

ON THE APF'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY, HERE'S A TRIBUTE TO OUR ORIGINAL INNOVATOR, INFLUENCER AND ENTREPRENEUR. MANY NEWER SKYDIVERS HAVE SEEN **CLAUDE GILLARD** BELT OUT HIS TRADITIONAL AFTER DINNER SONG, *KING OF THE AIR*, WITHOUT REALISING JUST HOW MUCH MOVING AND SHAKING HE HAS DONE, OR FOR HOW LONG.



Claude GILLARD

Living Legend

By Kelly Brennan



UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS...



Claude Gillard Junior was born in March 1928, not long before Charles Kingsford Smith flew the *Southern Cross* from California to Brisbane. His parents, Iris and Claude, would have marvelled at the feat, unaware their own bundle of joy would also become an aviation pioneer.

Claude grew up through the great depression in Melbourne. He worked a few different jobs over the years, including time as a merchant marine, a waterside worker and 11 years with the Victorian Railways.

He found his calling in the 2 Commando Company

of the Citizens Military Forces. That's where he first earned his parachuting wings in 1959, launching a remarkable career that would shape the future of Australian skydiving.

THE APF'S EARLY DAYS...

According to popular legend, Claude started the APF and ran the whole thing for decades. That's an exaggeration, but it isn't too far from the truth.

Claude was a self-described 'stirrer' when Bob Milligan started the APF in 1960. He said he only got involved because he wanted affiliation with FAI and officials in local areas. Claude wrote a manifesto for the federation's leaders and was installed as Secretary two years later. He worked on a constitution and paperwork for the new structure, which introduced state councils. (Fun fact: In those days, members at council meetings would hand write copies of the Op Regs, partly to learn the regulations and partly to save on printing costs.)



In 1966, Claude became the APF's fifth President, and he took on much of the federation workload, running the APF Office from his home in suburban Melbourne. He served stints as National Safety Officer, Chairman of the Board, National Coach and Executive Director. Through this time, there was plenty of Vic v NSW rivalry, so Canberra was chosen when the APF bought its first building, APF House, in the late 1980s.

COMPETITION AND SPORT SAFETY...

While Claude Gillard was best known for his admin roles, he was also quite the superstar in his early days of jumping. He achieved many impressive firsts in safety, development and competition.

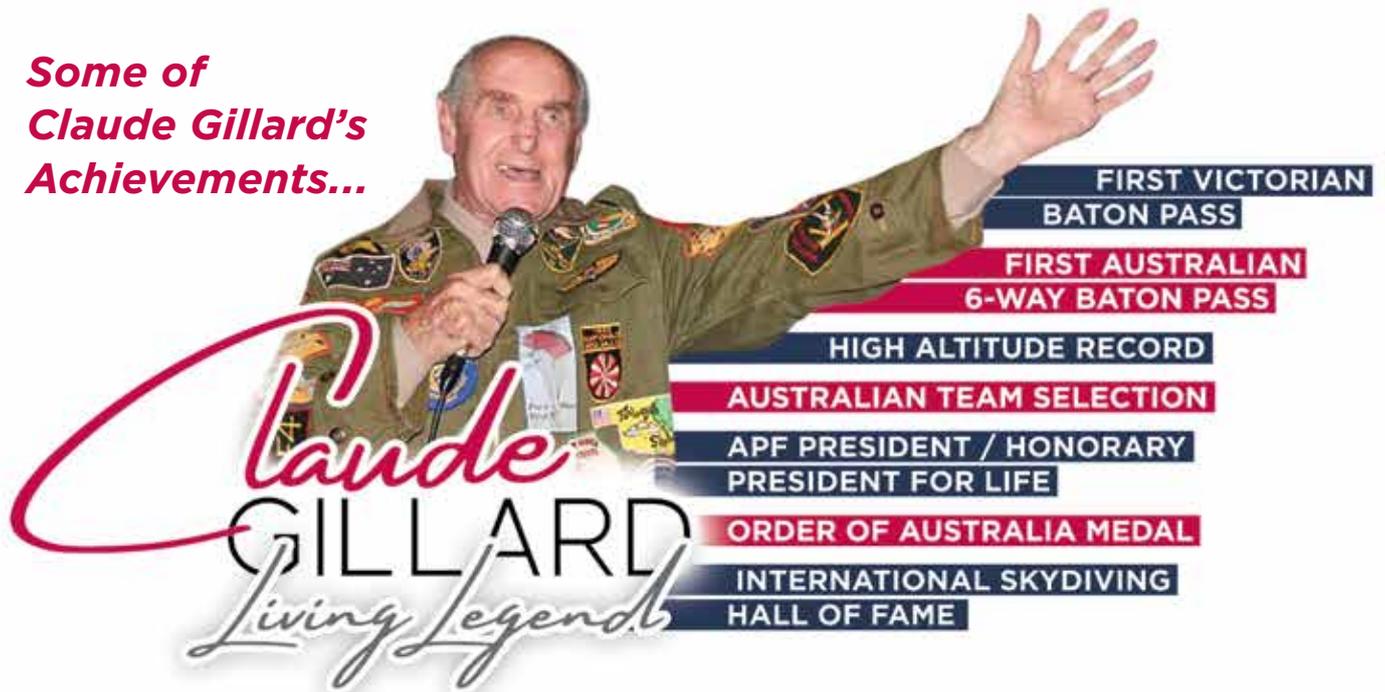
Claude was involved in Static Line training when they were only just learning about the benefits of a hard arch, thanks to some visiting Puerto Ricans. He was passionate about training, writing the original

Parachute Instructor Manual which was ahead of its time in the early seventies. He also developed instructor courses and introduced the first coaching accreditation requirement.

In 1961, Claude was on a record high altitude jump from 23,600ft. In the earliest days of relative work, he was part of Victoria's first 2-Man baton pass (1962), and later a national 6-Man baton pass record (1964).



Some of Claude Gillard's Achievements...



FIRST VICTORIAN
BATON PASS

FIRST AUSTRALIAN
6-WAY BATON PASS

HIGH ALTITUDE RECORD

AUSTRALIAN TEAM SELECTION

APF PRESIDENT / HONORARY
PRESIDENT FOR LIFE

ORDER OF AUSTRALIA MEDAL

INTERNATIONAL SKYDIVING
HALL OF FAME

Claude was a successful competitor in the earliest Style and Accuracy competitions. He secured a place on the Australian team for several of the World Championships in the sixties, but he elected to stay here and concentrate on APF duties instead of making the long and expensive journeys. In later years, he attended more than 30 WPCs as a judge or team official, and he likened them to a drug. "Every time Australia won a medal, it was a high that you will never forget!" he said.

CLUBS AND BUSINESSES...

Claude's name was front and centre for several of our earliest clubs, but he was also one of our first commercial entrepreneurs.

He was involved in the Victorian Parachute School at Pakenham, along with Commando Skydivers and Southern Cross Skydivers. In those pioneering days, the clubs only had one or two rigs, and jumpers would arrive before dawn to get their name on a list for a turn at leaping from a Tiger Moth or an Auster. The pilot would usually be the dispatcher. "A student refusal to jump was considered to be a slur on the club," Claude once said. "So we kicked em off!"

Good old-fashioned club 'politics' were the trigger for Claude starting the Labertouche Sport Parachute Centre with a mate, Bill Molloy. Members at Southern Cross Skydivers wouldn't spend £200 on landing mats, but they voted to spend £300 on a Christmas party.

Labertouche was Australia's first commercial centre, and it soon had a Pilatus Porter taking 11 people to 17,000 feet. "We all wanted to move ahead, do new things and do them well," explained Claude. He felt that going commercial made skydiving professional, so people could earn a good living from it.

Claude was also an equipment innovator. In the early days, he'd dabbled with dyeing the various round chutes to make them more colourful. He also established Southern Cross Parachutes and put his name to the Gilstar canopy. Later, he introduced the Piggyback system to Australia and he brought in the first Ram Air (square) canopy.

KING OF THE AIR...

It's hard to summarise just how much respect Claude earned as an influencer, not just back in those early days but for several decades. He had the ear of government and aviation leaders. He was elected to significant positions in Australian aviation bodies and around the globe.

From the late sixties, for about 30 years, Claude took on numerous volunteer roles with the global bodies, the Federation Aeronautique Internationale (FAI) and the International Parachuting Commission (IPC).





He gets a new angle on the parachute divers



SKY FILMS WITH NO HANDS

SKY DIVERS Claude Gillard was 1900 when he was the first to film the aerial stunts for the ABC's film, 'The New Sky'. He signed up for the unusual activity, which was to be a 60-second film, his 16mm camera.

As his cameraman and assistant, he had to be ready to jump at a moment's notice. He had to be ready to jump at a moment's notice. He had to be ready to jump at a moment's notice.

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Sky Divers in Record Baton Pass

Six parachutists, including a woman, equalled a world record and set up an Australian and Commonwealth record at Fakenham East yesterday.

They dropped from 12,000 feet and passed a baton between them until they opened their parachutes at 4000 feet.

They made their pass on a 60-sec. delay.

The team was Miss Beryl Blakemore, Colonel King and Andy Keech, of Newcastle, Bill Molloy, of Albert Park, Len Hunter, of Avondale Heights, and Claude Gillard, of Dove-

HIGH ADVENTURE IS JUST A STEP AWAY



He received the first Order of Australia Medal for parachuting in 1981 after twenty years of contribution, and his efforts were just as strong for another 30 years after that.

RETIREMENT PROJECTS...

Claude has been driven by two major goals in his retirement years.

In the 1990s, he devoted all of his time, energy and savings towards creating a national Sports Aviation Centre at Wangaratta in Victoria. His aim was a Centre of Excellence for instructor training and a world class DZ to host competitions. But it wasn't to be, and Claude eventually conceded that his vision wasn't widely shared across the sport.

Claude's other big mission has been to preserve the history of skydiving in Australia. He has gathered photos, stories and manifest records about thousands of people and events.

Like many of the other 'old boys' of skydiving, Claude moved to Queensland for his sunset years. He lived on the DZ at Toogoolawah at first, helped out by Dave McEvoy. And he kept travelling to as many skydiving events as he could manage, often on road trips with his old mate Bruce Towers.

Claude feigned reluctance each time he was dragged up to sing 'King of the Air', often wearing his iconic coat

of many colours which is covered in skydiving badges. During one performance at an APF conference his false teeth went flying, but Claude laughed as hard as the audience.

His friends travelled from all over Australia for his 90th birthday, and Claude had a ball.

CIRCLE OF LIFE...

Last year, aged 91, Claude moved into an aged care home in Toogoolawah. He'd had some injuries and health issues, and his memory was playing up on him. "From his courtyard he can keep an eye on the jump runs," says APF CEO Richard McCooey, who helps look after Claude's wellbeing and finances. "Dave McEvoy takes him to the DZ for regular visits."

"Claude still likes to know what is happening in Australian and world skydiving," says Richard, who began jumping at Claude's Labretouche DZ back in 1980.

He has made friends around the globe, and he has never stopped dreaming of ways to make our sport better.

Claude Gillard has carried many different titles during his years at the forefront of skydiving. He was originally "Gillard of Doveton", aka GOD. He was later dubbed the 'Father', or 'Grandfather', of Australian Skydiving. To many he simply reigns supreme as 'King of the Air. Long may he wear the crown.'

