Sources and acknowledgements

Scholars writing about recent history — the past that is within living memory — do not and should not believe everything they are told. Nor for that matter everything they read. They should be sceptical about motives, alert to faulty recall, and watchful for undeclared jealousies and enmities.

Some of my professional colleagues may cavil at reliance on some of the evidence deployed in this book, particularly the quotation of conversations recalled after 40, 50, or, in some cases, more than 60 years. I am happy to acknowledge the likelihood that the remembered words might in many cases differ from those that were actually spoken long ago. This could diminish the reliability of some testimony. But one thing should be clear. Unlike some earlier accounts of the events and characters critical to the story I have told, the conclusions reached are not based on a bare handful of affirmations or allegations. Where there is conflicting testimony of roughly equivalent probability, it is all presented. As so much of the story turns on perceptions of personality and judgments of ability, it seems to me that the lesser evil is to let people speak for themselves wherever possible. If there is reason to doubt the essence of what they say then that is indicated. Vigilant readers will see a number of occasions where I have discounted or discarded testimony that cannot be true.

The research on which this book is based began in 1976. All of the documentary and newspaper sources on which I have drawn are cited in the footnotes. I follow therefore the precept of my late colleague and friend Allan Martin in his biography of Sir Robert Menzies: ‘it would be tedious, not to say pretentious, to list them in detail here’. The many people who responded to my enquiries with interviews, written recollections, telephone calls, and other informal conversations are also acknowledged in the footnote references. Sadly most of them have not lived to see the work completed. But their contributions testify to the unique value of the memories of men and women ‘who were there’. I am very conscious of the gaps that might have been filled had my research been more persistent and more thorough. If I knew then what I know now…Yet I am deeply indebted to those who shared with me their observations of old friends, family, and comrades; explained technical matters that were beyond my ken; identified locations, and recounted experiences, routine, exhilarating, emotional, painful, even traumatic. To all of them, for this and in many cases for most enjoyable hospitality and patient encouragement, I offer a candid account which I hope will not disappoint. Of those few who did not help, though they could have done so, or were economical with the truth, only they can have known how much better the book might have been.
I owe particular gratitude to a number of people who were especially close to those who lost their lives in Duncan Cameron’s farm on 13 August 1940 and who shared their memories and provided access to family papers and photographs: James Fairbairn’s children, Geoffrey Fairbairn and Angela Mercer, their friend Virginia ‘Bardie’ Mercer (née Grimwade), his nieces Alethea Russell and Gillian Gubbins, and his grandchildren Mary Browne and Tim Mercer; Geoffrey Street’s son Tony Street, his wife Ricky, his daughter ‘Tim’ Gillespie, and nephew David Sydney Burnand, and his friend Sir Rutherford Guthrie; Dick Elford’s widow Audrey Elford, her twins Dianne Boddy and Hugh Elford (whose rescue of papers consigned to an incinerator by his Aunt Barbara ensured that some vital family history was not lost), Hugh’s wife, Jenny, and Audrey Elford’s granddaughter, Wendy Elford, and great-niece Annie Basham; Sir Henry Gullett’s son, Jo Gullett, and grandson, Peter Gullett, and Kate Gullett; Frank Thornthwaite’s widow, Inez Thornthwaite; Dick Wiesener’s widow, Joan Wiesener, his daughter Margot Buttrose, his son Richard Wiesener and Richard’s wife Diana, and granddaughter Anna Hyles; the family of Charlie Crosdale, especially his sister, Alice McDonald, brother Norman and Jan Crosdale, Janette Crosdale, and Charlie’s nieces Michelle Lake and Jeannette Turner; the family and friends of Jack Palmer, especially Sheila Palmer’s son John Foley, her brother Ron Curtain and niece Pat Snowball who supplied important photographs; Bob Hitchcock’s son Robert Hitchcock, his nephew Ian Hitchcock, and his brother Les Hitchcock; Bob Hitchcock’s friends Les Lingwood and Rex Taylor, and May Lingwood; members of Olive Hitchcock’s family, especially her daughter Kaye Greene, cousin Beryl Noske, her niece Joan Richardson (née Beecroft), and Helen Gregg (née Hoskings); Sir Charles Manifold’s daughter, Mary Schlicht. Mark Derham granted me access and permission to quote from the indispensable diaries of his grandfather, Sir Brudenell White, furnished family photographs, and generously made a press cutting collection available on CDRom as well as an insightful biographical essay.

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the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. And I am glad also to acknowledge Peter Helson’s important thesis (now published) on Sir George Jones; and the excellent Wikipedia contributions on RAAF officers by Ian Rose.

The first instalment of David Vincent’s indefatigable research on RAAF Hudsons appeared two decades after I started exhuming the relevant archives. His second volume, part of which he generously showed me in draft, completes an incomparable resource. I am indebted to him as well for a thoughtful exchange of views on some key points and for several important photographs. Mark Lax brought the special understanding of an officer of ‘Air Rank’ as well as a scholar to answering the questions of a newcomer to RAAF history; he transferred a valuable interview with Paddy Heffernan from tape to CD, and his vigilant reading of much of the manuscript saved me from many errors and inconsistencies. Neither he nor anyone else can be blamed for the remaining blemishes.

As will be evident from the notes, I have drawn information from the published work of countless scholars and dedicated explorers of family, institutional, military, and aviation history. I salute their achievements, both celebrated and unsung. It was a relief to find the incisive commentaries of an official historian, Alan Stephens, notably his contribution on the RAAF to the Australian Centenary History of Defence, resonating with what I was concerned might be my own prejudices. Earlier work by Chris Clark on RAAF history, especially his study of inter-war developments, *The Third Brother*, has been an invaluable foundation on which to proceed. Clark and his colleagues Greg Gilbert, Steve Allan, and Martin James in the Office of Air Force History in the Air Power Development Centre, and Kerry Hodge in the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, have been patient and unfailingly thorough in responding to queries and guiding me to official sources I might otherwise not have located. John Bennett’s published history of No. 2 Squadron and Master’s thesis on No. 3 Squadron answered important questions and prompted others. H. J. Manning’s ‘Air Disaster at Canberra’ (*Stand-To*, Jan–Feb. 1962), though occasionally astray, was an important early account, based in part on information supplied to A. W. Bazley three years earlier by A. B. ‘Tich’ McFarlane, then Secretary of the Department of Air (NAA: A705, 32/10/2733).

Andrew Tink’s book, *Air Disaster Canberra: the plane crash that destroyed a government*, came to hand on 3 April 2013, seven months after the MS of this book was despatched to publishers. An early synopsis of my proposed work had been sent to several publishers between September 2008 and March 2009. My tentative conclusions were foreshadowed in ‘Evidence, deduction, and inference: Lockheed Hudson A16-97 and the men who died in it on 13 August 1940’, a paper presented to a seminar at the ANU Humanities Research Centre, 25 September 2009. Draft chapters of the book were circulated to colleagues...
from March 2011 onwards. Dr Tink’s interpretations differ from mine on a number of significant issues and I have drawn attention to his published and broadcast views at appropriate places in the text and in footnotes.

Both in the original research phase and in more recent work I have been greatly aided by librarians and archivists, genealogists, booksellers, film-makers, and other writers who have shared information and ideas. John Taylor and Ray Walls enlightened me on the parents and extended family of Bob Hitchcock’s wife, Olive Beecroft. Estelle Blackburn furnished timely contact details for descendants of the Crosdale and Hitchcock families. I have cause also to be grateful to the volunteers who sustain the work of the Williamstown Historical Society (Jane Ridley, Brian Haynes), Essendon Historical Society (Lenore Frost), Ku-ring-gai Historical Society (Jennifer Harvey), Maryborough-Midlands Historical Society (Margaret Walkley), Camperdown & District Historical Society (Maree Belyea, Ray Watson), Derrinallum & Lismore Community Association History Group (Avon Buchholz, Margaret Nixon), Western Australia Scout Museum (Fay Hall), Australian Association of Time Table Collectors (Geoff Lambert, Victor Isaacs), Horticultural Society of Canberra (Merylyn Condon), Royal Victorian Aero Club (Rex Hobson), NSW Presbyterian Church Archives (Daryl Lightfoot), Australian Racing Museum (Elizabeth Brown), and several independently maintained websites including the Lockheed file (Ron Cuskelly), and OzatWar (Peter Dunn).

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Bob Livingstone furnished tantalising photographs of Anson aircraft which might have had Bob Hitchcock at the controls. Phil Vabre and Geoff Goodall instructed me on the history of Jim Fairbairn’s aircraft and guided me to other pictorial collections; and John Hopton responded generously. Gordon Birkett and Brendan Cowan welcomed me to the resources of ADF-Serials. Brian Hernan provided photographs of Jim Fairbairn’s Dragonfly VH-ADG. For photographs
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Harrison sent personal memories and unique photographs, and traced others who could help. The invaluable pictures taken at Laverton and Canberra by Frank Jefferies were found and copied for me by his daughter and son-in-law, Helen and Paul Struc. Wendy Coults did the same for pictures in the collection of her father Jack McNally. Unfortunately, Harry Kuehne’s No. 2 Squadron ground crew photos, kindly sent by his daughter-in-law Judy, arrived too late for inclusion.

‘Tich’ McFarlane, Bob Dalkin, and Geoff Hartnell not only talked to me at length but made available flying log books and personal correspondence. Anne Kelly kindly allowed me to see a photocopy of the log books of her father Sir Raymond Garrett, the originals of which are in the RAAF Museum at Point Cook, as well as letters, articles, and photographs, and her own compilation of stories from his taped recollections. Charles Eaton sent me draft chapters from his planned biography of his father, ‘Moth’ Eaton; provided a cornucopia of photographs; and introduced me to Sally Douglas who most helpfully sent transcripts of her father Eric’s diary, log, excerpts from RAAF reports, and photographs of the *Kookaburra*, Bobby Hitchcock, and Keith Anderson in 1929. At very short notice Bob Thomas retrieved and digitised an important letter, photographs, and extracts from the flying log book of his father Sir Fred Thomas. Extracts from Bill Heath’s log book were copied for me by his son Daryl Heath. Bill White’s nephew, Geoffrey White, guided me through the important collection of letters and photographs which he has assembled. Charles Eaton, Daryl Heath, and Geoffrey White were valuable sources of family information. The Rev. Bill Gilmour and Msgr Ken Morrison contributed the unique perspectives of RAAF chaplains. I learned much about the legal fraternity and their relationship with the Air Force in conversation with Sir George Pape, Sir Harry Winneke, and Sir Arthur Dean’s daughter, Ursula Whiteside. Heather Winneke kindly found and scanned pictures of her father-in-law Sir Harry Winneke. Sir Murray Tyrrell’s daughter and grand-daughter, Leonie and Kirsten McCulloch, allowed me to select from an enviably ample digitised family album. The life of Dr Duncan Mackellar was illuminated by information furnished by his son, Dr John Mackellar. L. P. Coombes recalled early days at the Aeronautical Research Laboratory. Ron Duffield, a vastly experienced civil airline pilot, gave me incisive commentary on the training and experience of RAAF pilots. Margaret Lodge, to whom scholars are indebted for the deposit of her father General Ernest Squires’ diaries at ADFA, brought to life his period as Chief of the General Staff.

The ghastly task of fighting the fire and retrieving the bodies from A16-97 was recalled by Bill Maloney and Jim Kearney.

The research for this book began over 37 years ago. At first it was carried on concurrently with a project on the life of Sir Robert Menzies which culminated in the publication of *Menzies Observed* in 1979. It grew out of, and in the end
displaced, what was intended as a study of the Menzies wartime premiership. I am grateful to Alan Bateman and the Hon. Humphrey Fisher of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (as it then was) for the original impetus, and access to film and sound archives; and to the Australian War Memorial for a grant which enabled me to assemble much of the material on the wartime political environment which underpinned the relevant chapters of *Menzies Observed* as well as the political background and narrative in this book. The award of a fellowship by the Australian Prime Ministers Centre gave me the opportunity to deepen my understanding of Robert Menzies’ emergence as Prime Minister in 1939. Among those who instructed me on the Lyons and Menzies governments, and public service and political life between the two world wars, I am deeply indebted to Dame Enid Lyons, Sir Chester and Lady Manifold, Lady White, Sir Murray Tyrrell, Sir Peter Looker, Sir Keith Waller, Sir Laurence McIntyre, Sir Roland Wilson, Sir Percy Spender, J. R. Willoughby, K. R. Ingram, Garry Armstrong, Colin Moodie, Sam Landau, Corbett Tritton, Hattil Foll, Sir John McEwen, Sir Laurence Hartnett, Charles Meeking, Sir Albert Chadwick, F. T. Hill, Sir Reginald Leonard, Sir Richard Randall, Sir Edwin Hicks, and Alfred Stirling.

A series of public service and academic appointments as well as private business commitments, deflected me from the work until 2006 when I was invited to an Adjunct Professorship in the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University. This beneficent privilege was all the more welcome as the original research had been undertaken when I held a fellowship in the History Department in the ANU’s Research School of Social Sciences. At that time I had the benefit of assistance from several able and resourceful people, notably Jan Brazier, Marion Stell, Carol Flanagan, Jeannette Horrocks, Brenda Willcox, Ann Millar, Anthea Bundock, and Pam Crichton; and I must acknowledge my appreciation of the rather puzzled forbearance of supportive academic colleagues, especially Barry Smith and Allan Martin. More recently, the enthusiastic interest of Ian Donaldson, Paul Pickering, and Christine Wallace inspired me to get on with putting into my laptop that which had long been in my mind; and Ian Hancock has brought his unrivalled knowledge of twentieth-century conservative politics to reviewing draft chapters, saving me from an abundance of infelicity and solecism, and convincing me of the worth of the project.

Because of the sensitive nature of some of the information uncovered in the 1970s and 1980s it seemed appropriate to defer completion and publication until the passage of time reduced the potential for offence or embarrassment. I am conscious that even now some of what is recounted here may dismay some readers. There are things they might feel were better left unsaid. In each case where I have thought there was potential for upset or hurtful speculation
I have sought counsel from wise friends. None of them of course bears any responsibility for the outcome. All of the research and correspondence files for the project will be deposited in the National Library of Australia.

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