

= Thomas White (Australian politician) =

Sir Thomas Walter White , KBE , DFC (26 April 1888 ? 13 October 1957) was an Australian politician and First World War pilot . He was one of the first airmen trained for the Australian Flying Corps in 1914 , and among the first to see action when he deployed to the Middle East with the Mesopotamian Half Flight in 1915 . He was captured in November that year but escaped in July 1918 . Awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and twice mentioned in despatches , White began his parliamentary career in 1929 when he was elected Member for Balaclava in Victoria . He served as Minister for Trade and Customs in Joseph Lyons ' United Australia Party government from 1932 to 1938 , but resigned when he was excluded from Lyons ' inner cabinet . He joined the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) during the Second World War and saw service in Australia and the United Kingdom . Returning to parliament as a member of the newly formed Liberal Party in 1945 , he served as Minister for Air and Minister for Civil Aviation in Robert Menzies ' government from 1949 to 1951 . His term coincided with the commitment of RAAF squadrons to the Korean War and the Malayan Emergency . Australia 's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from 1951 to 1956 , White was knighted in 1952 and died in October 1957 .

= = Early life and First World War = =

Thomas Walter White was born on 26 April 1888 at Hotham , North Melbourne , the son of Charles James White , a brass @-@ finisher from England , and Emily Jane Jenkins of Victoria . Educated at Moreland State School , White was commissioned in the 5th Australian Regiment , Citizen Military Forces (CMF) , in 1911 . In August 1914 , two weeks after the outbreak of the First World War , he became one of the first four students to commence training at Point Cook as a pilot in the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) . He was later described by a biographer as " pugnacious and impatient for success , with a disdain for authority and a suspicion of elites " . White recalled flying in the school 's Bristol Boxkite thus : " The senses took the place of the instruments . One 's eyes and ears did duty as engine counters ; the rush of the air in the face told whether the climb or glide was at the right angle . " He graduated with his four fellow students , who included future Chief of the Air Staff (Sir) Richard Williams , in November .

In April 1915 , White was appointed a captain in the Australian Imperial Force and adjutant of the Mesopotamian Half Flight , the first AFC unit to see active service . Based initially in Basra and operating primitive Maurice Farman biplanes , the Half Flight assisted the Indian Army during the Mesopotamian campaign , conducting reconnaissance and sabotage missions . White successfully carried out several operations that involved landing behind enemy lines . On a mission in October 1915 , he was forced to land owing to engine trouble and , rather than risk attempting repairs , taxied the aircraft some twenty @-@ four kilometres (fifteen miles) past enemy encampments while his observer kept watch with his rifle at the ready ; the " Keystone Cops adventure " , as historian Alan Stephens described it , culminated in the engine finally powering up and allowing White to take off and fly to the safety of the Australian base . White himself touted the feat as " a taxi @-@ ing record " .

On 13 November 1915 , White was captured while attempting to cut telegraph wires near Baghdad . He was mentioned in despatches in July 1916 . Imprisoned in Turkey , he escaped from a train in Constantinople in July 1918 , and managed to stow away on a cargo ship to Odessa , Ukraine , before travelling to London . His experience of the Soviets in Odessa helped inform his subsequent anti @-@ communism . White was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in June 1919 . In December , he was again mentioned in despatches , for " valuable services whilst in captivity " . Still in London , he met Vera Deakin , daughter of former Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin , and promptly became engaged to her . White was discharged from the AIF in January 1920 , and married Vera on 22 March at St John 's Church of England in Toorak , despite the opposition of some of the Deakin family . That year he also became managing director of his father 's hardware company , C.J. White & Sons Pty Ltd . From 1926 to 1931 , he commanded the 6th Battalion , CMF , as a lieutenant colonel . In 1928 he published an account of his wartime exploits as Guests of the

Unspeakable .

= = Parliamentary career and Second World War = =

White ran unsuccessfully as a Nationalist for the House of Representatives seat of Maribyrnong in the 1925 elections . In 1927 , he failed to win the Victorian Legislative Assembly seat of Prahran . Denied pre @-@ selection as a Nationalist for the Senate the following year , he won the seat of Balaclava at a by @-@ election held on 3 August 1929 . He succeeded retiring member William Watt . The United Australia Party (UAP) came to power in the 1931 elections and in March 1933 he was appointed Minister for Trade and Customs in the first Lyons Ministry , replacing Henry Gullett , who had stood down due to ill @-@ health . White had given up the directorship of C.J. White & Sons the previous year . His portfolio was responsible for reducing tariffs and attempting to increase trade with Britain as opposed to the United States and Japan , and also with book and film censorship ; for the latter he established an advisory board , chaired by Robert Garran , to make recommendations to him . In 1934 , White became Australian chairman of the Royal Life Saving Society , serving until 1951 ; he was also an active supporter of such organisations as Legacy and the Royal Flying Doctor Service .

In July 1938 , White represented Australia at an inter @-@ governmental conference on Jewish refugees held at Évian , France , to discuss the growing numbers of Jewish emigrants seeking to leave Germany and occupied territories . He expressed remorse after listening to stories from refugees during the conference , but ultimately hedged his offer of support , saying that , " As we have no real racial problem , we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large @-@ scale foreign migration " . Australia would go on to accept 15 @,@ 000 refugees over three years . White 's reaction to the Australian government 's support for the Munich Agreement was to diarise : " I think we should hang our heads that we did not stand up to the bully of Europe ... It may yet mean peace but at what price ? " He called for stronger preparations at home in case of war , including the introduction of conscription . On 8 November 1938 , he resigned his portfolio , having discovered that Joseph Lyons had established an inner cabinet from which he was excluded . Lyons ' response in parliament to White 's resignation publicly highlighted the divisions in the UAP . White stood for the UAP 's leadership after Lyon 's death the following year but was eliminated early in the balloting , and Robert Menzies eventually became leader .

With the outbreak of the Second World War , White became a flight lieutenant (temporary squadron leader) in the part @-@ time Citizen Air Force . He took leave from parliament in April 1940 and was appointed the inaugural commanding officer of No. 1 Initial Training School at Somers , Victoria . The following year he travelled to England , where he administered Australian airmen at Bournemouth , served as Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Liaison Officer with RAF Training Command , and commanded RAF Station Brighton . According to the Parliamentary Library of Australia , White also " surreptitiously flew on several sorties as a second @-@ pilot " . He paid tribute to the men of the Empire Air Training Scheme with the narrative poem Sky Saga in 1943 . Returning to Melbourne later that year , White served at RAAF Staff School until his discharge as an honorary group captain in October 1944 . The same month , he attended the conference that resulted in the establishment of the Liberal Party ; the new party was officially launched in August 1945 .

Following the election of the Menzies Liberal government in the 1949 elections , White was appointed Minister for Air and Minister for Civil Aviation , despite his personal animosity for Menzies , which partly stemmed from the latter 's failure to serve in the First World War . In January 1950 , White and the Minister for Supply and Development , Richard Casey , announced that the English Electric Canberra had been selected to replace the RAAF 's Avro Lincoln bombers , and that the new jet would be manufactured by the Government Aircraft Factory in Victoria . White 's term as Minister for Air saw the deployment of RAAF squadrons to the Korean War and the Malayan Emergency in mid @-@ 1950 , and the establishment of the Women 's Royal Australian Air Force , the successor organisation to the wartime Women 's Auxiliary Australian Air Force , that November . The following year he gave his approval for the manufacture of a licensed version of the North

American F @-@ 86 Sabre jet fighter for the RAAF , and played a major part in the controversial decision to replace the long @-@ serving Chief of the Air Staff , Air Marshal (Sir) George Jones , with an RAF officer , Air Vice Marshal (later Air Chief Marshal Sir) Donald Hardman . White also sought to strengthen the Citizen Air Force , and personally ordered the establishment of No. 24 (City of Adelaide) Squadron at Mallala , South Australia .

= = Later life = =

On 21 June 1951 , White resigned from parliament to become Australian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom , a position he held until 1956 . He was succeeded as the member for Balaclava by Liberal Percy Joske . White was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire in January 1952 . As High Commissioner he advocated continued British migration to Australia , and participated in the renewal of the assisted passage scheme between the two countries in 1954 . He suffered from emphysema and on 13 October 1957 died of a heart attack at his home in the Melbourne suburb of South Yarra . Survived by his wife and four daughters , he was accorded a state funeral at St Paul 's Cathedral , Melbourne , and interred at Point Lonsdale cemetery . His daughters donated his papers to the National Library of Australia in 1997 and 1998 .