



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

PROPOSALS TO USE HELICOPTERS IN TASMANIA 1946 - 1954

Proposals to use Helicopters in Tasmania 1946 - 1954

Author: Paul A.C. Richards AM, September 2021

As early as 1946 the "Sydney Morning Herald" reported that Mr. Barrie Valentine, a former R.A.A.F. flying-officer, of Hobart, was negotiating the purchase of a helicopter on behalf of the Tasmanian Government. The helicopter would be invested in surveying and exploration, orchard spraying, bush-fire prevention and fishing surveys. The machine being considered can carry four passengers and can land in a 50ft area. It will cost 53,000 dollars (£A16,562).¹

In April that year it was announced by the then Minister for Lands and Works, Mr Brooker who was speaking at Swansea, said that Mr B. Valentine, of Hobart who had been a flying officer during the war, was now in America learning to fly helicopters. He intended to bring one to Tasmania as soon as he could get permission from the Commonwealth Government. If the helicopter were found practicable for passenger transport, its use would bring Hobart within half an hour of Swansea, and passengers could land when and where they liked. The Government was negotiating for the purchase of more land at Swansea to enable the aerodrome to be completed, he said.²

By June the Mercury had interviewed Mr Valentine who had returned to Hobart and gave an informed appraisal of the helicopters peacetime use and how important there use would be to Tasmania.

The headline read - COULD OBTAIN HELICOPTER FOR TASMANIA - Hobart Pilot Keen

Having flown helicopters in the United States, Mr E. B. Valentine, of Hobart, former RAAF pilot, is enthusiastic about these aircraft. He said yesterday that if enabled to place the order he could obtain a helicopter for Tasmania from the Sikorsky organisation.

Mr Barry Valentine, who returned to Hobart from America last weekend, said yesterday the advantages of the helicopter had been proved under war conditions.

Experiment now was being intensified to make the helicopter unique in its serviceability for a wide range of purposes. In America 30 firms were concentrating on the task. The opportunity for Tasmania to obtain a machine was valuable, as helicopters were being released in America only for national development and community projects. It would be at least five years before helicopters were available in sufficient quantity for individual civilian use.

Helicopters were being allocated for forestry, fisheries, mining, survey, crop dusting, and coastguard services. Over 100 machines were in use in such services in the United States. The exact position of forest fires could be determined and men and equipment dropped.



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Reactions of mining terrain to scientific detectors at low altitude could be recorded. Pest-infested orchards and field crops could be sprayed. Shipwrecked men could be rescued.

For survey purposes and many other uses Tasmania would do well to obtain a machine.

To Mr Valentine the helicopter exerts a lure leaving all other forms of air activity tame in comparison.

"I will back my future with helicopters here or elsewhere, and will go back to USA to fly them there if none come here," he said.

In America he found helicopter thrills in plenty. Every facility was placed at his disposal by the Sikorsky organisation. He put to the test the manoeuvrability, smooth travel, speedy vertical ascent, and instant yet cushion like braking of helicopters. Their ease of hovering at heights from 3,500ft. to just above ground level captivated him most of all.

Sikorsky helicopters can rise to but not hover at 21,000ft. "We came across a 100ft. factory chimney stack in Connecticut, hovered and just sat down on top of it, then rose and flew on," he said.

In the future helicopter owners would alight on home roofs, or on any 50ft. by 50ft. street, garden, or beach space.

Because manufacturers were determined to remove any possibility of mishap, the day of unrestricted individual use of helicopters was still distant. Mr Valentine said the opportunity of acquiring a helicopter for use in Tasmania had been placed before the State Government.³

In November 1950, a helicopter ambulance service was suggested by Dr Gounds during the debate in committee of the Public Works Execution Bill in the Legislative Council. The Leader of the Government (Mr. D'Alton) agreed that a helicopter would be useful, especially in transporting patients from such remote places as Rosebery and Tullah. Mr D'Alton in September in favour of a helicopter service said the Forestry Department would equip its staff with "walkie-talkie" and other radio apparatus.

"This was a step in the right direction, but the necessity for a helicopter service to be started in Tasmania was most essential, particularly with regard to fire-fighting' Mr. D'Alton said. 'During the summer months a helicopter could be used also for geological surveys, in the fishing industry, in mining development, and for other purposes."

"The Federal Government Indicated-recently that a helicopter would be stationed in all States except Tasmania. I feel sure all Tasmanians will resent the omission, in view of our mountainous country and other difficulties."⁴

In the same debate, Mr. Lonergan suggested an aerial ambulance and said that when he visited the Northern Territory recently, he had seen an aerial ambulance, located at Alice



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Springs. This often went 500 miles to bring in a stockman with a broken bone or someone else who was ill.

The aircraft did not land on prepared aerodromes, but on flat areas of ground. Dr. Grounds said he agreed with Mr. Lonergan and said that this system was practised extensively during the war in the Middle East, when front line casualties were taken to hospital quickly.

What he preferred, however, was the helicopter, a type extensively used in America, he said. Tasmania had some practically inaccessible parts and a helicopter would be able to remove patients therefrom.

Twelve months ago, there was a fatal case of snake bite. Had there been a helicopter, the young woman could have been removed quickly and her life saved.

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In December 1954 "The Advocate" reported that in order to assist the Tasmanian Government a special flight of two Bristol Sycamore helicopters will be formed to embark on H.M.A.S. Vengeance arriving in February 1955 and made available to the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Commission until February 12, being temporarily based at the construction village of Butler's Gorge. The naval helicopters are to be placed at the disposal of the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Commission to survey the King Franklin river area of western Tasmania.

The other aircraft will remain in Vengeance as a safety measure should the helicopter working with the Commission be forced to land in difficult country. The Minister said that in eight days the helicopter would assist the Commission to do work that would otherwise take many months.⁶





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Royal Australian Navy Sycamore Helicopter (Australian Navy Website)

The history of helicopter operations in Australia commenced with military helicopters in 1947 and was followed by the introduction of civil helicopters in 1956. These early aircraft were capable of operating under the Visual Flight Rules and generally by day and introduced a new era of aviation in Australia.

¹ Sydney Morning Herald (NSW : 1842 - 1954), Friday 3 May 1946, p. 3

² Herald (Melbourne, Vic. : 1861 - 1954), Saturday 13 April 1946, p. 3

³ Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Wednesday 12 June 1946, p. 13

⁴ Advocate (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Thursday 20 September 1951, p. 14

⁵ Mercury (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Friday 10 November 1950, p. 4

⁶ Advocate (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Tuesday 21 December 1954, p. 9