

# **SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM**

## **SIGNIFICANT AVIATION EVENTS**

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### **A History of the St John Air Ambulance Service**

#### **Introduction**

This history was written by a Whyalla student, Samantha Robinson, as a Year 12 project and lodged with the St John Historical Society of South Australia. Attempts to locate and contact Ms Robinson through the St John Historical Society prior to publication of her document by the South Australian Aviation Museum (SAAM) were not successful. We are grateful to Ms Lyn Dansie, present Secretary of the St John Historical Society, for her efforts in this regard.

Some footnotes have been added to Ms Robinson's document as points of clarification and to reflect comments received; and a postscript added to detail events occurring after she wrote her document and provide a profile of SAAM member Barry Clifford, the St John Air Ambulance's longest serving pilot. All the photographs included are from Barry Clifford's collection.

#### **Preface by Ray Schilling**

The then Secretary of the St John Historical Society of South Australia, Ray Schilling<sup>1</sup>, attached a note dated 4 May 2004, to a re-typed copy of Samantha Robinson's document. The note reads as follows: *"This historical record of the St John Ambulance Service and the Whyalla Ambulance Service was produced in hand-written form by Samantha Robinson, presumably as a school exercise in or about 1987, and is held in safe custody by the St John Historical Society. I'm not sure how we came by the manuscript, but having read it, realised how extremely interesting this well-written document is now, and how much more it will be valued in years to come. Further, I believe that it would be helpful to have several copies readily available for interested readers, so have produced several 'hard copies' of Samantha's document so that it can be read by several people at the one time. Thank you very much Samantha."*

#### **Forward by Samantha Robinson**

As part of my Year 12 S.A.S. Australian History Curriculum in 3<sup>rd</sup> term and part of the 4<sup>th</sup> term we had to devote all our time to a Local Heritage Study. For my Local Heritage Study I decided to do St John Ambulance and the Air Ambulance, as I always drive past it but have never really taken much notice. So I thought this would be a great opportunity to find out more about St John's and how it was started in Whyalla.

Most of the information was provided by Mrs Smith and Mr Goodsell<sup>2</sup>. Other information was from the BHP Library and from interviews. I also sent a letter to the main office in Whyalla asking for information. I have also provided photographs of St John's and of the Air Ambulances. Other pictures were from newspaper cut-outs and magazines<sup>3</sup>.

I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I did studying it.

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Schilling was Country Superintendent St John Ambulance during the operation of the Air Ambulance.

<sup>2</sup> Max J. Goodsell, Air Operations Manager St John Air Ambulance appointed after Barry J. Clifford's resignation in March 1978. See Postscript p9.

<sup>3</sup> No photographs were included in the copy of Ms Robinson's document in SAAM's library files. The photographs included here are all from Barry Clifford's collection.

## History

Over the years St John workers in Whyalla and the St John management in Adelaide developed an uneasy wariness about each other. It was a similar relationship to that existing between the city as a whole and the capital city two gulfs and 230 miles or 395 kilometres away, depending on whether one travels by air or road. Adelaide's citizens would speak of the troublesome inhabitants of the State's second city, all of whom seemed to have a chip on their shoulders. People in Whyalla spoke depreciatingly of Adelaideans' 'end of the earth syndrome'. Adelaideans who had reached Port Wakefield, a bare ninety-five kilometres north of the capital, thought they were in the outback, so the Whyalla adage went, and by the time they were on the far side of Spencer Gulf they were in fear of falling off the planet! Whyalla's residents felt they were constantly overlooked by the decision-makers in the capital. If a decision about Whyalla was made, to close down a school, for example, or shut a post office, or to cancel an aeroplane route, then the decision would be made with reference to the wishes or needs of Whyalla citizens, who had usually struggled to build up the amenity concerned. Whyalla's people were therefore reluctant to concede power over any of their facilities to centralised – that is, Adelaide – control.

Whyalla in many respects typified all country towns. Its sense of isolation from Adelaide, its resentment of the dominance of the capital city, and its conviction that Adelaide's centralizers had perfected the art of ignoring the wishes of country people – all this was common to many country districts but was perhaps felt more strongly in Whyalla. In other respects Whyalla was untypical. It was firstly, a 'steel' town, and it was on the edge of one of the world's great deserts – for motorists driving West across Australia it was the last town before the Nullarbor Plain. Its smelters, steel mills and ship building yards rising up above a dreary landscape of sun-scorched red earth, salt pans and blue-grey saltbush could hardly be compared to the wheatfields rolling away from the grain silos of rural settlements like, say, Bordertown. Then, too, Whyalla was above all a company town. Nearly all its 34,000 residents either worked for, or in activities indirectly related to, the 'Big Australian' – Broken Hill Proprietary. Steel making, a sense of remoteness and working for 'the Company' together made for a different regional personality – one that was more defensive, more inward-looking, more intensely proud of being independent, and much less willing to accept direction from Adelaide. And so it was in St John operations no less than in other things; and nowhere was that more obvious than in the development of the St John Air Ambulance, which was another of St John's spectacular achievements during the 1960s.

In those early days the town ambulance was owned and run by BHP. The company generally welcomed the Brigade initiative, donating twenty pounds towards the new Division. In 1944 it gave the Division permission to use its ambulance should there be a need, and any Brigade member with a driver's licence could drive it. This offer was most often taken up for the Division's public duties at the races and football. Sometime after the war the Division made arrangements for its own ambulance, when it began hiring a Volkswagen Kombi van for its racetrack engagements. In the early 50s, too, the Whyalla Town Commission began taking an interest in ambulance work. It set up an ambulance committee, obtained a vehicle for use as an ambulance, and made arrangements for the local taxi drivers to staff it. The usual practise was that medical practitioners would call the vehicle out whenever it was needed for a case of accident or illness, with bystanders co-opted as stretcher bearers. In 1958 the Town Commission obtained a replacement vehicle through the St John Ambulance transport service in Adelaide but continued the arrangement with the taxi drivers. In 1961 the ambulance committee decided to employ a full-time manager and assistant for its service,

and perhaps because the chairman of the Town Commission, C.L. Ryan<sup>4</sup>, supported the Brigade strongly – he was President of the Ambulance Division and his wife was President of the Nursing Division – decided to enlist Brigade support in running the service.

The two men the ambulance committee appointed to operate its service were Don Jacquier and Bruce Battersby. Jacquier had been a car salesman in Adelaide, but had come to Whyalla as a sales representative for a medical firm. The entrepreneurial style he brought to his new job with St John owed something to that background. As a medical salesman he was one of those whom the committee had consulted when it had to make up its mind to establish a full-time service. Such were his salesman's skills that it chose him as its first full-time manager, a position he still held under St John patronage nearly a quarter of a century later. He took over in November 1961. At his disposal was a Holden 'EH' van and a Volkswagen Kombivan, which he ran from a tin shed the brigade used as their training hall. The tin shed had its limitations, so Jacquier soon began running the service from his own house. The service was known as 'the Whyalla Ambulance' but it was affiliated with St John. The team of volunteers who operated it after hours and at weekends were all brigade members and occupied the living room of Jacquier's home while waiting for calls. This meant he had four and sometimes more semi-permanent guests.

The Whyalla Ambulance was busy from the outset. Its main work was the same daily routine of all ambulance services, and in handling its caseload it carried everything from the usual injuries, accidents and heart attacks to cot deaths, drowning, and hospital and clinic transport cases. In addition to these and because Whyalla had no veterinary surgeon at the time, it took care of dogs and cats with broken bones.

After late 1962, when a radio base using the State ambulance frequency had been installed for the service, the workload increased appreciably. Ambulance staff were called on more frequently to drive cases to Adelaide, with which they could be in constant radio contact during the long trip south. The round trip to Adelaide meant that for ten hours or more Whyalla was without one of its two ambulances – a serious situation for an industrial city where a multi-casualty accident has a better chance of happening than in places more tranquil.

Jacquier's mind was typically full of ideas, schemes and plans for improving the service he took proprietorial pride in. Out of his discussions with C.L. Ryan came a proposal for solving the problem of the long round trip to Adelaide – why not obtain an aeroplane, which could be stationed in Whyalla and used for transporting to the capital not only local cases but also those of other Eyre peninsula towns as well? They put separate requests to



*Fig 1 - Pilot Barry Clifford loading VH- TYZ, Des's Aviation's Beech B36 Bonanza for a charter flight ex Whyalla in 1969. Barry was initially employed by Des's Aviation as a Flying Instructor for the Whyalla Aero Club, charter pilot and standby Air Ambulance pilot before joining St. John Ambulance Service in 1970.*

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<sup>4</sup> Charles L. Ryan was Town Clerk until 28 April 1945 when he was made inaugural Chairman of the newly-formed Whyalla Town Commission, which for the first time removed town governance from the control of BHP



Figure 2 - Barry Clifford with Cherokee 6 VH-PPK in the Department of Civil Aviation hangar at Whyalla Airport in 1969. This was the 3rd Cherokee purchased and the first -300 with the 300hp engine. It was also the last in the "Whyalla Ambulance Service SA" livery. Don Jaquier noted that the "Whyalla" reference raised parochial hackles in some regional centres and so later aircraft were painted in a "St John Ambulance" livery.

the St John Council for an 'air ambulance' but by this time Hayward<sup>5</sup> and his Council had already committed St John to the construction of a large new ambulance centre to house the Whyalla Ambulance, and were in no mood for grandiose schemes like that. A promoter with Jacquier's enterprise does not accept refusal easily, and so Jacquier fell to devising other means for obtaining the aircraft he was convinced the Whyalla Ambulance needed. He guessed that Whyalla's population, then about 8,000<sup>6</sup>, would justify the cost of about 8,000 pounds to buy a second-hand light aircraft, and that

many residents, he reckoned, would provide sufficient income for the service in carriage fees to meet both running and maintenance costs plus loan repayments. In 1965 he hired a Piper 235 Cherokee four-seater for several weeks to test his theory, then because he thought the scheme economically feasible, he undertook to buy the 'plane.

Hayward and the St John Council remained unaware that Jacquier's aeronautical dreams were taking physical form like this. They could not be kept ignorant indefinitely. Their illumination occurred on an auspicious occasion for the Whyalla St John Branch – the weekend of the opening of the new St John Ambulance Centre. A group



Figure 3 - Pilot Barry Clifford emerging from the third Seneca VH-STU, purchased in March 1974). OIC Don Jacquier is on the wing.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Edward Hayward. He was best known for owning and operating the John Martins chain of department stores in SA and for instigating the Adelaide Christmas pageant. He was chairman of the St John Council in SA when in 1952 it became responsible for ambulance services in the State. He died on 13 Aug 1993.

<sup>6</sup> This may be a typographical error. Whyalla's population increased rapidly after BHP's establishment of its steelworks in 1958. By 1961, a year or two before Jacquier was contemplating the need for an air ambulance, it had reached 14,000, and it continued increasing to a peak of 33,000 in 1976 (note on pg 2 Ms Robinson refers to a population of 34,000, so she may have been referring to the earlier peak). It declined thereafter with the closure of the shipyards in 1978 and by the last census in 2016 stood at 21,500.

[<https://www.whyalla.sa.gov.au/our-city/history/history-1960-1980>] [<https://www.whyalla.sa.gov.au/our-city/history/history-1960-1980>]



of Council members flew up from Adelaide for the opening. Flight bookings that weekend were heavy, and some Council members had to take whatever seats were available on light 'planes. Jacquier arranged for his Piper Cherokee to be available. Not knowing who owned it, some of them



Figure 4 - Seneca VH-STW (foreground) and Cherokee 6 VH-ST5 in Keith on 23/3/1975.

were grateful to accept seats on it. The opening of the building took place on the Saturday afternoon, the visitors stayed overnight, and most of them flew home on the Sunday. A group of them, including Hayward, were standing waiting for their flight at the Whyalla airport when a call came over the public address system, "Would the pilot of the St John air ambulance please report to his 'plane?" Too taken aback to demand explanations, Hayward and his companions then

had the unique opportunity of seeing the latest St John enterprise go into action on its very first case. Jacquier, however, suspected that there would be angry 'phone calls from Adelaide on the morrow, and to pre-empt that he gave Hayward just enough time to reach his home then rang him there. "We have called our first 'plane the 'Sir Edward Hayward'", he explained, "and we wonder if you could come here again next weekend to perform the naming ceremony?" Hayward's opposition ended there and then. He duly returned and, with due ceremony and the assistance of CV.L. Ryan, withdrew the flag of The Order from the nose section of the 'plane, revealing the magical words bold-scripted from the door to the propeller.

The air ambulance was a great success from its first day of operations. It was kept so busy ferrying patients between the Eyre Peninsula towns and Adelaide that before long, the Whyalla ambulance committee had to charter a second 'plane. By 1969 the service was employing two pilots full-time, both of them Brigade members. That year they logged 600 hours flying time in case work, the following year they did 900 hours, and in 1971, 1000 hours, saving some 150,000 miles (240,000 kms) of ground travel. In 1971, too, the service bought its second 'plane, another Piper Cherokee which took the name 'C.L. Ryan'. By this time the Whyalla ambulance centre boasted not only its two air ambulances but fifteen ground ambulances as well<sup>7</sup>. The air ambulance service continued to grow under



Figure 5- Seneca II VH-SVM, purchased in July 1975, on the Whyalla apron. This was the first of seven Seneca IIs purchased during the life of the St John Air Ambulance.

<sup>7</sup> Glen Woods, ex Secretary of the St John Council, when commenting on this document, noted that while controlled by St John in Whyalla, only 4 or 5 were based in there. There were also one each in Ceduna, Cleve, Coober Pedy, Cowell, Elliston, Kimba, Lock, Streaky Bay, Tumby Bay and Wudinna.

Jacquier's guidance. By 1984 it had six full-time pilots and three aircraft, two of which were now based in Adelaide. It was logging over 2,500 hours flying time a year and was annually carrying 1,400 patients. In the two decades since Jacquier had bought his first Piper Cherokee, the service had owned no fewer than twenty-five aircraft.

It no longer used the single-engined Cherokees, having long since switched to roomier twin-engined 'planes, which were more suitable for ambulance work.

In the intervening years it had used a succession of Piper Senecas, Chieftains and more recently, the eight passenger Navajos.<sup>8</sup> These 'planes were flying far and wide, all over South Australia and into every other State as well. By that time, too, Whyalla had become one of the strongest St John centres in South Australia, if not in all Australia, or indeed the entire St John world. Members of the local



*Figure 6 - VH-SIN at Whyalla, acquired in August 1976 - the first of two Navajos purchased by St John Air Ambulance.*

Whyalla Brigade divisions by then were spending a vast amount of time on voluntary duty either with their division or on the ambulance service – 20,000 hours annually, or about 3% of the 620,000 hours South Australian Brigade members put in that year, or roughly 1.7% of the all-Australia figure of 1,283,000 hours. In the meantime, Jacquier had acquired a reputation as one of the great characters of South Australian Aviation - his aerial ambulance service nothing quite so much as a busy small airline that had achieved respectability in the industry through the valiant pioneering and



*Figure 7 - Chieftain VH-STO after delivery in December 1976. Left to right: Operations Manager Barry Clifford, His Excellency Governor Sir Keith Seaman, Lady Seaman, the Governor's PA and Ray Schilling.*

fast talking of its venturesome proprietor. He travelled widely in his quest to become an expert in all aspects of the airline industry, including a round-the-world trip in 1975, when he visited the Piper factory in the USA, the Paris Air Show, and the Biggin Hill Air Display in the UK. He was Vice-President of the General Aviation Association of Australia; his name and photograph appeared often in at least the Whyalla News; he received invitations to write papers for learned journals and to address seminars on aviation medicine; other States were

<sup>8</sup> The first Chieftain purchase (VH-STO) was actually *after* Navajo VH-SIN so this sentence might be better read as "In the intervening years it had used a succession of Piper Senecas, Navajos and, more recently, ten-seat Chieftains." Ref. Appendix – St John Air Ambulance Fleet List on page 12.



developing air ambulance services that looked remarkably like what had evolved in South Australia; and he was known widely throughout St John circles as 'Biggles'.



*Figure 8 - The blessing of VH-STO, the first Chieftain acquired by the St John Ambulance in December 1976. Left to right: Dr Fred Gilligan, the RAH's ICU Head is at the microphone; Phil Ferrier; pilot Barry Clifford; Bishop T.T. Reed, the St John Chaplain; Hon Don Banfield, the Minister of Health; and Murray Norton. A second Chieftain, VH-TTX was acquired in January 1982 and a third, VH-NPA in October 1987. The latter two were the only aircraft transferred to the RFDS in 1990.*

These achievements had not been without their costs to Jacquier, for his 'airline' had had to pass through some pockets of severe turbulence. Firstly, as the aerial ambulance service expanded it became clear that the State needed such a facility; and the question then arose as to whether or not such a vital utility should be located in Adelaide rather than Whyalla. Further, should such a State-wide ambulance service continue to be controlled by an autonomous regional body, the Whyalla ambulance committee, or should it come under direct St John Council control? To investigate questions like these the St John Council in 1974 engaged a retired R.A.F. Wing Commander, Frank Davison, then working as an executive for Hayward's firm, John Martin Limited. Davison flew over to Whyalla, reviewed Jacquier's operations and wrote a report recommending that the Whyalla set-up should become the nucleus of a wider State air ambulance system, with stronger links to the St John Council but with its regional autonomy retained. That was, perhaps, having a bet each way, but at least it would have helped allay Whyalla fears that Adelaide was bidding for a take-over. On the other hand, it might not have entirely satisfied Jacquier that his personal performance was not under continuous scrutiny by the St John Council executive, some members of which conveyed the impression that they disapproved of his 'wheeler-dealer' style.

The next problem Jacquier had to face was 'rebellion' by his pilots. From about 1976 they had been grumbling about aspects of his management. Things came to a head in January 1978 when the pilots submitted a long report to Jacquier on the operation of the aerial ambulance service. They marked it 'Private and Confidential' but sent copies to the chairman of the Whyalla ambulance committee Murray Norton, a local real estate agent; to the St John Council general manager, Phil Ferrier; and to the St John Council secretary, Glen A. Woods. This report alleged various charges against Jacquier. It accused him of an *"unbending attitude"* and a *"flat refusal to do anything about problems"* with the service as identified by the pilots. It said that to make economies, he was forcing them into breaches of air navigation regulations, for example, requiring them to fly aircraft that had not undergone mandatory maintenance servicing, to fly longer hours than permissible, to carry patients without adequate restraining braces, to call into sub-standard airstrips, and to fly aircraft that were left in an unhygienic state from previous trips. It concluded by claiming that illegal operations void all insurances, crew licences, and operator licences, and risk lives... *"The patients and medical personnel have the right to expect they are being carried legally, but frequently go with total and often misplaced trust in the legality of the operation. Because we are a community service, the standards of our operation should be impeccable. Our nil accident record since our inception is not because of management policy, but in spite of it!"*

The day after the pilots had submitted their report Norton convened a meeting of his committee to consider it. Ferrier and Woods came over from Adelaide, and Mrs. Ekblom, the Mayor of Whyalla, was also present. Norton said he had *"complete confidence"* in Jacquier, who had *"never pressured pilots"* into flying unairworthy 'planes. He also said he *"considered the pilots were lazy and were not doing their job"*. This point of view was in accord with Jacquier, who would later claim the problem arose from the influence of one of the 'stirrers' within the pilots' ranks. To state the pilots' case, B.J. Clifford, the chief pilot and operations manager was present. He said Jacquier *"had not supported him"* and had not given him *"proper opportunity to run the operations"*. Speaking for the St John Council, Ferrier said *"the Operation must not be jeopardised because of costs"*, and that *"there should be a greater contribution to the flying subsidies by HQ"*.

To gain a clearer view of the rights and wrongs of each side to this dispute, the St John Council subsequently sent Davison back to Whyalla to make another report. This was not very favourable to the Jacquier side, for it recommended that he should not be directly responsible for the air ambulance operations. This placed Ferrier and the Council in a quandary. On the one hand they had Davison's adverse report, but on the other they knew the ambulance committee in Whyalla was behind Jacquier and would interpret any move to shift him sideways as an unacceptable attempt by Adelaide to play 'Big Brother'.

Ferrier's way out of this problem was to call for a further review. This time he engaged the firm of management consultants, P.A.Consulting Services Pty Ltd. One of the P.A. Consultants. R.E. Morris duly carried out an investigation then submitted his report in March 1978. He found that Jacquier's leadership style had been a contributing factor to his difficulties with the pilots. Thus, Morris wrote, Jacquier *"made most of the key decisions"* and kept *"tight control"* over the *"top down"* decision-making process, as a result of which *"the key problem"* was *"the lack of top management delegation"*. At the same time, Morris went on, Jacquier had *"become bogged down by an expanding volume of routine decision making"*. His *"first love was the air ambulance service"*, and he *"found it quicker to move in and make decisions in this area than to develop an executive who can do the job effectively"*. Morris drew other conclusions. He thought that Jacquier needed to work on his communication skills, that the air operations procedures could be tightened, that financial controls could be improved, and that, in relation to the pilots, who, he found, were working in an intolerable



situation, industrial problems could have been handled better. On the other hand, he concluded, *“on the road operations side of the service, morale and team spirit were excellent”, and “all in all, the Upper Eyre Peninsula undertaking in both its road and aerial operations, was giving excellent service to patients and member branches”.*

Morris’s report went on to say that the way out of the various problems he had isolated was for the UEP ambulance committee to play a more active role in supervising the service Jacquier was running in its name. At the same time the St John Council should exercise more direct influence over the service by appointing three representatives to sit on its committee. These recommendations were duly implemented. A former R.A.A.F. Squadron Leader, Max Goodsell, was recruited as Air Operations manager, while the new St John Council General Manager, D.W. Jellis (the successor to Ferrier, who had retired in July 1978), joined the committee, along with John Rawes, the Council’s finance and administration manager, and Ray Schilling, the ambulance transport service’s superintendent of country operations.



*Figure 9 - Pilot Barry Clifford and ambulance road crew loading a patient on Chieftain VH-TTX in Renmark c1984.*

The service settled down after that, evolving into the St John Air Ambulance for South Australia. Its administration remained centred on Whyalla, but, with two of its three ‘planes based in Adelaide, the centre of gravity of its operations had shifted. This could be seen in the fact that, of the 1,056 separate flights its aircraft made in 1985, no fewer than 977 were either from, to or through Adelaide, whereas only 117 were from, to or through Whyalla. It had frequent interstate calls to retrieve South Australians in need – eighty of these in 1983, or 7.5% of the total. These made it a truly nation-wide service but also meant that Adelaide was its natural focus. Whether or not the balance of its operations tilted in favour of Whyalla or Adelaide, the fact remained that, like country services generally, it had been another development where the provincial hinterland had led the capital. Jacquier could take pride in the justification of his vision, for what he had started, continued

on, setting new records of hours and kilometres flown, patients carried, and hours of duty performed by the brigade's team of voluntary attendants. In doing so it had become not only one of the key elements in St John's State-wide network of ambulance facilities but a vital part of the State's system of health services. Government acknowledgment of the latter point was perhaps apparent during 1981, in the official recognition that year of Jacquier's contribution to aerial ambulance work. He received the Medal of the Order of Australia – a decoration he could wear alongside his St John awards, his Brigade long service medal and the cross of an Officer in the Order he had received six years previously.

## Postscript

Ray Schilling, in the Preface to Samantha Robinson's history, says she wrote it in around 1987. The St John Air Ambulance was still operating then, but ceased not long thereafter – which suggests a postscript to bring the story to a close is necessary.

Nigel Daw, in Vol 19 No 1 Apr-Jun 1990 of the *South Australian Air Journal* consulted with Don Jacquier in writing the final chapter. Jacquier had retired in 1987 when control of the Air Ambulance was transferred to Adelaide. On 30 March 1990, it was announced that the St John Air Ambulance would be merged with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) with effect from close of business on 30 June 1990.

The RFDS had been operating in parts of northern South Australia since 1938 from its Broken Hill base, to which the NSW and SA Governments both contributed, and from Alice Springs since the base was established there in 1939. It did not base aircraft in South Australia until after the establishment of its Port Augusta base in 1954. Nigel Daw reported operations beginning there 'in the very early 1960s' with Cherokee Six VH-FDY followed Beech 95 VH-FDX around the same time. He says Initially the aircraft were flown by Broken Hill 'Silver City Air Taxis' pilots under contract.

The Bush Church Aid Society had also operated an aero-medical service from Ceduna since the 1930s, and its Beech Baron VH-FMS was taken over by the RFDS after the establishment of the Port Augusta base.

The RFDS did not, however, base aircraft in Adelaide until after the takeover of the St John Air Ambulance Adelaide base in 1990.

Barry Clifford, who Samantha Robinson notes was operations manager at the time of the 1978 St John Air Ambulance pilots' dispute, flew for the organisation for its entire twenty-two-year life, including the first two years when the pilots were provided under contract by Trevor Brougham of Des's Aviation Company. He was its chief pilot for six years. He resigned as Operations Manager in March 1978 after eight years in the role, in the bitter aftermath of the



Figure 10 - Barry Clifford on the wing of one of the St John Air Ambulance Chieftains, late in his St John's career c1989.

pilots' dispute that Samantha Robinson describes in her history. He then transferred to the Adelaide base from Whyalla and returned to line flying. With the transfer of operations to the RFDS on 1 July 1990, he continued flying on the same roster with only a change in uniform involved – but not for long. The following year he went to Mount Gambier as the owner, operator and chief flying instructor of Mount Gambier Ultralight Aviation, before moving to Queensland in 1993 in the same roles with Suncoast Ultralight Aviation in Caloundra. He came back to Adelaide in 1997 and flew for Tony Kingham's Airlines of South Australia until retirement in 2004, with some flying during this period also with Dick Lang Desert Trek. By then he had accumulated 15,000 flight hours, including 2,000 instructional hours on Jabiru Ultralight aircraft.

Barry has been a member of the South Australian Aviation Museum since 2006 and has contributed an extensive file of documents and news clippings about the Air Ambulance to the Museum's library. The file includes Samantha Robinson's excellent history that is reproduced here.

Samantha Robinson notes that the St John Air Ambulance achieved a 'nil accident record' during the period she wrote about. That record continued to the closure of operations in 1990. Nigel Daw stated in his 1990 article that only one incident with the fleet was recorded during its entire period of operations, which was a bent propeller suffered by VH-PEU at Cleve. Nigel also noted that Jacquier had told him that at the height of its operations, the St John Air Ambulance flew 80% of air ambulance flights in South Australia, with the remaining 20% by the RFDS. Jacquier also claimed that for its entire operating life the St John Air Ambulance remained financially viable with costs met by the users. The service never needed to subsidise costs with donations.<sup>9</sup>

Donald Goldberg Jacquier OAM, who was born on 13 September 1929, died on 19 February 2001 and is buried in the Whyalla Cemetery. He had been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for community service in the 1981 Australia Day Honours.

**Mike Milln**  
**History Group Member**  
**South Australian Aviation Museum Inc**  
**June 2021**

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<sup>9</sup> This is not borne out in a memorandum from General Manager Phil Ferrier to the Chairman of 16 January 1978 as part of St John's response to the pilot grievances then being investigated, in which he states "...*direct and indirect subsidies from the St John Headquarters approximate \$70,000 pa at present.*" That constituted 10% of the Air Ambulances annual revenue at the time.

## APPENDIX – St John Air Ambulance Fleet List <sup>10</sup>

Reg	Type	C/N	Acquired	Sold	Remarks
PEU	PA28/235 Cherokee	28-10451	220266	100966	'Sir Edward Hayward'
POI	PA32/260 Cherokee 6	32-227	100966	250567	'Sir Edward Hayward'
PPK	PA32/300 Cherokee 6	32-40118	190567	151069	'Sir Edward Hayward'
PDG	PA32/300 Cherokee 6	32-40482	101069	151270	'Sir Edward Hayward' [Not painted on]
RUL	PA32/300 Cherokee 6	32-40924	271170	080672	'Sir Edward Hayward V'
BMH	PA32/300 Cherokee 6	32-40509	190871	240173	'Chas L. Ryan'
STJ	PA34/200 Seneca	34-50077	040472	071808	'Sir Edward Hayward VI'
STV	PA32/300 Cherokee 6	32-740003	111272	290474	'Chas L. Ryan II' [Commissioned 270374]
STW	PA34/200 Seneca	34-7350220	220673	180875	'Sir Edward Hayward VII' [" 270374]
STU	PA34/200 Seneca	34-7450004	210374	040477	'Chas L. Ryan III' [" 270374]
STS	PA32/300 Cherokee 6	32-7440171	120275	130176	
SVM	PA34/200T Seneca II	34-7570189	240775	260978	'Sir Edward Hayward VIII'
BTW	PA34/200 Seneca	34-7450107	131175	050177	Replacement for STS
SMM	PA34/200 Seneca	34-7450084	170376	141077	
SIN	PA31/310 Navajo	31-785	120876	040477	
STO	PA31/350 Chieftain	31-7652148	221276	080282	
COB	PA34/200T Seneca II	34-7570012	141077	190678	
STP	PA34/200T Seneca II	34-7770402	160178	081080	
KAE	PA34/200T Seneca II	34-7670251	260978	111279	Replacement for SVM
STT	PA34/200T Seneca II	34-7870414	240979	201082	
STN	PA34/200T Seneca II	34-7970100	091080	280284	Replacement for STP
TTX	PA31/350 Chieftain	31-8152034	200182		
AUW	PA34/200T Seneca II	34-8170056	201082	231087	
KTS	PA31/310 Navajo	31-7912014	240284	210688	
NPA	PA31/350 Chieftain	31-8452016	151087		'Don Jacquier'

<sup>10</sup> Reproduced from South Australian Air Journal Vol 19 No 1 Apr-Jun 1990 Edited by Nigel Daw, who noted "Special thanks to Don Jacquier for his information on the Air Ambulance and to John Streeter for his assistance with the production of the fleet list."