

A Train Beat Australia's First Air Mail

By OUR AERONAUTICAL
CORRESPONDENT

THIRTY-NINE YEARS ago last Wednesday, Maurice Guillaux, a French airman, left Melbourne for Sydney on a flight with the first Melbourne-Sydney aerial mail. His tiny Bleriot carried 1,785 postcards for each of which enthusiasts had paid 2/-.

THAT represented Albury, Culcairn, Wagga, and Juneec. This is how the flight was made: £178/10/. But the postage on the cards represented a much higher amount. Philatelists, recog-

nising the increased value that the cards would possess in later years, invested extra money in stamps. Some of the cards were covered with stamps of high denominations.

That flight, the longest air mail flight in the world at the time, was the beginning of Australia's air mail system.

In addition to the postcards, which weighed a trifle more than 40lb, Guillaux carried a "cargo" consisting of a number of small parcels which he placed in his valise—the beginning of air freighting in Australia.

Guillaux made his historic Melbourne-Sydney flight in 9 hours 15 minutes' flying time, but he took two and a half days to do it, so he was easily beaten by the mail train.

His plane was made of wood and fabric held together with glue and wire. His spluttering engine gave a maximum output of less than 100 horsepower (compared with the 12,000 horsepower of a modern airliner).

During the flight, newspapers of the day presented "Reports en route" stories of the airman's progress, sent by telegraph from Seymour, Albury, Culcairn, Wagga, and

"Like A Carrier Pigeon"

A CHEERING crowd at the Melbourne Agricultural Grounds saw the airman take off at 9.15 a.m. on July 16, 1914. A Melbourne reporter wrote: "He soared gracefully into the air and, on reaching about 1,000 feet, took his bearings like a carrier pigeon and set his course northwards."

After a flight of 45 minutes Guillaux dived on Seymour at

9.55 through a gap in the clouds just when he thought he was lost. He followed the railway line when he could see it. Albury was reached at 1.50. His flying time for the 190 miles between Melbourne and Albury was 2 hours 15 minutes.

The airman flew part of the journey between Albury and Wagga at 12,000 feet. He put down at Wagga at 2.50 p.m.

Railway engines tooted, church bells pealed, and the fire bell was rung when he passed over Juneec at 3.45 p.m.

He arrived at Harden, 86 miles from Wagga, at 4.6 p.m., and then took off for Goulburn. Headwinds forced him back. Heavy rain set in at Harden during the night, but he took off for Goulburn at 2 p.m. next day and ran

out he took off for Goulburn at 2 p.m. next day and ran into turbulence which made him airsick and forced him to return.

At 7.15 a.m. next day Guillaux departed for Goulburn, where a large bonfire was kept going so that he could find the landing paddock. Moss Vale was the next scheduled landing place but when he arrived over the golf course the approaches were too difficult, so he flew on towards Sydney. He landed at Liverpool at 1 p.m., almost out of fuel.

He was expected at 3 p.m. at Moore Park, Sydney, where a large crowd had gathered. After taking off from Liverpool at 2.5 p.m., he was pushed along by a tail wind and arrived over Sydney too early for a reception by the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson. So he cruised over the football grounds and sports areas to fill in time.

He landed on the grass opposite the Sports Ground at 2.30 p.m., and the Governor-General, who was warned of his early arrival, sped from the city to greet him. The mail bag and freight were unloaded by volunteers, and Guillaux was "chaired" to a waiting car.

After his flight Guillaux shipped his plane back to Europe on the Orontes. The Great War had begun. He joined the French Army, and was killed a few months later.



From that modest flight 39 years ago there has grown in Australia one of the largest air mail and air freight businesses in the world.

Internal airlines are now covering more than 40 million miles a year, carrying more than 50,000 tons of freight a year, and flying more than one million mail ton miles.

There Are Some Forgeries

INTERNATIONAL air services flying into and out of Australia each year carry more than 1,000 tons of freight and fly nearly five million mail ton miles.

Collectors, such as Mr. E. A. Crome, of Sydney, who has the best collection in Australia showing the development of air mail flying, place a high value on the postcards carried by Guillaux. But beware of forgeries, says Mr. Crome, there are quite a few about.

Incidentally, the first company in the world that went in specifically for air mail delivery was called The Great Barrier Pigeongram Service Company. It operated from Great Barrier Island, 56 miles



One of the 1785 postcards Guillaux carried.

from Auckland, and charged 1/ per "pigeongram."

The world's first official air mail stamp was issued in Italy in 1917. But the first air mail that had an official blessing was carried on aircraft based at Allahabad in 1911—a few months before the first

delivery of mail by air in England, a flight between London and Windsor.

Australians have carried air mail covers which are highly prized by overseas collectors. They include mail recovered from the sea when Harry Hawker crashed on his

attempted Atlantic flight, the first envelopes flown by Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith between England and Australia, and unofficial mail flown by Kingsford Smith, C. T. P. Ulm, and P. G. Taylor, on first Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Ocean crossings.