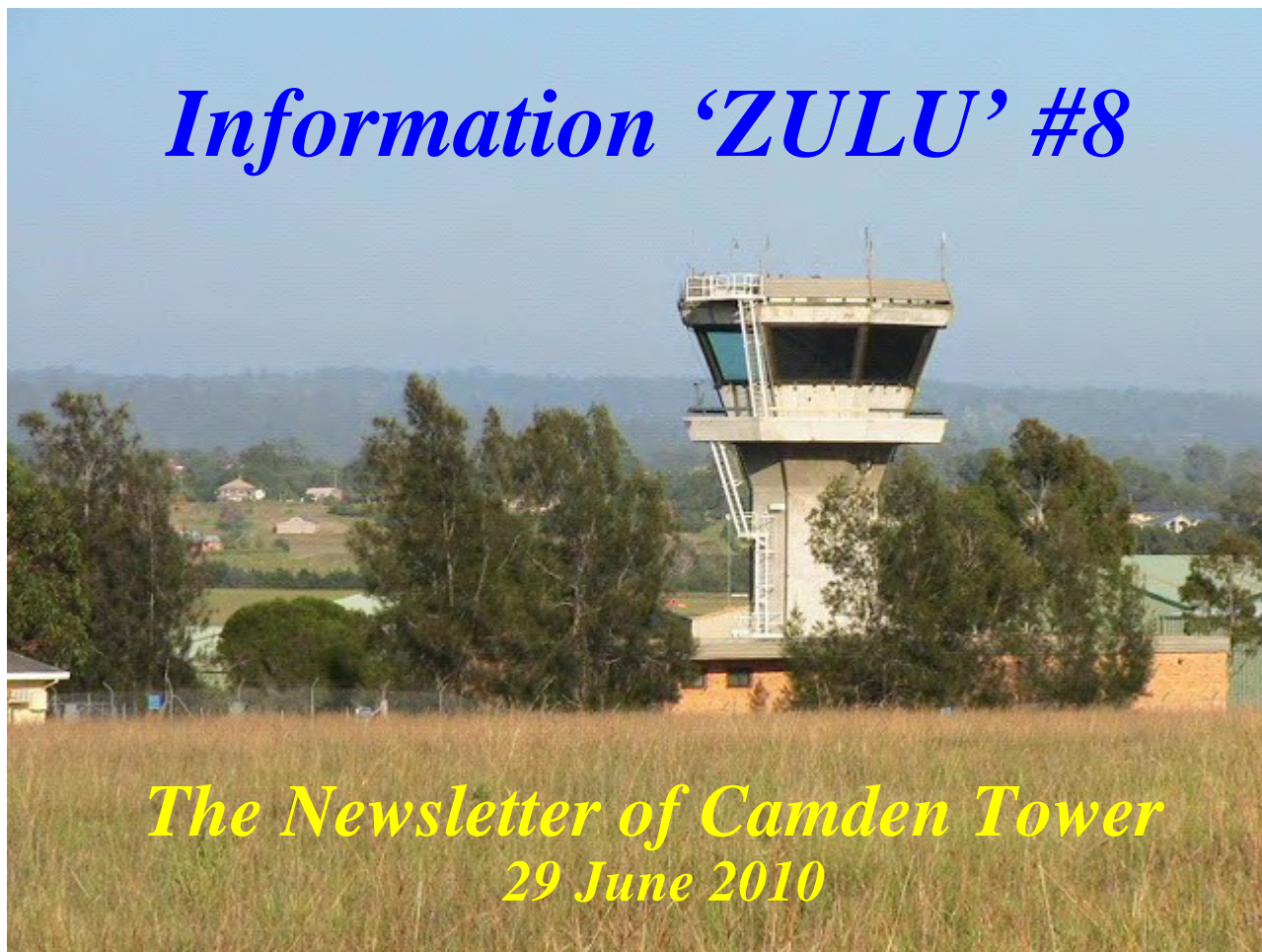


Information 'ZULU' #8



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Welcome to the newsletter from the Air Traffic Control Tower at Camden, New South Wales. This newsletter edition will cover a topic most important to VFR flights and pilots. This edition, we present ...

Special VFR (SVFR)

SVFR is a tool available to pilots primarily designed to allow them to proceed to a destination when weather conditions are non-VMC. Let's revisit the VMC criteria:

1. In-flight visibility not less than 5000 metres,
2. 500 feet vertically below or 1000 feet vertically above cloud, and
3. 600 metres laterally displaced from cloud.

To have VMC, all 3 of these conditions must be present. If you are in a situation where ANY of these conditions are missing, you are NOT in VMC. So, how do you proceed to a destination if you encounter non-VMC conditions.

Let's look a scenario based around Camden.

1. Daytime
2. Cloud SCT 1400 feet
3. Visibility 3500 metres in rain

It is daytime. SVFR flight is not permitted at night. Camden is 230 feet AMSL. To maintain the required vertical displacement from cloud, a flight would have to be conducted not above 900 feet.

That sounds fairly reasonable for an arrival into Camden as it allows for the obligations for flight over populous areas to be met. Visibility however, is below that required for VMC. In theory, flight would not be permitted for this VFR flight in controlled airspace but there must be some avenue available to a pilot to reach the destination. That avenue is Special VFR (SVFR). The following takes place.

'Camden Tower, Cessna 182, ABC at Mayfield, 1300 feet, received information Alpha, inbound, request clearance'

'ABC, Camden Tower, conditions are non-VMC, advise'

The pilot now has to make the decision as to whether to continue to Camden or to divert to a destination with better weather.

'Camden Tower, ABC, request Special VFR clearance to Camden'

This request for SVFR **MUST** be initiated by the pilot. ATC cannot solicit or suggest SVFR under any circumstances. If you don't request SVFR, you **WILL** be held outside Class D airspace.

'ABC, track to Camden, SVFR, report (left base)'

Note that there is no specific tracking instruction given as the pilot must be able to manoeuvre the aircraft around cloud, as part of the SVFR criteria is to remain clear of cloud. Note also that an altitude need not be given but there is always the option available to ATC to instruct, for example, 'not above 1300'

Your obligations as pilot-in-command are now to track to Camden clear of cloud with in-flight visibility of not less than 1600 metres and to report at the position requested by the Tower. It's very simple but you have to know the rules. The rules are:

1. the pilot must know that it is only by day (HJ),
2. the pilot must know that VMC does not exist,
3. the pilot must initiate the request for SVFR, and
4. the pilot must comply with the SVFR rules.

Under the Class D airspace rule set, SVFR flights are separated from IFR aircraft at all times and SVFR are separated from other SVFR flights when visibility is the issue. For example, Cessna ABC is positively separated from Warrior DEF if in-flight visibility is less than 5000 metres (non-VMC). However, if ABC and DEF are happily running around the circuit at 1300 feet with in-flight visibility of '9999' as SVFR flights due to cloud being at 1600 feet (non-VMC), traffic information only may be sufficient. The Air Traffic Controller is given the authority to 'make the snap' under the Class D rule set effective June 3.

All this is fine when we are talking about SVFR flights. SVFR was originally designed to enable aircraft to recover to the field when unexpected or unforecast weather conditions are encountered by arriving aircraft. It is not in the spirit of the circumstance that aircraft would be accommodated to conduct circuit training whenever non-VMC conditions exist.

There is certainly the situation whereby a Flight Instructor would expose a student to operations of less than VMC conditions so as to show that student what they could expect if 'caught short' but the non-VMC event. That exposure experience would be of a short duration and is an extremely valuable part of pilot training. However, it would be a rare day when a flight would be conducted under SVFR for an extended time frame if visibility is less than 5000 metres. It would also be a rare day when ATC would accommodate more than one aircraft to conduct circuit training in conditions of less than 5000 metres visibility. This applies in all classes of controlled airspace in Australia.

In short, SVFR was designed to allow aircraft to arrive at the destination when conditions are less than VMC. It is not designed to accommodate circuit training (when visibility is less than 5000 metres) or to accommodate departures or transits. In any event, SVFR approval will not be accommodated by ATC if it presents any delay to an IFR arrival or departure. Sorry to all the VFR drivers.

New ATC Staff

We have a new staff member at Camden. He will be under training for the next 22 weeks or so. Please be patient with him and his Training Officer.

There are also 3 ATCs under training at Bankstown and again we ask for patience when you go up that way.

Australia has a shortage of Air Traffic Controllers. Worldwide, there is the need for about 3000 new folks per year to replace the ATCs who have been around since the great flood. It is a terrific career for those who are disciplined and focussed. Details can be found at the website www.airservicesaustralia.com

The pilots who use Camden can be pretty proud of what they have achieved in their transition to Class D. There have been hiccups and there have been Air Safety Incident Reports submitted by ATC. Rule number one about Air Safety Incident Reports is that they are not designed to punish, but are an attempt to stop the reoccurrence of an adverse event.

It was very pleasing to see the number of 'our Camden Mob' attend the formal CASA and somewhat informal Airservices Australia briefings held at various venues within the Sydney Basin and Camden area. Lots of discussion was generated in the streets and in some favourite pubs and cafes whenever the local ATCs and pilots met. Just like in the good old days when the bears were bad. Thanks folks. Nice working with you.

The Tower Team

29th June 2010

