



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

CAPTAIN HUXLEY PROMOTES CITIZEN AIRFORCE- 1937

Captain Frederick George Huxley Promotes Citizen Airforce - 1937

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In February 1937 the idea of a citizen air force was mooted at the official opening of a private aerodrome at Campania. There was a growing interest and recognition of the growth in aviation in Tasmania and His Excellency - the Governor recognised this when he officially opened the private aerodrome.

Mr. Dudley Ransom won his wings on active service in WW1. He made available as an aerodrome a paddock on his farm, which was officially recognised as an official airstrip, being passed by expert officers. The *Mercury* reported:¹

It may be hoped that this will be one of a chain of such areas which will be charted and known to all pilots. The official function included a speech by the Governor, one by a State Minister, by the Vice President of the Aero Club, and a short address by Capt. Huxley, who, like the donor of the aerodrome, had a distinguished war record. But there was a notable omission. No one was present representing the Royal Australian Air Force, either the military or the civil aviation branch. This omission of patronage was the more notable because of the speeches which were made. With the constant and insurgent threat of war, the place of aviation in the defence system becomes constantly more important. Captain Huxley made a particular mention of the plan, encouraged by the Aero Club, for the creator of a citizen air force. But at present there is no offer of inducement from the Defence Department. The training which a pilot can get in Tasmania through the Aero Club is excellent so far as it goes. But a pilot thus trained who took up a fighting plane in war would be committing suicide without any possible gain to his side. Indeed, it is more probable that he would be a danger to his own side by upsetting the organised flight. Before a pilot could be available for war service, no matter how well trained he might be in civil flying, he would have to go through an intensive training for some months, and it might be that those would be the critical months of the war. A citizen air force in Tasmania would be attractive to many young men. But until the department gives encouragement, and the means of proper training, which involves the use of military planes, not on occasional visits, but available for training, the building up of such a force would be little better than the organisation of a suicide club if war should come.

In early April, only two months later Captain Huxley was farewelled from Tasmania. He had held the position of aviation officer for the Shell Company in Tasmania and had been promoted to the position of chief aviation officer for the Shell in South Australia.



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The *Advocate* reported:²

HOBART, Friday. - To express their appreciation of the service he had rendered to aviation in Tasmania, and bid him farewell, members of the Tasmanian Aero Club tendered a dinner to Captain F. G. Huxley at the Imperial to-night.

The acting chairman (Mr. Basil Jones) presided in the absence from the State of the Chief Secretary (Mr. T. D'Alton), who is chairman of the club. Associated with him was the acting-Premier (Mr. E. Dwyer-Gray). The guests included Captain J. Francis, first instructor of the club, and Captain P. L. Taylor, one of the first pupils. Messrs. B. Wilmott (president) and C. Ransome (secretary) represented the Australian Flying Corps Association.

Playing a tribute to Captain Huxley, Mr. Jones recalled the fact that he was the first Australian aviator to bring down a German machine in the Great War, and also that he won the title of War Ace by subsequently claiming as his victims six other enemy planes.

Captain Huxley was presented with a travelling case and an illustrated address, prepared by the secretary of the club Mr. M. Roache.

However, in August 1937 the notion of a Citizens Air Force was rejected.

The *Mercury* reported:³

The Commonwealth Government has rejected the proposals advanced by a recent deputation that waited on the Acting Minister for Defence (Mr. H. V. Thorby) for the establishment of a Citizen Air Force Unit in Tasmania. It has also declined to agree to the request for the provision by the Commonwealth of aircraft for the use of the Tasmanian Aero Club. Advice to this effect has been received by Mr. G. W. Mahoney, M.H.R.

The Minister for Defence (Sir Archdale Parkhill) in a letter to Mr. Mahoney regarding the deputation, stated that careful consideration had been given to the proposals submitted by the deputation. The present development programme for the Royal Australian Air Force, approved by the Government, was based on the recommendations of Sir John Salmond, and these did not include the establishment of a unit in Tasmania. Until such time as this programme of development was completed it would not be possible to give consideration to the setting aside of funds for establishing an Air Force unit in Tasmania.

"As regards the proposal for this provision by the Commonwealth of an aircraft for use by the Tasmanian Aero Club for the training of pilots in Tasmania in air defence duties, it is considered by the Air Board that the allotment of a single aircraft in the manner suggested could be a most uneconomical arrangement, as experience has shown that the best results for money expended are to be obtained from definite organised units," states the Minister. "Unless the instruction proposed was imparted by the Royal Australian Air Force personnel, it is considered by the Air Board that there would be little



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result of any real value for defence purposes, in view of the fact that considerable development has taken place, and is still taking place, in every branch of training since the Great War. It is pointed out that training in gunnery, bombing, photography, wireless and the like is essential in any efficient training scheme for defence purposes. This would involve the provision of much valuable equipment. In addition to the aircraft, all of which would have to be properly housed and cared for, and would necessitate the employment of experienced-air-force personnel."

"In any-case, the De Havilland 'Dragon Fly,' which is the type of aircraft suggested by the Tasmanian Aero Club, was designed purely for civil purposes, and has no military characteristics of any kind. It is not suggested, however, that it would be of no use whatever in war, as some use could be made of almost any existing aircraft. Apart from this, if a military type were available, considerable equipment would be required to carry out the training which the sponsors of this proposal have in mind.'

"While I fully appreciate the interest of the Minister for Transport (Mr. D'Alton) and the members of the Aero Club in defence matters, I regret that, for the reasons outlined, it is not practicable at this stage to provide Commonwealth funds for the purpose suggested by the deputation, but I wish to assure you that the question of the establishment of a unit in Tasmania will not be lost sight of if any further extension of the Royal Australian Air Force is contemplated after the Salmond scheme is completed."

In 1951 it was announced by Captain Waddy, the Citizen Air Force representative on the Air Board at the opening of an air pageant at Western Junction, that an Air Force squadron, to be known as the Tasmanian Squadron, would to be based on Western Junction and implemented sometime in the future.

The *Mercury* reported:⁴

"It should be a matter of pride to Tasmanians to know that a Citizen Air Force squadron will be based on Western Junction, and that the Citizen Air Force will be looking for Tasmanian personnel to man the squadron," said Capt. Waddy.

However, as the years rolled on, no sign of the Tasmanian Citizens Air Force emerged. This report in 1953 attests to no major advance. The *Daily Examiner* reported in September:⁵

Air Force Week: CANBERRA, Sun, — RAAF units throughout Australia will be open to the public during Air Force Commemoration Week, which begins tomorrow. During the week RAAF aircraft fly over many country centres. Citizen Air Force squadrons in capital cities of each State except Tasmania will give flying displays on September 19 and 20.

Again, in October 1954 support for claims for a permanent Air Force base in Tasmania was given by the Premier, Mr. Cosgrove.⁶



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A Note on Frederick George Huxley

Born on King Island, WW1 flying ace awarded the military cross.



"The weather on the Western Front was poor with a lot of low-lying cloud. Only low-level flying was possible and British aircraft did their best to help the troops by carrying out low level reconnaissance and ground attack missions. 68 and 84 Squadrons in were heavily involved and suffered for it. Lieutenant Frederick George Huxley from 68 Squadron RFC (2 Squadron AFC) engaged a single seater enemy scout which he destroyed. This was the first victory for 68 Squadron."



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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68 Squadron WW1, Captain Huxley is circled

¹ *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Monday 15 February 1937, page 6

² *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Saturday 3 April 1937, page 7

³ *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Saturday 14 August 1937, page 14

⁴ *Mercury* (Hobart, Tas. : 1860 - 1954), Tuesday 6 March 1951, page 1

⁵ *Daily Examiner* (Grafton, NSW : 1915 - 1954), Monday 14 September 1953, page 3

⁶ *Advocate* (Burnie, Tas. : 1890 - 1954), Friday 1 October 1954, page 9