

## **JOHN FREEMAN OAM**



*John Freeman*  
*Photo – Freeman family via Mike Milln*

John Freeman was born on 17 May 1934 and spent his boyhood in Rugby, Warwickshire near Church Lawford Aerodrome, then a RAF Training Command facility. This led him to join the Air Training Corps on his 14<sup>th</sup> birthday and to his first flight on a RAF Anson that imbued him with his fascination with aircraft and flying.

He emigrated with his family to Adelaide in 1948 and immediately joined the Air Training Corps Squadron at Keswick Barracks. He was awarded a place in a course at Point Cook where he commenced his flying training in February 1951. He achieved his Private Pilot's License in October 1951 at age 17, but was subsequently classified during National Service as not being of commercial pilot material. Fortunately, Reg Ellis, chief flying instructor at the Royal Aero Club of South

Australia at Parafield disagreed, and John achieved his Commercial Pilot's License there in April 1955 on a flying scholarship.

He started work as a pilot for Rural Aviation Limited in May 1955 and began a lifelong career in agricultural aviation. This included a stint with Robby's Aircraft Co in 1956 before he married his first wife, Margaret, and went to England in April 1957. From July 1957 to May 1959 he flew on jobs with Crop Culture Ltd throughout England, Scotland and Wales – and spent 3 months in 1957 spraying cotton in the Sudan. This involved a flight of two DH-82 Tiger Moths and an Auster departing from Bembridge on the Isle of Wight to Lyon-Marseille-Rome-Palermo, then across the Mediterranean to Bone in Algeria then Tunis-Tripoli-Benghazi-El Adem-Cairo-Wadi Haifa and, finally, Khartoum. After three months spraying in the Ghazirah, the group returned to England in December 1957 by a different route.

During his England sojourn he and Margaret had a daughter, Debbie, was born in January 1959.

John then returned to Adelaide with his family and set up his own company, Trojan Aerial Spraying Co, in September 1959 in partnership with Alan Jones<sup>1</sup>. The company was merged with SA Air Taxis in 1962 to form United Aviation Co Ltd. A son, Mark, was born in December 1960.

United Aviation was the Piper Aircraft dealer for South Australia and operated United Aviation Flying School at Parafield Airport, the first flying school at Parafield other than the Royal Aero Club. However, late in 1962 SA Air Taxis pulled out and United Aviation went out of business some time in 1963, which almost caused the

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Jones is standing at left in Trojan's 1961 Calendar cover in the Attachment

failure of Trojan as well. United Aviation was liquidated in early 1963, but John continued agricultural spraying as Trojan Aerial Spraying Co.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the merger the company was originally formed using DH-82 Tiger Moth VH-TSM. Two additional Tiger Moths, equipped with Micronair A700 Rotary Atomiser spraying equipment, VH-TSE and VH-TSJ, were added during the 1960 season.

The re-formed Trojan shrank to one Tiger Moth (VH-TSE), but 1963 was a good year and John Freeman and Bill Wauchope, who had joined the company, expanded with the purchase of two Piper Pawnee PA-25 aircraft.



*Parafield hangar from 1962 United Aviation Ltd calendar  
John Freeman via Mike Milln*

John first sprayed a potato crop at Virginia, using VH-TSE on 26 October 1964, and also had various spraying contracts. One was spraying Torrens Island<sup>3</sup> against mosquitoes, when he and Bill Wauchope operated from a beach at Outer Harbour and parked the aircraft on the front lawn of a householder across the road<sup>4</sup>.

By mid-1965 the company had secured a six-week contract to spray cotton near the Ord River. This activity expanded over the next eight years as Trojan Aerial Spraying Company (Ord River) Pty Ltd (TASCO). TASCO operated Piper Pawnees and a Snow S2D (with a 600hp radial engine), and John pioneered night spraying with them, when the wind and turbulence tended to be least. Kimberley Chemicals Pty Ltd was also established at Kununurra.

In 1971 John left the company and returned to South Australia to establish Trojan Aerial Services Pty Ltd. Bill Wauchope remained in Kununurra and continued operating TASCO.

Trojan Aerial Services Pty Ltd was operated out of Parafield until a new strip was constructed on five blocks of land off Womma Road at Virginia that John purchased in 1972. He called it Virginia Airstrip and made it the company's headquarters. By 1973 he had built a hangar and was operating four to five aircraft including two Piper Pawnee PA-25s, a Supercub PA-18A and a Cessna AgWagon.

John married his second wife, Sue, in 1973. They had two sons, Jamie born in 1974 and Ben in 1977.

<sup>2</sup> This section about Trojan Aerial Spraying Co Ltd and later Trojan Aerial Services Pty Ltd is derived from material provided by John Freeman including his Resume of Experience/Career and his History of Trojan Aerial Services Pty Ltd. The author also interviewed Mr Freeman at his home several times between January – July 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The 1964 Calendar cover reproduced in Attachment 1 depicts John Freeman carrying out mosquito eradication spraying at Adelaide Airport, then including much swamp land. The 1965 Calendar shows him spraying mosquitoes over the Torrens outlet in the vicinity of Henley Beach Road.

<sup>4</sup> This anecdote is from Bill Wauchope's eulogy of John Freeman

As well as agricultural spraying in the Virginia area, Trojan sprayed vines in the Coonawarra during the period 1972-1982. John also joined the Department of Transport's central office in Melbourne in 1978 as the Department's agricultural aviation specialist in Australia, and John and Sue moved to Melbourne. David Shaw managed the company while he was away.

During his time with the then Department of Transport from 1978 to 1981<sup>5</sup>, John wrote an Agricultural Pilot Training Manual and two books on low level safe flying techniques.



*Piper Pawnee and hangar at Virginia Airstrip  
from 1975 Trojan Aerial Services calendar  
John Freeman via Mike Milln*

In 1983 John effectively severed his connection with Trojan and rejoined the Department of Aviation<sup>6</sup> as its Central Office agricultural specialist, but this time attached to the Adelaide Office and based in Adelaide. During this time he took periodic leaves of absence to train pilots to agricultural rating standard and participated in a delegation to China to discuss the checking and training of Chinese agricultural pilots. He led the program that eventuated and made a further eight trips to China throughout the '80s.

Trojan also operated a subsidiary company from 1981 to 1984 called Seawings with a floats-equipped Cessna 185 VH-TSF on tourist flights between Port Adelaide and the Coorong, and scenic flights at Goolwa. On Saturday 12 May 1984, John piloted this aircraft to the first float landing on Lake Eyre.



He stayed as the CAA's agricultural specialist until 1992 when he left the Authority and commenced agricultural flying training full-time with Trojan under the trading name Low Level Aviation. He continued with Low Level Aviation based at his property on Goat Island, Lake Alexandrina, until 2000. By then he had trained 84 pilots to agricultural pilot rating standard and 74 more in low flying techniques using a low level safety course he had developed.

He finally retired in 2006.

Trojan's aerial spraying operations based at Virginia Airstrip were purchased by Bill Wauchope in 1983 on John Freeman's departure. He renamed the company Southern Aerial Spraying Services, and in 1989 renamed it again as Agricair.

<sup>5</sup> The Department of Transport was formed in 1972 from the previous Department of Shipping and Transport, and was renamed again in 1982 as the Department of Aviation.

<sup>6</sup> It became the Civil Aviation Authority in 1988



*Bill Wauchope with Piper Colt VH-KFB at Virginia Airstrip 13 December 1991  
John Bergamin via Mike Milln*

The photograph at left shows Bill Wauchope and his Piper Colt VH-KFB in front of the Virginia Airstrip hangar on 13 December 1991. By June 1992 an office extension had been added to the hangar and the building remains substantially unchanged to this day.

Agricair was purchased by Godfrey Gardiner in 1991 and the company continued to spray in Virginia for local vegetable growers John and Geoffrey Bergamin from Virginia Airstrip until the closure of the airstrip on 6 June 1996.

The hangar, still painted with Trojan's name as shown in the photograph below, is now a vegetable packing shed.

The closure of Virginia Airstrip was anticipated for some time prior to this because of its non-compliance with environmental legislation and regulations. This led to John Bergamin's decision to develop a new airfield at his property in Virginia, which he called Calvin Grove after the nearby historic farmhouse built by the pioneer Taylor family around 1860-70.

The airfield was officially opened for the Bergamin family on 2 May 1997 by John Freeman, whom John Bergamin recognizes as the inspiration for his development of it. Film exists of the ceremony and John Freeman's speech.

John Freeman was awarded the UK Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators Sir James Martin Award for 2006 *"in recognition of the development of low level flying techniques and low flying courses in Australia resulting in a significant enhancement to flight safety"*. Also in 2006 he was awarded Aerial Agriculture Association of Australia Ray Mackay Award at its annual convention.



*John Freeman at site of Virginia airstrip 25 May 2008  
Mike Milln*

On 26 January 2008 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia *"for services to aviation through the development of safe low flying techniques in the agricultural sector"*.



Perhaps John himself described this rich and fulfilling life best in his book *The Golden Years of Low Level Flight*:



*"A life full of low flying operations as aerial spraying operator and pilot for twenty seven years, then examiner of airmen in low flying with the Department of Aviation for eleven years followed by nine years training agricultural pilots, eighty four in all, plus seventy two other pilots in general low level operations. A total of 13000 hours of flight at lower levels with the only injury being a scratch on the back of my hand from a split pin!"*

*John Freeman's speech to open Calvin Grove Airstrip 2 May 1997  
John Bergamin via Mike Milln*

John died at the Mary Potter Hospice on 9 November 2008 after a long battle with cancer, just a year after the death of his wife Sue in October 2007. He is survived by his four children and grandchildren.

Mike Milln  
History Group  
South Australian Aviation Museum Inc  
August 2013 [Correction to son Mark's place of birth pg1 added 24 Nov 2023]

Photographs from Calendars supplied by John Freeman

***Trojan Aerial Spraying Co. Ltd.***

Hangar 48 (First on Left) - PARAFIELD AERODROME - South Australia



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AFTER HOURS: 76 4927 (A. JONES)  
78 2419 (C. J. FREEMAN)  
71 0614 (D. L. TRELOAR)



**1962**

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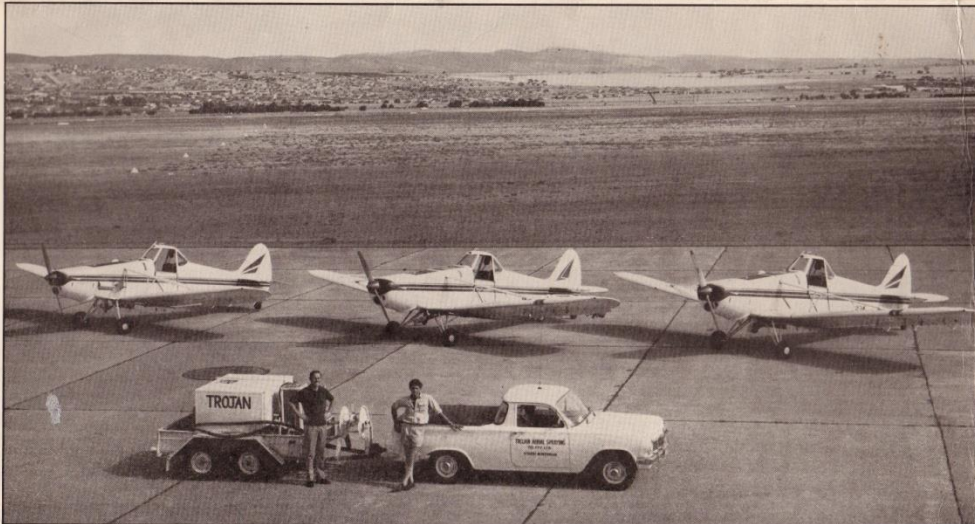
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TODAY'S WINGS—Pawnee C's at Trojan's Virginia Base.

COMPLIMENTS FROM JOHN FREEMAN

1975

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