‘Pard’ Mustar were flying aircraft such as DH4, DH9 and Bristol F2B in the area.

These wooden aircraft were not durable, but proved the efficiency of air transport. All-metal aircraft were purchased, notably German Junkers aircraft – the single engined W34 was put into operation in April 1928 and was so profitable that it paid for itself in three months. So more were purchased, and three-engined G31 aircraft were in use by 1931.

Guinea Airways records show that pre-World War II they had a gross airlift of 80,000 tons, including 8,804 tons during the year 1939, figures approached by no other aviation operator in the world.

Flying at that time and place was very risky; as is mentioned on page 10, Les Trist, crew member on the Williams flight, was killed while transporting gold mining equipment.

Three Junkers W34s at Lae airfield, 1931, Geoff Goodall picture.

The war led to enormous expansion of facilities. Post-war, light and general aviation in New Guinea have become essential to daily life to an extent that is probably unequalled anywhere in the world, but both these matters are stories for another time.

First to the Solomons

Williams Pacific Flight 1926

Edited by Tom Lockley

In September-November 1926, Group Captain Richard Williams, Chief of Staff of the Royal Australian Air Force, led an exploratory flight to islands north of Australia. This was the first overseas flight of a RAAF aircraft and was, for much of the journey, the first aircraft to visit.

This draft printing is being distributed to various individuals and groups for information.

Corrections, comments and suggestions to tomlockley@gmail.com

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Afterword:

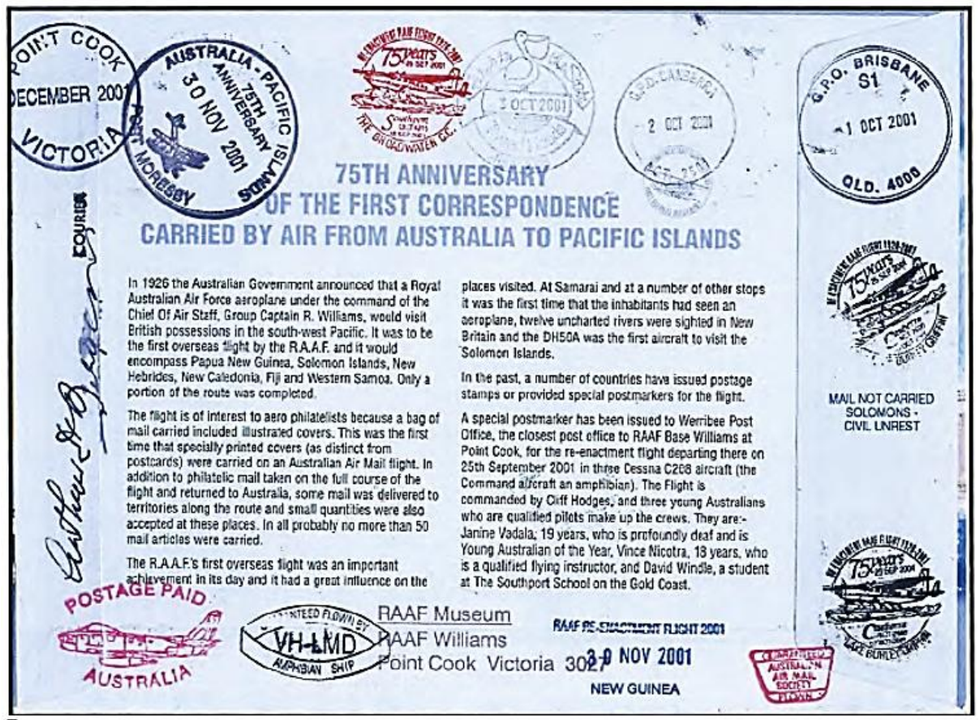
Williams' flight had somewhat of a bad press in that it did not achieve its intended aim of flying to Samoa, as seen on the map on page 6, and also there were mechanical problems. But given the difficulties encountered, it cannot be denied that this was a major achievement. This was also only the third, or maybe fourth or fifth[13], aircraft to be seen in the islands north of Australia and was definitely the first major flight through the area.

Only 15 years later major battles that were vital to Australia's survival were being fought there. Williams' strategic foresight was vindicated.

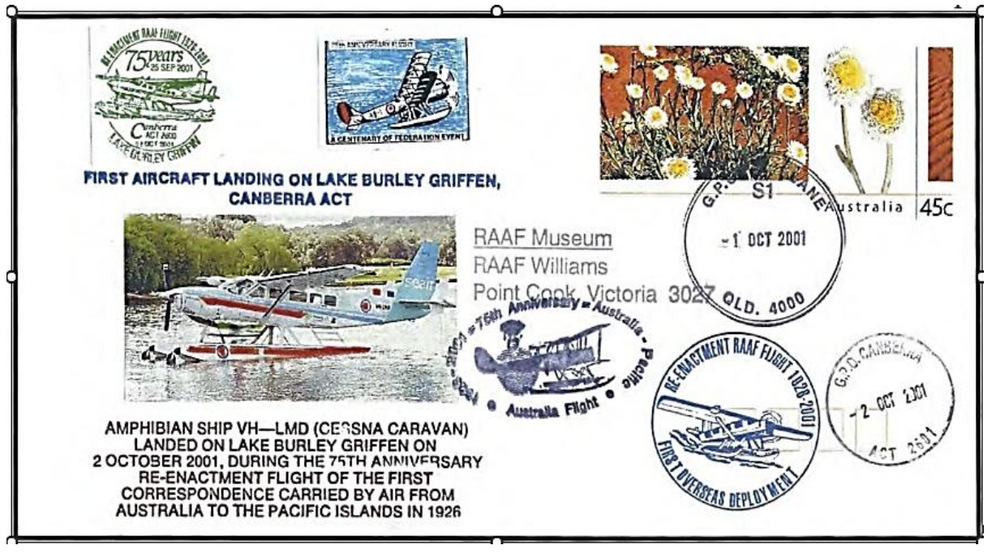
De Pinedo was a great supporter of seaplanes, but as can be seen from his comments on page 38 Williams was not. Before the second world war there was a time when flying boats had a very important place in the world passenger network, but during the war there was so much development in terrestrial landing fields that flying boats were largely obsolete.

Coincidentally, in1926 New Guinea was about to make history for its use of air transport. A very rich goldfield had been discovered at Edie Creek, only about 60 km from the coast near Salamaua, but the land route was over steep jungle-covered mountains. By mid-1927 pioneer airmen such as Ray Parer and

[13] Frank Hurley expedition 1922 Mainly Port Moresby to Daru – use of Lebbeus Hordern's / Areial Company Seagull G-AUCU, Port Moresby to Daru (definitely the first aircraft in PNG), Short Shrimp G-AUPZ (probably made a few flights), Seagull G-AUCV (possibly), De Pinedo 1925 Savoia seaplane Australia to Japan via Thursday Island and Dutch New Guinea; and a Vought UO-I floatplane from an American battleship which called at the islands on the return voyage from Australia after the visit of the United States Fleet in 1925 (no further details available).



The major philatelic item: front on previous page and back, above, detailing the plans. Below: souvenir of the landing on Lake Burley Griffen, Canberra, probably the work of Arthur Bergen.



Flight Lieutenant Ivor McIntyre, Flight Sergeant Les Trist and Group Captain Richard Williams with their RAAF DH50A seaplane at Buna, Papua during their historic 6,000 kilometre Pacific Islands survey flight. (RAAF picture)

About this book

The major aviation event in Australia in 1926 was undoubtedly the flight made by the Chief of the RAAF Air Staff, Group Captain Richard Williams and his crew along the east coast of Australia and through Papua New Guinea, New Britain, the Solomon Islands to Tulagi and return. It was the first RAAF overseas flight, and the first flight by an Australian-based aircraft to areas beyond Australian territories.

The hundredth anniversary of the flight is a good opportunity for collecting new information, particularly at a local level: please contact me at tomlockley@gmail.com if you can help. It may be possible that some commemorative activities will be held.

The flight left Point Cook on 25 September 1926 and returned on 7 December. Despite its importance, it is not well-known to the

Australian public, and this little booklet gives a brief outline on pages 12 to 35. The basis is Williams' official report *Survey of Air Routes – South Pacific, 1926,* stored in the National Archives, supplemented by an article by Group Captain Keith Isaacs, published in AIRCRAFT magazine, March, 1977, pages 28-34, and Williams' own narrative in *These Are Facts: The Autobiography of Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams*, published in 1977, over 50 years later; they provide interesting vignettes of contemporary life and, indeed, of Williams' own attitudes.

The subsequent history of Australian aviation in New Guinea, both civil and military, testifies to the importance of this flight:

- New Guinea was an early adopter of air transport. The opening up of New Guinean gold mining efforts in the late 1920s were very much handicapped by difficulties of transport: the entire country is mountainous; there were no roads and aircraft were far more efficient. Amazing feats were performed in the years before World War II.
- During World War II New Guinea was the theatre for significant battles: air transport was a major factor in the vital victories won in this area.
- Modern New Guinea could not survive without the hundreds of aircraft that enable efficient transport. A comprehensive road network will require decades of further effort.

And finally the recent conclusion of the Papua New Guinea – Australia Mutual Defence Treaty once again underlines the importance of close ties between Papua New Guinea and Australia, in which aviation is a vital part.

Tom Lockley, January 2026

There were also ambitious plans for celebrating **the 75 years anniversary** of the Williams flight in 2001, but the outcomes were not as hoped[12].

RAAF Warrant Officer Cliff Hodges, of the Air Force Cadets Training Office planned an anniversary flight from Point Cook to the Solomon Islands, and the Australian Airmail Stamp Society were also involved. The flight would travel from Point Cook, via PNG, to the Solomon Islands. With two young co-pilots, he hoped to complete the journey and that the two young people might be able to repeat the flight in 2026. A Cessna Caravan amphibian was chartered, with a pilot from the charter company. The flight left Point Cook on 24 September 2001 and flew via Sale (Victoria), Jervis Bay, Rose Bay (Sydney), Newcastle, Taree, Port Macquarie, Ballina, and other intermediate stops on the NSW coast. It reached Southport, Queensland on 28 September. Somehow there was also a landing on Lake Burley Griffin on October 1, but exactly how this fitted into the overall plan is not clear.

The hope was that the flight could be funded by philatelic sales: 3,000 examples of a very detailed cover were produced, to be sold at $100 each. Also, there were 1000 copies of a certificate with medallion – a PNC (Philatelic Numismatic Cover) which were to be sold at $110 each. This simply did not make money. Cliff Hodges, and Arthur Bergen of the AAMS were, it seems, the main source of funds for what was accomplished.

[12] The only account of this that can be found is in the Canberra Philatelic Society bulletin #27, part 2, 2009. I have endeavoured to create a short summary, but the accuracy of my account is not guaranteed, (tl)

Anniversary celebration flights 1976 and 2001

Some philatelic covers were carried on a **50th anniversary flight in 1976** and others in a **75th anniversary flight in 2001**.

According to Nelson Eustis' *Australian Airmail Catalogue,* the flight began on September 27 1976 with a Williams[11] Aviation Piper Chieftain VH-WGK which carried commemorative mail from Melbourne to Melbourne, and to and between PNG, Solomons, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. Special postmarks were applied in Melbourne and other points. The flight was organised by the Australian Air Mail Society. Covers were back stamped and generally signed by the pilots _ Captain Tony Schwerdt and Captain N S D Buckley or crew members. Vignettes designed by E W Roberts were affixed to much of the mail.

'Nobby' Buckley, 1905-1981, was involved in aviation from the 1930 until his retirement in 1980. He was a pilot for Guinea Airways from 1938. His biography, by Paul Divett, can be found on the website for the South Australian Aviation Museum.

This ambitious flight has had very little publicity.

[11] The name of the charter company appears to be coincidental – no link with Richard Williams,

Why make this flight?

Keith Isaacs explains this flight in the context of Australia's defence forces at the time:

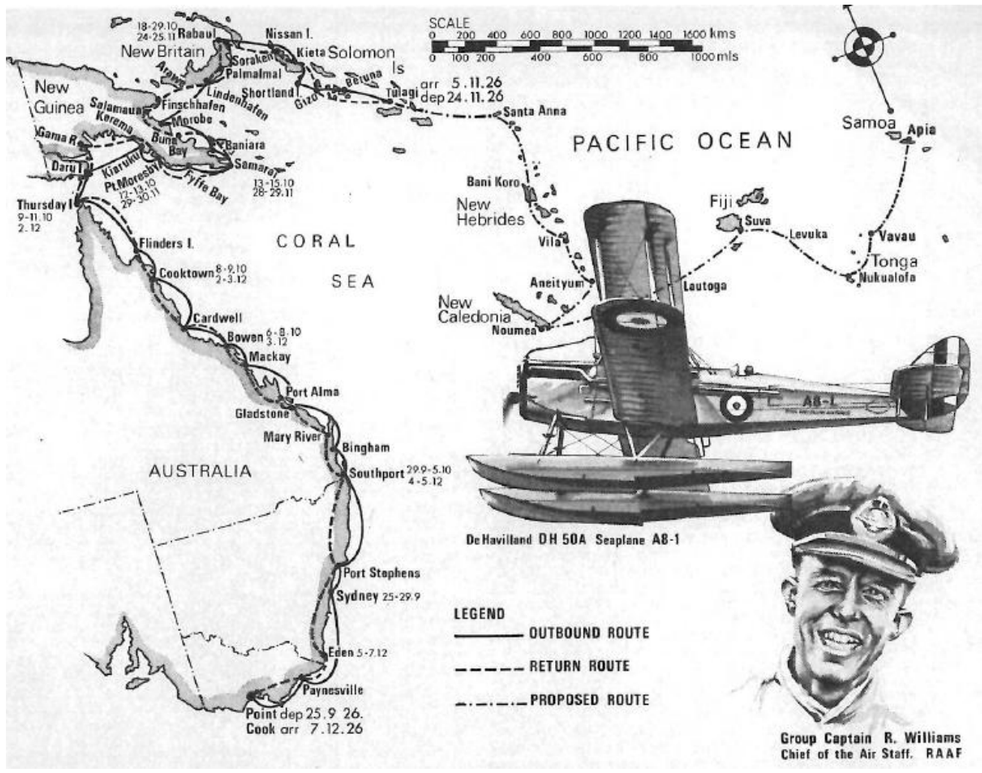
> ON JUNE 24, 1924, the Prime Minister, Mr S M Bruce, announced the first major rearmament programme for Australia since the end of the 1914-18 war. At the time, the Royal Australian Navy was regarded as the nation's first line of defence and most of the defence expenditure went to the purchase of new warships for strategic operations in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Orders were placed for two long-range cruisers, HMASs Australia and Canberra, an aircraft carrier, HMAS Albatross, and two ocean-going submarines, HMASs Otway and Oxley.

In comparison, the Royal Australian Air Force was sadly neglected. The hundred or so aircraft of the Imperial Gift of 1919 were both obsolete and suffering from lack of proper maintenance and support. Apart from a few basic trainers and six Fairey IIID seaplanes, the main acquisitions were six Supermarine Seagull Ill amphibians, two de Havilland DH.60 Cirrus Moth trainers, and a single de Havilland DH50A transport aircraft, A8-1, 'for conveyance of the Governor-General and other government officials.'

The Governor-General of the time, Lord Stonehaven, had been chosen by Stanley Bruce, Australian Prime Minister 1923-29, possibly because he thought Stonehaven was a bit more adventurous than other candidates. This was a time when the role of the Governor-General was becoming more oriented to Australian society instead of being just the representative of 'the mother country' and its power.

The RAAF needed to make its presence felt. RAAF personnel Stanley Goble and Ivor McIntyre had made headlines in 1924 by making the first flight around Australia, and Richard Williams, Chief of the Air Staff, was keen to build on this by making a survey flight of the British possessions in the Pacific, flying some 27,300 kilometres (17,000 miles) to Samoa and return. The object of the flight 'was to gain knowledge of the geography and flying conditions of the islands in the Pacific adjacent to Australia for air defence purposes.' The planned route for this pioneering journey was through the islands of Papua New Guinea, Solomon, New Hebrides, New Caledonia and Fiji, to Samoa and return. However, in the event, the flight finished at Tulagi, in the Solomon Islands, as per the map on page 11.

Map from AIRCRAFT, March 1977



Later history of the DH50 in Australia

The DH50A used by Williams was written off in a crash in 1929. The type was popular in Australia and a total of 16 DH50s were actually built in Australia under licence from de Havilland. QANTAS supplied a DH50 to what became the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 1928 (below).

The original VH-UFA (above). The Qantas Founder's Museum at Longreach has a replica of this Australian-built aircraft.

Philately of the Pacific Flight

From Leski stamp sales catalogue, 2008: 'A specially printed cover flown and signed by Group Captain Richard Williams on his survey flight which originated in Melbourne. This example addressed to the Air Board, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne with date stamps of 'SYDNEY', 'THURSDAY ISLAND 10 OC 26', 'KIETA 31 OC 26' and 'SAMARAI 29 NOV 26'.

One was sold at Aeropex in Adelaide, December 2019 for $16,000.

obstacles such as coral and the like, the work involved in, loading, unloading and maintenance against salt water.

My view that seaplanes were properly employed only where landing places for landplanes were not available was confirmed. That, of course, was the position in most of the islands at that time; we could not have visited this area in a landplane,

The Prime Minister at this time was Mr S M Bruce. He was then in London, and I received a congratulatory cable from him:
'Congratulations on splendid achievement in your flight of ten thousand miles. You have demonstrated the wonderful possibilities of aviation, not only in linking Australia more closely with outlying portions of the Empire in Pacific, but also in defence of Australia and adjoining possessions.'

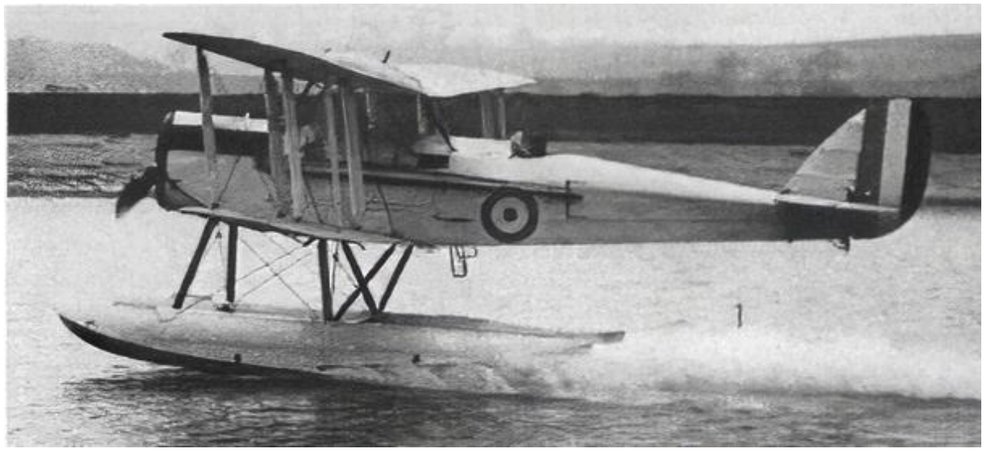
The 1927 round-Australia flight

The DH50A was reconfigured as a landplane and was flown by Williams on a reconnaissance flight around Australia, with an additional flight from Adelaide to Tennant Creek, Two DH 9s accompanied the DH 50A for most of the way, and between July and September, the three de Havilland aircraft covered almost 13,000 miles.

DH50A at Fannie Bay, Darwin, 1927

Preparations

Most of the route was over water, and there were very few landing fields, so a seaplane was desirable . The best choice was the DH50A, which had been ordered with an interchangeable wheel and float undercarriage. It was a modern-looking aircraft with an enclosed cabin for up to four passengers. Importantly, the Siddeley Puma engine of the DH50A, with its low compression, permitted the use of ordinary motor spirit which was the only kind of fuel available for most of the journey. The logistics for the 1924 Goble / McIntyre flight around Australia were very challenging as supplies of aviation fuel and oil had to be relocated at 37 sites around the coastline. Goble, essentially second in command of the RAAF, had only succeeded in getting ministerial approval for his flight because he was acting Chief of the Air Staff in 1924 when Williams was overseas. In 1925 the situation was reversed: Goble was overseas.



The DH50A had been tested as a seaplane at Shorts works at Rochester, UK (picture above) in April 1926. The aircraft was formally accepted for the RAAF on May 4, 1926, by Stanley Goble in his role of Commonwealth Liaison Officer at the Air Ministry, and it was then shipped to Australia. It arrived at RAAF Point Cook

in August 1926 and was given the serial number A8-1 and it became the first aircraft to be labelled 'Royal Australian Air Force' – in small letters under the serial number.

After much effort, ministerial approval was gained for the flight, despite concerns over safety issues.

The aircraft was quickly prepared for the flight. The twin floats were fitted, and Williams personally tested the seaplane on the 11 September. There were very few aircraft radio stations along the route, so it was decided not to carry a wireless operator and 54kg (120 lb) of wireless equipment was removed. Because they had only a three-person crew, they were able to carry a considerable number of tools and spare parts, which proved to be of great benefit.

A rare picture of Goble (left) and Williams together, 1930.

was hailed at the time in England as another triumph for British aircraft.'

Of more importance than the honours and tributes. however, was the original report of the flight compiled in 1927 by Richard Williams. This comprehensive defence assessment was submitted to the Minister for Defence on May 31. The report formed the basis for strategic air planning in the Pacific islands adjacent to Australia until the advent of the 1939-45 War; when, of course, the PNG-New Ireland-Solomons theatre of war became an Achilles' heel in the Japanese plan to conquer the Pacific. There is no doubt that of all the flights made by Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, RBE, CB, DSO, the most significant was his 1926 strategic survey.

Williams' concluding comments:

We had covered a distance of 10 000 miles, small today but not so then, and visited 23 localities outside the mainland where water suitable for the operation of seaplanes existed. Flying time was 126 hours. We had all gained a good deal of experience of the possibilities and needs for the operation of aircraft in the islands and of the meteorological conditions there and in the tropics generally and I became aware more than ever before of the limitations of aircraft operating from the sea. From the very beginning of Service aviation there had been arguments between pilots as to the relative merits of landplanes and seaplanes.

Seaplane pilots claimed that alighting places of almost unlimited area were always available to them throughout the world and that no amount of bombing could destroy them. They failed to mention the ease with which wind and tide could upset the surface of those alighting places, the danger of floating and submerged

Isaacs' final comments:

The Pacific islands survey flight of 16,000 kilometres (10,000 miles) occurred between September 25 and December 7, 1926, and 126 hours 4 minutes were flown on 31 flying days. Of the 23 areas visited in Papua, the Mandated Territory of New Guinea, and the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, 20 of the districts had never seen an aircraft. The remaining three were visited by a Vought UO-I floatplane from an American battleship which called at the islands on the return voyage from Australia after the visit of the United States Fleet in 1925[10].

In retrospect, the flight would have been even more successful but for the misfortunes encountered with the seaplane's temperamental Puma engine. The fast return flight of 8,121 kilometres (5,046 miles) in 13 flying days demonstrated what could be achieved when the engine functioned normally and, of course, the original intention of surveying 27,300 kilometres (17,000 miles) to Samoa would have been accomplished but for the engine malfunctions.

In recognition of the fliers pioneering and surveying achievements, Group Captain Williams was awarded a CBE, Flight Lieutenant McIntyre a Bar to his AFC, and Flight Sergeant Trist an AFM, in the 1927 Birthday Honours. McIntyre also received the Oswald Watt Gold Plaque for 1926 ('for achieving the most brilliant performance in the air during the year in the Commonwealth of Australia') having previously been awarded the same medal in 1924 for the RAAF Fairey IIID seaplane flight around Australia. In his History of Australian Aviation (The Hawthorn Press, 1960), Stanley Brogden relates that 'the flight

[10] Isaacs neglects the aircraft used by Frank Hurley, Port Moresby-Kalmare-Daru-Thursday Island, 1923

The aviators

Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, KBE, CB, DSO (1890-1980) was a self-made man. His father was a miner. Aged 19, he enlisted in the South Australian Infantry Regiment and was commissioned in 1911. In November 1914 he graduated from the first flying course held at the Central Flying School, Point Cook, Victoria.

Late in 1915 he joined the first Australian aviation unit sent overseas for service with the Royal Flying Corps. The squadron began operations as a separate entity in December1916, supporting the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in the advance towards Palestine. Richard Williams was awarded the Distinguished Service Order for acts of conspicuous gallantry and assumed leadership roles. He finished the war as temporary lieutenant-colonel, second in command of 4th (Army) Wing, Palestine Brigade, RFC.

Despite his comparatively young age (and his working-class background), his administrative skills were recognised, and he took a prominent part in setting up the Royal Australian Air Force and in 1922 was became chief of the Air Staff. He continually worked towards developing a strong and independent air force. In late 1926 he led the flight that is the subject of this booklet.

Williams had a distinguished career in the Australian air force and held important overseas positions. During World War II however, Australian officers were denied the opportunity of commanding the Australian air force. The situation is very complex and has been the subject of PhD dissertations,

impossible to summarise in this short document. After the war Williams became Director-General of Civil Aviation and his work over the next ten years certainly 'created the network of airfields, communications and related support services required by the industry, while maintaining an enviable safety record[1]'. But that is another story!

Lieutenant Ivor Ewing McIntyre, CBE, AFC (1899-1928) was born in Scotland. During World War I he served with the Royal Naval Air Service and was a very skilled aviator, specialising in seaplanes. He came to Australia in 1923 to take up a commission in the RAAF, and took up duty with 5 Squadron RAAF, flying Fairey IIID seaplanes, based at Point Cook. He immediately took part in major flights, notably the first flight around Australia, as pilot for Wing Commander Stanley Goble. His pre-eminence as seaplane pilot is shown by the fact that he was also selected for the Williams flight. Ivor remained in the air force until 1927 and then became chief instructor for the South Australian section of the Australian Aero Club. Sadly, he was killed in the crash of a Cirrus Moth on 11 March 1928.

Flight Sergeant Leslie Joseph Trist (1898-1931) joined the army in 1918. He was a talented engineer and secured a position in military aviation. In 1926 he was a Sergeant in the RAAF and is listed as 'mechanic' in the records of the Pacific flight. He left the RAAF in 1927 and joined *Airgold*, a pioneering air transport firm in New Guinea, as pilot. *Guinea Airways* took over *Airgold,* and Les joined them as pilot. He was an important pioneer of the wonderfully successful air transport services in New Guinea and was killed in the crash of a Junkers W34 on 22 May 1931.

[1] Australian Dictionary of Biography

Sunday, 5 December: Total for day: 690 miles, 1110 km.

Southport-Port Stephens 0743-1105 (fuel), duration 3.22; Port Stephens-Eden 1242-1622, duration 3.40. The original intention was to fly to Sydney but, with such fine weather and favourable winds, Williams decided to bypass the harbour and proceed to Eden.

Unbeknown to Williams a reception had been arranged at Sydney and a formation of RAAF aircraft flew out to escort the aircraft into Rose Bay. When the seaplane failed to appear, fears for the safety of the crew began to grow until a sighting report of the seaplane was received from Jervis Bay. Williams was very happy: *with a tail wind and 7 hours in the air we covered the distance of 690 miles (1110 km) to Eden on Twofold Bay.*

Monday, 6 December: Bad weather kept the fliers at Eden – the first and only day on which a flight was not made since leaving the Solomon Islands.

Tuesday,7 December: Total for day: 365 miles, 517 km.

Eden-Paynesville, 0835-1045, duration 2.20, Paynesville-Point Cook 1133-1445, duration 3.12.

The return journey from Tulagi had been 5046 miles, 9590 kilometres, and the total flight very close to 10,000 miles, 1600 kilometres.

Two Fairey IIID seaplanes had been launched to escort the DH50A into its home. They, however, failed to make contact and nine Avro 504K trainers then took off and escorted Williams' aircraft to Point Cook.

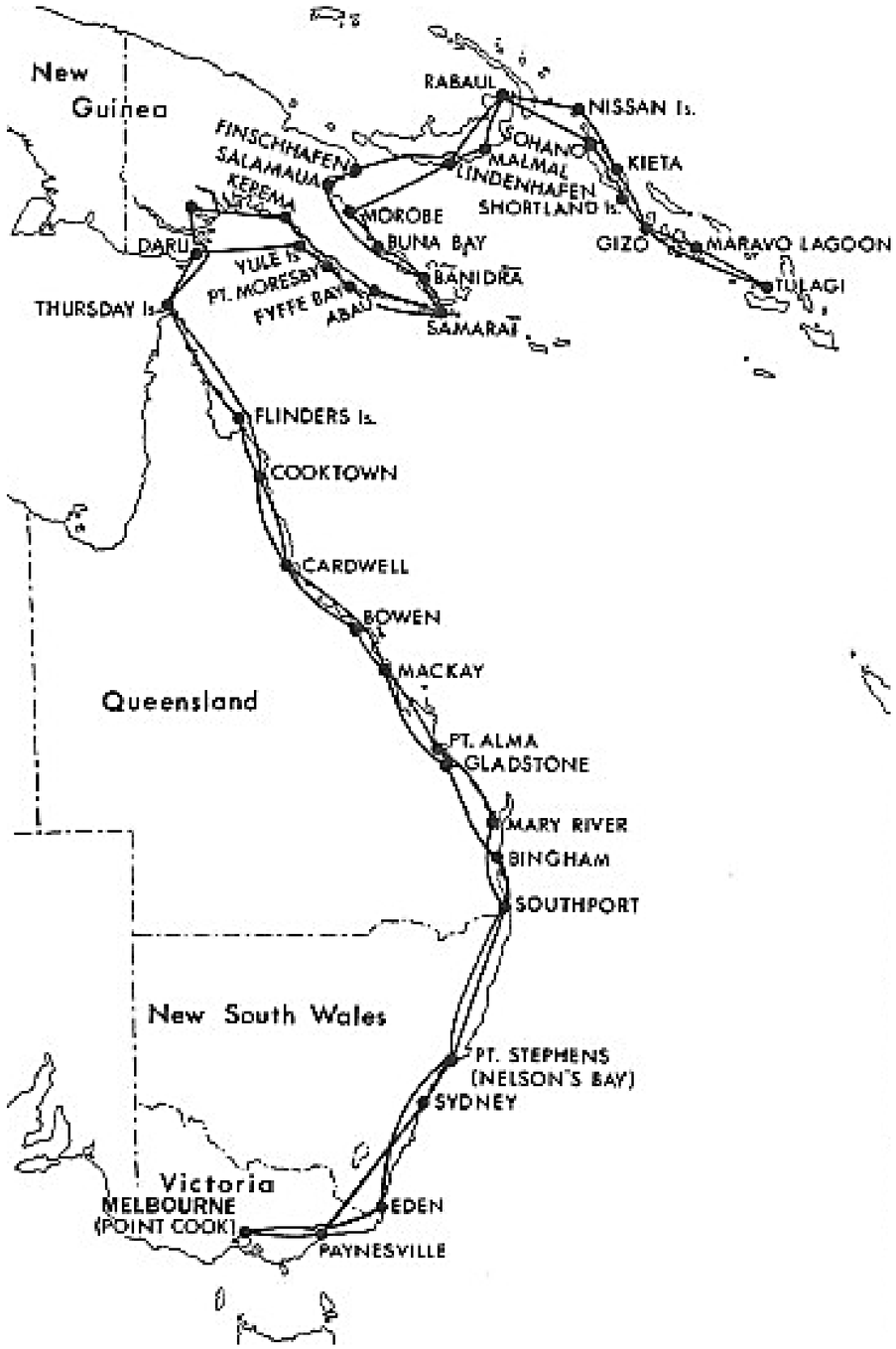
thoughts of these men who were obviously unacquainted with the ways of white men and could never have seen such a strange 'canoe' race along the surface of the water and then take to the air.

When we arrived at Daru I was questioned quite closely by the Resident Magistrate as to where we had landed and the attitude of the natives. When I asked him why he was so interested in the details he informed me that because of the attitude of the natives he had not sent an officer into the Gama River area for over two years. The last time he did so was to recruit village constables. Two men who were selected were sent off to a training course at Port Moresby but on returning to their villages were murdered by the local inhabitants. The natives obviously were not very kindly disposed towards the white man or his agents. Fortunately we knew nothing of this.

Thursday, 2 December: Total for day: 530 miles, 853 km. Daru-Thursday Island (fuel) 1008-1135, duration 1.27 Thursday Island-Flinders Island (fuel)1250-1645, duration 3.55, Flinders Island-Cooktown 1705-1850, duration 1.45. 'It was a good day' (Williams).

Friday, 3 December: Total for day: 710 miles, 1143 km. Cooktown-Cardwell 0710-0940, duration 2.30, Cardwell-Bowen 1000-1220, duration 2.20, Bowen-Mackay 1340-1505, duration 1.25, duration 1.45, and Mackay-Port Alma 1529-1830, duration 3.01: 9 hours 15 minutes flying time.

Saturday, 4 December: Total for day: 370 miles, 595 km. Port Alma-Gladstone 0906-0930, duration 24 minutes, Gladstone-Mary River 1027-1230, duration 2.03, Mary River-Southport 1331-1547, duration 2.16, total 595 kilometres (370 miles).



Route of the completed flight

Diary of the expedition: Point Cook to Thursday Island

Williams gave detailed reports on the suitability of each landing site, often including hand-drawn maps. There is a shortage of good photographs of the flight[2]. His records have been supplemented with notes from Isaacs' AIRCRAFT article and Richard Williams' 1977 autobiography, as described on page 4. Isaacs' summary usually introduces each day's entry, and I have often included Williams' later comments. It is sometimes very interesting to note what each writer included or omitted!

Friday, 24 September: planned date of departure, but a rough sea prevented the heavily laden seaplane from lifting off.

Saturday, 25 September: Total for day - 600 miles, 965 km. Point Cook to Paynesville (fuel stop), 0550-0850[3], duration 3.00[4]: At Paynesville they found that a small external leak had developed in the engine's water jacket. Paynesville to Sydney, 1019-1540, duration 5.21: Williams noted strong headwinds that reduced ground speed to 60 mph. The aircraft landed in Rose Bay amidst the normal Saturday afternoon's conglomeration of pleasure craft on Sydney Harbor.
It was decided to replace the engine with an engine from Wing Commander L J Wackett's RAAF Experimental Section at Randwick. The engine change took three days, and the aircraft was ready to resume the flight on the 29th.

Wednesday 29 September: Total for day: 455 miles, 716 km. Sydney to Nelson Bay, (fuel)1035-1140, duration 1.05. Departure time was set for 1000 hours, but McIntyre had to taxi

[2] Williams' report has some original photos with accurate captions that should be enhanced and published.
[3] Departure and arrival time in military time.
[4] Flight times in hours and minutes.

years. On that occasion two village constables were appointed – but, when they arrived in their respective villages, they were promptly disposed of by the local inhabitants!

From These are Facts: *On 1 December we experienced deteriorating weather- when attempting to cross the Gulf of Papua until before long we had no alternative but to turn back and alight on the first suitable water we could find, there to await the passing of a large storm ahead of us. We landed near the mouth of what I judged from our chart to be the Gama River which was wide enough to alight on or to take off from in any. direction, and we were able to tie up to a tree on the steep bank of the river.*

We had seen natives in the vicinity before we landed but they had all now disappeared. We had been warned to be careful if natives disappeared when we approached and particularly so if when they did subsequently appear they were not accompanied by women or children.

We were experiencing intermittent heavy showers and when one of these cleared we found a canoe containing several natives on the river and within shouting distance. We were able to persuade them to come ashore, no doubt prompted by curiosity to see the unusual looking white man's canoe which they could not have seen before the rain cleared. It was not long before other natives started to come out of the bush, but neither women nor children. We were unable to communicate with these men as they did not understand pidgin English, nor had they seen matches or tobacco. But they showed no signs of being other than friendly.

After about three hours here, the weather cleared, and we took off for Daru. It would have been interesting to know the

RAAF picture, Williams and McIntyre at Samarai

Monday, 29 November: Samarai-Abau (fuel)1155-1325, duration 130. Abau-Port Moresby 1357-1520, duration 1.23. *We were now experiencing rainstorms every day and although it was possible to get round many of them we got no further than Port Moresby by way of Abau on 29 November* (These are Facts)

Tuesday, 30 November: Total for day: 142 miles, 229 km. Port Moresby-Karema 0905-1145, duration 1.18.

Wednesday, 1 December: Total for day: 235 miles, 378 km. Karema-Gama River 0812-1020, duration 2.08. The weather was still bad on December 1 when the fliers took off for Daru. About 90 minutes out from Kerema the aircraft encountered a storm of such magnitude that McIntyre was forced to turn back, and he alighted on the Gama River. Gama River-Daru 1300-1410, duration 1.10. The Resident Magistrate was most interested in the behaviour of the natives at Gama River, because they had not seen a white man for two and a half

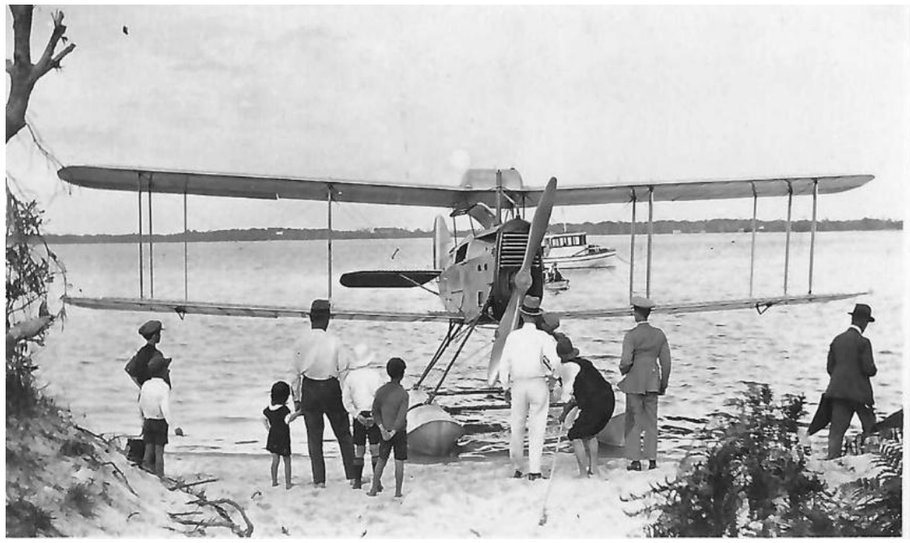
the seaplane around for 35 minutes to stir up the smooth water surface to enable the aircraft to lift off[5]. Nelson Bay to Southport, Queensland, 1235-1800, duration 5.25. Strong headwinds were encountered. Shortly before 1700 hours, when the fliers were within 10 kilometres (six miles) of Southport, the engine suddenly failed and McIntyre had to make an emergency landing in the open sea. A split-pin had been dislodged from the pilot's throttle control, and the fault was quickly remedied. High seas, with waves of 3-3.6m (10-12ft) were running and it was impossible to take off again, so McIntyre set about taxiing some eight kilometres (five miles) to Southport. The failing light, and the spray from the breakers, prevented the crew from locating the entrance to Southport, and McIntyre had to skilfully come to the beach through a high breaking surf: Williams commented on McIntyre's amazing skill: the aircraft had no wing floats and if a wave had broken over a wing, the result could have been disastrous. The firing of a Very light brought assistance from the local cinema which was screening a silent epic. A party of 50 men dragged the machine across the sand-dunes to a lagoon where McIntyre taxied to a secure position in front of the Grand Hotel. Over seven hours had elapsed since the forced landing, and the exhausted crew collapsed into their beds during the early hours of 30 September.

Thursday, 30 September: It was found that the propeller had been badly damaged and would have to be replaced. The only suitable propeller available was in the process of being built at the RAAF Experimental Section. Work on this propeller was hurriedly completed.

[5] This indicates the narrow margins on which the aircraft operated!

Meanwhile, the unfortunate incidents that had occurred to the seaplane since the fliers left Point Cook were being adversely reported in the newspapers. In fact, the Acting Minister for Defence was even called upon to cancel the flight.
Williams later argued that the criticism was unfounded: 'When the leak developed in the water jacket in Sydney it was said that this was to have been expected, as the Puma engine, which was being used, usually developed internal trouble in the water jacket. The one developed on the flight was external. When the machine failed to get off after the forced landing at Southport, it was assumed, in the press, that the reason was due to the limited performance of the machine. This was not so, for no seaplane could possibly have taken off from the sea running on that day.'

Preparing to leave Southport (RAAF photo)



Monday, 4 October: The propeller arrived at Southport, was quickly fitted and tested, and all made ready for departure.

Tuesday, 5 October: Total for day: 340 miles, 547 km. Southport to Bingham (fuel, near mouth of Mary River, Hervey

us. We were there for lunch and the boys produced a tray on to which a large tin of cold sausages and onions had been emptied. We helped ourselves to this but did not make much of an impression on it, so it was on the table again for the evening meal and again for breakfast next morning. We did not seem to be very hungry that morning!

Saturday, 27 November: Total for day: 292 miles, 470 km. Arawe-Finschhafen 0858-1010, duration 1.13, Finschhafen-Salamaua[9] 1110-1205, Salamaua-Buna Bay 1253-1445, duration 1.52. Continuous heavy rain then kept the aircraft grounded until 0900 hours.

From These are Facts*: It had rained heavily during the previous afternoon and throughout the night but cleared in the morning. We had beached the aircraft and pegged it down when we arrived and it was not standing level on the beach. When we launched it next morning we were surprised to find water coming in streams from inside the wings through the breathing holes at the bottom of the trailing edge. We could not work out just how that water got inside the wings nor how long it had been there; we knew of course it was only since we landed the day before. Careful examination, such as was possible, showed no indication of any damage having been done and we acted on that assumption. Refuelling at Finschhafen and Salamaua we made Buna Bay.*

Sunday, 28 November: Total for day: 320 miles, 515 km. Buna Bay-Baniara1145-1325, duration 1.30, Baniara-Samarai 1355-1510, duration 1.15

[9] Spelt *Salamoa* at the time of the flight.

L/R, Trist, McIntyre, Williams, unknown person, unknown location -possibly Palmalmal!

***Thursday*, 25 November: Total for day: 225 miles, 362 km.** Take-off at 1750, but forced to return to Rabaul because of 'impenetrable storms' after 30 minutes flying. Rabaul to Palmalmal (fuel)-1330-1530, duration 2.00: – 'a plantation in Jacquinot Bay, managed by an Australian who had little communication with the outside world, and who inquired as to the winner of the Melbourne Cup and the result of the last Test match.' Palmalmal-Lindenhafen 1600-1710, duration 1.10

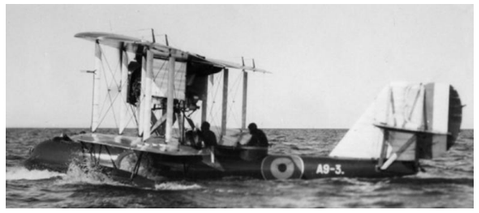
Friday, 26 November: **Total for day: 110 miles, 193 km.** Lindenhafen-Arawe, 1253-1400, duration 1.07. Bad weather delayed the take-off.

From These are Facts*: We were unable to get away from Lindenhafen on 26 November until after midday because of rain and got only as far as Arawe on the southwest corner of New Britain. Here we stayed at a coconut plantation, the manager of which was a bachelor and was away at the time, but who knew of our coming and had instructed his native boys to look after*

Bay) 0620-0920, duration 3.00. Bingham to Gladstone 1040-1320, duration 2.40.

Wednesday, 6 October: Total for day: 342 miles, 550 km. Gladstone to Mackay, (fuel), 0650-1010, duration 2.40. Mackay to Bowen, 1105 to 1240, duration 1.25. The DH50A was met and escorted into Bowen by one of the Seagull Ill amphibians of No 101 (Fleet Co-operation) Flight which was stationed in the area.

Thursday, 7 October: The aircraft remained at Bowen. Williams, as Chief of the Air Staff, inspected the flight, and flew out to the section of the Great Barrier Reef that was being photographed by the Seagull crews. Seagull A9-3 is shown.



'Filling up at Bowen' – RAAF picture

Friday, 8 October: Total for day: 398 miles, 640 km. Bowen to Cardwell (fuel), 0935 to 1150, duration 2.15; Cardwell to Cooktown, 1237-1450, duration 2.13.

These are Facts describes the visit to Cooktown. Here the whole town, a small handful of people, turned out to greet the airmen. The mayor asked them if they would like to attend a dance that evening. Williams was not keen, but politeness prevailed, and they attended. He was surprised that such a small town had a full brass band: the music, played in a tin shed, as deafening. The whole community, including babies, attended. Williams was obviously impressed!

Saturday, 9 October: Total for day: 400 miles, 644 km. Cooktown to Flinders Island 1120-12.35, duration 1.15 (fuel); Flinders Island to Thursday Island 1328—1700, duration 3.32. The airmen stayed with the Garrison Artillery unit which was maintained there at that time.

At this point the DH50A was about to become the first locally based aircraft to fly out of Australia. But *Aircraft* magazine later commented that 'after an exchange of telegrams with Defence Headquarters on the advisability of pushing ahead or returning to Melbourne, the flight was resumed to Papua on Monday 11 October'.

The then Minister for Defence was in England and his temporary replacement needed to be persuaded to allow the flight to continue in spite of adverse press reports.

Isaacs commented that 'the flight didn't begin to grow interesting until after leaving Thursday Island, for most of the places called at in the Pacific had never previously been visited by aircraft.'

'Yes', he said, 'me mission boy'; then pointing to the man at the engine I asked, 'Him mission boy too?' and was surprised to receive the answer 'No, him bloody heathen'.

The engine was shipped from Sydney on 12 November and arrived on Sunday, 21 November. By Tuesday 23 November it was installed and tested. The return journey could begin.

Wednesday, 24 November: Total for day: 772 miles, 1242 km. Beginning of return flight: Tulagi-Gizo 0620-0840, duration 2.20; Gizo to Kieta 9.40-1130, duration 1.50; Kieta-Sarakan 1205-1310, duration 1.05; Sarakan to Rabaul 1205-1750 duration 2.40.

From These are Facts*: It was now the last week in November, and we were starting to get occasional breezes from the north-west. Although it rained heavily on the night of 23 November and was still raining at daylight we were able to get off soon after 6 am with a south-west wind behind us and; refuelling at Gizo, Kieta and Soraken*[8]*, arrived at Rabaul just before dark. With 7½ hours in the air and 3 refuellings we had covered 770 miles, our best run so far.*

Williams took photos and made neat diagrams of each stop. Unfortunately, the available copies are of poor quality and so are not reproduced in this booklet.

[8] I think this might be a mistake for *Sorano Island*, a beautiful spot on northern Bougainville.

aeroplane before there was consternation in the native villages as we passed over, men, women, children, pigs and dogs running in all directions. It was not long before the aircraft was being referred to by the natives as 'motor car belong Jesus Christ'.

Williams was 'not very favourably impressed' by the way that some European (principally Australian) storekeepers treated the natives. Most stores were in two sections, one for Europeans and the other for natives, and the natives were charged more than the Europeans. For example, a hair comb which was sixpence in the European section cost one shilling – twice the price – to the natives. He asked the reason for this and was told that the natives did not understand anything but shillings, which he found hard to believe. He was particularly shocked at Tulagi when he saw a native who had just purchased a camera, which would cost several month's wages. The purchaser had no idea what to do with it to make it work. Williams remonstrated with the shopkeeper, whose attitude was that he had no responsibility his customer. Williams was ashamed to be an Australian because of these attitudes.

Christian missions were important. Williams was guarded in his comments: *We called at several missions during this flight and sometimes I wondered just what the natives were being taught; at others I noted that they were being taught a great deal more of the Bible than I had been.*

He recounted a journey across the bay in Tulagi in the Resident Commissioner's launch. *The crew consisted of two natives. Natives who had had some training at a mission station were referred to as 'mission boys' and whilst sitting in the stern of the boat I said to the man on the rudder, 'You mission boy?'*

(An oversimplified) Colonial History.

European colonisation of this part of the world gathered momentum after about 1880. Germany had become a united country in about 1866 and confirmed this with victory over the French in the Franco-Prussian War 1870. Seeking to join the imperial powers, Germany colonised parts of Africa and areas of the Pacific not already taken by other European countries, notably Britain. The Germans named the Bismarck Sea and, under the name German New Guinea, colonised the surrounding islands and the northern half of eastern New Guinea. The British pre-emptively took over the southern half, (Papua) and declared a protectorate over the (British) Solomon Islands – BSIP.

Australia replaced Britain as the colonial power in Papua after Federation in 1901. Port Moresby was the main administrative centre. For the German colonies Rabaul was the main administrative centre, and Tulagi on Guadalcanal Island was the main centre for the BSIP. At the outset of World War I, Australia seized German New Guinea, and after the war Australia was given a League of Nations mandate over German New Guinea. In essence, Australia controlled the combined Papua New Guinea until independence in 1975.

Colonisation had four main manifestations. Administrative outposts were established, known by the British as Government Stations. Missionary activities were also very common: often these actually preceded formal colonisation. Plantations were set up by private enterprise, typically by large commercial organisations. Copra (dried coconut) was a major crop, particularly in German New Guinea, but the production of coffee, cocoa, palm oil and rubber was rapidly developing in 1926. Finally, if preliminary geological studies indicated the presence of

oil or of valuable minerals, the mining companies were quick to investigate possibilities. The discovery of huge gold deposits in the Edie Creek area is mentioned on page 10.

Early colonisation was mainly along the coastal areas: the mountainous interior made travel very difficult. Shipping companies such as the Australian Burns Philp group ran regular steamship timetables, often providing a monthly or six-weekly service. Smaller vessels belonging to Government, religious missions, plantations etc were also important.

Wireless communication was developing, but not widespread. Williams' report mentioned that both Cooktown and Thursday Island had telegraph connections with the rest of Australia and also had wireless stations which could contact New Guinea. On the flight route, Port Moresby, Samarai, Salamaua, Rabaul, Kieta (Bougainville) and Tulagi (Guadalcanal) were the only places with wireless stations. It is interesting to note how the main Australian news of the flight emanated from the places with radio telegraphy, and thus newspaper coverage was intermittent.

By 1926 there were a few motor vehicles and petrol-driven boats in many settlements, and as the Puma engine ran on normal petrol, there was no need to establish special fuel dumps as was necessary for the round-Australia flight of the RAAF Fairey IIID aircraft in 1924. The records of the flight seldom mention any problems with obtaining fuel.

The island stages.

This involved flying through Papua New Guinea and New Britain to Tulagi, main settlement of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate, and return by a slightly different route.

before take-off —and the fliers reached Maravo Lagoon and stayed overnight at Betuna.

Friday, 5 November: Total for day: 150 miles, 241 km. Maravo Lagoon-Tulagi, 11.25-1320, duration 1.55, 241 kilometres (150 miles). This was the end of the outward journey. The seaplane was beached immediately at the Burns Philps island, Makambo. A new engine was requested from Sydney. The only Puma engine available was the engine that had developed the leaking water jacket on the flight from Point Cook to Sydney and had since been repaired at the Experimental Section.

From These are Facts*: While at Tulagi I stayed with the Resident Commissioner, British Solomon Islands Protectorate, Captain R R Kane.*

The question now arose as to what we were to do about our engine and finding that the Mataram *which traded to the Solomons was due out of Sydney in a day or two we asked that another engine be sent to us, and when this arrived it was installed.*

Whilst waiting for the engine at Tulagi I went down with malaria. The Resident Commissioner said he would bring his medical officer along to see me and when he did I found that he was Chinese. The only Chinese I had ever met up to that time had been market gardeners or laundry men, and I am afraid this did not fill me with a great deal of confidence.

However, I found that the doctor had been trained at Edinburgh University and he proceeded to fill me with quinine until I felt I must burst. He obviously knew what he was doing for in a few days I was up and about and have not had a trace of the fever since.

Because the people along our route had not seen an

explains: *water collected on the piston head when cold but by soaking up this water with strips of cloth inserted through the plug hole the engine could be started up and we had no trouble whilst it was warm and operating.*

Saturday, 30 October: Total for day: 170 miles, 274 km. Nissan Island-Kieta, 137-1622, duration 2.45.

Sunday, 31 October: Total for day: 74 miles, 119 km. Kieta-Shortland Island. An attempt was made the following morning to fly to Gizo, but a landing had to be made at Shortland Island because of heavy rain and bad weather along the rest of the route. The weather, in fact, deteriorated so much that the aircraft was grounded for the following two days during which time it was found that the engine sump had cracked. Monday, 1 November and Tuesday, 2 November were occupied with repairs.

Wednesday, 3 November: Total for day: 96 miles, 154 km. Shortland Island-Gizo, 0850-1020, duration 1.30.

Thursday, 4 November: Total for day: 112 miles, 180 km. Gizo-Maravo[7] Lagoon 0930-11.25, duration 1.15. A second take off for Maravo Lagoon had to be abandoned when the engine missed and vibrated badly under full power. The seaplane was beached, and it was found that No 6 cylinder had also developed a leak in the water jacket. Again, temporary adjustments were made—Nos 2 and 6 cylinders were freed of water through the plug holes, the engine was warmed up, and clean plugs were then inserted in the faulty cylinders just

[7] Google Earth lists only *Morovo Lagoon* and does not list Betuna

Monday, 11 October: Total for day: 130 miles, 209 km. Thursday Island-Daru Island, 0817-1000, duration 3.32, 209 kilometres (130 miles) across the Torres Strait.

From *These are Facts*: The water round these islands seems never to be clear of driftwood or other rubbish and we damaged our airscrew in trying to take off from Daru. Fortunately, it was repairable, but we had to stay there the night.

Tuesday, 12 October: Total for day: 377 miles 607 km. Daru-Kairuka (Yule River), 1134-1500, duration 1.43, Kairuka-Port Moresby 1720-1810 duration 50 minutes.

Willians: *At Yule Island we met a number of young Australian nuns. It was dark by the time we got ashore at Port Moresby but we were met on the wharf by the Administrator, Staniforth Smith, who was acting for the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Hubert Murray, who was on leave.*

Williams stayed at Government House that night. He was attacked by swarms of mosquitoes. Staniforth Smith ordered a native servant to bring a metal pan on which were some coals giving off quantities of smoke. Williams tried sitting in the smoke but found it difficult to decide which was the least uncomfortable, the mosquitoes or the smoke. *I was glad to make an early move to bed where I was inside a mosquito net.*

Sir Hubert Murray had apparently had one room (in which he appeared to live) made mosquito-proof but had made no attempt to protect the rest of the house. There was no woman living there at this time.

Wednesday, 13 October: Total for day: 275 miles, 443 km. Port Moresby-London Mission Station at Fyffe Bay (fuel) 0959-1312,

duration 3.13; Fyffe Bay-Samarai Island (Milne Bay)1515-1610 duration 55 minutes.

Williams described a brief stopover at the mission station. *Our next destination was Samarai, but en route we landed at the London Mission Station in Fyfe Bay and accepted an invitation to lunch there.*

He noticed that one of the servant girls had very short hair. On enquiring, he was told that this girl had misbehaved herself in some way and the clipping of her hair was a punishment. Williams did not entirely approve of some interactions with the natives!

On arrival at Samarai Williams stayed with the Anglican Bishop of Melanesia, Dr Henry Newton. *Everybody on the island of Samarai seemed to be assembled on the beach when we went ashore that afternoon. Apart from some of the natives in the Fly River area where Frank Hurley had a few years previously operated an aircraft (which he mentions in his book* Pearls and Savages*), Papuan natives had not previously seen an aeroplane nor indeed had many of the white residents. On the evening of our arrival at Samarai, the bishop and I were invited to the home of the medical officer for a drink. The bishop was a bachelor, but the medical officer had a wife and a little girl of about 3 years old. That afternoon the child had been taken by her nurse to see the aeroplane, and she arrived back home anxious to tell her mother all about it. She had obviously seen me removing my overalls and having said something about the man in the aeroplane she said, 'And Mummy, he wears rompers'.*

We were travelling in uniform and when in the air wore a pair of overalls. It was my custom when we had run the aircraft up on

tail and damaged the rudder and elevators and that delayed us another two days.

Unfortunately, this RAAF picture is unlabelled. Because of the repaired rudder, it must have been at Rabaul or later.

Friday, 29 October: Total for day: 170 miles, 274 km. At daylight the aircraft was flight tested with the two-bladed propeller that had been used since leaving Southport. Then it was fitted with a four-bladed propeller originally designed for the Wackett Widgeon I amphibian. The Widgeon's propeller had been positioned at Rabaul so that it could be tested in the warmer latitudes. This propeller, however, caused considerable vibration and it was found to be out of balance, and the normal propeller was refitted. The next leg was Rabaul-Nissan Island, 1050-1300, duration 2.10. After flying across New Ireland and clearing the east coast, the aircraft ran into heavy rainstorms. At Nissan Island they found serious engine problems: an internal leak had developed in the water jacket of No 2 cylinder. The crew found an ingenious temporary fix, as Willliams

From These are Facts*: ... we made Rabaul. This was the headquarters of the administration of the Mandated Territory (previously German New Guinea) which was then quite separate from the Papuan administration. The Administrator was Brigadier General E A Wisdom with whom I stayed.*

Tuesday 19 October to Friday 29 October: at Rabaul. This work was completed on October 26, when a test flight was carried out.
Unfortunately, the Customs launch drifted into the tail of the machine and severely damaged the rudder.
Wednesday, 27 October and Thursday, 28 October were occupied with repairs.

From These are Facts*: There are two definite 'seasons' so far as weather conditions in the islands are concerned, the southeast or dry' (comparatively) when the wind blows regularly from that direction and the north-west or 'wet' when the prevailing winds are from that direction.*

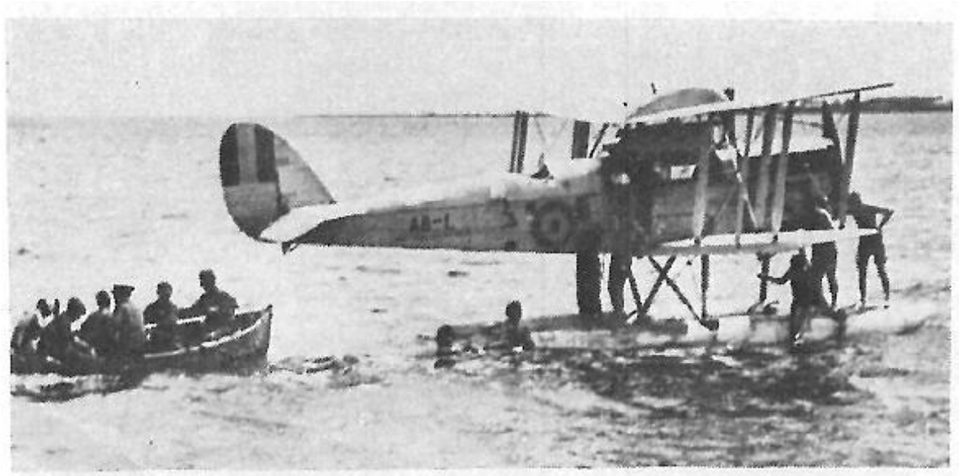
We were hoping to complete this flight before the north-west season set in and the Minister was now asking my views as to whether the flight should go beyond Rabaul. I recommended continuance to Tulagi, the headquarters of the Solomon Islands administration. This correspondence plus the collection of information I was seeking resulted in some days' delay at Rabaul, and the opportunity was taken to give the engine a top overhaul[6]*.*

When the aircraft was being tested after this work a Customs launch in passing a line to the aircraft while drifting, ran into the

[6] This involves removing the cylinder head and cleaning the valves, typically coated with carbon deposits aggravated by the variable quality of petrol used at the time

to the beach to step out on to the float and there remove the overalls before stepping ashore.

Thursday, 14 October: Torrential rain held up the fliers for 24 hours at Samarai where they were guests of the Bishop of New Guinea.



Typical of the many PNG departure scenes, this picture shows the crew being taken out to A8-I and natives swimming around the floats note the repaired rudder with the red, white and blue stripes partly obliterated. (Isaacs' original caption, RAAF Point Cook photo)

Friday, 15 October: Total for day: 362 miles, 582 km. Samarai-Baniara 0933-1050, duration 1.17, Baniara-Morobe 1224-1520. Duration 2.56. While crossing Milne Bay the aircraft ran into a heavy tropical storm which caused the engine to lose power. McIntyre turned back to evade the downpour and, when the engine subsequently picked up, he flew around the storm area. Morobe was the first landing made in the Mandated Territory, (formerly German New Guinea). The Administrator at Rabaul had sent a welcoming telegram

From These are Facts: *We met our first really bad weather at Samarai and were held up for a day. Next morning we set off over the China Strait, our destination Morobe via Baniara. It was fine at Samarai, but we had not gone far before we were faced by cloud extending south-east for some distance and north-west into Milne Bay, in other words across our track. If we attempted to get round it to the north we would be heading over the land, which we wished to avoid.*

In the tropics aircraft performance was impaired by the less dense heated air, particularly if the water was calm and there was little wind, It was often necessary to take off with partially filled petrol tanks to save weight, and Williams bemoaned the difficulty of having to fly the most direct route and his inability to get to higher altitudes. Williams describes a tropical storm on this leg:

The cloud in front of us this morning was too high to get over, and it extended down to the sea. There was no object in our going lower. We had no knowledge of how far it extended horizontally and with the hope that it was not far we entered it.

Almost immediately we ran into a most terrific rainstorm. We were literally hit by a barrage of water and at once there came from the engine a clatter and vibration far exceeding anything I had experienced previously (or since), making me feel that the engine must fly apart, and we were losing height. Knowing that clear air was only a few seconds behind us I immediately instructed McIntyre to make a 180-degree turn. When we came out into the clear air, to my amazement and relief the engine settled down to its normal purr. I had thought that the engine could not have escaped damage. The fuselage on each side of our engine was of plywood. The engine air intake was a pipe

about three inches in diameter, and it came through the plywood but was cut off flush with it. When we ran into the storm, water running down the plywood side was sucked into the engine air intake with alarming results. We now had no alternative but to try to get round this storm by flying into Milne Bay. Before reaching the head of the bay we passed the storm and were able to fly on to the north-east coast of Papua and after refuelling at Baniara arrived at Morobe, in New Guinea.

Saturday, 16 October: *From* These are Facts*: We had hoped to get as far as Finschhafen that evening, but Morobe is so situated that in most winds it was necessary to take off from water open to the swell coming straight in from the ocean and because of the conditions we were unable to take off that day. The next day was hot and muggy and there being no breeze the surface of the sea was like glass and this with a ground swell from the ocean made it impossible for us to take off.*

Sunday, 17 October: Total for day: 278 miles, 447 km. Morobe-Lindenhafen, 1150-1500. Duration 3.10. Conditions were much better and the seaplane was flown across the Huon Gulf, via Fami Islands, direct to Lindenhafen on New Britain.

***Monday*, 18 October: Total for day: 225 miles, 362 km.** Lindenhafen-Rabaul: 1337-1622, duration 2.45, 362 kilometres (225 miles).

Further telegrams were then exchanged with the Defence Department, culminating in authority being received to proceed beyond Rabaul – 'Continuation of flight to Tulagi approved. Acting Minister desires impress no undue risks should be taken and feels flight should not proceed beyond Solomon Islands.'