



# AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc

ABN: 83 295 759 224

PO Box K346 Haymarket NSW 1238

## *Southern Skies*

The Newsletter of AHSA (NSW) Inc

February 2010 No.436

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### February Meeting

The February meeting will be held at the Powerhouse Museum on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2010, commencing at 7.45pm. Enter from the Macarthur Street end and the meeting room is adjacent to the main foyer. Visitors are most welcome and supper will be available after the meeting.

The Guest Speaker for the evening will be Gareth Morgan, whose topic will be:

#### *The 1919 England – Australia Air Race*

Gareth will talk about the pioneering flights from England to Australia in 1919 and 1920. We all know that the race to be the first to fly between the countries was won by Ross and Keith Smith, and their story is truly remarkable, but the stories of the other competitors are also fascinating. In the aftermath of the War, there was a great desire to prove the capabilities of the aeroplane as a means of transport, though many of the difficulties involved in long-range flights were either not understood or underestimated. The fliers involved had to battle bureaucracy, weather, unforgiving terrain, hostile natives and sundry other problems, generally in aircraft that weren't really designed for the job. Those who were in aeroplanes that were specifically intended for the journey suffered worse, with fatal consequences. The entire contest was a testament to the courage and determination of the men involved, and is worthy of study.

Gareth served in the Departments of Civil Aviation/Transport and its successors for 36 years, including time in NSW, Queensland and WA Regions as well as Central Office in Canberra. As his position was in Aviation Security, which remained under direct Ministerial control, he was one of the handful of Departmental staff who remained with the Department after the formation of the FAC and CAA in 1988. At retirement he was Regional Manager, NSW, charged with ensuring that airport and airline security at major Airports in the Region conformed to the Government's expectations. As well as working in Australia, he was loaned to the Government of Vanuatu to develop an aviation security program for that country, and to ICAO to lecture at a Security Managers' training scheme in Fiji. Before retirement he represented Australia at a Counter-Terrorism Forum in Bangkok. Since leaving the Department, he has had time to pursue his interest in the First World War in the air, and is now the Hon Secretary of the Australian Society of WWI Aero Historians.

Please join us for the first meeting of the year.

### Committee Meeting

A Committee meeting, commencing at 6.30pm, will be held immediately prior to the February meeting.

### December Meeting – A Special Review

The meeting was a joint meeting with The Royal Aeronautical Society, Australian Division, Sydney Branch and celebrated the centenary of the first heavier-than-air powered flight in Australia. Indeed, this was a most enlightening and entertaining evening.

The large audience was welcomed by AHSA (NSW) President, Ian Debenham, who spoke about the significance of the day and made reference to the feats made by Colin Defries, Harry Houdini and Fred Custance.

RAeS Chairman, David Adkins also welcomed members and guests and introduced Chairman of the Australian Branch of the RAeS, David Forsyth, who conferred Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society awards upon Professor Don Kelly and Professor Jason Middleton.

Guest Speaker was eminent aviation historian, David Craddock, whose subject was *Sydney's Wings*. David described the attempts by budding aviators who aspired to be the first to fly heavier-than-air craft in Australia.

David said that the USA, United Kingdom and Brazil had already celebrated "one-day" centenaries for first flights in those countries. Yet Australia was celebrating two centenaries in one week: the first heavier-than-air flight by George Augustine Taylor and the first powered heavier-than-air flight by Colin Defries.

He noted that the definition of flight as agreed by the Aero Club of Great Britain stated that: "Free flight in an aeroplane occurs when the machine, having left the ground, is maintained in the air by its own power on a level or upward path for a distance beyond that over which gravity and air resistance would sustain it". There was no requirement for lateral control or return to the point of take off, and that balloons did not qualify under the definition.

Many identities were discussed including Richard Strachan, who in 1868 made an attempt to fly in Tasmania and Mlle Zelinda, an illusionist who claimed that her *Zelindator* flying machine enabled her to rise to 600 feet at 40 mph. In a newspaper advertisement she sought support for her new machine under construction! In the NSW Riverina town of Whitton, Richard Rowe claimed to have flown his machine to a height of about 150 feet at 10mph, although the local newspaper editor cast doubt on the achievement.

By the early 1890s, Lawrence Hargrave had conceived ideas of artificial flight and by 1893 had

designed his boxkite. In 1894, having learnt about Otto Lilienthal in Germany, he developed his boxkite further and a hang glider, which he considered dangerous.

In 1897 George Hardacre, an Englishman who had migrated to the Coffs Harbour area in 1884, patented a flying machine, which David believed may have flown in some sort of tethered flight.

Frederick and Valentine Ayers of Meningie, South Australia had also prepared drawings of several of their aircraft allegedly built. David has discovered letters to the Department of Defence seeking funds to build an aircraft "towed by a horse"! On 15<sup>th</sup> December 1901 they attempted flight although the wind was considered too strong. On the second attempt, the tethered bamboo structure became airborne to about 15 feet but crashed and was destroyed.

Andrew Herbert Byron claimed to have flown his machine powered by the dubious fuel "Byronite" to a height of 4000 feet and sought money from the public to support this project.

In June 1903, Charles Lindsay Campbell claimed to have flown a glider near Perth, Western Australia. Allan Rupert Betteridge and Jim Lambe claimed to have made glider flights near Adelaide, South Australia between 1904 and 1906.

G.S. Richardson designed and constructed a pedal powered kite in 1908, and this is perhaps the first recorded successful flight in Australia. It allegedly flew at Penguin, Tasmania although it ended when it crashed onto Watcombe Beach.

John Duigan and his brother Reginald attempted flights in a Wright glider in 1908, but of course their best efforts were achieved in 1910.

Yet it was not until December 1909 that George Augustine Taylor successfully flew his glider at Narrabeen Beach, NSW, although one of his test pilots may have really been the first to fly.

David believes there is no doubt that the first to fly a heavier-than-air powered aircraft was indeed Colin Defries on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1909, at Victoria Park Racecourse, Sydney. Defries' Wright Model A flew for about 100 yards at between 2 and 15 feet as reported by one newspaper, whilst another estimated the distance of 115 yards at a height of between 12 and 15 feet. Either way, the flight satisfied the definition as specified by the Aero Club of Great Britain.

But another revelation was yet to come. David noted that Defries' Wright Model A aircraft was sold to the American, Ralph Banks, who flew the aircraft on several short hops in Melbourne during February 1910. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1909 he succeeded in flying the aircraft about 300 yards at a height of about 15 feet, before losing control and the aircraft crashing. Notwithstanding, he too satisfied the definition of flight agreed to by the Aero Club of Great Britain and therefore he also should be acknowledged as having flown before the more colourful Harry Houdini!

Following David's most enlightening and entertaining talk, Ms Zaniah Defries, grand-daughter of Colin Defries, spoke about her grandfather and her involvement with AHSA. Zaniah mentioned her initial enquiry to Warwick Bigsworth about her grandfather and the subsequent contact with John Scott, who in turn was able to provide

her with a great deal of information about Colin Defries' aviation activities in Australia. Zaniah was in turn able to provide John with much family information, which he used in his now famous *Loops & Landings* column.

But another surprise was forthcoming; Zaniah invited her father, David, to speak about Colin, via amplified mobile phone, all the way from Spain. David thanked the meeting for its honouring of his late father and related a few of the many stories about him.

Following the formal proceedings, Warwick Bigsworth gave a vote of thanks to the RAeS, David Craddock and Zaniah Defries. He made special note of the contribution made by Ian Debenham, who has "spread the word" about Colin Defries, via talks to RAeS in Sydney and Melbourne, AHSA Inc and the Aviation Museums Association, as well as a published article in *Flightpath* magazine. Ian was instrumental in providing the display featuring Taylor and Defries in the Powerhouse Museum foyer and establishing the *First to Fly* blog.

Warwick then spoke about John Scott's major contribution to resolving the "First flight" debate, primarily by his diligent research and his publication of "The Looming Australian Aviation History Wars", "On the Trail of Harry Houdini" and "In Search of Bolivar" series in *Loops & Landings* supplement to *Southern Skies*. John's research has also led to the publication of articles in the Royal Aeronautical Society's *Aerospace Professional* magazine, on the RAeS Australian Branch website and also by Gary Sunderland in the Australian Society of World War I Aero Historians '14-18 Journal. He noted that without John's research and the publication of his findings, that Australian history would still incorrectly consider Harry Houdini as the first to fly.

There is no doubt, that this was a very special evening and acclaimed by all those who attended.

### Annual Subscriptions

Members are reminded that Annual Subscription renewals are now overdue. For those who have not yet returned renewal forms, that, in order to take advantage of the combined AHSA (NSW) Inc and AHSA Inc membership for one or two years, such subscriptions must be received by **5 February 2010**. To subscribe to both societies, the rate is \$55 per annum, or for 2010 and 2011 only, \$110. For those who are currently members of both Societies, this will, in fact result in a discount of \$25 p.a.

Those who wish to just remain a member of AHSA (NSW) Inc need pay only \$25 per annum.

### Anniversaries

The December 2009 issue of *Southern Skies* mentioned the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Ross and Keith Smith's arrival at Darwin from Great Britain on 10<sup>th</sup> December in Vickers Vimy G-EAOU. In commemoration of the event, a Tiger Moth, VH-NMD, overflew Darwin and carried special airmail envelopes. At Aldinga, South Australia, another Tiger Moth, VH-UEQ, overflew the local area carrying another batch of airmail envelopes.

### The Origins of the Call-sign "Wallaby"

Readers will be aware that the RAAF retired its DHC-4 Caribou aircraft from service at the end of

November 2009. The following edited story originally written by Don Pollock has been provided by Peter Coates:

### **RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) 1964**

As the RAAF is planning to demob the Caribous it is an appropriate time that the origins of "Wallaby" are explained. Like most tales the origins of the name "Wallaby" Airlines was a combination of different events, a name which later became famous in Vietnam amongst many armed services and peoples including US, New Zealand, Thai, Korean and Vietnamese Armed Forces, French plantation operators, the occasional Brit on some civil aid project and of course the Australians who served both in the armed forces and the civil assistance programs.

About a year before the formation of RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) a young group of pilots from 38 SQN had formed an association with several Qantas air hostesses who shared a flat in the Sydney eastern suburbs. The association was neither constant nor regular. The relevance of this casual relationship and its importance to the "Wallaby" call-sign will soon become apparent.

In late 1963 we heard that crews had been picked for the ferry of the Caribous from the de Havilland factory at Downsview, Canada, to RAAF Base Richmond, in Australia. Most of the co-pilots on Caribou ferry I and 2 had formed a close and friendly contact with many Qantas air hostesses.

Both the first and the second Caribou ferry had been completed by June 1964. During the second ferry through RAAF Base Butterworth, Malaysia the pilots on that ferry learned that a flight of Caribou aircraft would be committed to operations in Vietnam.

Back in Australia a week later those that were picked for Vietnam were given pre-embarkation leave then briefings and some intensive training. We started to think about what we might take to Vietnam to identify ourselves; slouch hats, flags, koalas? All the suggestions were dismissed as kitschy, too large or too expensive.

During this busy period the friendship with the Qantas air hostesses was renewed. At one of the get togethers, one of the girls was seen with a Qantas pin; the golden kangaroo. We asked the girls if they could get us some pins. They told us they would try and also that they would organise a send off party for us. The party was a happy affair. Delas England, a hostie, gave us a small cardboard box jammed packed with a few hundred kangaroo pins, a great gift from Qantas. On the day that the Caribous were to arrive in Vietnam, there was a terrible storm. The powers to be were informed that the aircraft could not possibly fly in these conditions and not to expect them. Shortly thereafter they heard the unmistakable engine noise emitting from the arriving Caribous. They had not factored in the forceful willpower and flying excellence of the RAAF pilots.

A day or so after arriving in Vietnam, our boss, SQNLDR Chris Sugden (Suggy) gave a pin to the Base Commander Vung Tau, Colonel Dillard, U.S. Army. Dillard was a most professional officer who did what he could to get us kitted, billeted and supplied to become an effective unit without delays. Likewise Major Dillard, US Army, the Executive Officer to the Colonel (but no

relation) received a pin. Other people around Vung Tau also received the kangaroo aka Qantas pins.

Major Schaumberg, USAF, was our liaison officer and he was most diligent in getting RTFV operational "in country". RTFV had been integrated as part of the USAF air support services and was tasked by the USAF but most of the tasks were supporting the US Army and the South Vietnamese Army. Our induction had been completed in record time thanks in a large part to Schaumberg. The only item requiring agreement was a unit call-sign which would identify us for all future operations.

So when "Suggy" gave Schaumberg a Qantas pin as appreciation for his services to us the conversation went something like; "What is this animal called, Chris?" Schaumberg sometimes had a peculiar manner of pronouncing and emphasising each syllable. On this occasion in an almost Southern drawl Schaumberg said "An- I- Mal" although I do not recall Schaumberg being a Southerner. Chris replied. "A Kangaroo. Could that be a suitable name for our squadron call-sign?" Schaumberg was almost aghast. "A Kan-Ga-Roo? Hell Chris, that's not an easy name to pronounce. The Vietnamese would find it impossible. Are they called something else?" Chris replied, "A Wallaby". The name had an instant appeal for Schaumberg. He said it several times. "Wal-La-By" sounded much better to Schaumberg than "kangaroo." It was Schaumberg who then said that he would arrange for "Wallaby" to become the identifier for the RAAF Transport Flight Vietnam (RTFV) which later became 35SQN.

Thus "Wallaby" Airlines was named after a casual relationship with the QANTAS kangaroo.

### **New Book**

*Never a Dull Moment* by Philip Dulhunty OAM.

Phil's autobiography is an insight to an amazing man. His enthusiasm for any of the many tasks that he has set himself is an inspiration for anyone to "go and do it". The book details Phil's private, professional and commercial life, along with the challenges and the achievements that most of us would never encounter.

He describes his childhood in Port Macquarie and the pleasures and benefits of growing up in the bush. Phil enlisted in 1942, when he turned 18; he was rejected by the RAAF for having "crook" knees, but joined the Army where he participated in hours of drill! He was based at Georges Heights, on Sydney Harbour during 1942 where he observed the flyover by the Japanese Navy reconnaissance "Glen" aircraft just prior to the attack by the Japanese midget submarines. Much more of this story is revealed in the book, but his post-war life is as equally or more exciting.

Amongst many facets of Phil's life, are stories about his creation of Dulmison, his establishment of the Port Macquarie Clipper airline, his passion for aviation and particularly seaplanes, as well as sailing, power boating and marine electronics that make this book such easy and enjoyable reading. Phil's many accomplishments include designing, building and selling Australia's first laptop computer over 30 years ago, his invention of the FLOOK flying anchor and "Aqueon" swimming machine. At a time when most of us would prefer to put their feet up, Phil

embarked on the challenge to establish a historical flying boat museum and along with the importation of a Catalina aircraft.

This excellent hard-cover book of almost 450 pages is available direct from Phil for \$100 plus \$15 P&P. Make cheques payable to Philip Dulhunty and send to Phil at Unit 2, 35-41 Waterloo Road, North Ryde NSW 2113.

### **New DVD**

#### ***The History of the Ansett Group of Airlines 1921-2002 DVD 7<sup>th</sup> Edition.***

Fred Niven's latest version of his excellent History of Ansett Group of Companies is now available.

The DVD, which holds some 4,000 "pages" and about 10,000 images, is a must for all those interested in the development, operation and demise of the Ansett Group of Companies. Price is \$35 including Australian P&P. Contact Fred at [fniven@bigpond.net.au](mailto:fniven@bigpond.net.au) to place your order.

### **Wings over Illawarra**

The annual Wings over Illawarra open day will be held at Albion Park Aerodrome on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010. AHSA (NSW) Inc will be providing a table with information about the Society, along with newsletters and membership applications.

The Open Day will feature many aircraft from the HARS collection, including the newly arrived DC-4, VH-PAF, which will be on static display. Other HARS aircraft that will be on display include the Super Constellation, Neptunes, Catalina and C-47s. Aircraft from the Sport Aircraft Association, RAN Historical Flight and the Temora Aviation Museum will also be in attendance.

### **AHSA meetings**

#### **Melbourne**

Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month, at the East Malvern RSL, Stanley Cross Avenue East Malvern or RAAF Association, 24 Camberwell Rd, Hawthorn East. Meetings start at 7.30pm. Contact Antony Grage, 0418 170 395.

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February.** "Harry Houdini: his times, his Voisin, and his flights in Australia", by Antony Grage and Graeme Minns, both AHSA members, exploring Houdini's background and the state of the science of aviation when he made his flights in Australia, and his contribution to the fledgling industry.

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March.** "The history of radio navigation aids used by Australian civil aviation since 1935" by Roger Meyer, president of the Civil Aviation Historical Society of Australia and AHSA member. Roger worked with the Radio Installation Section of DCA from 1965, and was involved with the design and installation of radar-based radio control of airport approach systems.

#### **Brisbane**

Meetings are held on the last Friday of each month in the "Meeting Room" at the Indooroopilly Library, Indooroopilly Shoppingtown, Station Rd, Indooroopilly. As the meeting is after library hours, entry is via a door from the car park. Visitors are welcome; contact Don

Furlonger (07) 3371 5867. **Note the new venue from this month.**

**January Meeting Friday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2010**, guest speaker Phil (Curley) Ware, who flew with the RAAF on Neptunes and C-47s, and will discuss Neptune operations and ATC.

### **Calendar of Events**

**30-31 January 2010** Temora Aviation Museum Flying Days. Temora NSW

**28 February 2010** Wings over Illawarra. Albion Park NSW

**6 March 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**20 March 2010** Houdini Centenary of Flight Air Show. Melton Vic.

**20-21 March 2010** Hamilton Aero Club Fly-in in conjunction with Sir Reginald Ansett Museum. Hamilton Vic.

**21 March 2010** Antique and Classic Aircraft Air Display Parafield SA.

**27-28 March 2010** Grand Southern Cross Model Air Rally. Luskintyre NSW

### **Contributions and Contacts**

News items, other contributions, or requests for information etc for inclusion in the newsletter can be sent to AHSA (NSW) at P.O. Box K346, Haymarket NSW 1238 or to Warwick Bigsworth, E-mail ([madsen2010@optusnet.com.au](mailto:madsen2010@optusnet.com.au)) or (02) 8824 7814.

### **Thanks**

Thanks to Peter Coates, Antony Grage, John Scott and John Ulm for their contributions to this newsletter.

## **Aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) Inc**

ABN: 83 295 759 224

### **Notice of Annual General Meeting**

The Annual General Meeting of the Aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) Inc will be held at the Powerhouse Museum, Harris Street Ultimo on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2009 commencing at 7:45pm.

#### **Business**

1. Accept President's Report
2. Accept Honorary Treasurer's Report
3. Elect Office Bearers for the current year:
  - (a) President
  - (b) Vice President
  - (c) Honorary Treasurer
  - (d) Honorary Secretary
  - (e) Photo Archivist
  - (f) Committee
4. Any other business

Warwick Bigsworth  
Honorary Secretary

## LOOPS AND LANDINGS

### No 145 Squadron RAF Newsletter - John Ulm Recollects.

With the kind permission of John Ulm.

*Recently joined our Association is John Ulm of Sydney, who flew Spit VIII's with the squadron in Italy in 1944-45. John bears an illustrious name in aviation history: his father was Charles Ulm who organised and jointly commanded the great "Southern Cross" first trans-Pacific flight in 1928, pioneered air services between Britain and Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea, founded Australian National Airways - and was lost surveying a regular trans - Pacific air route in 1934.*

*Johnny (as he was invariably known) finished OTU at Eshott, Northumberland, and not receiving an expected invitation from Montgomery to assist his invasion of Normandy, had a haircut and went off "in a bit of a huff" to the Med. John has taken our invitation to "reflect " as a licence to shoot a line -- Which herewith.*

On my approach to the Italian theatre, Kesselring thoughtfully withdrew most of the Luftwaffe north of the Alps but left the dug - in Wehrmacht to be beaten up by 145 and our associates of Desert Air Force and the USAAF. With fellow Aussies Reg Nevett, Ross "Junior" Harding, Kiwi Joe Moffat and Brits "Paddy" and "Pud", I joined the squadron on the Adriatic coast, touching hands with Neville Duke the night he handed over to Stephen Daniel.

The squadron lived mainly under canvas and in my time with 145, of the four in our tent, two were killed and I nearly bought it three times that I was aware of. Staging in the heat of Naples brought my Worst Moment of the War. Commandeered a row - boat on the way back from wall art appreciation at Pompeii and "showing leadership" dived in first -- into a nutrient enriched sewage outlet and was then left by loyal companions to swim naked and alone back to Mamma Italia. A bit on the nose!

Our work was mainly in close support of Eighth Army, dive - bombing and strafing sometimes 100 yards ahead of our somewhat trusting infantry. We particularly got to know the Maori Battalion through our own Kiwi, Joe Moffat, whose brother was the colonel's driver. We urged them to take more towns and villages, but, please save some furniture for us, because Taffy Williams nightly did his bibulous gorilla act by stamping our mess tables into the turf.

Church steeples were attractive targets as they sheltered German artillery observers. They brought my first "near thing", over Bagnacavallo (and on a Sunday!) -- shrapnel through the spinner, oil and glycol everywhere, but landed OK as our strip was only five minutes away. Daniels inspected the aircraft and drawled "I see you've had a bit of a dabble."

A - Flight commander was Aussie Harry Brown - Gaylord, who grabbed as many Australian replacements as he could for 145. The others were Harry Clifton and Barry Ware (who recently joined the Association). Our Australian Comforts Fund goodies and parcels from home, particularly the heavy, sunken rum - preserved fruit cakes from Mum, went down well in the mess. We also improved our fare by sending off a three - tonner with people on leave, loaded with barter, woodbines and blankets, which would produce eighty dozen eggs. I managed one weekend away from the winter mud, which yielded a Delicious Moment: crisp, spotless, virginal, expectant sheets in Assisi, along with golden loganberry wine which had been happily missed by both Wehrmacht and Eighth Army -- who usually left us opaque pink dregs.

Shortly afterwards we Down Under boys suffered our Saddest Moment of the War, to date. Ross Harding, just turned 21, known to us all as "Junior", a born fighter pilot, sun bleached hair from

his home at Sydney's Dee Why beach, was killed. During take-off he had engine trouble, his 500 pounder exploding under him. We buried him in blood-soaked hessian in the mud, marking the temporary grave with white painted stones. He now rests forever at Ancona.

March 3, 1945, turned out to be my Most Interesting Day of the War. Led by Bill Hughes with Harry Clifton as his No 2 and myself with Alan Stacey as No 2 we attacked a train west of Venice, which was probably of some importance as it was moving in daylight protected by five flak cars with triple mounted cannon. We dive-bombed and then strafed and I can still see my cannon shells exploding on the loco now. At about 20 feet right on top of the loco I collected a godawful thump starboard in the Merlin's guts, jamming the throttle at over 350 mph full power. Duck below the trees to avoid the flak -- she'll burn out -- head to the heavens. At 9000 feet she seized. Option 1: bail out and drown. Option 2: (preferred and quieter) glide towards partisan territory. Pick your field -- go in fast -- keep flaps in reserve -- flick them down to lift through a line of tree tops -- grab gun sight to protect face -- land heavily but flat -- head out of canopy which had not jettisoned properly. Rang up Harry to tell him I was leaving the aircraft, so that my mother would know I had survived so far. I still have his letter to her.

Picked up by two Jerries in a couple of minutes. "They're not going to get my remaining two Dunhills" -- shared them with an Italian civvy who had pushed through the small crowd to hurry me away but nicked off quick - smart when my Huns showed over the hedgerow. Maybe?

Bleeding a bit -- taken to an Italian doctor who drove staples into skull. Brandy with woodchips. Then a tumbrel to village with small Wehrmacht unit and first of countless Most Boring Observations: "For you the War is over." Response: "And so say all of us!"

I guess all Services are the same. Lying in a bunk next to the tiny Orderly Room I could hear the Orderly Sergeant shouting over his crank-phone to an opposite number in the Luftwaffe at Mestre. "I've got a bloody airman here. Come and get him. He's your responsibility and I've got a war to run." Which they did in an open VW. I had a string of VWs in later years and their air-cooled engine sound always took me back west of Venice.

To Padua (neither wives nor wealth!) then to Luftwaffe HQ at Verona where I joined up with three gentlemen: two SAAF Spit boys and one American, Sigmund E. Hausner from Linden, New Jersey. "Eddie" and I introduced each other by scratching matching finger holes in the hollow plaster walls of our "cells". Flying a Thunderbolt, Eddie snook up on an FW190 at dusk over Florence, blew it out of the sky and exploded its bomb -- which blew him up. One - all.

We four went to Germany under escort of three Luftwaffe ground staff. At that stage of the war they were at the bottom of the manpower barrel -- but they were proud of their Italian Front, the only Germans holding the line. And we could converse in dog Italian.

The transport, invisible by day, was nose to tail through the Brenner at night, which brought Second Worst Moment of the War: in the dark, knee-to-knee in a crowded closed up 3-tonner, I felt and heard a vigorous scratching. Match light revealed a forced labourer de-lousing his pubics into my lap. The things we did for England!

We were done over by Boston mediums at dawn (145 would have done better). Later, "marching" through the Black Forest in a column of kriegsgefangener, we were momentarily strafed by Thunderbolts, but at least he wing-waggled an apology.

Apart from the smashed-up destruction in the main cities -- and how we exulted seeing from a few miles away the shock waves in the cumulonimbus at 30,000 feet rising from the bombing of Nuremberg

(not that disastrous night raid that Harris wouldn't even mention in his memoirs) – one's main impression was of dull resignation under stress. Trains turned up maybe and there was lots of waiting around – which all Services know in war and peace. We had to get out of wood - fuelled half - tracks and push them up hills.

We had ersatz coffee and woodchip bread in a Soldatenheim, the blacked - out fug much like a NAAFI canteen – or the Longhorsley pub where we challenged the tankies at darts, having beaten them up in our low - flying area by day.

To the German soldiers we were soldiers too. To their civilians we were curious but some had "attitude", understandably. In Augsburg a tall, executive type in immaculate black from hat to polished shoes, put down his attache case on the footpath and marched past several times, spitting at us and snarling "Schweinhunde, terrorfleigel". Our guards never took their gun sights off him.

Schweinfurt, steaming from yesterday's big USAAF raid, brought my Very Still Moment of the War. Picking our way through the wreckage our lead escort while adjusting his rucksack handed his beautiful Schmeisser machine pistol to a wild - eyed 12 - year - old, who held it distressingly close to my nose.

Walking through a picture - book village we heard Goebbels' last speech over the village square radio: all Siegfried myth and Germany will again rise from the flames of sacrifice. The villagers, all old and well - fed, seemed not to be that impressed. Next day he murdered his beautiful young family and suicided.

Our morale held up reasonably well but there were some who had been "in" since 1939 who could be excused for acting "somewhat strange". On the morning the American tanks came through the wire of Stalag VIIA at Moosburg (near Munich, with Dachau just down the road) Graham Friis, a Kiwi from a neighbouring DAF squadron and I lit a fire to celebrate. We were immediately berated by an English captain in spotless walking - out dress and gleaming pips, for wasting fuel. He'd been in since Dunkirk.

On the march I'd met P/O John Jones, to us an oldie of 35 plus - no wings, an Admin type. He was returning in peacetime from years in India; a U - boat stopped his ship in the Bay of Biscay at the outbreak and he spent the entire war in captivity, including the tragic winter march from Sagan away from the Russians. Kindest Moment of the War: we were in a Lanc together from Rheims and the crew, God bless 'em, had him up front to see the White Cliffs. At Waddington, a line of burly WAAFS with de - lousing puffers. "Open shirt, open pants, you lot. Righto go and get a cuppa." Home!

Train to Liverpool Street (compartment discretion, no conversation with untidy man in grimy battledress and blood - stained scarf) – No 11 bus to Victoria (I still take it) – train to RAAF Brighton. Check into the Metropole then up High Street to my barber to attend to gollywog hair. "Hello again sir. Been away for a while?" So I guess the War was over.

Most Vivid Memory of the War? Try this: take off in the murk before dawn on a long - range recce to the top of the Adriatic. Pull up into the clear with sun just rising behind your right shoulder – and there, en face, the Alps at dawn: infinite ramparts of pink ice cream. This is Dumpling Red Three - Over and Out.

Post-war PS – stood as best man for Reg Nevett before he moved to the country, learning from him sadly that Joe Moffatt was lost in a strafing run during the final breakthrough which we had all longed for. He rests in Bologna.....**John Ulm.**

# No. 145 SQUADRON



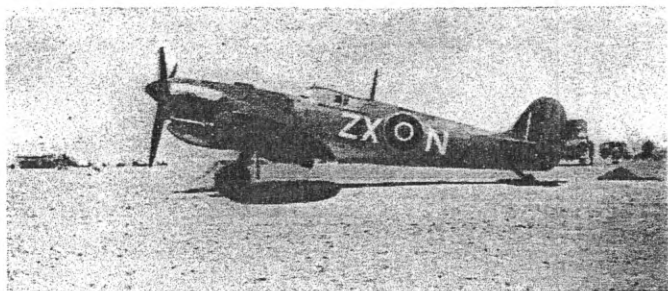
Badge: *In front of a cross couped, a sword in bend, point downward.*

Motto: "*Diu noctuque pugnamus*" ("We fight by day and night").

The sword represents No. 145 Squadron's role, the cross couped the squadron's association with No. 14 Squadron.

No. 145 Squadron was formed late in the First World War in Palestine (May, 1918) and became operational with S.E.5a's during the final offensive in September, 1918. Its role at this time was to join with No. 111 Squadron in maintaining standing patrols over the enemy airfield at Jenin to keep the German aircraft on the ground. Thus its operational existence was short and after the Armistice it remained until 6th September, 1919.

The squadron reformed at Croydon on 10th October, 1939, as a day- and night-fighter unit equipped with Blenheim If's. In March, 1940, it began to convert to Hurricanes and in May became operational, ferrying Hurricanes to France and backing



First in the desert with Spitfires. BP981 "ZX N" of No. 145 Squadron at LG.85 in 1942.

up the squadrons there. Its first action was on 18th May when it engaged twelve He 111's over France. June and July were busy months for No. 145 for it was one of the units bearing the brunt of the fighting over the Channel. Its heaviest battle was on 8th August when it took on a mass raid on a Channel convoy. Six days later the squadron flew north for a rest, returning to 11 Group in October, 1940, but by then action was desultory until the New Year when sweeps began and No. 145 was busy converting to Spitfires. First victory with a Spitfire was on 1st March when a Ju 88 was put into the sea off Selsey. Sweeps and *Rhubarbs* were the order of the day and in May the squadron started using cannon-Spitfires. In July it went over to North Sea patrols in Scotland and prepared for overseas. In February, 1942, it left the U.K. and became the first squadron in the Western Desert with Spitfires; becoming operational in June, 1942, concentrating on seeking out and destroying the Bf 109's. It was now involved in intensive air battles again both on offensive patrols and escorts to Boston day-bombers; in August going over to interception duties in the Delta area.

LV729, a bomb-laden Spitfire VIII of No. 145 Squadron on Fano strip in the Autumn of 1944. The badge has appeared on the cowling and the code letters are red, outlined in white.



At the end of the year the squadron was again heavily in action providing air superiority patrols for the break-out at El Alamein, following this up with intensive cover for the fighter-bombers chasing the Germans back to Tunisia. This continued for six months and then No. 145 went to Malta for Sicily and Italy, once again providing fighter cover for the attacking bombers and fighter-bombers. In Italy the squadron flew bomb line patrols and convoy patrols until moving to the East Coast and operating over the Adriatic, flying armed recce up the coast. In March, 1944, it transferred its attention to the Anzio landings; it was in that month that the squadron claimed its 200th enemy aircraft destroyed. Having been a pure fighter squadron all this time it transferred to ground-attack in June and its aircraft were fitted with bombracks; by August it had almost entirely transferred to this role and by now it was moving further up the Adriatic Coast until some of its operations were as far afield as Fiume. The winter reduced operations but in February, 1945, the squadron entered into three months frenzied action before peace in Europe took place. Disbandment quickly followed, at Treviso on 19th August, 1945.

The squadron was reformed in 2nd T.A.F. in Germany at Celle on 1st March, 1952. A brief beginning on Vampires and then it flew Venoms for the whole of its existence there, the squadron being disbanded again on 15th October, 1957.

## Commanding Officers

S/Ldr. J. D. Miller	...	...	...	Oct. 1939—Jun. 1940
S/Ldr. J. R. A. Peel	...	...	...	Jun. 1940—Jan. 1941
S/Ldr. W. J. Leather, D.F.C.	...	...	...	Jan. 1941—Apr. 1941
S/Ldr. P. S. Turner, D.F.C.	...	...	...	Apr. 1941—Oct. 1941
S/Ldr. D. J. L. Lovell, D.F.C.	...	...	...	Oct. 1941—May 1942
S/Ldr. C. N. Overton	...	...	...	May 1942—Aug. 1942
S/Ldr. P. G. H. Mathews	...	...	...	Aug. 1942—Nov. 1942
S/Ldr. R. Marples, D.F.C.	...	...	...	Nov. 1942—Jan. 1943
S/Ldr. L. C. Wade, D.F.C. Bar	...	...	...	Jan. 1943—Nov. 1943
S/Ldr. O. C. Kallio, D.F.C.	...	...	...	Nov. 1943—Mar. 1944
S/Ldr. N. F. Duke, D.S.O., D.F.C. Bar	...	...	...	Mar. 1944—Sep. 1944
S/Ldr. S. W. F. Daniel, D.F.C. Bar	...	...	...	Sep. 1944—Jul. 1945
S/Ldr. C. H. Saunders, D.F.C.	...	...	...	Jul. 1945—Aug. 1945
S/Ldr. C. A. Rennie, D.F.M.	...	...	...	Mar. 1952—1953
S/Ldr. F. A. Johnson, D.F.C.	...	...	...	1953—

## Aircraft Insignia

It is improbable that any insignia was carried by No. 145 Squadron in Palestine in 1918. When re-formed in October, 1939, the code letters "SO" were used whilst the squadron was in this country. Whilst in the Middle East it carried the letters "ZX" and in addition the squadron badge on a white disc either on the fin above the fin stripes or on the nose cowling. The Vampires carried the letter "B" on the booms and rudders in flight colours. With the Venoms it put the badge on the nose in a white disc and carried a white rectangle with a red cross thereon each side of the boom roundels.

## Detachment at Rosignano.

Loreto	...	...	...	...	Aug. 1944—Sep. 1944
Fano	...	...	...	...	Sep. 1944—Dec. 1944
Bellariva	...	...	...	...	Dec. 1944—May 1945
Treviso	...	...	...	...	May 1945—Aug. 1945

Disbanded at Treviso on 19th Aug. 1945. Reformed at Celle on 1st Mar. 1952.  
Celle ... .. Mar. 1952—Oct. 1957  
Disbanded at Celle on 15th Oct. 1957.



# AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc

ABN: 83 295 759 224

PO Box K346 Haymarket NSW 1238

## *Southern Skies*

The Newsletter of AHSA (NSW) Inc

March 2010 No.437

### March Meeting

The March meeting will be held at the Powerhouse Museum on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010, commencing at 7.45pm. Enter from the Macarthur Street end and the meeting room is adjacent to the main foyer. Visitors are most welcome and supper will be available after the meeting.

The meeting will feature the Annual General Meeting which will include The President's Report, The Financial Report, Election of Office Bearers and other business. Included in the Office Bearers will be the new position of Membership Secretary. A copy of the duties of that role will be available for perusal before the commencement of the AGM.

Following the AGM, members will be invited to experience a forensic analysis of Australian aviation enthusiasts as a group. Whether your speciality is plane spotting, the restoration of antique aeroplanes, or delving deeply into the minutiae of aviation history - you will not escape the discomfort of scrutiny. During the evening session, our analyst will explore the obsessive - compulsive disorder suffered so acutely by most of us. The session will include periods of stress relief, in the form of music therapy, during which members will be encouraged to sing-a-long. Song sheets will be provided for those who may have forgotten the words.

There will be a short health and safety briefing before we take to the psychologist's couch. A preparatory reading of *Loops & Landings*, from the May and June 2006 copies of *Southern Skies* is recommended in order to get the most out of the treatment. And remember - group therapy is the best therapy!"

Please join us for this important meeting.

### Committee Meeting

A Committee meeting, commencing at 6.30pm, will be held immediately prior to the March meeting.

### February Meeting

Guest Speaker for the evening was Gareth Morgan, whose topic was *The 1919 England - Australia Air Race*.

Gareth introduced the talk with the background surrounding the first survey flight between England and initially India using a Handley Page 0/400 bomber. William Morris Hughes, as Prime Minister agreed to the proposal that the Commonwealth of Australia should sponsor a prize of £10,000 to be awarded to the pilot to accomplish the first successful flight from Great Britain to Australia in 720 consecutive hours (30 days). The conditions made in March 1919 included that the offer

remained open until 31<sup>st</sup> December 1920; the aircraft and its components must have been constructed within the confines of the British Empire; the pilots and all crew must be Australian and the starting place must be from either Hounslow Aerodrome or Calshot Seaplane Station.

The first unofficial starters were, in fact French. Etienne Poulet and his mechanic, Jean Benoist, departed Paris for Melbourne in a Caudron G4 biplane on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1919, one week before the first official entrant in the Race. Poulet retired after engine problems forced him to return to Moulmein, Burma on 9<sup>th</sup> December, one day before Ross & Keith Smith arrived in Darwin.

Captain George Campbell Matthews and Sgt. T.D. Kay departed Hounslow in a Sopwith Wallaby on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1919 as the first official starters. The Wallaby, which was designed by Harry Hawker and based on the Sopwith Atlantic, was equipped with the latest devices: retracting seats, dual control and a turn meter. It crashed on the island of Bali on 17<sup>th</sup> April 1920.

Ross & Keith Smith, Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett departed Hounslow in a Vickers Vimy on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1919 and arrived in Darwin on 10<sup>th</sup> December 1919 and later in Sydney on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1920. They, of course, were the winners of the £10,000 prize.

Capt. Roger Douglas and Lt. Leslie Ross departed Hounslow in an Alliance Endeavour on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1919, but the aircraft crashed shortly thereafter at Surbiton, only 6 miles from Hounslow, killing both crew members.

With Lt Valdemar Rendle and Lt. David Williams as pilots and Capt George Wilkins (later Sir Hubert) as navigator and Lt Garnsey St Clair Potts as mechanic, the Blackburn Kangaroo departed Hounslow on 21<sup>st</sup> November 1919 and due to engine problems en-route from Greece to Egypt, returned to Crete, where the aircraft crash-landed at Suda Bay. The crew withdrew from the race when it was evident that it would take some months to effect repairs.

Capt Cedric Howell and Lt George Fraser departed Hounslow on 4<sup>th</sup> December in a Martinsyde A1. It crashed into the Mediterranean Sea near Corfu on 9<sup>th</sup> December, killing both crew.

Lt Ray Parer and Lt John McIntosh departed Hounslow on 8<sup>th</sup> January 1920 and arrived in Darwin on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1920 in the DH9 "PD". They were thus the second crew to fly from England to Australia.

Gareth accompanied his talk with many photographs and much more detail of the competitors' adventures and concluded with a somewhat melodramatic video of Ross & Keith Smith's flight which included much footage from Frank Hurley.

## Annual Subscriptions

Members are reminded that Annual Subscription renewals are now overdue. For those who have not yet renewed their subscriptions, another Membership Renewal Form is enclosed. Please note that AHSA Inc has closed the opportunity to join both Societies at the special rate. Membership of AHSA (NSW) Inc remains at the very modest \$25 per annum.

## Wings over Illawarra

The annual Wings over Illawarra open day will be held at Albion Park Aerodrome on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010. AHSA (NSW) Inc will be providing a table with information about the Society, along with newsletters and membership applications.

The Open Day will feature many aircraft from the HARS collection, including the newly arrived DC-4, VH-PAF, which will be on static display. Other HARS aircraft that will be on display include the Super Constellation, Neptunes, Catalina and C-47s. Aircraft from the Sport Aircraft Association, RAN Historical Flight and the Temora Aviation Museum will also be in attendance.

## AHSA meetings

### Melbourne

Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month, at the RAAF Association, 24 Camberwell Rd, Hawthorn East. Meetings start at 7.30pm. Contact Antony Grage, 0418 170 395.

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February.** "Harry Houdini: his times, his Voisin, and his flights in Australia", by Antony Grage and Graeme Minns, both AHSA members, exploring Houdini's background and the state of the science of aviation when he made his flights in Australia, and his contribution to the fledgling industry.

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March.** "The history of radio navigation aids used by Australian civil aviation since 1935" by Roger Meyer, President of the Civil Aviation Historical Society of Australia and AHSA member. Roger worked with the Radio Installation Section of DCA from 1965, and was involved with the design and installation of radar-based radio control of airport approach systems.

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> April.** "The Migrant Caper 1947-49" by Geoff Goodall, covering a little-known period when Australian charter companies flew large numbers of migrants from Europe in military disposals Hudsons, Lodestars, C-39s, C-47s and even a DC-5.

### Brisbane

Meetings are held on the last Friday of each month in the "Meeting Room" at the Indooroopilly Library, Indooroopilly Shoppingtown, Station Rd, Indooroopilly. As the meeting is after library hours, entry is via a door from the car park. Visitors are welcome; contact Don Furlonger (07) 3371 5867.

**Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February.** Members Night – "Viscounts and Electras". Members are invited to tell-and-show their recollections, anecdotes, trivia, photos and scrapbook extracts on these first turboprop airliners to enter service in Australia.

## Calendar of Events

**28 February 2010** Wings over Illawarra. Albion Park NSW

**28 February 2010** RAAF Museum Air Pageant. RAAF Museum, Point Cook Vic.

**6 March 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**20 March 2010** Houdini Centenary of Flight Air Show. Melton Vic.

**20-21 March 2010** Hamilton Aero Club Fly-in in conjunction with Sir Reginald Ansett Museum. Hamilton Vic.

**21 March 2010** Antique and Classic Aircraft Air Display. Parafield SA.

**27-28 March 2010** Grand Southern Cross Model Air Rally. Luskintyre NSW

**27-28 March 2010** Cardinal aircraft Fly-in. Mittagong NSW

**28 March 2010** Canberra Airport Open Day. Canberra Airport ACT

## Contributions and Contacts

News items, other contributions, or requests for information etc for inclusion in the newsletter can be sent to AHSA (NSW) at P.O. Box K346, Haymarket NSW 1238 or to Warwick Bigsworth, E-mail ([madsen2010@optusnet.com.au](mailto:madsen2010@optusnet.com.au)) or (02) 8824 7814.

## Thanks

Thanks to Antony Grage and John Scott for their contributions to this newsletter.

## Aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) Inc

ABN: 83 295 759 224

### Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the Aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) Inc will be held at the Powerhouse Museum, Harris Street Ultimo on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2010 commencing at 7:45pm.

### Business

1. Accept President's Report
2. Accept Honorary Treasurer's Report
3. Elect Office Bearers for the current year:
  - (a) President
  - (b) Vice President
  - (c) Honorary Treasurer
  - (d) Honorary Secretary
  - (e) Membership Secretary
  - (f) Photo Archivist
  - (g) Committee
4. Any other business

Warwick Bigsworth  
Honorary Secretary

## LOOPS AND LANDINGS

Inspired by John Kingsford-Smith

### A Centenary For The Aerial League Trophy - 16th March 2010 - Part 1.

On March 18, 1910, the news from South Australia of a successful flight by Fred Custance was in the Sydney papers. The news prompted the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* to reflect, under a heading, *Flying in Australia*, that, "The initial successes of two experimenters with a Bleriot monoplane at Bolivar, in the vicinity of Adelaide, almost mark the entry of Australia into the world of flight. If the entry is a somewhat belated one we have at least the advantage of being able to make use of the experience of others." Because a flight measured in minutes, rather than seconds, had been reported, the editor believed that we were on the verge of witnessing the birth of aviation in Australia compared with Europe, where flights measured in hours already proclaimed the existence of a healthy infant. The editor was also expressing an opinion that our progress had been slow because we had not taken sufficient advantage of overseas experience.

For the past twelve months, George Augustine Taylor, as Hon. Secretary of *The Aerial League of Australia*, had worked tirelessly to make Australians aware of the importance of aviation, particularly for national defence. He was well aware of the rapid progress in the practical application of aeronautical science in the USA and Europe. However, he believed that this progress was due to the unacknowledged use of the results of Lawrence Hargrave's research. He also believed that Australia, and Hargrave, had more to give to the world of aviation, if left alone, and protected from the theft of its inventions by overseas predators. Therefore, his attitude to foreign aviation interests seeking a foothold in Australia, particularly any connected to the Wright brothers, was distinctly hostile. However, his high expectation for Australia's contribution to the immediate future of aviation was, within twelve months, proved to be misplaced. In March, 1909, he wrote an article in his publication, *Building*, under the heading, *Australia and the Aeroplane, The Youngest Nation Solves the Problem of the Ages, A Plea for National Self Respect*. At the end of his article he wrote, "We wish to see the Government subsidising Australian aeronautical research. We wish to see public spirited Australians contribute to a national fund for the purpose of rewarding the inventor of a heavier than air machine that will first fly from Sydney to Melbourne. This fund would help Australian defence and encourage Australian engineering research. We will start it with Fifty Pounds." Australia had to wait five years before a flight from Melbourne to Sydney was finally achieved, and then by a French aviator, Maurice Guillaux - flying a Bleriot monoplane!

During 1909 Taylor formed *The Aerial League of Australia*, succeeded in having the Federal Government offer a £5000 prize for an Australian inventor of a flying machine for military purposes, and set up his own aeroplane factory in Sydney. The conditions of the government competition, drafted in part by Taylor, excluded foreigners, and required the Australian designers to: "embody sufficient novelty and invention over what has been previously published in Australia to warrant the grant of Letters Patent." Unfortunately, none of the forty odd entrants for the prize was successful. In a preliminary assessment of some of the entrants in November, 1909, the eminent engineer, Norman Selfe, confided in Lawrence Hargrave, "I saw like you such an absence of knowledge that it seemed to me the first thing to decide was the question - Is there anything here that the Aerial League should recognise at all?"

In the January 20, 1910, issue of *The Motor in Australia*, the publisher announced that the Aviation section was now under the control of George A. Taylor. Taylor used this, and other publications under his control, to advertise his own success with heavier-than-air flight at Narrabeen Heads on December 5, 1909. He frequently obfuscated to the extent that his readers may have believed that his flights at Narrabeen were powered. But in fact powered flight had eluded him, though he still held out hope. In the March 1, 1910. issue of *The Motor in Australia* he wrote: "The full sized automatically stable aeroplane has now been completed by Mr George A. Taylor and his first flight is

expected in a fortnight." But now came the unwelcome news from Adelaide, just as he had sent off his copy to meet the deadline for the April issue of *The Motor in Australia*, in which he wrote: "A Farman machine is coming to Australia. We trust it will have better luck than the Wright, Bleriot, and Voisin machines, which up to the present time have not got off the earth." Perhaps March 18, 1910, was the day that Taylor realised that Australia could not progress far in aviation on its own. It must have been with mixed feelings that he composed the telegram to Fred Custance which read: "Congratulations from the Aerial League of Australia, hope injuries trifling, best wishes success. George Taylor, Hon. Sec." He may have then turned his mind to the significance of March 17, 1910, and the kind of trophy the Aerial League should present to Fred Custance.

During most of 1909, Taylor had been fighting a rearguard action against an assault from interests associated with a Wright biplane. At about the time he launched the Aerial League in April, Taylor became aware of the plans of J & N Tait to import and demonstrate a French built Wright Model A. This was precisely the kind of distraction he did not want at the time. His focus was on encouraging local inventors to build and fly Australian aeroplanes. He also believed that national pride depended on the prize for the first powered flight being awarded to an Australian. He had an additional concern about the impending importation of the Wright biplane bringing with it a threat to Australian designers because of the Wright's propensity to use the law to protect their patents. This was particularly galling because Taylor believed that the Wright brothers patents were stolen from the inventions of Lawrence Hargrave in the first place.

Colin Defries, who was chosen to pilot the Wright biplane, soon felt the chilly atmosphere generated towards him by Taylor. Barbed comments flowed between the two in the press, culminating in an article by Taylor on November 25, in *The Motor in Australia*, titled, *The Wright Machine, A Chapter of Mistakes*. In response, on November 29, Defries used his speech to the students of Wesley College, Melbourne, to insult Taylor by suggesting that he had set up the Aerial League for self serving reasons, and also to forbid attendance by members of the Aerial League at his exhibitions, planned to commence in Sydney on December 4. His actual words were: "Whilst talking to you I would like to let forth on my opinion of the *Sydney Aerial League*, or whatever this body like to call themselves. I heard such a lot about them before I came to Australia, that I thought perhaps before I gave any flight and possibly broke my machine up, I would give these gentlemen an opportunity of seeing it at rest, which if the *Aerial* part of their brains is developed, as they would lead people to think it is, would have been of the greatest interest; quite apart from the fact, that for the first time in any part of the world, the public were to to be admitted to watch an aeroplane being built up. Would you believe that out of the 500 odd thousand population, not more than a thousand, if that, took the opportunity, and I cannot but think that the *Sydney Aerial League* is a big fluke, and was formed for somebody's benefit...whose at present I cannot say. However, I can tell these gentlemen that if they desire any concessions to view the flights they will not get them, in fact, if I have my way I shall not let them in at all, as the fact that they are anxious to see a flight, but yet did not trouble to come and see the machine that I took the trouble to place before them, proves that their interest in aviation merely consists in watching other peoples' exploits for their own excitement."

The failure of Defries to get into the air on the opening day of *The Flying Fortnight*, coupled with the success of Taylor on December 5 at Narrabeen, was a spectacular victory for the local man. Although Defries did get airborne briefly on December 9, he failed again on the next public day, Saturday, December 11. Although he did fly for about a quarter of a mile in the early morning of December 18, the last day of *The Flying Fortnight*, this flight ended in a crash. By then, the people of Sydney had lost interest. Taylor's subsequent repeated insistence, in his publications, that the Wright biplane did not leave the ground, generally became the accepted wisdom. Taylor was not in attendance at Defries' exhibitions, on December 9th and 18th, to judge whether he flew or not. In any case an award of a trophy to Defries from the Aerial League, for the first flight in Australia, would have been over Taylor's dead body.

Now, on March 18, 1910, with George Taylor Hon Sec's telegram having promptly, and solicitously, recognised the achievement of Fred Custance, would a trophy soon follow?.....**J. Scott.**



# AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc

ABN: 83 295 759 224

PO Box K346 Haymarket NSW 1238

## *Southern Skies*

The Newsletter of AHSA (NSW) Inc

April 2010 No.438

### **April Meeting**

The April meeting will be held at the Powerhouse Museum on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> April 2010, commencing at 7.45pm. Enter from the Macarthur Street end and the meeting room is adjacent to the main foyer. Visitors are most welcome and supper will be available after the meeting.

The meeting will feature the:

#### ***Annual Aviation Trivia and Aircraft Recognition Competitions***

The 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Aviation Trivia competition will be hosted this year by David Eyre, who will provide a set of questions which are sure to test the minds and memories of all those interested in aviation history. He will present the highly prized Slipstream Trophy to the winner.

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Aircraft Recognition competition will be presented by Warwick Bigsworth who will provide a selection of some very easy and some exotic images of civil, military and vintage aircraft. Participants will compete for the fabulous Brian White Memorial Trophy, which will be awarded to the winner and the President's Trophy which will be awarded to the most "average" competitor.

In addition to the trophies, winners will also be able to choose from a selection of book prizes. A small charge will be required to enter the competitions.

Previous winners are reminded to return their trophies for the hand-over ceremonies. Please join us for this most entertaining and light-hearted meeting.

### **March Meeting**

The March meeting was the Annual General Meeting which consisted of the President's Report, Financial Report and Election of Office Bearers for 2010.

### **President's Report**

"For me the highlight of 2009 was the celebration of the centenaries of the first flights in Australia and the first powered flights in Australia. Because of the controversy surrounding the first powered flight in Australia it was a delight for me to be able to take the case for Colin Defries, first to Adelaide and then to Melbourne where I pressed the case for Defries in front of audiences that had an interest in their own 'heroes'; Custance and Wittber in the case of South Australia and Houdini in the case of Victoria. I also had an article published in *Flightpath* magazine and a blog on the Powerhouse website and Defries even made it to PpRuNe, the Professional Pilot's Rumour Network. While

I was treated well in my talks to the groups in South Australia and Victoria, the views I expressed in the blog and those that appeared in PpRuNe were not treated so kindly. However, we stand firm that Defries was the first and that stance will be maintained. Of course, I acknowledge the fine historical analysis carried out by John Scott that sorted out the historical situation that allowed Defries to gain his rightful pride of place. The centenary year culminated delightfully in the combined AHSA (NSW) and RAeS Sydney Branch meeting with Dave Craddock as guest speaker and an appearance by Zaniah Defries and by the 'magic' of modern communications, her father David from Spain.

The downside of the year was the sad loss of respected member, friend and Treasurer, John Swanson. He will be remembered.

2010 will continue as usual here at the Powerhouse Museum but with the imperceptible difference that I am no longer a member of staff. I retired on the fourth of February with almost thirty years of service. I will continue to look after the interests of AHSA (NSW) here at the Museum with assistance from my former colleague, Andrew Grant.

Some of you took the opportunity offered by AHSA Inc. to take out two years subscription to *Aviation Heritage* for \$110 offer. It is good that the hoped for integration is progressing albeit on this minor level. Hopefully there will be more news of further integrating strategies to come.

That having been said, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the committee members for their support, Warwick Bigsworth, our extremely competent secretary and newsletter editor, John Scott for his ever interesting and well researched *Loops & Landings* and Keith White taking over the handling of the Society's funds following John's death.

Thank you all for your interest and commitment to aviation history.

Ian Debenham - President"

### **Financial Report**

Acting Honorary Treasurer, Keith White, presented the financial report and advised that for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009, Total Income was \$2,368.53; Total Expenditure was \$2,206.30; Total Assets were \$7,718.16 and Total Liabilities were \$0.

### **Election of Office Bearers**

Eleonore Eyre kindly presided over the election of office bearers for 2010. The results were:

President: Ian Debenham  
 Honorary Secretary: Warwick Bigsworth  
 Honorary Treasurer: Keith White  
 Membership Secretary: Peter Coates  
 Photographic Archivist: David Eyre  
 General Committee: Barry Collins, Bill Holswich,  
 Roger Kennedy, John Scott.

The cryptic words by John Scott about the agenda following the AGM certainly attracted much attention, judging by the large gathering in attendance.

John's presentation was in fact a preamble and background about Bert Hinkler and his fatal accident in Italy. The video which followed showed the obsession by one person, (the late Ted Wixted), about conspiracy theories, Catholic dogma and intrigue which he believed all featured in Hinkler's disappearance.

Not only was Wixted obsessed with Hinkler and particularly the search for the "real truth" about Bert's accident, but so is Hinkler's home town of Bundaberg, Queensland which has numerous sites and facilities bearing the Hinkler name.

True to his word, John did supply the words and music to "*Hustling Hinkler*", although no-one was observed to join in the singing!

### Wings over Illawarra

The Wings over Illawarra open day was held at Albion Park Aerodrome on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2010. The HARS was the principal organiser and beneficiary of the open day, with flights by the Super Constellation, Catalina and Neptune. Static displays by HARS included the other two Neptunes, DC-4, C-47, with one other undergoing major maintenance in a hangar, CAC Winjeel, Hawker Hunter, CAC Ceres, Piaggio P-166, LET L-200 Morava and various other airframes.

The RAAF participation included flying displays by the Roulettes PC-9 aerobatic team and an F-18/A Hornet, along with a static display of a C-130J Hercules and King Air 350. The RAN provided static displays of its S-70B Seahawk, Westland Sea King and Aerospatiale Squirrel helicopters, whilst the RAN Historic Flight UH-1B Iroquois provided a platform for the Army's parachute team. The Army had an S-70 Blackhawk on static display.

Other interesting static displays included Sy Allsep's Twin Pioneer, VH-EVB and Beaver VH-SYS; McDermott Helicopters Bell 214B, RFDSA King Air B200 VH-MWX, L-39C Albatros VH-LCJ and TBM-3E Avenger VH-TBM.

AHSA (NSW) Inc had a table with information about the Society, along with newsletters and membership applications. We were able to sell a number of books and magazines to contribute to our funds.

Special thanks go to Ken Garland who provided table and chairs and facilitated our position in the HARS hangar and assisted with transportation of our material. Thanks also to Peter Coates, Ian Debenham, Bill Holswich and Jack Powell who provided much assistance during the day.

### Book Sale

#### Mark's Book Barn

Mark's Book Barn at 215 Homer Street, Earlwood NSW has acquired several aviation collections in the past

few years, including that of the late Chris O'Neill. He has now acquired the collection of many books and magazines from the estate of the late Michael Tooher, who was also a member of the Society until his passing last year.

Mark is anxious to reduce his stock of aviation books, so he is offering a special 30% discount on aviation books and magazines to AHSA NSW members; **but you must take a copy of this newsletter to the shop to receive Mark's generous discount.**

The sale commences on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> April; the shop is open Wednesday - Friday 1200-1700 and Saturday 1000-1500. However, you can contact Mark any day on 0417 065 089.

### Special Events

A number of special events have been held to commemorate some parochial "firsts" in Australian aviation history:

#### Adelaide: Wittber & Custance

A large celebration of the centenary of powered flight was held at the South Australia Aviation Museum on 14 March. Bill Wittber had done a 'hop' on 13<sup>th</sup> March 1910 & four days later Fred Custance allegedly flew the Bleriot twice around a paddock at Bolivar. This was one day before Harry Houdini at Diggers Rest, but three months after Colin Defries' now widely acknowledged first heavier-than-air powered flight in Sydney.

The day was opened by Jon Johansen (pilot of RV4 VH-NOJ that had flown around the world three times) followed by four speakers talking about each 25 years (total time 10 minutes). Following the talks, a model of a Bleriot XI tried to fly, and then Graham Hosking of Tyabb fame ran the 24hp Anzani engine from the original Custance/Wittber Bleriot. Guests later went to the memorial cairns at the paddock of the original flights and posed with the Anzani. Many people came dressed in period costume and an old car and motor bike from around 1910 were also present at S.A.A.M. A locally based Wirraway and a Yak 52 did a flypast followed by the Roulettes that were in Adelaide for Clipsal 500 car races.

#### Victoria: Houdini Centenary

The Diggers Rest Community and the Shire of Melton held a Commemoration Ceremony at Diggers Rest on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> March, a Centenary Air Show at Melton Airfield on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> March, and a Festival of Flight fair at Diggers Rest on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> March.

The Houdini Centenary Air Show at Melton attracted over 90 aircraft, from RA-Aus types to more contemporary Cessna, Piper, Beech, Mooney models and numerous vintage, war-bird, fire-fighting and fire spotting aircraft.

#### Commemorative Flight

On the 9<sup>th</sup> March Temora Aviation Museum President and Founder David Lowy AM flew the Museum's Ryan STM from Wagga Wagga to Temora with a special bag of mail, to celebrate the Centenary of Powered Flight in Australia with the launch of a series of three new aviation-themed postage stamps from Australia Post.

The Centenary of Powered Flight stamp issue, which commemorates the efforts of three notable aviators, Colin Defries, John Duigan, and escape artist Harry Houdini,

aims to recognise the pioneers of aviation in Australia who helped shape the way in which mail was delivered in this country.

The day began with David displaying enlarged versions of the stamps in front of the Ryan in Wagga Wagga. After receiving his mail delivery he then departed Wagga in the Ryan and headed for Temora. The aircraft's arrival at the Museum was witnessed by many visitors, who turned out especially for the occasion. David said a few words to those assembled, followed by the Mayor of Temora Peter Speirs. The mailbag was then handed over to the rider of a vintage postie bike for its journey to the local post office.

The first airmail flight was undertaken by Frenchman Maurice Guillaux, who flew from Melbourne to Sydney over seven stages to deliver a small quantity of parcels and 1,785 postcards. It was the longest airmail journey in the world at the time.

Prior to the flight, Temora Aviation Museum Founder and President, David Lowy AM, said, "Our flight will start in Wagga Wagga, NSW because this was one of the stopovers on that first ever airmail delivery in 1914. We're going to take one of our historic open cockpit aeroplanes, complete with a load of special postcards, and fly to Temora, NSW to help acknowledge the impact aviation has had on the world we live in today."

The stamps that Australia Post has released are 55c featuring Colin Defries, \$1.40 International featuring John Duigan, and \$2.10 International featuring Harry Houdini. It is noteworthy that Australia Post acknowledges Colin Defries as the first who flew a heavier-than-air powered aircraft in Australia.

### **Qantas Heritage Collection**

Travellers through Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport's Domestic Terminal T3 may be aware of the Qantas Heritage Collection. It is located adjacent to Gate 13, open Monday - Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm and admission is free.

The display area was opened in September 2005, although the project began in the 1990s by former staff members, including the late George Roberts.

Qantas memorabilia has been collected by the public for many years. Much of it is ephemera such as timetables and tickets but occasionally something exceptionally rare turns up, such as a pair of wicker chairs used in pre-war aircraft by the pilot and navigator. These were donated recently by a family who found them in a farm shed. They were made by the Jubilee Institute in Auckland and a long-serving Qantas employee identified them as the real thing.

Other important finds include the winter and summer uniforms worn by Australia's first air hostesses on the Qantas Empire Airways Lockheed L749 Constellations, which operated between Sydney and London in 1948.

Qantas ephemera, particularly related to the flying boats days, is especially valuable to collectors. A desirable item is edition No.1 of the Empire Airways in-flight magazine, published in 1935. Copies are now worth about \$150. Menus, tickets and brochures are considered valuable, with cabin tickets for C Class flying boats also worth about \$150. Aero philately is another popular area for airline collectors. This includes first flight covers, with

the earliest examples now hugely valuable. Charles Leski in Melbourne is a specialist in this area; his Canberra representative, Tom Frommer, is one of Australia's biggest collectors.

Last year Leski sold the collection of the late Nelson Eustis, which included a Qantas envelope signed by McGinness and Fysh and carried on the first Charleville to Cloncurry flight. It sold for \$12,815.

An envelope carried on the first flight of the extended Camooweal service sold for \$4,660. Related items are the bags used to carry the mail, often specially printed to mark the occasion. Also important are early documents, such as a menu owned by Tom Frommer from the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner for Qantas, signed by all the important figures, including Fergus McMaster, the grazier who became the first Qantas Chairman. Frommer gives this menu a value of several thousand dollars.

So if you have a spare hour or two when at Sydney Airport, a visit to the Qantas Heritage Collection is worth the effort. And you can get a panoramic view of the runways, too! (*Courtesy Sydney Morning Herald*).

### **Military Additions**

#### **F/A-18F Super Hornet**

The first batch of five of the RAAF's new F/A-18F Super Hornets arrived at RAAF Base Amberley to join No.1 Squadron on 26<sup>th</sup> March. Whilst they made landings at Honolulu, Pago Pago and Auckland, they also received in-flight refuelling from a civilian DC-10 tanker. The new aircraft have the Defence serial number prefix of A44 - .

In early March, Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Mark Binskin said that "The Super Hornets arrival will represent a major leap in Air Force capability. They are Australia's first new air combat aircraft in 25 years."

A detachment of aircrew and maintenance personnel from No. 1 Squadron is currently at NAS Lemoore in California, and have been preparing the aircraft for the series of flights to Australia.

"This is the beginning of a new chapter for Air Force. The Super Hornet is a true multi-role aircraft that, when flown and supported by RAAF's high-calibre people, will ensure Australia's regional air combat capability edge through to the introduction of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter," Air Marshal Binskin said.

"Reaching this stage of the project on time and on budget has been due to a great partnership between the Royal Australian Air Force, Defence Materiel Organisation, United States Navy, The Boeing Company and their industry partners, General Electric, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon.

"The next few weeks will be a very busy time for the Super Hornet aircrew and maintainers at Lemoore. The detachment is conducting acceptance flights and ground tests on each of the aircraft.

"Another key task for the detachment will be working with an air-to-air tanker, conducting day and night refuelling flights to ensure they are ready for the journey to Australia," Air Marshal Binskin said. The Air Force is acquiring 24 Super Hornets which will progressively arrive at their home base, RAAF Amberley near Ipswich, during 2010 and 2011.

The Super Hornets are an interim replacement for the ageing F-111s. The F-111s have served Australia well, but are now approaching the end of their operational life, and will be retired at the end of this year.

#### **CH-47F Chinook**

On 20<sup>th</sup> March 2010, Greg Combet, the Minister for Defence Personnel, Materiel and Science, announced the Defence Materiel Organisation (DMO) has signed a contract with the US Army Security Assistance Command to acquire seven CH-47F Chinook helicopters, two Simulators and associated spares.

"The aircraft will replace the (Australian Army's) existing fleet of six CH-47D Chinooks operated by C Squadron of the 5th Aviation Regiment based in Townsville, and the first two aircraft are planned to enter service in 2014, with all seven in service by 2017," Mr Combet said.

"The CH-47D fleet is providing outstanding support to the ADF, particularly in Afghanistan, and this acquisition of seven new CH-47F Chinook helicopters by the Australian Government will strengthen our ability to support our soldiers in the future.

"The CH-47Fs purchased for the Australian Defence Force are planned to incorporate some minor Australian specific mission equipment enhancements including crashworthy crew and passenger seating, fitment of Miniguns, and underfloor ballistic protection.

"The contract to procure the aircraft through the US Government's Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programme was signed at a ceremony at the Australian Embassy in Washington on Friday 19 March. It follows Government approval of Project AIR 9000 Phase 5C announced by the Minister for Defence, Senator John Faulkner, on 25 February 2010.

"Australian industry will have the opportunity to incorporate the Australian specific enhancements and to support the new helicopters as part of through-life support arrangements," Mr Combet said.

(Above items courtesy Department of Defence Public Relations)

#### **Globetrotting Flight**

Our Victorian members may have noticed an interesting aircraft in their skies recently. Retired American airline pilot, Bill Charney recently touched down at Ballarat as part of a round-the-world trip in his restored 1943 vintage Beech 17 Staggerwing NC16S. Painted bright red, it has been a popular exhibit at New Zealand air shows in the past few years. The aircraft is next bound for Adelaide, before heading off to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand Cambodia and Vietnam.

#### **Military Historical Society of Australia Conference**

April 3rd-5th 2010 – MHSA national biennial conference at Box Hill RSL (Melbourne). Two papers of particular interest to AHSA members will be '*The First Course – RAAF Point Cook 1923*' and '*Operation Firedog' - No1 Squadron in the Malayan Emergency*'.

For full programme details, registration form and cost etc., call Andrew Kilsby (convenor) on 0408 342 795, or these can be viewed at:

[http://www.mhsa.org.au/national\\_conferences.html](http://www.mhsa.org.au/national_conferences.html)

#### **AHSA meetings**

##### **Melbourne**

Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month, at the RAAF Association, 24 Camberwell Rd, Hawthorn East. Meetings start at 7.30pm. Contact Antony Graze, 0418 170 395.

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> April.** "The Migrant Caper 1947-49" by Geoff Goodall, covering a little-known period when Australian charter companies flew large numbers of migrants from Europe in military disposals Hudsons, Lodestars, C-39s, C-47s and even a DC-5.

##### **Brisbane**

Meetings are held on the last Friday of each month in the "Meeting Room" at the Indooroopilly Library, Indooroopilly Shoppingtown, Station Rd, Indooroopilly. As the meeting is after library hours, entry is via a door from the car park. Visitors are welcome; contact Don Furlonger (07) 3371 5867.

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> April.** The April meeting will feature an ex-Bush Pilots captain, Eamonn Gaffney, who will speak about his flying experiences with the airline.

#### **Calendar of Events**

**1-4 April 2010** Natfly 2010, RA-Aus National Fly-in. Temora NSW

**2-4 April 2010** FUN-Fly United. Narromine NSW

**2-5 April 2010** National Aerobatic Championships. Parkes NSW

**10-11 April 2010** Temora Aviation Museum Flying Days. Temora NSW

**14 April 2010** "Managing Airservices Australia's History" 12.00 noon, Airways Museum. Essendon Vic

**18 April 2010** "A Century of Australian Aviation" Air Show. Tyabb Vic

**18 April 2010** Vintage and Classic Fly-in. Aldinga SA

**23-25 April 2010** AAAA National Fly-in. Griffith NSW

**1 May 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**1 May 2010** Wings, Wheels and Wine Air Show. Mudgee NSW

**1-2 May 2010** Sydney Aviation Model Show. Bankstown NSW

**1-2 May 2010** Gathering of the Harvards & Wirraways, and David Hack Classic Aircraft & Vehicle Meet. Toowoomba Qld

**5 June 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**5-6 June 2010** Temora Aviation Museum Flying Days. Temora NSW

#### **Contributions and Contacts**

News items, other contributions, or requests for information etc for inclusion in the newsletter can be sent to AHSA (NSW) at P.O. Box K346, Haymarket NSW 1238 or to Warwick Bigsworth, E-mail ([madsen2010@optusnet.com.au](mailto:madsen2010@optusnet.com.au)) or (02) 8824 7814.

#### **Thanks**

Thanks to Peter Coates, Bill Holswich, John Scott and Keith White for their contributions to this newsletter.

## LOOPS AND LANDINGS

Inspired by John Kingsford-Smith

### A Centenary For The Aerial League Trophy - 16th March 2010 - Final.

Returning again to March 18, 1910, as Taylor contemplated the success of Fred Custance at Bolivar, unaware of what had occurred at Diggers Rest earlier that morning, it is as well to dispose of a couple of myths concerning Houdini and the Aerial League. The first myth is that, "Harry Houdini was to visit Australia on a theatrical tour, so the Aerial League undertook to invite him to bring his Voisin biplane with him, mindful of the publicity such a flight would generate in their attempts to promote aviation." The second myth is perpetuated on an information panel associated with the memorials to Houdini at Diggers Rest, and has been created by the statement that: "The Aerial League of Australia witnessed and recorded the event. Below is an extract from their record." Then follows the well known witness statement which was not initiated by the Aerial League and, therefore, could not have been extracted from their record. As at March 18, 1910, if the Aerial League had had anything to do with the importation of the Voisin, or was standing by to officially witness and record its first flight, George Augustine Taylor's name would have been prominently associated with its progress. It was not until March 19, 1910, that Taylor read of Houdini's success. He probably noted that the longest of Houdini's three flights was a couple of minutes shorter than Custance was reported to have achieved.

Houdini arrived in Sydney on Easter Sunday, March 27, and commenced his performances at the Tivoli Theatre on the following day. Arrangements for Houdini's public flying exhibitions, *The Aviation Week*, were managed by his theatrical agent, Harry Rickards, and were to commence on Monday, April 25. In the meantime Houdini was ready on April 17 for trial and practice flights from Rosehill Racecourse. With the prospect of significant flights being achieved by Houdini at Rosehill, there was no excuse for Taylor or the Aerial League to simply watch from the sidelines. Taylor met with Rickards and Houdini to offer his and the Aerial League's support. Like most who met him, Taylor was charmed by Houdini. There is no doubt that there was also a sense of camaraderie between the two since both were now pilots, Taylor on his glider, and Houdini on his Voisin. Taylor was also aware that no better example of the use of Hargrave's box kite technology could be exhibited before the Australian public than Houdini's Voisin. Houdini's mechanic Brassac declared wind conditions unfavourable for flight on April 17. However, on April 18, Houdini achieved a straight line flight of 200 yards, followed by a flight described by *The Sydney Morning Herald* as being over about half a mile, during which the Voisin made a, "short turn to the right and another to the left, and the turn has been successfully negotiated. The machine inclines violently to the left, rights itself, then almost immediately lurches towards the left once more, and commences to descend. She comes down quickly with a rush, hitting the ground with the left hand portion of the front plane. The impact was so severe that Houdini was thrown from his seat, landing on his hands and knees some distance from his disabled machine." Even though these early flights in Sydney were brief, poorly controlled, and ended with a spectacular crash, the Herald reporter declared that, "for the first time in New South Wales a man has succeeded in flying." Taylor witnessed a more convincing flight on the following day, April 19, and was satisfied that a trophy should be presented to Houdini for the first powered flight in New South Wales.

Between March 17 and April 19 there may have been rumours arriving in Sydney, from *The Aerial League of South Australia*, that the flights of Fred Custance at Bolivar were not exactly as reported. It is also probable that when Houdini was informed of the nature of the presentation proposed by Taylor, he insisted that his successful flights at Diggers Rest should be recognised as the first in Australia. Taylor needed little convincing. A committee meeting of the Aerial League was called for April 20, at which he informed those attending that, "several members have suggested to me that in some little way we should recognise Mr Houdini's successful flights which as certified took place at Diggers Rest in Victoria some months ago, copy of certificate signed by reputable gentlemen to be sent to the League for its information." It was immediately moved and carried that, "at the next

general meeting to be held, Mr Houdini is to be made a presentation on behalf of the League on account of his having made the first successful flight in Australia." The motion had been adopted without sighting Houdini's witness statement, without any certainty about the flights of Fred Custance, and having been denied any consideration of the flights of Colin Defries.

The Aerial League gave Taylor the responsibility for organising the presentation to Houdini, and allotted an amount of five guineas to cover expenses. It was typical of George Augustine Taylor that he would choose the most splendid public interior in Sydney, the Vestibule of the Town hall, for the occasion. The programme for the reception, set down for Friday April 29, just one day after the first birthday of the Aerial League, was titled "An Evening With the Conquerors of the Air." The same title had been used by the Aerial League for the opening of its aeronautical exhibition on July 23, 1909. Then, the conquerors of the air referred to were the Montgolfier brothers, Lilienthal, Hargrave, Zeppelin and the Wright brothers. Now, on April 29, 1910, the conquerors of the air would appear live at Sydney Town Hall - Lawrence Hargrave, George Augustine Taylor and Harry Houdini.

Foremost among Taylor's many talents was his skill as an artist. Therefore, he applied himself with relish to the creation of the trophy to be presented to Houdini. He conceived it as a cast bronze representation of Australia on a globe, holding up two eagle wings, with a scroll in the form of an aeroplane fuselage complete with propeller. The casting was to be mounted on polished Australian timber in the shape of a shield. Taylor then called in a few favours from his sculptor mate Gilbert Doble. Doble was given only three days to complete his task. Taylor was a consummate draftsman, and it is most likely that he personally devised and applied the inscription on the trophy. The inscription reads: "The Aerial League of Australia to H. Houdini for the First Aerial Flight in Australia 16 March 1910." There may have been some nagging doubt in Taylor's mind that Custance had, after all, achieved something significant at Bolivar on March 17. Therefore, it is probable that "16 March 1910" was deliberately inscribed. It was Taylor's intention to safeguard Houdini, and the Aerial League, from any future controversy concerning Custance. The Holy Grail that Taylor fervently hoped would be won by an Australian, now has a permanent home at *The Harry Ransom Center* on the campus of the *University of Texas* in Austin, Texas. It is alive and well, residing in Box 46 of the Harry Houdini Collection, and still communicates George Augustine Taylor's deception. Just as it has informed generations of American aviation historians over the past century, it informed a recent researcher for the new *Jewish - American Hall of Fame in Cyberspace*, that, "on March 16, 1910, Houdini became the first person to make a successful flight in Australia."

During his presentation speech at the Sydney Town Hall, on April 29, Taylor explained that: "Mr Defries departed from the Wright principle of using a starting derrick so as to get a "kick - off", and therefore the machine did not fly, though it gave Australians an opportunity of studying what was practically the first flyer. Last November a Bleriot machine reached Adelaide, but it made one great dash and then crashed to the ground - and it flew no more. It remained, however, for Mr Houdini to give Australians the first opportunity of watching a sustained flight in Australia - and his attainment would not be forgotten as long as this continent existed." Nobody, then or now, could disagree with the sentiments expressed by George Augustine Taylor, and when he handed over the trophy to Houdini, the audience cheered him to the rafters.

It is probable that Taylor lectured Houdini about the pioneering work of Lawrence Hargrave and the obvious inclusion of his box kite principles in Houdini's Voisin biplane. Before Houdini left Sydney early in May 1910, *The Aerial League of Australia* entertained him at a farewell dinner at the Paris House restaurant. Houdini ended his farewell speech with words that would have softened any sadness suffered by George Augustine Taylor due to the loss of his treasured trophy to a foreigner. Houdini concluded: "I was proud. I was the first man to fly in this great country. A great nation that in future will hold pride of place in aerial invention. Why? I will tell. The Australian box kite reached France twenty years ago. Voisin placed an engine in it and it flew. I bring Australia back her own. The box kite comes back like the prodigal son, but married to a foreign engine. I was proud to fly in Australia with the Australian box kite! I was proud to fly here first, proud for myself, and proud because I speak the same tongue as Australians, because I come from that great United States that was British born.....**J. Scott**



# AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc

ABN: 83 295 759 224

PO Box K346 Haymarket NSW 1238

## *Southern Skies*

The Newsletter of AHSA (NSW) Inc

May 2010 No.439

### **May Meeting**

The May meeting will be held at the Powerhouse Museum on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> May 2010, commencing at 7.45pm. Enter from the Macarthur Street end and the meeting room is adjacent to the main foyer. Visitors are most welcome and supper will be available after the meeting.

The guest speaker for the meeting will be Ken Garland, whose topic will be:

### ***The GAF Nomad – South East Asian Ferry Flights and Operations.***

Ken participated in many of the ferry flights of GAF Nomad aircraft to South East Asia and has first hand knowledge of the virtues and deficiencies of the N22B and N24A series. He will discuss some of the interesting experiences he endured during his involvement with the aircraft, along with many images and data on the aircraft.

The Nomad suffered much criticism during its period of operation, particularly by the Australian Defence Force, but it has successfully operated for the Defence Forces of Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Papua New Guinea for many years.

Only one Nomad is in current operation in Australia, however Gippsland Aviation has secured the rights to re-commence construction of the aircraft in an enhanced form. It is understood that a couple are used for parachuting in Europe and New Zealand, whilst several are utilised in sight-seeing flights in the south island of New Zealand.

Ken Garland is no stranger to our Society. Not only does he win Aircraft Recognition competitions (see below) but he operates Aero V Australia, an aircraft manufacturing and training organisation at the Illawarra Regional Airport, Albion Park. Ken produces the Sadler Vampire and has several other manufacturing projects in train.

Please join us for another entertaining evening of aviation history.

### **Committee Meeting**

A Committee Meeting, commencing at 6.15pm will be held immediately prior to the May meeting. Note earlier starting time.

### **March Meeting**

The 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Aviation Trivia competition was hosted this year by David Eyre, who provided a challenging set of questions to all in attendance. Winner of the Slipstream Trophy was John Scott, who easily beat the next group of aspiring historians.

A short set of questions from David's list is included later in this newsletter.

The 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Aircraft Recognition competition was presented by Warwick Bigsworth who provided a selection of images of civil, military and vintage aircraft. Some of those included were: Soko Galeb, Stolp V-Star, Avro Anson V, Monnett Sonerai, Aero L-29 Delfin, Bristol F.2b Fighter, Stampe SV-4, Boeing E-6B Mercury, Bellanca Pacemaker, Fouga Magister and Ruschmeyer R-90. Winner of the fabulous Brian White Memorial Trophy was Ken Garland, whilst winner of the President's Trophy (with a slight adjustment of the rules) was Peter Coates.

### **New Book Release**

#### ***The Terrace Sabre – A Vision Squandered, by Trevor Boughton***

This excellent 24 page A4 size book provides a fascinating chronicle on the life and times of Avon Sabre A94-959. In 1981, a vision became a reality when the Sabre was mounted on a pole at Raymond Terrace NSW to commemorate the link between R.A.A.F. Base Williamtown and the township of Raymond Terrace.

Trevor Boughton details the evolution of the North American F-86 Sabre, its involvement in the Korean War and its eventual selection as Australia's replacement of the Gloster Meteor fighter. The competitors for selection and the usual pressure to "Buy British" are also covered, as is the process of engine selection. However, Trevor does not attempt to re-do much of the material that has already been published in other books and journals

The Sabre in R.A.A.F. service is well covered, including a description of all R.A.A.F. Units that operated or had involvement with the Sabre. This Sabre is particularly significant because it was a reliable aircraft that was always available on the

flight-line and was one of the first of the type to complete 1,000 flying hours.

There are several supporting appendices that cover world production of Sabres the official record of A94-959, a list of surviving Australian-built Sabres and a performance summary. The cover pages feature coloured images of the aircraft and inside there are a number of excellent black and white photographs of the aircraft in service.

However, the sad part of the story is the neglect and lack of responsibility by local government to maintain this historic aircraft and that the Council has now rejected the future vision for Raymond Terrace.

Copies of the book are available for \$15 post paid from:

Man and Aerial Machines  
5 Tea Tree Avenue, Aberglasslyn NSW 2320

### **TAA Museum**

The item about the Qantas Museum at Sydney Airport which appeared in the April issue of *Southern Skies* was reproduced from an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* written by James Cockington. Following the feedback generated, James has recently written another article about the TAA Museum near Essendon Airport. Below is an edited copy of the article:

“James Meehan is now the custodian of the TAA Museum and was one of a small group of employees it was important to preserve the airline’s history. They retrieved large quantities of TAA memorabilia when it was being thrown out during the 1986 name change to Australian Airlines and the eventual 1993 merger with Qantas. Under Meehan’s guidance, the number of items held by the Museum has risen from about 5,000 to more than 150,000.

The TAA Museum, opened in 2006, is just across the road from Essendon Airport, home of TAA pre-Tullamarine. Everything you want to know about TAA is here, from a simulated Airbus cockpit to the Junior Flyers badge. Young passengers were given these and it’s amazing the emotional response that they bring. Every TAA collector wants one and they fetch from \$40 to \$70 at auction. Much more valuable is the 50 Hours badge, given to junior frequent flyers.

Symbols of the first TAA flights are most desirable and the museum has the Holy Grail item, the first pair of embroidered pilot’s wings. These were handed from pilot to pilot in the first few weeks of operation until official uniforms became available. Meehan describes them as “historically priceless”.

They were donated to the museum in 2006 by Captain Bill Waterton, the man who delivered the first aircraft to TAA, an ex-RAAF DC-3 known as “Shanghai Lil” during WWII. Tickets are the most

accessible items from this period but uniforms also appear.

TAA was quick to recognise the public appeal of the hostess, and an original uniform greets you at the museum. The design was based on that of the Women’s Royal Australian Navy and remained virtually unchanged until 1964. Complete costumes are ultra-rare but the trademark hostess caps appear, priced at about \$1,200.

Valued even higher are original TAA posters. Copies of the “blue background” poster issued in 1952/53 and featuring “Fly TAA – The Friendly Way” slogan have value; one sold for \$5,000 through Leski Auctions in Melbourne.

On July 19, 1960, on a Sydney-Brisbane flight, passenger Alex Hildebrandt produced a sawn-off .22 rifle and told the crew he was carrying a gelignite bomb. He fired a bullet through the plane’s ceiling. First Officer Tom Bennett tackled and handcuffed him, then disabled the bomb. Hildebrandt served 10 years in prison (3 years in Queensland and 7 years in NSW, Ed.) and the handcuffs are displayed in the TAA Museum.” (Lockheed L-188 Electra VH-TLB was the aircraft involved, Ed.).

The TAA Museum is located at 7 York Street, Airport West and open Tuesday – Thursday 10am-2.30pm. See also the website [taamuseum.org.au](http://taamuseum.org.au).

### **Temora Aviation Museum**

Temora Aviation Museum is changing the format and timing of its flying days to enable more flying opportunities and provide visitors with a more in-depth experience. In the past, flying days have been held every eight to ten weeks and typically included most of the Museum collection. From July this year, the Museum plans to fly twice a month in a completely new format titled Aircraft Showcase Days where they will fly two or three of the Museum’s aircraft and showcase them in detail. This will allow many more visitors to experience its flying activities.

Aircraft Showcase Days will be held on the first and third Saturday of every month with the aim of providing visitors with a personal, interactive and in-depth experience with two or three of the Museum’s aircraft. Visitors will witness the aircraft being towed from the hangar and watch the pre-flight inspection, servicing and refuelling as it takes place in front of them. The pilot will strap in and start the engine and then the flight will take place.

The flying display will vary from a simple handling display to aerobatics or formation flying. The aircraft will land and taxi back to the visitors where they will have the chance to have a chat with the pilot, take photographs, and inspect the cockpit and engine. Audio-visual presentations both in the cinema and the Display Hangar will enhance the

stories of veterans who will be invited to share with visitors their wartime experiences. At the conclusion of the flying activity, the Engineering Hangar will be open to all visitors. The Museum has rarely allowed access to the workshop areas, but now visitors will be able to take a closer look at the most diverse range of aviation engineering activities anywhere in the world. The Museum's Engineering Team will demonstrate the projects they are working on and the unique processes, materials and techniques required to keep this fleet of vintage aircraft flying.

The Museum has also announced an expansion of its activities to include an Education Program, which offers special curriculum experiences to high school students studying Australia's involvement in WWII, Korea and Vietnam. Schools will have access to a tailor-made Temora Aviation Museum excursion program. In the coming weeks, the Museum will post on its web site a History Education framework document. Students visiting the Museum will also have access to excursion work sheets and materials, which will assist in their studies and understanding of Australia's role during World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

In planning for the upcoming Museum changes, President and Founder of Temora Aviation Museum David Lowy said: "I am really excited about these new initiatives. We have had 10 very successful years and now there will be more opportunities for visitors to see our historical aircraft in flight."

"We are also enthusiastic about broadening the scope of our activities to include an educational component that will provide students of Australia's history the opportunity to touch, hear and see our history in action".

Aircraft Showcase Days will take place on the first and third Saturday of each month commencing Saturday July 3rd 2010. As our flying calendar has been reallocated in support of Aircraft Showcase Days, our previously scheduled June, August and November Flying Weekends will not take place. Some of our visitors will need to alter their travel plans and we apologise for this inconvenience.

## Book Sale

### Mark's Book Barn

Mark's Book Barn at 215 Homer Street, Earlwood NSW has acquired several aviation collections in the past few years, including those of our late colleagues Chris O'Neill and Michael Toohar.

Mark is anxious to reduce his stock of aviation books, so he is offering a special 30% discount on aviation books and magazines to AHSA NSW members indefinitely; **but you must take a copy of**

**this newsletter to the shop to receive Mark's generous discount.**

The shop is open Wednesday - Friday 1200-1700 and Saturday 1000-1500. However, you can contact Mark any day on 0417 065 089.

## On the Internet

### Great War Aircraft

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3-idVjBKr4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t3-idVjBKr4)

This Royal Flying Corps site shows many of the aircraft used by the RFC in WWI. The site also has some excellent links to other WWI sites including "Over the Front" original black and white footage; Great War in the Air - The Battle of the Somme; Avro 504K; WWI Wright Patterson Dayton Fly-in; Funeral of the Red Baron, and much, much more.

### Airport and Aviation Appraisals Inc

[www.airportappraisals.com/contact](http://www.airportappraisals.com/contact)

This site has some excellent links to original footage of Charles Lindberg's flight across the Atlantic.

### Weekend Warbirds

[www.weekendwarbirds.com.video/vid1.html](http://www.weekendwarbirds.com.video/vid1.html)

Only in America! This is a most interesting film clip of what the real enthusiasts of matters concerning WWI do on weekends.

### Bye Bye Blackbird

[www.nasicaa.org/SR-71%20Story.doc](http://www.nasicaa.org/SR-71%20Story.doc)

Members might recall a most interesting presentation on Clarence "Kelly" Johnson by David Marshall and Bruce Harris at the February 2007 meeting of AHSA (NSW). Johnson was the driving force behind Lockheed's famous "Skunkworks" which designed the SR-71. Many articles and websites are already well-known, but this site details some pilot recollections of this incredible aircraft, along with some great images.

### AHSA Queensland

[http://tripod.com/ahsa\\_q/](http://tripod.com/ahsa_q/)

Although the site of AHSA Queensland has not been updated for almost 2 years, it does provide some interesting articles, such as about flying the Bristol Freighter and the Society's link to the Queensland Aviation Museum. Well worth a look.

## Aviation Trivia Quiz

Here are a few aviation trivia questions extracted from David Eyre's list from our April meeting. Answers next month.

1. In 1933 a small airliner was flown from the UK to Australia on a private charter, was flown

- around Australia and returned to the UK. What was the aircraft type?
2. In 1950 the Australian Government expressed interest in obtaining a new fighter from the UK powered by a Rolls Royce Tay turbojet to replace the Gloster Meteor. RAAF serial A86 was allotted but no aircraft was obtained. What type of aircraft was involved?
  3. One entrant in the 1919 England to Australia race was flown by Lt V Rendle, Lt D R Williams, with Hubert Wilkins as navigator and G Potts as engineer. It only reached Crete. What aircraft type was it?
  4. In November 2009 the Australian Government ordered a new fighter for the RAAF to replace the McDonnell Douglas FA-18. Two parts to the question; name the new aircraft and the number of aircraft in the initial order.
  5. Barrier Reef Airways operated flying boats in Queensland in the 1950s. What type of aircraft did it initially operate?
  6. Remnants of an aircraft were found in Antarctica in 2010, this machine having been taken there in 1911 by Sir Douglas Mawson. What was the aircraft type?

### AHSA meetings

#### Melbourne

Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month, at the RAAF Association, 24 Camberwell Rd, Hawthorn East. Meetings start at 7.30pm. Contact Antony Grage, 0418 170 395.

**Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> April.** "The Migrant Caper 1947-49" by Geoff Goodall, covering a little-known period when Australian charter companies flew large numbers of migrants from Europe in military disposals Hudsons, Lodestars, C-39s, C-47s and even a DC-5.

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> May.** Keith Meggs (President, AHSA Inc) will speak on Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation aircraft. Keith worked as a draftsman at CAC before joining the RAAF and flying fighters in Korea, Malta and at home. CAC is the subject of Vol.2 of his book "*Australian-Built Aircraft and the Industry*" to be published later this year.

#### Brisbane

Meetings are held on the last Friday of each month in the "Meeting Room" at the Indooroopilly Library, Indooroopilly Shoppingtown, Station Rd, Indooroopilly. As the meeting is after library hours, entry is via a door from the car park. Visitors are welcome; contact Don Furlonger (07) 3371 5867.

**Friday 30<sup>th</sup> April.** Eamonn Gaffney has flown as an aerial survey pilot and mission pilot in Papua New Guinea in the 1960's; then between 1968 and

1971 he was a Chief Pilot for Aerial Tours Pty Ltd in Port Moresby. He joined Bush Pilots Airways in 1971, then joined TAA/ Australian Airlines in 1989 and served as a First Officer on B727 and later as a Captain on B737 aircraft operating domestically. He stayed with Qantas on the B737 until his retirement in 2004. He has a grand total of 26,290 flying hours and will speak about his flying experiences.

### For the Diary

#### The Pig: the F-111 story

MAIN GALLERY | Saturday 20 November 2010 to Sunday 27 February 2011

The Ipswich Art Gallery, in collaboration with the Amberley RAAF Base and Boeing Aerospace will, in November 2010, be launching a unique exhibition celebrating the true marvel of aeronautical engineering, the F-111 aircraft, the machine and the men who built and flew them. Further details will be made available when they come to hand.

### Calendar of Events

**1 May 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**1 May 2010** Wings, Wheels and Wine Air Show. Mudgee NSW

**1-2 May 2010** Sydney Aviation Model Show. Bankstown NSW

**1-2 May 2010** Gathering of the Harvards & Wirraways, and David Hack Classic Aircraft & Vehicle Meet. Toowoomba Qld

**5 June 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**3 July 2010** Temora Aviation Museum Showcase Day. Temora NSW

### Special Event

**16-18 July 2010** – Centenary of the first flight of an Australian-built aeroplane, by John Duigan at Mia Mia, Vic in his Duigan Biplane. AHSA is an official Supporter of the Mia Mia Centenary Celebrations – more details will be advised in future notices.

### Contributions and Contacts

News items, other contributions, or requests for information etc for inclusion in the newsletter can be sent to AHSA (NSW) at P.O. Box K346, Haymarket NSW 1238 or to Warwick Bigsworth, E-mail ([madsen2010@optusnet.com.au](mailto:madsen2010@optusnet.com.au)) or (02) 8824 7814.

### Thanks

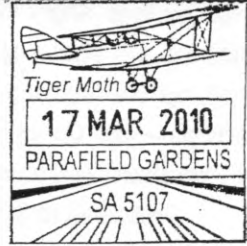
Thanks to Peter Coates, David Eyre, Antony Grage, Roger McDonald, Gareth Morgan, Jack Powell and John Scott for their contributions to this newsletter.

AUSTRALIAN CENTENARY OF FLIGHT COVERS

AIR MAIL



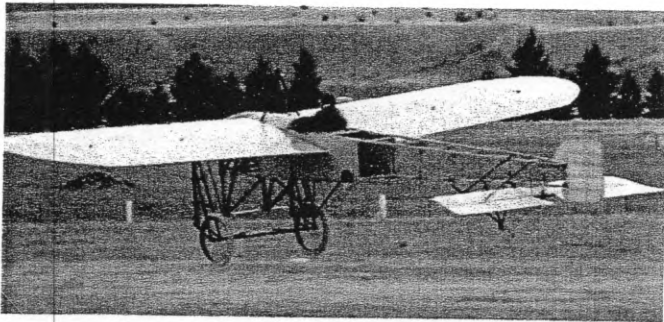
100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE  
FIRST POWERED FLIGHT IN AUSTRALIA  
17<sup>th</sup> MARCH 1910  
BOLIVAR SOUTH AUSTRALIA



BILL WITTBER

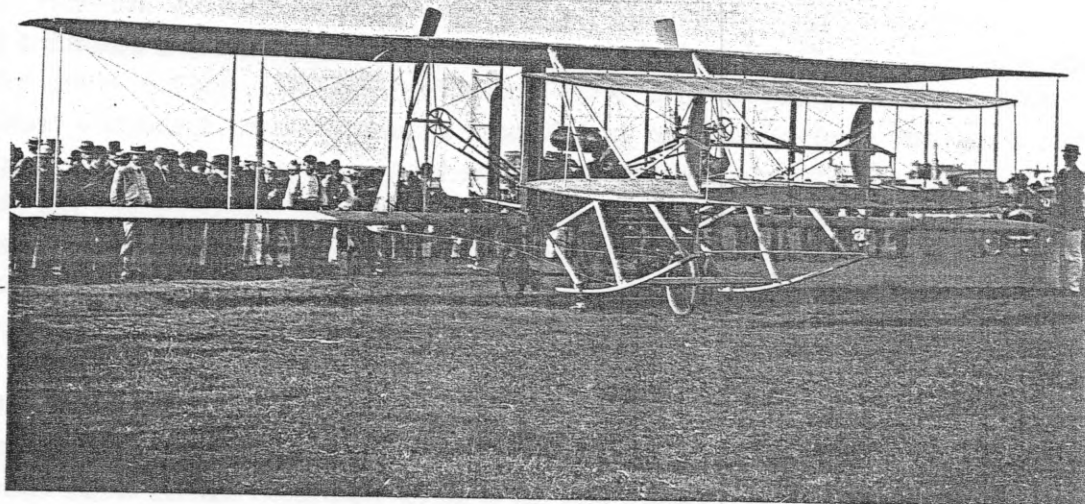


FRED CUSTANCE



PILOT *Paul Dan*

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST POWERED FLIGHT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
17TH MARCH 1910, would have been a more accurate description.



Postcard flown from Wagga to Temora on March 9, 2010. If only the  
Narrowmine Wright Model A had been available for exhibition at Victoria Park on  
December 9, 2010.

transport, David Crotty. But I had planned to visit Museum Victoria's **SCIENCEWORKS**, not because of Houdini, but because I wanted to recreate the flight of Fred Custance on the museum's flight simulator, on the same day that 150 flight covers were being carried over Bolivar, in a Cessna 180, (VH - KGG), to commemorate Custance's centenary. Having elbowed a couple of five-year-olds out of the way, I settled comfortably into the cockpit. My challenge was, without having previously flown this type of simulator, to do three circuits, and land without any damage. By now the five-year-olds had been joined by their angry mothers, glaring, and with hands on hips. I now had four witnesses – just like Custance. OK now – apply power smoothly, and gentle back pressure on the control column. Whoa! – nothing but blue sky – where's the horizon? – push forward – there's the ground coming up, and buildings – pull up! pull up! – then – SPLATT. The flight had lasted but a few seconds. There were unsympathetic sniggers from the witnesses. "Custance couldn't have done it – could he?"

I returned to **SCIENCEWORKS** a couple of days later, after the museum had opened its display titled, *The Centenary of Flight in Australia*. The display featured, not Harry Houdini, but Colin Defries. The original Barriquand & Marre aero engine, that powered *The Stella*, is preserved by the museum, and was on exhibition. The museum also has one of *The Stella's* propellers. And there, in the information panel, beneath the engine, was the museum's solution to the ADP. "On 9 December 1909, with English racing driver Colin Defries at the controls, *The Stella* made a short flight of about 100 metres at Victoria Park racecourse in Sydney. Although it was never officially recognised, this was the first aeroplane flight in Australia."

Last month there was a postcard in the envelope with your newsletter, to give you an idea of the whole hearted celebrations that were organised at Diggers Rest over the period March 18 to 21. The Diggers Rest community, Melton Shire Council, the Lions Club, and AHSA Inc did a magnificent job, on behalf of Australia, celebrating our powered flight centenary. And the weather shone beneficently on their efforts. Members of AHSA (NSW) Inc, who are also members of AHSA Inc, will have their copy of the special *Centenary of Flight 1909 – 1910* issue of *Aviation Heritage*. I thanked the editor, Dion Makowski, for his sterling effort. I had my first read of the special issue of A. H. on the morning of March 18, while waiting for the commemoration ceremony to begin at Diggers Rest. Later, I was able to congratulate Gary Sunderland for his paper, *First Flights in Australia – An Engineering Analysis*. With reference to the ADP, readers will find that Gary has disqualified *Wittber's Hop* as a flight, making that SAD really sad. However, in Gary's assessment; the first flight in Australia was by Colin Defries on December 9, 1909; the first flight in Victoria was by Ralph Banks on March 1, 1910; the first flight in South Australia was by Fred Custance on March 17, 1910.; the first circuit flown in Australia was by Harry Houdini on March 21, 1910. Although Gary records that the first flight by Houdini on March 18, was the second in Victoria, and the fifth in Australia, there can be no doubt that the first and subsequent flights on that day, by Houdini, demonstrated for the first time in Australia, the real potential of powered flight. So there you have it – the ADP has been finally, and irrevocably, solved.

An ultralight, carrying 25 covers, flew over the commemoration ceremony and Plumpton's paddock on March 18. My aerophilatelic salute consisted of fixing a Houdini stamp to a blank first day cover, having it cancelled March 18, 2010, at the Diggers Rest Post Office, and then driving with it really fast, in my Ford, along Holden Road, past Plumpton's paddock. When I arrived back home in Sydney, there were two flight covers waiting for me. The first was the postcard flown from Wagga Wagga to Temora by David Lowy, described by Warwick Bigsworth in the April newsletter. *The Stella* was the aircraft image chosen for the card. The second was the envelope flown over Bolivar on March 17, to commemorate Bill Wittber and Fred Custance. This ceremony was organised by the *West Beach Aviation Group*, and the *Australian Air Mail Society*, and they chose to place the Colin Defries stamp on the envelope. So, after all, Colin Defries, and December 9, 1909, were saluted during 2010, on covers flown, on March 9, and March 17. All was right with the world, until I settled into my reading chair with a copy of the April/June 2010 issue of *Aero Australia*. There, under a heading, *Centenary of Australian Powered Flight*, I read: "Others who did fly earlier were Colin Defries, Wright Flyer, 9 December 1909, near Adelaide... Defries flew his Wright on 9 December 1909 but he failed to land in one piece." I shout. "No! it was Sydney, and he made a good landing!" I'm back in analysis!..J. Scott.

Sydney's Victoria Park racecourse in December 1909." Although he did not mention Custance or Houdini, we know that these two aviators flew later. The three new stamps, issued on March 9, 2010; honour Colin Defries for his flight on December 9, 1909; Harry Houdini for his flights on March 18, 1910, and John Duigan, for his first substantial flight, on October 7, 1910. The Australia Post *Stamp Bulletin*, NO 303, Mar - Apr 2010, which gave notice of the issue, confirmed its long standing position on the ADP: "the first sustained, controlled flight in a powered aircraft was made by Englishman Colin Defries on 9 December 1909 at Victoria Park racecourse in Sydney. The plane was a modified Wright Model A named *The Stella*. On 18 March 1910, at Diggers Rest, Victoria, the American "escapologist" Harry Houdini made the first of several well - publicised flights in this country." There is no mention of Custance or Wittber, and of course Duigan falls outside the parameters of the ADP.

The Australian Philatelic Federation and the Philatelic Society of Canberra organised a wonderful three days of exhibitors, seminars, dealer and Australia Post participation. I'm sure the organisers would allow some mild criticism from someone clinically deranged by date obsession. In the official catalogue for the Canberra Stamp Show 2010, there is a helpful article titled *Early Powered Flight in Australia*, in which, "Colin Defries, a racing motorist, attempted powered flight in an imported Wright biplane at Victoria Park Racecourse, Sydney, on 4 November 1909, with a second attempt on 9 November. Even though he is reported as having flown about 100 metres, the flight was regarded as uncontrolled." This erroneous information is given despite the front cover of the catalogue containing an enlarged colour image of the 55c Wright biplane stamp inscribed, "Colin Defries - 9 December 1909". At the same time, *The Stamp Bulletin*, on free issue at the show, provided the correct information as quoted in the previous paragraph.

Notwithstanding my praise for Australia Post, I found the timing of the new stamp issue, (March 9, 2010), a surprise. I had looked eagerly in *Stamp Bulletin No 301*, Nov - Dec 2009, for details and the arrangements in hand for a flight cover for December 9, celebrating the Centenary of Powered Flight in Australia. To my horror, the only centenary being celebrated was that of the *Australian Pig Breeders Association*, by a pre - stamped envelope, postmarked 2 November, 2009. Then again - pigs might fly. Although AHSA (NSW) Inc, and The Royal Aeronautical Society, Sydney Branch, commemorated the first of the awkward dates, (on December 9, 2009), with a most successful joint meeting, the philatelist in me was somehow unfulfilled. Even after one hundred years, there would be no flight cover for Colin Defries. When no news of powered flight was found in the Jan - Feb issue of *Stamp Bulletin No 302*, I developed the anxiety symptoms I presented with at our March 3 meeting.

At the Canberra Convention, I purchased the latest edition, (2008), of *The Australian Air Mail Catalogue*. Appendix II has a helpful list of Important Australian Pilots & Personalities who are commemorated in the catalogue. I found references for John Duigan and Bill Wittber. However, I found no references for Colin Defries, Fred Custance or Harry Houdini. These individuals were presumably not considered to be either important, or Australian. In the body of the catalogue, I did find; AAMC 1431, 18 March 1960 - "Souvenir covers were flown to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Harry Houdini Voisin biplane flight in Victoria." Then there was AAMC 1541, 7 (Sic) March, 1965, The 55th anniversary of the first powered aeroplane flight in Australia by Fred Custance etc. Then AAMC 1707; AAMC 1998&1999, and AAMC 2235, commemorating the 60th, 75th & 90th anniversaries respectively, of Fred Custance's flight of March 17, 1910. The 100th anniversary cover has since been flown. Nothing more is recorded for Houdini after 1960, and there is no reference anywhere for Colin Defries. Now don't get me wrong - I, like all Australian aerophilatelists, regard *The Australian Air Mail Catalogue* as a monumental gift from that great philatelist and historian, Nelson Eustis. But he solved the ADP in his own way. The record of the catalogue does not start until AAMC 1, 16 June, 1914, when Maurice Guillaux carried a number of postcards between Melbourne, Bendigo and Ballarat. Therefore, the AAMC does not offer any primary source, for aviation historians, relating to events earlier than June 16, 1914. But now, it was time to continue on my excellent adventure. I planned to be at **SCIENCEWORKS**, Spotswood, in Melbourne, on March 17.

In Victoria, there is something heretical about the doubting question, "Houdini done it - or did he?", particularly when it comes from the lips of Museum Victoria's curator of engineering and

## LOOPS AND LANDINGS

Inspired by John Kingsford-Smith

### **Aerophilately And Those Awkward Australian Centenary Dates.**

"Not those bloody awkward dates again!", and, "Get a life!", I hear you cry. But please bear with me. My analyst says it will be good to get it all off my chest this one last time. Following the March 2010 meeting of AHSA (NSW) Inc, when the "Doctor was in", my analyst forced me to have a good, hard look at myself. I was able to confront my obsession with those awkward dates of Australia's aviation history; December 9, 1909; March 17, 1910, and March 18, 1910. In essence, the ADP, (Awkward Date Problem), has been created by claims to the effect that Australia's first powered flight was achieved on three separate occasions, the impossibility of which naturally disturbs the simple mind. The lack of a solution to the ADP, even after scholarly research by eminent aviation historians over the past century, has been the cause of some anxiety on my part. In search of a cure, I self - prescribed a journey south to the restorative support of fellow AHSA members, to join with them for the centenary celebrations at Diggers Rest. I also believed that my salvation might be found in a retreat with a religious order, well known for its militant pedantry, accurate recording of dates, dedicated commemoration of aviation events, and a slight tendency to self flagellation – the Brotherhood of Aerophilatelists. They were to gather in Canberra from March 12 to 14, for the Canberra Stamp Show 2010, to celebrate 100 years of powered flight.

In preparation for the sanctuary of commune with the aerophilatelists, my readings included the February, 2010, issue of the *Australian Stamp Professional*. There, under a heading, *100th Anniversary of Powered Flight in Australia*, I learnt that: "On March 18, 1910, Harry Houdini made the first controlled, powered flight in Australia. He was visiting Australia and made the short flight in a Voisin biplane purchased for US\$5000 in Hamburg, Germany, prior to the trip. Houdini was also the first aviator in Australia to record his flights on film, which occurred at Randwick racecourse in 1910." On Friday, March 12, I departed Sydney, setting the Ford on a southerly heading. I could hardly wait to tell my friends at Diggers Rest that they got the date right, but the location wrong. But in the meantime my first stop was to be the Canberra Stamp Show. Unfortunately, before I got there, I was seduced by the temptations of the Berkelouw Book Barn at Berrima. So much time was spent rummaging through the Barn's 200,000 odd books that I was forced to overnight in a seedy motel in Goulburn, with *Women Aviators* for company. I mean the book by Bernard Marck, English language edition, Flammarion, Paris, 2009. I discovered that I had just missed the centenary of the award of the first pilot's licence to a woman, Elise Deroche, which was on March 8, 1910, by the Aero Club of France. The book celebrates the centenary of women and powered flight. Unfortunately, by buying the book, I had given in to another obsession. No! Not with women aviators! With books! Then again – but I digress.

I arrived at The Hellenic Club, the venue for the stamp show, just before lunch on March 13; 100 years, almost to the hour, since Bill Wittber hopped Fred Jones's Bleriot at Bolivar. I had always regarded March 13, 1910, as a SAD, (Slightly Awkward Date). I have a flown, official souvenir cover, signed by Bill Wittber, dated Parafield Airport March 17, 1965. It is inscribed, 55th Anniversary First Aeroplane Flight in South Australia – March 17th 1910 - 1965. There is no reference to March 13, 1910. I planned to honour Bill Wittber aerophilatelically by having a blank first day cover, with each of the new stamps attached, cancelled with the show's official circular date stamp, showing 13 March 2010. Unfortunately the cds seemed to be stuck on 12 March 2010. The stamp show, which was combined with the 16th National Philatelic Convention, had the theme, *A Centenary of Powered Flight*, which had been chosen because of the issue of three stamps by Australia Post commemorating the centenary.

To give Australia Post due credit, it had long ago solved the ADP in its book, *Taking Flight, Aviation in Australia*, written by Mark Clayton, in 1994. In the book, Mark gives most weight to the achievements of John Duigan. He acknowledged that Duigan's flights, "had been preceded by the demonstration of a number of imported production aircraft, a Wright Flyer having been flown at



# AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc

ABN: 83 295 759 224

PO Box K346 Haymarket NSW 1238

## *Southern Skies*

The Newsletter of AHSA (NSW) Inc

**June 2010 No.440**

### **June Meeting**

The June meeting will be held at the Powerhouse Museum on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010, commencing at 7.45pm. Enter from the Macarthur Street end and the meeting room is adjacent to the main foyer. Visitors are most welcome and supper will be available after the meeting.

The theme for the meeting will be a Members' Night, with Buy, Sell and Swap as well as a showing of slides provided by Fred Bowers, a retired gentleman and who is an acquaintance of Honorary Life Member, Bruce Winley.

The slides feature shots of aircraft in the 1970s and early 1980s and include the Sandringham, DC-6B, Viscount, DC-3, Catalina and more as well as some from air shows at Hoxton Park and Schofields.

Members are invited to bring any items of interest that they might wish to discuss with others, as well as buy, sell and swap books, photographs and ephemera.

### **May Meeting**

The guest speaker for the meeting was Ken Garland, whose topic was *The GAF Nomad – South East Asian Ferry Flights and Operations*.

Ken began in the aviation industry as an apprentice at de Havilland. Following his apprenticeship, he was conscripted into the Australian Army for National Service, where he gained much experience in military operations. On completion of his Army service, he returned to Hawker de Havilland and worked on detachment to the Singapore Defence Force where he worked on Hawker Hunters and BAC Strikemasters. Following this task he temporarily left aviation but returned in a sales capacity, initially with Beechcraft and later with Hawker de Havilland as a sales executive for the GAF Nomad in South East Asia – with an area extending from Sri Lanka to Korea.

During the Vietnam War, the Australian Army was attracted to the de Havilland Canada DHC-3 Otter, a type which the US Army used extensively as a utility aircraft. From the Army specification for a similar aircraft evolved the Nomad. GAF tendered to construct 15 aircraft and believed that building the Nomad would act as a stop-gap measure between the

manufacture of the Mirage III, which was winding down, and the future manufacture of the F/A-18 Hornet. GAF believed that it would keep skilled trade staff in employment and maintain such essential skills in aircraft manufacture.

It was a complicated aircraft because of the wing with double-slotted flaps that were essential for STOL operations in military service, but not normally necessary for civilian use.

Whilst the choice of engine was criticised by many, the selection of the Allison 250-B17 was most appropriate. It had three major components that were interchangeable with the very similar Allison 250 installed in the Bell 206 Kiowa, also operated by the Australian Army.

Ken's many images also showed the benefits of the electrically driven undercarriage and chain drive for the nose-wheel and the resulting advantages in the case of a wheels-up landing.

The original concept was to feature a swing-tail, which never happened, but Ken did reveal images of the T-tail version, which also never entered production.

Versions of the N22 Nomad were termed as – Master, such as the Missionmaster – for the Australian Army; Searchmaster, with Bendix radar, – for the Indonesian Navy; Searchmaster L, with Litton radar and bulb under the nose; Surveymaster; and, Floatmaster. The larger N24A was termed as Commuterliner for the passenger version and Medicmaster for use by medical services.

Military clients that came within Ken's area of responsibility were the Philippine Air Force which operated N22Bs supplied under AusAid, Indonesian Navy N22 Searchmaster and Royal Thai Air Force N22 and Royal Thai Navy N24A. Civilian operators included Sabah Air, which had two N22Bs, but suffered a fatal accident when an unlicensed MP chose to fly the aircraft. Ken was also involved in the sale of Nomads to Trans Micronesian Airlines, Airline of the Marshall Island and Polynesian Airlines.

During Ken's tenure in Singapore, he had frequent liaison with the Royal Thai Air Force which wanted to develop several modifications to the design

to facilitate carriage of Northrop F-5 engines for transit to the overhaul facility and a gunship to replace AC-47 gunships. Sensitivity about the aircraft being used against insurgents was the main reason that GAF decided not to become involved in such modifications.

Ken also related several very humorous anecdotes about South East Asian diplomacy when trying to leave The Philippines and on another occasion when ferrying aircraft to Thailand and assisting the military to avoid the wrath of Customs.

Ken complimented his excellent talk with many images and other Nomad ephemera.

### **Vale Jack Maillard**

Members will be sorry to learn that one of our esteemed members, Jack Maillard, passed away on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2010.

Jack was a popular and frequent attendee at our meetings until he moved to Old Bar several years ago. He was always happy to recall some of his many experiences when the opportunity arose. He will be sadly missed.

### **New Books**

#### **The Terrace Sabre – A Vision Squandered, by Trevor Boughton**

This excellent 24 page A4 size book provides a fascinating chronicle on the life and times of Avon Sabre A94-959. In 1981, a vision became a reality when the Sabre was mounted on a pole at Raymond Terrace NSW to commemorate the link between R.A.A.F. Base Williamtown and the township of Raymond Terrace.

Copies of the book are available for \$15 post paid from:

Man and Aerial Machines  
5 Tea Tree Avenue, Aberglasslyn NSW 2320

#### **Never a Dull Moment, by Phil Dulhunty OAM**

Phil has sold out of the first printing of his excellent autobiography and the second printing of this edition is now on sale.

The A4 size book of some 450 pages covers Phil's many achievements and experiences including those prior to and during WWII, the development of his engineering business, his sailing activities and his wide involvement in aviation. His involvement in aviation is certainly not confined to his seaplane and Catalina activities, but also covers his Port Macquarie Clipper business utilising Sandringhams between Rose Bay and Port Macquarie, Dulmison Aircraft Sales and the joys (?) of ferrying aircraft from Eastern Europe to Australia.

Books are available direct from Phil for \$50 plus \$15 P&P. Make cheques payable to Phil Dulhunty

and send to Phil at Unit 2, 35-41 Waterloo Road, North Ryde NSW 2113.

### **Book Sale**

#### **Mark's Book Barn**

Mark's Book Barn at 215 Homer Street, Earlwood NSW is still anxious to reduce its stock of aviation books, and is offering a special 30% discount on aviation books and magazines to AHSA NSW members indefinitely; **but you must take a copy of this newsletter to the shop to receive Mark's generous discount.**

The shop is open Wednesday - Friday 1200-1700 and Saturday 1000-1500. However, you can contact the owner, Mark Burgess any day on 0417 065 089.

### **Aviation Trivia Quiz**

Answers to David Eyre's Trivia Quiz list in the May issue.

1. In 1933 a small airliner was flown from the UK to Australia on a private charter, was flown around Australia and returned to the UK. What was the aircraft type?  
A. Spartan Cruiser II G-ACDW of Spartan Airlines.
2. In 1950 the Australian Government expressed interest in obtaining a new fighter from the UK powered by a Rolls Royce Tay turbojet to replace the Gloster Meteor. RAAF serial A86 was allotted but no aircraft was obtained. What type of aircraft was involved?  
A. Hawker P.1081.
3. One entrant in the 1919 England to Australia race was flown by Lt V Rendle, Lt D R Williams, with Hubert Wilkins as navigator and G Potts as engineer. It only reached Crete. What aircraft type was it?  
A. Blackburn Kangaroo G-EAOW
4. In November 2009 the Australian Government ordered a new fighter for the RAAF to replace the McDonnell Douglas FA-18. Two parts to the question; name the new aircraft and the number of aircraft in the initial order.  
A. (i) Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II; (ii) 14.
5. Barrier Reef Airways operated flying boats in Queensland in the 1950s. What type of aircraft did it initially operate?  
A. Consolidated Catalina
6. Remnants of an aircraft were found in Antarctica in 2010, this machine having been taken there in 1911 by Sir Douglas Mawson. What was the aircraft type?  
A. Vickers Rep or Vickers No 1.

### **Macchi Movements**

On 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010, the former RAAF Macchi MB326 A7-030 was loaded onto a semi-trailer at South Australian Aviation Museum in Port Adelaide and later in the afternoon headed off for Wollongong and H.A.R.S.

The Museum understands that it is the intention of HARS to have a flyable Macchi on show at Avalon

next year, building a good one from the four airframes they now have.

### Help Wanted

The following is an extract from a recent issue of the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

"I am researching a family history and hope to contact passengers from Butler Air Transport Avro Anson, VH-BAB, which ditched off Swansea NSW on 14<sup>th</sup> July 1951. Also seeking crew members of the trawler which rescued them. My late father was the pilot. Contact Jock McCardell, phone (02) 6771 4499 or at [prokor@ceinternet.com.au](mailto:prokor@ceinternet.com.au)."

**Network Ten** intends filming a documentary about the F-111 in Australia and is looking for an F-111 historian to interview. They will be filming over the next few weeks until around mid-June. Their production team is based in Brisbane but will travel if there is a prominent F-111 historian based in another state. This one hour documentary will screen in August on Network Ten to coincide with the decommissioning of these aircraft at the end of the year. Call Stacey Ehrbacher, (07) 3214 1136.

### AHSA meetings

#### Melbourne

Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month, at the RAAF Association, 24 Camberwell Rd, Hawthorn East. Meetings start at 7.30pm. Contact Antony Grage, 0418 170 395.

**Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> May.** Keith Meggs (President, AHSA Inc) will speak on Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation aircraft. Keith worked as a draftsman at CAC before joining the RAAF and flying fighters in Korea, Malta and at home. CAC is the subject of Vol.2 of his book "*Australian-Built Aircraft and the Industry*" to be published later this year.

**Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June;** The John Duigan Memorial Lecture, to be presented by David Crotty, Curator of Transport at Museum Victoria. The inaugural lecture was given last year by Dr Gwynne Duigan and Terry Egan, and mainly concerned the Duigan family and the replica Duigan biplane. In this centenary year it is appropriate again to examine this important personage in Australian aviation, and the research that David has done for his forthcoming book on John Duigan has provided a lot of information on Duigan's aeronautical theory and experiments, and his subsequent aviation career.

#### Brisbane

Meetings are held on the last Friday of each month in the "Meeting Room" at the Indooroopilly Library, Indooroopilly Shoppingtown, Station Rd, Indooroopilly. As the meeting is after library hours,

entry is via a door from the car park. Visitors are welcome; contact Don Furlonger (07) 3371 5867.

**Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2010.** Spitfires. A discussion night on this marvellous aircraft, and members and guests are urged to enter into the prevailing spirit and bring to the evening your interest, DVD's and publications about an aircraft that was instrumental in winning WWII for the Allies and thereafter continued to serve in air forces well after 1945. It was a player in the first of the Israeli/Egyptian wars in the late 1940's. Now, worldwide, only a few examples of the type are flyable; two of which are domiciled in Australia. The aircraft is sought after by enthusiasts all around the world and to own one is to have an asset valued into millions of dollars.

Additionally, our Queensland colleagues are intending to visit The Supermarine Spitfire factory at Moggill on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> June.

### For the Diary

#### The Pig: the F-111 story

Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2010 to Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2011. The Ipswich Art Gallery will hold a unique exhibition celebrating the F-111 aircraft, the machine and the men who built and flew them.

### Calendar of Events

**5 June 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**3 July 2010** Temora Aviation Museum Showcase Day. Temora NSW

**3 July 2010** Lunch with the Tiger Moths. Luskintyre NSW

**21 August 2010** Wings & Wheels Spectacular. Dalby Qld

**28-29 August 2010** Festival of Flight. Watts Bridge, near Toogoolawah, Qld

**17-19 September 2010** SAAA Annual Convention Cowra NSW

**18-19 September 2010** Port Stephens Air Show. Williamtown NSW

**23-24 October 2010** AAAA Auster Rally and AGM. Kyabram Vic

### Special Event

**16-18 July 2010** – Centenary of the first flight of an Australian-built aeroplane, by John Duigan at Mia Mia, Vic in his Duigan Biplane. AHSA is an official Supporter of the Mia Mia Centenary Celebrations.

### Contributions and Contacts

News items, other contributions, or requests for information etc for inclusion in the newsletter can be sent to AHSA (NSW) at P.O. Box K346, Haymarket NSW 1238 or to Warwick Bigsworth, E-mail ([madsen2010@optusnet.com.au](mailto:madsen2010@optusnet.com.au)) or (02) 8824 7814.

## **Marist Brothers College Darlinghurst Famous Old Boy Honoured**

Jack Powell was one of many famous Old Boys from Marist Brothers Darlinghurst, but the one who attracted an article in a late 2009 issue of the school journal was George Augustine Taylor. Jack has kindly provided the following extract from the journal, *Blue and Blue*.

On 25<sup>th</sup> September 1965, there was unveiled at Narrabeen a memorial to the amazing foresight and courage of the late George Augustine Taylor, an ex-student of the School. It was he who, on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1909, made history by being the first in Australia to fly, in a machine built by himself.

The Sydney Morning Herald of 7<sup>th</sup> December 1909 carried this report: "On Sunday last, Mr George Taylor, secretary of the Aerial League, took a biplane 18ft long with 4ft planes and box kite tail balance, to Narrabeen, where trials at gliding were held, Mr Taylor himself acting as demonstrator.

"The scene of the flights was at Narrabeen Heads, in the presence of about 100 visitors, the wide stretch of sand rendering any possible fall a matter of some safety.

"At the beginning of the experiments, the wind came from the east at 10 miles an hour.

"The machine was carried to a sand knoll and brought face to the wind.

"For the preliminary flights, the corners were held by guide ropes, 15ft in length, to prevent the machine getting out of control before the experimenter was properly tuned to automatic balancing. At the signal to "let go", the machine was well lifted by the wind, and by careful manipulation on the part of Mr Taylor it shot towards the ocean, dragging the guides, who, whoever, pulled it to the ground at the water's edge.

"As the afternoon wore on, the flights improved, on account the wind freshening to 15 miles an hour, coming directly from the east, so much that the last flight of the day was notable. At "Let Go", the wind immediately lifted the machine to full length of the guide ropes and dragged the operators so fast to the ocean that two let go; the machine now soared towards the ocean, and, at the water's edge, the remaining ropes were loosened, the machine making a leap upwards. Mr Taylor, by careful manoeuvring, kept the machine well under control and dived it into the sea some little distance from The Heads."

His versatile talent was not confined to one profession. Apprenticed originally as an architect, he blossomed into one of Australia's top cartoonists, being the first ever from this country to get his drawings into London "Punch." Always interested in the development of engineering in Australia, George Taylor founded the Local Government Engineers'

Association. He died in 1928. On his passing, Sir John Sulman said: "His was an example of whole-hearted service that this generation sadly needs ... George Taylor was one of the most talented men I have ever met."

In his early days, Taylor gave many public displays of his skill and originality. On many occasions they described him, when aeroplanes were thought to be just "toys" as "that adventurous airman", a sort of scoffing "tag", which afterwards made his critics look silly.

In the Sydney "Evening News" of 16<sup>th</sup> May 1912, is an account of a demonstration given in the Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, by George Taylor and Allan Roberts when a ten-foot model Zeppelin was controlled. The report led:

"The big oil-silk, elongated balloon, with its undercarriage of motors, whirling propellers and little lights, was very obedient to all the flashes sent out from the apparatus on the platform. It set sail by itself, discharging a bomb in the stalls, cruised round the upper gallery, and obediently returned to stage. The Lord Mayor of Sydney (Alderman Clark) made a eulogistic speech, and expressed the hope that Australia would afford assistance to its inventive sons."

George Taylor fought unsuccessfully to have Lawrence Hargrave's original models accepted by the Australian Government for preservation in the archives. But his clause was lost and the precious models were soon in the "Deutsches Museum" in Munich. The museum was bombed in 1940 and some of the survivors of Hargrave's models, through the initiative of Qantas, are now back in Australia. As far back as 1909, the year of the first flight, Taylor demonstrated that pictures could be transmitted by wireless.

We at Darlinghurst acclaim with pride the marvellous achievements of this pioneer in aviation. It is pleasing to recall that George Augustine Taylor remained a loyal Old Boy, who always found time to keep in touch with his Alma Mater in the midst of his many and varied activities. He took a prominent part in the School's Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1925 and was a regular contributor to *Blue and Blue* until his death in 1928. His article, "The Air Age and Australia's Necessity", in the 1911 issue, is of particular interest this year when his great contribution to flight in Australia is being commemorated.

### **Thanks**

Thanks to Allen Clarke, Peter Coates, David Eyre, Antony Grage, Bill Holswich, Roger McDonald, Jack Powell and John Scott for their contributions to this newsletter.

## LOOPS AND LANDINGS

Inspired by John Kingsford-Smith

### Don't Let a Pedant Spoil the Spinning of a Good Yarn.

It was one of those advertisements that immediately captures your attention. There, on Tuesday morning April 13, flying sedately across page 5 of my Sydney Morning Herald, was *Hannibal*, a Handley Page HP42, (G-AAGX). Perhaps I was captivated because I have a soft spot for *Hannibal*. Imperial Airways Ltd signed the contract with Handley Page for eight HP42s on April 15, 1929, and the prototype, *Hannibal*, took to the air for the first time, at Radlett, on October 31, 1930. As aerodynamically grotesque as *Hannibal* may appear by today's standards, to my eye it holds great beauty. Eighty years ago it represented a breakthrough for luxurious, long-distance air travel. *Hannibal* was the A380 of its day, leading Imperial Airways Ltd into the Golden Age of Aviation.

Getting back to the advertisement – it wasn't really much to do with *Hannibal*. In fact British Airways never did operate an HP42. It was more about British Airways celebrating 75 years of flying to Australia. Somehow, that didn't seem quite right either. Did the spin doctors claim that British Airways had been flying to Australia for 75 years? Or was British Airways celebrating the fact that flying to Australia, by one airline or another, had been going on for the last 75 years? Readers were invited to consult [ba.com](http://ba.com) for details of special fares linked to the celebration, and for some further historical clarification. On its web site the airline provided the following details about the inauguration of the air route from the United Kingdom to Australia. Some of the information, which is reproduced below, seemed to be at odds with aviation history as we in Australia know it.

- (a) British Airways first started flying the *Kangaroo Route* from London to Australia in 1935.
- (b) The inaugural flight departed from London for Australia on 13 April, 1935.
- (c) It took 12 days to get from London to Australia. Various types of aircraft were used for the 12,754 mile journey, including the A. W. Argosy; Short Scipio; A. W. Atalanta and the DH66 Hercules.
- (d) Today you can get from London to Sydney in under 24 hours.

I assumed that a spokesperson from Qantas would soon be engaged to publicly reclaim ownership of the name, *Kangaroo Route*, and to highlight the history of its own participation in the events of April, 1935. However, within 48 hours of publication of the advertisement, much of Europe's air space was closed due to ash from a volcanic eruption in Iceland. As a consequence, British Airways' 75th Anniversary celebrations were cut short, and the attention of the people at Qantas was also diverted to related emergencies. Just the same, with Qantas's own 90th Birthday celebrations coming up on November 16, it is important that its role in the development of the air route between the United Kingdom and Australia should not be usurped, or ignored, by misleading advertisements.

British Airways was apparently intending to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of its embarkation of the first regular airline passengers booked all the way through from London to Australia. However, there was no airline by the name of British Airways operating until early 1936, and even then it operated only on European air routes. The airline that did so much hard work to establish the UK-Australia service was of course Imperial Airways Ltd. The relationship between British Airways and Imperial Airways came about in 1939 when both airlines were nationalised to form BOAC. Even so, while Imperial Airways had extended its service to Singapore by the end of 1933, Singapore remained the end of the line until the service was terminated by the Japanese invasion. It was Qantas Empire Airways Ltd, in which Imperial had a 49% shareholding, that held the contract for the regular service

between Singapore and Brisbane.

The first regular air service with a connection to Australia, although mail only was carried for the Singapore-Darwin sector, departed Croydon on Saturday December 8, 1934. And yes, the aircraft was an HP42, in the form of *Hengist*, (G-AAXE), which flew as far as Karachi. Passengers for ports onwards to Singapore, together with the Australian mail, were then transferred to *Athena*, an A. W. Atalanta, (G-ABTK). It was an embarrassment for Qantas at the time, that its DH86s, intended for the Singapore-Brisbane service, had been grounded by the Department of Civil Aviation. Therefore, Imperial Airways was subcontracted to fly the mails on to Darwin, until Qantas had its DH86s in service. After discharging passengers in Singapore, *Athena*, carrying the first regular air mail, flew on to Darwin, touching down on Australian soil on December 18, 1934. Qantas then carried the mail on to Brisbane.

By March 31, 1935, Qantas was at last in a position to accept passenger bookings on the Singapore-Brisbane sector, using its DH86s. Accordingly, for the first time, Imperial Airways accepted bookings for passengers wishing to fly all the way from England to Australia. The departure of the first passengers was scheduled for April 13, 1935. Then, as now, airline schedules don't always go to plan. John Stroud relates, in *Annals of British and Commonwealth Air Transport*, that: "Imperial Airways and Qantas Empire Airways opened the 12,754 mile London-Brisbane route for passengers. Single route fare £195. No through passengers were carried on the first scheduled service, (April 13, 1935), because of heavy sector bookings, but there were two through passengers on the service which left London on 20 April. The route was opened for passengers from Brisbane to London on 17 April. Frequency of service was once weekly and the journey time 12 1/2 days." Only one of the two passengers reached Brisbane on the inaugural flight. He was author/journalist Richard Coke. The other passenger, Mr J. B. Usher, a rubber broker, was off-loaded in Singapore because of the mail load to be carried by Qantas's DH86.

If Qantas had chosen to celebrate the 75th Anniversary of its first international passengers, it would have been able to spin a scandalously romantic yarn. John Gunn, in *Defeat of Distance, Qantas 1919-1939*, wrote: "The first overseas passenger to travel on a QEA service... was Maj. A. Phillips, a reserve officer of HM Coldstream Guards... at Charleville he was reunited with Lady Mountbatten... they had recently completed a voyage together on a schooner from Tahiti to Sydney." Major Phillips had attempted to conceal his identity by booking under the name of Mr Wilson. This had caused great affront to the ever righteous Hudson Fysh who would have none of it, insisting that Qantas did not book passengers under assumed names. Also, it would not have done for the couple to be seen boarding together in Brisbane. Ernie Crome takes up the story: "The first passenger service and mail service was inaugurated from Brisbane on 17th April, 1935, arriving Charleville and Cloncurry the same day. Major A. Phillips was the first passenger to book through from Brisbane to London. Lady Louis Mountbatten joined Butler's Air Transport plane at Cootamundra and flew to Charleville by this service, joining the Qantas plane at this point on the 17th April, 1935, arriving Darwin the next day. Lady Louis, booked on the through service from Charleville to Brindisi." Edwina Mountbatten was returning to her husband Louis, who was then stationed at Malta. Air travel enabled Edwina to rejoin her husband, and two daughters, in time for the Silver Jubilee of H. M. King George V on May 6, 1935. Qantas saved the Mountbattens from the even bigger scandal her absence from the ceremonies would have caused.

Finally, British Airways seemed to appropriate the title, *Kangaroo Route*. The correct title is, the *Qantas Kangaroo Route*, and it defines travel on Qantas aircraft, with an Australian crew, between Sydney and London. The title does not relate to air travel between Brisbane and London. Qantas inaugurated the first scheduled Qantas flight from Sydney to London, using Australian registered aircraft, with Australian crews, on December 1, 1947. The aircraft was a Lockheed Constellation, VH-EAD, *Charles Kingsford Smith*. Smithy's name should also be linked to the names of other Australians who helped pioneer the route. There was Reginald Lloyd and his early vision for, *Aerial Mail Services (Sydney-London) Ltd*; Ross Smith for his Cairo - Calcutta flight in a Handley Page 0/400, and further route survey to Timor; Ross and Keith Smith for their Vickers Vimy Flight from the UK to Australia at the end of 1919, and Hudson Fysh, who was there in 1919 through to the true inauguration of the *Qantas Kangaroo Route* in 1947. I enjoy a good anniversary, provided real history is celebrated. **John Scott.**