

Australia's First Aerial Mail

A PHILATELIC RARITY

By P. COLLAS

This year is important in aviation. Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith has flown from Melbourne to Sydney in 2 hours and 11 minutes; the Centenary Air Race looms nearer; England has just established a network of internal airmail services, and in a month or so Australia and Great Britain will be linked by a permanent air-line, fed by numerous subsidiary services covering all parts of Australia. Only 20 years have elapsed since the first aerial mail was carried in Australia, yet, even in those days of July, 1914, "The Argus" foretold a time when the aeroplane would scarcely attract an upward glance, and published illustrations of pedestrians in the city streets having their last look at the Bleriot biplane which, making a farewell flight over the city and suburbs, was to carry, two days later, Australia's first aerial mail from Melbourne to Sydney.

M. Guillaux, a French aviator, was the man to whom credit is due for this historic flight. With his Bleriot machine, he arrived in Sydney on March 21, 1914, and gave a number of aerial displays in New South Wales. He looped the loop at Victoria Park, Sydney, on April 20—the first time this feat had been performed in Australia. He reached Melbourne on May 25, and three days later gave an exhibition of flying above the city. On Saturday, May 30, he gave a public display at the Royal Agricultural Showgrounds, Flemington, above an admiring crowd. The newspapers of the day announced that tickets for admittance to the showgrounds were on sale at the Government Tourist Bureau, and that an increased service of cable trams would connect with electric trams at Flemington Bridge; further, that motor-buses and cabs would also run continuously from Bourke street. In a special advertisement the Victorian Railways drew attention to the "Aeroplane Display" at the Royal Agricultural Showground, and announced that special trains would be run from Spencer street every few minutes. Return fares, including admittance to the ground, were 2/9 first class and 2/6 second class.

On July 3 M. Guillaux flew to Geelong, a distance of 45 miles, in 63 minutes. He carried greetings from the Lord Mayor of Melbourne to the mayor of Geelong, and he gave an exhibition of looping the loop and "other sensations" above the Geelong race-course in the presence of 4,000 spectators the following day. The newspapers enthusiastically reported that he "gave a fine exhibition of aileron and tail slipping, and performed the 'S' dive within a space of 1,200 feet. He looped the loop eight times

performed the 'S' dive within a space of 1,200 feet. He looped the loop eight times altogether from an altitude of between 5,000 and 6,000 feet, where he experienced wind blowing at 40 miles an hour. His exhibitions of flying upside down and banking feats demonstrated the remarkable mastery and control he has of the machine." M. Guillaux took up six passengers, including one woman, for flights on the following day, and later returned to Melbourne to prepare for the first airmail, which he proposed to carry to Sydney. It had been intended that he should leave on July 9, but the date of departure was postponed to July 16.

Originally, the carriage of souvenir postcards was being arranged by Arthur Rickard and Co. Ltd., but on July 7 this firm announced that negotiations with the aviator's representatives had fallen through, and that purchasers of souvenir postcards who posted them here (in Sydney) could have the money refunded. Owing to short notice, inhabitants of the districts over which Guillaux was to fly were not advised of the change of plan, and thousands were disappointed by his non-arrival, many having travelled long distances to view the plane. At Seymour, among other centres, much indignation was expressed. However, the flight was commenced on July 16. Preliminary announcements stated that the aviator would start from Royal Park near the Burke and Wills monument, but this was changed to the Agricultural Showgrounds.

A few minutes after 9 a.m. on the great day, Guillaux rose into the air, carrying 40lb. of official mail and letters from the Governor of Victoria to the Governor of New South Wales, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne to the Lord Mayor of Sydney, and the French Consul in Melbourne to the Consul-General in Sydney. The post-office mail comprised 1,785 postcards, "for each of which some enthusiast had paid 2/." However, other reports were that the cards were only 1/ each. Postage was 1d. on each card and 2d. on each letter, and "Many of the cards were addressed via Sydney to the remitters themselves to be returned by the ordinary mail, and philatelists, recognising the increased value they would possess in after years by being extra stamped, did not hesitate to invest an extra few pence on the postage. Many of them bore shilling stamps, many more were stamped at sixpence, while the threepenny stamp was a common authority for the carriage of the postcard."

These philatelists of 20 years ago were certainly right in their surmise that the cards would rise in value, although the extra stamps used had nothing to do with the increase. The cards are now valued at £12 each, so that they represent some hundreds per cent. profit on the original outlay. At various times forgers have produced clever imitations which are foisted on the inexperienced collector at a very reduced figure. All cards flown by Guillaux were cancelled in Melbourne with a special oval postmark in violet in-

with a special oval postmark in violet inscribed "Australian Aerial Mail — Melbourne—16-Jul-1914-Vic."

Gullaix left Melbourne at 9.12 a.m. on July 16, 1914, and passed over Wandong (34 miles) at 9.25 a.m. He reached Wangaratta (145½ miles), where he landed, at 11.40 a.m., departing at 12.30 p.m. for Albury (190½ miles). He landed there at 12.50 p.m., and left 45 minutes later for Wagga (269 miles), passing over Culcairn at 2.15 p.m. He arrived at Wagga at 2.50 p.m., and after a halt of 40 minutes departed for Harden (352 miles), arriving there at 4.6 p.m. Here he stayed the night.

Leaving early in the morning, he was obliged to return owing to adverse weather conditions, but the next day made a fresh start, and arrived at Sydney on Saturday, July 18, 1914, at 2.50 p.m. in the midst of a rainstorm, which, however, did not prevent a successful landing at Moore Park. His actual flying time for the 582 miles between the two capitals was 9½ hours, and seven stops were made. At each of the stopping places members of Gullaix's staff were stationed with petrol supplies, but subsequently the aviator mentioned that half of the stops were unnecessary, and that the flying time could be improved.

M. Gullaix returned to France shortly afterwards, and joined the French Air Force. He was killed in a crash at Ville Combley on May 22, 1917, just three years and one day after he had first arrived in Australia.