

## **In Memory of Eric Felmingham**

### **OIC of Archerfield Airport**

**Years 1966 to 1978**

Arrived on Planet Earth at Maryborough in 1922

Departed March 5<sup>th</sup> 2006

***Details supplied by the Felmingham Family based on RAAF and Civil Flying Log Books***



Eric commenced his flying career during the early war years of 1941. At age 19 he decided to join the Royal Australian Air Force as a trainee pilot with the intention of becoming a fighter pilot so he could do his bit in the defence of Australia.

Initial flying training was carried out on the standard primary trainer of the day - the DH-82A Tiger Moth. On completion of flying training Eric was posted to Canada for "advanced training" where he was expecting to receive a commission to an operational fighter squadron.

As it turned out it - and to his disappointment - it was not an operational fighter unit he was assigned to ...it was a flying instructors training course instead!

At the instructors course Eric eventually rebelled refusing to accept the conventional Air Force wisdom of the day. He was then suspended from flying duties for a time and finished up on attachment to the Royal Canadian Air Force with other "bad boys" from the bombing and gunnery school.

During his sojourn with the RCAF Eric was given the opportunity to fly a wide variety of military aircraft like the Avro Anson, Bolingbroke (Canadian built Bristol Blenheims), Texans, Harvards and Yales etc. Most of the flying time recorded in the log books during this period indicated he was "towing targets for air gunners"!

Eric recalled one story to his family about flying a Lysander in a blizzard. *"He radioed the tower to check him out and got the controllers to verify that he was flying steadily backwards over the airfield"*.

In 1944 Eric was posted to a Mosquito squadron but within a week of the post received the rather mixed news that the posting was cancelled and all Australians were returning home.

Back home in Australia Eric became adjutant at the Amberley Air Force Base for a while and it was around this time he was put through an air-controllers course. A posting to a Mustang unit for conversion at the time was short lived due to Government funding cuts which effectively stifled any further "advanced training" courses.

Eric remained with the RAAF until early 1949 leaving the air force with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

The RAAF log book indicates his last recorded flight for the military was in December 1948 flying a Wirraway - the duties column marked with the words "Transporting Santa Claus"

*"Apparently during the flight an undercarriage hydraulic line fractured and sprayed fluid all over the interior of the cockpit including the VIP passenger as well as Eric. Eric managed to get the wheels down using the emergency extension and on setting the*

*machine down safely snuck away to leave a blackened Santa, who was by now dripping with hydraulic oil, to deliver Christmas presents to some very concerned looking children at the Garbutt RAAF base in Townsville (Santa was probably a bit traumatised by the experience as well!)"*

Eric was demobilised and was eventually recruited (in December 1949) by the then Department of Civil Aviation as an air traffic controller operating out of Brisbane's Eagle Farm airport.

*In 1952 Eric married Carmen and then promptly whisked his new wife away to Papua New Guinea - it was there the Felmingham's shared the enjoyment of living in their first home...*

*...it was a grass hut.*

After 3 years stationed in PNG and serving out of Lae, Madang and Port Moresby aerodromes Eric was posted back to Australia and returned to the Eagle Farm airport (as it was called back then).

Eric commenced work at Archerfield aerodrome in 1961 which soon became his pride and joy. He was the Officer in Charge (the Boss) from 1966 through to 1978.

In addition to being airport manager he was responsible for air traffic control and a regular duty roster in the briefing office (now abandoned) as well as the control tower duties. He was also called on to relieve at Coolangatta airport on several occasions.



*One of the very few perks he was able to achieve as the airport OIC was when carrying out the mandatory daily runway inspections he also happened to include the collection of a bucket full of fresh mushrooms (when in season) from the then "all-over-grass" runways.*

In 1962 Eric renewed his interest in flying again and joined the Royal Queensland Aero Club where he remained a member right up to the time of his departure.

*Eric grabbed any opportunity to get aloft whether that be flying the family to Lightning Ridge for the weekend or flying for a local radio station for their road traffic watch reports.*

During the late 60's through to mid '70's Archerfield was the base for a number of Warana Air Races with Eric joining the air-race committee where he helped for a number of years including the Hinkler Bicentennial Air Race held in 1988.

In September 1976 Eric - along with his close flying friend Wal Read - entered the Hinkler 1000 Air Race (Archerfield to Cairns) where they came in 2<sup>nd</sup>. They then entered the Tom McDonald Air Race (Cairns to Horn Island and return) flying in an almost worn-out Citabria with the registration VH-SLO where they were rewarded with a 1<sup>st</sup>. place



In 1978 Eric returned to Eagle Farm and took up duties as the civil/military coordinator for a couple of years before retiring early due to a hearing problem. He was then able to travel overseas and look-up the many friends he had made in Canada during the war years.

Eric celebrated his golden wedding anniversary in 2002. Ill health took its toll over the last few years of his life however Eric remained cheerful accepting the situation without complaint.

He is remembered by his wife Carmen - his three children, 10 grandchildren and all who knew him as a true gentleman in every sense of the word.

**The Era of Archerfield during the 60's and 70's has departed never to return  
...only the memory remains**

From information as supplied by the Felmingham Family - April 12, 2006