

BUTLER, HENRY JOHN (1889-1924), aviator, was born on 9 November 1889 at Yorketown, South Australia, son of John James Butler, wheat-farmer and his wife Sarah Ann, nee Cook. Harry Butler showed his enthusiasm and aptitude for mechanics by building models of primitive aircraft while still at school in Koolywurtie; he later accorded farm-work a lower priority than collaboration with a neighbour and lifelong mentor S.C. Crawford in building and flying one of Australia's early aeroplanes. Among the February 1915 candidates, Butler alone gained entrance as an aeromechanic to the Australian Flying School at Point Cook, Victoria. Commissioned three weeks after joining the Royal Flying Corps in 1916, he became fighting-instructor at Turnberry, Scotland in 1917, and chief fighting instructor at No. 2 Yorkshire School of Aerial Fighting in 1918. He alternated teaching with studying German aerial combat tactics over France, and he received the Air Force Cross in 1918.

Demobilized as captain, Butler brought back to Australia in 1919 a £2000 Bristol monoplane, a type which had proved its superiority in speed and manoeuvrability. He also purchased an Avro 504-K and three 110 horsepower Le Rhone rotary engines: he converted the Avro to carry two passengers on joy-rides at £5 for fifteen minutes. The monoplane, popularly termed the 'Red Devil', made the first Australian mail-service flight over water on 6 August 1919 when Butler covered the distance of 67 miles (108km) from Adelaide to his home town, Minlaton, in twenty-seven minutes, reaching an altitude of 15,000 feet (4570m). With 'luck, pluck and ability' as a formula for success, he also raised funds for patriotic purposes in several daring aerobatic exhibitions, notably a stunt-flying display before a crowd of 20,000 at Unley oval on 23 August 1919, the provision of a low-flying escort for Prime Minister W.M. Hughes's [q.v.] train from Salisbury to Adelaide that year, and the winning of an aerial Peace Loan Derby on 7 September 1920.

With Crawford's administrative help and the mechanical services of H.A. Kauper [q.v.], Butler operated as the Captain Harry J. Butler & Kauper Aviation Co. Ltd. The firm used the Albert Park field which later became South Australia's government airport; it was voluntarily liquidated in 1921, as a result of the public's waning interest in aerobatics. Butler retained the equipment and operated on his own until his flying career was terminated by a crash south of Minlaton on 10 February 1922. Upon recovery he established an aviation and motor-engineering garage at Minlaton and in 1924 became a director of Butler, Nicholson Ltd, motor distributors and engineers.

He died suddenly on 30 July 1924 from an unsuspected cerebral abscess and was buried in North Road cemetery, North Adelaide. He was survived by his wife Elsa Birch Gibson, a nurse from Bool Lagoon whom he had married on 21 July 1920 at St Paul's Anglican Church, Adelaide. The restored 'Red Devil' is housed in the Captain Harry Butler Memorial Museum at Minlaton; an oil portrait of him is held by the Art Gallery of South Australia.

#### References:

1. E.R. Burnett-Reid, 'The Harry Butler story', *Aviation Hist Sac of Aust.* J,4 (1963), no 4; *Advertiser (Adel)*, 5 July, 7, 30 Aug 1919; *Observer (Adel)*, 14 Jan 1922, 2 Aug 1924; H. Butler collection, PRG 207, and letters to G. Ward (SAA).
2. MacGillivray, Leith G. Butler, Henry John (1889-1924)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7, 1891-1939, A-Ch.. Melbourne University Press, 1979.

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## HAY-TAYLOR, ELSA BIRCH (1897-1989)

Elsa Hay-Taylor, formerly Butler, nee Gibson, was born on 9 September 1897 to James and Mary Gibson (nee Shaw) at Bool Lagoon, about 20 miles from Naracoorte in the South East of South Australia, where her father had taken up a selection in the Hundred of Robertson, after being a coach-driver between Kingston and Robe with his brother, George.

Elsa Birch was the third child and second daughter of a family of eight siblings. Her mother died in 1910, when she was thirteen and her mother forty, after giving birth to her youngest child and contracting septacimea. Elsa went to school at the Hundred of Robertson (later Bool Lagoon) school, helped around the farm, and declared her interest in being a nurse. These early years are recorded in an oral history interview in the 'S.A. Speaks' series, of which a tape and transcript have been lodged in the Mortlock Library.

Because her father disagreed with her choice of vocation, she became, at his exhortation, a teacher. After completing her training at the Model School in Adelaide, she taught at Caroline and Koolawurtie. Here she met Harry Butler, pioneer aviator, whom she married in 1920. After his death, following a crash, Elsa began training for her vocation as a nurse at the Royal Adelaide Hospital which she followed with further training at the Harley St Clinic in London, a record of which is given in Joan Dundin's account of nursing in S.A.

During World War II she was matron at 'Ashridge', a converted home, in Hertfordshire, where she nursed hundreds of wounded including evacuees from Dunkirk. On her return to Australia in 1946 she was first housekeeper at the Royal Adelaide and later Matron at St Margaret's Convalescent Hospital at Semaphore. In 1960 she married Alexander Hay-Taylor, Chairman of St Margaret's Board, and after trips overseas, settled at Aldinga until her stay in nursing homes in Pt Noarlunga and Goolwa. Elsa Birch Hay-Taylor died on Monday 3 April 1989.

Leith McGillivray

Most of the material relating to Captain Butler was copied from originals held by the captain Harry Butler Memorial, Minlaton, through Minlaton District Council, in 1966.

Some of the photographs and the papers relating to the nursing career of Elsa Birch Butler, later Elsa Birch Hay-Taylor, were donated to the Mortlock Library by her niece, Dr Leith McGillivray, in 1990.

R.N.A. March 1990

1. Photographs - family photographs and portrait photographs of Henry John Butler and Elsa Birch Butler and photographs relating to flights of Captain Harry Butler.  
c. 1900 - c. 1948. 1 volume.
2. Logbook of Butler and Kauper Aviation Company.  
1919-21. 1 volume. Photoprint copy.
3. Le Rhone Engine Instruction Book  
Gnome and Le Rhone Engine Company, London.  
c. 1919. 1 volume. Photoprint copy.
4. History of Harry Butler's Bristol Monoplane. Bristol Aeroplane Company Adelaide.  
1958. Photoprint copy.
5. Scrapbooks on Captain Harry Butler. 1919-22. 2 volumes. Photoprint copies.
6. Souvenir pamphlets comprising: 'Up Up Among the Clouds', souvenir of Captain H.J. Butler, Minlaton, 1919. 4p. Photoprint copy. 'The Call of the Clouds', souvenir of Unley Aviation Day. Vardon & Sons, Adelaide, 1919. 7p. Photoprint copy. The Sporting Index.  
1919. 4p. Photoprint copy.
7. Souvenir aerial postcards carried by Captain H.J. Butler on his flight across Gulf St Vincent. 1919. 4 items. Photoprint copies.
8. Note dropped from the air by Captain Butler to his old school at Koolywurtie.  
1919. 1 item. Photographic copy.
9. Letters from Harry Butler to his parents. 1919. 4 items. Photoprint copies.
10. Souvenir certificate of flight with Captain H.J. Butler. c.1920. 1 item. Printed.
11. Nursing and midwifery certificates of Elsa Birch Butler issued in Australia and the United Kingdom.  
1928-36. 5 items. Printed, with manuscript additions.
12. Nursing correspondence of Elsa Birch Butler consisting of correspondence from Central Midwives Board London, British Red Cross Ministry of Health, Charing Cross Hospital, Dr Warner, General Nursing Council for England and Wales and Florence Nightingale Memorial Committee, South Australian Branch,  
1936-48. 1 cm. Typescript.
13. Testimonials to nursing skills of Elsa Birch Butler including testimonials from Adelaide Hospital Matron and surgeons, the Agent General for South Australia, Shardoloes Hospital U.K., Ministry of Health U.K. and Ashbridge Hospital U.K.  
1929-46. 12 items Manuscript and typescript.
14. Nurses record of service of Elsa Birch Butler.  
1929-46. 1 item. Printed, with manuscript additions.

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15. Craft prize certificates of Elsa Birch Butler awarded for china painting at South Australian Chamber of Manufacturers' Royal Adelaide Exhibition.  
1952. 2 items. Printed, with manuscript additions
  16. Invitations to Elsa Birch Butler from Government House.  
1952. 2 items. Printed, with manuscript additions.
  17. Letter to Elsa Birch Butler from Frank ... concerning Mrs Dowling's entitlement to an allotment of land.  
1948. 1 item. Manuscript.
  18. Photographs: Harry Butler in a racing car; Butler in a plane with children; 'Menu' from his time in the Air Force  
24 July 1917. 3 items.