



A MESSAGE FROM

THE CLOUDS

ROBERT GRAHAM CAREY
1874 — 1959

BY DESMOND MARTIN AND BERTHA CAREY, EDITED EDITH MARTIN

Carey's Chickens had flown high and wide since their mother hen, a fragile, yet famous little Bleriot winged its way to Point Cook for a life-changing rendezvous.

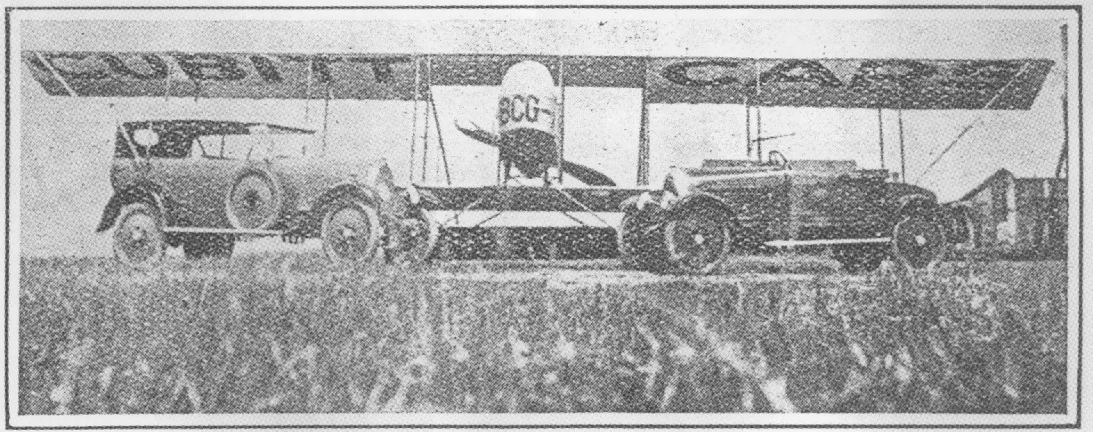
Carey's 50 hp Gnome-engined Bleriot XI was the very same monoplane in which Maurice Guillaux made the first flight from Melbourne to Sydney on July 16, 1914. Guillaux made numerous landings to re-fuel during the two-day flight, but despite driving rain and cloud he

RIGHT: RGC and wife Edith about to board one of Carey's Chickens, c1920.

TOP: Pilot R.G Carey (52) with two of his children, Bertha (11) and Howard (9) in Maurice Farman Shorthorn GA-UCW, August 1926. Photo courtesy HWT.



RIGHT: VH-UBC
advertising Cubitt Cars.



arrived in Sydney during the afternoon of July 18; his actual flying time was nine and a half-hours. Shortly after this flight, Guillaux crashed the Bleriot and spent some time in hospital with serious injuries. In his haste to return and take up his Reserve Commission in the French Aviation Corps in 1914, Guillaux left the machine on a Sydney wharf, crated and ready for shipment after him. In the meantime, the badly damaged Bleriot lay unclaimed and attracting demurrage fees.

Or it did, until 1915 when a Ballarat garage proprietor named Robert Graham Carey fortuitously heard about this deserted and famous aircraft. It is understood that this information was relayed through his friendship with a young English pilot, Edwin Prosser, then living in Ballarat. Prosser is believed to have said to Carey: "We ought to buy that." And [we] did! They caught the train to Sydney and made a deal with the Sydney manager for the Messageries Maritime Shipping Company, to offset

the holding charges on the crated machine. In need of extensive repairs, the battered Bleriot was transported in its wooden crate by ship from Sydney to Melbourne, then overland to Ballarat. There, Carey induced Edwin T. Prosser, who held R Ae C Certificate No 526, to teach him how to fly.

The early adventures of 'rookie' pilot Carey (a RGC) in the frail Bleriot under Prosser's instruction, provides fascinating reading. It was in the time of flying 'by the seat of your pants' with minimum instrumentation, absence of airfields meant landing in country areas where farmers and the population had their first sight of an aeroplane. Certainly, cattle, horses and sheep were frightened as the huge 'bird' alighted in their paddocks, but passengers and observers spoke excitedly about their experiences, which have been preserved in the birdman's massive scrapbook. The Carey family has in their possession copious documentation and origi-

BELOW: Carey in Bleriot
at Adelaide.



nal photos preserving RGC's many ventures that also include his long and most interesting career in motor-ing.

Once he had mastered the Bleriot, Carey proceeded to fly to places mostly handy to Ballarat such as Bacchus Marsh, and now and then landed on vacant ground at Port Melbourne. He had also become well known to the staff and members of the Central Flying School at Point Cook. Through them he had completed the theoretical and technical course and in just 25 minutes passed with distinction the written examination for an aviator's certificate of competence.

On November 23, 1916, forty-two year old Robert Graham Carey flew his Bleriot monoplane to Point Cook via Bacchus Marsh to undergo his flying test. His two Central Flying School examiners had the power invested in them by the Royal Aero Club of Great Britain to pass student pilots for the Australian Flying Corps and also for civilian operations. The result was a foregone conclusion. RGC flew home the proud possessor of the Australian Aero Club Aviator's Certificate No. 34 as granted to him on that date, signed by Lieutenant Eric Harrison. This was the first pilot's certificate issued to a civilian in Australia; furthermore Carey was the first Australian born pilot to obtain an official commercial flying permit.

As a legally qualified pilot there was no holding Graham Carey, he continued to fly all around his base at Ballarat to give country people their first introduction to an aeroplane. He also opened the Ballarat Flying School with Edwin Prosser as its Chief Instructor, a position he took over himself at a later date. The flying school must rate as probably the first of its kind in Victoria. Besides the training of pilots, activities included barnstorming, advertising ventures, aerial photography and the transport of mail, freight and passengers. In all of these Carey offered expertise, for indeed he was an undisputed Australian trailblazer in Civil Aviation during and after World War I.

Considered too old for war service, he was refused admission to the Australian Flying Corps; notwithstanding, Carey gave of his time and talents unstintingly to promote wartime appeals and charities. In 1916, newspaper accounts report Carey's flight in the tiny Bleriot over Adelaide during a fierce storm on an Army Nurses' Day event to boost the war effort. RGC distributed 'a message from the Clouds' in war bond and enlistment dodgers while piloting his Bleriot. In November 1917, Carey flew his Bleriot with the first Airmail from Adelaide to Gawler and in 1957 was able to attend the re-enactment in South Australia at its 40th Anniversary, aged 83. He handed a bag of mail to the same person who had received that first airmail bag.

After several busy years Carey expanded his operations and the rotary engine Bleriot 50 found itself in dusty retirement due to the scarcity of spare parts. Nevertheless this remarkable antique aircraft was eventually restored and is displayed in the Power House Museum at Ultimo, Sydney.

Early in 1919, the Carey family moved from Ballarat to the Melbourne suburb of Port Melbourne. RGC purchased a church hall and had it transported from Brighton to his private aerodrome, on leased Crown land beside the Port Melbourne Rifle Range. He located the hall next to the fence line beside the Rifle Range Clubhouse buildings well back from Williamstown Road. Carey, Edith and four children lived in the hall that RGC converted into the family residence and office.

Right from the start RGC's motto was 'Safety First'. He considered stunting to be the purview of the fighter pilot and saw no reason to include it during his commercial aviation activities. In his subsequent thirty years of flying Carey experienced his share of forced landings



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and setbacks, as did his fellow pioneers, yet commendably, it is claimed that there were no injuries received by the 70,000 passengers he is reported to have carried.

Carey's private aerodrome at Port Melbourne, became the roost from which the chickens of Australian commercial aviation emanated to carry names such as ANA, East-West, Ansett, and Qantas, across Australian and international skies.

On March 16, 1919, Carey and the then Mayor of Essendon, Ald. Arthur Fenton, purchased four obsolete Maurice Farman Shorthorn biplanes from the Department of Defence (Point Cook). Carey dubbed them 'Carey's Chickens', which he had derived from the legendary Stormy Petrels, known as 'Mother Carey's Chickens'. RGC's application of this name to his aircraft at the time of their delivery to Port Melbourne arose from references to Carey as 'The Stormy Petrel' because of his storm defying flight over Adelaide in the Bleriot, October 1917.

Part of the Farman acquisition deal was a conversion

ABOVE: Aerial view 1919, in the foreground are aircraft hangars, church hall at rear left for accommodation, clubhouse & office. centre rear buildings along fence line belong to Port Melbourne Rifle Range.



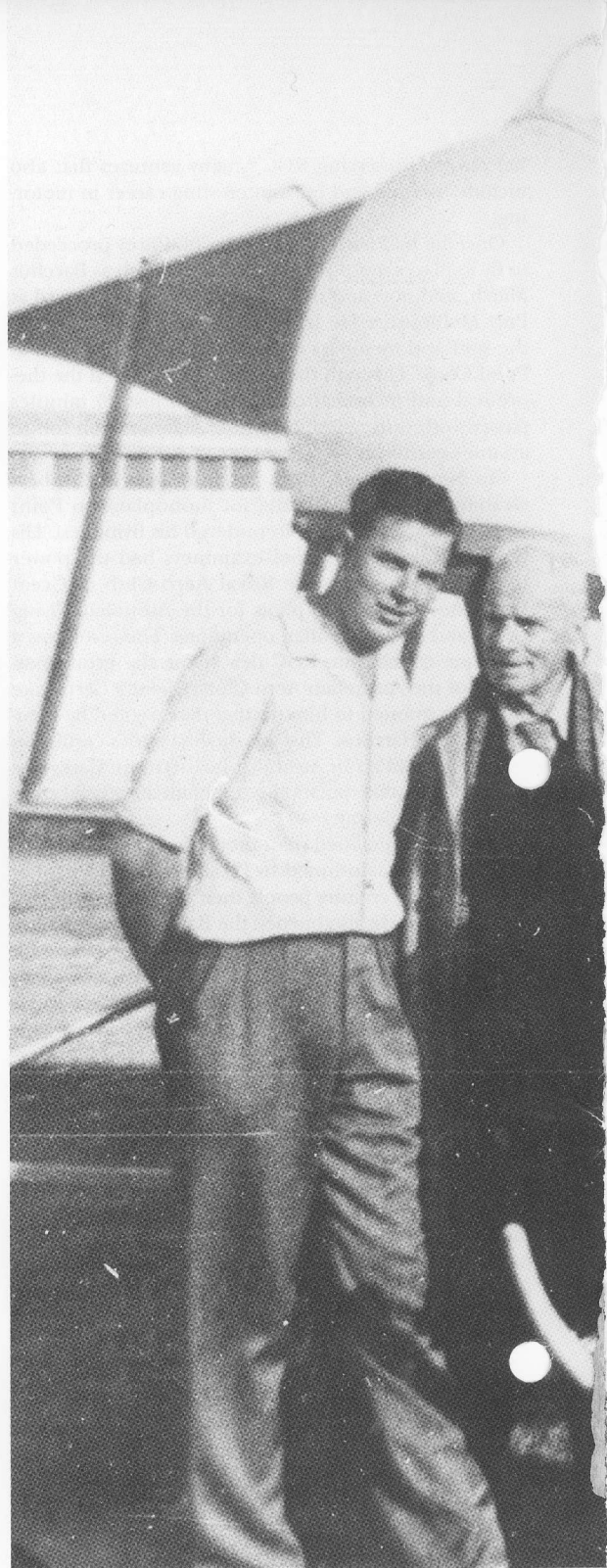
LEFT: RGC and 1957 airmail with the same Walter Nelson who had received the airmail delivery from Carey at Gawler in 1917.

course to fly Farmans for the purchasing pilot with Lieutenant W.H Treloar to be the instructor. A quiet achiever, Harold Treloar was one of the AFC's most experienced pilots who had been posted during WWI to the Mesopotamian Half Flight. Forced down by a faulty engine, he and his Indian Army observer were captured and given a rough time by the Arabs and Turks as prisoners of war. RGC and Treloar became good friends during Carey's instruction on operation and maintenance of the Farmans. Treloar and three other Central Flying School pilots delivered the Farmans from Point Cook to the refurbished landing ground at Port Melbourne on Saturday, April 11, 1919.

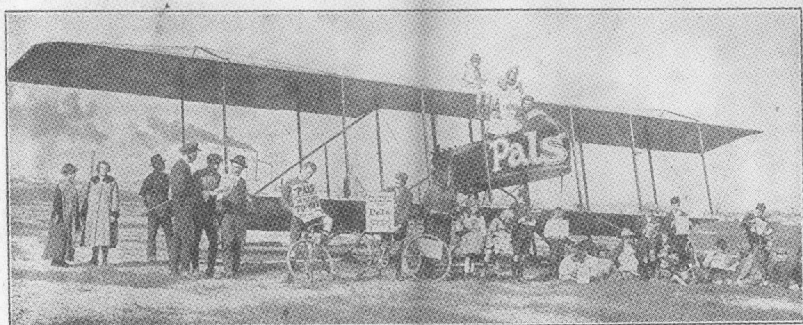
“With the first Commercial (Aviation) Permit, R.G Carey inaugurated Melbourne Air Service and for many years Carey made headlines with his Farman Shorthorns.”

Since the Farman's hangar was not yet ready, the four machines were tied down in the open. A huge gale blew across Hobson's Bay and struck the aerodrome causing damage to all the Farmans, two were hit so badly that they were reduced to spare parts. The other two were fully restored and later registered as G-AUCW and G-AUBC. The four Farmans were all composite machines because they had been damaged and repaired during air cadet training; likewise, the remains of RGC's wrecked Farmans, plus the extra engine and parts from the original sale, provided Carey with all the spares he needed for many years.

With the first Commercial (Aviation) Permit, R.G Carey inaugurated Melbourne Air Service and for many years Carey made headlines with his Farman Shorthorns involved in events all over Melbourne environs and the Victorian countryside. Notwithstanding his news making aerial delivery of Easter Hot Cross Buns to Philip Island, he flew avid race goers to country meetings, promoted community events and carried such cargo as 'Pals' boys' magazines to name just a few of his ventures. RGC continually used his planes for advertising with painted sig-



BELOW: The Pals Plane advertisement. Photo courtesy HWT.



A MESSAGE FROM THE CLOUDS

MELBOURNE TO THE GULF OF CARPENTARIA
In the "PALS" Aeroplane

SPECIAL FEATURES.

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nage on the underside of both lower and upper wings as well as the rudders and nacelle.

Carey's extensive 'Message from the Clouds' promotion records cover War and Peace Loan flyers, Vacuum Oil Company, Wangaratta Woollen Mills, charity and sporting events, various traders' association shop locally campaigns, Palm and Cubitt brand cars and Velvet Soap. Dodgers (leaflets) were scattered from the plane overhead as a novel marketing device similar to that of towing aerial banners or sky writing objectives today.

Mindful of promoting his own aviation and motor-ing business, Carey periodically included huge captions on his planes such as 'Carey's Chickens', 'Melbourne Air Service' or 'Carey's Auctions'.

Carey's most publicised and ambitious aerial advertising campaigns for the Herald and Weekly times 'Pals' magazine was announced in the Melbourne Herald, on Wednesday, September 22, 1920. The front-page story, with a five column picture of the 'Pals Plane' with the



Carey family in front of it, declared that RGC would begin an epic journey from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the coming week. Sub-titles announced "Pals' Aeroplane To Cross Australia", and "Pals' Aeroplane Carries Message To Australian Boys". Around the Farman nacelle was painted the word 'Pals', and clearly visible as the plane flew overhead, the message: 'Boys' and 'Read Pals' emblazoned across the wingspan. The tour was discontinued at Forbes however, probably due to problems with supply and finance. A journal by Miss Maisie Carey and her mother provides insight into the difficult conditions encountered during long distance motor travel in the late 1920s.

The 'Pals' slogan later became 'Palm' during Carey's comprehensive air tour for the Palm cars company. Various slogans graced the Farman wingspan during Melbourne Air Service years as Carey drew more and more attention from his advertising ventures. Subsequently, Carey and his Farmans advertised Cubitt brand cars and

then Velvet Soap, followed by various promotions for Progress Associations that were keen to see the Farman slogan 'Shop Locally' over their particular district.

Carey was kept busy with Melbourne Air Service activities, developing Melbourne Flying School, grasping every opportunity to offer 'joy' flights throughout Victoria and border towns, passionate to enthuse all contacts with the thrill of the air. He was a capable and enthusiastic public speaker and as such was invited to speak on aviation matters at state and federal government levels, motoring associations and schools while continuing to manage his motoring business and partake in numerous long distance car rallies.

RGC was born in Warrnambool, Victoria and moved with his family to Melbourne when he was 5 years old. At the tender age of 10 began his first business venture carrying wood and coal by wheelbarrow as well as selling newspapers in Port Melbourne. In 1894, aged 20 Carey was the sole proprietor of a carrying firm in Heath

ABOVE: Carey's Farman re-restored in 1956 at Moorabbin. W. Boud (Test Pilot), Fred Edward's eldest son beside RGC in company with Mr & Mrs F. Edwards and their younger children.

RIGHT: Carey's Farmans in 1919. Farmans No: 17, 16, 19 & 20 line up at their new home – Carey's Port Melbourne aerodrome, delivered from Point Cook AFC Base, April 1919.



Street, Port Melbourne and by 1900 he registered the Port Melbourne Livery Stables in association with his existing hay and corn store. Meanwhile Carey had married Edith Gilchrist in 1899 and built up his team of fine horses and carriages for hire to include a taxi and motor hire service. In 1912 the Carey family moved to Ballarat where he built up a very successful motoring business, learnt to fly his Bleriot, and in 1919 returned to the Port Melbourne district again to further his aviation passion.

With wife Edith, and 6 children, Carey not only ran a thriving business but also involved himself in numerous civic interests. A life member of the Australian Natives Association, belonged to the Ancient Order of Druids, and was awarded a Life Governor membership for services with the Freemason's Homes of Victoria Citizen's Lodge. Carey was among the first members of the RACV and the VACC with many magazine articles applauding his motoring and aviation ventures published in early club magazines. Melbourne and country newspapers constantly found his activities newsworthy and these records have provided a marvellous source of additional information for the RGC biography.

Carey (63) last piloted a plane, flying one of his Farmans from Port Melbourne on the Coronation Day of King George VI, May 12, 1937. About this time RGC and family decided to concentrate their efforts on the

motor trade. Carey had sold off one of the Farmans and eventually surrendered the Port Melbourne airfield lease.

After auctioning off surplus stock from Melbourne Air Service, he spent a few years in his motor business at Wangaratta, eventually retiring to the family home in Chelsea where he had stored so many of the aeroplane parts including a Farman engine not sold at the Port Melbourne auction. He indulged his love of auction sales and finished up with a museum cum junkyard, full of weird and wonderful relics, including two tramcars plus an abundance of spare car parts and war surplus.

One of his Farmans was meticulously restored at Mentone by Mr Fred Edwards and recorded on film whilst being flown at Moorabbin 1956 in the presence of Mr. Carey aged 82 years. This Farman is now proudly displayed in the Canadian Aviation Museum in Ottawa. It was a great disappointment that the Australian Government of the time did not see fit to purchase this Farman, however we are thankful that she was appreciated in America and is now preserved in Canada.

Thanks to the dedicated endeavours of RAAF staff and volunteers, a static display Farman project, using a few original parts donated from Carey's estate and most other components painstakingly designed and constructed, has resulted in a magnificent exhibit at the RAAF Museum Point Cook. Civilian aviator Carey would have been overwhelmingly grateful to witness this tribute to the Maurice Farman S11 Shorthorns, home to roost at historical Point Cook.

Robert Graham Carey, the man who learnt to fly in a Bleriot XI monoplane, had lived through two world wars to see the advent of space exploration, with aircraft being invented that a decade later would enable men to walk on the moon. Although modern aviators in the jet age of electronic space machines may claim centre stage over Carey, he was indeed a major player in Australian aviation history and his spirit shines in the stars. No record of the early flying days would be complete without the inclusion of this colourful personality. His was a wonderful work – educating people to air safety.

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BELOW: The Velvet Plane advertising legend under top wing (1928).

