

Eulogy

(courtesy of Jan Swiggs)

In 1967, Air Charter Services opened a flying school in Devonport and, in addition to becoming Chief Pilot, Kevin was awarded a scholarship to obtain his instructor rating. Kevin enjoyed the challenge of teaching people to fly and proved to be a natural instructor... calm, knowledgeable, and confident, not only in his own abilities, but in those of his students. In fact, such was this quiet confidence, that Kevin was often known to turn his back and walk away, lighting a cigarette, as a student took off on their first solo flight, a reflection of his confidence in them, and in the knowledge that they were ready.

He quickly progressed from a C Grade Instructor through to holding an A Grade rating, conducting training for both private and commercial licences, instrument ratings, and multi-engine endorsements, as the company expanded into operating twin-engine aircraft.

The company was very busy during this period, operating flights into Lake Pedder in the south-west before it was flooded. It was not uncommon for four or five company aircraft to fly down in the morning, return to Devonport at lunchtime, and then take another group down for the afternoon.

By 1973, Kevin had been approved by the Department of Civil Aviation as Chief Flying Instructor at Devonport, and in 1975, when the business changed hands and became Astral Airways, their plans to expand into all-weather operations saw Kevin obtain a Class One Instrument Rating through Correl Advanced Flight Training at Moorabbin Airport.

In those days, obtaining an Instrument Rating was a significant achievement in general aviation. The Department of Civil Aviation required a minimum of fifty hours of flight training, along with a flight test conducted by a senior Examiner of Airmen. Before even beginning that training, candidates had to pass three theory exams, as well as a Morse code test at ten words per minute, something Kevin would go on to pass, along with the flight test, on his first attempt. David and Jan still have vivid memories of the television being switched off on a Friday evening, as Dad sat practising his Morse.

With the move into all-weather operations throughout south-east Australia, Astral was then able to expand into aeromedical work for the Burnie Ambulance Board. What began as flights to Melbourne for medical scans, taking patients across in the morning and returning them home that same afternoon, soon grew into something much more demanding, and before long, Kevin was flying critically ill patients to Hobart or Melbourne at all hours of the day and night. As the flying increased, the company purchased a new Navajo, VH-UFO, fitted with colour weather radar and a wider passenger door to allow easier loading of patients. It wasn't unusual for Kevin to come home after a day's work, only to be called out again, flying a critically ill patient to Melbourne through the night.

In 1980, Kevin made a move and joined Executive Airlines in Launceston, flying passengers to King and Flinders Island, a business that would later become Airlines of Tasmania. As the operation expanded into larger and more complex aircraft, Kevin's skills were widely called upon, particularly in training and checking pilots as they progressed through the ranks. During this time, Kevin served as Check and Training Captain on the DeHavilland Heron and Piper Chieftain. In 1987, the company was awarded the Tasmanian Government aeromedical contract, with Kevin playing a key role in training pilots for that operation. The fleet continued to grow, with the introduction of the Embraer Bandeirante in 1989, which brought Kevin's first turboprop endorsement, followed by the Shorts S360 in 1990 on the Launceston to Melbourne and Bass Strait Islands routes. Later in the decade, the company was acquired by Tamair, where Kevin went on to fly the Metroliner.

Through all of these years, David and Jan have wonderful memories of a caring and loving dad who, although often just so busy, always found time for them. He was never one for harsh discipline, he didn't need to be, because he was more the kind of man you simply wanted to please. Family holidays were a highlight each year, often a fortnight spent at St Helens in a shack

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overlooking the bay, sometimes with Pop making the trip over from Melbourne to join them. And when word spread that the birds were working over the water, it was like the bell at the fire station had just rung, with all hands to the boat, everyone moving quickly with purpose and excitement.

Times like these, and just the everyday moments in between, were wonderful reminders of a home and an upbringing filled with love and laughter and provided lessons and memories that would stay with them for life. Then, in 1997, Tamair suddenly suspended operations, leaving Kevin unemployed at 55, with retirement most certainly something not on his radar.

In the ultra-competitive commercial pilot market, Kevin found part-time work with Air North in Darwin, flying Metroliners, initially for what was to be just six weeks. But Air North was expanding, and they needed experienced pilots with strong training capabilities who were prepared to stay in the Territory. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority's Regional Manager in Darwin, suggested that Kevin was exactly the person they needed.

When Kevin finally made the decision to retire it was with more than 30,000 hours in his logbook, and a career that had taken him from the open cockpits of Tiger Moths to the flight deck of the Embraer 170 jet... but after 47 years as a highly regarded commercial pilot, it was finally time to step back and return home to Launceston.

Even in retirement however, Kevin never lost his keen interest in all things aviation, with his love of flying finding a new outlet in building and flying radio-controlled model aircraft at the Launceston Model Aero Club. He also had a love of reading, particularly non-fiction, with World War II histories and aviation narratives definitely his faves. And there were other loves too... He enjoyed his motor sport, V8 Supercar events in Darwin, on the Gold Coast and at Symmons Plains, a trip to the Formula One Melbourne Grand Prix, and countless speedway meetings across Tasmania with David.

Kevin also shared Lynette's passion for breeding and showing Siamese and Oriental cats, at one stage becoming President of the State body. And Kevin was one of those men who could turn his hand to just about anything... practical and capable, someone who took real satisfaction in making or fixing things.

His early involvement in picture theatres sparked a lifelong love of film, Kevin could recall the title of an old movie from the smallest clip, along with the stars who featured in it. He also loved a stage show and the theatre, whether it be a major production on the mainland or a local performance, and when it came to Tory, well he never missed a chance to be there, watching her on stage.

Kevin loved people, and people loved Kevin. Whether it was the hundreds of students over the years, with whom he formed that special bond between pilot and trainee, forged not just in the thrill of flying, but in the trust, responsibility, and quiet understanding of what was at stake... or the "Grumpy Men's Club," where he enjoyed talking flying over a coffee with fellow pilots, Kevin was one of those people who you would not see for years, yet pick up a conversation with like it was yesterday.

But of all the things Kevin loved it was his family he loved the most. Lynette his one true love, and co-pilot in life for over sixty years; his children David and Jan of whom he was just so proud and who he loved just so much, and his granddaughter Tory who was quite simply his greatest pride and his grandest joy.