

8. Air Transport in Victoria.

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It is such a very short time since man first mastered the art of flying in a heavier than air machine that any historical account of air transport would be incomplete without reference to the early pioneers of flight.

As is well known, the first flight in an aeroplane was made by Orville Wright at Kitty Hawk, United States of America in December, 1903. Some seven years later, Harry Houdini, the American magician, who had made some flights abroad, visited Melbourne, bringing with him a used Voisin biplane. Houdini established himself at Diggers Rest and made several attempts at flight which were unsuccessful on account of weather conditions. On 18th March, 1910, however, he accomplished three successful flights, the longest of which covered over two miles, reached a height of 100 ft. and lasted 3½ minutes. These were the first flights by an aeroplane in Victoria. Further successful flights were made on 20th March and 21st March, the latter covering six miles in 7 minutes 37 seconds.

Meanwhile, J. R. Duigan, who had built a successful glider as early as March, 1909, and made several useful practice flights—though not rising above 4 ft.—completed the construction of a biplane fitted with a 25 horsepower 4 cylinder engine—the engine being constructed by Mr. J. E. Tilley of Melbourne. This machine was some 35 ft. long; the main planes measured 25 ft. across and were fitted at the ends with two smaller surfaces capable of being depressed or elevated by the foot of the pilot. Balance was secured by means of a diamond shaped plane at the rear. The plane was entirely designed and constructed by Duigan, although he had never previously seen an aeroplane. On the 7th October, 1910, a successful flight of 196 yards at a speed of 25 miles an hour was made, a height of 12 ft. being reached. This flight was made on the constructor's property at Spring Plains and was the first flight by an Australian in an Australian machine.

Shortly afterwards, Gaston Cuguet who had been sent to Australia by Bleriot, attempted a flight at a cycle meeting at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on 3rd December, 1910, the machine used was a Bleriot monoplane fitted with a 25 horsepower engine. The plane reached a height of 40 ft. but an eddy of air from between the buildings resulted in a crash on a picket fence. Cuguet made several successful flights at Altona during the following January.

Early in 1911 Mr. J. J. Hammond, a New Zealander, who had been studying aviation in England and Europe and had gained his aviator's certificate in ten days, arrived in Victoria bringing with him two Bristol biplanes (50 h.p. Gnome engines) with the intention of giving exhibition flights throughout Australia. At Altona on 19th February, he made a flight of some 22 miles over Altona, Newport, Footscray and Sunshine, reaching a height of 3,000 ft. and remaining in the air for 31 minutes. The wind velocity at the time was some 5 to 10 miles per hour, but so confident

was Hammond in the efficiency of his plane that he claimed that it could fly in a wind of 30 miles an hour. Hammond made a number of other successful flights, including flights over the city of Melbourne and a flight to Geelong made in 55 minutes at a height of 5,000 ft in order to avoid the wind. On some flights he carried passengers, including ladies.

On 17th February, 1912, Mr. L. G. Marshall, who had been working for two years on the construction of a biplane, made his first flight at Ivanhoe. The flight covered 500 yards and reached an altitude of 30 ft. After making extensive alterations to the machine he made three further successful flights at Ivanhoe on 14th April. In October, an American aviator—Mr. A. B. Stone—who had brought a Bleriot monoplane (50 h.p. Gnome) with him with the intention of giving exhibition flights in Victoria made a successful test flight at Royal Park. A speed of 75 miles per hour was reached during that flight.

The year 1913 saw the completion of another machine by the brothers, J. R. and R. C. Duigan. The production of this machine followed a visit to England and Europe and the machine was on the pattern introduced by A. V. Roe. The machine had a span of 31 ft., a mainplane chord of 4 ft. 6 in., a length of 25 ft. and weighed 550 lb., and was constructed of materials brought from England. It was fitted with a 40 horsepower water-cooled E.N.V. engine of British make. This machine was flown at Keilor on 18th February and reached a speed of 55 miles per hour, but crashed on landing.

August of this year saw the establishment of an aviation school in Victoria. It was established at Altona by Australasian Aviation Pty. Ltd., who secured the services of a French aviator Monsieur Paull. The objects of the company were to give exhibition flights and undertake training of pilots, and their equipment consisted of two Bleriot monoplanes. On the 15th August, Paull made several successful flights.

Early in 1914, Harry Hawker arrived in Melbourne with an 80 horsepower Sopwith machine (Gnome engine) having a span of 26 ft. During February, he made a number of exhibition and passenger flights carrying on one occasion Senator E. D. Millen, then Minister for Defence. Hawker found passenger bookings plentiful at £20 per flight.

In May of this year, Maurice Guillaux, a French airman, who was the first man to loop the loop in Australia visited Melbourne bringing with him a Bleriot monoplane (50 h.p. Gnome engine). On the 28th May, he flew from the Showgrounds over the city at a height of 3,000 ft. and landed at Government House where he was greeted by the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, and the State Governor, Sir Arthur Stanley. On taking off again, he gave two exhibitions of looping the loop, this being the first time this manoeuvre had been seen in Melbourne. During his stay in Melbourne, he gave several

further exhibitions including one of upside-down flying and later visited a number of Victorian country centres.

On the 16th July, Guillaux left Melbourne for Sydney carrying the first airmail, which consisted of 1,785 postcards which had been specially prepared and sold at 2/- each. The total weight of the mail was a trifle over 40 lb. He reached Harden 352 miles from Melbourne on the first day and landed at Moore Park, Sydney, at 2.50 p.m. on the 18th., having been delayed by bad weather and air sickness. The flying time for the trip was 9½ hours.

August, 1914, of course, saw the outbreak of the Great War, and the turning of attention almost entirely to war activities. The only events in the war period calling for record in a history of air transport are the completion early in 1915 of the first aeroplane built by the Military Aviation School at Point Cook. Incidentally this school commenced its first course of instruction to military aviators on 10th February of that year. There were of course a number of flights by civil aviators during the war years, but that of Basil Watson, of Brighton, from Melbourne to Bendigo in a machine of his own construction, is the only one of particular historical interest.

December, 1918, a few weeks after the signing of the Armistice, saw the formation of the first Australian air transport company, which was registered in Melbourne under the name of Australian Aerial Transport Limited. Although a considerable sum of money was subscribed, nothing valuable came of this project.

The year 1919 saw the return of the majority of the Flying Corps personnel from service abroad, and the sale of large quantities of surplus military aircraft equipment, both in Australia and in England. These two factors led to the formation of numerous small aviation firms who engaged mostly in short passenger flights, or, as they are more commonly known, "joy rides." Large numbers of the public were given their first experience of flying, but most of the ventures soon ended in a crash, either of the aircraft or financially. A flight of particular interest to Victorians, however, was made on the 17th December of that year, when Arthur Long flew from Tasmania to Victoria, landing at Torquay.

Much the same conditions applied during 1920, though there was then a marked agitation for governmental control. This agitation resulted in the passing by the Commonwealth Parliament of an *Air Navigation Act* on 11th November, 1920—exactly two years after the signing of the Armistice. Shortly afterwards, Colonel H. C. Brinsmead, O.B.E., M.C., was appointed Commonwealth Controller of Civil Aviation, with headquarters in Melbourne, and Regulations were then gazetted under the *Air Navigation Act*.

December, 1920, saw the first serious use of air transport in Victoria, in the delivery of "Herald" newspapers to Victorian holiday resorts by the Shaw Ross Aviation Co.

The new Controller of Civil Aviation lost no time in giving effect to the Commonwealth Government's decision to encourage the establishment of regular air transport services, and in May, 1921, tenders were called for the first of such services, the selected route being one from Geraldton to Derby on the north-west coast of Western Australia. A few months later, tenders were similarly called for a service to link Sydney and Adelaide, and traversing Victorian territory from the South Australian border to Mildura, which was to be a regular stopping place.

This contract was secured by the Larkin Aircraft Supply Co. Ltd., of Melbourne, but for various reasons the service did not commence until 2nd June, 1924. After operating over this route for twelve months the Cootamundra-Sydney section was discontinued and the company was granted a new contract for a weekly service between Adelaide and Cootamundra, via Mildura and Hay, with connecting services operating twice weekly between Mildura and Broken Hill and between Hay and Melbourne. These three services continued until the expiry of the company's contract in June, 1930. For a brief period in the early part of 1930, this company operated unsubsidised services along the Murray Valley and between Adelaide and Melbourne, but the general financial depression intervened and caused the cessation of these activities.

At the beginning of 1930, Australian National Airways Ltd., with Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and Mr. C. T. P. Ulm as co-directors, had inaugurated the first unsubsidised air transport undertaking of major importance to be established in Australia. After operating daily in each direction between Brisbane and Sydney for five months, the company extended the service to Melbourne on 1st June, 1930, and, later (January, 1931), across Bass Strait to Tasmania. These services were maintained with a fleet of Avro X 3-engined aircraft of the "Southern Cross" type. Passenger bookings were very satisfactory until the early part of 1931 when the company met with a serious reverse in the tragic disappearance of the "Southern Cloud" whilst flying in stormy weather from Sydney to Melbourne. Shortly after this the company's earnings were so seriously lowered as the result of the prevailing economic conditions that it was found impossible to continue operations. The company's services were discontinued at the end of June, 1931—an unfortunate ending to an enterprise which had deserved a better fate.

After the withdrawal of the Sydney-Melbourne and Melbourne-Tasmania services, Victoria was not included in any regular air transport undertaking until February, 1933, when the Matthews Aviation Pty. Ltd., established a weekly service between Melbourne and Launceston using amphibian flying-boats. Two months later the Hart Aircraft Co., Ltd., also commenced operations over this route to a twice-weekly schedule. September, 1933, saw the entry of a Tasmanian Shipping Co.—Holyman & Sons Pty., Ltd.—into the air transport sphere. Forming a separate organization under the title of Tasmanian Aerial Services, Ltd., the company purchased a modern twin-engined aircraft (De Havilland "Dragon") and commenced a thrice weekly service between Melbourne and Launceston on 2nd September, 1933. The schedules of these three services were so arranged as to provide a daily air connection between Tasmania and the mainland. The Matthews and Hart services were discontinued in February, 1934, but Tasmanian Aerial Services have continued their operations with the "Dragon." In October, 1934, this company will commence operations under the contract which has been granted to it by the Commonwealth Government for the maintenance of a daily service between Melbourne and Hobart, using modern high-speed 4-engined aircraft of the type which will be employed also on the forthcoming Singapore-Darwin-Brisbane service.

Victoria, mainly on account of its relatively small size and its well-developed railway system, has not lent itself to the development of air transport to the extent that has occurred in other parts of the Commonwealth.