



Media Release

2 May 2018

The Royal Flying Doctor Service welcomes the “Great Pilgrimage”

On the morning of May 17 1928, an emergency call was received from the Julia Creek Bush Nursing Home - some 60 miles from Cloncurry in Western Queensland. Pilot Arthur Affleck, flying without communications or a navigation aid, and Dr Kenyon St Vincent Welch took off in a single engine De Haviland 50 bi-plane named “Victory” leased from the fledgling Qantas airline for two shillings a mile.

This was the inaugural flight of the Australian Aerial Medical Service, which would soon be re-named The Flying Doctor Service of Australia (RFDS). The brainchild of The Reverend John Flynn of the Australian Inland Mission, it was one of the world’s first aeromedical services. History records that the two patients Dr Welch operated on both survived.

“It was a significant moment in Australian history,” said Greg Sam, Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Flying Doctor Service South Eastern Section (RFDS SE).

“John Flynn knew of the hardships in the bush through his Ministry. He wanted to throw what he called “.....a mantle of safety” over those who sought to wrest a living out of the hard, unyielding Outback, which formed a significant part of our economy at that time.”

“Using aircraft and the specially invented pedal radio to deliver healthcare just a couple of decades after the first flight was seen as innovative, risky even, but Flynn’s vision was fully justified.”

A squadron of 26 vintage aircraft, registered through the Antique Aeroplane Association of Australia, will mark the 90th anniversary of that historic first flight with a “Great Pilgrimage” of vintage aircraft from New South Wales to Queensland. The squadron will be led by two 1930’s Tiger Moths and a 1950’s Hercules transport from the RAAF. Their itinerary is:

8/9 May	Dubbo
9/10 May	Moree
10/11 May	Roma
11- 13 May	Charleville
13 May	Longreach
15/16 May	Winton
16/17 May	Cloncurry
17 May	Julia Creek
17 May	Mount Isa

The Great Pilgrimage will begin at the rapidly-expanding RFDS base at Dubbo airport on the morning of Wednesday 9 May. The aircraft will leave from 8am following a breakfast BBQ and a welcome speech by Greg Sam, CEO of the RFDS SE.

There will be plenty of community participation with ex-patients and staff on hand to speak first-hand about what it's like to work for and to be helped by the Flying Doctor. The mobile education unit, a life-sized replica of the fuselage and cockpit of a Flying Doctor King Air B200, will be present. The media, local students and invited guests will be given a guided tour around the fully-equipped cockpit and the "mini-intensive care units" by a RFDS SE pilot and/ or Flight Nurse who do vital life-saving work on the real thing. A special walkway will allow the media to witness and record the vintage aircraft departing from the airside apron.

Are you turning 90 this year? Know someone who is? The Flying Doctor is inviting you to the event to share our celebration with a glass of champagne. Get in touch the Flying Doctor Base in Dubbo with your name and contact details.

"While this event has a strong historical focus, it's also about anticipating the next 90 years," said Mr Sam.

"The RFDS is just as relevant today as it was in 1928. We have a "waiting room" of some 7.6 million km sq and during the past year we flew 24.6 million kms to help almost 339,000 people, which is the equivalent of one every two minutes."

"Every day right across Australia the RFDS delivers vital emergency and primary healthcare services, including: mental health, oral health, GP clinics, Alcohol and other Drugs, breast care, Women and children's health – as well as a range of specialist clinics."

"We are dedicated to delivering the finest care to the furthest corners and reducing the gap in health and wellness between those living in remote, rural and regional areas and those in the cities."

"John Flynn said it best, *"....If you start something worthwhile, nothing can stop it."*

What: The start of the "Great Pilgrimage" vintage aircraft event

When: Wednesday 9 May from 6- 9am

Where: The Royal Flying Doctor Base, 9R Coorena Road, Dubbo NSW 2830

Who: RFDS SE CEO Greg Sam, RFDS SE, RFDS SE pilot/ Flight Nurse and members of the Antique Aeroplane Association of Australia.

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For more information or photographs, contact:

Nick Bleszynski, Media Consultant, RFDS (South Eastern Section) on 0403 931 291 or nick.bleszynski@rfdse.org.au



ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section facilitated almost 4,500 clinics,

took over 5,500 telehealth calls, had over 49,100 patient contacts and transported almost 8,200 patients.