

**WELCOME REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE PETER
UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA AT A
RECEPTION TO MARK THE 85TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FOUNDING OF THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE,
WEDNESDAY 8TH MAY 2013**

Good evening everybody and a very happy 85th birthday to all of you. It is a great pleasure for me and my wife to welcome you all here to Government House to celebrate this great anniversary of a great organisation.

As you all know, the Royal Flying Doctor Service began as a dream of the Reverend John Flynn - an outback minister of the Presbyterian Church. But perhaps what is not so well known is that in 1917 the Reverend Flynn received an inspirational letter from a Lieutenant Clifford Peel, a Victorian medical student, with an interest in aviation. The young airman and war hero suggested the use of aviation to bring medical help to the Outback. Shot down in France, Lieutenant Peel died at just 24 years of age and never knew that his letter became a blueprint for the creation of the Flying Doctor Service.

The inspired Flynn spent the next 10 years starting up an aerial medical service. It was hard going until a long-time supporter of Flynn, a Mr H V McKay, left Flynn a large bequest to undertake what McKay called an "aerial xperiment". About the same time as he received the bequest, Flynn met up with a founder of Qantas, Hudson Fysh. This meeting led to the signing of an agreement to operate an aerial medical ambulance from Cloncurry in Queensland. As is well known, the first flight took place from Cloncurry on 17th May 1928 - 85 years ago this month. That plane was a single engine, timber and fabric bi-plane named 'Victory' (leased by QANTAS for two shillings per mile flown).

There are many interesting stories to be found in the 85-year history of the RFDS, but time does not permit me to rehearse them this evening. However, one thing that I am pretty confident about is that the pilot of that first flight and the two doctors who were with him would never have dreamed for a moment that the Aerial Medical Service, as it was then called, and which in its first year flew 50 flights to 26 destinations and treated 225 patients,¹ would have grown as it has over the past 85 years. In 1942 it was renamed the Flying Doctor Service and in 1955, the Flying Doctor Service added the prefix 'Royal' to its name; an honour that was granted by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in recognition of the Service's valued contribution to outback Australia.

Today, the RFDS owns a fleet of 61 fully instrumented aircraft with the very latest in navigation technology. RFDS pilots annually fly the equivalent of 25 round trips to the moon and are responsible for the care of over 270,000 patients.² Not a bad record is it?

The Service has been active in Tasmania since 1960. I have to confess that it was not until I became the patron the Royal Flying Doctor Service (Tasmania) did I realize that there are people living in rural Tasmania (and on the surrounding islands) who are just as isolated and in as much need of access to medical care as those living in the outback. And, in addition there are also people who require air transport between Tasmanian cities in order to access specialised services.

It is a wonderful service and those associated with it are rightly proud of the work that it does. I say well done to them and also well

¹ Attachment to email dated 17 April 2013 from Mary Frost, Executive Officer RFDS Tasmania, to David Owen.

² Supra

done to all the many sponsors who support the RFDS in Tasmania and of course, right across the country.

This evening is an occasion for celebration and I invite you all to join with me in a toast to the Royal Flying Doctor Service.