Victor then convinced his family, presumably including his close brother Ivan who was managing the day-to-day activities of the company and his uncle James then Chairman of the company, to enter into aviation. Subsequently, in 1932, the Holyman family company, Holyman Brothers Pty Ltd, purchased a newly launched de Havilland DH83 Fox Moth, named



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the aircraft *Miss Currie*, and commenced flying the old Holyman sea-route from Launceston to Flinders Island.



**Brothers Clive (left) and Ivan Holyman, c.1917**

Initially Victor was the only pilot with Jack Stubbs being hired as the engineer and Victor's wife Hazel acting as hostess (albeit from the ground). Shortly after they merged with Laurie Johnson, who was already flying the Launceston – Flinders Island route, to form Tasmanian Aerial Services Pty Ltd. In 1933 they acquired a new De Havilland DH84 Dragon, named the aircraft *Miss Launceston*, and commenced a tri-weekly service between Launceston and Melbourne.

In November 1933, the Commonwealth Government called for tenders for a subsidised airmail service to Tasmania as part of the Empire Air Mail Scheme. In order to ensure the success of its tender, they restructured Tasmanian Aerial Services, with Huddart Parker and the Union Steamship Company, (being shareholders in William Holyman and Sons Pty Ltd), taking an interest and in July 1934 changed the name to Holyman's Airways Pty Ltd.



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On being awarded the tender, Holyman's ordered two de Havilland DH86s, specially developed for the Empire Air Mail Route. The first DH86s were single control models with only one seat in the nose of the aircraft making it somewhat difficult for pilots to change seats.

Holyman's first DH86 arrived in September 1934, was named *Miss Hobart*, and commenced a regular service between Launceston and Melbourne on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1934.



On October 19<sup>th</sup> 1934, Victor was co-piloting the new DH86 *Miss Hobart* when she went down with 10 passengers between Victoria and Flinders Island. Initially the enquiry focused on the theory that the aircraft may have run out of fuel or that the pilots may have lost control whilst changing seats. When another DH86 was later lost off Whitemark it was found that the spruce main wing beam had broken and it was thought the same fate had befallen Victor's aircraft.

The loss of *Miss Hobart* was a devastating blow for Holyman's Airways. The airline had lost its founder and driving force.

Victor was remembered by his family members as tough, completely fearless and a bit of a wild character but had business sense and a clear vision of the future of transportation.

His character is somewhat caught in his service records from 1916 – 1917 brief in nature as was the norm:

*In 1916 "Good pilot, fair officer" and in 1917 "Ability to command but very little discipline"*

Victor was survived by his wife Hazel, affectionally known as "Matron", who went on to play a major role in the development of cabin crew (air hostessing as it was known then) as Superintendent of Air Hostesses at ANA.