



AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc

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13/40A ROSLYN GARDENS RUSHCUTTERS BAY NSW 2011

Southern Skies

THE NEWSLETTER OF AHSA (NSW) Inc

JULY 2019 ~ No 540

Honorary Life Member AHSA (NSW) Inc: Ian Debenham

**THE JUNE AHSA (NSW) Inc MEETING
WILL BE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 3rd COMMENCING at 8:00 pm.**

**PLEASE NOTE THE VENUE IN THE LOWER
FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM AT THE
NORTH RYDE RSL COMMUNITY CLUB.**

The club is located at the corner of Pittwater and Magdala Roads, North Ryde. There is ample free parking and visitors are most welcome. The facilities of the club are available to members and visitors for pre and post meeting refreshment and conversation.

**MEMBERS MEET FOR DINNER IN THE RIVERVIEWS
RESTAURANT ON THE TOP FLOOR AT 6.30 pm.**

OUR GUEST SPEAKER:

ANNA CHRISTINE GEBELS, a PhD Candidate, Museum and Heritage Studies, University of Sydney, will address the meeting on THE EMPIRE AIR TRAINING SCHEME AND ITS HERITAGE ON THE HOME FRONT.

Her research is focused on the collected heritage of the **EMPIRE AIR TRAINING SCHEME IN AUSTRALIA** in an attempt to ascertain what information we have, and what facts we need, in order to record an inclusive account of the Scheme.

By day Anna is a museum curator and educator who has worked in quarantine, military aviation and medical museums. By night Anna enjoys singing for and with military veterans, transporting them to yesteryear with the sweet harmonies of the WWII era with her group *Davey T and the Aces*.

Many references to the Empire Air Training Scheme are included in personal World War II histories. This research background should be of interest to our members.

AT OUR JUNE MEETING James Oglethorpe elaborated on the rare subject of the use of gliders as weapons, and for flight training by the Germans in WW2.

James is a retired industrial engineer having worked in the international airline industry. His interest in aviation was sparked when growing up under the flight path of Richmond RAAF Base in Kurrajong, NSW. For the past 16 years he has been an active volunteer

with 3 Squadron RAAF Association - an Australian veterans' Association.

James' talk entitled "*Gliding off to War*" was an evocative story of how the glider was developed into a "silent" weapon of war.

It was the German military who were instrumental in building gliders, as under the Versailles Treaty of the 1920's /1930's they were forbidden to develop powered aeroplanes.

Therefore the authorities encouraged gliding as a sport and trained many pilots under this scheme.

Testing of those early machines was also carried out by Hanna Reitsch before they were used as weapons.

As an example of their capabilities gliders were deployed to Belgium in an attack on 10th May 1940 at Fort Eben Emael, when 42 gliders captured 3 bridges and the fort itself.

This led to Winston Churchill's decision to allow the allies to build their own gliders with the result that some 500 were used on *D-Day* as well as later campaigns in Burma, with a final use in Papua New Guinea.

Post war gliders were replaced with helicopters thus ending a short but illustrious wartime career for the glider.

**MEMBERS OF THE AHSA
ARE INVITED TO ATTEND A LUNCHEON
TO CELEBRATE THE RECENT AWARDING
OF HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP**

to

RON HOUGHTON and SENJA ROBEY

*The venue for the luncheon will be
The Watergrill, Sydney Rowing Club,
Great North Road, Abbotsford
on Thursday 1st August 2019
at 12-30pm for 1-00pm.*

Meals & drinks at member's own expense;

choose from the menu at the servery

RSVP Paul Ewoldt by Friday 19th July.

Phone 8356 9583

Email paul.ewoldt@hotmail.com



A VALUABLE ADDITION TO AUSTRALIAN AVIATION HISTORY

Author KEITH WHITE
1926 – 2018

Keith White, a member of our society for over three decades, contributed to the proceedings of AHSA NSW monthly meetings through

reports on the progress of his research into the life of W. E. Hart. He published in *Southern Skies*, from September 2011 to September 2012, a most valuable record titled *William Hart Centenary Celebrations*.

Keith's contributions to our newsletter varied from research on the *Bristol Beaufort* at the Australian War Memorial to details about the operation of the *Fairey Swordfish* in Australia.

During Keith's years at high school the world was at war. He became determined to join the RAAF as a pilot. He gained his Leaving Certificate in 1942, then repeated the year to soak up time until he reached recruitment age. A couple of weeks after his eighteenth birthday he joined the RAAF, only to find that a couple of weeks earlier the RAAF had cut back on its pilot training intake. He did make it to aircrew, but as an air gunner. At this point in time the red, white and blue father and son duo joined the select few father-and-son teams that served Australia in the armed services in the same war.

Following his qualification as an air gunner, Keith was posted to New Guinea to join a B 24 Liberator crew for conversion and operational training as a ball turret gunner. By the end of the war in August 1945, 25 Sqn had flown nearly 6,000 hours on 85 bombing missions, much of it over the ocean. He was discharged from the RAAF on 25 January, 1946, with the rank of Flight Sergeant. Keith studied accountancy, and after qualification he joined Kelvinator, where he worked for the rest of his professional life.

In retirement Keith was able to follow his great passions - aviation history, cricket and philately. Through the pages of *Southern Skies* we were able to follow his travels to many places recording aviation events. Keith also served as a volunteer in the library of the Australian Aviation Museum Bankstown and contributed to the newsletter of the museum.

In July 2018 Keith donated his considerable collection of books on aviation history to the AHSA NSW Library.

On Keith's 90th birthday, his granddaughter, Stephanie, presented him with a bound copy of his 150 page biography of Bill Hart. Keith continued to edit this work up to the time of his death on the 8th October aged 92. **It is a wonderful tribute to Keith's meticulous research that this outstanding biography is published to a wider readership.**

A copy will be available for borrowing by members.

Excerpts from John Scott's Vale for Keith published in the Nov 2018 issue of Southern Skies.

JR

TO RESERVE AND BORROW BOOKS: email
Christine: paul.ewoldt@hotmail.com or
Gordon: glaslett@bigpond.net.au

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

JULY 1919 - 2019

Chronology GL

From July 1919 a supplement entitled "Aircraft" was incorporated in the monthly journal "Motor in Australia". The editor of "Aircraft" was E. J. Hart.

01 Major Lee Murray left Melbourne for Adelaide by road to locate suitable landing grounds for an air route between the cities.

- 221 Sqn RAF attack four Red Army paddle steamers but are forced to evacuate Lagan in Kalmykia, Russia owing to the advancing Bolsheviks.

- London's first airport, Hounslow Heath, is opened.

02 British airship R.34 leaves the RNAS Airship Station at East Fortune, Scotland for New York, USA at 2.48am.

- US Navy Blimp C-8 explodes landing at camp Holabird, Marland injuring 80 spectators.

05 Peace Treaty signed at 3pm. As Clemenceau was giving the opening speech four DH4s of the RAF Communications Squadron, one piloted by Sydney born Lt Frank Briggs, formed up in line ahead formation and flashed past the Hall of Mirrors. The London Press was not amused by their hijinks.

- Airship R.34 reaches St Johns Newfoundland and parachutes the mail being carried.

06 R.34 lands at Hazelhurst Field, New York at 2pm.

10 French WWI ace Jean Navarre killed in a crash while practicing for an unauthorised flight through the Arc de Triomphe.

11 President Woodrow Wilson signs appropriations for *USS Jupiter* the US Navy's first aircraft carrier.

13 Maj Norman Brearley returned to Perth bringing two 110hp Le Rhone Avro 504K's for joy flights and taxi work.

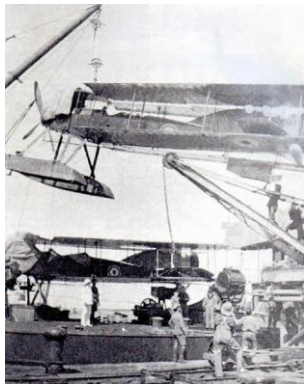
21 Anthony Fokker founds Fokker Aircraft Industries after smuggling two trainloads of machinery and aircraft from Germany to The Netherlands.

23 Capt H.J. (Harry) Butler's Bristol M.1c C5001 and Avro 504K H1973 plus three 110hp Le Rhone rotary engines arrive in Adelaide from the UK.

Anthony Fokker

27 Seaplane carrier HMS Orlioch delivers two Short 184s to the Ural Cossacks who do not expect them, do not speak English





Short 184s on HMS Orlioch

and no one wants to fly. Capt Igoroff of the Russian flying service took one Short and for three days bombed the front line but refused to use bomb racks insisting that his observer carry the bombs in his cockpit and throw the bombs out by hand. On

the third day the Short, Igoroff and the observer vanished in a mid-air explosion while taking off.

30 The Romanian Army defeats the Hungarian Soviet Republic's army in the Hungarian-Romanian war of 1919.

Fegyverbe!ToArms



- On a mission by three DH9As of 47 Sqn RAF over southern Russia the fuel tank of Capt Walter Anderson's DH9A is hit by ground fire and Lt John Mitchell, his observer, climbs onto the wing and plugs the holes with his fingers. When another DH9A is forced down Anderson and Mitchell land and pick up its crew with Mitchell holding off Bolshevik cavalry with his Lewis gun in the rear cockpit before again climbing onto the wing to plug the fuel tank's hole with his fingers despite being burned by the aircraft's exhaust. They return safely to base with the rescued crew. Anderson and Mitchell receive the DSO and later the DFC for their actions.

31 Harry Butler flies his Bristol M.1c for the first time for 30 minutes.

ASK'nANSWER People who want INFORMATION on a particular question are invited to list the question and anyone with information or suggestions can reply - with the question and the reply printed in future *SSkies'* issues. Students researching a topic and those with ideas and answers can support, clarify and question aviation facts and records. This can publicise research, which is always good for both aviation researchers and readers. **T L**

I am contemplating writing a story for *The Aviation Historian* in the UK about the crash of the RAF Liberator C.VII EW631, but it won't 'fly' without photographs and just maybe someone out there has what I need, so...

WANTED: Publishable photographs of any 300 Wing (243 Squadron, 1315 Flight, Communications Flight, 145 Staging Post) Dakotas and Liberator C.VIIs, particularly EW631 which crashed Mascot 19JUL45. The aircraft were variously based at Mascot, Camden and Archerfield. Also access to history of 300 Wing or its components (maybe something from Air Britain?). Contact Bob Livingstone ev982@netspace.net.au.

AERIAL REFUELLING

First practical aerial refuelling systems

Continued from June issue

Grappled-line looped-hose



The US Airforce Boeing B-50 Superfortress, *Lucky Lady II* being refuelled by Grappled-line looped-hose during the first non-stop circumnavigation of the world by air (1949)

Sir Alan Cobham's Grappled-line looped-hose air-to-air refuelling system borrowed from techniques patented by David Nicolson and John Lord, and was publicly demonstrated for the first time in 1935. In the system the receiver aircraft, at one time an *Airspeed Courier*, trailed a steel cable which was then grappled by a line shot from the tanker, a *Handley Page Type W10*. The line was then drawn back into the tanker where the receiver's cable was connected to the refuelling hose. The receiver could then haul back in its cable bringing the hose to it. Once the hose was connected, the tanker climbed sufficiently above the receiver aircraft to allow the fuel to flow under gravity. (see reference #11 *Gas Station in the Sky* for detailed drawing of this type of operation.)

When Cobham was developing his system, he saw the need as purely for long-range transoceanic commercial aircraft flights, but today aerial refuelling is used exclusively by military aircraft.

In 1934, Cobham had founded Flight Refuelling Ltd and by 1938 had used FRL's looped-hose system to refuel aircraft as large as the *Short Empire flying boat Cambria* from an *Armstrong Whitworth AW.23*.

Handley Page Harrows were used in the 1939 trials to perform aerial refuelling of the *Empire flying boats* for regular transatlantic crossings. From August 5 to October 1, 1939, sixteen crossings of the Atlantic were made by *Empire flying boats*, with fifteen crossings using FRL's aerial refuelling system. After the sixteen crossings further trials were suspended due to the outbreak of World War II.

During the closing months of World War II, it had been intended that *Tiger Forces' Lancaster and Lincoln* bombers would be in-flight refuelled by converted *Halifax* tanker aircraft, fitted with the FRL's looped-hose units, in operations against the Japanese homelands, but the war ended before the aircraft could be deployed. After the war ended, the USAF bought a small number of FRL looped-hose units and fitted a number of *B-29s* as tankers to refuel specially equipped *B-29s* and later *B-50s*. The USAF made only

one major change between the system used by the RAF. The USAF version had auto-coupling of the refuelling nozzle, where the leader line with the refuelling hose is pulled to the receiver aircraft and a refuelling receptacle on the belly of the aircraft, allowing high-altitude air-to-air refuelling and doing away with the aircraft having to fly to a lower altitude to be depressurized so a crew member could manually do the coupling. This was the air-to-air refueling system that the *Lucky Lady II* used to make its famous first non-stop around-the-world flight in 1949.

From February 26 to March 3, 1949, an American B-50 Superfortress *Lucky Lady II* of the 43rd Bomb Wing flew non-stop around the world in 94 hours and 1 minute, a feat made possible by four aerial refuellings from four pairs of KB-29M tankers of the 43d ARS. Before the mission, crews of the 43d had experienced only a single operational air refuelling contact. The flight started and ended at Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth, Texas with the refuellings accomplished over the Azores, West Africa, the Pacific Ocean near Guam and between Hawaii and the West Coast.

This first non-stop circumnavigation of the globe proved that, because of aerial refuelling, vast distances and geographical barriers were no longer an obstacle to military air power. In 1949, four additional ARS units were organized by the USAF and both the 43d and 509th ARS became fully operational.

Probe-and-drogue system

Cobham's company FRL soon realized that their looped-hose system left a lot to be desired and began work on an improved system that is now commonly called the *probe-and-drogue* air-to-air refuelling system and today is one of the two systems chosen by air forces for air-to-air refuelling, the other being the flying-boom system. In post-war trials the RAF used a modified *Lancaster* tanker employing the much improved **probe-and-drogue system**, with a modified *Gloster Meteor F.3* jet fighter, serial *EE397*, fitted with a nose-mounted probe.

On 7 August 1949, the Meteor flown by FRL test pilot Pat Hornidge took off from Tarrant Rushton and remained airborne for 12 hours and 3 minutes, receiving 2,352 imperial gallons (10,690 L) of fuel in ten refuellings from a Lancaster tanker.

Hornidge flew an overall distance of 3,600 mi (5,800 km), achieving a new jet endurance record. FRL still exists as part of Cobham plc.

USAF KC-135 hose-drogue pod



Modern specialized tanker aircraft have equipment specially designed for the task of offloading fuel to the receiver aircraft, based on drogue and probe, even at the higher speeds modern jet aircraft typically need to remain airborne.



Two A-3 Skywarriors and an A-4 Skyhawk performing a stunt refueling in 1964. Normally, only two planes are used for in-flight refueling.

In January 1948, General Carl Spaatz, then the first Chief of Staff of the new United States Air Force, made aerial refuelling a top priority of the service. In March 1948, the USAF purchased two sets of FRL's looped-hose in-flight refuelling equipment, which had been in practical use with British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) since 1946, and manufacturing rights to the system. FRL also provided a year of technical assistance. The sets were immediately installed in two Boeing B-29 Superfortresses, with plans to equip 80 B-29s.

Flight testing began in May 1948 at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, and was so successful that in June orders went out to equip all new B-50s and subsequent bombers with receiving equipment. Two dedicated air refuelling units were formed on June 30, 1948: the 43d Air Refuelling Squadron at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona, and the 509th Air Refuelling Squadron at Walker Air Force Base, New Mexico. The first ARS aircraft used FRL's looped-hose refuelling system, but testing with a boom system followed quickly in the autumn of 1948.

The first use of aerial refuelling in combat took place during the Korean War, involving F-84 fighter-bombers flying missions from Japanese airfields, due to Chinese-North Korean forces overrunning many of the bases for jet aircraft in South Korea - refuelling from converted B-29s using the drogue-and-probe in-flight refuelling system with the probe located in one of the F-84's wing-tip fuel tanks.

View on approach to a drogue basket



Raymonde de Laroche

(22 August 1882 – 18 July 1919)



Raymonde de Laroche became the world's first licenced female pilot on March 8, 1910.

She received the 36th aeroplane pilot's licence issued by the Aeroclub de France, the world's first organization to issue pilot licences. At the time, pilot licences were only required for

pilots operating aircraft for commercial purposes.

Born on 22 August 1882 in Paris, France, as **Elise Raymonde Deroche**, Raymonde De Laroche was the daughter of a plumber. She had a fondness for sports as a child, as well as for motorcycles and automobiles when she was older. As a young woman she became an actress and used the stage name "*Raymonde de Laroche*". Inspired by Wilbur Wright's 1908 demonstrations of powered flight in Paris and being personally acquainted with several aviators, including artist-turned-aviator Léon Delagrangé, who was reputed to be the father of her son André, de Laroche determined to take up flying for herself.

Achievements in aviation



Raymonde de Laroche in her Voisin aeroplane in 1909

In October 1909, de Laroche appealed to her friend, aviator and aeroplane builder Charles Voisin, to instruct her in how to fly. On 22 October 1909, de Laroche went to the Voisin brothers' base of operations at Chalons,

90 miles (140 km) east of Paris. Voisin's aircraft could seat only one person, so she operated the plane by herself while he stood on the ground and gave instructions. After she mastered taxiing around the airfield, she lifted off and flew 300 yards (270 m). De Laroche's flight is often cited as the first by a woman in a powered heavier-than-air craft; there is evidence that two other women, P. Van Pottelsberghe and Thérèse Peltier, had flown the previous year with Henri Farman and Delagrangé respectively as passengers but not as pilots.

Decades later, aviation journalist Harry Harper wrote that until de Laroche made her celebrated flight on the Voisin, she had only flown once, for a short hop, as a passenger; when she first took the controls, Charles

Voisin expressly forbade her to attempt a flight; and after taxiing twice across the airfield, she took off, flying "ten or fifteen feet high" and handling the controls with "cool, quick precision". Although Gabriel Voisin wrote, "... *my brother [was] entirely under her thumb*", the story of de Laroche as a headstrong woman making the flight after scant preparation and against Voisin's orders almost certainly romanticises what actually took place. *Flight* magazine, a week after the flight, reported: "*For some time the Baroness has been taking lessons from M. Chateau, the Voisin instructor, at Chalons, and on Friday of last week she was able to take the wheel for the first time. This initial voyage into the air was only a very short one, and terra firma was regained after 300 yards (270 m). Flight was also responsible for bestowing the title "Baroness" upon de Laroche, as she was not of noble birth. Flight added that on the following day she circled the flying field twice, "the turnings being made with consummate ease. During this flight of about four miles (6 km) there was a strong gusty wind blowing, but after the first two turnings the Baroness said that it did not bother her, as she had the machine completely under control."*

On 8 March 1910, de Laroche became the first woman in the world to receive a pilot licence when the Aero-Club of France issued her licence #36 of the *Fédération Aéronautique Internationale* (International Aeronautics Federation or F.A.I.).

De Laroche participated in aviation meetings at Heliopolis in Egypt as well as Saint Petersburg, Budapest and Rouen. During the show in St. Petersburg she was personally congratulated by Tsar Nicholas II. There she was presented once again as "Baroness" de Laroche. Thereafter, the title became commonly used.

In July 1910 de Laroche was participating in the week-long airshow at Reims in France. On 8 July, her aeroplane crashed, and she suffered such severe injuries that her recovery was in doubt, but two years later, she was fit again and had returned to flying. On 26 September 1912, she and Charles Voisin were involved in a car crash. Voisin was killed, and she was severely injured.

On 25 November 1913 de Laroche won the Aero-Club of France's Femina Cup for a non-stop long-distance flight of over 4 hours duration.

During World War I, as flying was considered too dangerous for women, she served as a military driver, chauffeuring officers from the rear zones to the front under fire.

In June 1919 de Laroche set two women's altitude records, one at 15,700 feet (4,800 m); and also the women's distance record, at 201 miles (323 km).



The AHSA (NSW) Inc library is 90% catalogued with the remaining 10% being mainly large format pictorial books.

Attached to this newsletter is current listing of the library for members to check out and borrow.

If you let me (Gordon) know a couple days before a meeting I will bring the books along for you to borrow for up to **two months**. See Christine at the meeting as she will have the books. If members cannot make it to meetings we will arrange to post the book to them at a discounted rate and include a discounted return envelope.

Our library includes books published from the dawn of aviation up to the present day. Many are extremely rare and therefore quite valuable so we expect our members to treat them with respect.

Of more recent publications are Peter Ingman's Avonmore Books Press in Adelaide series covering the South Pacific Air War between Australia & Japan and they are a must read. Your newsletter editor Judy has been a keen borrower of these books while I am halfway through 'The Fall of Rabaul'.

To borrow a book email me on glaslett@bigpond.net.au or phone 0409654947.

It is our library given to us by members and now catalogued and restored so please use it.

INTERSTATE NEWS

MELBOURNE MEETINGS are held on the fourth Wednesday of the month in the auditorium of the RAAF Association, 24 Camberwell Rd, Hawthorn East. Parking is available under the building - enter from the lane at the south end. The meetings start at 7.30pm - ring the bell if the front door is shut. A number of members meet casually for dinner from 6.00pm at the Tower Hotel opposite the RAAFA. Visitors are welcome. Website <http://www.ahsa.org.au/> Contact Dave Prossor, President, president@ahsa.org.com

BRISBANE MEETINGS are held on the last Friday of each month in the Lounge Area, Terminal Building, Archerfield Airport, Brisbane. Visitors are welcome. Next Meeting: Friday 26th July 2019 - 7:00 for :30pm Peter Dunn, Secretary, advised that the AHSA Q'land web site links to Victoria Museum's Facebook page - <http://ahsaqld.org.au/> Contact ahsaqld@gmail.com or Warwick Henry at 0417 771 563

CALENDAR OF EVENTS : 2019

THE TEMORA AVIATION MUSEUM'S AIRCRAFT DISPLAYS

Email: info@aviationmuseum.com.au

Website:

<http://www.aviationmuseum.com.au/event/aircraft-showcase>



SMITH FLIGHT CENTENARY COMMEMORATIONS PROGRESS REPORT

There has been steady progress towards the re-enactment flight to be held next March from Darwin to Adelaide. Tony Coleiro has been working on an itinerary, which is very difficult because of all the factors that have to be kept in mind. We will not have a final itinerary before November!

I should be able to report some interesting news at the next meeting of AHSA.

The South Australian people have published two major books: a reprint, with some additions, of Ross Smith's book *14,000 Miles Through the Air*, describing the 1919 flight, and *Long Flight Home*, a historical novel in which the narrator is Wally Shiers, written by Lainie Anderson, who spoke at the last Aviation Futures conference. Thanks to a Churchill Fellowship she has made a major study of the Smith flight. Her book is very accurate and a good read. She has provided good notes of the sources of her information and ideas.

The books are available from Wakefield Press in Adelaide, ordered from their website.

Tom Lockley

Smith Flight Commemoration Group

AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA (NSW) Inc

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Raymonde de Laroche continued from p5

Death and legacy

On 18 July 1919, de Laroche, who was a talented engineer, went to the airfield at Le Crotoy as part of her plan to become the first female test pilot. She co-piloted an experimental aircraft (whether she flew this is not known); on its landing approach the aeroplane went into a dive and crashed, killing both de Laroche and the co-pilot.

There is a statue of de Laroche at Paris-Le Bourget Airport in France.

From 6 March to 12 March 2010, to celebrate the Centennial of Licensed Women Pilots, women pilots from eight countries on three continents used 20 types of aircraft to establish a new world record: 310 girls and women introduced to piloting by women pilots in one week.

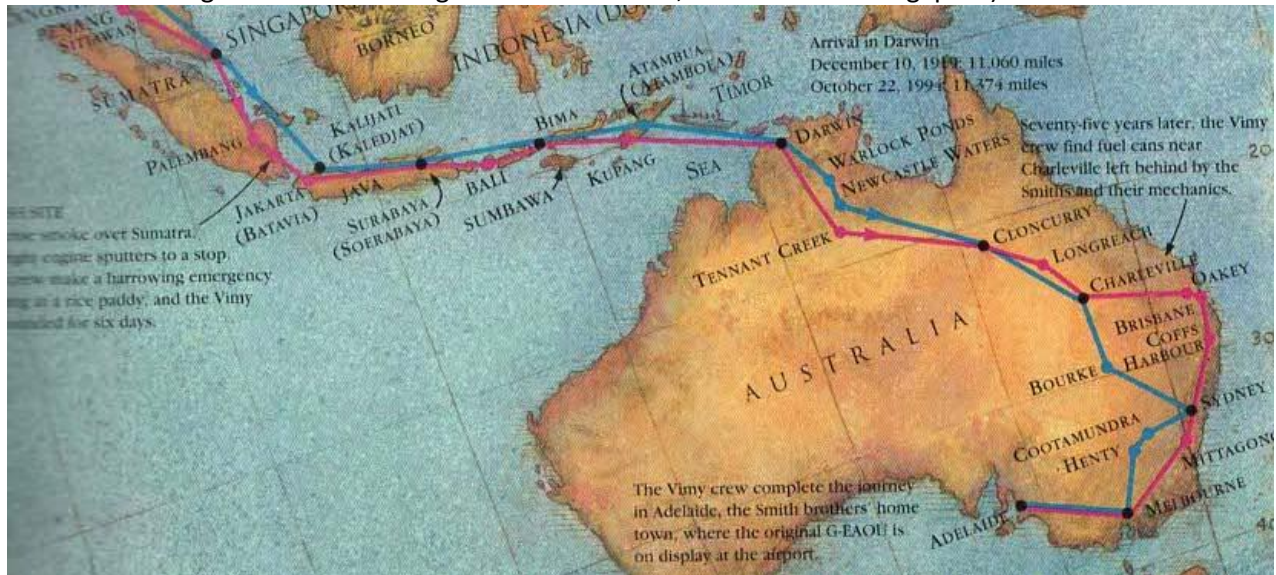
Women of Aviation Worldwide Week is held annually during the week including 8 March, which marks the anniversary of Raymonde de Laroche's pilot licence.

Thank you, Gordon Lasslett, John Scott, Paul & Christine Ewoldt, Tom Lockley, and aviation friends for submissions to this newsletter. Contributions should be sent to the Newsletter Editor: judyrainsford@hotmail.com

in 70 AHSA (NSW)

Countdown to the Smith flight centenary commemorations: 'Spirit of Brooklands' part 3.

(*Spirit of Brooklands* was the replica Vickers Vimy made by Australian adventurer Lang Kidby, and flown to Australia in 1974. The aircraft was as close as practicable to the original in terms of construction, weight and performance, the main difference being the use of Chevrolet engines instead of the original Rolls Royce Eagles. Last month's *Southern Skies* described the flight from Farnborough to Seletar airfield, in the north of Singapore).



At Seletar airport, Singapore Ian Snell, pilot of the Britten-Norman Islander escort aircraft, became ill and had to be replaced by Malcolm Wood, a suitably qualified pilot flown out from Britain. In the meantime it was decided to press on, with only the *Nomad* as escort, loading essential supplies from the *Islander* on the *Nomad* and the *Vimy*. This made the *Vimy* so heavy that it took some time before the aircraft reached 1500 feet. They flew across Singapore, flying over Changi airport, to be opened in 1981. The next exciting incident was when they crossed the Equator: the original *Vimy* had been the first aircraft to achieve this feat.



The weather closed in. They had to fly through low cloud, navigating by instruments and eventually reached Palembang while flying at under a hundred feet below the cloud ceiling. A major problem was smoke generated by huge burning-off operations.

A major welcome had been prepared at Jakarta, but the delay was making this an impossible goal for the day. In any case, shortly after taking off from Palembang, the starboard engine had a catastrophic failure, probably due to overheating. A hair-raising forced landing was necessary. They landed in a rice paddy field – fortunately the field was not flooded – and were quickly surrounded by local farm workers. Even in 1974, it was the first aircraft seen close-up by many of them, and it became a huge local attraction! The crew were very worried that the aircraft might catch fire when surrounded by hundreds of onlookers, many of whom were smoking. They made radio contact with a passing airliner, and the *Nomad* eventually was able to locate the crash site.

The nearest phone was two hours away, and eventually contact was made with local authorities. The response was good: soldiers appeared, the aircraft was fenced off, and a work team was organised to prepare an airstrip, paid \$1.50 per man per day. The *Nomad* and the *Islander* landed on 10 December, only two days after the crash, and the considerable damage done to the aircraft was repaired under very difficult conditions. A new engine was installed, and again this was a remarkable feat. On 16 October, a week after their arrival, the *Vimy* took off from the improvised ground and flew on to Jakarta, where another two days were spent completing repairs. A particular need was bungee cords for the undercarriage suspension sent from Germany.



The airmen had decided to deliberately reduce the engines' performance so as to prevent overheating, and on the next two legs they were flying into 25 knot headwinds, making the over-ground speed no more than 50 knots. Fatigue was obviously setting in. The next stages were relatively trouble free: modern radio and navigational aids certainly made a difference, but the fact is that a flight of over seven hours to cover the 441 nautical mile last stage to Darwin was not a minor undertaking in such an aircraft.

Their arrival was a major event. Among the usual Northern Territory political dignitaries was Wendy Miles, daughter of Hudson Fysh of QANTAS fame, who handed Lang Kidby a telegram from Prime Minister Paul Keating. The airmen recalled Ross Smith's description of the arrival: *The hardships of the past month were forgotten in the excitement of the present. We shook hands with one another, our hearts swelling with those emotions invoked by achievement and the glamour of the moment. It was, and will be, the supreme hour of our lives.*

Though the 1974 airmen had not this unique experience, Peter McMillan, author of *The Long Flight*, the record of the re-enactment, had his own thoughts. *I think the mishaps made on our flight a real living biography of the Smith brothers. Except they made it two weeks faster than we did. So much for progress in the last seventy-five years.*

The airmen recognised that the distance still to be covered to Adelaide was equivalent to the distance between Darwin and Calcutta, but it was clear that this would be a great deal easier for them than it was for the Smith crew. Much of the terrain was 'flat and friendly' and the 1974 radio would ensure that they would not be out of contact with the outside world, as the original crew were when their starboard propeller broke and they had to improvise repairs from a packing case and some galvanised iron strips.

Peter McMillan recognised the significance of the Smith flight: Most of the towns we visited were ports of call on Ross Smith's tour of Australia in 1919, and a surprising number of the people who came to greet us brought along pictures and memories of the great Australian heroes and the giant bird that delivered them safely from England. We were similarly feted, and had only to circle a town a few times to see a stream of cars rapidly converging on the airport from all directions to see us land. The crowds would press up against the aeroplane, and almost before the propellers had stopped, we would be caught up in a frenzy of signing everything from hats and shorts to all manner of outstretched pieces of paper. Lang and I would tell stories for the schoolkids while Don, Mark and Erik helped the eager onlookers young and old alike, up onto the wing to take a close look inside the cockpit. Throughout the trip, it never ceased to amaze us how the Vimy struck a tactile nerve in everyone who saw her.

This was not the last adventure of Lang Kidby. In 1998 he restored then flew a tiny 1927 Avro Avian biplane from England to Australia to recreate the first solo flight by Bert Hinkler. He has also participated in many automobile events.

The Vimy also had many more adventures. In 1999 it successfully flew to South Africa, piloted by Mark Rebholz and John LaNoue (the American builder of the machine) and on 2nd -3rd July 2005, the Vimy achieved the ultimate goal



when Steve Fossett and Mark Rebholz successfully re-enacted Alcock and Brown's trans-Atlantic flight from St Johns, Newfoundland to Clifden, Ireland, in just under 19 hours.

The aircraft was finally donated to Brooklands Museum Trust on 26th August 2006. It took part in several flying displays including the Farnborough airshow, but on 15 November 2009 the aircraft made its last flight and is now a prized exhibit of the Brooklands Museum.

Illustrations: Previous page from *The Longest Flight*, Peter McMillan, Turner Publishing, 1995; This page from Brooklands Museum.

Tom Lockley