

## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM

### SIGNIFICANT AIRCRAFT PROFILES

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#### COMMODORE AVIATION and the Aero VH-WWC/VH-ZCL



*Aero 145 VH-WWC At Adelaide Airport on 12 November 1970. This aircraft has been re-registered as VH-CZL and will shortly be on display at SAAM.*

*Photo by Nigel Daw*

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 26<sup>th</sup> 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.



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

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 off 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



*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*

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.

After acquiring the hangar and offices from the Port Lincoln Flying Club, Commodore 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 then eventually completed the purchase of the company.



*Commodore Aviation's Port Lincoln hangar  
Photo via Chris Doudy*

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 45 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*  
section of the Mid North Christian College in Port Pirie for restoration, and VH-WWC has

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

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-ZCL, 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 of 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 ZCL Aero 45 & Aero 145 in Australia,  
<http://goodall.com.au/australian-aviation/aero145/aero45.html>

**Chris Doudy**

**History Group**

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM INC**

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