



Air Marshal The Honourable SIR COLIN HANNAH KCMG, KCVO, KBE, CB

(1914 – 1978)



Sir Colin was Patron of the Club from 1972 to 1976

Sir Colin Hannah was elected to Life Membership of the Club in 1977.

Sir Colin Thomas Hannah (1914-1978), air force officer and governor, was born on 22 December 1914 at Menzies, Western Australia, son of Thomas Howard Hannah, public servant, and his wife Johanna, née Frame, both native-born. The family shifted from Bunbury to Perth where Thomas officiated as clerk of the Local Court and later as a magistrate.

Educated (1929-30) at the Hale School, Colin obtained his Junior certificate and excelled at sport. In February 1933 he joined the Militia, serving as a gunner with the 8th Field Battery; six months later he took a post as a junior clerk in the State Public Service and was employed in the Crown Law Department.

On 15 January 1935 Hannah enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force. Sent as an air cadet to No.1 Flying Training School, Point Cook, Victoria, he gained his flying badge in June 1936 and was commissioned next month. His first posting was to No.22 Squadron at Richmond, New South Wales.

We thank the History Interest Group and other volunteers who have researched and prepared these Notes. The series will be progressively expanded and developed. They are intended as casual reading for the benefit of Members, who are encouraged to advise of any inaccuracies in the material.

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Moving to Laverton, Victoria, in May 1937, he joined No.23 Squadron as adjutant. In March 1938 his unit was transferred to the new air base at Pearce, Western Australia. At Christ Church, Claremont, on 5 January 1939 he married Patricia Treacey Gwenyth Gordon with Anglican rites.

Flight Lieutenant Hannah travelled to England in July 1939 for armament training with the Royal Air Force; he began the course less than a week before the outbreak of World War II. Returning to Australia in March 1940, he was employed at No.1 Armament School, Point Cook, and at base headquarters, Laverton. In May he was posted to Air Force Headquarters, Melbourne, for duties on the technical staff. He was promoted acting squadron leader in September. Appointed deputy director of armament in 1941, he rose to temporary wing commander in April 1942.

Arriving at Milne Bay, Papua, in October 1943, Hannah joined No.6 Squadron, a Beaufort bomber unit operating against the Japanese. During a familiarization flight his aircraft strayed over Kiriwina Island and was fired on by allied anti-aircraft batteries: he was fortunate to receive nothing more than a nick in the forehead. He assumed command of the squadron in November, was made temporary group captain in the following month and led No.71 Wing in January-February 1944. Evacuated ill, he spent almost six weeks in hospital at Laverton before re-joining No.6 Squadron at Goodenough Island. In September he became senior air staff officer on the headquarters of Western Area, Perth, and held the command from June 1945 to May 1946.

In 1947 Hannah attended the RAF Staff College, Andover, England, and was subsequently SASO at RAAF Overseas Headquarters, London. Back home, in May 1949 he took over the base at Amberley, Queensland. There, in August 1950 he was given temporary command of No.82 Wing (Lincoln bombers). In 1951 he was appointed O.B.E. He was posted to RAAF Headquarters in September as director of personnel services; from July 1952 he was director-general of personnel. Appointed an aide-de-camp to Queen Elizabeth II, he was largely responsible for planning RAAF involvement in the royal tour of 1954 and that year he was elevated to C.B.E. While studying at the Imperial Defence College, London, he was promoted air commodore in January 1955. He was SASO, headquarters, Far East Air Force, Singapore, from January 1956 and was appointed C.B. (1959) for his service during the Malayan Emergency.

Returning to Melbourne, in March 1959 Hannah became director-general of plans and policy, and in August led an advance party which began the Department of Air's transfer to Canberra. As DGPP, he represented the RAAF on the joint planning committee. In December 1961 he was appointed deputy chief of the Air Staff and on 17 May 1962 was promoted acting air vice marshal (substantive, January 1963). After heading Operational Command at Penrith, New South Wales, from February 1965 to December 1967, he took charge of Support Command in Melbourne. On 1 January 1970 he was promoted air marshal and made Chief of the Air Staff for what was expected to be a three-year term. He was appointed K.B.E. in 1971.

In January 1972 it was announced that Hannah would be the next governor of Queensland - the first RAAF member to attain such a position. He was sworn in on 21 March and hailed as 'a young thinking man of action . . . an experienced administrator with a no-nonsense reputation . . . a man with the flexibility of mind and ability to mix with people, so necessary for a governor'. Nevertheless, by late 1975 he was involved in controversy. Following several petty incidents which had attracted adverse publicity, at a Brisbane Chamber of Commerce luncheon on 15 October Hannah criticized the 'fumbling ineptitude' of E. G. Whitlam's Federal Labor government for placing Australia in 'its present economic state'.

Convinced that Hannah lacked political impartiality, the Commonwealth government advised the Queen to revoke his dormant commission to serve as administrator in the event of the absence or incapacity of the governor-general. The Queensland premier (Sir) Joh Bjelke-Petersen stated publicly that he wanted Hannah's term extended, but it was allowed to expire on 20 March 1977. Hannah had been appointed K.C.M.G. and a knight and deputy-prior of the Order of St John in 1972; in August 1977 he was appointed K.C.V.O.

Sir Colin was stocky in build, with light blue eyes, a fair complexion and straw-coloured hair. He was regarded as a bluff, informal man, who was easy to work with, though he had a 'short fuse'. Survived by his wife and daughter, he died of myocardial infarction on 22 May 1978 at his Surfers Paradise home; he was accorded a state funeral and was cremated. A portrait (1979) by Paul Fitzgerald hangs in the RAAF officers mess, Point Cook.

Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents
- *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 14, (MUP), 1996 by Chris Clark