

The Deniliquin Flying Club was formed in 1952. The main instigator was Bill Fitzmaurice who was in the RAAF during World War II, but not as a pilot. He learned to fly later, in Shepparton, during the 1940's.

We used the parachute packing shed as a clubroom. The present Flying Club building was the passenger terminal. It was where the terminal is now. It was to be demolished, but with much effort we managed to get it moved and it became our clubhouse.

We decided to invite the Aircraft Industry Flying Club to Deniliquin as it wanted to expand from Melbourne to Swan Hill and Ararat. This club was made up mostly of Australian National Airways (ANA) people who were ex-RAAF. They used the Wackett Trainer, an Australian designed and built aircraft. It had a 7-cylinder radial 175hp Warner Scarab engine.

The first instructor was Keith Goehdeer. The president of the IFC was Don Stewart, a very qualified engineer who left us to help develop and improve the new Comet Jet passenger plane following the loss of several aircraft. A number of us obtained a license around 1954. We went to Moorabbin for the test. We were required to wear parachutes because the tester, W Bond (ex-RAAF), would not fly in a Wackett without one. His fear was prophetic as the plane we were using on Saturday in Deniliquin, was taken to Ararat on Sunday and during the flight, piloted by two ex-RAAF members, the wing fell off killing them both. This finished us and the aircraft were sold.

The plane I learnt to fly in, VHBEC, was bought by a married man with a small child who decided to fly to Perth. He was following the train line across the Nullarbor and during the flight he lost site of it. Unaware that his compass pedestal has lost two bolts holding it, allowing it to move, he relied on false readings, and ended up lost and stranded in the desert. His body was never found but his plane was recovered and many years later put in a museum in Alice Springs.

We went from 1955 using aircraft from Wagga – they supplied us with the DH C1 Chipmonks and DH 82 Tiger Moths, and with them came Jim Kenyon, a very good instructor. He was killed doing aerobatics at an aero-pageant we organized. After the crash, 7 witnesses were called to give statements on what happened. It emerged he started a slow roll to the right at 100-ft and stalled out. One of our members had a movie camera – it showed he started at 15-ft to the left. This put us out of action in 1958. We started again in 1960 as part of the Murray Border Flying Club.

During the 1956 floods, we were in demand. The town levee banks were just saved from breaking by everyone in the town contributing on them. The Flying Club delivered food to flooded-in properties. We also took owners of stock out to check on them. Davidson Street, North Deniliquin was under water. I took Jim Faulkner out over Boonoke; the only parts out of water were the sandy rises. We used tiger moths from Wagga for this.

Another time of note was when the Deniliquin part of the Murray Border Flying Club organized the night stopover of the 1981 Southern Cross Air Race. We had to park 220 aircraft, which was difficult as they all arrived in a short space of time. All went smoothly and safely. One aircraft, VH SXY, for some unknown reason went outside of our markers and a bent propeller was the result. We sold 24,000 litres of fuel the following morning.

Ian Bradford