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# AIRTOURER ASSOCIATION



Dedicated to the preservation and continued airworthiness of VICTA and AESL Airtourer Series Aircraft



# NEWSLETTER

<http://www.Airtourer.asn.au>

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Articles for inclusion in the Newsletter should be submitted direct to John O'Halloran at the contacts listed above.

The next Newsletter will be published in February 2013. Contributions and or advertisements are to be with JOH by 15 January 2013.

Advertisements are free for current members.

### Editorial

Life at work for the Editor continues at its hectic pace. Having missed Coota due to the B747-8F simulator it was threatening my attendance at Parkes as well. In the end the simulator qualification slipped a week allowing me to get back to Australia. See the website for a picture of the simulator and it's connection to the Airtourer.

Despite the last couple of fly-ins enjoying good weather at the venue, members have nevertheless had challenges attending. See Stan Tilly's article on page 8. Jan and I encountered strong headwinds on the way to Parkes, fortunately only from Wedderburn, but the trip home was more interesting. Approaching the QLD border we had to divert behind a line of thunderstorms, eventually waiting on the ground at Kingaroy for a couple of hours. Modern technology, smart phones and the Bureau of Met website radar, ensured our decision making was well informed.

The Airtourer Co-operative has been closely monitoring CASA's concerns on ageing aircraft. Co-op Board member John Day is running with the project and published an article in the last Newsletter. The Co-op response to CASA is included in this issue. CASA's concern is a real problem and will not go away. It is in the interest of GA generally to actively engage CASA to ensure the final rulemaking is balanced and sensible.

There are still a number of members who have not renewed. I will send them reminder emails separately but I would ask that you check to see if your membership renewal could have been overlooked. It is possible that I have missed some renewals if

*Cover Photo:* The President's Fly-In 2012 group at "The Dish", the Parkes Radio Telescope.

### Disclaimer

The views expressed are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Publishers, the Airtourer Association or the Airtourer Co-operative Ltd.

a bank transfer was made without a follow up email to prompt me to check.

On the matter of renewals, I couldn't help notice that a number of Airtourer owners are members of the Association only and not the Co-operative. The Co-op has a legal responsibility to CASA regarding ongoing airworthiness. Discharging this responsibility costs money and those costs are minimised by an immense amount of volunteer work put in by the likes of Alan Wood, Hugh Knox and the Board. If, as an owner, you are not a Co-op member you are benefiting without contributing.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the Newsletter throughout the year. In particular thanks to my Assistant Editors. Jan and I wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Safe Airtouring,

*John O'Halloran*

## Heard at the Hangar Door

**Margot Rayner** was unable to make it to Parkes as she was in hospital undergoing an ankle operation. There will be a long road to recovery being unable to walk for 7 to 8 weeks but she hopes to make it to Mudgee next year.

**Dave Disney** in the UK reports that he also is the victim of airport closures. His Airtourer collection has been hangared at Filton airport near Bristol. Unfortunately Filton, like Hoxton Park, is about to be converted into a housing estate. Dave's aeroplanes are currently hangared on a farm strip which is too limiting for a 115 with two up and hence they are for sale. See the Association website for details.

**Gerry Lawson** was unable to make it to Parkes and asked that we pass on his thanks to all those Association members who expressed their condolences after Pam passed away earlier this year.

Long time member **Robert Zweck** has done little Airtourer flying since his time in Darwin pre Cyclone Tracy. Therefore it was good to see him and Pam drive all the way from Adelaide to join us at Parkes. Robert has an extensive photographic collection of Airtourers and a number of the photos in this issue are his. Thank you Robert.

## Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Safe Flying



President John Treble would like to thank the Committee and other members of the Association for their enthusiastic support during the year and wish them a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Safe 2013.



# 2012 "BACK TO PARKES"

## PRESIDENT'S FLY-IN

John Treble

Our previous President's Fly-In to Parkes was 2002 and it certainly doesn't seem like 10 years since our last visit there. Considering this one was such a successful Fly-In let's not leave it for another 10 years before we "RETURN TO PARKES" for perhaps a future Convention and AGM.

Friday saw a good roll up of members with a nice welcome by President Bill Barbour of the Parkes Aero Club. Arrivals were refreshed with tea, coffee and assorted cake and bikkies. Following on from the very pleasant welcome we made our way to the various Motel accommodations for a quick freshen up before moving on to the Parkes Golf Club Bistro. Before and after our dinner a lot of chair shuffling went on, being the first night for carrying on where we left off unfinished Coota conversations.

Saturday morning saw some exploring of the township while others spending

the time at the airport flying, and/or talking about it. An excellent lunch was welcomed in an outdoor setting exclusively set up for us at the Dish Cafe located at the CSIRO radio telescope centre, 20 km north of town.

The dinner venue was "Windows on Welcome" restaurant within easy walking distance from most motels. Just before beginning our dinner, Stan and Bonnie arrived and received a big round of applause just for getting there in very difficult conditions, (their airfield in Tassie being waterlogged). The choice of meals was excellent making for a good top night.

Sunday saw us being shuttled to the Henry Parkes Centre for an interesting variety of Parkes local memorabilia and other exhibits ranging from the Elvis Presley segment, to an always interesting car display, truck and farm machinery. A couple of them were fired up, with lots of



interest shown by our members. Around 12.30 we shuttled back to the airfield for a barbecue lunch provided by the Parkes Aero Club.

All in all it was another enjoyable President's Fly-In with a full on program including perfect flying weather.

A big thank you to Lizzy Matthews for organizing all the venues and happenings for the week-end. Well done Lizzy.



**Opposite page:** The Parkes flight line.  
**Above:** The impressive backdrop for Saturday lunch. **Top Right:** Merle reveals her secret to a long and healthy life, profiteroles, ice cream and chocolate sauce. **Right:** Roger & Neroli Merridew. **Below:** Pamela and Robert Zweck with Jon Pels.





**Above:** *Graham Wood, John & Doreen Treble, Tim Sears, Col Taylor, Pat Sheil and George Penfound.*



**Above:** *Jan O'Halloran, Liz Matthews, Pamela Zweck, Merle Wood and Bonnie Tilley.*

**Below Left:** *John Treble thanks Bill Barbour of the Parkes Aero Club.*

**Below Right:** *Gary and Jorja Coote.*



# The Parkes Radio Telescope

## "The Dish"

CSIRO's Parkes radio telescope is a 64-m diameter parabolic dish used for radio astronomy. It is located about 20 km north of the town of Parkes, New South Wales (NSW), and about 380 km west of Sydney.

## The Telescope

The telescope was built in 1961, but only its basic structure has remained unchanged. The surface, control system, focus cabin, receivers, computers and cabling have all been upgraded - some parts many times - to keep the telescope current.

The telescope is now ten thousand times more sensitive than when commissioned in 1961.

- NASA copied the design of the telescope for the satellite tracking dishes of it's Deep Space Network.
- The moving parts of the telescope, above the concrete tower, weigh 1,000 tonnes - more than two Boeing 747s.
- The telescope can be pointed with an accuracy of better than 11 arcseconds - about the width of a finger at a distance of 150 metres.
- The telescope only receives signals from space, it never sends them.
- It can handle radio waves from 7mm to 4m long.

## Using the Telescope

The telescope operates twenty four hours per day, through rain and cloud. About 85 per cent of all time each year is scheduled for observing. Less than five per cent of that is lost because of high winds or equipment problems. Most of the rest of the time each year is used for maintenance and testing. Around 300 researchers use the telescope each year, and more than 40 per cent of these users are from overseas.

The moving part of the dish is not fixed to the top of the tower but just sits on it. Because the large surface catches the wind like a sail, the telescope must be 'stowed' (pointed directly up) when the wind exceeds 35 km an hour.

## Radio Astronomy

The radio waves from objects in space are extremely weak by the time they reach Earth. The power received from a strong cosmic radio source by the Parkes telescope is about a hundredth of a millionth of a millionth of a watt (10-14 W). If you wanted to heat water with this power it would take about 70 000 years to heat one drop by one degree Celsius.

Galaxies contain stars, gas and dust. The gas - mostly hydrogen - is the raw material from which stars form. It emits radio waves, at a frequency of 1420 MHz. Radio astronomers spend a lot of time studying this gas, learning where it is and how it is moving.

Astronomers don't look through the telescope. Instead, signal processing systems and computers take the radio waves the telescope collects and turns them into pictures (like photographs) of objects in space.

# Back to Parkes - From Hobart

## Stan Tilley

The 2012 President's Fly-In was scheduled for Parkes on the 22nd and 23rd of September. What fun! Parkes had been a regular visiting point when Tony Matthews was President and we had often enjoyed the wonderful hospitality of Liz and Tony. We were even allowed to enjoy snuggling under the Foxy Fur rug at times. Parkes had also been an enjoyable stopping place on some of our trips north as well. Tony unfortunately has gone but it was still great to be returning and to look forward to catching up with Liz and all the Airtourer friends.

By adjusting our busy schedule we were able to make plans to leave on Friday the 21st. Unfortunately things did not turn out that way. The aircraft was all fuelled and ready, bags were packed and Bonnie had made a beautiful lunch and the weather was fine. That is, until Thursday night when it rained, and rained and rained.

Friday it was still raining. We packed up and headed off for a look at our grass strip at Sandfly. Not Good! The rain was still falling and the cloud was sitting firmly at ground level.

What we could see of the strip was covered with water. Only once before have we had to abandon any thought of taking off because of the very wet strip. I took a walk, rapidly got wet feet and decided that:

1. The strip was very wet and boggy, and

2. The cloud base was below the required minima for even an IFR departure.

So, we took our lunch, found a shelter shed on the banks of the Huon River and as

the rain pelted down, ate it there.

Saturday looked better. There was still low cloud but the rain had stopped so maybe we could get away.

With a new lunch, all packed and ready to go from Sandfly, I went to put the current GPS chip in the unit. "Hang On!, where's the chip?" I had it in my pocket yesterday. It must have fallen out when I was changing shirts. The GPS will not work without a chip. Back to home, but a search everywhere could find no sign of the chip so I had to use the old chip. (The GPS will work but some of the data may be incorrect.) Back at the strip we finally took off, straight into cloud, but an hour later than we planned. (The lost chip was found some days later inside one of the wet shoes I had discarded on Thursday! I have no idea how it got there.)

Once airborne things went well although with a headwind it took us 4 1/2 hours to get to Wangaratta for fuel.

The new refuelling machine at WGT did not work! After several phone calls to the owner, who just happened to be in Western Australia, and multiple resets of the system, by myself under instruction, it finally dispensed fuel. Finally airborne for Parkes we had lost another hour.

Arrival in Parkes was after dark and after a cab to the motel we arrived late to the dinner to a tumultuous welcome. "Thanks Everyone, it is wonderful to be here."

We had unfortunately missed out on the Saturday activities. This was a pity, because I had especially wanted to again



visit the radio telescope where lunch was provided.

Sunday was a visit to the Henry Parkes centre. It included a wonderful display of Elvis gear, as Parkes of all places, has an annual Elvis Presley Festival, with over a 1,000 Elvis impersonators descending on the town. There was also a huge collection of ancient tractors, including a 1925 Fowler driven by reins. Yes! Like a horse, I kid you not! Most of the machinery still works.

The collection of vintage cars I also found fascinating. It included a 1926 Austin Seven, the car in which I learned to drive, an Austin Seven Meteor of the same vintage which featured in many of my brother Norm's escapades, when he was at University. There was even a fairly rare Morris Minor factory built utility, identical to one I acquired with the purchase of a motor bodyworks business.

However, the requirements of the Airtourer Co-operative had to take precedence so there was very little time available to just have fun.

Many Airtourer friends departed Sunday afternoon but those remaining enjoyed another meal and get together on Sunday night.

Parkes weather had of course been fine and sunny so Monday morning we were back to Wangaratta. No problems, the fuelling machine worked fine, and then it was off into the blue for home. Did I say blue? 7,000ft was lowest safe over the mountains and soon we were in cloud. No problems, except that the freezing level was 5,000ft. Sure enough a little voice said, "It's getting twinkly out there." As soon as we had passed the mountains I requested a lower level and the ice slowly disappeared from the canopy and the wing leading

edges.

No cloud over the Strait but Hobart was a different matter. Low cloud and drizzle with an ILS approach being the only way in. After becoming visual at 1,200ft on final I decided that maybe we could just sneak into Sandfly. I requested an onwards clearance and headed west.

I don't know why I bothered. There had been lots more rain. The brilliant setting sun decided to break through the low cloud and all I could see of Sandfly as I headed into the light westerly breeze was a sea of water. So it was back to Hobart, and a taxi home.

### President's Fly-In Attendance List:

George Penfound, Pat Sheil	VH-MWR
Gerry Pels	VH-DWT
Alan & Merle Wood	VH-POB
Lizzy Matthews	Car
John & Doreen Treble	VH-CRK
Stan & Bonnie Tilley	VH-MTL
Mike Fisher & Jackie Brown	VH-BNV
John Day	VH-VRT
Murray Wallace	VH-SIA
Neil & Kathy Jensen	VH-CND
John & Jan O'Halloran	VH-COI
John Pels & Monique Gillett	VH-LVU
Graham Wood & Tim Sears	VH-HTM
Bob & Pat Peak	VH-EQG
David Wearne	VH-WAU
Andrew & Sharon Clement	VH-KGR
Gary & Jorja Coote	VH-CKE
Robert & Pam Zweck	Car
Roger & Neroli Merridew	VH-ECI
Doug Dow	VH-BQK
Col Taylor	VH-MRL

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# CASA Ageing Aircraft Management Plan

## DP 1205CS Response

*Comments submitted by the Airtourer Co-operative Limited representing the interests of owners of Airtourer series aircraft.*

### **The Type Certificate Holder**

The Airtourer Co-operative Limited (the Co-Op) was established in 1978 to acquire the inventory of components, jigs, spare parts and intellectual property relating to the Airtourer series of aircraft. These assets were acquired from the former New Zealand manufacturer Aero Engine Services Limited (AESL) who had in turn purchased them from Victa Aviation in Australia. Today the Co-Op is the Type Certificate (TC) holder for both the Australian and New Zealand produced models and continues to facilitate the supply of parts and provide advice on restoration and continued airworthiness of these aircraft to owners in Australia, New Zealand and the UK.

As the TC holder the Co-Op has continued to maintain and update both the Maintenance and Repair Manual and the Illustrated Parts Catalogue. The Co-Op also monitors the continued validity of the Aircraft Flight Manual (AFM) and has where necessary issued Service Bulletins (SB's) and Temporary Revisions (TR's) to ensure that these documents remain up to date.

The Co-Op currently has around 65 financial members, which represents the majority of aircraft owners. Several members are LAME's that have been involved with both the original production and subsequent restoration of these aircraft.

### **The Aircraft**

The Airtourer was originally designed and certified in Australia. Of the 255 aircraft that were produced by Victa and AESL 94 remain registered in Australia with an additional (approximately) 40 in NZ and the UK.

The aircraft is a simple two seat, aerobatic, fixed landing gear all-metal aircraft using predominantly pop rivet construction. There are a variety of engines fitted ranging from 100 to 160HP fitted with both fixed and constant speed propellers. The primary flight controls are actuated by push rods with only the rudder and elevator trim utilising cables.

Whilst the vast majority of the fleet are privately owned and operated a few remain in commercial service for instructional purposes.

There are essentially original examples of the type still in service however the majority of aircraft have been restored at some point in their service life. In many cases this has been conducted with modifications to allow the airframe to accept the larger 150/160HP engines. These modifications involve strengthening both the fuselage and wing structure under an approved SB. In all cases the restoration process has allowed very thorough inspections of the aircraft structure.

### Recognition of an Ageing Type

Certain elements of the Maintenance and Repair Manual account for aspects of the ageing process. The wing has a life of 17200 hours. Competition aerobatic flight time is calculated at a multiple of 20 times the actual aerobatic time. The landing gear bolts have defined hour limits.

The Co-Op is currently reviewing Australian Service Difficulty Reports (SDR's) to determine if they contain any issues that could be due to the ageing of the aircraft.

## The Position of the Co-Op

As the TC holder of a group of aircraft that, in some cases, are now 50 years old, the Co-Op has a significant interest in CASA's Ageing Aircraft Management Plan. The Co-Op both recognises and supports the need for an appropriate Management Plan. DP 1205CS proposes 5 Options that CASA may pursue in isolation or combination. The Co-Op's position in representing its members and Airtourer owners in general is outlined below.

### **Option 1 – Do Nothing:**

The Co-Op does not consider this an appropriate course of action

### **Option 2 – Matrix Tool:**

The Matrix Tool in its current form is educational but of limited use when applied to a specific aircraft. The value of the tool could be significantly enhanced if some of the variables were related to the type of aircraft rather than generic questions.

### **Option 3- E-Learning:**

The Co-Op can and would support any on going educational programs to both owners and LAME's that were either generic or type specific. The Co-Op has begun referencing currently available material in the Airtourer Association Newsletter to encourage members to improve their knowledge of the ageing process.

### **Option 4- Type Clubs:**

The Co-Op is funded by modest subscriptions and proceeds from the sale of inventory items. Volunteers carry out work done within the Co-Op. As such the organisation does not have the resources to cater for any significant change in current regulations. On this basis the Co-Op cannot support any proposal to alter the current mandatory inspections unless the associated costs were borne by the Commonwealth.

The Co-Op can and would support voluntary additions to CASA Schedule 5 and believes that these should be predominantly type specific. It is likely that any additions would be cyclic in nature rather than being required every year/100 hours.

### **Option 5 – Professional Development:**

The Co-Op can and would support this type of training.

## General Comments

CASA should be commended on the approach that has been taken thus far in considering the issue of ageing aircraft.

One of the statistics quoted in Stage 2 of the Industry Awareness program was that 8700 of 14000 aircraft in the Australian piston fleet were “of concern”. This equates to 62% of the fleet. How this figure was derived was not explained but presumably it must be heavily driven by date of manufacture as that is the only variable that CASA have full visibility of. Whilst the Co-Op does not believe that it is immune from the problems associated with the ageing process it would subjectively arrive at a figure well below 62% of its fleet. This belief is based on a combination of the following:

1. Date of manufacture: The aircraft are at the high end of the age spectrum.
2. TTIS: Individual aircraft are in the range of 2000-8000 hours with an effective life of 17200 hours and low annual rates of flying and cycles.
3. Storage: Most aircraft are well cared for and stored in hangars.
4. Life Cycle: Many aircraft have had significant restorations and modifications affording the opportunity for extensive inspections of the airframe and systems during their lives.
5. Reparability: The construction of the airframe and absence of composite or bonded materials makes it easier to recognise and repair damage than on some other types.
6. Usage: Most aircraft are flown only by their owners and for personal use.

The observations above are subjective at this point but could be quantified by a well-constructed survey of owners. The survey data, SDR records and LAME feedback could be used to determine if additional inspections should be recommended. This approach would work with any type of aircraft but is more suited to types that have had limited commercial use.

## Recommendations

The Co-Op believes that the solution to the issue of ageing aircraft in private ownership will not be found in any “one size fits all” resolution. It is the Co-Op’s belief that an effective solution will come about as follows:

1. Continued electronic and printed generic educational material for owners and LAME’s. The importance of directly mailed printed material should not be underestimated given that many older individuals do not actively seek this sort of material via the internet.
2. Education leads to understanding and acceptance of the issue, which in turn leads to willingness to accept recommendations (whatever they may be).
3. Consultation with manufacturers and owner groups will allow type specific recommendations to be combined with generic advice. These recommendations/advice should be, as far as possible, preventative in nature such that it can be demonstrated that long-term maintenance costs will be reduced and following them will enhance the value of the aircraft.

# OUR WILD NORTHERN FRONTIER

Pat Sheil

In the period 2006-2009 my son, Raymond, was a police officer based at Tumut. He resided with his wife, also a police officer, in the lock-up at Adelong. Whenever Raymond and his wife were absent on vacation or on our-of-town duties he would ask me to attend and look after the lock-up. I used to look forward to this opportunity because it allowed me to renew my membership and association with the Tumut Aero Club. My main duties were to feed and tend his dogs and fowls. I was also asked to check the mail box at regular intervals for mail for him and the Learmont family, who lived in the Sergeant's Residence,

One morning I collected a letter addressed to Mrs. Julie Learmont. I went to her residence and handed it to her. Julie invited me in for a cup of coffee and a chat. She inquired as to how I spent my life. I advised her that I had spent a great deal of my time as a Charter Pilot and Pilot Instructor, which included two years flying charter in Queensland. She responded that she had connections with Mackay and that she often returned to there. When I told her of an occurrence during which I was trapped in Mackay for a number of days due to extremely bad weather, she made the statement "Queensland is our Wild Northern Frontier!" Oh yeah, that fits.

In about March 1969 I obtained a position as Charter Pilot with the firm "Country Air" based in Rockhampton. A

condition of my employment was that I be the holder of a Grade B Instructor Rating. This enabled me to instruct Student Pilots without the direct supervision of a Chief Flying Instructor. The only previous times that I had penetrated north of Brisbane in Queensland was in 1964 when I flew into Brampton Island with members of the Goulburn Aero Club, and again in 1966 with members of the Monaro Flying Club. Brampton Island is NNE of Mackay. To secure my new position I stacked my new V8 Holden with essentials and left Griffith on my own. The plan was that my wife and 5-month old son, Paul, would follow by air. In those times a great number of the homes in Queensland were of wooden construction and elevated on high pylons. Obviously this was to allow airflow underneath. Air conditioning was sparse. Most of the sealed roads took on the appearance of a double edged saw with the bitumen tending to have jagged edges and be in a state of disrepair. It was a long way from my origins and, overall, I had a genuine feeling of isolation.

Rockhampton was a Primary Control Zone and, at a time after my own arrival, experienced Air Traffic Controller Rodney Wolfe was appointed to the staff of the Rockhampton Tower. Although I hadn't met Mr. Wolfe I knew of him as an Air Traffic Controller in Canberra when I was training for my Commercial Pilot licence in 1960-61. His voice was distinct

and easily recognisable with a stern and very strict attitude to procedures. Pilots were in awe of him and were careful not to make a mistake. When I became aware of Mr. Wolfe in Rockhampton I attended the Control Tower and introduced myself. Rodney proved to be quite appreciative of my attendance. Perhaps he too felt that he was in unfamiliar territory? I subsequently made regular visits to the Control Tower when time permitted between my scheduled flights. It was a great opportunity to understand the operation of ATC.

Our second child was due in June 1970. Grietje, my wife, was pleading with me to be available when the time came. I could see the desperation in her eyes. In response to her expression, I could only remain mute; I could not see how I could guarantee my availability. At the time my own mother, Lorna Sheil, was 54 years old. When she realised that the baby's arrival was close, she leaped into the family Vauxhall sedan, left her home situated near the little village of Douglas Park, NSW, and set out for Rockhampton. I estimated the distance to be 1700 kilometres, but others claimed it was even greater. Whatever; when I learned of her intentions, I believed it would take three days to complete the journey. Two years earlier, when our baby, Paul, was due in Griffith mother also attended, but the time lapse was only about six hours to cover about 400 kilometres. So I was astounded to understand that my mother took less than two days to reach Rocky! Apparently, she slept only once during the entire journey. The rest of the time was spent driving with short necessary stops enroute. This was an achievement that no one would consider attempting in those times. Subsequent events were

to prove that my mother's presence was vital.

In those times we had two airlines, TAA and Ansett. They operated in competition throughout most of Australia. One of the most extraordinary occurrences whilst I was with Country Air was that the Company had the contract to transport Sydney afternoon newspapers, the Mirror and the Sun, from Rockhampton to Mackay. I never did really understand why this should be so, as all aircraft and pilots with Country air were equipped and qualified Visual Flight Rules (VFR) only, whilst airlines could fly Instrument Flight Rules (IFR). Ansett used to load the newspapers at Sydney, fly into Brisbane, then to Rocky and unload the papers for Mackay. Then they would fly onto Mackay, land and exchange passengers and proceed further north. (Why not carry the papers all the way to Mackay?) The newspapers would then be loaded onto a single-engined Country Air aircraft at Rockhampton and delivered to the Mackay destination.

Pilots in the Company used to sit and talk about their experiences. On one such occasion I remember one young pilot saying, "If you get caught in cloud, climb, climb, climb!" Ensuing events proved this statement to be sound advice. On the morning of 23rd June 1970 I was rostered for just one charter flight, to Gladstone. This assignment was to convey a regular customer to this destination, leave him there and return to base. I was not rostered for any other flights on that day. Whenever we flew with this gentleman he always carried a large suitcase and I believe he was involved in the early stages of computers and their general use.

Other pilots were out on charter to

other areas. One of these pilots was rostered to do the paper run to Mackay in the afternoon. Soon after my return to Rocky on that morning, I received advice that my second son had arrived. I requested that I be given leave to attend the hospital but was denied with a very rude statement saying, in effect, "No. You stay right where you are!" It was now early afternoon. The other aircraft out on charter had not returned. However, the Ansett F27 had arrived with the newspapers.

My employer directed I load the newspapers onto a Company aircraft and fly them to Mackay. At that time Country Air was the distributing agent for Piper Aircraft and its entire fleet consisted of Piper aircraft. All versions of Piper aircraft were named with American Indian Tribal names, e.g. Cherokee, Comanche, Aztec, etc. The one that I was to fly was a Cherokee 180, VH-MCR. MCR was one of three Cherokee 180s in the fleet. It carried only basic instrumentation and no navigation aids. This aircraft was used as a work-horse. Although it was sometimes used to carry passengers a great deal of its time was in the carriage of freight and supplies, e.g. 10 gallon milk cans and sides of beef to Kerpel Island. The interior was rough and the engine noisy. However, it was a "tad" lighter than the other two Cherokees and would out-perform them.

As can be appreciated, I wasn't feeling too happy about having to do this flight. We had what was known as a "Standard Plan" for these flights to Mackay. I picked up the phone and called the Tower. "Bluey" answered. "Bluey" was the Chief Traffic Controller at Rocky. I do not recall his name, but he was a red-head, and was always known as "Bluey" I said to him, "Pat

Sheil here, standard flight plan for Mackay in MCR." His reply was, "This aerodrome is closed to all operations." This meant closed to both VFR and IFR flights. I was relieved to hear this as it meant that I did not have to fly. I replaced the phone and informed the boss, Mr. Milroy, who was nearby. He immediately went into a rage. Withdrawing his cigar from his mouth, with smoke pouring out of him (both literally and figuratively) declared, "We will see about that!" Rushing into his office he slammed the door with a loud bang. Some minutes passed, and Mr. Milroy emerged from his office with the instruction, "Now call the Tower!" The reply was now different. "Special VFR clearance, remain clear of cloud, and in sight of land or water at all times." I should have challenged the controller but it was now a stressful time for me, and I could not afford an argument.

I could see cloud off to the south-west, but it did not appear to infringe on the airfield. As my flight-path was to the north it did appear to me that I would be able to comply with the "Special VFR" clearance. This was with the understanding that the view from the Control Tower could show quite a difference aspect. I taxied the Cherokee, VH-MCR, to the terminal, loaded the newspapers and was cleared to take off to the south-west on Runway 22. The cloud was in the distance, but right onto the ground in the form of a very thick fog. The plan was to become airborne and track north to my destination. However, when going into the rotation and just lifting off, I found myself in cloud. This is what is known as a "WHITE-OUT." Indeed, everything was white! The first choice was to slam the aircraft back down onto the runway and perhaps seriously injure myself

or even be killed. The second choice was to “climb, climb, climb!!” I chose the latter. The aircraft was very lightly loaded and the climb angle was very steep. Very steep indeed! On climbing into clear air, I found myself beneath another cloud layer. There was no way I could get back to Rocky. The only option was to continue to Mackay. As I continued north along the coast conditions improved and I had no trouble maintaining VFR.

Mackay is approximately 155NM from Rocky and under normal conditions would have taken 75-80 minutes in the Cherokee. Approaching Mt. Funnel I called Mackay for clearance to enter. Mt. Funnel is a rock formation/outcrop in the shape of a chimney, more than 1,100 feet above sea level and 30NM south of Mackay. The standard height when approaching Mt. Funnel was 6,500 feet. I do not remember whether I was actually at this altitude, or lower, as storm clouds had formed on the range to the west.

The response from the Tower: “Track towards Sarina, I have a vacuum cleaner lining up for departure to the south on Runway 14.”

“Vacuum cleaner? You mean blow torch don’t you?”

“Yes, that’s right. Blow torch.” (DC-9)

I did as directed and started to track towards Sarina. Some minutes had passed and lightning started flashing at regular intervals, with rain. Visibility was still reasonable when suddenly the ASI (air-speed indicator) locked. “Oh, what now!” Although I had experienced ASI failures before it had been during the take-off roll, enabling the take-off to be aborted and remedial action taken. This was the first time it had happened to me while airborne.

Usually, problems occur because the pitot cover is not in place when the aircraft is parked. This can allow an insect, usually a wasp, to enter the pitot tube thus rendering the ASI inoperable. Obviously a blockage can also occur during take-off and at other times. I had been advised that should this happen whilst airborne, as in this case, to gently tap the instrument around the edges with my finger. I must have hit the glass too hard and too close to the centre causing it to shatter. Thus, the ASI was unserviceable for the rest of the flight. The Mackay Tower had not communicated with me since my departing Mt. Funnel and I became concerned. Apparently the controller had forgotten about me and when I alerted him he immediately cleared me to Runway 05.

On arriving at Mackay the Newsagents were already waiting for me. I hurriedly unloaded the newspapers and departed on the return flight to Rockhampton. At first conditions were good with reasonable visibility. However, as I approached Broad Sound conditions were again deteriorating rapidly and by the time I reached Charon Point at the mouth of the Styx River the altimeter was down to 500 feet and visibility to 2-3 miles. It had previously been established that the altimeter was over-reading by 150 feet so my actual height was only 350 feet. This was a frightening situation and resulted in a feeling that I was flying into a brick wall. I put the Cherokee into an “orbit” (360 degree turn) and called Rocky FSU (Flight Service Unit) on HF Radio and asked for the cloud base at Rocky. FS informed me that cloud base at Rocky was 2,000 feet and conditions VFR. This was good news but I still had 70 miles to run and a series of scattered peaks to negotiate. The tops of all these peaks were



in excess of 1,000 feet. I informed FSU that I would orbit at Charon Point for about 20 minutes while waiting for the cloud to lift. I then orbited for a few minutes only because I realised that conditions were not going to improve significantly within a practical time frame. Fuel remaining was now becoming an issue and I informed FS that I intended to return to Mackay. Rocky advised me to contact Townsville FS with my intentions. Townsville then advised that Mackay was now closed to all operations due weather. "Oh damn! What will I do now?" There was no choice but to return to Mackay. On reaching Mt. Funnel I was granted a clearance to land. On approach I could see that the airfield had been affected by a heavy downpour.

Overnight accommodation was not a problem. Country Air had a pilot based at Mackay. Using a Company aircraft he did charter from the base. He and his wife resided in their own home near the airport. All this time and I still had not been able to see my new-born son. Arrangements were made and I was able to telephone the hospital at Rockhampton. Grietje was so excited about our new son that she appeared not to be too concerned that I was unable to be present for his birth.

I said to her, "What name have you chosen for him?"

"I don't know," she said.

I said, "Call him Kevin John."

"Okay," she said.

Out of my four sons Paul, Kevin, Raymond and Christopher, Kevin was the only one for whom I chose the name.

Weather conditions only got worse at Mackay. I was there for a number of days. I can't recall whether it was three, or perhaps four or five days. My clothing was becoming a problem. As can be appreciated I was

not carrying a change of clothing. The lady of the house recognised the problem and was able to arrange alternative attire for me whilst she washed my clothes. It was winter and there was no monsoon influence. However, on one occasion during this period I observed flood waters from the window of the room I occupied. This will give an idea of the type of weather and the downpour we had been having. Local aircraft were grounded most of the time, but the airlines were still operating. However, no newspapers were being unloaded. The ASI on the Cherokee had been repaired and was now functional.

Finally, well into the afternoon, the Chief Pilot arrived in the Company's Cherokee 6, PA-32. The PA-32 was a powerful 300 HP version of the series and was capable of carrying a pilot, six passengers and baggage. On this occasion it was carrying a massive load of dated newspapers. It was already 4 o'clock in the afternoon but the Chief Pilot ordered me to return to Rocky and to avoid the weather by tracking west of the range. Normally this would have been a routine flight but in this case my difficulties were not over. I did as James had directed and flew to a position west of the Great Divide. This was an isolated area and it was necessary to establish a positive location/fix for the final run into Rocky. The plan was to proceed on a southerly heading to Junee Cattle Station. This cattle station is located in a very remote area 70NM north-west of Rocky. It was well know to Country Air pilots. We had often planned charter flights into Junee Station with cattle buyers, etc. It had an ochre coloured landing strip.

In those times GPS (Global Positioning Systems) did not exist. Aircraft weren't equipped with transponders and no-one

had heard of the term “mobile phone.” The only navigational tracking devices apart from the compass were the ADF (Automatic Direction Finder) and the VOR (VHF Omni Range). The aircraft I was flying had only basic instrumentation and was not equipped with either ADF or VOR. Even if they had been fitted I was well and truly outside the range of both these aids. Navigation was done by what is known as “Dead Reckoning Navigation” using a map, magnetic compass and clock. It could only be worked in daylight hours. The pilot would draw the track on the map from departure point to destination, measure the distance in nautical miles and the direction from north in degrees magnetic. He would then use the forecast wind to establish heading to steer to maintain track (corrected for drift) and to calculate the ground speed to the destination. Forecasts were often unreliable, and if map reading showed that the aircraft was off track adjustments had to be made. In my capacity as a Flight Instructor I preferred to “track crawl”, that is to say, if I was flying an aircraft with a TAS (True Air Speed) of 120KTS or more, I would work 20 mile intervals on my map. If the TAS was less than 120KTS I would work 10 mile intervals. Travelling at a ground speed of 100KTS would take six minutes to travel 10 miles. Ground speed is dependant upon the direction and speed of the wind and was the ingredient in establishing time interval or time of arrival at destination. Track was maintained by map reading, looking for such things as outcrops, ridges, creeks, streams, etc. and adjusting heading as required. In this case, as I was flying over a great deal of featureless country, it proved to be quite difficult.

It was the winter season and darkness

was rapidly approaching. My flight-planned time for arrival at Junee Station was reached but although I could see a number of lights from the scattered homesteads it was far too dark to identify the cattle station. This did not concern me. The sky was clear and I could see the glow from the lights of Rockhampton across the range. Even if I was 10 or even more miles out of position it would not have mattered. I knew the track and was only an estimated 40 minutes from home. “Yippee!!”

“Rocky Approach, this is Mike Charlie Romeo, position Junee Cattle Station, 7,500 feet inbound, request clearance.”

“Clearance denied! That aircraft is not equipped to fly at night time.”

“Oh no! It was Rodney Wolfe back to his old ways. I did the wrong thing, again. True, the aircraft was not equipped with night navigation aids, but it was already airborne at night, heading for home, and the engine was “on song”. Young men can “move mountains and knock down dam walls”, but when confronted with a challenge of this nature, are left wanting. What I should have said to Mr. Wolfe was, “I am already airborne. I intend to land at Rocky either with or without your approval. On landing, I will contact DCA, (Department of Civil Aviation), and arrange a meeting with yourself, Bluey, Mr. Milroy and Jimmy Stewart.” This was with the understanding that all conversation between myself and the Tower was being recorded. However, I didn’t do that.

I had the aircraft in orbit in the area, pondering what I could do. Going back to Mackay was not an option. Tracking inland to Emerald would have been very difficult. Firstly, I did not have a track to steer. In those times, a pilot could not activate the

flare path by “keying” the microphone transmit button on a designated frequency. I would have had to ask Mr. Wolfe to contact the groundsman at Emerald and have him activate the flare path at the Emerald aerodrome.

It was whilst in a banked turn to the left that I looked to the wing tip. There it was! MIRACULOUSLY, I was directly over the Junee Cattle Station landing strip. I could just make out the dim form in the darkness. My navigation had been accurate to the metre! Immediately I turned on the landing light located in the nose of the aircraft, selected full flap and dived vertically at the strip. To hell with the possibility of hitting a kangaroo, or exceeding flap extension speed. If I had lost sight of the strip I would have died anyway. At the commencement of the dive I was a long way above standard circuit height. Everything went to order. I was able to flare as in a normal approach and a good landing was achieved. The aircraft suffered no damage.

After parking the aircraft, and in the darkness, I went and knocked on the door of the homestead. When the door opened I was confronted by a neatly attired valet wearing a bow tie and waistcoat! “Oh No!”

Here I was still wearing the same clothing I had been wearing when I departed Rocky several days previously. One sock was half way up my calf, the other was down around my ankle. My shirt, partly hanging out of my shorts, was loosely open at the front, displaying my hairy chest. “Oh, how can I help you, Sir?” was his opening remark. I explained my predicament to him. “Come with me,” he said, “We will have to speak to the Manager.” The valet took me to the dining room and introduced me to the manager who was sitting alone at a very large dining table. He too, was tidily clad in a long sleeved shirt and a tie. He had a meal in front of him, with a knife in one hand and a fork in the other. I was directed to a motel-style bedroom with shower and toilet facilities and given a meal.

Early the next morning I climbed into the Cherokee, and flew to Rockhampton. After landing, I nosed the aircraft straight up to the front door of the Country Air building, jumped into my car, and drove back to my family.

There was no evidence of the Chief Pilot having returned from Mackay. Perhaps he was held up unloading the large number of newspapers from the PA32?

## **Calendar of Events**

### **VICTORIAN BRANCH CHRISTMAS FLY-IN**

#### **“Back to the High Country”**

See next page.

### **2013 CONVENTION and ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

#### **“The BIG ONE”**

The 35th Convention and AGM will be held at Mudgee over the weekend of 15th to 18th March 2013. Details on the website and in next Newsletter.

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# VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS FLY- IN 8th & 9th DECEMBER 2012 "A RETURN TO THE HIGH COUNTRY"

This event will be held in the Mount Beauty / Bright area of North Eastern Victoria, flying into the Mount Beauty airfield in the beautiful Kiewa river valley.

A fly-in to this delightful part of Victoria will be an occasion not to be missed. I'm sure that the proposed 2-day itinerary will be a total treat for everybody to enjoy.

Accommodation has been arranged with the Snowgum Motel. For commercial reasons they will only hold 11 units for us until the 16th of November, therefore to secure a bed you need to book by that date. Phone (03) 5754 4508, mentioning your part of the Airtourer Association group booking. The cost of a room for the night of the 8th is \$85.00

The Motel is in easy walking distance to our Saturday dinner venue, giving Niel a well-earned night off from driving the usual Mini-Bus shuttle service.

No deposit or registration is required for the weekend as it will be mostly a pay-as-you go fly-in. The cost of the Mini-bus will be shared depending on numbers.

There is Glider activity at Mount Beauty on weekends so check your ERSA for all MBT details and for situation awareness, make full use of CTAF 126.0

For catering purposes etc, please advise me (John Treble) on 03 9336 2056 if you are attending.

## PROGRAM OUTLINE

### Saturday the 8th.

- Morning arrivals then to attend a combined barbecue lunch with the Gliding Club at their premises on the airfield from 12pm onwards.
- Mid afternoon will see us moving to our Motel before departing on a very secret mini-bus tour before returning to freshen up for dinner at the Settlers Tavern in a private room.
- Drinks at 6.30pm
- A few of the Gliding Club members have indicated they would also like to join us.

### Sunday the 9th.

- Around 9am we shall depart in the Mini-Bus for a mystery scenic tour including lunch, then to return to the airfield early afternoon to begin our homeward journey.

*Hope to see you there.*