

Soaring Australian Thermals

The Collected Papers of
Garry Speight
from 1966 to 2015



Canberra Control Zone Extension Reversed

By Garry Speight

Originally published in Australian Gliding, August 1974

Many glider pilots will have wondered how the recent NOTAM H.O. 16 of 25 April 1974, which sets out extensions to the Canberra Control Zone, affected the gliding clubs at Canberra. Well, it was a kick in the teeth. As is well known, we operate at Currandooley under an airspace limit 1800 ft. above the ground, but we have a safety valve in that, whenever Lake George is fairly low and the exposed bed of the lake is dry enough, we can ferry our aircraft 13 miles to a locality at the north end of the lake, one mile outside the control zone. Here we not only enjoy 3800 ft. of airspace but also soar for miles along a 900 ft. escarpment in every easterly breeze. The site is so attractive we did 60% of our flying from it last summer. The Control Zone extension took from us both the airstrip on the lake bed and the greater part of the escarpment.

Feeling slighted, we wrote on 1 May a strongly-worded protest to the man at the top, Mr. R.D. Phillips, Deputy- Secretary of the Air Transport Group, pointing out the drastic effect of the NOTAM on our operations and implying that our 1600 aircraft movements in one summer might be hard to match in other aircraft movements that might be facilitated by the Control Zone extension. We concluded by asking for a meeting with a senior officer to discuss the matter. Some of our club members, who felt that the Air Transport Group was intentionally leaning on us, predicted that their reply would simply reiterate the reasons for the Control Zone extension given in the NOTAM and would conclude, with regret, that we would have to do our gliding elsewhere.

The actual outcome was very different. First, we had a letter dated 29 May and personally signed by Mr. Phillips stating that a further investigation of the airspace tolerances required to protect

instrument descent procedures was being carried out to determine whether modifications could be made to the Control Zone boundaries to exclude the areas that we had mentioned. In the meantime we could expect to obtain release of the airspace almost at any time by telephoning Canberra Control. A second letter from the Air Transport Group dated 7 June said that, by requiring DME as an integral part of the Runway 17 VOR instrument approach to land procedure, it had been found possible to reduce the control zone to its previous boundaries, and that AIP amendments would be made accordingly!

Naturally, we are delighted with the outcome of the correspondence. Our enjoyment of the lake floor site itself will have to wait for the weather to improve, but we are very encouraged to find that, in this case, the Air Transport Group's policy of first priority for commercial passenger traffic has not been interpreted to mean absolute priority. A way has been found to accommodate gliders as well as airliners in an area of intense air traffic.

In our reply thanking the Deputy Secretary for his courteous consideration of our case we concluded with a regret that no machinery existed that could have brought our needs to the attention of the Air Transport Group before the airspace change was promulgated. This is a point that we, as a Gliding Federation, must put as often as we can. As Alan Patching wrote after Pirat Gehriger's talk on airspace to Australian aviators in February, we should be actively pursuing a case for the setting up of a Federal Airspace Committee on which all users have a place.

All airspace use is associated with centres of population: the larger the population the greater the potential density of air traffic, including gliding traffic. While the total traffic density was relatively low, it was possible for the glider pilot to accept the position of bottom man on the totem

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pole because there were still some bits of sky near cities that nobody else wanted. Now the heat is on. Since gliding clubs serve a community need for recreation and that recreation is needed most of all by people who live in cities, we have an excellent case for insisting that gliding should not be forced out. To submit to pressure to relocate gliding sites further than one or two hours travel from major cities is to accept that gliding is the preserve of an elite who have plenty of time and money.

Each club with airfield or airspace problems sees its own case in isolation, and tends to fight a rearguard action against bureaucratic edicts. We must pool our resources, plan a strategy on recreational use of airspace, and insist on a voice in negotiations at both national and regional levels.



Garry Speight in his Astir CS at Collector near Canberra, 1978