Upon returning home to Port Lincoln in late 1958, after completion of his service with the Royal Air Force at the conclusion of the Malayan conflict, John Doudy’s desire to continue flying was encouraged by the interest shown by a number of local ex-servicemen.

So in early 1959, John, in association with Bert Tilbrook of Aviation Services SA Parafield, established a flying school and charter service using a De Havilland Chipmunk and an Auster, operating out of a small storeroom in the Port Lincoln airport terminal.

The flight school was a success with a number of locals taking up training. One was local salmon fisherman Mike Buberis, who realized that aerial spotting would greatly enhance his catches. The success was noted by several tuna fishermen, who with SAFCOL management, negotiated with John to provide an aircraft for tuna spotting services.

The association with Aviation Services was terminated, with John and wife Rosemary forming Commodore Aviation P/L. To comply with regulations for flying over water, they decided to purchase a Republic RC-3 Seabee amphibian aircraft VH-WWA, taking delivery 26th March 1961. Spotting commenced in late April, with the Seabee helping to extend that season into late May. Although there were increases in the catch over the next season there were limitations in the performance of the Seabee (single engine, and range). So John was asked to research a better alternative.

The Aero 145, marketed by Phil Brown of Dulminson’s Aviation at Bankstown, came to his notice. Being a light, versatile twin engine utility aircraft, with a large fuel capacity giving an approximate 1,700km range, great downward visibility and good engine-out performance, the aircraft met all requirements for spotting.

The Seabee was traded on VH-WWC, John taking delivery in October 1962 and immediately flying down to Eden, enabling him to complete the NSW season before returning to Port Lincoln.

To familiarise himself with the capabilities of the aircraft, John conducted several survey flights in early December, where he found fish at a time considered out of season, resulting in catches.

The daily routine would commence with a radio hook-up between Commodore, SAFCOL and the boats to check weather and establish priority to the aircraft.

Departing Port Lincoln Airport, the aircraft would cover an area from Kangaroo Island out to the Continental shelf (approx. 200 kms from Port Lincoln) to the Great Australian Bight. They were capable of staying aloft for up to 10 hours. Over the next few years catches increased in what were the boom times for the industry.

In need of a backup, Commodore acquired a Super Aero 45, VH-WWH in December 1963. After undergoing a full engine and airframe overhaul, this aircraft was dispatched to Eden NSW for the 1966 tuna season, but unfortunately the aircraft was caught in a gusty crosswind on take-off at Cootamundra NSW, and veered of the runway, through a fence and overturned. The wreck was returned to Port Lincoln and put in storage. Commodore then acquired Aero 145 VH-DUH as a replacement.

Powered by Walter Minor M322 supercharged 104 kw engines combined with large flaps, the Aeros had outstanding STOL capabilities making them ideal aircraft for accessing the likes of Neptune and Althorpe Islands. Having landed an Auster on Neptune Island in August 1959 and having had discussions with several of the lighthouse keepers who aired their frustrations at not receiving regular supplies, John approached the Department of Transport about providing a regular supply service. A contract was awarded in October 1963 with this service continuing for ten years without any major incident. There have only been a small number of pilots endorsed to carry out this work. The aircraft also flew into St. Frances and Evans islands off Ceduna, Cape Bauer, Flinders and Pearson islands to service the unmanned lighthouses under the same contract. Commodore was able to provide easy access to Reevesby, Spilsby, Wedge and Thistle islands for their owners as required.

To supplement the Aeros, the company purchased an Auster VH-WWB for general charter, salmon spotting and enabling Ron Fuller to service his Elders/Goldsbrough Mort clients on the West Coast. The company also had access to the Port Lincoln Flying Club’s Cessna 172 VH-RBG and Piper Colt VH-UAB to service a number of varied tasks asked of the company, like flying worn engine bearings from broken-down ships to Adelaide, collecting fresh Abalone from Flinders Island, air ambulance and aerial search duties and taking personnel to the varied horse racing meetings on the peninsular.

Aero 145 VH-WWC photographed while fish spotting Photo via Geoff Goodall

After acquiring the hangar and offices from the Port Lincoln F l y i n g C l u b , C o m m o d o r e established its own maintenance facility to service not only its own aircraft, but also to look after a varied number of clients on the West Coast under the guidance of engineers the likes of Phil Hansen and Bob Dyer.

In the mid-sixties Commodore ventured into the aerial agricultural business with the purchase of a Piper Pawnee and ground support vehicles.

In May 1968 John was fatally injured in a car accident. With no-one to take over the running of the company, the family negotiated with Ron Fuller to come in as manager. Later Ron bought a half interest and then eventually completed the purchase of the company.

At this point the fish spotting contract was due for renewal and as part of that negotiation, SAFCOL made it clear they would prefer a Cessna 337 aircraft as was being used by other operators in NSW.

VH-RIY was acquired along with a new contract for fish spotting; and the Aeros were then used only in general charter and island service work until around 1979 when they were removed from service and placed in storage. To enable Ron to concentrate on the core business, the agricultural business was sold off to another local operator. The fleet was updated to include a Cessna 182 and a couple of Piper Cherokee 6s to cater for the new contracts including air ambulance and newspaper runs.

Aero 145s VH-DUH & VH-WWC at the Althorpe Island lighthouse off Yorke Peninsula. Photographed in February 1973 by Terry Martin, courtesy of the Civil Aviation Historical Society

Commodore Aviation’s Port Lincoln hangar Photo via Chris Doudy

Aero 145 VH-WWH arriving at SAAM (then the SA Historical Aviation Museum on Mundy Street) on 21 May 1989. It was later moved from the Museum to Port Pirie as part of an arrangement to restore it to display standard by engineering students at Mid North Christian College. Photo by David Tanner, via Nigel Daw

Commodore Aviation was sold to Dr Rex Senior in March 1979, whereupon he gained an RPT licence using Commodore’s infrastructure, operating as a supplemental airline service out of Port Lincoln.

In 1985 John Ellis and David Harris purchased the airworthy Aero VH-DUH along with the airframes of WWC, WWH and spares from Commodore. In 2007 VH-DUH was sold to James Lewis from Mittagong NSW, underwent a full restoration returning it to airworthy status, and is still flying today.

John Ellis and David Harris loaned VH-WWH to the Aviation section of the Mid North Christian College in Port Pirie for restoration, and VH-WWC has been donated to SAAM by the members of the ‘Charlie Zululima Trust’, the owners of the aircraft. The aircraft has been re-registered as VH-CZL, from which the Trust obviously derives its name.

Technical specifications of Aero 145

Engine: Walter Minor M322 104KW (140hp) 4cylinder, fuel injected, air cooled, supercharged, with twin blade electrically adjusted pitch control propellers.

Maximum take off weight: 1600 kg. (3527lbs)

Maximum speed: 152 knots. (282km/h)

Range: 1700km. (1055 miles) Ceiling: 5900 m. (13960ft)

Length: 7.80 m (25ft 6in)

Width: 12.30m (46ft 2in)

Height: 2.30 m (7ft 6in)

Capacity: 1 pilot with 3/ 4 passengers Useful load: 600 kg

Reference: Geoff Goodall CZL Aero 45 & Aero 145 in Australia, http://goodall.com.au/australianaviation/aero145/aero45.html

Chris Doudy

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| **C/n 20-002    Aero 145                                                                                            VH-WWC, VH-ZCL** |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | .61 | Built Kunovice, Czechoslovakia by Orlikan (Czechoslovak Aircraft Works) | | .62 | Issued as a new aircraft to Australian agents Dulmison (Australia) Pty Ltd, Bankstown NSW Ordered by Commodore Aviation, Port Lincoln, South Australia | |  | Shipped to Australia dismantled and crated | | 10.62 | Assembled at Bankstown Airport, Sydney. Two tone blue and white factory scheme | | 10.62 | engine runs at Bankstown, "Commodore Aviation, Port Lincoln SA" painted on fuselage, but no registration yet applied. | | 19.10.62 | Commodore Aviation's Republic RC-3 Seabee VH-WWA changed ownership to Dulmison, part trade-in on the new Aero 145 | | 26.10.62 | Registered **VH-WWC:** Mutual Acceptance Co Ltd, Sydney. Operated by Commodore Aviation Ltd, Port Lincoln SA  *Mutual Acceptance was a finance company which had an arrangement with Dulmison to provide attractive hire-purchase rates for Czech aircdaft sold in Australia* | | 27.10.62 | Local flying Bankstown: Peter Brown of Dulmison gave endorsement check-out to new owner John C. Doudy, founder of Commodore Aviation | | 9.11.62 | Change of ownership: Commodore Aviation Ltd, Port Lincoln SA | | 10.11.62 | VH-WWC noted at Bankstown, parked outside the Fawcett Aviation hangar | | 1.12.62 | Departed Bankstown on delivery flight to Port Lincoln, flown by Commodore Aviation's founder John Doudy. His logbook shows one refuelling stop at Mildura, flying time 6 hr 45 min | | 3.12.62 | John Doudy's logbook: WWC local flying Port Lincoln. Also 3.12.62, 7.12.62 | | 8.12.62 | Commenced tuna spotting operations from Port Lincoln | | 2.64 | visited Adelaide Airport. Also 9.66 | | 14.2.67 | noted at Port Lincoln SA flying.  Also 7.7.67 with VH-DUH | | 19.9.69 | minor damage at St Francis Island SA | | 22.11.69 | visited Adelaide Airport, "Commodore Aviation, Port Lincoln SA" titles. Also 12.11.70, 1.1.71 | | 31.12.74 | noted at Port Lincoln | | 11.6.76 | Change of ownership: R. K. Fuller c/- Commodore Aviation Ltd, Port Lincoln SA  *Fuller was Managing Director of Commodore Aviation, having taken over the company after founder John Doudy's death.* | | 9.8.76 | **Struck-off Register as withdrawn from service**. Stored in hangar at Port Lincoln | | .85 | John Ellis t/a Aero Enterprises Pty Ltd, Adelaide SA purchased the airworthy Aero 145 VH-DUH from Commodore Aviation at Port Lincoln. Included in the purchase was Commodore Aviation’s Aero spare parts stock, including the dismantled VH-WWC & WWH. | | .89 | Loaned to SA Historical Aviation Museum, Port Adelaide SA | | 21.5.89 | Arrived at museum dismantled on a truck, along with VH-WWH. The museum was at that time in its original location in the SA Lion Flour Mill, Mundy Street, Port Adelaide.  It later moved to new building nearby land was named SA Aviation Museum | | c01 | Removed from the original museum site and taken to Parafield Airport by road | | 23.3.01 | Restored to Register as **VH-ZCL:** David D. Harris t/a Charlie Zulu Lima Trust, Adelaide Partners are John Ellis and David Harris (Harris also own CZL Meta Sokol VH-DUT) | |  | Long-term restoration project at Parafield Airport | | 12.12.07 | noted in hangar Parafield, under restoration to fly. All paint stripped, metallic, standing on gear,  wings removed outboard of engines. | | 12-14 | Restoration project continued but moved to Pallamana airfield, Murray Bridge SA | | 4.14 | Advertised for sale by David Harris: partly restored, fuselage standing on wheels, located in a hangar at Pallamana SA | |
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        The prototype Aero 45 OK-BCA first flew on 21 July 1947, one of the first civil designs of the post-war Czechoslovakian aircraft industry. The name was chosen to indicate it was a 4 or 5 seater. The type was developed as Super Aero 45 and then the improved more powerful Aero 145.  A long production run at Kunovice, Czechoslovakia by Orlikan (Czech Aircraft Works) was terminated in 1961 after approximately 700 had been delivered, all but 80 of these being exported.  
  
       They were of duralumin construction, including the skinning except for control surfaces, and had retracting main undercarriage. The general lines have been compared with the wartime German Heinkel He 111.  The Aero 45 series was powered by two 105 hp Walter Minors, while the later Aero 145 series had 140hp Walter M332 fuel-injection in-line air cooled engines. Commercial sales were handled by Omnipol Foreign Trade Corporation, Prague.  One Aero 45 and four Aero 145s were sold to Australia.

SAAM is about to acquire Aero 145 VH-ZCL, donated by John and Marj Ellis and the ‘Charlie Zululima Trust’ that had dismantled it for restoration. SAAM will undertake the restoration and display the aircraft in due course.  
It has huge South Australian historical importance – purchased originally by John Doudy, who established Commodore Aviation, and registered as VH-WWC in October 1962 then used for tuna spotting and lighthouse supply out of Port Lincoln until around 1979. John’s son, Chris Doudy, wrote a history of it in our last newsletter