



AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION of RETIRED AIRLINE PILOTS and AVIATION PROFESSIONALS

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EDITORIAL

I was recently prompted to include the story of Captain Ron Hickey (ex RAAF & ex TAA). Accompanying the suggestion were links that covered his RAAF time, but very little on his civilian aviation career with TAA. Hopefully, there is someone amongst the membership who can provide us with his *TAA story* and we can include it in the next newsletter.

This provides a segue to a problem we, as Editors – (not Investigative Journalists), come up against when one of our members leaves us. In order to honour that member, we always try to include a valedictory and therein lies the problem as most of us have not given us their career stories. This edition provides a couple of exceptions to the rule: Phil Elliot and Bill Crollick. Phil responded to my requests sometime back and we were able to add Ray Vuillerman's contribution to Phil's. Bill Crollick wrote his own, which made it easy for us.

Whereas the application for membership form provides for some information, it doesn't provide enough to accurately portray the members aviation involvement, which is what we all want from a valedictory point of view. So, can we encourage each and everyone of us to put together your

'story' and send it to aarapqldnews@gmail.com We will then keep the information on file as we did for Phil Elliot, for example.

The Air India AI171 crash has brought to the fore the proposal to have cameras in the cockpit. Personally, I have no problem with that as we've had them in simulators for quite some years now. However, whereas they would assist in accident investigation, they remain reactive – not proactive and as yet, I'm to hear of any solution to *pilot involvement* in the cause of a crash?

Somewhat related, it is interesting to note that China refuses to make public the investigation into China Eastern MU5735. The China Eastern Boeing 737-800 crash in March 2022 marked China's deadliest aviation disaster in 30 years. The aircraft, operating a scheduled domestic service within China, abruptly entered a high-speed descent during cruise and impacted terrain near Wuzhou (WUZ).

The Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC), responsible for leading the investigation, released a vague update two years post-accident, calling the incident "very complicated and rare." However, the agency declined to specify the underlying cause. It did confirm however, that no aircraft control command failures, communication issues, hazardous weather, or dangerous goods were involved.

Finally, some of you may have known Captain Bryan N McCook? He is ex RNZAF, Talair and Air Niugini. His daughters have put together his biography in a book titled "Flying Men & Metal Birds". It is available for purchase by emailing balusmasta1926@gmail.com

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Hi all from Noosa where my class has been celebrating our 55-year Ansett intake course: (August 3rd 1970)

Following on, together with 38 others, I also attended a luncheon for Ansett Captain Henry Theunissen, an icon of Australian aviation. At 89 he is in great shape and spoke of some of his past years.

The AGM was again well attended and the new venue a great success. We will be back there next year.

Phil James

WELFARE & RECRUITMENT REPORT

I'd like to talk about what Laurie, John and I do in Welfare. The main thing being we get in touch with colleagues who are not travelling too well and to let them know they're not forgotten. We do this with phone calls, or if they reside nearby, we visit them for a cuppa and a chat and provide some solace in just listening to their story.

Throughout the year there are numerous events promoting camaraderie amongst the members with events like the first Wednesday of the month breakfast at the Spit Kiosk, the yearly Phoenix BBQ at Caboolture airport, mainly for our North Coast colleagues, and at the clubhouse at my gated community home in Clear Island Waters for mainly South Coasters. The Alexandra Headlands annual lunch is also well supported by Northerners, Brisbane and Gold Coasters with some of us overnighing and having a mini holiday in the area.

Another event, held every second year, is the 3-day gabfest held at Kingaroy airport which is very well supported.

Currently, we're looking at the Brisbane city area for an annual lunch that would suit the Brisbane guys. Ideally the venue would be near the CBD and close to a train station so it would attract North

and South Coasters as well. Some colleagues have come forward with venue suggestions so hopefully we'll have more news in the near future.

Of course, the Christmas lunch in Brisbane and AGM on the Gold Coast always have a good turnout of members and wives and your presence at all our events is well appreciated by your AARAP office holders.

Now the majority of these events would never occur if it wasn't for the time and effort of some of your fellow colleagues that do all the planning and preparation to bring an event to fruition.

Laurie, John and Bob

NEW JOINERS

Captain Mark Bishop: ex **AN** F27; DC4/Carvair; DC9; B727. ex **CX** B747 200/300/400; A330 200/300; A340 300/500/600. ex **EK** B777

Captain Lex Garriock: ex **AN** F27; B727; B737; **ANSW** F27. ex **MH** FK50. ex **VQ** (Impulse Airlines) J41; B1900. ex **SL** (Rio Sul) F50. ex **PE** (Pacific Air Express B727. Currently **VA** B737 (retirement pending)

Captain Peter Murphy: Air Tasmania; Forrestair; British Island Airways (KD); Air Algérie (AH); Agip; East West Airlines (EW); MH; Condor (DE); Airtours (VZ); Korean Air (KE). Peter flew DC3; Handley Page Dart Herald, HP7; F27; B737; B757; B767; B777.

RIP

Captain John (Jack) Mardling (ex TN & TG)

Mrs Audrey Austin (wife of long-time member and ex AARAP President Captain Ron Austin (ex TN)

VALE

Captain John O'Keefe (26 September 1941 - 4 May 2025)

John O'Keefe began his working life in 1958 at the Commonwealth Bank. However, true to his mischievous humour, he made a personal holiday on the date he resigned—June 25, 1963—celebrating it every year as the day he swapped balance sheets for blue skies.

On his way to a new government role in Papua New Guinea, John took a trial flight at the Cairns Aero Club. This whim turned into a lifelong passion for aviation.



While working in PNG, John completed his flying training and joined Adastra Aerial Surveys flying Lockheed Hudsons by 1964. He later instructed at the Narrabri Aero Club before joining Ansett in 1966 on the DC-3. Over the years, he moved through the ranks and aircraft, including the F27, DC-9, and eventually, the A320.

John's first command was in Melbourne on the F27, later transferring to Brisbane where he continued on the DC-9. In the 1970s, he was one of several captains who volunteered for a temporary transfer to Port Moresby when Air Niugini found itself short of F27 captains.

Just before the pilot dispute in the late 1980s, John began training on the A320. He flew only three sectors before his time at Ansett came to an end. During this period, he served as Secretary/Treasurer for the AFAP Queensland Branch, a steady and principled voice in turbulent times.

Never one to sit still for long, John co-founded Combi Trader II with fellow pilots in 1990. This unique passenger and vehicle ferry service operated between Redcliffe and Moreton Island. Around the same time, he briefly flew as a First Officer with Compass Airlines Mk 2.

From 1997 to 1999, John flew the Boeing 737 with Malaysia Airlines. He then embarked on other international adventures with Stirling Airlines in Denmark and Transavia in the Netherlands, showcasing his passion for aviation as a means of exploring the world.

Returning to Brisbane, John joined Virgin Blue at its inception, operating one of just two Virgin flights on August 31, 2000. At that time, he was one of only five pilots in the company, playing a pivotal role in the formation of what would become one of Australia's major airlines.

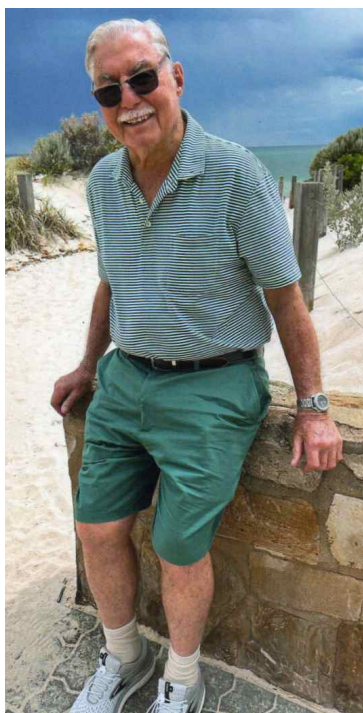


In July 2004, John's professionalism, skill, and contributions to aviation were recognised with his induction into the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators (now The Honourable Company of Air Pilots).

After a nearly five-decade flying career spanning dozens of aircraft types and continents, John retired in February 2013 at the age of 71.

Beyond his flying achievements, John was a mentor, a raconteur, and a man who could balance professionalism with dry wit. He always found time for others, whether in the cockpit, the crew room, or across a ferry to Moreton Island.

Captain John O'Keefe flew with skill, integrity, and spirit. His final flight marked the end of an era, leaving behind blue skies, countless stories, and many who were better for having known him.



Captain Bill Crollick (11 November 1939 – 8 June 2025)

I completed the Department of Civil Aviation's correspondence course for my private pilot's licence and my commercial pilot's licence course. I completed my instructor's rating in 1961 and I also completed my airline transport pilot's licence later, whilst in the employ of Ansett Airlines.

My flying career commenced with Darling Downs Aero Club in Toowoomba in 1961 and later with a charter company flying mostly for an oil drilling company, *Oil Drilling and Exploration*, who were drilling throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory, including the development of the Mooney oil field and its oil pipeline down to the Port of Brisbane. For me, this involved daily, low-level pipeline inspection flights to guard against any potential leaks or damage. It was during this time with Union Air, that I met and married Judith née Budden of Monash Street, Toowoomba.

In early 1964 I applied for a position with Ansett Airlines and was called upon to attend an initial interview in Brisbane with the then

Regional Flight Captain, Doug Way and the then personnel manager Mr Hugh Evans! The interview was successful in that I was advised that they would send me a letter to provide me with a free airfare with their sister airline Airlines of New South Wales, from where I was stationed at the time (Charleville) to pick up an Ansett Airlines flight to Sydney for my interview in Melbourne. However, ANSW refused the Ansett request and I had to purchase the ticket myself which was at the time approximately £50 (over a month's wages). As I was shortly to get married, quite foolishly (I later realised) I raised the matter of the £50 with the Melbourne personnel manager, prior to the actual interview. Of course, I quickly realized that this had not been a good idea when I found him sitting in the middle of the interview panel and kicked my own backside all the way home!

After some weeks with no job offer and knowing that intakes were taking place, I took the opportunity to call upon Mr Evans during a flight to Brisbane and whilst waiting for some return passengers, to highlight my indiscretion, to which he replied, "Bill, you shouldn't have had to! Leave it with me!". Within a week I received my intake into Ansett Airlines and so began a 25-year career! The reason for this story is to point out that we all need a little luck through life but sometimes you just have to give it a hand!

My career with Ansett commenced with a cadetship on the DC3 which was still carrying out passenger transportation along the smaller routes and in mainly regional areas of the country. The captains, with whom I was privileged to fly, were to pass on to me the experience and wisdom of the turbulent war years and I was always grateful for their efforts, especially in those my early days. The wonderful thing about this industry was that as long as you did your work, you were given the opportunity to qualify throughout your entire career! What a wonderful industry!

Two years after joining Ansett I moved onto Vickers Viscount (700 and 832 series) aircraft. A much faster and Rolls Royce turbo propped engine, its British ancestry left much to be desired and the type was withdrawn from service after three hull losses during its last three years of service. The final loss involved the loss of our flight between Mt Isa and Longreach in 1966 which killed all 24 passengers and crew, including our much-respected training captain Ken Cooper and my friend, first officer Laurie Gillam. He had been one of my students during my instructing days with Darling Downs Aero Club. The disaster was caused by an uncontrollable engine fire which resulted in the wing burning off during an attempt to reach the safety of Winton airport some few miles further on. A terrible day indeed.

After withdrawal of the Viscount, we were transferred onto the F27 which I then crewed for the next year or so before moving on to the much-loved Boeing 727. As luck would have it, Ansett's training pipeline for the 727 was so overstretched, that the company was forced to send a number of first officers (including myself) plus a number of captains to Eastern Airlines in Miami, Florida to complete our actual in-flight training and endorsement. The result (with holdups and delays) meant we enjoyed almost a month in Miami and even managed a trip to visit the Kennedy Space Centre at Cape Canaveral.

The American style of training was something of an eye-opener for us and a pleasant surprise and experience in contrast to the stiff and formal manner of the training methods used in this country.

The 727 has proven over the years to be a very safe and reliable aircraft on which I gladly served, both as a first officer and captain for many years, with very few system failures and just the one complete engine failure during a take-off at Brisbane airport bound for Port Moresby! We were at max take-off weight and it was very memorable. I was later to also fly the grand old lady, for a couple of years with Emirates Airlines throughout the Middle East.

In November of 1974 I was rostered to complete my initial command in Ansett on the Lockheed L188 Electra. This aircraft, with its four wonderful big Allison engines had long been one of my dream aircraft. The last of the high-performance turbo prop passenger aircraft, which ushered in the highest level of passenger comfort in air conditioning and pressurisation of any aircraft to that time. I can even



still clearly recall my first sighting of one of these beautiful aircraft and it was long before I joined Ansett. I was on one of my school holiday driving trips with dad and we were having lunch in the shade of a mulga tree, somewhere near Longreach which I now know is directly under the international air route between Brisbane and Darwin. There, flying above us, in the clear skies overhead was the unmistakable silhouette of a Lockheed Electra. The sight of its stubby wings and its four huge engines have remained with me in my memory ever since! The memory was in fact strong enough all those years later to inspire me to move myself and family down to Melbourne just to fly it!

I finally got us back to Brisbane by taking up a vacancy on the DC9. A beautiful aircraft and my little pocket rocket! The DC9s were replaced with the new Boeing 737 aircraft which were a good reliable aircraft and which were an efficient money earner for the airline but never felt like the thoroughbred that the DC9 had. We all loved the DC9!

Back to the good old 727 until Ansett purchased (in fact, leased) the world's first "fly by wire" Airbus A320 aircraft. Because I was to be training on the aircraft, I was among the first crews sent to France to do our conversion training so that we could come home to train the remainder of the crews as the new aircraft arrived. As it was the very first aircraft of a new generation, there were a lot of teething problems which meant we had to quickly learn a lot about rebooting systems to keep the computerised systems going. As it turned out, we never got to settle into the Airbus before the upheaval of the industry with the Pilots' Dispute.

During this time, the country's highly trained and experienced pilots were being snapped up in huge numbers by airlines such as Singapore Airlines, Cathay Pacific, Malaysian Airlines, Emirates Airlines and host of others throughout the world. Due to personal reasons, I did not start to apply for overseas positions for several months. Although I did eventually apply to Singapore and received and passed an interview, my intake was to be scheduled for towards the end of that year. Sadly, just before Christmas of that year, Singapore Airlines put off any further intakes for the time being.

Aware that time was now getting away from me, I started looking elsewhere and applied to a new start up called Eurocypria, which was to commence in several months' time using the Airbus A320. The only catch was that I had to have a British licence which meant that I had to go to London, complete a number of British subjects and lastly, complete a single pilot, first-class instrument rating test with a UK flight examiner out of Gatwick Airport on unfamiliar airways and in the black of night! Quite a daunting task under the circumstances and one which I have always felt proud of. Still no job but a British licence! During all this I never stopped looking elsewhere and was keeping in touch with the Flight Captain of the 727 fleet in Emirates as there had been a rumour that they may be going to take in a small number of experienced crew to expand their operations. The captain's name was Harry Gallagher and he undertook to call me if any such occasion arose.

Harry did finally call, not long after I arrived back in Australia and while I was filling in time waiting for Eurocypria to start taking in their new crews. The news was good and bad! Apparently, Emirates couldn't even give me an interview as I was not what was regarded as recent – I hadn't completed three take-offs and landings in the aircraft within the last year. Another setback but another challenge! Fortunately, I was able to seek out the name and contact details for the 727 Flight Manager of Dan Air at Gatwick and was able to make a booking on their simulator and an aircraft for revalidation purposes for early the following week. So, off to the nearest travel agent to book a flight back to Gatwick for two days' time! I then rang Harry back to tell him of my plans and I still recall him saying to me "Hell, you're serious, aren't you?" to which I replied "You bet your bum I am!". He then booked me an interview and at the same time asked, "If you're successful in your interview, are you able to start straight away?". The answer of course was, "You bet your bum I am!". As a result, I left Rainbow Beach for the United Kingdom and didn't get home for several months. I WAS BACK IN BUSINESS, ALMOST!

Back to London Gatwick in time for the Emirates interview, followed by a 727-simulator ride and I was offered a position with an immediate start. In fact, two days later I was given a first-class ticket to Dubai and I celebrated by enjoying their wonderful service and drank Dom Perignon all the way!



Initially, I was to fly the 727 for a couple of years and then to move onto their Airbus A300/600 and A310 fleets.



The Emirates network covered of course, all the Middle Eastern destinations, such as Cairo, Bombay, Karachi, Beirut, Muscat and Kuwait immediately after cessation of the fighting in the “Kuwait” war (first Gulf War) with the oil wells still burning and the airport itself showing recent repairs due to extensive war damage. Quite an experience! Our Asian destinations included Hong Kong, Singapore, Manila, Colombo, the Maldives etc. Our European destinations covered London Heathrow and Gatwick, Paris, Nice, Rome, Cyprus etc and of course we operated into Africa with flights into Nairobi and Johannesburg. What a wonderful change and challenge from operations within Australia.

My eight years sadly came to an end because of their (then) retirement age of 60 years. However, it was without doubt the best and most enjoyable period of my airline career.



Throughout my airline career I also very much enjoyed quite a deal of gliding with a long association with the Kingaroy Soaring Club. A couple of years after my retirement, my passion once more fuelled a need for aviation and I built a lovely little J4340, a four-seater Jabiru light aircraft. The Jabiru is of fibreglass construction which was designed and manufactured in Bundaberg with the major components such as the fuselage, wings and tail plane completed to a basic product level. The kit was well designed and presented and I enjoyed the

almost one-year project to completion, testing and certification. I went on to enjoy several years and many trips across northern Australia including flights with fellow aircraft owners to Broome and Thursday Island and others. However, there came a time when I no longer had the need and tired of the work involved in the necessary and continual maintenance of my little aircraft so I sadly sold it. To my knowledge, it is still flying happily in the Northern Territory!

So ended my aviation career after some 18,000 hours of flying. These days I now like to reflect that I was born and lived through an era that allowed me to start flying on the old tiger moth which was little more advanced than the aircraft used by the Wright brothers in 1903, through to the latest “fly by wire” generation of aircraft that are the state of the art today.

Bill Crollick
24 August 2022

Captain Phil Elliott 28 January 1935 – 17 June 2025

It is with regret I wish to advise of the passing of Phil Elliott on Tuesday last.

Having had long careers in aviation we all feel we have a story to tell but few could compare with Phil. I regularly asked him to write his bio but he never got around to it.

Born in England he, as a youth, was an observer to the Battle of Britain and talked of watching low flying Allied and German aircraft.

His first job was as a P and O ships officer. He made a couple of voyages to Australia in that job.



His older brother was an RAF fighter pilot on Supermarine Swifts. This inspired Phil who followed him into the RAF, graduating as a fighter pilot himself and then doing a posting to an RAF Hunter squadron in Germany during the cold war.



In the early sixties he migrated to Australia with his Aussie wife expecting to start with Qantas. When that

didn't happen, he started with TAA, originally Sydney based where he flew Viscounts and Electras. He later transferred to Brisbane for initial F27 command, and then the normal progression through the DC9, 727 and A300.



Some years later wanderlust struck him and he applied for a job with the ANARE as the officer commanding Davis base in the Antarctic. He was successful and when he talked of his role there he highlighted having to be trained as the surgeon's assistant.

Upon returning to TAA, he settled only until the bug bit again. This time it was to the Middle East where for two years he became the 727 pilot of the Muscat police force

On his return to Brisbane, he supplemented his salary building swimming pools until, eventually he had seniority for an A300 command, but in Melbourne. Over the years he had resisted type advancement in order to maintain his family's stability by being Brisbane-based. Eventually he gave in and completed an A300 endorsement. He was on his last day of line flying training when the events of 1989 struck. True to his fellow pilots he was now looking for a job.

His knowledge of the Middle East had alerted him to a start-up airline, Emirates, then operating 727s. He applied to them and after a 727-sim assessment, started with EK.

Five years after, he was retired from Emirates with a medical issue and returned to Brisbane where amongst other things, he and his wife ran child care centres.

Over his last twenty years or so Phil has had the misfortune of just about every nasty medical condition around. He set an example of putting up a good fight, strongly supported throughout by his wife, Jill and son, John.

Over the years he found time to own and fly a Tiger Moth and participate in antique aircraft events.

He leaves behind Jill, John and four daughters.

A life well lived but never thoroughly documented. And a great privilege to have been thought of as his friend.

Ray Vuillermin.

Royal Air Force

1955: Commence Wings Course

1956: Wings Awarded (Piston Provost, Vampire F5)

1956: Fighter Conversion (Hawker Hunter Mk1)

1957: 54F Sqn Active Service Cold War Era & Middle East conflicts (Hawker Hunter Mk6)

1960: Central Flying School (6 months – 104 Flight Instructor Course)

1960: Instructor 6FTS A2 & Master Green Instrument Rating Examiner

1962: Retired. 8 years active service plus 8 years reserve.

Civil Aviation

1963: Joined TAA. F/O Essendon then posted to Sydney. Viscount; Electra; DC9; B727
1971: Captain F27; DC9; B727; A300
1988: Muscat Police Air Wing. Captain B727
1989: Emirates. Check/Training Captain B727
1995: Retired

Other aircraft flown

Gloster Meteor; English Electric Lightning; BAC Jet Provost; Avro Anson; DH Chipmunk; Cessna(s); Beechcraft Baron; Mooney.

Aircraft owned

Tiger Moth; Fairchild Argus; Auster; Aeroprakt A-22 Foxbat

COMMENT

Those of you who overnighted in Anchorage will have been to **F Street Station**, the bar at the back of the Hilton Hotel. This is a favourite of the Alaskan aviation fraternity, which includes the US Air Force personnel, general aviation and of course, visiting airline pilots.

It was standard procedure to order a beer and perhaps some halibut or clams from the kitchen. Whilst waiting, you would then help yourself to the free cheese and crackers on the corner of the bar.

On a subsequent visit I was surprised therefore, to find the cheese no longer there and after eliciting this response from the bar staff “Oh crap, do we have to explain it again!”, I was told that a new Health Inspector had decided that the cheese was a health hazard and had to be removed.

This rightly *annoyed* both staff and patrons.

However, as you can see from the photo, the problem was subsequently solved.

Cheese back, crackers back and signed changed – I would suggest much to the annoyance of the Health Inspector?



Emirates' \$20 billion plan for new A380neo superjumbo



With over a hundred A380 superjumbos in its fleet, Emirates remains a staunch champion of the double-decker plane, which Airbus scrapped in 2021.

Emirates president Sir Tim Clark wants Airbus to bring the A380 back to the skies while also taking advantage of the latest technology to give the new jet – which many have dubbed the A380neo – a better chance of success than its predecessor.

"I still have a design in front of Airbus as to how they could build a new one which would be 25% cheaper to run, far more fuel-efficient than this one," Clark told Executive Traveller during a whistle-stop trip to Melbourne.

"They said, 'Well if you give us €20 billion, we'll do it for you!'"

Clark's riposte was that it was up to Airbus to make that staggering investment, "but if you build them, we'll buy them."

To make this second-gen superjumbo lighter and more fuel-efficient, the A380neo would use modern composite materials already seen on the Airbus A350 for the wings and fuselage. Clark noted that composites were not widespread when Airbus first developed the A380 "We now know a lot more about the A380 than we did when it was built," Clark explained. "The (tail) fin is too large, the wings need to be changed... all of this is in the later generation of aircraft."

Higher-efficiency engines would be vital in reducing the A380neo's thirst for fuel and therefore increasing its appeal to airlines. Aviation veteran Clark is bullish on the prospects of the UltraFan engine being developed by Rolls-Royce. "If it's ever allowed to get its head above the water level, this is a revolution in power," Clark said. "It's a much bigger fan requiring less fuel to drive it, with enormous thrust capabilities (so) you've got to get something like that on the A380."

Clark's blueprint for the A380neo would deliver "at least a 20-25% reduction in fuel," which he believes would tilt the scales back towards the big, four-engine double-decker jet and its massive passenger-carrying capacity.

And there's no doubt that passengers would welcome the return of the superjumbo, which launched a new era in travel – especially for the premium experience of private first-class suites with showers, and a cocktail bar at the rear of the upper deck.

HISTORY

They were adrenaline junkies! The remarkable all-female flying team that helped defeat the Nazis – with wooden planes

A squadron of Russian female pilots who flew under the cover of night and carried out covert bombing missions, which the Germans would go on to call these women die Nacht Hexen, or the Night Witches.

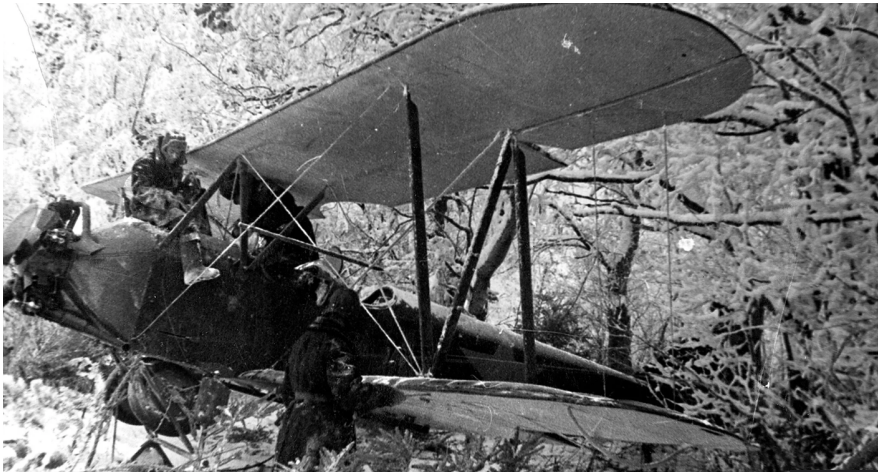
They were an elite band of pilots, navigators, ground crew and mechanics, whose passion for aviation and strong sense of duty led them to break gender barriers. Those who were part of the squadron included aspiring pilots and best friends Polina Gelman and Galya Dokutovich. Both had learnt to fly when young – and when in October 1941, the order was given to famed Soviet aviator Marina Raskova to recruit women into female flying units, including the Night Witches, they jumped at the chance.

"They definitely were adrenaline junkies. They wanted to fly, they were crazy about flying," historian Lyuba Vinogradova, author of *Avenging Angels: Soviet Women Snipers on the Eastern Front (1941-45)*, says of the two women. "And second of all they were extremely patriotic. So, they, both of them, volunteered."

Their commander Raskova was an inspiration. "She was a great celebrity of her time. Her name, her picture, her face were known all over [the country]. She was a role model. She was a woman that showed that women are perfectly capable of this kind of flying," Vinogradova says.

The Night Witches trained near the Volga River near Engels, Russia, and had to fit what would have typically been three years of training into just three months. The women found themselves both selected as navigators, rather than pilots, something which initially disappointed Dokutovich – though after she got up in the air, she became more positive about this outcome, writing: "Now I see how exciting being a navigator is! When you have done a little flying you walk around in a dream, and just want to get back up in the sky."

Because the Soviet forces were short of aircraft, the women were issued wooden Po-2 planes, which were not fit for battle, having typically been used to spray pesticide. On top of that, they weren't given guns, radios or parachutes. As a result, they prioritised carrying bombs.



When it came to their planes, they used their limitations to their advantage: the Po-2s made hardly any noise, couldn't be tracked by radio location, and were too small to show up on infrared locators. So, the women were able to fly over German territory, shut off their engines and glide – and more easily release their bombs without detection.

According to Vinogradova, the pace of their operations was relentless: "Every four minutes an aircraft would take off, bomb the target and turn back, and the other aircraft would take their place." The Germans spread stories of the attacks across areas they occupied, depicting the Night Witches as a supernatural force. They were given the name *die Nacht Hexen*, or the Night Witches, because their wooden aircraft were likened to brooms, while their tactics made it feel as if they could appear and disappear without a trace.

The Night Witches' victories earned them distinction, and in 1943 they officially became the Forty-Sixth Guards Night Bomber Aviation Regiment. However, in July 1943, the Germans surprised the pilots with a new tactic: they kept their anti-aircraft guns silent, and instead waged a night fighter air attack against the bombers.

Dokutovich was killed on 31 July, along with seven of her fellow "Witches" in what Vinogradova calls "the worst night probably in the entire history of the regiment". Nevertheless, the women continued to fight right up until the Allies declared victory in May 1945. They were at the airfield ready to fly a mission when it was announced to them."

In October 1945, the regiment was officially disbanded and it would hold the distinction of being the only unit within the Red Army to still be entirely female at the end of World War Two. Gelman would later join the Military Institute of Foreign Languages, and name her daughter Galya after her fallen friend.

Gelman died in 2005, and towards the end of her life she reflected on why the Witches were so successful – crediting the fact that they performed their duties voluntarily. Speaking to historian Reina Pennington, Gelman said, "It was their free will, and that which is done at the call of the heart is always done better than that which is done out of obligation."



FLIGHT SAFETY

Learjet touched down with misaligned landing-gear before fatal Scottsdale excursion

Investigators have disclosed that the Learjet 35A which veered off the runway and fatally collided with a parked business aircraft at Scottsdale had touched down with a misaligned left-hand main landing-gear.

As the aircraft conducted the approach to runway 21 on 10 February, video images captured from a golf course reveal the jet's left main-gear trailing rearwards from its normal position. The video also shows a bright spot beneath the left wing-flap, consistent with the landing-gear strut facing aft and the landing-gear light pointing the wrong way.



According to preliminary findings from the US National Transportation Safety board, the crew "did not make any radio calls" indicating they were aware of a landing-gear malfunction.

As the Learjet touched down at 112kt, its left wing immediately dipped and the aircraft veered off the left side of the runway. It crossed rock-covered islands and the parallel taxiway B, struck the windsock, and entered an apron area where it collided with the aft right fuselage of a parked Gulfstream G200.



Of the Learjet's four occupants, its captain was fatally injured, and the first officer and one passenger were seriously injured. An individual inside the G200 also received serious injuries. The Learjet travelled about 2,700ft between touchdown and the impact. Its engines, which continued to run after the collision, were not equipped with thrust-reversers and the jet's drag chute was not deployed. Investigators discovered the left main landing-gear assembly had separated from the aircraft. It was located on taxiway B10.

The landing-gear trunnion casting is normally attached to the wing spar with an aft trunnion pin which, in turn, is fixed in place with a retaining bolt. But the inquiry says that, while the retaining bolt was in place and secured, the aft trunnion pin was "not present" in the trunnion casting. The pin was still inserted in the wing spar. The inquiry says that, during landing-gear installation, it is possible for the retaining bolt to miss its locating hole in the aft trunnion pin if the pin is not fully pushed into the trunnion casting.

While the inquiry is yet to reach conclusions, the aircraft had suffered a hard landing at McAlester, Oklahoma, in June last year, touching down just short of the runway and bouncing several times. As a result, both main landing-gear assemblies had been removed to facilitate inspections, by a mechanic who had worked on the jet under its previous owner. The mechanic told the inquiry that he followed the maintenance manual for all of the work he performed. Investigators have not ascertained the Learjet's hours and cycles since this maintenance was carried out. A technician who serviced the landing-gear in December last year noticed nothing unusual but observed that the left-hand assembly required "excessive" grease. If the aft trunnion pin is not fully engaged, it

can allow grease to escape, and investigators found large quantities of deposited grease beneath the pin in the jet's wing spar.

Investigators are aware of three other events, at least, in which a Learjet's landing-gear had disconnected from the airframe because the retaining bolt was not engaged through the aft trunnion pin.

The Network Aviation operated F100 was conducting a scheduled passenger flight from Perth on 22 November 2021 and as the aircraft approached Paraburdoo the flight crew encountered unforecast weather, an ATSB investigation details.

"Having completed 2 missed approaches at Paraburdoo, the flight crew had lost confidence in their flight plan weather forecasts and were reluctant to attempt a diversion to an alternate airport without current weather information for the alternate," said Transport Safety Director Dr Stuart Godley.

"After the third missed approach, the aircraft did not have sufficient fuel to reach a suitable alternate and the flight crew were committed to landing at Paraburdoo."

The flight crew conducted a RNAV GNSS approach to Paraburdoo's runway 24, which required the crew to visually acquire the runway at a height above the aerodrome of no less than 584 ft. The investigation report details that 25 seconds after the aircraft descended through the minima, the autopilot was disconnected and the pilot monitoring announced that they had sighted the runway and that they were on profile. At this stage, the aircraft was 293 ft above ground level and 291 feet below the minima/MDA. Flight data recorder information indicated a steady descent profile on the approach and a maximum of 5° heading change between the autopilot disconnect and landing.

"The actual weather conditions the flight crew encountered at Paraburdoo were below their landing minima and were continuing to deteriorate. The cloud base at Paraburdoo was difficult for the Bureau of Meteorology to forecast as detection of low cloud by satellite imagery was obscured by higher level cloud," said Dr Godley. After their second missed approach the crew attempted to obtain from air traffic control an updated forecast for Newman Airport for a possible diversion there.

"However, the crew did not express any urgency when making this request, which, in combination with air traffic control workload at the time, resulted in a delay of 15 minutes before an update was offered. By that time, it was no longer required as the aircraft no longer had sufficient fuel remaining to divert to Newman."

The investigation notes that the crew had no other means of obtaining updated weather forecasts for potential alternates beyond contacting air traffic control, as the aircraft was not fitted with an operational ACARS digital datalink messaging system, and the aircraft was beyond the range of the nearest AERIS automatic enroute information service (which broadcasts a range of weather information from a network of VHF transmitters). Meanwhile, there is an automated weather station at Paraburdoo, but it did not have a means of detecting the moisture content in the atmosphere above the surface. "This increased the risk that low cloud below the instrument approach landing minima might not be forecast."

Dr Godley said the incident highlights the importance for all operators to consider how unforecast weather will be managed and ensure it is reflected in their risk management. "This is so that safety assurance activities can review how effectively it is managed and provide feedback for management review."

Other than a procedure that limited the number of missed approaches to 2, Network Aviation did not provide flight crew with diversion decision-making procedural guidance when encountering unforecast weather at a destination, the investigation found. In addition, the operator did not include the threat of unforecast weather below landing minima in their controlled flight into terrain risk assessments. This increased the risk that controls required to manage this threat would not be developed, monitored, and reviewed at a management level.

“The ATSB acknowledges and welcomes that, since the incident, Network Aviation has implemented several proactive safety actions in response to safety issues identified in the investigation,” Dr Godley said. These include introducing several diversion decision-making tools for F100 flight crew, such as an amendment to their flight plans to include an 'alternate summaries' section for all flights, the top of descent arrival brief procedure to include 'minimum divert fuel', and the introduction of an F100 *Company Procedures Manual* with pre-populated standard divert calculations for F100 destinations. In addition, the operator has updated their controlled flight into terrain risk assessments to capture the threat of adverse weather.

Minimum safe drop heights are in development for large firefighting aircraft in Australia, to address safety issues identified by an ATSB investigation into a 737 air-tanker accident in south-west WA.

'Bomber 139', a Boeing 737 aircraft converted as a large air tanker, impacted a ridgeline after completing a drop while extending a fire-retardant containment line during a bushfire-fighting task in the Fitzgerald River National Park on 6 February 2023. After striking the ridgeline, the aircraft cleared a small line of foliage before impacting the ground a second time and then sliding to rest. The two pilots on board were able to evacuate through a cockpit window before the aircraft was consumed by a post-impact fire.



“The ATSB’s investigation found that the aircraft was conducting a drop at a low height and airspeed over descending terrain, which required the use of the idle thrust engine power setting and a high rate of descent,” ATSB Chief Commissioner Angus Mitchell said.

“Towards the end of the drop, the aircraft’s height and airspeed decayed as it approached rising terrain that had not been detected, and was not expected, by the aircraft captain.” While the aircraft’s thrust levers had been advanced mid-way through the drop, there was insufficient time for engine power to increase to allow the aircraft to climb away and safely clear the ridgeline crossing the aircraft’s exit path.



The report notes the ridgeline had likely not been detected as the captain, who was the pilot flying, had declined a 'Show Me' run from the Birddog aircraft, had conducted right hand circuits (restricting their visibility of the target area as they were seated in the left seat on the flightdeck), likely had no visibility of

the ridgeline during the go-around from the first drop, and was led by the Birddog to the target through smoke on the second drop.

“Not detecting the rising terrain likely contributed to the captain allowing the aircraft to enter a low energy state during the drop.” Further, the co-pilot did not identify nor announce any deviations during the retardant drop, which could have alerted the aircraft captain to the low-energy state of the aircraft.

“Notably, the operator and tasking agency had not published a minimum drop height for large air tankers,” Mr Mitchell said. “This resulted in the co-pilot, who did not believe there was a minimum drop height, not making any announcements about the aircraft’s low energy state prior to the collision.”

The accident occurred when the aircraft was conducting a second drop after releasing three-quarters of its retardant load on the prior run. “The operator’s practice of the pilots recalculating, and lowering, their target drop speed after a partial load drop also contributed to the aircraft’s low energy state.”

The investigation found that neither the operator nor the relevant Western Australian Government Departments had published a drop height for large air tankers (whereas the US Forest Service has a minimum large air tanker drop height of 150 ft). This meant that aircraft captains could exercise their own judgement for drop heights to improve accuracy.

Bomber 139 was operating in Australia under a contract with the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, which did not impose a minimum drop height, but required the operator to comply with the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the member state for the aircraft’s nominated operational base, in this case Western Australia. In turn the Western Australia large air tanker SOPs did not impose a minimum drop height limit.

Since the accident Coulson Aviation implemented a minimum drop height of 200 ft for its airtankers, while the Western Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions are amending procedures to incorporate drop heights, including a large airtanker drop height of 200 ft.

Meanwhile, at a national level, the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council, the parent organisation for the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, has undertaken to develop national large air tanker SOPs.

Separately, the ATSB has issued a safety recommendation to Coulson Aviation to address crew resource management procedures for retardant drops to reduce the risk of the aircraft entering an unrecoverable state before the pilot monitoring alerts the pilot flying. “This accident highlights that standard operating procedures and crew resource management should be implemented with the intent to prevent an unsafe situation from developing,” said Mr Mitchell. “Safety standards should not be solely dependent on the performance of the pilot flying and recovery call-outs.”

EVENTS

Virgin 25th Anniversary – August 2025

It has been noted that Virgin Australia is planning a celebration of its’ 25th year; festivities to be held in the Virgin Hangar at BNE airport. **However, only current employees will be invited.**

Given that many AARAP members and other Aviation Professionals were closely involved in the start-up of VA’s originator, Virgin Blue, and it is this 25th Anniversary that is, in fact, being celebrated; it is intended to hold a **Virgin 25th Anniversary reunion where ALL are welcome – Aircrew, Cabin Crew, Ground Staff.**

The date has been set for 9th November, 2025 at a venue still to be advised, most likely at a Brisbane City hotel.

All VA and VB staff (retired or not) and partners are welcome.

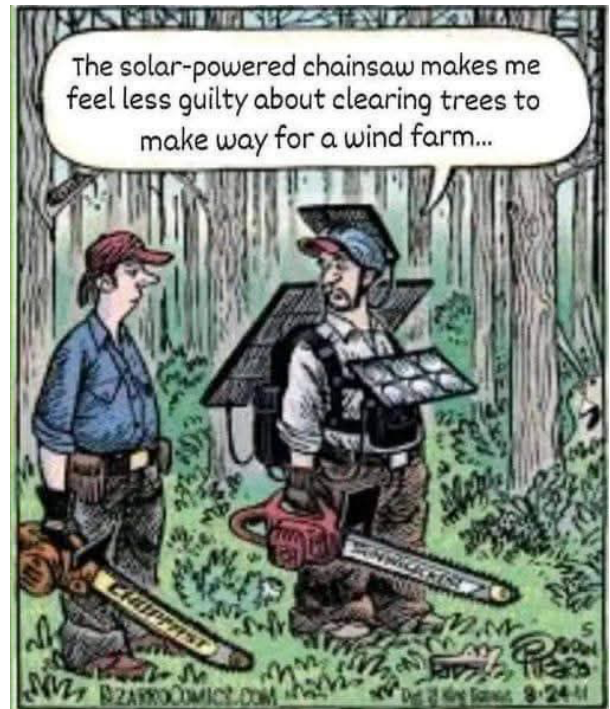
If you wish to attend, please click on the link below to notify the convenor and to be kept up to date as to the venue.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdo4CI6QDYVDflptJ3aZJaSlavQgBHUU8V2ZIS6b5ltDzkogQ/viewform>

Air Niugini Pilots' Luncheon

Past and present PX drivers are invited to a get-together luncheon to be held on the 19th of October commencing at 12h30. The venue chosen is the Criterion Hotel, corner of George and Adelaide Street in the Brisbane CBD. <https://criteriontavern.com.au>

The event is being organised by Phil Heggie. He would appreciate an RSVP to pippip@rocketmail.com so as to get an idea of numbers.



I used to think I was indecisive, but now I'm not too sure.

If you're not supposed to eat midnight snacks, why is there even a light in the fridge?

Why did the chicken go to the séance? To get to the other side.

Why is "abbreviation" such a long word?

\$30.00 Annual Subscriptions for the financial year 24/25 were due 1 July.

For accounting and recording purposes, please pay by electronic transfer. **Suncorp BSB 484 799 Acct No 000044125 AARAP.** Remember to include your name when you do the transfer. (Suncorp no longer accept cheques.)

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