



**TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated**

**TASMANIAN AVIATION GIANTS – THE HOLYMAN FAMILY  
HAZEL HOLYMAN – “THE MATRON”**

**Tasmanian Aviation Giants – The Holyman Family - Hazel Holyman “The Matron”**

*Author: W. Dearing, December 2021*



It would be remiss that any story or history regarding the Holyman family and Australian National Airways (ANA) is recorded without reference to the airline’s air hostesses (or flight attendants in today’s language) and in particular, one incredible lady known affectionately throughout the company as “Matron Holyman”.



**Sisters Mollie (R) and Hazel (L) Gaunt**

Born in Launceston on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1899, the eldest of four children of locally born parents Frederick and Emmeline Gaunt, Hazel was educated at Broadland House Church of England Girls’ Grammar School in Launceston.

Hazel married Victor Clive Holyman on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1921, at Christ Church Longford.



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When Victor and his brother Ivan expanded the family’s shipping business into aviation in 1932, Hazel supported the family business by driving passengers to the airport, providing them with blankets, biscuits, and coffee for their forthcoming flight. It could be argued that Hazel became Australia’s and the airline’s first air hostess and she did it without leaving the ground!!

However, she was dealt a cruel blow by the death of her husband in the 1934 crash of the aircraft *Miss Hobart*. Following Victor’s death, she withdrew from the “firm” and sought solace by travelling in England and America. Whilst in America she spent time in Chicago with officials from United Airlines, one of the pioneers of air hostessing services.

At the suggestion of Ivan Holyman that she take up the role of hostess superintendent, Hazel took up duties in her new role in November 1939 with just 18 hostesses. By the time of her retirement in 1955, the numbers had grown to almost 200.

On commencement of her new role, her duties were far from glamorous. They included taking charge of stores, catering, laundry, designing uniforms, and even filling in for hostesses that were too sick to fly. Always elegant, composed and very much in charge she was forever courteous and had a very pleasant manner.

While she ruled the hostesses with a rod of iron and was renowned for her steely grey eyes that could spot dirty shoes, crooked stockings seams, and soiled unpressed uniforms at fifty paces, most hostesses soon realised she had a heart of gold. Although she gave the impression of being a “tough old bird” she was as soft as butter underneath and was known to cry after having to reprimand a hostess.



**Executives of ANA in 1945. Seated are Hazel (left), Ivan Holyman (centre) and Lawrence Johnson (second from right)**



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Matron Holyman believed in first class service and that hostesses were essentially a public relations job. She was one of the first to realise that airlines are largely judged by the people the passengers spend the most time with – the air hostesses. As such the “Matron” encouraged hostesses to speak with every passenger insisting they allocate the time to do this.

In the early 1950’s aviation and flying was still very much a novelty for some and a nerve-wracking experience for others. Another function of ANA’s hostesses that was deemed vitally important was to reassure anxious and nervous passengers, whilst at all times, maintaining an air of calm and control.

Matron Holyman had strong views on the hostesses’ appearance. She preferred a neat, efficient and discipline image rather than a glamorous one.



**“Matron” Holyman presenting their wings to newly graduated hostesses.**

Hostesses had to keep their hair tidy and above the uniform’s collar, skirts were to be mid-calf length, gloves must be worn, together with stockings and sensible shoes with faces made up with a smile and little else. All of these requirements were often for a very short career as an airline hostess. Until the introduction of the DC-4s all ANA aircraft operated with one hostess, unless a trainee was flying with an experienced hostess, whereas the DC-4s required two hostesses and on their introduction the DC-6s required three.



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Early life as a hostess was not all glamour but plain hard work. Most hostesses stayed with the airline only for a period of approximately two years although one reason for this, as with all airlines at the time, was because they had to resign upon marriage.

ANA used their hostess training to achieve another first for the airline when they use their hostesses and their in-flight service as a promotional tool. The hostesses being presented in promotions and advertisements based not on their glamour and beauty, but on their training and dependability.



The ultimate test for hostesses would be demonstrated in a crisis situation and whilst the vast majority of the hostesses never experienced an emergency, those who did found their training proved invaluable.

All hostesses were taught emergency procedures, the need to remain calm and the importance of getting passengers out of a crashed aircraft. The success of their training was graphically illustrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1946 with the crash of the DC-3 "Kurana" at Mount Macedon. Tragically both pilots were killed but the hostess on the flight, Elizabeth Fry, managed to supervise and assist all passengers safely from the burning wreckage, applying first aid to the injured until help arrived. In recognition of her coolness and courage Elizabeth Fry was presented with an inscribed silver tray from Lloyds of London. She was the first hostess in the world to receive such an award. A tribute to their training.



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Nan Whitcomb was a long serving hostess, joining ANA in 1950 and in the final chapter of her book “Up here and Down There” she referred to the methods and training received under the guidance of Hazel Holyman. She commented that “I tried to follow the Matron’s recipes for law and order and a mixture of loyalty and sense of belonging of a group with a common worthwhile purpose.”

Under Matron Holyman, the ANA hostess service was an enormous strength to the airline. Her influence lasted long after her retirement in 1955, extending through not only ANA, but also Ansett, TAA and Qantas as her senior hostesses were recruited to leadership positions with other airlines.

In 1966 Hazel Holyman was nominated for the “Down to Earth Club” formed that year by former Ansett-ANA air hostesses that raised money for various charities. She continued her involvement with this group for the rest of her life.



**Hazel on her 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

Awarded an AM in 1980 she also received an Advance Australia Award for her services to aviation in 1988.

Hazel Holyman died in Launceston on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1992.

***NEXT ISSUE: Post war years flying for ANA.***