

PREPARING PLANES

Wapiti Returns to Laverton

NEW EQUIPMENT

MELBOURNE, Friday.

To be refitted to take part in the search for the missing Antarctic explorer, Mr. Lincoln Ellsworth and his companion, Mr. Hallock Kenyon, an R.A.A.F. Wapiti plane flew back from Cootamundra to Laverton today.

The plane was chosen because of its good performance in the recent bombing exercises at Cootamundra.

With an Air Force Moth the Wapiti will form an important part of the equipment of the Discovery II search expedition commissioned by the Federal Government.

Following a conference yesterday between the Director of Navigation (Captain Davis), the Secretary for Defence (Mr. Shepherd) and officers of the Royal Australian Air Force, the Chief of the Air Staff (Air Vice-Marshal Williams) today confirmed the appointment of Flight-Lieutenant Douglas and Flying-Officer Murdoch to be pilots attached to the expedition.

Probable Staff

"The number of men who will be attached to the two machines," the Air Chief said today, "will depend on the accommodation available in the ship. There will be at least one wireless operator and two riggers and, if there is room, also two fitters, one of whom will probably be also a pilot. These men have not yet been selected, but there will be very many more volunteers than positions open. They will be chosen by two officers already appointed. The work of refitting the machines will begin at once.

Special Accessories

"Such matters as extra tankage, engine-wearing devices, wireless and special equipment to meet Antarctic conditions will be decided by experts at once, and the technical branch of the force at Laverton will build ice skis that will have to be fitted to the machines."

The Director of Navigation, who is organising the expedition, said today that he had sent a wireless message to the captain of the Discovery II advising him of the Commonwealth Government's decision, and asking for details of extra stores and equipment that would be needed. He had not yet received a reply, but all arrangements would be in readiness when the vessel arrived to accelerate the work of fitting and loading of stores and equipment.

When the Discovery II arrives on Monday she will go to Williamstown, and it is probable that the ship will be dry-docked at once in order that her bottom can be examined and any defects made good.

Afterwards the vessel will lie at a berth to receive her oil fuel supplies from the navy tanks.

Plans are being made on the assumption that she will be ready to sail about Christmas Day.

It is probable that a relief expedition committee will be formed to take charge of the expedition and keep in touch with the captain while the ship is in the south.

7.12.35 WA PAPER

ANTARCTIC FLYERS.

DISCOVERY II FOR SEARCH.

Australian Planes on Board.

CANBERRA, Dec. 5.—Negotiations were advanced by the Commonwealth Government today for sending the British whale research ship Discovery II to the Antarctic to assist in the search for Messrs. Lincoln Ellsworth and Hallock Kenyon, the American airmen who left Dundee Island (Weddell Sea) on November 23 in the plane Polar Star for Little America (Ross Sea) and have not been heard of since the same afternoon, when their last radio message stated they had covered half the 2,140 miles of the journey. The Discovery II will leave Melbourne direct for the Bay of Whales (on which Little America is situated) as soon after December 9 as is possible.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Lyons) received advice from the Secretary for Defence (Mr. M. L. Shepherd) that a conference had been held in Melbourne today between the Director of Navigation (Capt. J. K. Davis), Wing-Commander Cobby, Flight-Lieut. Douglas and Lieut.-Commander Herries, of the Australian Navy, to discuss the proposal. Arrangements had been made to prepare for shipment on the Discovery II a Wapiti and a Moth aeroplane. These would be equipped with wireless and floats and skids for landing on the ice, and fitted with extra tanking for longer-range flights. Captain Davis would get into touch with the commander of the Discovery II for full particulars of his requirements for docking and supplies at Melbourne, which the vessel was expected to reach on December 9, so that immediate action could follow the vessel's arrival there.

Capt. Davis would also get into touch with Sir Douglas Mawson, the Australian explorer, regarding supplies of sledges and the necessary land gear which would be needed by the search party. Flight-Lieut. Douglas, of the Royal Australian Air Force, who had twice been to the Antarctic, would be in charge of the flying operations. He would have Flying-Officer Murdoch as second pilot and the necessary crews.

Mr. Lyons said that the Discovery II would go direct from Melbourne to the Bay of Wales, via Macquarie Island. It would not call at any New Zealand port. Consequently the Commonwealth would not be able to avail itself of an offer by the Tasman flyer, Mr. O'Hara, to lend his machine for the search.

ORGANISER'S VIEWS.

Navigation "An Everyday Task."

MELBOURNE, Dec. 5.—The Director of Navigation (Captain J. K. Davis) said today that the Antarctic search expedition would not be as dramatic as people believed. "Navigating in the Antarctic is an everyday task," said Captain Davis, who has had extensive experience in those regions himself. "Whole fleets of whaling ships go down there every year and there is no need to talk about the expedition as a dangerous task or to make any sort of fuss about it."

Captain Davis, who has been appointed organiser of the search, said that his organising would all be office work and that it was not likely that he would accompany the expedition. After receiving the news of his appointment from Canberra today, Captain Davis discussed the type of aircraft which would be most suitable to carry on the Discovery II, with officers of the Royal Australian Air Force and the Civil Aviation Department. Captain Davis said that the Discovery II was expected to arrive at Melbourne on Monday; but that it would not be possible to arrange for her departure before December 25.

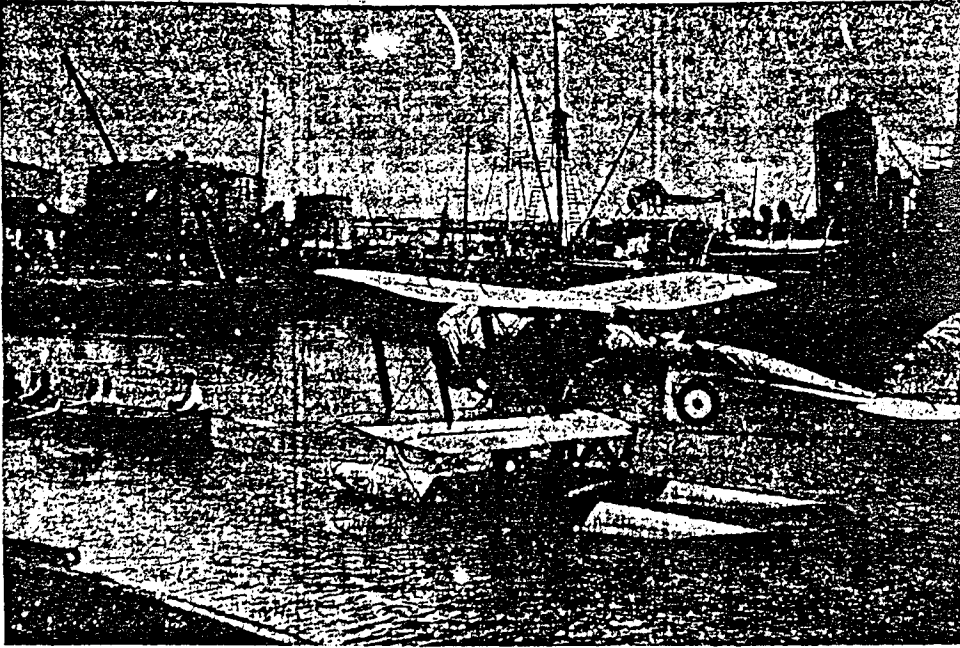
6.12.35 WEST AUSTRALIAN

A5 general. Westland Wapiti in RAAF service. Ski-equipped Wapitis not used in Antarctica: general use of Wapitis in Antarctica and in Arctic.

A5-37 and A5-2 mentioned as regards use of skis and attempted rescue of American explorer Lincoln Ellsworth who had crashed his Northrop Gamma in Antarctica. 1935. DH Gipsy Moth A7-37 also mentioned: this aircraft did indeed rescue Ellsworth. (Original story in West Australian, 6 and 7 December 1935 Article from Air International, December 1975, page 292)

MOth: A7-55

ANTARCTIC SEARCH PLANE.



A Royal Australian Air Force Wapiti machine, fitted with floats, being towed by a rowing boat at Williamstown, Victoria, last Sunday. The plane has left for the Antarctic on the ship Discovery II, to search for the missing flyers, Ellsworth and Kenyon. This is said to be the first occasion on which a Wapiti machine has been towed by a boat.

12-35

benefit of potential customers from frozen climes. A5-2 happened to be available for the photographs but, in fact, the skis were not bolted on to the RAAF aircraft and no flight tests were carried out.

Nevertheless, the photographs partially achieved the desired effect and, in 1931, the Royal Air Force sent the first Wapiti II, J9237 (built to specification 16/31), to Canada for winter trials. The aircraft operated on loan to the RCAF until 25 May 1932, but — as the accompanying photographs reveal — it used skis of slightly different design to those pictured on A5-2. The RCAF eventually introduced the Wapiti in 1936 when 24 Mk IIAs were purchased from the RAF, and some of these aircraft operated with ski-undercarriages.

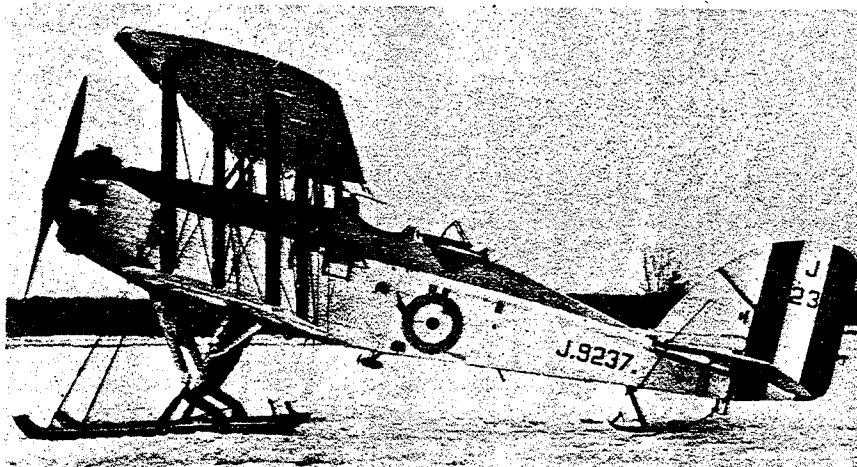
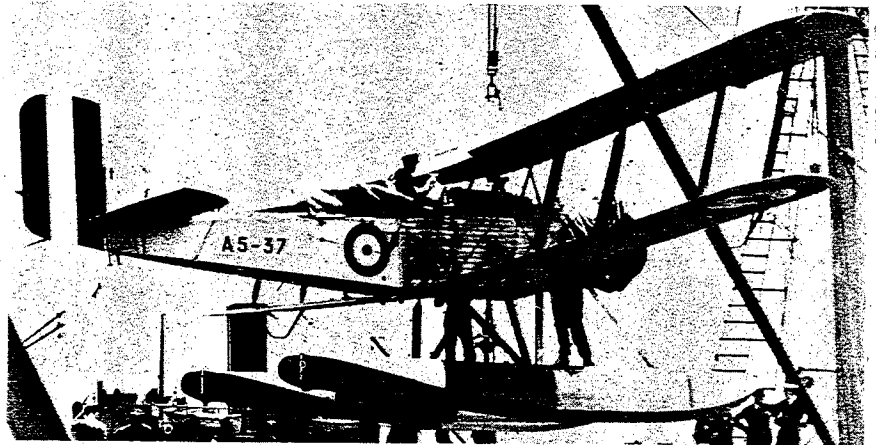
To complete the story, one RAAF Wapiti almost did use skis in the Antarctic — but for a dramatic rescue attempt rather than for exploration. Late in 1935, news flashed around the world from the Antarctic that the American explorer Lincoln Ellsworth was missing in his Northrop Gamma monoplane, *Polar Star*. The Royal Research Ship *Discovery II* made an emergency dash from Australia in December 1935 to search for Ellsworth with two RAAF float-equipped aircraft — the DH Gipsy Moth A7-55, and the Westland Wapiti IIA, A5-37. During the voyage to the Antarctic sets of skis were made with beaten sheet copper over wood for both aircraft. In the event, the seaplane Moth located Ellsworth during its first flight on 14 January 1936, some 16 miles from Little America. The Wapiti was not required and it remained unassembled aboard the ship, and the skis were never used.

Ski-equipped Wapitis

I read recently in an English publication that the Royal Australian Air Force used the Westland Wapiti "on skis . . . for Antarctic exploration." Can you oblige and publish further details and photographs of these aircraft.

S G T Bruce
Ottawa, Canada

The statement you read is incorrect, Mr Bruce, because the RAAF did not use ski-equipped Wapitis in the Antarctic. This misunderstanding probably originated in early 1929 when Westland Aircraft released a series of photographs showing the second RAAF Wapiti IA, A5-2, fitted, apparently, with skis. At the time, and by sheer coincidence, a request for several sets of snow skis had been received by Westland from the Royal Canadian Air Force. It appeared to the company, that Canada could well be another customer for the Wapiti as a result of the initial order of 28 from Australia. Thus, when a providential fall of snow covered the airfield at Yeovil, Westland seized the opportunity to photograph a Wapiti on the new skis for the



(Above) The sole RAAF Wapiti IIA seaplane being hoisted aboard 'Discovery II', (left) the first RAF Wapiti II with skis while on loan to the RCAF in 1931-32, and (below) the second RAAF Wapiti IA with skis temporarily attached at Yeovil early in 1929.

