

‘The Flying Bug’ by the late John Stanwix

A project of TAHS

Ralph King in his forward to the book ‘The Flying Bug’ the diaries of Captain John Stanwix an extraordinary helicopter pilot and aviation engineer of Hobart said “ that it gave him great pleasure and a feeling of relief to be able to publish John’s book that documents the achievements of his good friend John Elson Stanwix”.

John Stanwix in his retirement John wrote a dossier of his flying history and gave Ralph a copy a short time before his passing on 25th April 2014. Ralph had always intended to pursue the publication of this record of John’s achievements but work and other commitments did not seem to provide a clear pathway to fulfil this intention.

Local historian and friend, Gwen Hardstaff, had always been very enthusiastic and felt that they should pursue publication of this work and provide assistance with the initial preparation, options and ongoing support.

Following contact with the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society, Ralph and Gwen were delighted to get their support in a quest to see the book come to reality. The enthusiasm of TAHS was also recorded in Ralph’s foreword remarks “ It has been a pleasure to work with Paul A.C. Richards AM, Chris Byrne and members of the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society. Their knowledge, ability, experience and contacts have enabled this work to progress from my rough-draft form to the book that I am now delighted to finally see in print.

Ralph went on to say that publication of the book was a tribute his friend John Stanwix, a man who worked hard with great enthusiasm in the years of early development of helicopter and fixed wing flights.

John was born in Hobart, Tasmania on 6 September 1932. His parents were Jack and Rita Stanwix. His father was a watchmaker-jeweller who had premises in Liverpool St. in Hobart.

Ralph’s friendship with John began in the early 1940s, when they both became members of a model aeroplane club in Southern Tasmania. At this time, the club headquarters were located in West Hobart at the Lockley home, where as young boys they meticulously built many model planes. To test fly our planes, we travelled to the eastern shore of the Derwent on the ferry ‘*Lurgarena*’ to enable access to open paddocks around an area now known as Mornington.

This friendship with John continued through the years when they both attended secondary school at the Hobart Technical College in Bathurst Street in Hobart.

Ralph remembers that on the first day at this school, all new boys were assembled and asked to tell the class what their plans were for the future. My choice was to become a fitter and turner, others planned to become carpenters, electricians etc. but John did not choose any of these pathways. The Headmaster then asked him what his plans were and John replied that he wanted to become an airline pilot. Obviously, there was no specific course of this type on offer so John also joined the class to become a fitter and turner. This proved to be a relevant choice of study and stood him in good stead for his future exploits in the aircraft industry.

Both John and Ralph obtained apprenticeships at the end of their years at Hobart Junior Technical College and they both maintained an interest in aviation. John’s daily travel to Cambridge Airport, where he was apprenticed to Allen Hume, was on an Ariel Square4 motor-bike. He then bought a 7R

Triumph racing-bike for his daily commute. Fortunately he was never seriously challenged by the police, as they seemed more interested in the machine than the legality issues with riding it.

Around this time, John also built another special bike, which was quite spectacular at that time and was a forerunner of bikes that were yet to come. John gained his aircraft licence at Cambridge, on a Tiger Moth, tutored by Lloyd Jones.

Early in his aviation career John qualified as a licensed aircraft maintenance engineer. Whether working as an engineer, a flying instructor, a helicopter pilot or later as a helicopter salesman, John Stanwix was seen as a man of great integrity. John became one of a fairly small group of Australian aviators who were qualified as pilots and licensed aircraft engineers on both fixed and rotary wing aircraft.

Ralph was awarded a half-scholarship to gain a pilot's licence, by Lloyd Jones around this time, but was unable to complete this course, due to suffering extreme motion-sickness. Ralph soon realised that inhaling petrol fumes in the front cockpit was no place for a weak stomach so that was the end of my flying time and regular meetings with John at Cambridge Airport.

John and Ralph's lives drifted apart as they pursued individual pathways and John moved to Queensland, but they still maintained contact. Ralph was best-man at his wedding in Hobart, prior to his relocation to Queensland to begin his long association with flying helicopters.

In later years, Ralph was fortunate to be able to accompany John on several delivery flights and to holiday with him in Queensland. Ralph now looks back on those years with great pleasure. After retirement, John built his own helicopter but this was a disappointment to him, as it lacked the power he had become used to in other machines he had piloted.

As a result of his constant flying, time spent in the cockpit of helicopters and the time in the Queensland sun, he developed cancerous growths on his face, and these problems later progressed and led to other complications.

Ralph felt that if he did not have this work published, he would have let down this pioneer aviator in the helicopter industry, and importantly, have let down his very good friend.

Ralph King is the Managing Director Of King Trailer Industries ARB, Jayco (King Caravans) Tasmania and has supported the printing of 'The Flying Bug'. Dick Smith a well know aviator of Australia also supported the publication to bring it to fruition.

The book is available from The Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society, Hangar 17, Western Junction, Tasmania for \$70/copy.

Paul A.C. Richards AM

Preface

In early 2020 the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society (TAHS) was approached by Ralph King and Gwen Hardstaff asking if they would help publish a photocopied manuscript 'The Flying Bug' written by John Stanwix a pioneer helicopter pilot who died in 2014. There was no financial commitment attached to the request it was just a matter of preparing the manuscript for publication and then marketing.

The original manuscript or any form of an electronic copy was not available and when John Stanwix's family were asked about the original they unfortunately could not help.

The task at hand was to convert the photocopied manuscript into an electronic format to enable publication. Paul A.C. Richards AM a member of the TAHS volunteered to take on the project and follow through with the publication and marketing of the book gratis as Paul was familiar with publishing over thirty books of his own and all those processes necessary to bring such a project to fruition.

When Paul received the manuscript he noticed a loose leaf letter from Australian aviator and entrepreneur Dick Smith dated 19 July 2000 written to John Stanwix thanking him for being sent a photocopy of the book and offering support to publish.

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter, the copy of your book and the extra book you have given me as a gift. These were a few of the items on my desk when I returned yesterday from flying my Cessna Caravan in South Africa for two weeks.

I was fascinated with your manuscript and believe you should go ahead and publish it. Obviously there will not be huge sales but I believe it is very important for Australia that you go ahead. I am now out of the publishing business so I can give no recommendations, however I may be able to assist in a small way with some financial help if you can get a publisher.

I was particularly interested in the names of the people. I did my second hour of helicopter flying with Bob Larder and I knew Pat Long well. I was also interested in the fact that a number of the locations in Oates Land have been named after you.

As you would know, I have flown over Leningradskaya and I would have flown over Stanwix Ridge without realising that it was named after you. I am currently assisting Don and Margie McIntyre in the purchase of a small icebreaker and we have plans to try and set up an independent base in the Matusevich Glacier region of Oates Land. No doubt if we do this we will be able to visit your ridge.

I may have met you. I seem to remember in 1984 when I flew around Australia in my helicopter VH-DIK, that I called in and saw the helicopters at Proserpine. Would you have been there at that time? If so we may have met or I may have met some of your pilots. Thanks very much for what you have sent me and I hope you can go ahead with the book. Give my regards to Pat Long.

Best Regards

Dick Smith¹

¹ Permission received from Dick Smith 24 May 2021 to publish his letter 19 July 2000

Unfortunately the manuscript did not progress any further. In discussions with Ralph and Gwen it was suggested that Paul contact Dick and ask for his permission to use the letter and also acknowledge him in the book. This was duly done by using the twenty year old email address noted on Dick's letter. A short time later Dick had replied saying that he would be delighted for me to use his letter and made a substantial contribution to the publishing costs which assisted in the manuscript being scanned and formatted ready for publication.

Captain John Stanwix was one of Australia's original adventurers flying aircraft into unknown territory including Papua New Guinea, Antarctica and Australia for Nat Map in the early 1960s. In December 1967, John led the air search for Harold Holt, the Prime Minister of Australia, who disappeared while swimming in the sea near Portsea, Victoria.

John Stanwix was a passionate aviator and after a 60 year flying career he retired from commercial aviation in 1986 in Proserpine, north Queensland.

*Paul A.C. Richards AM
June 2021*

Acknowledgments

The manuscript 'The Flying Bug' acknowledges several key players who have brought this book to fruition after lying dormant for over two decades. The friendship and generosity of Ralph King, Gwen Hardstaff and Dick Smith along with Paul A.C Richards AM and the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society have allowed the book to be published. There have been many others including the Stanwix family and close friends of the late John Stanwix who have also contributed in some way or another to see this extraordinary diary of John's life and passion for aviation become a reality.