

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

SYDNEY JAMES PINK – ROYAL AIR FORCE WWII AND AIRLINE PILOT

Sydney James Pink (known to all as 'Jimmy') was born in Brussels in the Spanish Embassy on 13 April 1924. His parents were butler and maid to the Spanish Ambassador, positions they had got through previously working in Kensington Palace for Princess Beatrice. Beatrice's daughter Victoria Eugenie was the Queen Consort of Spain.

After the communists took over in Spain, which led to Franco and the Spanish Civil War, the embassy was closed and the Pinks returned to England. Pink senior was employed as a butler with a family in London who also had a stately home in Wiltshire. The Pink family, which included Jimmy and two sisters, had quarters over the garages.



*Jimmy (middle, back row) with Tiger Moth at Fort William
EFTS*

Jimmy did his secondary schooling in London at Emanuel School where he excelled in mathematics. He also sang in the choir and on stage – in the cast of HMS Pinafore.

Jimmy joined the RAF in 1942, aged eighteen. He did twelve weeks of initial training then 'Grading School', which included twelve hours flying in Tiger Moths to select pilot and navigator streams, before going to Canada (to where he travelled on the Queen Mary) as a pilot under the Empire Air Training Scheme for further training. He went to Fort William Elementary

Flight Training School (EFTS) in Ontario, where he made his first instructional flight on 30 May 1943 in the DH82A Tiger Moth for twenty minutes under the instruction of Sgt Wilson. He went solo on 14 June after 12 hours 35 minutes dual instruction. After five months of training and 85 hours and 50 minutes total flying time, Jimmy completed his EFTS.

This was followed by from November 1943 Service Flight Training School (SFTS) in Manitoba where he converted to the twin-engine Avro Anson and later that month he soloed on the type. By the end of April 1944 when he completed this section of his training, he was up to 258 hours 25 minutes.

Then to Comox Operational Training Unit (OTU) on Vancouver Island where he initially trained on Beechcraft Expeditor for working as a crew and then onto Dakotas where he underwent 64 hours conversion training and he then graduated in 1944. Jimmy was disappointed because, after

experiencing the Blitz in London, he had hoped for heavy bomber training and a chance to hit back at Germany.



With wings after SFTS 1943

To return from Canada to the United Kingdom he travelled courtesy of the ocean liner 'Isle de France' and then to travel to south-east Asia he flew via air transportation.

He was posted to No 117 Squadron initially at Hathazari (then in India but now Bangladesh) then Akyab and finally Ramree both in Burma (but now known as Myanmar) around Christmas 1944. No 117 Sqn, with 267 and 62 Squadrons, supplied the 14th Army across the mountains to the Irrawaddy Valley undertaking transportation and dropping of supplies and troop transfer. Each squadron had twenty Dakotas and forty crews, and they flew ten hours a day every second day, utilising all the daylight hours. One interesting point is that they flew as a single pilot operation.

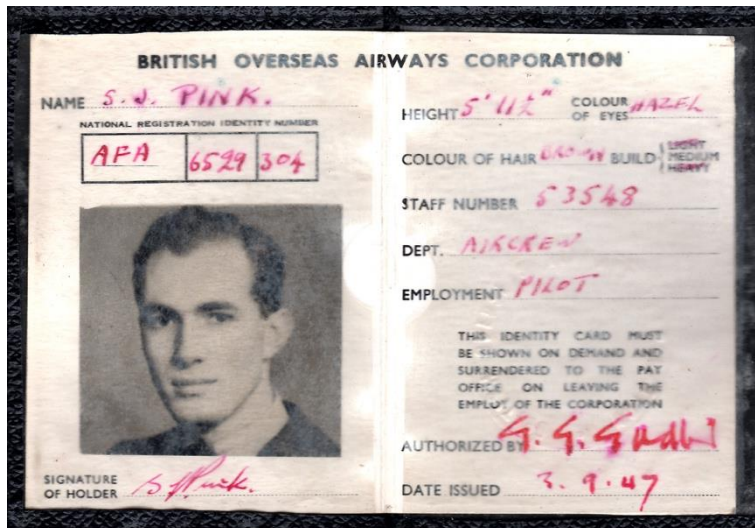
When the war ended, he continued flying with 117 Sqn, where his then total flight time was 1,119 hours and 20 minutes, then posted to Singapore, with No 215 & 48 Squadrons until the end of 1946. The squadron transported supplies, troops and civilians back and forth to India and to the various occupied territories throughout the Indo China Peninsula and the Dutch East Indies, and repatriated prisoners

of war on the return trips.

Jimmy has some great stories – his favourite being about a flight to Saigon when the weather was so bad he had to divert to Bien Hoa, north East of Saigon. The only hard surface there was the runway, so he stopped on it to unload/load his passengers, but the defeated Japanese troops still staffing the airfield persuaded him to taxi off the runway to clear it for other aircraft. He knew it was a bad idea, and, sure enough, he was soon bogged to the axles. After fruitless attempts to tow him out with progressively larger vehicles, over a hundred Japanese troops appeared, bent their backs under the wings and lifted the aircraft bodily out of the mud so that it could be dragged forward. Jimmy has regretted not having a camera with him ever since!

Jimmy returned to the UK at the end of 1946 and was de-mobbed as a Flight Lieutenant in April 1947. When he returned to the UK, he had a total of 1,622 hours and 25 minutes and that included 1,210 hours and 5 minutes as pilot-in-command.

Due to his large number of multi-engine transport flying, he was snapped up by BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation) – in fact he joined the company in February 1947 before he was de-mobbed.



Jimmy's BOAC Card soon after joining

He flew initially as a co-pilot on DC-3 Dakotas, making his first flight on 5 May 1947 on G-AGHS for a one hour training flight; then from 17 February 1948 on Avro Yorks (the civil version of the Lancaster with Lancaster wings, engines and tail but a new fuselage to accommodate passengers), on African and Indian routes. From 17 July 1950 he flew the Handley Page Hermes (a conversion of the HP Hastings troop carrier) when he made his first flight on G-ALDC. What he liked about the Hermes was that it was pressurised and had a nose-wheel.

In 1952 he stepped up to the Comet 1 as a co-pilot/navigator, having by then taken a navigation course. He made his first flight of the type on 6 September 1952, in G-ALYV. The Comet 1 was grounded in April 1954 after four decompression crashes, the third of which was a BOAC aircraft, and Jimmy made his final flight on the type on 15 January 1954 on G-ALYW. In total he flew nine different Comet 1s including several that had crashed.

Jimmy was then seconded to Bristols for the Britannia flight test program, which included a trip to the Middle-East, South-East Asia, Australia and return in G-ANBE. In Australia he flew Melbourne-Adelaide-Brisbane-Sydney on 17 September 1956. BOAC purchased the type and introduced the 102 (long range) model in BOAC service on Africa/Far East routes, on which Jimmy was promoted to Captain on 27 December 1958. When he finished Britannia flying in 1962, he had a total flight time of 9,406 hours.



Bristol Britannia test crew to Australia 1954 (Jimmy far right)

He also flew brief periods on the Boeing Stratocruiser and the Lockheed 749 in order to keep his navigators' licence.

The Comet 4 was introduced in 1958 by BOAC, and Jimmy flew them from 16 June 1962 when he made his first flight on the type on the familiar Africa and Far East routes. He was based in Sydney for some time in 1964. He had married his wife, Diana, the previous year, whose father was a BOAC ground

engineer and she a ground hostess in Nairobi. She went on to fly as a cabin attendant. (More of her earlier flying history in the postscript.)



Jimmy in his London office

The Boeing 707s were introduced in 1966 and Jimmy flew them on long-range routes with some Sydney basing for a time. He gained his endorsement on the type on 6 January 1966 on G-APFC.

In 1967 he was appointed as a Flight Superintendant in London. This was a pilot-management position, ground based with enough line flying to retain licence currency. By then he had the seniority to fly the Boeing 747s when they came into

service, but Jimmy was concerned with pension maximisation by then and his earnings-based pension would be better served by remaining in his management role!

Jimmy had some interesting times as a Flight Superintendant – he set up a new polar route west-about from London to Anchorage then on to Tokyo, and he was part of the British delegation that negotiated Russian trans-Siberia rights for London-Moscow-Tokyo flights in 1970. Part of that role was a month investigating destination and enroute alternate airport options throughout Russia, and he flew the first Narita – Sheremetyevo flight of 10 hours 20 minutes on 3 June 1970.



Jimmy with bouquet and Russian dignitaries at Moscow after the first trans Siberian flight.



BOAC 707 over the North Pole

He had some other interesting flight duties too – in 1972 he flew the freighter carrying the Tutankhamen treasures from Cairo to London, the first time they had been out of Egypt, on loan to the British Museum for its exhibition from 1972 to 1981.



Jimmy as a BOAC B707 Captain in 1975

And in April 1975 he flew the Queen's flight to Jamaica as a British Airways charter (BA was formed in March 1974 from the merging of BOAC with three other airlines), and he received a signed photograph from the Queen.

By 1978 Jimmy had maximised his pension, so he took early retirement from BA after 31 years.



The Queen's Flight, Heathrow Apr 1975

His final flight with British Airways was on 21 December 1977 in the B707 G-AXXY from Cairo to London. His total flight time on retirement was 15,740 hours and 37 minutes.

He was immediately snapped up by Singapore Airlines as a Boeing 707 flight and simulator instructor based in Singapore, which also entailed some line flying. He was with that airline from March 1978 until July 1980.

Singapore Airlines had just leased Air Lanka two 707s after its formation from the bankrupt Air Ceylon, and was training its pilots, so Air Lanka management got to know Jimmy and hired him from in 1980, whereupon he relocated to Colombo. He then flew B707s from August 1980 until May 1981 when on 20 June 1981 he converted onto the Lockheed L1011 wide-body which he flew until 7 January 1985.

He made his final airline flight on L1011 4R-ULD Colombo/Dhahran/Colombo in a total time of 9 hours 35 minutes F/Ns UJ261/262. This brought his total flight time to 19,234 hours and 53 minutes and fifteen different aircraft endorsements.

Jimmy and his wife, Diana, lived in retirement in England for another twenty years. They travelled to Queensland to visit Diana's family every other year before immigrating to Australia in 2004 when Jimmy was 80. By then daughter Helen, who had earlier immigrated to New Zealand, had been transferred by her employer to Adelaide, and so Jimmy and Diana chose to settle in Adelaide. Their Colin stayed and still lives in England, but visits Adelaide frequently.

Sadly, Diana died in 2006, whereupon Jimmy, bereft and looking for something to do, brought his energies to the South Australian Aviation Museum (SAAM) who have been the fortunate beneficiary of his talents since.

Diana had been an air hostess with Aden Airways from June 1951 until April 1956, where she completed 4,343 hours all on Douglas DC-3s. She then spent from October 1956 until April 1959 with BOAC on Argonauts and Britannias.

Jimmy celebrated his 95th birthday in style at a party in Hangar 1 of the Museum on 13th April 2019.

In late 2019 Nigel Daw and Ian Jones filmed a fifty minute interview with Jimmy and a copy of that DVD is held in the South Australian Aviation Museum Inc Library.

Nigel Daw

History Group Member

South Australian Aviation Museum Inc

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(Prepared using a birthday story for Jimmy's 95th birthday written by fellow History Group Member, Mike Milln in 2019).