



**Tasmanian Aviation  
Historical Society**

*Preserving Tasmania's aviation history.*



## ***“ROARING FORTIES”***

***OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE TASMANIAN  
AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY INCORPORATED***

**NEWSLETTER NUMBER 17 - MARCH 2024**

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**TASMANIAN AVIATION  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**NEWSLETTER NUMBER 17**

Welcome to the 17th edition of our quarterly newsletter “*Roaring Forties*”

Our President Andrew Johnson provides his annual report on the activities and achievements during 2023 and the future plans for our society.

**TAHS - Office Bearers.**

**Patron:** R Holyman  
**President:** A Johnson  
**Vice President:** J Brett  
**Treasurer and Membership:** C Gilbert  
**Secretary:** W Dearing  
**Newsletter Editor:** W Dearing  
**Executive:** P Manktelow  
I Pinkard  
L Millar

We all admire the courage and daring of Tasmania’s early aviators. Tasmanian Max Sanders, DFC, a navigator on a Lancaster during World War 2 was one of those. He completed 31 missions, and it is in his story, we discover the incredible bravery of the crews who knew only too well their slim chances of survival.

From Bomber Command to RAF fighters comes the story of Tasmanian Spitfire pilot Phillip Miller during World War 2

This issue also contains an article provided by Australian Historical Aviation Association President Dave Prosser on his experiences flying float planes out of Strahan.

As we enter a new year we look forward in continuing to present articles that embrace Tasmania’s historical events and people.

“Captain Sizzle” aka Peter Manktelow provides another insight into his world of helicopters and glider pilots!!!!!!

Items that show the lives of Tasmanian aviators, their careers and achievements, the tragedies, developments and the future of aviation in our state that to date has provided so much to aviation throughout not only Tasmania but our entire country and in some cases overseas.

We also touch on Skyrace Tasmania and an interesting visitor from the US together with our “Do you remember” page, some early visitors to Wynyard and passenger flights in the 1920’s.



## ***PRESIDENT'S REPORT***

*Andrew Johnson, President TAHS.*

Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society President's Report February 2024 saw the TAHS enter into its fifth year of operations and another twelve months of significant activity for our young society.

In the Air conference was again successfully held at Launceston Grammar School attracting a number of quality speakers from around Australia sharing their aviation stories. An encouraging number attended both the seminar and soiree sessions enjoying the rich offerings and opportunity to catch up and meet. The addition of a mentoring session was well received, delivering aviation insights from a range of industry individuals to the year 10s. I do hope the TAHS can continue to deliver some sort of gathering of aviation enthusiasts in future years.

The other large project delivered in 2023 was the touring exhibition Flying by the Seat of their Pants. During the year it has been installed in three locations: Furneaux Museum on Flinders Island, the Queen Victoria Museum and in the Airport at King Island. All three locations have offered the opportunity for the pioneering aviation stories of Bass Strait to be shared to a large number of people. Attempts to travel the exhibition interstate have not been successful however there are opportunities to take the exhibition or parts of it around more of Tasmania.

Building on the relationship established with the midland's council, work has continued on the Harold Gatty Memorial in Campbell Town. There is an important Tasmanian aviation story to tell here and it pleasing that the TAHS are involved and supporting work being done on the memorial to ensure it is not forgotten.

## ***PRESIDENT'S REPORT***

*(Continued)*

Communications have again been strong through a variety of channels including the quarterly newsletter, the website and Facebook. An impressive depth of stories and history has been recorded over the short time the society have been going.

The passing of Neil Louis last year was a sad day for the society. Neil was one of the founding members of the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society and a positive supporter during his involvement. We are very fortunate to have his wife Lyn join up as a member and continue providing energy and action.

Thank you to our Bunnings Sausage Sizzle captains and crew who have helped make this a very successful generator of funds for the society. It has also been so pleasing to see the days become an enjoyable social get together for members. The TAHS have continued to build on and establish positive, supportive partnerships this year. Sponsorship for In the Air and FBTSOTP have guaranteed the success of these two events.

Helicopter Resources in Launceston have been enormously supportive this year led by Hoey and Joe Pentridge. They have provided a choice of venues to regularly gather including another Christmas get together. Foot and Playstead were also generous in allowing us to use their board room. The next twelve months are looking interesting with the offer to acquire the Gipsy Moth VH-ULM. What an opportunity to return this aircraft to where it began its career in Launceston and played such an important part in Tasmania's Aviation history.

Regards, Andrew Johnson - President

**TASMANIAN AVIATION  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**2024 ANNUAL GENERAL  
MEETING REPORT**

The 2024 TAHS Annual General Meeting was held on Sunday 17 March at Helicopter Resources rooms.

During the meeting the first life-member on TAHS was appointed. Hobart member Rob Gard was awarded the honour by club President Andrew Johnson and will be presented with a plaque in memory of the event.

The Executive Committee for 2024 is listed for your information.



*Above and below TAHS file photos of "Miss Flinders" on display at Launceston Airport.*



**TAHS 2024 EXECUTIVE**

**Patron:** R Holyman

**President:** A Johnson

**Vice President:** J Brett

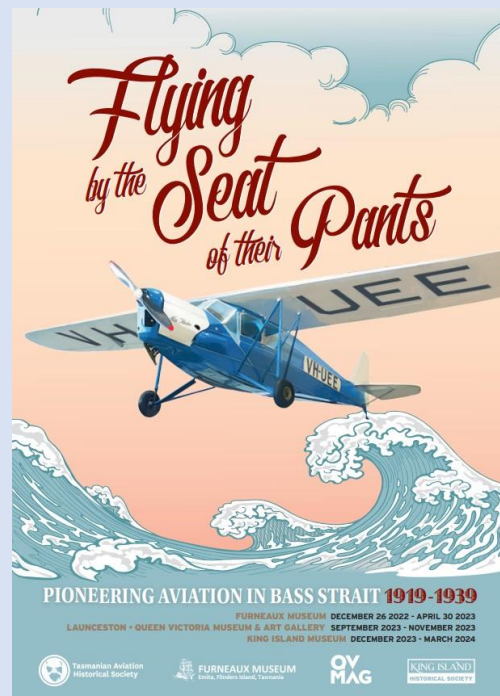
**Secretary:** Vacant

**Treasurer:** P Mantkelow

**Public Officer:** P Manktelow

**Executive:** I Pinkard

L Millar



*Exhibition now at King Island Airport.*



**MAXWELL FRED SANDERS,  
DFC, RAAF NAVIGATOR.**

*By W Dearing*



*Photo courtesy F Madill author "Sanders DFC,  
Out of The Darkness."*

In the words of Commander-in-Chief, Bomber Command Air Marshall Arthur Harris commenting on the courage of the aircrew that fought under his command –

*"There is no parallel in warfare to such courage and determination in the face of danger over so prolonged a period....it was moreover, a clear and highly conscious courage.....it was, furthermore, the courage of the small hours, of men virtually alone taken with calm forethought, for at his battle station the airman is virtually alone."*

Of every 100 aircrew who started training in the UK only 24 would survive the war unscathed. Crews had to fly 30 missions before being allowed a rest. Their chances of survival were 300% less than that of the ANZAC Corps. So, into this environment of carnage and incredible courage comes heroes. Heroes like Tasmania's Maxwell Fred Sanders, DFC.

**MAXWELL FRED SANDERS,  
DFC.**

Max was born in Launceston on 30 September 1924, the eldest of three children, of William and his wife Emily.

His early education was at the Glen Dhu primary school then onto the Launceston Junior Technical College. The Easter of 1940, at the age of 14, saw Max being pulled out of school by his father, a common occurrence of the times, and starting as a junior salesman at the general merchants D & W Murray.

In 1940 at the age of 16, Max decided he should join the newly formed northern flight of the Number 84 Cadet Squadron – Ait Training Corps (ATC). Max was duly issued with his new RAAF uniform that he proudly wore with his fellow cadets. 1941 Air Force Cadets took part in parade drills, mathematics, aircraft and ship recognition and general matters relating to the service organisation. Max also still found time to call on an attractive young lady by the name of Merle, but more of that later. A somewhat ironical issue during this period was that there was no flying for the cadets, in fact they never even visited the local airport, Western Junction.

When he reached the age of 18, Max was obliged to register for national military service. Because he did qualify for exemption he joined up on 26 February 1943, and because of his Air Cadet service chose, and was accepted into the Royal Australian Air Force.

Max continued to wear his ATC uniform until he was commissioned two years later but in handing his old uniform in, he kept his original cadet forage cap. That cap accompanied Max on every one of his 31 missions and remained with him for the rest of his life.

**MAXWELL FRED SANDERS,  
DFC.**

His initial allocation was to the No 1 Initial Training School at Somers Victoria. Max remembers well that in 1943 it was a sparsely populated remote area and bitterly cold. You filled a hessian bag with straw for your mattress and slept in corrugated iron huts that had no heating or insulation.

At the end of this training Max achieved what he called an average result and the rank of Leading Aircraftman. Unlike his fellow recruits Max's interest was in navigation and he subsequently applied for and was accepted a role as Observer/Navigator.

From Somers it was onto Number 2 Air Observers School at Mount Gambier where, for the first time, he began actual flying. The aircraft were twin engine Avro Ansons.



*Photo Avro Anson, RAAF Mt Gambier, courtesy Australian War Memorial.*

First built in 1935 they were already obsolete as bombers and Max did not enjoy flying in these aircraft primarily because he was air sick every time he flew.

In addition to the flying there were lectures and long periods of study with everyone under a good deal of pressure and strict discipline

**MAXWELL FRED SANDERS,  
DFC.**

There was one other thing on Max's mind, or should we say person, that young lady by the name of Merle. One evening in October 1943 Max made a phone call to Merle wishing her a happy birthday and would she marry him. She accepted!!

From Mt Gambier the trainees moved to Number 3 Bombing and Gunnery School at Sale in Victoria. More intense flying training, lectures and studies greeted them with exams every few weeks. Gunnery training was in Fairey Battles



*Photo Fairy Battle taxiing for take-off courtesy TAHS collection.*

Both the Avro Anson and Fairey Battle were to say the least uncomfortable to fly in. Minimum room, the constant smell of oil and fuel made the training not only difficult but unenjoyable, however, Max made his way through the course and onto the next training aircraft an Airspeed Oxford.



*Photo Airspeed Oxford courtesy Aust War Museum*

## **MAXWELL FRED SANDERS, DFC.**

These were specifically designed as a training aircraft and was significantly more comfortable. Whilst training accidents were all too common Max went right through his training without a flying accident.

His next posting was to number 1 AOS (Air Observers School) at Evans Head, NSW where Max was introduced to Astronavigation which, he said, he almost never used on operations as the visibility had to be good and that would not be possible in the English weather!

On completion of this course Max earned his sergeant's stripes and two weeks leave spent back in Launceston with his family and of course Merle.

On 29 January 1944, Max boarded the Nieuw Amsterdam steaming off from Melbourne en-route to the UK. subsequently arriving at Greenock, the Port of Glasgow in Scotland. Finally, after three weeks Max arrived at No 9 Advanced Flying Unit (AFU) at Llandwrog North Wales. Here training became more specific and he attended lectures only with other navigators. On 11 April 1944 Max took to the English skies for the first time aboard an Avro Anson. In contrast to Australia the English countryside appeared to be a spider's web of rail and roads making it easy to feel lost. It was here Max learnt the navigator's creed – *“Man is not lost – merely temporarily unsure of his present position.”*

After eight gruelling weeks Max was ordered to report to 1656 Heavy Conversion Unit (HCU) Lindholm in Yorkshire. Here Max was introduced to his first four engine heavy bomber, the

## **MAXWELL FRED SANDERS, DFC.**

Halifax. With a crew of seven plus three trainee navigators it was a cramped training environment but the friendship and assistance made up for any discomfort.



*Photo Halifax Bomber courtesy Pinterest.*

Seven weeks and eight training flights later he was ordered to report to Pilot Officer J A Anderson who greeted him thus – *“They tell me you're going to be my new navigator. If I agree.”* What Max didn't know was Anderson's previous three navigators had, for various reasons, been rejected by Anderson.

Max was ushered into the crew room and Anderson introduced him to the five men who had been waiting. An awkward pause followed then the Wireless Operator, “Eddie” Johanson broke the ice by saying– *“well we really are a crew of odd bods- three Englishmen three Canadians and an Aussie.”* Max quickly fitted in.

The training was intense. The new crew had their first training flight together on 12 June 1944 in a Halifax bomber. Over the next four days they logged 22 hours flying before being posted to Number 1 Lanc Finishing School at Helmswell.

Their first flight in a Lancaster occurred on 01 July 1944, and on following training



**MAXWELL FRED SANDERS,  
DFC.**

flights the crew change places so as to become familiar with each other's position and functions.

Further training on survival techniques was undertaken and kits were issued to all aircrew. During this period Max had been unaware that Anderson had checked with every crew member and found all in agreement that they had found their navigator. Max had found his crew and the adventure was about to begin. Their posting was to the Canadian Squadron 419 at Middleton St George, the "Moose Squadron."



*Photo Lancaster Bomber courtesy Pinterest.*

The transition from training to operations saw Max promoted to Flight Sergeant and a sixpence per day pay increase. So, the new crew was trained and ready. Anderson had done two trips as a spare pilot and Eddie had previous experience in the Middle East theatre. As for the others, it was literally going to be taking off into the unknown. Late in the evening of the 17 July Anderson notified the crew that they would be going into action early the next morning. Their aircraft, Lancaster KB 700 Z-Zebra the "Ruhr Express", was the first Mark X Lancaster to come off the Canadian production line.

**MAXWELL FRED SANDERS,  
DFC.**

Take-off was 3am next morning, the target Caen, 4.45hrs flight time, 963 miles, bomb load 11 x 1000lbs and 4 x 500lbs, fuel 1,300 gallons.



*Photo of nosecone of 419 Squadron Lancaster proudly showing the "Moose Emblem" courtesy of Pinterest.*

**THE CREW ON THAT FIRST MISSION**

*Pilot: John Allen Anderson "Andy"*

*Navigator: Maxwell Sanders "Sandy"*

*Bomb-aimer: Alexander McKillop "Pat"*

*Wireless Op: Edward Johanson "Eddie"*

*Flt Engineer: Alva Kenyon "Alfie".*

*Mid-upper gun: Maurice Gerard "Gerry"*

*Tail gun: Frederick Flippant "Flip"*

***It should be noted that this was the crew of the first mission. Edward Johanson was replaced as wireless-operator by Norman McConnachie "Sam" later.***

***Acknowledgements: The editor gratefully acknowledges permission of the Sander's family and Frank Madill author of the book Sanders "Out of the Darkness", in allowing TAHS to present this article.***

***Next issue: The war years and thirty more missions.***



## ***“FLYING FROM STRAHAN”***

***My experiences by AHSA (Vic) President  
Dave Prosser.***

I worked at Strahan in the period 1996 and again in 2005. In my time at Strahan in 1996 we had no less than five Cessna 185 float planes. The main flying was to go from Strahan down to the Sir John Falls. The CEO, Kevin, figured that after the Port Arthur shooting the tourists would flood back but alas that did not happen and as a result, we had more aircraft and pilots than we actually needed.



*Photograph Floatplane taxiing at Strahan  
Photo courtesy Pinterest.*

On my second session at Strahan, I again flew as a float plane pilot with occasional work in a Cessna 206. The company was Seair Adventure Charters a.k.a. Strahan Seaplanes and Helicopters. I did some charter and some fire spotting. My very first job on arrival at Strahan on 26 January 2005 I got asked to take five passengers across to Hobart airport. We took off in the C206 and with low cloud on the mountain tops I weaved back and forth to get into Hobart. Later that day I went back the same way. Yes, an interesting flight.

I drove to Queenstown airport several times for a look see. The west coast salty air is not good for the body work of cars. These days the strip is 09/27, 1250 m. The north/south strip is now abandoned but part

## ***“FLYING FROM STRAHAN”***

of it is now the taxiway to the terminal, a simple shed. No fuel available. There is a reported Queenstown taxi service but no good for Strahan, a half hour drive away.

The north south strip must have been shortened over the years. It was an airport that I put into the category of an alternate, a plan B airstrip to use in case my wheeled aircraft could not get into Strahan.

The strip at Zeehan (now the star of a TV movie production!) was a short strip. I looked at that strip and while I never operated into it, I figured that it was a strip only suitable for the likes of a lightly loaded Cessna 172 and a good pilot. You would have to land on the very start of the runway or risk over running it. There was also an even shorter east-west strip.

Strahan. I flew a Cessna 185 floatplane off the water front. I flew for a firm called Wilderness Air. The firm had a large hangar where the big car park is now, just adjacent to the boat launch ramp. We used that ramp to get the float planes out of the water and into the hangar every night. Sometimes quite an exercise and a tight fit.

In my time off I would go down to the Strahan airstrip to see what aircraft were visiting. It was always interesting. There was no fuel available for the small numbers of visiting aircraft. With Wilderness Air there was a fuel tanker that called in and that topped up the big tank on the shore line. On my second time at Strahan our firm had fuel drums stored in a shed at the airport but none for sale. Those drums had to be trucked down from Wynyard. Expensive.

In both my times at Strahan there was no taxi to take aircrew from the airport and they would have to rely on their motel or

## ***“FLYING FROM STRAHAN”***

hotel to give them a ride into town. Good luck! I understand that still applies, no taxi available even today. Good reason for an Uber ride to be at Strahan.

The airstrip at Strahan is a north south airstrip (Runway 18/36, 1220 m long). Because of the westerly weather one could expect to get a good cross wind for a landing or take off. Many years before my 1996 time at Strahan there had been a light twin, probably a PA23 Apace/Aztec that took off to the north but crashed very soon after lift-off. I saw no remains. The rubbish dump was on the route to the airstrip. I went there several times looking for house bricks to make a temporary book shelf in my digs but could find none. Strange that.

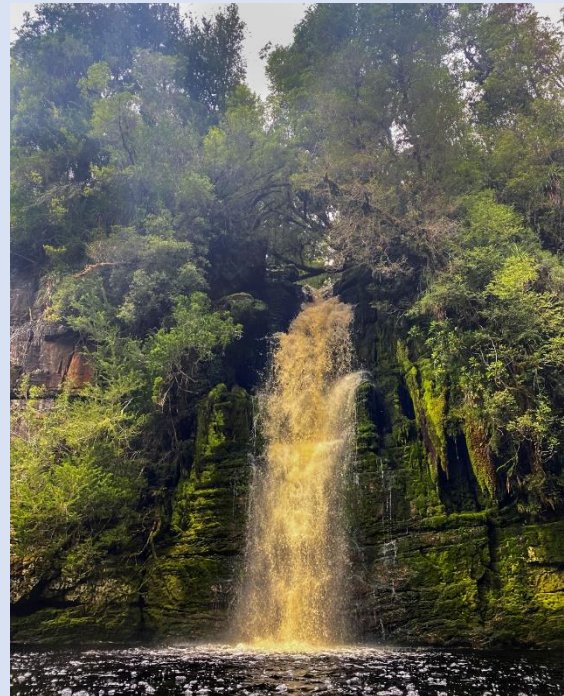


*“Dave’s office window”. Flying past Frenchman’s Cap West Coast Tasmania. Photo TAHS collection.*

Flying the floatplane was interesting and different. We took off from Strahan and flew down to the jetty and landing at Sir John Falls. There we let the passengers out and they could take the short walk to the falls for a look see. The jetty is almost opposite where a dam across the Franklin River was proposed back in 1982 but after many protests the plan was abandoned. To land on the river we had to go from 800’ elevation to make no less than four turns of the gorge and river before seeing where we

## ***“FLYING FROM STRAHAN”***

would land the floatplane. Then a taxi up to a corner and to the jetty. A pilot had to approach the jetty, make a low powered turn and then cut the engine and glide on the water to step off the float and onto the jetty with the painter (rope) in hand. Most times it was a smooth exercise but if one cut the power too soon or too late problems would arise.



*“St John Falls” Photo courtesy of Robert Parsons.*

I did some 5-6 six months at Strahan on my first floatplane charter work. On my second time at Strahan, we had a C185 float plane plus a Cessna 206 land plane. Both operations have since shut down. Float planes at Strahan was a managerial exercise nightmare. Getting suitable pilots and getting them trained for a job that only lasted for 5-6 months. Having them fly into a river gorge with trees close on each side and land on the river was an exercise in itself. Then getting enough passengers/tourists to fly in the float planes was yet another exercise. Maintenance for aircraft was yet another



## ***“FLYING FROM STRAHAN”***

negative. One time I had a starter motor fail on an attempted start up at Sir John Falls. I lost a lot of time doing a hand start and then had to get the passengers back aboard the aircraft, then to untie the painter and taxi away for the take- off. Not for the faint hearted.

I enjoyed my time working at Strahan. I would like to go back and see the then and now differences.

Dave Prosser

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## ***“SKYRACE TASMANIA REMEMBERED”***

In the mid 1990’s Tasmania again created aviation history by conducting the first “Aircraft Pylon Racing” in the southern hemisphere. The event was conducted at the ex-RAAF airstrip at “Valleyfield” Epping Forest. Just to whet your appetite for a future article, David Swiggs, a Tasmanian RFDS Captain, has generously provided this pictorial history of the early events.



*One of two Sea Fury’s that competed in the unlimited racing class.*

## ***SKYRACE TASMANIA REMEMBERED***



*A T-6 Texan Harvard complete with guest pilot “Mickey Mouse”*



*The RFDS Kingair arriving at Valleyfield, showing its versatility using grass strips.*



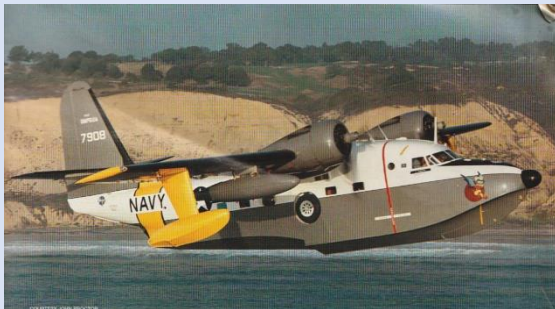
*And what airshow would be complete without a performance by legendary aviator Bob Hoover.*



## ***A RATHER UNIQUE VISITOR TO TASMANIAN SKIES***

Skyrace Tasmania was a unique and spectacular aviation event full of speed, skill and competition amongst the competitors, but more of that in a later issue.

This story is about a visiting recreational vehicle that just happened to be in Tasmania for Skyrace and decided to drop in for a look. This RV was by no means your average vehicle, in fact, it was a refurbished Grumman Albatross aircraft and its American husband-and-wife team of John and Joyce Proctor are in the middle of their planned round the world flight that they estimate will take about two and a half years to complete.



*Airborne off Lake Wanaka NZ. Photo courtesy of John Proctor;*

For the technically minded reader the aircraft was manufactured in 1954 by Grumman Aircraft Corporation and weighs just over 30,000lbs (about 14,000kgs), is 62 feet long, has an 80-foot wingspan and stands 26 feet tall.

Two Pratt and Whitney 1820s engines with two-speed superchargers develop 1425 hp at 52 inches of manifold pressure and 2700 rpm. The aircraft carries 1,680 gallons (approx 3,600 litres) of fuel and two oil tanks each carrying 29 gallons (approx 64 litres). In addition, the aircraft carries three anchors, 60 feet of chain and 2,000 feet of line for mooring.

## ***A RATHER UNIQUE VISITOR TO TASMANIAN SKIES***

But it's the interior that leaves you speechless. The entire cabin was outfitted as you would an antique yacht. The woodwork for the cabins is teak and black walnut. Every inch of space was uniquely utilised with every conceivable home comfort.



*Above Table and chairs in the dining room whilst below is the shower.*



## *A RATHER UNIQUE VISITOR TO TASMANIAN SKIES*

The bathroom, pictured on the preceding page, has a tub and two showers. A 9KW alternator driven by a 16 hp Y twin, provides the power and for fresh water there is a desalination and water purification plant that is capable of providing up to 40 gallons (approx 90 litres) an hour whilst below is the full kitchen complete with micro wave, couch and a small green house located in the observation window behind the couch.



In addition to all of this there was a heating and air conditioning system, a queen size bed, a state of-the-art computer system and when you are securely moored and you need to go to the supermarket there is a Honda trail bike. As the Proctor's agree if this was going to be their home for the next two and a half years it should be as comfortable as possible.

## *A RATHER UNIQUE VISITOR TO TASMANIAN SKIES*



Joyce Proctor, pictured above, at a work station in the forward cabin is one of only two women in the US to be endorsed on the Grumman Albatross.

The Proctors arrived in Australia from New Zealand and after leaving Tasmania will continue with their world trip in this incredible RV "home away from home".



The Protors Grumman Albatross pictured above and featuring the nose art logo "For World Travel" and a likeness of Ariel from Disney's animated movie The Little Mermaid.



## ***STAVANGAR AND THE RAAF GLIDER PILOTS***

*Author Peter Manktelow*

You would think that flying helicopters would be fairly localised flying and unlike a Boeing 747 or an A380, rotary wing aircraft would not often get around internationally.

I flew for many years with a Canadian company called Okanagan Helicopters Pty Ltd, which later became Canadian Helicopter Corporation. Most of our work was in providing transport for the offshore oil and gas industry and where they had rigs, we flew to them. Sometimes that entailed a round- trip flight of three plus hours over water, out to 200 nautical miles from the coast.

Of course, we had to get to various locations from which to base the helicopter and if time permitted, then the aircraft would be shipped. If time did not permit then we ferried all the way to the location.

One of my memorable ferry flights was Exmouth, Port Headland, Broome, Kupang, Denpasar, Dkakarta, Singalora, Hat Yai, Bangkok, Rangoon, Calcutta, Nagpur, Amadabad, Karachi, Seeb, Bahrain, Hail, Luxor, Cairo, Athens, Naples, Marseilles, Dinard, Shannon in Ireland. That was 107 flight hours over eleven days with a day off on Bangkok and again in Athens for maintenance.

The above ferry flight was under the command of Captain Dave Whyte with myself as a raw co-pilot. The aircraft was a Sikorsky S61N. This was a 24-passenger machine with two pilots and a flight attendant or engineer, in our case, the late Ken Cosh. Planned cruise speed was 115 knots and we always took off at maximum all up weight of 20,500 pounds with three

## ***STAVANGAR AND THE RAAF GLIDER PILOTS***

full under floor fuel-tanks, an above floor ferry tank and 4 drums of fuel also above floor.



*Two views of the Sikorsky S61N Helicopter graphically showing the size of the aircraft. Photos courtesy P Manktelow collection.*



So where do these gliders pilots come into the picture?

In 2011 I transferred from Canadian Helicopter Corporation International to our sister company Canadian Helicopter Corporation Australia and in doing so, had to undertake a conversion to a new type of helicopter. As such I had to go to Stravangar Norway which was where the simulator was based for training on the AS332L/L1 Super Puma. The course was conducted over six weeks of ground school and simulator flying but we did have the weekends off



## STAVANGAR AND THE RAAF GLIDER PILOTS



AS 332L/L1 Super Puma Helicopter Photo courtesy of Pinterest.

In my previous international travels, I had always looked out for locations that may have some World War II history and Stavanger was not going to disappoint me.



Stavanger Norway, Photo courtesy of Pinterest.

Their aviation museum displayed many World War II aircraft types and they had them set up so that, while you could not get into the cockpit as such, the inspection walkways allowed you to get right beside the aircraft's cockpit. Stavanger was a German Luftwaffe base during the war hosting Me 109's and 110's.

## STAVANGAR AND THE RAAF GLIDER PILOTS



Above Messerschmitt 109 and below the Messerschmitt 110, photos courtesy of Pinterest.



There was also, as I discovered, a Commonwealth War Graves cemetery fairly close to the town and that is where I found out about two RAAF pilots.

What in blazes were these two Aussie RAAF pilots doing in a Stavanger cemetery?

And glider pilots at that!

Confused? So are we!!!!!!



But, stay tuned and we will try to answer that question in our next issue!!!!!!

## ***TASMANIAN SPITFIRE PILOT***

### ***PHILLIP MILLER'S STORY.***

***Author: Lindsay Millar.***

Phillip Charles Miller, born 03rd August 1917, spent his early days on his parent's orchard "Constant Springs" at Hillwood, Tasmania.

At 16 years of age he left home and headed to Queensland obtaining employment in a variety of industries including mining, cane cutting and farming. Whilst visiting Townsville, in 1940, Charles decided on joining the RAAF. A problem, that may have impacted his flying ambitions, arose at his medical where it was determined he was colour blind. Using true Tasmania ingenuity, he sought a second opinion that resulted, after some financial leverage, in him passing his medical. On 03<sup>rd</sup> January 1941 he was called up and posted to Narromine, NSW to commence his basic training. On-route he met a young lady, Christine Pearson, who he would ultimately marry on his return to Australia.



***Phillip Charles Miller***

### ***PHILLIP MILLER'S STORY.***

On completion of his training on Tiger Moths Phillip journeyed to Canada to complete his fighter pilot training on the America T-6 Texan Harvard aircraft. Whilst there he became a "film star" acting as James Cagney's stunt pilot in a movie publicising the war effort. He graduated with a "Distinguished Pass" on the 25th September 1941 and duly arrived in the United Kingdom by ship on 09 November. He was posted to Nr 56 Officer Training Unit (OTU) to complete his fighter pilot training on the Supermarine Spitfire aircraft. On completion he joined Nr 616 Squadron and flew his first operational mission on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1942 flying the high-altitude Spitfire Mark VB.



***Photo of the Spitfire Mark VB courtesy of Pinterest. (Note the pointed wingtips of the high-altitude variant.)***



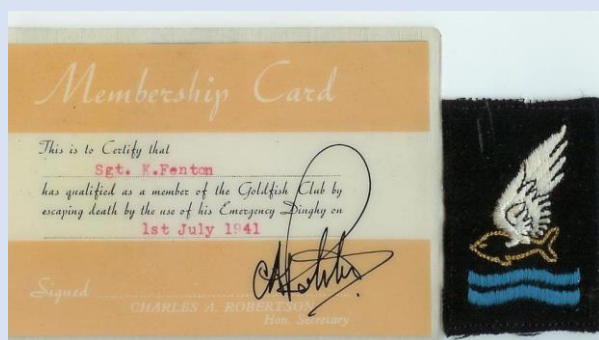
***Relaxing at 616 Squadron. Phillip is third from left lying down***

## PHILLIP MILLER'S STORY

616 Squadron flew fighter sorties over the English Channel and French coastline at heights up to 40,000 feet as against 30,000 feet in the conventional Spitfire range.

On 15<sup>th</sup> April 1942 whilst flying a fighter sweep over the French coastline at 30,000 feet Phillip was attacked by an Me 109. The engine was hit and commenced to overheat and Phillip, whilst still under attack, placed the aircraft in a dive and headed for the English coastline. Suddenly the engine stopped and Phillip was left no option but to ditch the aircraft about 5 miles off the south east U K coast at Dungeness. By this time the ME 109 had broken off the attack.

On impact his face smashed into the aircraft's instrument panel breaking an ankle but worse detaching one eye out of its socket. Somehow, he exited the aircraft climbed into his dinghy and once aboard he managed to replace his eye. Luckily Phillip was quickly picked up by one of the air/sea rescue units earning membership of the "Goldfish Club" whose airman had been rescued by air/sea rescue units.



*Acknowledgements: Early Goldfish Membership Card Photo courtesy BBC News.*

Phillip was transferred to the Queen Victoria Hospital in West Sussex where he was in the care of Doctor Archibald

## PHILLIP MILLER'S STORY

McIndoe who was a pioneer of burns and reconstructive surgery during World War Two. When told by the surgeon that Phillip needed a major nose reconstruction and what shape would he like, Phillip merely replied "*yours looks pretty good, I want one like that*".

After two months in hospital and a nose rebuild that qualified him for the famous "Guinea Pig Club" he returned to 616 Squadron and operational duties as a newly promoted Pilot Officer.



*Acknowledgement: Membership badge of the "Guinea Pig Club" courtesy of Wikipedia.*

With Australia now coming under threat from Japan and needing experienced fighter pilots to train new aircrew Phillip found himself transferred back to the RAAF arriving in August 1943 with 93 combat hours flying Spitfires in his logbook.

His first posting was on the 09th August to the RAAF Officer Training Unit at Mildura Victoria to train as a fighter pilot instructor and on 07<sup>th</sup> September he married Christine Pearson.

In March 1944 he was posted to No 15, A R D, in New Guinea where his work involved test flying aircraft after repair and maintenance. On one occasion he tested a Boomerang aircraft following engine repairs. On the first take off the engine faltered and he managed to stop the aircraft before running off the runway. More repairs were carried out and on the second take-off the engine struggled to get



## PHILLIP MILLER'S STORY

the aircraft airborne. Third time was not lucky as on this take-off the engine stopped just after lift-off, hit some trees and caught on fire. Phillip was uninjured and when told the fire crew were on their way simply said “*don't bother, let the damn thing burn.*”



*Photo Boomerang aircraft similar to the aircraft mentioned above courtesy RAAF Archives.*

Whilst in New Guinea Phillip flew to Charters Towers on a regular basis and undertook regular ferrying flights to Cairns.

In September 1945 he was de-mobilised and on 03<sup>rd</sup> October was discharged with the rank of Flight Lieutenant. His logbook showed 711 hours, including 93 hours in combat, and ten different types of aircraft. He survived three forced landings that included two in a Spitfire and one in that Boomerang.

Back in civilian life Phillip began a career in Real Estate and established his own business in Sydney, Phillip Miller Pty Ltd. The company proved to be very successful specialising in coffee shops and Greek restaurants.

At home with Chistine at Hornsby they had a family consisting of two daughters and a son.

## PHILLIP MILLER'S STORY

A keen sportsman, even with problems from his damaged eye and ankle, he still played cricket and football eventually becoming a champion bowler with the Hornsby Bowls Club becoming the only member to win all club championships twice.

Phillip passed away on 20<sup>TH</sup> February 1996.

4th July 1943 - No. 3 Embarkation Depot (ED), RAAF Station Sandgate, Brisbane;  
23rd July 1943 - No 1 ED, Melbourne Showgrounds, Victoria;  
8th August 1943 - No. 2 Operational (Fighter) Training Unit (OTU), West Sale, Victoria;  
Promoted to Fg Off. wef 13th September 1943;  
13th March 1944 - No. 1 Reserve Personnel Pool (RPP), RAAF Base Pool camp, Townsville;  
15th March 1944 - No. 15 Aircraft Repair Dept (ARD), Port Moresby;  
6th October 1944 - No. 2 Personnel Depot (PD), RAAF Bradfield Park, Sydney;  
27th November 1944 - No. 13 Aircraft Repair Depot (ARD), Queensland where he was employed as a Test Pilot;  
5th February 1945 - Landing accident during test flight of Boomerang A46-220 BF:U. The aircraft developed an uncontrollable swing to starboard and hit a pile of scattered timber at Breddan Strip 11:45 hrs. The aircraft suffered major damage. Deemed to Pilot error (error of judgement).

*Above Phillip's military record and below his military wings, ribbons and dog-tags courtesy of the Miller family.*



***GEORGE GODFREY FLACK,  
DFC, TASMANIAN, LANCASTER  
PILOT.***

In December 2015, at the Hobart Town Hall, a solemn and emotional ceremony took place. A 94 year-old Tasmanian veteran was presented with France's highest military award, the Legion of Honour, by the French Ambassador to Australia, Christophe Lecoutier, who paid homage to the veteran's service. George Godfrey Flack flew Lancaster Bombers on more than 40 missions over Germany during World War 2



*George Godfrey Flack at the Hobart Town Hall presentation. Photo courtesy ABC News.*

George was born in Queenstown on Tasmania's rugged West Coast on 08th April 1922. He did not originally go to school, although he eventually completed his studies, but became a truck driver in Queenstown, whilst harbouring a desire to join the RAAF and World War 2 gave him that opportunity.

He commenced his flying training with the 7 Elementary Flying Training School RAAF, at Western Junction, on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1942. Further training was undertaken on the Australian mainland before disembarkation to the United Kingdom where he arrived in July 1943 and continued his training on Halifax and Lancaster aircraft.

Following his training George was assigned to the RAF 51 Squadron flying

***GEORGE GODFREY FLACK,  
DFC.***

strategic bombing missions from RAF Snaith, in East Yorkshire.



*No 51 Squadron Badge above and below a Lancaster Bomber of the type flown by George. Photos courtesy RAF Museum.*



George flew 40 missions during his posting in the U K at a time when it was considered almost impossible to survive so many combat operations. George was commissioned and promoted to Flying Officer and in January 1944 he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with the citation reading "For skill and fortitude in operations against the enemy."

George returned home in July 1945 and reunited with his wife Alma Jean Flack.

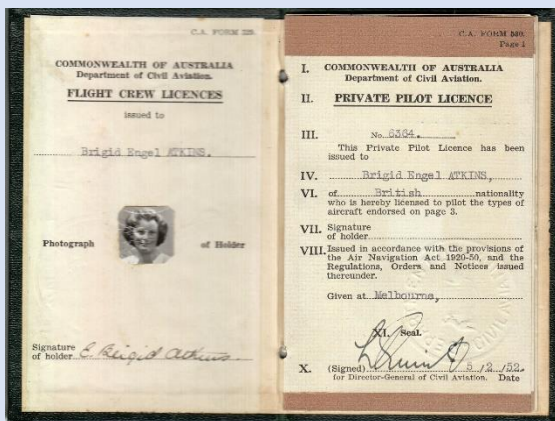
George passed away on 22 August 2017.

## **17-YEAR-OLD DEVONPORT GIRL OBTAINS PILOT'S LICENCE.**

### **BRIGID ATKINS**

Believed to be the youngest of her sex to hold a licence in Australia, Brigid Atkins was issued with her private flying licence on 05 February 1952.

Brigid is the 17-year-old daughter of Mrs E I Atkins the sister of Capt I Holyman, managing director of Australian National Airways. (ANA).



*Brigid's licence. Photo courtesy of B Atkins.*

Brigid, loved flying and commenced her training at 15 years of age whilst still at school. Her training commenced in a Tiger Moth and after nine hours dual flying went solo in the same aircraft.

Brigid was one of five students of the Devonport branch of the Tasmanian Aero Club who obtained their licences including her 18-year-old sister Honora. Both sisters hope to continue their training to a commercial standard.

Aviation flies in the family with the girl's mother being the first Tasmanian woman to obtain her pilots licence some 20 years earlier.

## **BRIGID ATKINS**



*A Tasmanian Aero Club Tiger Moth similar to the type flown by Brigid. TAHS file photo.*

Pupils were examined by L P Bond of the Department of Civil Aviation. The Devonport Instructor, Reg Munro, said that there were 28 student pilots in the branch with three of the members holding commercial licences.

He further added that since October 24 members of the club have been granted private pilot's licences a state record.

For Brigid, she was now free to view Tasmania from the air. Landing on the beach at Lake Pedder, flying over Cradle Mountain and the Central Highlands, however, it was not to be without a minor mishap.

Her minor mishap was when she landed downwind at Devonport and finished up in a ditch. Cost her ten pounds for a new prop and banned from flying for three weeks.

In seeking Brigid's permission to write this article the editor discovered that at almost 90 years of age Brigid plans a parachute jump with a nice young instructor to help her.



## ***AIRLINES AND AIRCRAFT THAT SERVICED BURNIE (WYNYARD) AIRPORT. 1930 – 1981.***

Tasmanian Aerial Services, the forerunner of Holyman Airways, was landing at Wynyard as early as 1933 as part of the route from Western Junction (Launceston), Latrobe (Devonport Airport was yet to be built), Smithton and King Island. During World War 2 services were sporadic and it wasn't until 1946 that Australian National Airways (ANA) resumed services between Essendon and Wynyard. TAA commenced services in November 1947 following receipt of Commonwealth approval, with both airlines operating DC-3 aircraft. These aircraft operated into Wynyard for most of the next decade, with the occasional visit by a Convair or DC-4. The only major change during this period came about in 1957 when ANA was taken over by Ansett and became Ansett-ANA.



*Photo TAA Convair courtesy of Pinterest*

In 1959 Wynyard was one of the first regional airports to see service from a prop jet aircraft when both Ansett-ANA and TAA received the Fokker F27 Friendship. In 1964, TAA began operating an internal "supplemental" route between Hobart, Devonport, Wynyard and Smithton, however, the DC-3's initially used on the route proved too large and were replaced by an eight-seat Beechcraft Queen Air.

## ***BURNIE (WYNYARD) AIRPORT***



*Photo TAA Beechcraft courtesy Pinterest*

By 1970 the Two Airline Policy that regulated operations of the major airlines had the practical effect that obligated both airlines to operate a route with similar aircraft capacity, similar departure times and charging identical fare. By this time both Ansett-ANA and TAA were providing regional services to every state in Australia. These services were undertaken alongside associated carries such as Airlines of New South Wales, East West Airlines, Airlines of South Australia and MacRobertson Miller Airlines.

By the 1980's both Ansett and TAA were incurring heavy losses on many of their regional routes resulting in both airlines reviewing their networks. In 1981 TAA withdrew its services and formalised an agreement that resulted in East-West's services to operate Melbourne-Wynyard-Devonport, competing alongside Ansett.



*Photo East-West Airlines F-27 Friendship courtesy of Pinterest*

## ***DO YOU REMEMBER?***

### ***HISTORY FROM YESTER-YEAR***

**1917** - On March 22 November, Lt H G Huxley of No 2 Squadron AFC, flying a DH-5 claimed the first Australian air victory on the Western Front when he shot down an Albatross Scout.

**1921** – On 04 December Sir Norman Brearley's Western Australian Airways, operating a Bristol Tourer, started a mail service to the North-West of the state, the first subsidised air service in Australia. Tragically the aircraft crashed the same day.



*Photo West Aust Airways Bristol Tourer courtesy of Wikipedia.*

**1936** – On 06 November Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and T Pethybridge took off from England on yet another record-breaking attempt Two days later their aircraft was last sighted near Aye Island, off Burma, before it disappeared. Both crew were lost.

**1940** – On 18 November the first thirty-four Australians graduated from the RAAF Flying Training Schools.

**1945** – On 15 August Japan surrendered. At the time the RAAF, in the Pacific, had a total strength of 131,662 officers and men and 3,187 front line aircraft. Casualties totalled 4,956.

## ***DO YOU REMEMBER?***

**1946** – In September Trans Australian Airways (TAA) began daily operations between Sydney and Melbourne with a DC-3. By December all state capitals were included.

**1956** – In October QANTAS carried the Olympic flame from Athens to Australia for the start of the Melbourne Olympic Games.



*Melbourne's Olympic flame 1956 courtesy Pinterest.*

**1964** – On 25 February 1964 the first of eighteen Caribou-4 STOL transports for the RAAF were handed over in Ontario, Canada.



*Photo of DH-4 Caribou courtesy of RAAF.*



***AVIATION SNAPSHOTS FROM  
THE MID-1920's.***



***Boarding a Hadley Page W.9 biplane at Croydan Airport, England in 1926. Hard to believe the passengers being allowed to linger on the tarmac today whilst refuelling is undertaken. Remember in those days it was 100 Octane petrol not Jet A1 fuel as it is today***



***Passengers sit back and relax whilst viewing an in-flight movie on a 1926 flight. Note the wicker chairs as seats and guess what!! No seatbelts***



***Adding insult to injury during the mid - 1920's passengers had to be weighed.***

***AVIATION SNAPSHOTS FROM  
THE MID-1920's.***



***Breakfast at 3,000 feet immaculately prepared and served but wait for the turbulence at that height over a built-up area.***



***This 1929 photo of a Transcontinental Flight shows the steward serving drinks and the pilots visible through the cockpits glass doors. In those days the aircraft were cold metal cans that shook violently. Perhaps this photo is for a promotion!***



***Lunch on a 1920's Gertman Deutsche Luft Hansa aircraft in the golden days of aviation.***

***(All photos courtesy of Pinterest)***



## AND IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!

- Our fascinating story of Tasmanian DFC winner Max Sanders continues.
- Peter Mantkelow's incredible story of two Australian Glider pilots and a Tasmanian connection.



*TAHS file photo of Airlines of Tasmania Short 360 aircraft.*

- A special three-part series of the TAHS Exhibition "Flying by the Seat of Their Pants". Currently on display at King Island Airport the exhibition has been seen at Flinders Island and Launceston's QV Museum and Art Gallery, now it's your turn!



*Map of those early flights.*

## LATE NEWS AND STOP PRESS

TAHS has just received a complimentary copy of Tasmanian born pilot Arthur Lovell's career compiled by his son who lives in America.

The book is a fascinating story of one man's career that included war service and ultimately led to being a Captain in Ansett/ANA and flying the first Boeing 727 aircraft into Australia.



*Photo Ansett/ANA courtesy of Pinterest.*

If you are interested in a copy let us know as we are in contact with the author as to how we can obtain copies.



*Don't forget our Bunnings Sausage Sizzle*

Third Saturday every month at Bunnings Kings Meadows. Drop by for a chat!!

**SEE YOU IN JUNE!!!!!!**