



## TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

### 7 ELEMENTARY FLYING TRAINING SCHOOL, WESTERN JUNCTION AUGUST 1940 – DECEMBER 1944

#### 7 Elementary Flying Training School, Western Junction August 1940 – December 1944

*Author: W Dearing, June 2023*

During the Second World War, in particular the period of 1940 through to 1944, Australia was committed to the Empire Air Training Scheme. This was a policy designed to train Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) pilots for eventual transfer to the Royal Air Force who, in the early stages of the conflict, were unable to supply sufficient pilots.<sup>1</sup> The plan called for an establishment of a pool of recruits in the dominions from which the RAF could siphon replacement pilots. The government of Australia accepted the plan for three years and began making preparations to adopt it. Under the plan, dubbed the Empire Air Scheme in Australia, 50,000 aircrew would be trained in the dominions.

Australia planned to provide 28,000 aircrew under the scheme, accounting for 36% of the total number of proposed aircrews. Basic flying courses officially began 29 April 1940. The first Australian pilots departed for Canada on 14 November 1940, from where they would be transferred to Britain and funnelled into the RAF. The "Scheme" would ultimately cost Australia about £100,000,000 for her commitments.<sup>2</sup>

The RAAF established twelve elementary training schools during 1940 and 1941.<sup>3</sup>

7 Elementary Flying Training School was established at Western Junction Aerodrome, now the site of Launceston Airport. The aerodrome, which predated the war, was the home of the Tasmanian Aero Club. Flight training began on the 20<sup>th</sup> August 1940. As such the Aero Club was forced to relocate their operations to Cambridge Airport, Hobart.<sup>4</sup>

No. 7 EFTS was the only RAAF training unit to be located in Tasmania during the war.<sup>5</sup>

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1940, an advance party of 21 NCO's and other ranks, under the command of Pilot Officer Hall, sailed for Launceston. Two days later Flight Lt Buscombe, 7 EFTS initial commanding officer and the unit's CFI Flight Lt Townsend, sailed. The schools initial complement of 60 NCO's and other ranks arrived during August 1940 having to be billeted whilst construction of the facility was completed. A further satellite airstrip was constructed at Nile approximately 8 miles south of Western Junction. Nile was used for training purposes and as an alternate should weather preclude landing at Western Junction.<sup>6</sup>

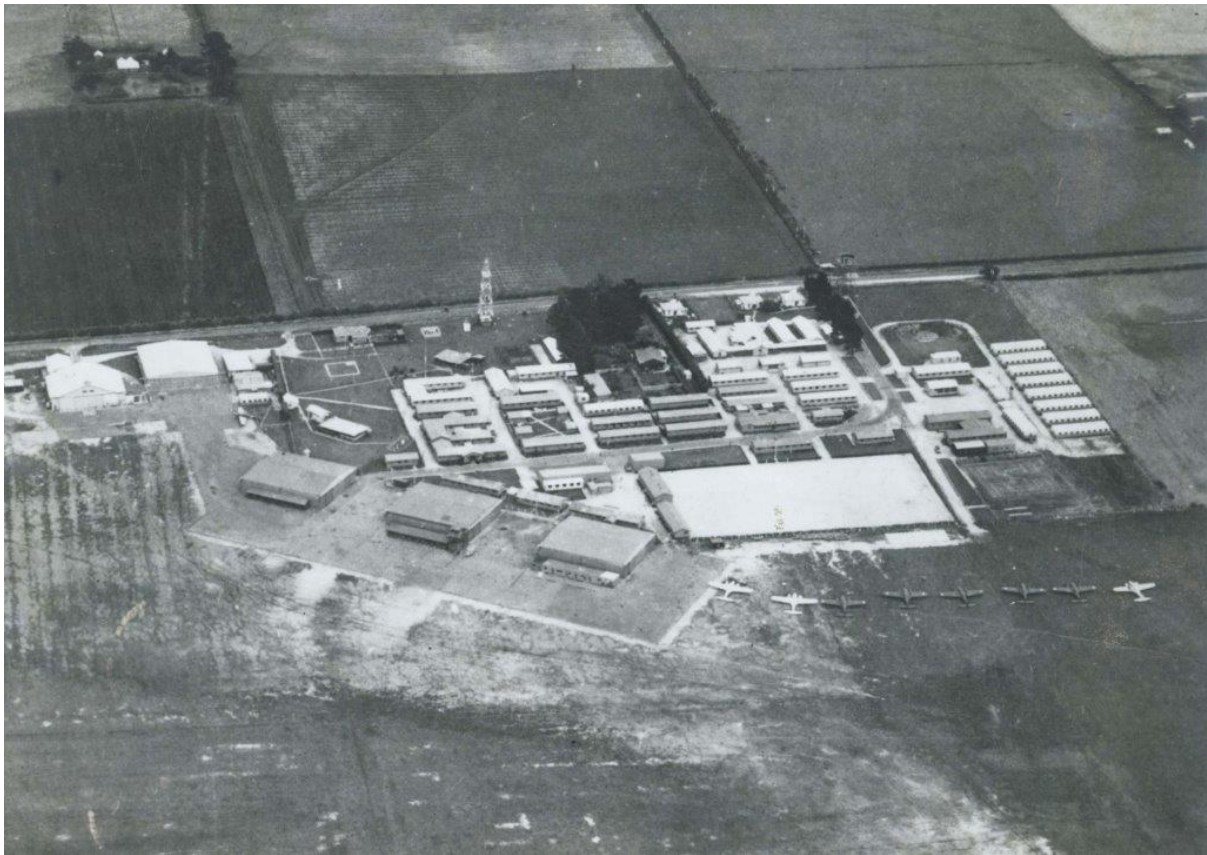
On the 11<sup>th</sup> August 1940 eleven Tiger Moth training aircraft arrived from Laverton via Yanakie and Whitemark eleven further arriving on 16<sup>th</sup> August.

Initially operating as a half-strength elementary flying training school, the unit comprised two flights of Tiger Moths with several others held in reserve.



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*Aerial file photo of the initial 7 EFTS facilities*

By the 28<sup>th</sup> August the 7 EFTS boasted 22 Tiger Moths with an aircraft serviceability of 96%. The Tiger Moth was the RAAF's primary training aircraft. A single engine, two seat biplane with a 130hp de Havilland Gypsy Major I engine, a max speed of 109 kts, a cruising speed of 90kts, a service ceiling of 13,000 feet and a range of 300 miles.



*Another training flight commences. Photo courtesy of the Schoon Collection*



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The role of these units was to provide a twelve-week long introductory flying training course. The flying training was undertaken in two stages; the first involved four weeks of instruction, including ten hours of flying, which were used to determine trainees' suitability to become pilots. Those that passed this grading process then received a further eight weeks of training (including 65 hours of flying) at the elementary training school.

Pilots who successfully completed this course were posted to a service flying training school in either Australia or Canada for the next stage of their instruction as military aviators.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout the 7 EFTS period of operations, accidents occurred, some as minor as a collision whilst taxiing, through to forced landings because of engine failure.

Tragically ten personnel lost their lives as a result of training accidents and illness during the operational period of 7 EFTS.<sup>8</sup>

Six personnel were killed in mid-air collisions, two died following their aircraft crashing near Longford whilst on a training flight, one enlisted man died as the result of a ground accident and one Flight Sgt died due to illness.

While 7 EFTS was the only flying unit stationed at Western Junction, the aerodrome was often visited by Airspeed Oxfords piloted by aircrew undergoing training at the Bairnsdale based No. 1 Operational Training Unit. Additionally, No. 67 Squadron aircraft also passed through the aerodrome during anti-submarine patrols of the Bass Strait area; this unit was headquartered at Laverton in Victoria.

By the end of October 1944, the 7 EFTS was equipped with 60 Tiger Moth aircraft and had trained 1,801 pilots. Training was suspended in December 1944, and all flying ceased on 28 March the next year. The school was disbanded on 31 August 1945. Many of the Tiger Moths previously used by 7 EFTS were sold after the war and three hangars constructed for the RAAF at Western Junction were donated to the Tasmanian Aero Club.

As a tribute, the Evandale History Society, in conjunction with the RAAF Association, decided to build a memorial dedicated to the men who trained and served at Western Junction. The memorial also commemorates the ten servicemen who died whilst based there and also honours the approximately one third of the 1,801 pilots who trained there and died while training in other bases or whilst on active duty.<sup>8</sup>

The memorial was appropriately located in the historic village of Evandale, close to Western Junction and the village where so many members of the initial intake were billeted.

On Saturday 21st August 2010, guests arrived for the formal unveiling of the memorial by Group Captain Glen Coy CSC.

Among the guests were 20 original veterans of No 7 EFTS.



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***File photo of pilots and aircraft of 7 EFTS***



***Tiger Moth of 7 EFTS. Photo courtesy of  
Evandale History Society***



***First three Tiger Moths to arrive at 7 EFTS  
Photo courtesy of Aust War Memorial***



***The unit's memorial at Evandale village.  
Photo courtesy of Evandale History Society***

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<sup>1</sup> Aust War Memorial Retrieved 16 Feb 2017

<sup>2</sup> Oxford Companion of Aust Military History

<sup>3</sup> RAAF Museum 2012

<sup>4</sup> RAAF historical Section 1995

<sup>5</sup> Western Junction RAAF Museum retrieved 01 June 2012

<sup>6</sup> RAAF Historical Section, 1995

<sup>7</sup> Stephens 2006

<sup>8</sup> Evandale History Society