



# Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society

*Preserving Tasmania's aviation history.*



## ***“ROARING FORTIES”***

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

**NEWSLETTER NUMBER 19 - SEPTEMBER 2024**

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## **TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

Welcome to the 19<sup>th</sup> edition of our quarterly Newsletter “Roaring Forties”.

### **TAHS OFFICE BEARERS 2024**

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### ***In this issue:***

We re-introduce our old format and a smaller edition of our newsletter. To compensate for these changes, we are about to commence monthly articles with our local newspaper, “The Examiner”, on the history of Tasmania’s aviation and we hope these will also be available in Hobart and N W Coast printed media.

Historian Lindsay Millar tells the story of VH-ULM.

We continue the story of Tasmanian navigator Maxwell Sanders and the missions he flew over Germany during World War 2.

Tasair Hobart’s ex Chief Pilot/CFI, John Pugh, describes the complexity and risks of a “search and rescue” mission he undertook in the Aero Commander.

Peter Manktelow explains the operation that the two Australian RAAF glider pilots, who are buried in the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery at Stavanger, undertook.

“Miss Flinders” annual maintenance, the tragedy and triumph of two Hobart aviators and a photo story of good luck!!!!

Aviation snippets and forthcoming events complete this newsletter.

***STOP PRESS: News just in sees the TAHS exhibition “Flying by the Seat of their Pants” has been short listed in the Australian Museum and Gallery Awards category “Community Connection Award”. An announcement will be made at the annual convention at Ballarat in September. More news as it breaks.***

***A FASCINATING HISTORY LESSON AND PERHAPS THE START OF  
OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE TO DATE***

On Tuesday evening 13 August, TAHS historian Lindsay Millar gave an informative talk on an aircraft full of history. The Gipsy Moth VH-ULM, one of the first two aircraft operated by the Tasmanian Aero Club (then known as the Australian Aero Club - Tasmanian Section), was the subject matter. Lindsay brought to life the aircraft's history, not only as an aero club training aircraft, but as an aircraft of over 90 years of age that was, until recently still flying, but has now been retired and is looking for a new home. The current owner has contacted TAHS regarding the possibility of returning her to Launceston. This would be a magnificent opportunity but a huge challenge for TAHS to obtain an aircraft such as this with some discussion with the current owner having taken place. More on this as time progresses, but until then, a couple of photos from Lindsay's talk.

A good gathering that was also Zoomed to members, thus enabling all of TAHS membership the opportunity to view these informative talks on Tasmania's aviation history.



***Above: Members gathered for Lindsay's talk on the left and on the right Lindsay with a photo of the aircraft in question VH-ULM***

***MAXWELL FRED SANDERS, DFC, RAAF NAVIGATOR.***  
***Continued from last newsletter number 18***  
***By W Dearing***



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

Missions number 20 and 21 were flights that nightmares are made from. Two trips within twenty-seven and a half hours and 11.25 hours in the air to the German city of Duisburg in weather that could only be described as atrocious.

The English autumn took a turn for the worst with temperatures plummeting, however this did not stop the Allied Command launching, at this stage of the war, the largest airborne raid on Germany. Operation Hurricane, as it was called, was to show the German people, in particular the Ruhr area, the enormous strike capacity of the allied air forces.

The first flight became airborne at 6:30am on a bitterly cold English morning but this paled into insignificance at 20,500 feet with freezing temperatures inside the Lancaster. The interior of the aircraft was soon covered with frozen condensation together with the Perspex of the gunners and pilot's canopies completely frosted over. This resulted in Andy having to fly the major part of the mission on instruments. This was a difficult task in itself but the raid was made up of one thousand RAF and United States 8<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force aircraft, all flying in close formation, with the pilot's vision somewhat obscured with frosted canopies. To illustrate just what the conditions were like, the exterior temperature was minus 46 degrees centigrade.

In Max's words "*it was all I could do to hold a pencil and I don't think I've ever been so cold.*"

Nearing the bombing run, Max ventured up to the cockpit. Wiping some of the frost from the window he seemed to be in the middle of hundreds of aircraft and intense flack with stricken aircraft falling out of the sky trailing flames. The raid dropped more than 4,000 tons of bombs on Duisburg. The flight home was more of the same, unrelenting cold and intermittent flak. Landing safely, albeit cold and tired, Max marvelled that none of the crew had got frost bite.

***MAXWELL FRED SANDERS DFC continued***

No sooner had the crew been interrogated and fed than they were back into the briefing room. Another flight as part of a thousand aircraft was about to begin.

Max was amazed at the efforts of the ground crews. His comment was simple and honest “*I don't ever remember hearing about ground crews receiving awards for working in such atrocious conditions. They all deserve a medal.*”

Long before arriving at their aiming-point, they became aware of their morning's work. Max was conscious of a glow inside the aircraft that became more apparent nearing the target. Getting up from his navigator's seat he saw the results of the previous mission. Duisburg seemed to be ablaze from end to end and it seemed pointless to drop more bombs, however, Andy positioned the aircraft and delivered 11 x 1,000lb bombs and 4 x 500lb clusters of incendiaries. The crew returned home tired and cold with the knowledge that the city of Duisburg probably no longer existed. We'd done the job, but it wasn't much consolation.



***Flight of Lancaster Bombers en-route to target Photo Courtesy Pinterest***

Mission 22, Stuttgart and a crew change. The seven-man crew of a Lancaster was kept as a unit as far as possible so it came as a surprise when Eddie, their radio operator, was replaced by Flight Lieutenant Norman McConnachie. Max had noticed that since the Bottrop mission Eddie seem to be less than his jovial self – no jokes or kissing of the tarmac on returning from a mission. It was not until after the war Max learnt that Eddie had been classified as medically unfit and honourably discharged. Not all war-time casualties are physical.



### **MAXWELL FRED SANDERS DFC *continued***

Mission number 23 was to Gelsenkirchen scheduled on a day that not even the birds were flying. Gale force winds and a blanket of snow-covered Middleton St George but orders were orders and all members of the ground crew including orderlies, cooks, mechanics, cleaners and even hospital-staff manned the shovels to clear the runway of snow. Airborne, the wings of the aircraft began icing up at 800 feet and Andy had to settle for 21000 feet flying all the way to the target at that height and minus 20 degrees Celsius inside the aircraft.

Mission 24 to Julich introduced the crew to another terrifying aspect of the bombing of Germany. On this mission the bombing height was at 15,000 feet and the aircraft was perfectly stabilised on its bombing run. Suddenly, a bomb released from an aircraft above, sheared the wing tip off the starboard wing. Fortunately, it not only failed to explode but didn't affect the flying capabilities of the aircraft, although, in Max's words "*it sure gave us a hell of a fright.*"

Mission 25 to Neuss produced two new experiences for the crew. En-route to the target they saw an unusual condensation trail spiralling above seemingly heading for England. They found out later that it was one of the first V 2 rockets being fired at London. The second experience was one which the crew were happy to experience again. Due to weather, their aircraft was diverted to an American base where they discovered unlimited quantities of sausages, eggs, bacon, fresh fruit and soft beds. In Max's words "*we were in no hurry to get back to Middleton St George.*"

Duisburg was mission number 26 in November 1944 and proved that Germany was not yet defeated. Their port inner engine was struck by flak and had to be feathered, whilst the aircraft itself suffered significant flak damage. Three aircraft close by were hit and were seen going down in flames. While Max did not see the incident, he was quick to agree with Flip's comment after landing "*what a rotten business we're in – the whole bloody lot.*"

Karlsruhe and mission 27 saw a second pilot coming on board to gain operational experience. Close to a Lancaster's maximum load of 72,000 lbs, they headed for the target with the second pilot terrified for the entire flight. Sadly, the crew heard that he went missing on his fifth mission.

Soest and mission number 28 saw the appalling weather continuing. With gale force winds, snow and freezing temperatures Max never realised that they would have to fly in such terrible conditions. Whilst they had not seen any German night fighters there was no release from the tension felt by every crew member and above all they were tired, very tired, not only of the weather but of the whole business.

Mission 29, Osnabruck, with only two more missions for Max after this one, produced a frightening incident that the crew had never before experienced. Established on their bombing run, the bombs were released and suddenly Pat yelled "*bloody hell skipper I think we've got a hang up.*" The bomb load for this trip consisted of incendiary bombs and one 4000lb bomb and of course that was the one the release mechanism failed on. This meant that they were destined to fly the return route having to carry the huge bomb. Regardless of Andy's efforts to shake the bomb loose by throwing the aircraft around the sky and Aflie attempting to activate the manual release catch, the bomb stayed firmly in the bomb bay.

### *MAXWELL FRED SANDERS DFC continued*

In addition to this problem, the extreme cold the worst that they had experienced, literally froze their instruments leaving Max using dead reckoning from then on. They had come through hell; survived being shot at from the ground and in the air, battled through wind and ice and now so near to the end of their tour, they were stuck with a hung-up bomb. As they flew closer to home the weather improved, however nearing Middleton St George, evening had commenced to set in and the runway had been shortened by snow. Using all of his skills, Andy landed the Lancaster smoothly and parked the aircraft and 4,000lb bomb off the runway in a vacant dispersal bay. It had been one hell of a scary trip.

Ludwigshafen and trip number 30 encountered exceptionally heavy flak and due to the slipstreams of so many aircraft, turbulence was created that bounced the aircraft around like a beach ball. On returning home, they were again diverted to the US airfield Waterbeach for some more American hospitality.

Duisburg Mission 31. Max had now flown thirty trips, Andy had two extra as a second pilot and the rest of the crew were on twenty-nine, so the crew had expectations that this would be their last mission, although that was no certainty. If the squadron was short of a crew they could be required to continue flying. The destination was Duisburg again and the weather was foul. As Max recounted later, he did not have time to think about flak or fighters or a last trip; he was flat out just getting the aircraft to the target. But arrive they did, dropped their load of 16 1,000lb bombs and headed for home. It may have been their last mission but somebody failed to tell the pilot of a German FW190 night fighter. Numerous corkscrews later, for whatever reason, the pilot did not press home his attack and the weary bomber crew headed for home. Once again, the weather intervened and they diverted to Metheringham, then four hours later they were airborne for Middleton St George and home.

Climbing out of the aircraft, Max didn't know at the time that was to be the last time he was to fly in a service aircraft. He didn't know what to think or feel. It was over and they had been lucky, but he was also sure that he had been with a very good crew – one of the very best. There were no handshakes, no congratulations – hardly any conversations. They handed in their flying gear, attended interrogation, sat down to bacon and eggs and then went to bed.



*Aerial view Middleton St George Airfield 1945 Courtesy Pinterest*

## ***TASMANIAN “SEARCH AND RESCUE” FLIGHT***

***As recalled by John Pugh ex Tasair Chief Pilot/CFI***

Since Tasmania was first settled, the fact that as an island, the state had to encounter the difficulties of relying on transportation, both in and out of goods and people, to not only survive, but to grow and develop. Many ships were lost or damaged en-route to our island but with the introduction of aviation, aircraft began flying in and out of Tasmania and created a whole new spectre of safety requirements, not only for Tasmanian traffic but Australia wide. Aviation “search and rescue” was born. The first search occurred in September 1920 and gradually its sophistication was developed with countless people and equipment located and ultimately rescued. The following article is one recalled by John during his tenure as Chief Pilot/CFI at Tasair.



***Tasair's Aero Commander VH-EXF Courtesy Frank Schaefer.***

The ringing of the phone at 5:00am signalled a request from the Australian Maritime Search and Rescue (AMSAR). Their satellite had picked up an emergency beacon from a yacht in the Tasman Sea just over 500 nautical miles east of Hobart. Fortunately, the right aircraft for the job, Aero Commander VH-EXF, (John's second most favourite aircraft), was not only fitted with long range tanks but was also parked outside the fuel bowser. Even with the long-range tanks, this was going to be a flight that tests the aircraft's endurance and the pilot's skills.

Arriving at the airport, John obtained the latest weather and after obtaining an updated position of the beacon, was able to measure the true track and calculate the magnetic track he would need to fly. Refuelling ensured every tank was full to the brim, food and drinks for the crew loaded, two life rafts and a host of other survival gear that could be dropped if needed, made up the aircraft's load. The crew, with John as Captain, was made up of three other members all who had been trained in search and rescue flights.



## *TASMANIAN "SEARCH AND RESCUE" FLIGHT continued*

Airborne, they headed out into the Tasman Sea transferred to HF (High Frequency) and established an ops-normal time of every 60 minutes and settled down for the long flight out. Flying over water, there is no intervening terrain to deflect the emergency beacon's signal and at 10:20am they picked up the signal.

Fortunately, conditions were good with a cloud base of 1,500 feet so they elected to cruise at 1,000 feet where the visibility was a good ten miles. With the auto pilot operative, it allowed the crew to update their ETA and fuel consumption. If their calculations were correct, they had only ten minutes in the search area before returning to Hobart. Homed in accurately to the beacon they would pass straight over the yacht. This was of course if the yacht and beacon were in the same place. The survivors may have taken to the life raft with the beacon or the worst possible scenario, the survivors and the beacon may have become separated. Certain disaster.

With about 200 nautical miles to run, the cloud base lowered and they descended to 800 feet. At 10:55am, exactly four hours after their departure, the crew sighted the yacht. Able to contact the yacht (the Keep Sake 2, en-route from Hobart to Nelson), John's crew were able to ascertain the yacht had been overturned in mountainous seas, with the Skipper and his wife suffering minor injuries and sea-sickness. The skipper was somewhat dismayed when he was told they only had ten minutes, in the area, but was reassured that two RAAF Orion aircraft were on their way as was a Russian bulk carrier. Final farewells were said and the aircraft turned back towards Hobart.

More fuel calculations and some pensive moments when the pumps were activated (and a sigh of relieve when they did), showed the endurance calculations correct, arriving in Hobart with their reserves intact. Closer to home the wind had started to increase and they descended but were unable to maintain the planned ground speed. Fuel gauges are notoriously inaccurate on aircraft but when the needle is showing less than a quarter of a tank it scares the pants off you. More so when over flying Sorrell and the gauge was nudging zero.

All's well that ends well and after a quick stop to add some fuel at Hobart, just in case the gauges were correct, they took flight once more for the five-minute sortie to Cambridge and home. Three weeks later John and the crew met the couple from the Keep Sake 2 and whilst it was not expected, the word of thanks made it all worthwhile.

Flights such as this one are conducted in all conditions day and night and are a testament to the professionalism and courage of the crews who regularly put their lives on the line to save others. From that first Bass Strait search in 1920 until today, with more advanced equipment the risk is still there.

***RAAF GLIDER PILOTS IN NORWAY - THE RAID***  
***Continued from last newsletter number 18***  
***By Peter Manktelow***

On 18 November 1942, a “nickelling” flight was carried out over Norway by the two Halifax crews, with one glider pilot in each aircraft. The purpose was to get a feel for the area, test their navigation and allow the glider pilots to learn the appearance of the ground and to identify the landing area. Pilot Officer Davies flew with Halifax B and Sergeant Doig with Halifax A. Group Captain Cooper later reported that Crew A returned after about two hours with a cracked radiator and partially seized engine. Crew B reached Oslo and were able to see the target lake. They released their Nickels successfully (three packages). They encountered no opposition from A.A., fighters or searchlights.

During the evening of 19 November 1942, despite some misgivings regarding the weather over the objective, the two Halifax /Horsa combinations took off from RAF Skitten, near Wick in NE Scotland for what would be the first combat mission using gliders undertaken by the Allies in WWII.

Take-off was fixed for 1730 hours but the first aircraft was delayed for half an hour, attempting, without success, to get the intercom gear serviceable. Finally, arrangements were made to use the ordinary emergency light signals between the glider and tug and the TR9 in extreme emergency. Crew A, with the addition of G/Capt. Cooper (as extra navigator), took off at approximately 1755 hours, towing Horsa Glider DP349 piloted by Strathdee and Doig. Crew B with the addition of P/O Haward (as extra navigator) took off half an hour later, also having had an intercom failure. This Halifax towed Horsa glider HS114, piloted by Davies and Fraser. The take-off was made in slight intermittent drizzle and in the case of the second aircraft, it was dark.



*Airborne - Halifax towing a Horsa Glider*

## ***RAAF GLIDER PILOTS IN NORWAY - THE RAID continued***

Group Captain Cooper, flying in Halifax A, wrote in his post operation report that, “The flight across the North Sea was uneventful, except that the Rebecca generator failed. This undoubtedly prevented the operation being successful”. In addition to this, low cloud developed over the target area obscuring the landing zone, which the four-man Grouse team had marked with flares. Unable to locate the landing zone, both Halifax/ Horsa combinations were forced to turn back and attempt to return to the UK. On the return journey, ice built up on the tow ropes and the increased weight began to seriously affect the flight performance and the aircraft lost altitude.

### ***Combination A***

At around midnight on 19 November, at a point over southwest Norway, the tow rope between Halifax A (W7720) and Glider A (DP349) snapped and the latter crash-landed in a steep mountain valley, Fyljgesdalen, near Lysefiord. Halifax A made it back safely to Scotland, extremely low on fuel. Of the 17 men on board Glider A, eight were killed in the crash, including both glider pilots, Strathdee and Doig. At around dawn on the following morning (Friday 20 November), three of the survivors made their way down the valley to the nearest farmhouse, Fylgjesdalgird. Here they made contact with the local Norwegians who agreed to guide the men down the steep mountain valley to another farm, Haheller, which was situated on the shore of Lysefiord and where there was a telephone. Contact was made with the local Lensmann (Sheriff) who contacted the Police Headquarters in Stavanger and reported the incident, stating that three foreigners, thought to be British, had crashed in an aircraft and needed urgent medical assistance. The police department in turn, informed the German Security Services in Stavanger who instructed them to send two policemen to the scene to bring the foreigners back to Stavanger for further questioning.

During the course of the next two days, the scale of the incident became more apparent and the German Army, Air Force and Security Services travelled in force to the area to investigate. However, before they arrived, a Norwegian policeman, Tollef Ravn Tollefsen and Leif Espedal (the brother of the Lensmann), had already been guided to the site by one of the less injured soldiers. Leif Espedal later described the scene as one of utter devastation with wreckage, equipment and explosives strewn over a large area. The glider had crashed at quite a high angle while flying up one of the narrow valleys leading out of Fyljgesdalen and the front of the glider was smashed to pieces. The rescuers found three injured soldiers still trapped in the wreckage and eight dead. Leif also reported that one of the latter had not been killed outright as he had crawled some way from the crash and had tried to splint his broken leg before succumbing to his injuries. At some time during that period, one of the survivors, Sapper Thomas William White, helped police constable Ravn Tollefsen make a list of the soldiers, both living and dead. Interestingly, he was unable to provide the names of the glider pilots, Strathdee and Doig! This may seem surprising, but as the soldiers and glider pilots had trained separately prior to the raid, it is absolutely possible that the glider pilots names were perhaps known only to the officers (and perhaps senior NCOs). The officer in charge of Glider A, Lieutenant David Methven, and the senior NCO, Lance Sergeant Frederick Healey, had both been killed.

Over the next few days, all nine survivors were transported back to Stavanger and incarcerated in the Gestapo ‘Prison A’, Lagirdsveien. At some time that week, four of the more seriously injured soldiers were brutally murdered by the Gestapo. Their bodies were then weighted down with rocks and dumped at sea off the coast of Stavanger. In 1985, a special memorial was raised to these four men with no known grave in Stavanger (see Peter Yeates 2012 article in GPN).

## ***RAAF GLIDER PILOTS IN NORWAY - THE RAID continued***

On Thursday 26 November 1942, the eight dead (including Strathdee and Doig) were buried by local men near Fylgjesdalgird. During the burial, one of the local Norwegians, Torvald Fylgiesdal, took a pair of military boots from one of the casualties. Initially, he told people that he had found the boots in the glider wreckage, but later admitted to his family that he had taken them from one of the dead during the burial. Torvald used the boots for many years and they are still in the possession of the family today.

The five remaining survivors from Glider A, were held in the Gestapo Prison in Lagirdsveien in Stavanger for a number of days before being transported to the concentration camp at Grini, near Oslo, arriving there on 29 November 1942.

On 19 January 1943 they were driven to Trandum Wood, north of Oslo, where they were executed by firing squad. Another British serviceman, Able Seaman Robert Evans, who had been captured during an attempt to sink the German Battleship, Tirpitz, was executed at the same time.

After the war, Captain H. Glynne-Jones, together with a squad of 7 men from 1st Airborne Squadron, Royal Engineers and a detachment of 12 German POWs, travelled to Fylgiesdalen to recover the bodies. Captain Jones, was guided by Leif Espedal who was now the Lensmann of Hole and Forsand. The bodies were disinterred on Saturday 18 August and transported back to Stavanger the next day (19 November 1945). In his report, Captain Jones made a description of the bodies, their clothing, etc and was able to identify each of the men. Regarding the examination of Strathdee, Glynne-Jones noted "no boots". Glynne-Jones also recalled that, "One of the most touching things about the trip was that in the whole of our forty-mile journey down the fiord I saw every little house and every little hamlet flying the Norwegian flag at half-mast as a token of respect for our honoured dead. We reached Stavanger at about seven o'clock and on the quayside were eight coffins which we filled and dispatched to the mortuary to await internment at Eiganes Cemetery on Wednesday."



*Original burial site of the eight men killed when Glider A crashed in Fyljesdalen, Lysebotn, Norway. Photograph by Dr. Bruce A. Tocher*

## ***RAAF GLIDER PILOTS IN NORWAY - THE RAID continued***

### ***Combination B***

The fate of Combination B (Halifax W7801 and Horsa HS114) was almost certainly similar to Combination A, in that at some point the tug aircraft and glider became separated. However, in this case, both glider and tug crashed on opposite sides of the broad valley near Helleland in southwest Norway. At around midnight on the 19th, local witnesses heard the sounds of what they believed to be a large British aircraft (they recognized the engine sounds) making wide circuits over the valley, getting lower each time. The aircraft then crashed at full power into a nearby mountain, Hestafiellet, instantly killing the seven-man crew. It is almost certain that the Halifax was following standing orders which stated that if the glider breaks free from the tow, the aircraft should circle the area to try to locate it and transmit its location. The crew of the Halifax were initially buried in a shallow grave close to the crash site, but were subsequently reinterred in the Commonwealth graves plot in Helleland Churchyard, Rogaland, Norway at the end of the war with full military honours.

Glider B crash-landed on a flat area of marshy ground on the slopes of Benkjafiellet (Benkja Mountain), on the north side of the valley. Although both pilots (Davies and Fraser) were killed in the impact, they clearly demonstrated considerable skill in finding one of the few reasonable landing spots in an area surrounded by massive boulders. A third occupant of the glider, Driver Ernest Pendlebury, died of his injuries shortly afterwards. The 14 surviving Royal Engineers, surrendered to the German Army in the early hours of Friday 20 November and they, together with the three dead, were transported by lorry to the local German Army Camp at Slettebo, near Egersund. At around 4pm, local civilian workers were ordered to leave the camp and the 14 soldiers were led one by one to an area just outside the camp perimeter and executed by firing squad. All 17 bodies of the men were loaded on to a lorry later that evening by a group of Polish POWs and driven to Oгна Beach (near Brusand), where they were buried in an unmarked grave in the sand dunes.

A subsequent War Crimes Investigation found one of the POWs later testified that they were ordered to strip the bodies before burial and he recalled that one of the men had "Australia" tattooed on his arm! Despite their attempts at secrecy, a local Norwegian civilian secretly observed the burial and was later able to alert the Allied Authorities as to the location. At the end of the war, the remains of the 15 soldiers and two glider pilots from Glider B were recovered and reinterred (together with the six soldiers and two glider pilots from Glider A), in the Commonwealth Graves section in Eiganes Cemetery in Stavanger. Remembrance ceremonies are still held each year to honour their sacrifice.

### ***SUMMING UP***

In his Post-Operation Report dated 8 December 1942, Group Captain Norman aptly sums up the achievement and performance of the four glider pilots: "Although the operation was unsuccessful, a great deal of most valuable technical and tactical information has been obtained as the result of the training and operational experience. The manifest difficulties of a glider operation at long range at night as compared with a parachute operation under the same conditions, have been clearly indicated. The fact that the objective was not successfully attained must not be allowed to obscure the excellent work which went to making the attempt. It is desired to record the work of Group Captain T.B. Cooper, D.F.C., whose personal skill and inspiration on the ground and in the air were



## ***RAAF GLIDER PILOTS IN NORWAY - THE RAID continued***

the greatest factors in narrowing the margin between success and failure. The work of S/Ldr Wilkinson and the members of the tug crews whose task - complicated as it was by lack of time, aircraft unserviceability and bad weather - narrowly missed being beyond their capabilities.

The admirable work, cheerfully carried out by the ground maintenance party under Sgt. Gale, supplied by RAF Station Tempsford and of the Radio Party directed by S/Ldr Godfrey. The extremely efficient work of S/Ldr Davis already referred to and above all, the work and magnificent example of P/O Davies and Sgt Fraser, RAAF, and Staff/Sgt. Srrathdee and Sgt Doig, Glider Pilot Regiment. These men in the course of their training and on the operational flight, accomplished feats of towing unapproached before by any British glider pilot. They embarked on the operation well knowing the risks it involved for them, not only on the long tow over sea and mountains through doubtful weather, but also on the ground. Their courage, skill and enthusiasm were beyond praise and should serve as a shining example to all who may follow them, the first British glider pilots to take part in an operation against the enemy”

***.....that ends Dr Tocher's article and I must again extend our thanks to Bruce for allowing us to use his work.....***

So ends the tragic story of these brave young men and Operation Freshman...or does it ? Two Halifax bombers each with a glider in tow, departed Scotland. Only one Halifax returned. 48 men went out. Of these, 41 either died in their crashed aircraft or were executed.

One of the 7 crew members of the surviving Halifax was Vic Chemis, another Aussie pilot, later to become Senior Officer RAAF Tasmania. Squadron Leader Chemis eventually retired in Hobart and passed away about 15 years ago but is still remembered by some members of the Hobart RAAF Association.

Operation Freshman was preceded by Operation Grouse and followed by a successful Operation Gunnerside, but those stories are for another day.

P/O Davies and Sgt Fraser were both graduates of RAAF 7 EFTS at Western Junction (Launceston Airport) They were both 28 years old. To this day, I am still a bit mystified why both pilots chose to fly gliders when a preferred posting from flight school (even to this day), was to fighters or bombers. We will never know.

The Australian War Memorial has a regular “Last Post” ceremony, commemorating fallen-servicemen. Bruce Tocher organised one such memorial quite recently for Pilot Officer Fraser. Bruce continues research work on Freshman and has included NATO as one of his audiences on his lecture tours.

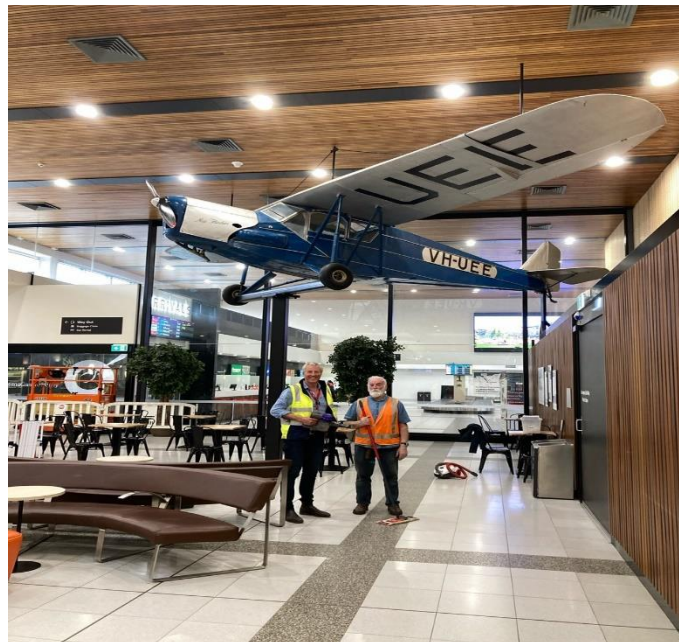
## ***MISS FLINDERS ANNUAL CLEAN-UP***

With the assistance of Iain Pinkard, the President of TAHS Andrew Johnson, conducted a successful session at the airport during August, inspecting and cleaning Miss Flinders.



***President Andrew Johnson hard at work!***

A well overdue task, however apart from a significant amount of dust, the aircraft appeared as she had been left when elevated to its present position. Warren Prewer, the Airport contact who was very helpful, acknowledged this would be an annual event ensuring the aircraft is kept in pristine condition. So next time you are at Launceston Airport, take a moment to view “Miss Flinders”, a significant part of Tasmania’s aviation history.



***Job finished Andrew and Iain take a break.***

## ***ANOTHER TASMANIAN FAMILY OF AVIATION HEROES***

Tasmania seems to produce families of aviators who became famous in the development of aviation and heroes in the conflict that was World War 2. The Boss-Walker family of Hobart was one of these.

The eldest of the brothers was Hubert Boss-Walker, who was born in Hobart on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 1910 and his brother Kenneth Boss-Walker, also born in Hobart on 16<sup>th</sup> November 1915.

Hubert, who was previously the chief instructor of the Royal Victorian Aero Club, gained his notoriety, when on the 27<sup>th</sup> March 1939 as a newly hired test pilot, he flew the first CA-1 Wirraway from Fisherman's Bend, Victoria. When the aircraft entered service, it was recognised as the fastest and most heavily armoured aircraft in the RAAF.



*CA-1 Wirraway Photo courtesy of Pinterest.*

Hubert went on to become the Chief test pilot for the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation until he was tragically killed at Bankstown on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 1944, when the Mosquito aircraft he was flying suffered a major structural failure and crashed.

Fifteen days later, Hubert's younger brother Kenneth, who had enlisted in the RAAF in May 1940, graduated as a pilot specialising in photographic reconnaissance and subsequently converted to the De Havilland Mosquito, flying missions over Japanese held Netherlands East Indies and Dutch New Guinea, boarded his Mosquito with navigator Jeffrey Love for a recon flight over Ambon

On the return flight, their aircraft suffered an engine failure when still 1,000 miles from their home base Broome. Kenneth flew the aircraft on one engine displaying his skill and courage, finally landing safely after ten hours airborne. For this flight he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

***ANOTHER TASMANIAN FAMILY OF AVIATION HEROES continued***



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P04938.001

***Flight Lt Kenneth Ford Boss-Walker DFC Phot courtesy Aust War Memorial.***

Two Tasmanian brothers one a test pilot tragically killed whilst flying a Mosquito aircraft and his younger brother awarded a DFC for flying 1000 miles on one engine and also flying a Mosquito. Ironical?



***RAAF Mosquito aircraft photo courtesy Pinterest.***



## ***GOOD LUCK OR GOOD FLYING?***

*By Peter Manktelow*



This is what happens when you lose 5 feet off one of the main rotor blades of a Sikorsky S61 helicopter. My colleague (Jack Jaworski) and his crew of +2 (nil passengers) walked away from this. Jack flew it all the way down to the crash site. The vibration was so intense that he had blurred vision and the instrument panel broke out of its mounts and fell on his lap. They were on a ferry flight from South America to Vancouver, but only got as far as the suburbs of West Palm Beach in Florida. As pilots, we hate to rely on good luck, but sometimes that is the only logical explanation for the outcome of some aviation incidents.





## **AVIATION SNIPPETS**

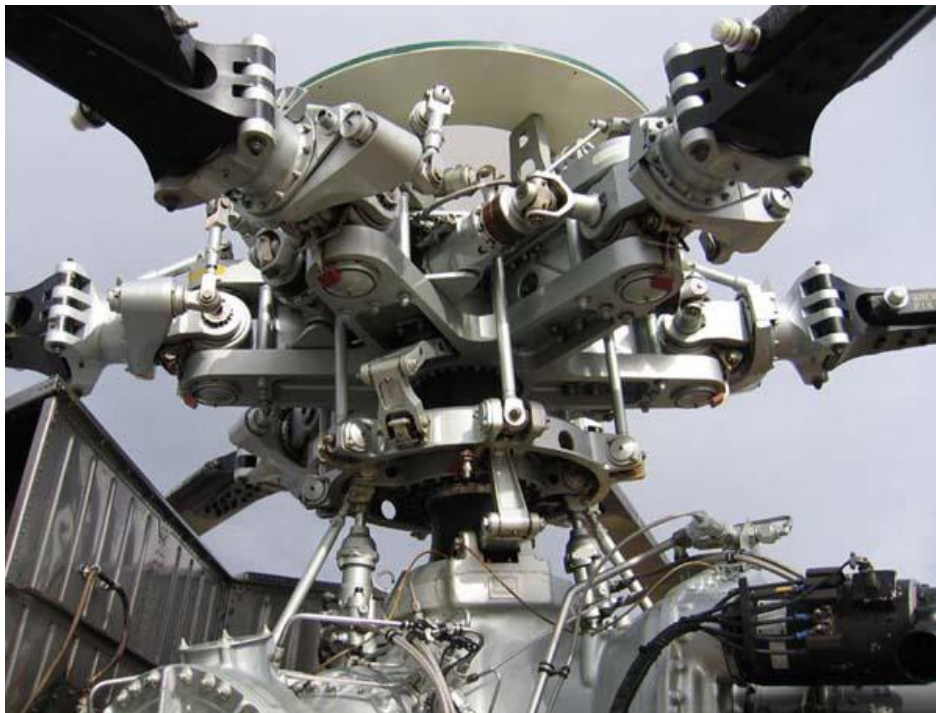
*By Peter Manktelow*

**25<sup>th</sup> July 1909** - The first successful aeroplane flight across the English Channel was made by Frenchman Louis Bleriot in his type XI monoplane, flying from Calais to a field at Dove, Kent. Bleriot later put the type XI into production.....**BUT**....how many Tasmanians (or mainlanders for that matter) know that a flying full scale Bleriot XI monoplane is resident in Launceston's Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery ?

**9th December 1909** - The first aeroplane flight in Australia was made in an imported Wright biplane, flown by motor racing driver Colin Defries, at Sydney, NSW. Ehrich Weiss, better known as Harry Houdini the escapologist, first flew on the 18th of March 1910 at Digger's Rest, Victoria.

**September 1920** - Airborne search operations in Tasmania were flown to and from horse racing tracks (Brighton race track) or farmer's paddocks (Riverside, Launceston). There were no established landing grounds, air fields or aerodromes in Tasmania at the time.

*The definition of complexity!!!!!!!!!!*



Sikorsky S92 (19 pax + 2 crew) rotor head. Never flew the 92. Wanted to but got the EC225 instead. Also, a 19 + 2. The Sikorsky S76 was a 12 + 2 and a real sports car of a helicopter to fly. Had about 2,500 hours logged on the 76. The popular mythology was that the guy who designed the rotor M head and mixing unit of the S76 (which was just as complex as that pictured) went mad and eventually did himself in. This was put down to the mental gymnastics he had to do with all the "geometry" involved in the design of the head !!!!!



Tuesday 10 September Executive Committee Meeting - 10:30am Venue Glebe Helibase.

Tuesday 08 October Information and Guest Speaker Evening - 5:30pm Venue to be advised.

Tuesday 12 November Executive Committee Meeting - 10:30am Venue to be advised

Tuesday 10 December Christmas Party - Time and venue to be advised.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Executive meetings are open to all members as observers (non-voting) via ZOOM or attendance in person with prior notice.

**REMEMBER:** *Sausage Sizzle Bunnings Kings Meadows Fourth Sunday in each month commencing 9:00am.*

***Remember if you have any historical articles you would like to share, just send us an email. Look forward to hearing from you!***

***NEXT NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2024***

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