



**Tasmanian Aviation  
Historical Society**

*Preserving Tasmania's aviation history*



## ***“ROARING FORTIES”***

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

**NEWSLETTER NUMBER 25 – MARCH 2026**

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## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Welcome to the 25<sup>th</sup> edition of our quarterly Newsletter “Roaring Forties”.

### TAHS OFFICE BEARERS 2025

<b>Patron:</b>	Robin Holyman	<b>Vice President:</b>	Peter Manktelow
<b>President:</b>	Andrew Johnson	<b>Secretary</b>	Chris Byrne
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Cranston Gilbert	<b>Iain Pinkard</b>	
<b>Executive:</b>	Lindsay Millar		

### *In this issue:*

President Andrew Johnson presents his annual report prior to March’s AGM.

Over 1800 trainees passed through No 7 Elementary Flying Training School at Launceston’s Western Junction airfield during World War 2 and some 70 of these trainees were Tasmanians. Over the next few publications, we will learn more about some of these RAAF personnel, their training, postings and aviation careers.

Pater Manktelow unveils an interesting safety procedure he used in helicopters and also shares one of his more challenging ferry flights.

Ray Mudway continues his series on Air Crashes in Tasmania. In this edition 1967 to 1983.

News and photos from our Hobart friends.

Andrew and Cranston have been busy erecting the “Flying By The Seat of Their Pants” exhibition at Campbell Town whilst Andrew unveils a new display at Launceston’s Library.

Interstate and overseas news and coming events complete our 25<sup>th</sup> edition.

### ***VALE: JOHN RIVERS BRETT 1942 – 2026***

Sadly, in late January this year, TAHS lost member and former Executive Committee member John Brett.

John was one of the founding members of TAHS and held the role of the inaugural Vice-President until 2025, when he was forced to resign the position for health reasons.

John’s commitment and dedication to TAHS was tireless and his knowledge and business expertise will be sadly missed.

On behalf of everyone at TAHS, we extend our sincere condolences to John’s family.



***PRESIDENTS REPORT 2025/26***

***Andrew Johnson***

It has been another busy and productive twelve months for the Society, as we continue discovering, preserving and sharing the rich stories of Tasmanian aviation.

One of the highlights of the year was attending the Aviation Museum National Network Conference in Adelaide, representing the Tasmanian Aviation Historical Society (TAHS), which is now proudly a member of this national body. It was a worthwhile and rewarding experience to connect with representatives from more than 20 aviation museums across Australia. The opportunity to exchange ideas, share experiences and build relationships will undoubtedly strengthen our work here in Tasmania.

Our quarterly newsletter, *Roaring Forties*, continues to recognise and promote Tasmanian aviation history. It remains an informative and enjoyable publication and an essential communication tool for our membership. The volume and depth of content is undeniably generous, with a great deal of research underpinning each edition. A sincere thank you to all contributors who make this publication possible.

Researching, investigating and publishing historical material remains central to what we do. Through our website, Facebook page, newsletters and engagement with media outlets, we continue to share important stories from Tasmania's aviation past with an ever-widening audience.

It has been particularly exciting to see our membership continue to grow, recently almost reaching the milestone of 100 members. This level of support gives the Society confidence to continue its work and provides a welcome financial benefit that strengthens our sustainability.

The bi-monthly Bunnings sausage sizzles once again delivered a healthy financial return for the Society. Beyond the funds raised, it provides a valuable social outlet for our dedicated team of volunteers who enthusiastically share aviation stories while turning sausages — rain, hail or shine. Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and energy.

A significant achievement this year was the successful completion of the renovation and enhancement of the Harold Gatty Memorial in Campbell Town, undertaken in partnership with the Midlands Council. We have now commenced discussions with the airport to further tell the Gatty story through a display, again envisaged as a collaborative effort with Council. A special thank you to Wayne for his commitment and hard work on this important project.

Promoting aviation in Tasmania remains a key focus and has been achieved through a range of initiatives, including:

***PRESIDENTS REPORT 2025/26***

***Andrew Johnson***

- Attendance at the Tasmanian Heritage and Militaria Fair.
- Installation of our touring display case in four Hobart-region libraries and the Launceston Library.
- Marking the 95th anniversary of the first flight from Western Junction with a display at Launceston Airport.
- Continuing the statewide tour of the exhibition *Flying by the Seat of Their Pants*, hosted this year in Stanley and Campbell Town.

We are increasingly settling into our Glebe base, which is developing a distinctive aviation theme with displays featuring helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. The establishment of the Neil Louis Library has further enhanced the space, boasting an impressive and growing collection of books and videos.

The venue has proven ideal for hosting our bi-monthly Guest Speaker evenings, which now enjoy a strong and growing following. These evenings are both informative and highly enjoyable. Thank you to Peter for continuing to source such engaging speakers.

I also extend our appreciation to Joe Pentridge for allowing the Society to utilise this highly functional space and for continuing to accommodate our 40-foot shipping container.

During the year, a number of members made the long-awaited trip to Hobart to attend a wonderful event hosted by RAAFA, including a tour of their aviation museum. Additional activities included attending the Soaring Club of Tasmania open day in Tunbridge, where at least three members experienced the thrill of gliding flight. Wayne Dearing also provided valuable historical insight into World War II airfields in Tasmania.

An important step forward has been the establishment of our collections on the eHive platform, making them accessible to a much wider audience. In time, our library collection will also be added to further broaden public access to our resources.

Finally, on a very sad note, we acknowledge the passing of John Brett earlier this year. John served as Vice President from 2019 to 2023 and was a passionate and dedicated supporter of the Society. He will be greatly missed, and our thoughts are with his wife and family. Thank you to all members, volunteers and supporters who continue to contribute their time, knowledge and enthusiasm. Together, we ensure that Tasmania's aviation heritage is preserved and celebrated for future generations.

Regards,

Andrew Johnson

President

## *Tasmanian Trainees at 7 EFTS Western Junction 1940 - 1944*

*By Wayne Dearing*

### **Geoffrey Charles Atherton**

Atherton was born in Launceston on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1919 and was posted to 7 EFTS (Elementary Flying Training School) on 19 September 1940, to commence his training as a member of the first course conducted at Western Junction. To clarify a point, whilst this course was the first to be conducted, it was officially known as Course No 4 (P), 19 September 1940. No reason is given for this.

During the course he became known for his unauthorised low flying and mock dog fights, but passed the course and was posted to No 1 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) Point Cook on 18 November and subsequently to No 25 Squadron at Perth, West Australia on 19 March 1941, flying Wirraway and Buffalo aircraft in the air defense of Perth.



*Above left RAAF Wirraway Aircraft and right Geoffrey Atherton Photos courtesy Australian War Museum.*

Promoted to Pilot Officer in October 1941, Atherton's old urge for excitement surfaced and he was caught out for disobeying orders and court-martialed, charged with two offences:

Charge No 1 - Flying a plane in a manner likely to cause unnecessary annoyance to persons.

Charge No 2 - Disobeying a lawful command in that he flew lower than 3,000 feet. It appears that he may have buzzed a farmer whose wrath he was now suffering.

Somehow his lawyer managed to get a "not guilty" verdict on both charges. It is often stated that the defiance of superiors by breaking the rules is often the hallmark of a successful pilot.

January 1942 saw him posted to No 24 Squadron at Townsville and on the 10<sup>th</sup> March, he was promoted to Flying Officer.

### *Tasmanian Trainees at 7 EFTS Western Junction*

On 15 March 1942, Atherton was posted to No 75 Squadron as a flight leader on Kittyhawks, flying to Port Moresby by Catalina on 21 March. The next day he flew a sortie against the Japanese at Lae and although he had little experience flying Kittyhawks, on the 10th April he destroyed an enemy bomber over 7-Mile Drome. During the next week he destroyed a Zero, shared in the destruction of another and managed to damage one more. He was the model of a fighter pilot.

This Japanese offensive went on for 44 days, resulting in pilots suffering from sheer exhaustion and being withdrawn to Townsville to recover and re-equip. In July, Nos 75 and 76 Squadrons returned to Papua to defend the airstrip at Milne Bay. The ensuing air battle saw Atherton claim a further Zero destroyed and another probable. Following this, he was posted back to Australia for a rest.

He returned to 75 Squadron at Milne Bay on 05 April 1943 and nine days later, shot down a Betty Bomber. This was his final claim of the war.

Atherton was Mentioned in Dispatches on 26 March 1943, which in part read:-

***“Led with courage and ability. He has led and participated in eight other raids on enemy positions and his flying and fighting has always been of a very high standard.”***

While stationed at Port Moresby in August 1943, he undertook a conversion course on the P-38 Lightning. On 16 August, two P-38-F4s (photographic reconnaissance version) were attached to the Squadron and Atherton, along with Flight Lieutenant Brown, flew the aircraft from Moresby to Turnbull strip. Between August and December, he flew reconnaissance flights to Gasmata, Kiriwina, Goodenough Island and Cape Gloucester.



*A somewhat blurred photo of a Lightning in flight taken during an operational sortie by Geoff Atherton possibly on 20 October 1943*

On 12 October, whilst on a reconnaissance flight from Goodenough Island to Simpson, Atherton was attacked by Japanese fighter aircraft, forcing him to return to base. Only eleven RAAF pilots

### *Tasmanian Trainees at 7 EFTS Western Junction*

completed the conversion to Lightnings, with Atherton logging a total of 76.1 hours between 10 August and 25 October 1943.

In June 1944 Atherton was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for – “*outstanding courage and leadership on two tours of operations*”.

Subsequent to this, on 05 July 1944, he was posted to command No 80 Squadron flying Kittyhawks at Hollandia, Dutch New Guinea. He was then posted to No 78 Squadron Wing Headquarters, assuming command on 10 November and was appointed Wing Commander on 17 January 1945. Shortly after this, on 3 February, whilst flying a low-level sweep at Hatatabaco, his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire, forcing him to ditch in the sea. Fortunately he was picked up by a Catalina aircraft, but not before the Japanese on shore fired at him with rifles and mortars.

During World War 2, Atherton compiled 1,501 flying hours, comprising 866 in Kittyhawks on operations and 422 in Wirraways and a total of 212 operational sorties.

On 19 October 1945 he was awarded a bar to his DFC.

Discharged after the war, Atherton served in the Royal Air Force, where he was appointed an OBE in recognition of distinguished service in Borneo and a Queen’s Commendation for brave conduct as a passenger in an air crash at sea. Atherton died in Launceston on 24<sup>th</sup> October 1980.

An interesting aside is the camaraderie and friendships that came out of the 7 EFTS courses. Atherton formed a strong friendship with fellow trainee, West Australian Harold Roberts. Both were headstrong and somewhat undisciplined, but excellent pilots and leaders. Following a posting to Egypt, Roberts named his Tomahawk aircraft “Cleopatra II” and when Roberts was shot down and taken prisoner, Atherton named his Kittyhawk aircraft “Cleopatra 111”, to remember his mate.



*Preparing Cleopatra III for battle courtesy Oz at War*

## *Tasmanian Trainees at 7 EFTS Western Junction*

### **George Percival Jenkins**

An orchardist from Premaydena, southern Tasmania, Jenkins enlisted on 06 December 1940 and following initial service training, joined 7 EFTS on 06 March 1941 and on completion of the course, was promoted to the rank of temporary Sergeant as an airman pilot.



*George Percival Jenkins Photo Courtesy Australian War Museum*

His flying career commenced by flying Lockheed Hudson aircraft in Australia and later from American bases, flying anti-submarine patrols. Jenkins rose through the ranks and his record shows he accepted his role as a pilot and showed ability and enthusiasm in setting a fine example to his fellow airmen.

Jenkins was commissioned as a Pilot Officer on 01 March 1943 and promoted to the rank of Flying Officer on 01 September 1943.

He subsequently joined No 35 Squadron and flew C-47 (Dakota) aircraft in New Guinea and the Pacific. On discharge in 1945 he held the rank of Flight Lieutenant.



*Dakota aircraft over New Guinea circa 1944. Photo courtesy Wikipedia.*

## *Tasmanian Trainees at 7 EFTS Western Junction*

### **Graeme Wolsey McCabe**

Born in Hobart on 09 April 1916, McCabe commenced training with 7EFTS, but on 01 December 1940, had his pilot training discontinued and was recommended for re-mustering to undertake an observer's course.

He ultimately qualified as a navigator and was attached to No 100 Squadron RAF based in Singapore. On 26 January 1942, a Japanese convoy (consisting of two cruisers, four destroyers and two large transport vessels) were spotted landing troops off the mouth of the Endou River in the South China Sea. The convoy was protected by strong air cover provided by several formations of fighter aircraft. This then, in the final weeks of the Malayan campaign, is where McCabe found himself a navigator in a Vickers Vildebeest (an antiquated torpedo carrying biplane), en-route to attack a convoy that was guarded by modern fighter aircraft.



*RAF Vickers Vildebeest, crewed by a Pilot, air gunner and navigator-bomb aimer Photo courtesy Pinterest.*

The Vildebeest was easy prey for the fighters and McCabe's aircraft was attacked and several were damaged. In the engagement, both the pilot and observer were killed and McCabe was wounded in his arm and hand. Whether the short period of pilot training at 7EFTS assisted McCabe or not, but his next action was to take over the controls and fly the aircraft in a long descending glide away from the action and eventually ditching in the sea.

After crashing into the sea, he stayed with the aircraft's rubber dinghy, finally reaching the shore unseen. He was hidden for some time by Cantonese Chinese before being captured by Malays and turned over to the Japanese. Fortunately, he survived the interrogations, imprisonment and brutal treatment handed out by the Japanese military to POW's and on returning to Hobart, was discharged on 20 December 1945, with the rank of Warrant Officer.

## *Tasmanian Trainees at 7 EFTS Western Junction*

### **Lyn Geoffrey Knight**

Born 1915 in Launceston, he was posted to 7EFTS on 10 September 1940, to 1STFS on 18 November and to CFS on 24 March 1941 and again on 18 May 1942. He later served in 7STFS as a flying instructor.

Knight suffered critical injuries in an aircraft accident at Deniliquin, NSW, on 03 January 1943 and succumbed to his injuries on 02 February.

### **Douglas Lowther Eric Gorringe**

Born in Tea Tree in 1919 and posted to 7EFTS on 17 October, Gorringe was posted on graduation to 1STFS on 16 December. He joined No 6 Squadron at Milne Bay, New Guinea on 28 September 1942, flying Lockheed Hudsons on maritime patrols.

On 28 October, whilst on a reconnaissance flight over the Timor Islands, his aircraft failed to return. Reported missing on-air operations, presumed dead, his body was never recovered.

### **Brian Melnotte Thompson**

Born in St Helens in 1919, Thompson was posted to No 7 EFTS on 17 October 1940. He then attended 1 STFS on 16 December and was posted to No 25 Squadron flying Wirraways at Pearce, West Australia on 16 April 1941.

On 28 September he was posted to No 3 Squadron, based in North Africa. Flying Hurricanes and Curtiss Tomahawks, the squadron's role was escorting bombers and carrying out ground attacks on Rommel's advancing army. The squadron later converted to Kittyhawks.

On 18 September 1942, as a Flight-Sergeant, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal and in addition, he was also awarded the Africa Star.

The DFM citation reads:

*“Throughout his sorties has displayed great courage and devotion to duty. During fighting May/June 1942 particularly in numerous dive-bombing and machine gun attacks on important enemy concentrations. Always pressed home attacks with vigor inflicting considerable damage to equipment and troops. He destroyed at least two enemy aircraft.”*

Thompson was discharged in 1945 with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

*The author wishes to acknowledge George Ashwood for his kind permission in allowing the use of his book “The RAAF Pilots of Western Junction” as a reference to this and forthcoming articles.*

## *Tasmanian Aircraft Crash Reports Part 5, 1967 - 1983*

*By Ray Mudway*

Flying in the early days was dangerous – so it is not surprising just how many flights failed to make their destination. Aircraft were fairly crude and unreliable; they did not have the benefit of later design experience and pilots too did not usually have extensive experience. Of course, weather plays some part, but it is surprising how many accidents happened in good weather.

This is the fifth article in a series compiling major crashes in Tasmania of both civilian and military aircraft. This covers the period from 1967 to 1983.

The articles have been compiled from various sources, and where known, the causes of them.

I have used a loose definition of a “crash” to include both those with and without fatalities. If there are other crashes you know about and we could detail in future newsletters, please contact me.

### **1 Apr 1967, Auster 5D (Taylorcraft Model J), VH-BYM**

Hunter Island.

Private flight. While landing on a beach which was narrowed by a rocky outcrop, the pilot made his landing run close to the high tide level. The port wheel dug into soft sand and the aircraft overturned.

### **6 May 1967, De Havilland DH-82A Tiger Moth, VH-BSD**

Near Ouse, NW Hobart.

Private flight. While flying through a gap in the hills bordering a river valley, the aircraft struck a long-span, single-wire power cable at a point 150 feet above the ground. Partial control was retained and a forced landing was made in a ploughed paddock, but the aircraft nosed over onto its back at the end of the landing run.



*Tiger Moth similar to aircraft in accident Photo courtesy Pinterest*

*Tasmanian Aircraft Crash Reports Part 5, 1967 - 1983*

**24 Jan 1968, Cessna 172F "Skyhawk," VH-DFV**

Lake Pedder, W Hobart.

Private flight. To initially offset the effect of a crosswind, the pilot commenced the take-off run with the aircraft's heading displaced 20 degrees. When unable to turn the aircraft back into line he abandoned the take-off but too late to avoid striking trees situated to one side.

**3 May 1968, Cessna 172, VH-RYN?**

King Island.

Training / Solo. When taxiing out in a strong wind, a gust tipped the aircraft onto its nose and wingtip. The pilot disembarked and attempted to right the aircraft but another gust tipped it onto its back.

**26 Jun 1968, Douglas DC-4**

Launceston Airport.

Freight service. When a severe nosewheel shimmy developed, the pilot abandoned the take-off. A bolt attaching the lower torque link to the nosewheel fork had failed as a result of fatigue progression, probably from the omission of spacing wear plates in the assembly. During the take-off it had separated from the torque link.



*Photo TAA DC-4 similar to aircraft in incident Photo courtesy of Pinterest.*

*Tasmanian Aircraft Crash Reports Part 5, 1967 - 1983*

**7 Dec 1968, Piper PA28, VH-ST?**

Cambridge Aerodrome.

Training / Solo. When landing in gusty wind conditions, the pilot approached at an airspeed which did not provide any margin for gusts. As he levelled off, the airspeed rapidly decreased and the aircraft stalled, then landed heavily on the nose gear.

**17 Dec 1969, Tasmanian Helicopters PL, Hughes 269B, VH-IHK**

Low Rocky Point, Tas. No fatalities.

**8 Sept 1972, Tasmanian Aviation Services, De Havilland DH.82A Tiger Moth, VH-AQL, Serial No. 83126.**

Charter flight, Hobart to Canberra, ACT.

The aircraft set off from Hobart's Cambridge Aerodrome, bound for Canberra carrying activists committed to saving Tasmania's Lake Pedder. Onboard were pilot Max Price and environmental campaigner Brenda Hean, who planned to sky-write the message "Save Lake Pedder" above Parliament House. It was part of a campaign to halt the lake's controversial inundation as part of a hydro-electric power scheme.

Against a backdrop of bitter enmity between forces of industrialisation and conservation and having received threats in the days before their departure, Brenda and Max vanished somewhere near Tasmania's north-east tip. Flight direction was north to Eddystone Point, where it headed seaward in the direction of Cape Barren and Flinders Islands. The last reported sighting, by a witness at Eddystone Point, indicates that the aircraft was then flying normally at an altitude of about 2,000ft.

There were alleged events, such as the breaking-in of the hangar housing the lost aircraft prior to its departure, threats made by telephone to the passenger prior to departure ("How would you like to go for a swim") and other unusual aspects of this tragic occurrence.

A full search went on for twenty days and continued on a reduced scale for a further twenty-nine days. Up to 13 aircraft on any one day, including a DCA Fokker F.27 Friendship, took part in the search when they failed to arrive at Whitemark on Flinders Island to refuel.

There was deteriorating weather and poor visibility (the cloud base was about 900 feet), severe turbulence and the seas were moderate to very rough. Ocean currents would take any wreckage to the south-east towards New Zealand.

*Tasmanian Aircraft Crash Reports Part 5, 1967 - 1983*

**10 Jan 1973, ?**

Aelaide, Tuesday (from the Canberra Times).

Life raft found in sea!

A fisherman has found a 25-man life raft floating about 10 miles off the south-east coast near Mount Gambier, sparking off a mystery that has baffled police and armed service personnel. The raft, inflated and containing survival gear, was found by Mr Bruno Marino, 37, of Milicent on December 27 while he was fishing. He said it appeared to have been in the water for about a week and was torn. Police got in touch with the RAAF but were told the raft was not the property of the armed services and its origin was unknown. Senior Constable Jim Green, of Beachport police, said today that there had been flare sighting off the south-east coast in recent weeks.

**30 Jul 1973, Air-Rep Service, De Havilland Australia DHA-3 Drover, VH-FDS**

Cargo flight, Smithton-Trefoil Island.

Upon landing on a grassy runway on Trefoil Island, the airplane went out of control, veered off the runway, lost its undercarriage and came to a halt. Both occupants were unhurt while the aircraft was damaged beyond repair.



*Photo De Havilland Drover courtesy Pinterest.*

**19 Apr 1974, Benders Aviation, DeHavilland DHC-2 Beaver, VH-BSY**

Local spraying mission in the region of Hamilton, Tasmania. While cruising at an altitude of 500 feet, the pilot initiated a left turn and descended to 50 feet when the airplane struck power cables. On impact, the left wing was torn off and the aircraft crashed in flames. Both occupants were killed. It was determined that a power line was installed a few days prior to the accident and apparently, the pilot was not aware of it. The crew has been briefed before flight, but the chief pilot failed to inform the crew of the presence of the power line as he was convinced the crew was already aware of its presence.

*Tasmanian Aircraft Crash Reports Part 5, 1967 - 1983*

**30 Nov 1977, Beechcraft A23A Musketeer, VH-DYJ**

Private Aircraft - local flying South-east of St Mary's near the Douglas River Two killed.

Apparently they dove in vertically from 3,000 feet. It had an ELT which was emitting and notified a fixed wing aircraft, who then called Mr Peter Manktelow in to locate it exactly. He also had to pull out the bodies the next day. The wreckage sat for a long time and was in-accessible on foot, but the NPWS decided to remove all traces of the wreck.

**21 Oct 1978, Cessna 182L, VH-DSJ**

Private flight, Moorabbin, Vic to King Island and return, pilot Frederick Valentich.

Departing Moorabbin at 6.19pm, the cruising altitude was planned at below 5,000ft via Cape Otway, then direct to King Island with a flight time of 69 minutes. The return flight would be similar. The aircraft was refuelled beforehand & had ample for the entire trip. The pilot reported at Cape Otway to Melbourne Flight Service at 7.00pm and at 7.06pm requested knowledge of any known traffic below 5,000ft, to which he was advised that there was none known.

For the next 6½ minutes, communication between Valentich and Flight Services consisted of Valentich's continued comments that a large aircraft had just passed over him at least a thousand feet above the Cessna. Valentich said the strange aircraft was flying over him two or three times at extremely high speeds. The final transmission occurred at 7.12pm. The weather at Cape Otway area was clear, with a trace of stratocumulus cloud at 5,000 to 7,000ft and scattered cirrus cloud at 3,000ft. End of daylight was at 7.18pm.

SAR procedures were declared at 7.12pm and, at 7.33pm when the aircraft did not arrive at King Island, a search was commenced. An intensive air, sea and land search was continued until 25 October, but no trace of the aircraft was found.

Despite ideal conditions, the aircraft was not plotted on radar, casting doubts as to whether it was ever near Cape Otway. Melbourne Police did receive reports of a light aircraft making a mysterious landing not far from Cape Otway at the time of the disappearance.

Claims asserting that some individuals reported seeing "an erratically moving green light in the sky" were received - an out-of-control aircraft's green navigation light?

Five years after the disappearance, an engine cowl flap was found washed ashore on Flinders Island - the part has been identified as having come from a Cessna 182 between a certain range of serial numbers that was within the range for Valentich's aircraft.

Much later a farmer in South Australia claimed that, on the day of the disappearance, he was ploughing a field when a large flying saucer passed overhead. "Stuck" to the side of it was a small aircraft like a Cessna & he could see the registration VH-DSJ on its fuselage. He claimed that he scratched the code on the bonnet of his tractor, proving that Valentich was taken by aliens but when challenged to show the evidence, he said that he no longer had that tractor.

*Tasmanian Aircraft Crash Reports Part 5, 1967 - 1983*

**13 Feb 1979, Pan-Air, DHC-6 Twin Otter, VH-PAQ**

Scheduled cargo flight, King Island - Wynyard.

The aircraft departed Currie Airport, King Island to Wynyard-Burnie Airport, carrying one pilot and a load of meat. Weather conditions worsened and the pilot was unable to locate the destination airport, so he decided to divert to Devonport Airport. Unfortunately, the visibility was too low and he decided to return to King Island. While approaching the coast, both engines failed due to fuel exhaustion. The pilot attempted an emergency landing, but the airplane crashed in a field at Yarra Creek on the east coast of King Island. The pilot was injured and the aircraft was destroyed.



*Twin Otter in flight. Photo courtesy Pinterest.*

**30 May 1979, Bizjets Aviation, Cessna 402B, VH-KIB**

Aircraft crashed on approach to Queenstown. The twin engine airplane went into clouds. The pilot initiated a go-around, when the airplane struck dead trees and crashed on Mt Sorell.

**17 Jul 1983, Rockwell Aero Commander 685, VH-WJC**

Private flight, Hobart-Moorabbin, Melbourne via Launceston and Wonthaggi.

Flight was IFR at 12,000ft with two persons on board, Emergency Locator Beacon (ELB) and life jackets were carried. Departed Hobart at 1.52pm and reported to Hobart Tower, Launceston Control and Launceston Tower. The flight progressed normally until 2.52pm, when the pilot advised Launceston Control of a low fuel indication. At 2.54pm the pilot transmitted a Mayday call, indicating that he was descending from 12,000ft on track to Bass (position reporting point), present position was 85nm from Launceston and he would be making a controlled ditching. Search and Rescue procedures were immediately initiated. Further communications indicated that the aircraft was continuing descent on track towards Wonthaggi. Last position report at 3.00pm was 94nm from Wonthaggi. Last transmission was at 3.01pm when the pilot confirmed that there were two persons on board.

*Tasmanian Aircraft Crash Reports Part 5, 1967 - 1983*

**17 Jul 1983, Rockwell Aero Commander 685, VH-WJC (continued)**

There were no indications at any time from the pilot that the fuel supply had been exhausted, or that either engine had failed. It was estimated that the aircraft ditched at about 3.05pm, at an approximate position of 81nm from Wonthaggi on the planned track. No trace of the aircraft or occupants were ever found.



*File photo Aero Commander similar to aircraft involved in above incident.*

**4 Aug 1983, Airlines of Tasmania, De Havilland DH.114 Heron, VH-CLY**

Crashed on final approach to Launceston Airport, the aircraft was misaligned and the crew decided to initiate a go-around procedure. Gear was retracted and flaps were partially raised when the airplane lost height and struck fences. It came to rest on the runway. The aircraft was damaged beyond repair.



*De Havilland Heron similar to aircraft involved Photo courtesy Pinterest.*

## *Peter's Helicopter "Torque"*

*By Peter Manktelow*

### *Centre of Gravity Traps and Cures*

I have just finished reading an article concerning a 1950 accident of a four engined passenger plane called a DeHavilland Tudor.

In a nutshell, the aircraft took off with a centre of gravity way out of limits, which resulted in it crashing as it came in to land. The captain had carried out three centre of gravity calculations before flight. This calculation required 1,000 kgs of luggage (or ballast) in the forward section of the aircraft. Sadly, the actual amount of luggage or ballast loaded was only about 50 kgs.

It struck me that in the helicopter world, we always had proof of our centre of gravity. Whilst we were always required to calculate manually or by computer a weight and balance report before each flight, the simple fact was that our take-off (99% of the time) was to pull up to the hover before transitioning to forward flight. It was in the hover that we could actually see and feel whether the aircraft was inordinately nose or tail down and so that was part of our hover checklist.

### *"Power, Temps and Pressures, Centre of Gravity."*

I said that 99% of the time we lifted the helicopter into the hover, but what about the 1% of times we did what we called a "rolling take-off"? The justification of this type of take-off was to avoid ingestion into the turbine engines of dust, small pieces of gravel or any other foreign objects that lay along the take-off path. By applying power/torque (that is increased main rotor pitch) and putting in forward cyclic (control column), the dust storm that the main rotor caused was kept behind the helicopter as we increased speed, getting airborne at around 20 knots. The last time I used this take-off technique, I was flying an EC225 at Cape Leveque (north east of Broome), which at the time was a partly gravelled runway. Of course, this type of take-off lends itself to a wheeled aircraft but could also be done with skids, although that was a bit messy.



*A dusty take-off courtesy Pinterest*

## *Peter's Helicopter "Torque"*

### *Vancouver to Bombay (Now Mumbai)*

I have one of my 6 logbooks opened on the pages 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> June 1990, showing myself and my very good buddy and co-captain, Canadian Blaine Forman, engineer Mike Senuik and C-GARC, a Canadian registered S-61N.



*Photo of a Canadian S-61N Coast Guard Helicopter courtesy of Pinterest*

We were out of Vancouver bound for Bombay. Our Greenland segment was to refuel at Godhab (now Nuuk) and then over the ice cap to Kulusuk on the east coast. Unfortunately, our single engine performance over the ice cap (altitude) would not have allowed a safe crossing, so we opted for a run down the west coast to Narsarsuaq, where we overnighted.

The terrain we crossed the next day was much lower and I think we may even have coasted south a bit, so as to be able to have a minimum altitude and some semblance of one engine inoperative performance should we lose an engine.

On arrival at Kulusuk for fuel, we noticed a DC-3 on ski gear, so we wandered over to chat to the crew. They were the "Glacial Girl" support team and that day they were about to fly inland to the site and send a man down the melted vertical tunnel to the P-38. We refuelled and took off for Reykjavic. It was not until years later that I spotted the book that detailed the recovery of the aircraft and told the complete story.

Brought back fond memories of our own flight that was one of my many "*Grand Adventures*".

## *News From Our Hobart Friends*

Early January saw a group of members from Hobart's RAAF Association gather to view a special display of some life-saving equipment. As one enthusiastic member said *"you can go interstate and not see the skill and precision on display today."*

The skills and precision were supplied by Tasmania's aerial firefighting fleet. Recently, six further specialised aircraft arrived and they complimented the eight helicopters and a surveillance aircraft that have been deployed in Tasmania since mid-December last year. Based at both Cambridge and Launceston, these aircraft can be deployed across the state where the fire risk may be highest.



*A Bell 214 Helicopter displaying its water drop ability.*

The Tasmanian Fire Services deputy chief officer, Matt Lowe, explained the fleet consists of fixed wing aircraft, some equipped with amphibious floats for water operations, helicopters (one equipped with winching capability) and an Aero Commander fire spotter aircraft.

All aircraft are centrally managed by Tasmania Fire Services Air Operations Unit. The amount of water carried by each will depend on how each aircraft is set up on the day. The medium helicopter can carry 2,500 litres in its bell tank, the bucketing aircraft 1,000 – 1,500 litres in a bucket and the fixed wing aircraft 2,500 – 3,500 litres.

He further explained the fleet are ready to respond within fifteen minutes to any fire that has potential to threaten life, property and the environment, A great day to understand the importance of Tasmania's fire-fighting personnel and see first-hand the skills required to safely fly the aircraft.

*Photos and story courtesy of personnel from Hobart's RAAF Association.*

*Hobart's RAAF Association Day with the Firies*



*Top the amphibious Fireboss AT-802F at work and below the BK117 winch-capable helicopter,*



# TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## *TAHS ON DISPLAY*

During December and January, Andrew and his team of Iain Pinkard and Cranston Gilbert were busy at the Launceston Library, Launceston Airport and the Cambell Town Town Hall, installing exhibitions of our aviation history.



*Andrew and Iain with the tribute to VH-ULM exhibition Launceston Airport and below "Flying by the Seat of Their Pants" at Campbell Town*

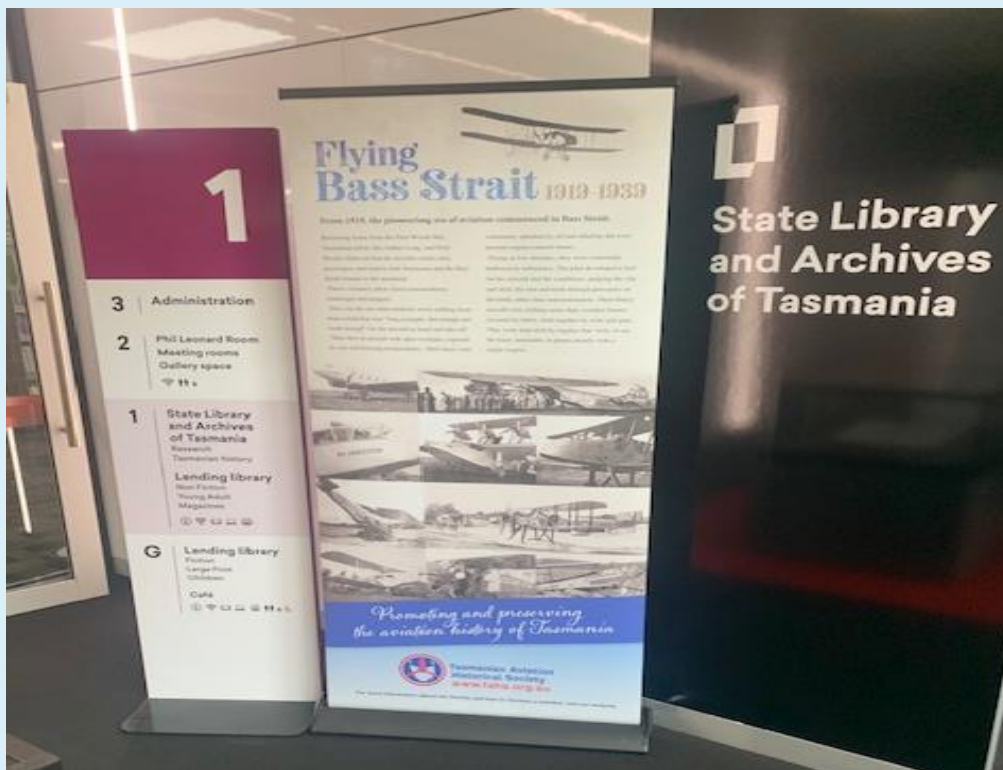


# TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## TAHS ON DISPLAY



*TAHS on display at Launceston's Library*



*Great effort guys, thank you.*

***TASMANIA'S ISOLATED MEMORIAL***

On his last home leave, a young Tasmanian Lancaster pilot climbed a hill called Sugar Loaf at Apsley, in Tasmania's central midlands area. Accompanied by his friends, he stuck a stick in the ground and uttered the profound words,

***"I wonder if this will be here when I come home?"***

Tragically, Jack Mitchell did not return home, His Lancaster, N - Nuts, was shot down over Magdeburg, Germany on the night of the 21-22 January 1944, with all crew perishing.



***Pilot Officer Jack Mitchell***

Mitchell, a former clerk and librarian, was born in Hobart in May 1923 and enlisted in the RAAF as a trainee pilot. On completion of his elementary training at Benalla (Vic) with 11 EFTS, he trained and was endorsed as a captain on Lancaster aircraft. Ultimately, he joined 467 Squadron RAAF in England. On that fateful night in June 1944, his was the only aircraft not to return to base. The crew was listed as missing and it was not until the end of the war it was discovered that the Germans had found the aircraft and the crew had been buried with full military honours.



***Lancaster Bomber similar to Michell's aircraft. Photo courtesy Pinterest.***

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### *TASMANIA'S ISOLATED MEMORIAL*

On receipt of the news of his son, his father Cliff Michell, climbed to the top of Sugarloaf Hill and replaced the stick with a cross as a memorial for Jack and his crew. As time went on, Cliff Mitchell passed away and the wooden cross fell down. It would seem this was the end of the story.

In 1981 fate intervened through the efforts of a local landowner Tony Bisdee. He manufactured a new cross of tubular steel and set it in concrete on the peak of the hill, using a tractor and winch system to haul the 3 metre cross up the steep hill.

Nine years on, the Air Force and the Bothwell Society climbed to the top of Sugarloaf Hill and held a memorial service. In 1994, 50 years to the day since the Lancaster and crew was shot down, a special gathering was held. The cross and memorial services remember not only Jack Mitchell and his crew, but all the bomber crews who paid the ultimate price for freedom.



*Above the cross on top of Sugarloaf Hill whilst below the crew of N-Nuts prior to a mission (Mitchell is second from the left) and a plinth bearing the names of the crew members beneath the cross.*



## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### *RAAF HISTORIC AIRCRAFT SQUADRON UPDATE*

January 2026 saw news with the RAAF announcing the withdrawal of eight heritage aircraft from 100 Squadron, the RAAF Historic Aircraft Squadron. This was done following a comprehensive review of technical and airworthiness factors, to ensure the squadron remains safe, sustainable and connected to Air Force history

The aircraft withdrawn – DH-115 Vampire T.35, Gloster Meteor F.8, Cessna A.37B Dragonfly, Ryan STM-S2, English Electric Canberra, CA-27 Sabre, CT4 and RE8 – will be transitioned with dignity. Five aircraft originally transferred from Temora Aviation Museum will be returned, whilst the remaining three aircraft will be considered for static display at approved institutions.



*Two of the aircraft to be retired on the left the Vampire T 35 and on the right a CT4A Photos courtest of RAAF  
And below the Spitfire Mk 8 that will remain operational.*

The RAAF will continue to operate eleven heritage aircraft: the Mustang, Harvard, Winjeel, 2 Tiger Moths, Hudson, Spitfire Mk 8, Spitfire Mk 16, Boomerang and Wirraway. The Chief of Air Force, Air Marshall Stephen Chappell DFC, CSC, OAM explained, "Our heritage fleet holds deep significance to both the Air Force and the Australian Public. Whilst withdrawing aircraft is never easy, this step ensures we preserve aviation history responsibly. By transferring these aircraft to museums and heritage organisations, their stories of service and innovation will remain accessible for future generations."

*And below the Spitfire Mk 8 that will remain operational.*





***TRANS AUSTRALIA AIRLINES. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE AIRLINE'S  
SIGNIFICANT AUSTRALIAN FIRSTS.***

Trans Australia Airlines (TAA), renamed Australian Airlines in 1986, was one of the two major Australian domestic airlines between its inception in 1946 and its merger with QANTAS in September 1992.

During this period, TAA played a major part in the development of the Australian domestic air transport industry, breaking the domestic air transport monopoly of Australian National Airways (ANA). The late 1940's also saw TAA supporting the Royal Flying Doctor Service by providing aircraft, pilots and engineers to ensure emergencies were answered quickly.

Over the next two Newsletters, we will explore the role and development of TAA, the airline's achievements and its impact on Australian domestic aviation.

**26 FEBRUARY 1947** – Captain Chapman and crew operated the first double crossing of the Tasman Sea in one day. Sydney - Auckland – Sydney in a Douglas DC-4.

**07 SEPTEMBER 1948** – TAA took delivery of a Convair 240 and became the first Australian airline to operate a pressurised aircraft. This aircraft went on to become the first Convair Liner 240 to operate 10,000 hours of flights.

**18 DECEMBER 1954** – This date saw TAA operate flights using the turbine powered Vickers Viscount aircraft on the Melb - Sydney - Brisbane route, becoming the first non-European Viscount operator and only the fourth airline in the world to order an airliner that was not fitted with piston engines.

**OCTOBER 1957** – October saw TAA introduce Economy Class air travel in Australia.

**30 APRIL 1956** – TAA operated Australia's first commercial helicopter service to and from the Yarra Bank in Melbourne.

**09 AUGUST 1956** – Under the command of Captain A Hawksford, Vickers Viscount VH-TVE set a record time interval of 50 minutes on a flight from Essendon to Launceston. The aircraft ultimately went on to fly 29,383 hours with 21,680 cycles.



***TRANS AUSTRALIA AIRLINES. A BRIEF LOOK AT THE AIRLINE'S SIGNIFICANT AUSTRALIAN FIRSTS.***



***TAA Viscount VH-TVE Photo courtesy of Pinterest.***

**06 APRIL 1959** – This date saw the acceptance of F-27 Friendship VH-TFB at the Fokker Works near Schipol Airport Amsterdam. Christened “Abel Tasman” after the Dutch explorer, TAA was the first airline outside of Europe to order the aircraft, and marked a significant milestone in the airline’s history, providing a new level of service to regional destinations. By June 1960 the airline had twelve Fokker Friendships in service.

**15 JUNE 1959** – This date saw the introduction of the Lockheed Electra to TAA’s fleet. The aircraft named “John Eyre” entered the airline’s service as flight TN534 Essendon to Sydney on 08 July.



***DO YOU REMEMBER?***

- 1915** In July, Lt Merz became the first Australian military pilot killed in action when his Caudron was forced down with engine trouble and he was killed by locals in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) during the AFC's first engagement of the war.
- 1934** On 20<sup>th</sup> October, the MacRobertson Air Race, from London to Australia, began. It was won by C W A Scott and T Campbell Black in a de Havilland DH-88 Comet, "Grosvenor House", in a time of 70 hours and 45 minutes.
- 1939** On 27 November, in Canada, agreement was reached by representatives of Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to establish the Empire Air Training Scheme to train aircrew for service with the RAF.
- 1943** On 17 May 1943, Tasmanian Tom "Tammy" Simpson from Hobart, climbed on board his Lancaster aircraft and into the history books. "Tammy" was a tail gunner with 617 Squadron and was about to partake in Operation Chastise, the dam busters raid. He was the only Tasmanian to take part in this historic raid. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) following the raid.



*Tom "Tammy" Simpson, centre, pictured with fellow crew members. Courtesy Fraser Simpson*

- 1944** On 18 February, a formation of RAF Mosquitoes from 464 Squadron (Australia) and 487 Squadron (New Zealand) undertook one of the most daring low-level precision-bombing operations of World War II, breaching the walls of Amiens Prison to release members of the French Resistance.
- 1947** In October, the RAAF's first helicopter, a Sikorsky S-51, was test flown at Laverton, Victoria.
- 1951** Between 14 and 27 March, P G Taylor made the first Australia to South America flight (to Valparaiso, Chile) in a Catalina PB2B Frigate Bird II
- 1952** On 28 August, the prototype Jindivik, A92-5 (which was subsequently used as a weapons target in Australia, Sweden, the US and the UK), made its first controlled flight.

# TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY COMING EVENTS

### MARCH 2026

- Tuesday 03 March** TAHS 2026 AGM the Gleb 6:30pm..
- Saturday 07,08,09 March** Steamfest Sheffield over the March long-weekend. TAHS will be there, great fun for all ages. Tiger Moth VH-BUG will do a flyover.

### APRIL 2026

- Tuesday 07 April** Guest Speaker Night Glebe 6:30 pm.
- Sunday 26 April** Sausage Sizzle Bunnings Kings Meadows 8:30am – 4.00pm

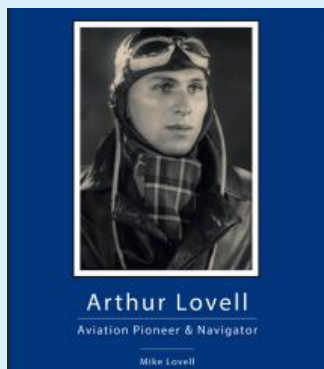
### MAY 2026

- Tuesday 05 May** Executive Meeting Glebe Time to be advised

### ***BE PREPARED - JULY 19***

Visit to RAAF Association Hobart and museum tour. Details and times in June Newsletter.

## ***2026 WEB SHOP SPECIALS***



***TAHS CAPS \$25.00. Arthur Lovell from Smithton to Chief Pilot for ANA \$50.00.***

***The Forgotten Giant the story of Australian National Airways, \$50.00***

***Postage \$15.00 per item \$25.00 for two or more items.***

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

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