



Squadron Leader H J I HINKLER AFC DSM

(1892 – 1933)



Squadron-Leader Hinkler was elected to Life Membership of the Club in 1928.

It is understood that he was awarded life membership in absentia in March 1928 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to aviation, being a local (Bundaberg) product, with an honorary commission awarded by the Royal Australian Air Force in that year.

Personal

Herbert John Louis Hinkler was born on 8 December 1892. The eldest of five children born to German-born John William and his wife Frances Aikin (nee Bonney), he was educated at North Bundaberg School. Nicknamed *Sondulix* after a well-known racehorse of the time due to his fleet-footedness, he developed a passion for birds, flying foxes and their flight, building and flying model gliding planes by the age of 12.

After the Wright Brothers conducted their flight in 1903, Hinkler left school to work in sugar-mills and the foundry at Bundaberg where he built Aviette, a real glider.

He married Nance in England, the couple not producing any children.

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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Military

On 7 September 1914 Hinkler enlisted in the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS). Following training at the Central Flying School, Upavon, he was posted to Newcastle-upon-Tyne and, early in 1915, to Whitley Bay, Northumberland. An excellent rifle-shot, he was chosen as the commanding officer's observer and by the end of 1915 was a petty officer. Among many other aeronautical devices, he invented an improved dual-control system which enabled the gunner to relieve a disabled pilot. Hinkler completed an aerial gunlayer's course and was posted to No.3 Wing, RNAS in France, escorting bombers in Sopwith '1½ Strutters' fighter escorts. When the wing was disbanded in June 1917 the crews went to other units and for several months Hinkler flew on night raids in Handley-Page bombers.

Serving as a gunner in DH4s on day bombings in No.5 Squadron, RNAS he got his first chance to fly a plane during one flight home. As a gunner, Hinkler claimed destruction of six enemy planes. In France, he met his brother Jack who was serving in the Australian Imperial Force. He sought to join the (Australian) Army Flying Corps, but his British superiors would not release him. Awarded the Distinguished Service Medal in 1917, he was recommended for a commission and pilot training. After graduation on 16 July 1918 he was posted to No.28 Squadron, Royal Air Force, stationed in Italy. He was repelled by having to carry out missions strafing Austrian troop columns on the ground, work that probably killed many men. He was demobilised on 18 August 1919 with the rank of Lieutenant, Royal Air Force.

Civilian

Prior to the war, Hinkler visited Brisbane seeking other aviation enthusiasts and joined the Queensland Aero Club and the Aerial League of Australia. Learning mechanics by correspondence in 1911, he built two gliders in 1911-12; the second design based on his observation and analysis of ibises in flight. An application to join the new aviation section of the Australian army was rejected so when American airman Arthur Burr Stone brought his Bleriot monoplane to Bundaberg in 1912, Hinkler became his mechanic on a tour of southern Australia and New Zealand, demonstrating his glider at the Ekka on 12 August 1912. Hinkler sailed for England in 1913 and found work in the Sopwith aircraft factory as an "aeroplane erector".

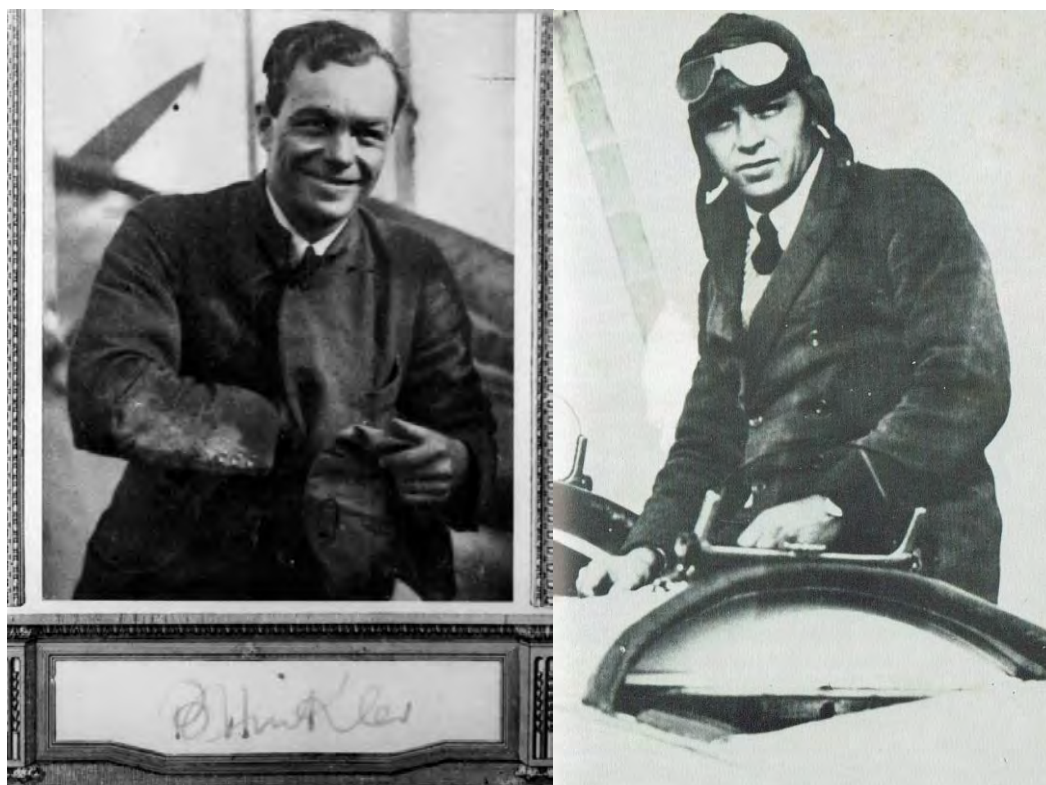
By the end of the war, flying had become an entrenched means of movement, and Hinkler, who had participated in the huge advances made, found himself well-positioned to take part in its further evolution. Australian Prime Minister Sir William Hughes offered a £10,000 reward for a solo flight from the UK to Australia. Failing to raise sponsorship to fly a Sopwith Dove in the 1919 air race to Australia, Hinkler undertook more flying training near Southampton before attempting to fly an Avro Baby on 31 May 1920 from Croydon, UK to Turin, Italy over the Alps in 9½ hours. Because of mechanical problems he abandoned the idea of flying on to Australia, but the flight won him the Britannia Trophy. Shipping the plane to Australia in 1921, he made a series of flights including one from Sydney to Bundaberg, non-stop.

Hinkler returned to England to become chief test pilot for Avro until 1926. In December 1922 he tested the Avro Aldershot, the first plane powered by a 1000-horsepower engine. He won the light aircraft trials at Lympne in 1923 in a monoplane motor-glider and in 1924 the Grosvenor Challenge Cup. In 1927 he flew an Avro Avian G-EBOV non-stop from London to Riga, Latvia, receiving a Latvian decoration. To secure funds for a flight to Australia, he made an unsuccessful attempt on the London to India air record.

In February 1928 Hinkler made the first solo flight to Australia in G-EBOV, taking fifteen days. The Australian government gave him £2000 and he was made an honorary Squadron Leader in the Royal Australian Air Force Reserve and awarded the Air Force Cross. Hinkler never used his new rank.

Returning to England by sea in October, he built an amphibian aircraft of his own design called the 'Ibis'. The prototype was successfully flown but the potential market vanished in the Depression. Hinkler went to Canada in September 1930 to survey American air transport prospects and in April 1931 he acquired a Puss Moth, which he flew from Canada to New York, the West Indies, Venezuela, Guiana, Brazil and across the ocean to Africa and back to Great Britain. For this feat, he received the Moroccan Cross, Segrave trophy, Britannia challenge trophy, the Gold Medal of the Royal Aero Club and the Johnston memorial air navigation trophy to add to other awards won in 1920 and 1928.

Failing to secure employment in Britain, he returned to America in 1932 contemplating a global circumnavigation by light plane. Following inability to secure work there, he headed back to England and prepared for another flight to Australia, intending to then fly on to Canada. He took off from Heathrow on 7 January 1933 in his Puss Moth and disappeared. The wreck and Hinkler's body were found on 27 April in the Apennine Mountains, Italy. He had survived the crash and died outside the wreckage. He was buried in Florence with full military honours. Two of his aircraft are displayed in Brisbane.



The dark days of World War I



Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents