



**critical**  
**metals** plc

RUSSELL FRYER  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Interview By: Karl West

Russell Fryer should have been an airline pilot, just like his dad and sister.

As a child growing up in Johannesburg, South Africa, the founder and chief executive of Critical Metals, the London-listed mining minnow, had three small aircraft, including a Cessna, to help develop the family passion.

But Fryer took a different path, keeping his feet firmly on the ground, and which led him into the world of investment management.

His father flew Boeing 747s in Asia for Hughes Air West, the airline founded by Howard Hughes, the American business magnate, and record-setting pilot. His sister flies Boeing 777s to South America.

"I was the one that should have been a pilot, not my sister. Now, I'm the black sheep of the family," he chuckled.

While his family were exploring the rarefied sights high above the clouds, Fryer's 28-year career in finance has led him to explore what lies below the ground.

This has included roles as chairman of both Western Uranium Corporation, a Canadian listed uranium and vanadium explorer, and Ecometals, a Canadian mining company focused on South American bulk and precious metals.

Fryer's latest foray into the world of mining is Critical Metals, an investment vehicle formed to identify and acquire brownfield mining opportunities in the strategic metals sector. These are metals that have been identified as playing an important role in economic and technological development, as well as national defence - such as Beryllium, Tantalum, Copper, Vanadium, Tin, Antimony and Cesium.

"Previously, these secondary and tertiary metals were almost throw away - they'd end up in your pile of tailings," Fryer said. "But, they have lots of desirable qualities - super light, strong and great at conducting heat."

He got the idea for Critical Metals in December 2018 while he was at The 21 Club in New York, which used to be a speakeasy back in the days of prohibition.

"I was one of eight people having lunch with General David Petraeus, who had noted that never in history has the number two world power not gone to war with the number one power. I realised that any such war would be an economic war, not a boots on the ground war."

Fryer left the lunch with a whirlwind of thoughts churning around in his head. He later realised that China had control over seven or eight strategically important minerals and if Beijing were to shutdown access to those deposits, it would be "very damaging to the West".

"There would be no satellites, communications, aerospace or skyscrapers taller than 10 storeys," he said.

Fryer set about searching for established mines that contained these key mineral deposits. His plan was to Hoover up these mines and consolidate them under one roof.

Pretty quickly, he found the Molulu Project, a copper and cobalt mine in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

It took some time to get the deal done, but Critical Metals has just completed its first acquisition - purchasing a 57% stake in Madini Occidental, which holds interest in Molulu, for \$750,000, plus a success fee of roughly \$300,000 that has already been paid.

Fryer is no stranger to this sort of consolidation play. He's done this previously in the Vanadium and Uranium space in Canada, where he was chairman of Western Uranium.



"The idea for Critical Metals is to be in five different countries with five different mines," he said.

Each mine will produce minerals that are strategically important for the growth of Western economies. For example, Vanadium can be used to make steel alloys that are super strong and perfectly suited for the creation of tools, axels, piston rods and girders. These alloys are also used in space vehicles, nuclear reactors and aircraft carriers.

Fryers set up Critical Metals by raising money from friends and family and listed on the London Stock Exchange on 29th September 2020, raising £800,000.

The acquisition vehicle was valued at £1.8m on listing and by the time shares were suspended on 20th May, 2021, it was worth £7.8m.

Fryer noted that because the business was listed as a cash shell, the exchange imposes a requirement that it must be active within an agreed 'grace period'.

It took Fryer and his team longer than anticipated to complete their first deal, so it was forced to suspend trading.

"We were going to do two transactions," Fryer explained. "But we didn't pass due diligence on one, so we parted ways. Ideally, we would like to have re-listed six months ago, but we wanted to be deliberate and meticulous [with the due diligence on Molulu] to ensure shareholders are protected."

Molulu is a 4 kilometre long lease area and has four open copper pits that were previously mined on an artisanal basis.

"It is very high grade copper," he said. "The idea is to start mining copper within 90 days of taking control and reinvesting the cashflow into the cobalt areas.

"The mineralisation seam is 1.5 metres below the surface and we expect that to continue into the cobalt area.

"The pit on the copper side is 50 metres deep, so we know it goes to 50 metres. We are very confident that it goes much deeper than that - we have that same confidence about the cobalt seam."

Fryer noted the business has set aside \$200,000 for a drilling programme that will provide a clearer picture of what lies beneath the Molulu Project area. The results of that drilling programme will give Critical Metals its first Jorc report.

Molulu may be the first asset in the Critical Metals basket, but it almost certainly won't be the last. Fryer has ambitions plans.

"We have identified 24 critical metals deposits [mines] and we are in initial talks with six of them," Fryer said. "We will pursue mergers and acquisitions and will use the cash we generate to invest. After two years, the intention is to declare a dividend.

"I'd like to get to £20m of Ebitda, which will give us a massive market cap."

Fryer's lofty financial expectations are matched by his appetite to spread the word about the business. He has invested his own cash in a deal to sponsor London Irish, the English Premiership rugby club.

"Rugby is a personal passion of mine, as a former prop forward. The sponsorship with London Irish is paid for out of my personal money, not Critical Metals money and it will benefit the whole company, including the shareholders. I couldn't risk shareholders' capital on this, but I can risk my own."



Fryer, who now lives in New York, began playing rugby as a child in Johannesburg, which in the 1980s was “a tinderbox ready to catch on fire at any moment”.

“It’s come through that a much better place,” he said. “Now, it’s a really positive place.”

At school, Fryer recalled he was “an excellent multi-sport athlete and an average student”, playing a range of sports including ice hockey, rugby, basketball and cricket.

His spare time was spent flying planes with his father and sister. Fryer’s mother is a respiratory therapist.

“She was in hot demand during Covid because she understands ventilators,” he noted.

After he finished school in South Africa, Fryer moved to the US where he studied Aeronautical Engineering for three years at Arizona State University (ASU). He left ASU to return to South Africa to play rugby, while also studying for the Stock Exchange course at WITS University in Johannesburg. Fryer completed a degree in Business Administration at the Newport University in Johannesburg. He later went to Rand Afrikaans University for an Advance Diploma in International Taxation & Offshore Financial Centres.

By 1991, Fryer was done with formal education and started working for an investment management firm in Durban.

“The biggest education I had was after school, when I started working in the real world,” Fryer noted.

The self-proclaimed ‘average student’ and wannabe pilot has just moved to the top of the class.

Ends

Favourite Book - How to win Friends and Influence People by Dale Carnegie

Favourite Film - National Lampoon’s Animal House

Favourite Music - The Rolling Stones. “I’m a rock guy.”

Written by Karl West.

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