

# First to the Solomons

Williams Pacific Flight 1926

Tom Lockley

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A wander through the collection

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# 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.

*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.*

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



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## Later history of the DH-50 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 DH-50s were actually built in Australia under licence from de Havilland. QANTAS supplied a DH-50 to what became the Royal Flying Doctor Service in 1928 (below).



*The original VH-UFA (above) and its replica at Qantas Founder's Museum Longreach (David Eyre collection)*

*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*



*Flight Lieutenant Ivor McIntyre, Flight Sergeant Les Trist and Group Captain Richard Williams with their RAAF DH.50A seaplane at Buna, Papua during their historic 6,000 kilometre Pacific Islands survey flight.*

### 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](mailto: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 10 to 37. It simply consists of extracts from two sources: 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. I need to thank Monica Walsh, Curator of Research, Point Cook RAAF Museum, for her help with this material and included pictures.

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 in particular 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 throughout this mountainous jungle country.

And finally the recent conclusion of the Papua New Guinea – Australia Mutual Defence Treaty once again underlines the importance of mutual cooperation, of which aviation is a vital part.

Tom Lockley, January 2026

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

### 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.

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 III D seaplane flight around Australia. In his *History of Australian Aviation* (The Hawthorn Press, 1960), Stanley Brogden relates that 'the flight was hailed at the time in England as another triumph for British aircraft.'

### Why make this flight?

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

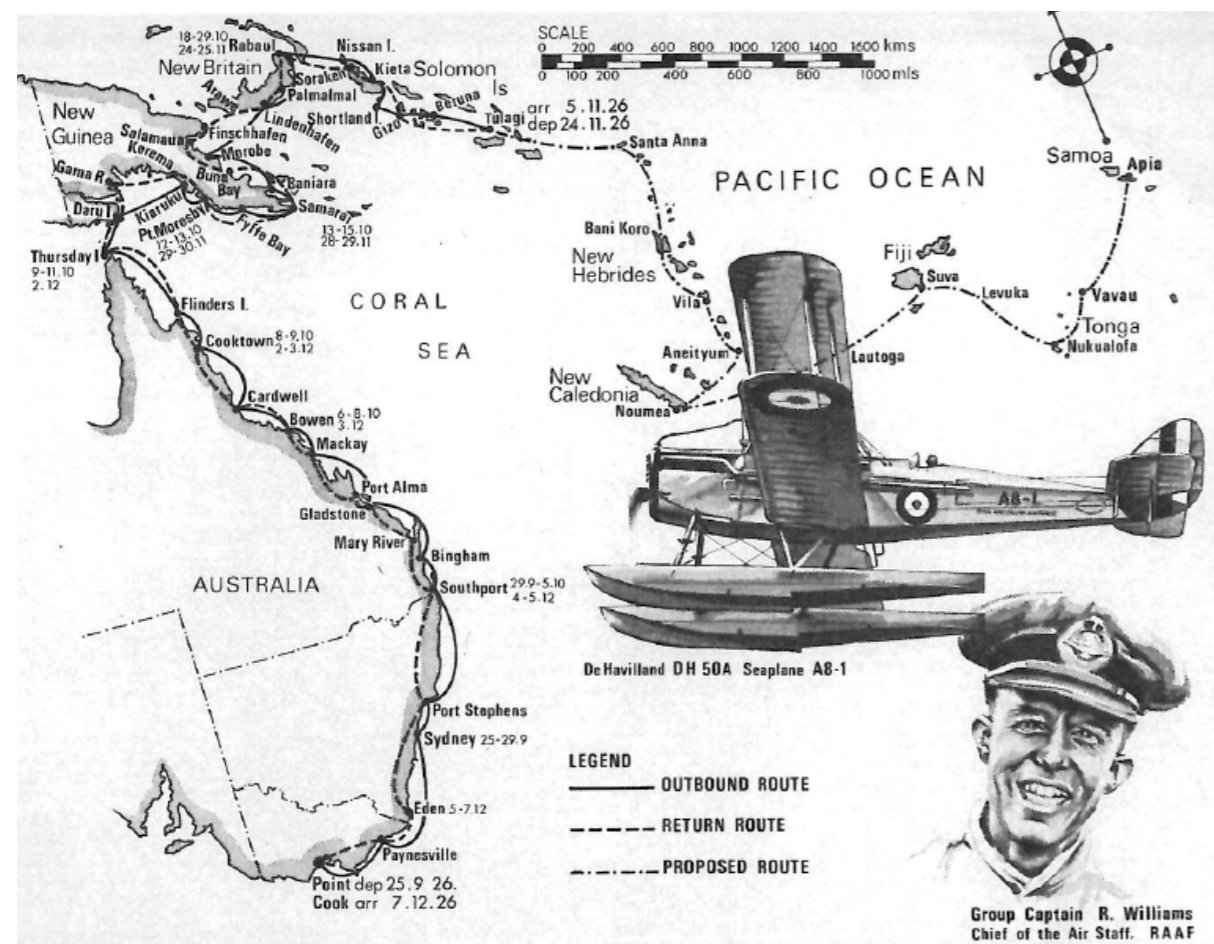
ON JUNE 24, 1924, the Prime Minister, Mr S M Bruce, announced the first major rearmament programme for Australia since the end of the 1914-18 war. At the time, the Royal Australian Navy was regarded as the nation's first line of defence and most of the defence expenditure went to the purchase of new 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 III D seaplanes, the main acquisitions were six Supermarine Seagull III amphibians, two de Havilland DH.60 Cirrus Moth trainers, and a single de Havilland DH.50A 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 9.

Map from AIRCRAFT, March 1977



**Sunday, 5 December:** The aircraft made good time from Southport to Port Stephens where McIntyre alighted to refuel. The CAS's original intention was to fly to Sydney but, with such fine weather and favourable winds, he decided to bypass the harbor and proceed to Eden. Unbeknown to Williams 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: and on Sunday 5 December again with a tail wind and 7 hours in the air we covered the distance of 690 miles to Eden on Twofold Bay ...*

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

*Williams: ..., but here we were held up for a day by bad weather, the first non-flying day on our return flight ...*

**Tuesday, 7 December:** The next morning McIntyre took off from Eden on the final stage of the survey flight. After refuelling at Paynesville, Melbourne was sighted just before 1500 hours. Two Fairey IID seaplanes had been launched to escort the DH.50A into its home base but they failed to make contact. Three SE 5A fighters, and nine Avro 504K trainers, then took off and accompanied the CAS's aircraft to Point Cook, where the seaplane alighted at 1512 hours, at the end of its epic journey.

*Williams ... which was completed at Point Cook on the afternoon of 7 December.*

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:** The next day's flight of 853 kilometres (530 miles) brought the party back to Australia when, after refuelling at Thursday and Flinders Islands they landed at Cooktown.

*Williams: Leaving Daru on 2 December and after refuelling at Thursday Island and Flinders Island, we made Cooktown just at dusk, a distance of 530 miles, which involved 7 hours' flying. It was a good day.*

**Friday, 3 December:** On the 3rd the seaplane flew to Cardwell, Bowen, Mackay, and Port Alma, completing 1,143 kilometres (710 miles) in 9 hours 15 minutes.

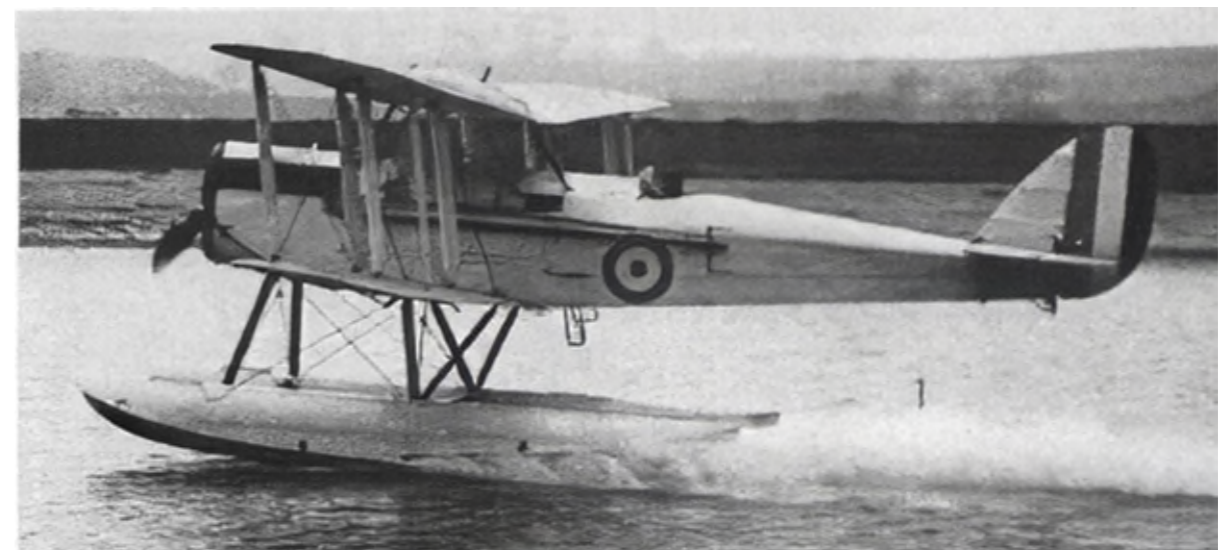
*Williams:* We were now getting away from the tropics and the weather being good on the 3rd we made Port Alma, a distance of 710 miles, refuelling at Cardwell, Bowen and Mackay and involving 9¼ hours in the air; our aircraft was behaving quite well.

**Saturday, 4 December:** The following day's run comprised 595 kilometres (370 miles) from Port Alma to Southport, via Gladstone and the Mary River.

*Williams: The next day we made Southport ...*

## 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 DH.50A, 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 DH.50A, 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 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 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 DH.50A 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.*

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 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

Williams: *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 ...*

**Tuesday, 30 November:** Rain again hampered progress on the 30th, and the fliers could only travel to Kerema, some 228 kilometres (142 miles) from Port Moresby.

Williams: *..and to Kerema the next day*

**Wednesday, 1 December:** The weather was still bad on December 1 when the fliers took off, at 0812 hours, 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. The crew tied the seaplane to the river's bank and took shelter in a native hut with five of the local inhabitants. Efforts to speak to the natives in Pidgin English were unsuccessful and, after the rain had cleared, McIntyre took off again and reached Daru at 1500 hours. 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 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!

Williams: 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

## The crew



**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 December 1916, 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 to the islands north of Australia which 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 many 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'. 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.

*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:** 515 kilometres (320 miles) were covered between Buna and Samaria, with a refuelling stop at Baniara.

Williams: ... and the next day we reached Samarai.



*RAAF picture, Williams and McIntyre at Samarai*

**Monday, 29 November:** The following day's flight was curtailed by local rainstorms and ended at Port Moresby after refuelling at Abau.

to the winner of the Melbourne Cup and the result of the last Test match.'

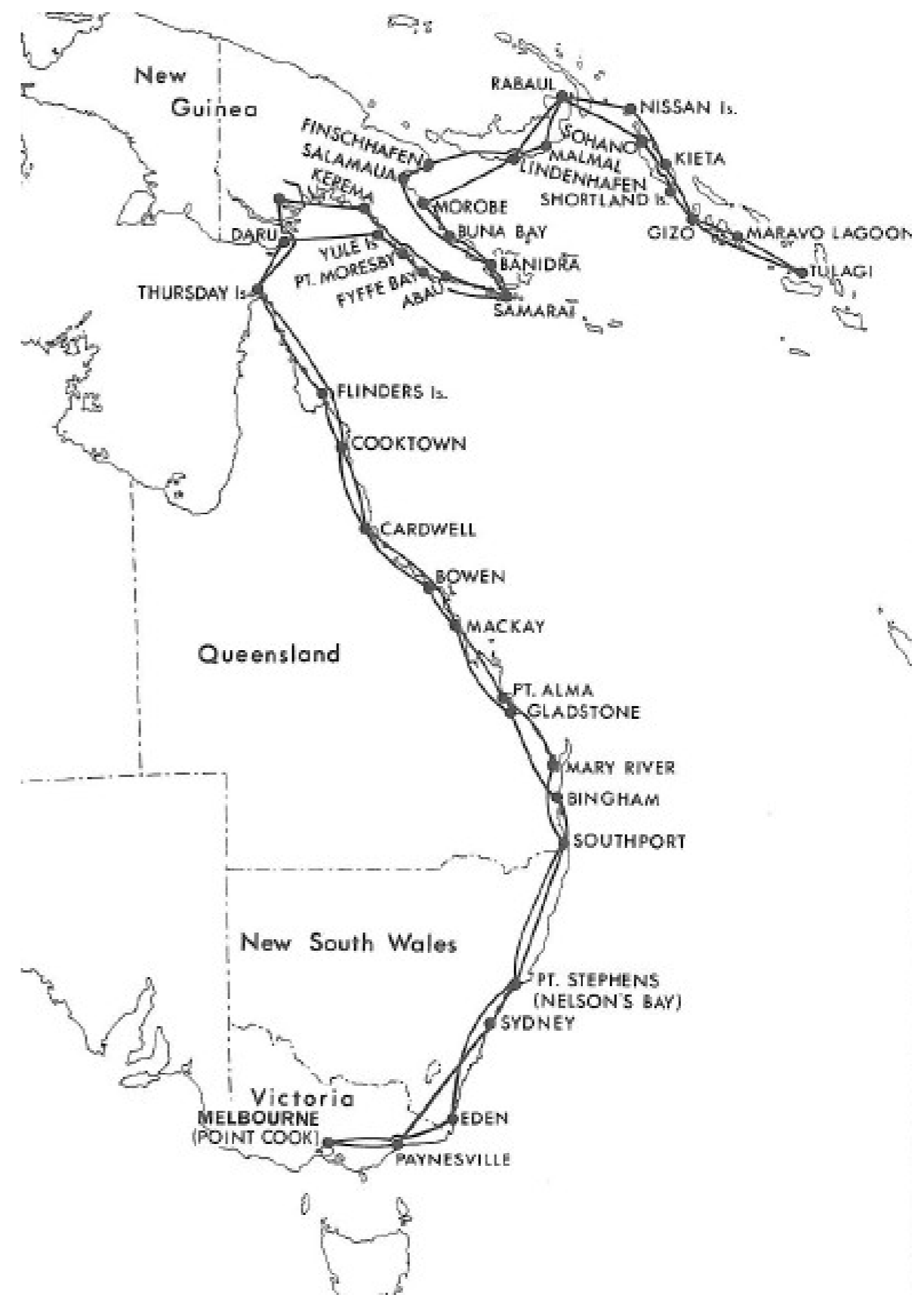
Williams: *Taking off early next morning we were forced by storms to return to Rabaul but were able to get to Lindenhafen later that day.*

**Friday, 26 November:** The following morning bad weather delayed the take off until 1253 hours, and the fliers arrived at Arawe at 1400 hours.

Williams: *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 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:** Continuous heavy rain then kept the aircraft grounded until 0900 hours the next morning. After leaving Arawe the crew flew to Finschhafen, Salamaua, and arrived at Buna Bay after travelling 470 kilometres (292 miles) in four hours flying time.

Williams: *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*



Route of the completed flight

## Diary of the expedition

This has been very simply compiled from Isaacs' AIRCRAFT article and Richard Williams' 1977 autobiography, as described on page 2. Isaacs' summary introduces each day's entry, and I have then included Williams' comments. I found it sometimes very interesting to note what each writer included or omitted!

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

**Saturday, 25 September:** the flight commenced at 0550 . When the seaplane alighted at Paynesville, on the Gippsland Lakes in Victoria, to take on fuel, it was found that a small external leak had developed in the engine's water jacket. Nevertheless, the flight resumed at 1019 hours, and the aircraft landed in Rose Bay at 1540 hours, amidst the normal Saturday afternoon's conglomeration of pleasure craft on Sydney Harbor. The seaplane was beached and, after an inspection of the leaking water jacket, it was decided to change the engine. The replacement Puma – one of those supplied with the 1920 Imperial Gift equipment – was obtained 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.

*Williams: Leaving Point Cook on the morning of 25 September 1926 we refuelled at Paynesville on the Gippsland Lakes then flew on to Sydney against a head wind which at times reduced our ground speed to 60 miles an hour. We were already experiencing leaks in the engine water-cooling*

in 7 hours 55 minutes with landings at Gizo, Kieta, Soraken, and Rabaul where the seaplane alighted just before dark.

*Williams: 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 a.m. with a south-west wind behind us and; refuelling at Gizo, Kieta and Soraken, 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.*



*L/R, Trist, McIntyre, Williams, unknown person, unknown location!*

**Thursday, 25 November:** The next morning the fliers departed at 0650 hours, but impenetrable storms caused them to return to Rabaul after 30 minutes flying. A second departure was made at 1330 hours, and Lindenhafen was reached at 1710 hours after a refuelling stop at Palmalmal – 'a plantation in Jacquinet Bay, managed by an Australian who had little communication with the outside world, and who inquired as

*Most of the natives employed by Europeans at that time were under contract for a period. They received a small weekly payment (perhaps in shillings), and were paid a lump sum, still not a large amount, on completion of their contract. The native I have mentioned could have had little more than enough to purchase his camera from such a final payment. I spoke to the storekeeper about the camera and told him what I thought of such a sale. His attitude was 'I'm here to sell things – it's not for me to refuse something a native or anybody else wishes to buy'. I am afraid this did not make me feel proud of being an Australian.*

*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.*

*On one occasion at Tulagi I was being taken across the bay to Makambo Island in the Resident Commissioner's launch. The crew consisted of two natives, one attending to the operation of the engine and the other to the rudder. 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?' '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'.*

**Friday, 12 November:** Engine shipped from Sydney

**Sunday, 21 November:** Engine reached Tulagi, engine installation

**Tuesday, 23 November:** Test flight in the afternoon

**Wednesday, 24 November:** The return flight to Point Cook commenced and 1,242 kilometres (772 miles) were covered

*system and decided to change it. This delayed us for four days in Sydney.*

**Wednesday 29 September:** Departure time was set for 1000 hours, but McIntyre had to taxi the seaplane around for 35 minutes to stir up the smooth water surface to enable the aircraft to lift off! (This indicates the narrow margins on which the aircraft operated! tl). En route to Southport, Queensland, the aircraft refuelled at Port Stephens and the flight then continued for four and a half hours against headwinds. Shortly before 1700 hours, when the fliers were within 9.7 kilometres (six miles) of Southport, the engine suddenly failed and McIntyre had to make an emergency landing in the open sea. It was found that 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 taxi ashore through a high breaking surf. 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.

Williams: *On 29 September we set off for Southport in Queensland, refuelling at Port Stephens. When within about*

6 miles of Southport that evening and a little out to sea the engine power died away and we had a forced landing in the open ocean. A fair sea was running and we were being tossed about considerably. We found that the throttle control had become disconnected and vibration had closed it. This was remedied but we were unable to take off. McIntyre's skill in handling the aircraft in the sea then running and through the surf saved us from getting a wave over a wing tip. We had no wing tip floats. We beached the aircraft on a sandy beach at the southern end of Stradbroke Island opposite Southport, safe but very wet.

It was now almost dark but a Very light fired into the air soon brought a policeman and some men in a boat from Southport, and with their help, assisted by others collected from the local cinema by the police, we were able to drag the aircraft over a sandy spit about 400 yards wide which separated the ocean from sheltered water. The aircraft had had a considerable buffeting whilst taxiing in the open sea, but the only serious damage was to the airscrew which had been hitting the waves, We had to wait at Southport until a new one arrived – a delay of another four days. We were not getting along very fast.

**Thursday, 30 September:** An inspection carried out later in the morning revealed 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. Meanwhile, the unfortunate incidents that had occurred to the seaplane since the fliers left Point Cook were being

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 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'.

I was not very favourably impressed by the operations of European (principally Australian) storekeepers in the islands. Most of the stores were in two sections, one for Europeans and the other for natives, and in the latter the prices charged were higher for the same article than in the European section. For example, a hair comb which was sixpence in the European section was one shilling – twice the price – in the native section. When I inquired of the storekeeper as to the reason for this I was told that the natives did not understand anything but shillings, I found that very hard to believe. Probably the occasion which shocked me most was at Tulagi when I saw a native outside a store with a camera which he had just purchased. It was a folding camera, and he was opening and closing it; obviously he did not understand it nor had he any knowledge of lenses or films, and of course he could get no photographs with it. It had cost several pounds.

**Thursday, 4 November:** 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 before take-off — and the fliers reached Maravo Lagoon and stayed overnight at Betuna.

**Friday, 5 November:** Departing next morning the party flew 241 kilometres (150 miles) to Tulagi and alighted at 1320 hours. The seaplane was beached immediately at the Burns Philps island, Makambo. As Tulagi had now been made the terminal point of the survey, a new engine was requested from Sydney. The only Puma 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.

Williams: *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*

adversely reported in the newspapers. In fact, the Acting Minister for Defence was even called upon to cancel the flight. In the official report of the flight subsequently compiled by Williams he commented that ‘up to this time there had been a certain amount of press criticism regarding the flight. 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. It was fitted and tested immediately, and the seaplane was readied for departure on the following morning.

**Tuesday, 5 October:** The DH.50A departed from Southport at 0620 hours, refuelled at Bingham three hours later and arrived at Gladstone at 1320 hours. (Bingham cannot be found on Google Earth, but there is a Bingham Point named at an inlet at Hervey Bay)

Williams: *Leaving Southport on 5 October we made Gladstone ...*



*This RAAF picture is labelled 'Island Survey Flt. at Ashgrove, QLD'. But there is no mention in the sources of a stop at the Brisbane suburb of Ashgrove.*

**Wednesday, 6 October:** the fliers completed the next stage to Bowen, after landing at Mackay for fuel. The DH.50A was met and escorted into Bowen by one of the Seagull III



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

**Saturday, 30 October:** Nissan Island to Kieta

**Sunday, 31 October:** 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:** Nevertheless, a successful take off was achieved on November 3, and the fliers arrived at Gizo at 1020 hours.

*some days' delay at Rabaul, and the opportunity was taken to give the engine a top overhaul.*

*When the aircraft was being tested after this work a Customs launch in passing a line to the aircraft while drifting, ran into the tail and damaged the rudder and elevators and that delayed us another two days.*

**Friday, 29 October:** At daylight on the 29th, 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 and the fliers departed from Rabaul at 1050 hours on the same morning.

After flying across New Ireland and clearing the east coast, the aircraft ran into rainstorms before arriving at Nissan Island. An inspection revealed that an internal leak had developed in the water jacket of No 2 cylinder. Temporary adjustments were made and the flight continued.

*Williams: So after a total of 11 days in Rabaul we took off on 29 October for Nissan Island, off Bougainville.*

*Here we found that we had an internal leak in the water jacket of one cylinder of our engine and that water collected on the piston head when cold but that 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.*

amphibians of No 101 (Fleet Co-operation) Flight which was stationed in the area.

*Williams: ... and the following day reached Bowen.*

**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. A9-3 is shown.



'Filling up at Bowen' – RAAF picture

## GOING ON

### WILLIAMS'S FLIGHT

#### LEAVES THURSDAY ISLAND

MELBOURNE, Monday.

According to a message received by the Air Board, Group-Captain Williams's seaplane left Thursday Island at 8.15 a.m. to-day, in continuation of the long flight to the Pacific Islands.

This stage of the flight is to Port Moresby, Papua. He will probably re-fuel at Daru.

The secretary of the Air Board, Major Coleman, stated to-day that no special reports were being received by the Acting Minister for Defence (Mr. Marr) from Captain Williams, and the question of the abandonment of the flight was not under consideration.

#### At Second Attempt

THURSDAY ISLAND, Monday.

Captain Williams's seaplane pushed off from the beach at 6.45 a.m. to-day, but was unable to rise owing to the light wind, though there was a smooth sea, and was moored midway between Thursday and Horn Islands.

At 8.15 the wind had increased slightly, and the plane then rose beautifully. It was soon lost to view. Daru is the next stop, and then Port Moresby. A slight easterly breeze was blowing on a smooth sea. The weather was cloudy, but fine.

There had not been much press coverage of the flight, but this increased considerably after they left Australia. This article is from the Sydney Sun of Monday 11 October.

the aircraft ran into rainstorms before arriving at Nissan Island. An inspection at Nissan revealed that an internal leak had developed in the water jacket of No 2 cylinder. Temporary adjustments were made and the flight continued on October 30 to Kieta.

Williams: ... 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.** : While awaiting approval to continue the flight an opportunity was taken to top-overhaul the engine. 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.

Williams: 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

*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:** Conditions were much better and the seaplane was flown across the Huon Gulf, via Fami Islands, direct to Cape Bulli on the south coast of New Britain and reached Lindenhafen at 1500 hours.

Williams: *On the following day changed conditions enabled us to reach Lindenhafen on the south coast of New Britain and the next day ...*

**Monday, 18 October:** The following day the fliers reached Rabaul at 1622 hours after a 362 kilometre (225 miles) flight from Lindenhafen. 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.’

At daylight on the 29th, A8-1 was flight tested with the two-bladed propeller that had been used since leaving Southport. The DH.50A was then temporarily 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 true,’ reported Group Captain Williams. ‘It was not tested in the air.’

The normal propeller was refitted and the fliers departed from Rabaul at 1050 hours on the same morning.

After flying across New Ireland and clearing the east coast,

**Friday, 8 October:** the fliers reached Cooktown after refuelling at Cardwell.

Williams: *The next day via Cardwell we arrived at Cooktown. Here the whole town, a small handful of people, turned out to greet us and when proceeding to the hotel after refuelling, the mayor asked me if we would like to attend a dance that evening. Personally I did not feel a bit like a dance but it was obvious that the local people would like us to do that, so I said we would. Whilst we were having dinner at the hotel I heard a brass band playing in the distance and commented on such a small community being able to raise a brass band. I was told it was playing at the hall where the dance was to be held.*

*When we arrived at the hall the band was playing outside, but before dancing commenced the whole band moved inside. The hall was built of corrugated iron without any lining and we certainly could hear the music, but we could not talk to our partners. Everyone was there including the children, some babies were in prams parked around the hall whilst here and there one was lying asleep on a form against the wall, quite capable of rolling off I thought but none did. It was quite a pleasant evening and seemed very quiet when the band had completed its program.*

**Saturday, 9 October:** To Thursday Island via Flinders Island. The airmen stayed with the Garrison Artillery unit which was maintained there at that time.

At this point the DH.50A was about to become the first locally based aircraft to fly out of Australia. 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. ... a section of the press was printing a lot of sheer nonsense about the difficulties encountered during the early stages of the flight. The then Minister for Defence was in England. His Acting Minister seems to have lent a credulous ear to those who wanted to have the flight stopped at Thursday Island and for a while there was some real danger of their representations being acted upon ... actually, 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.'

**(Sunday, 10 October:** delay awaiting approval to proceed)

**Monday, 11 October:** The fliers departed from Thursday Island at 0817 hours and, after flying 209 kilometres (130 miles) across the Torres Strait, alighted at Daru Island, Papua.

Williams: *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. Fortunately, it was repairable, but we had to stay there the night. We*

**Tuesday, 12 October:** They flew along the Fly River Delta, and across the top of the Gulf of Papua where the aircraft flew into its first tropical storm. After landing at Kiaruku, Yule Island, for fuel, they reached Port Moresby at 1720 hours.

Williams: *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. I stayed at Government House that night and my*

*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:** 'The next day was hot and muggy without a breath of wind,' Group Captain Williams recounted in his report. 'The surface of the sea was like glass, and a ground swell was coming in from the ocean. We had planned to fly to Lindenhafen, but under these conditions it was impossible to get off with the necessary load to make it in one flight.'

Williams: *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*

Territory, and the party found a welcoming wire awaiting them from the Administrator at Rabaul.

*Williams: 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.*

*We had found, of course, as we proceeded north from Melbourne, especially when we got into the tropics, that our aircraft performance fell off rapidly. Our ability to take off was controlled by the nature of the sea. This controlled the load we could carry and consequently our range. We could not take off at all with any reasonable load on the calm oily waters one often meets in the tropics. On several occasions we had to discard petrol in order to get off, but of course there was a limit to this as it was useless getting into the air if we had not sufficient fuel to reach our destination.*

*The combination of all these factors meant that we could not wander off our direct course very much, nor did we have the ability to get much height.*

*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*

*outstanding memory of it is of swarms of mosquitoes inside the house. Staniforth Smith seemed not to notice them on his hands and face whilst I found myself continuously on the move trying to keep them away from my head, ankles and hands. Noticing my discomfort Staniforth Smith gave an order to a native servant who soon after appeared with a metal pan on which were some coals giving off quantities of smoke. This was placed in front of me, and I was told that the way to keep the mosquitoes off was to place oneself in the smoke. I tried it and 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:** The following day's flight took the party to London Mission Station at Fyffe Bay for fuel, and on to Samaria where the aircraft touched down at 1515 hours.

*Williams: 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. Up till now all the Papuan natives we had seen were what we call fuzzy-wuzzies, that is they wore a large quantity of curly hair. Most of the missionaries we met seemed to live fairly comfortably. In the course of training the natives, all the labour they needed, whether inside the home or elsewhere, was available to them. Here at luncheon two Papuan girls served at table; one had a full head of black curly hair, the*

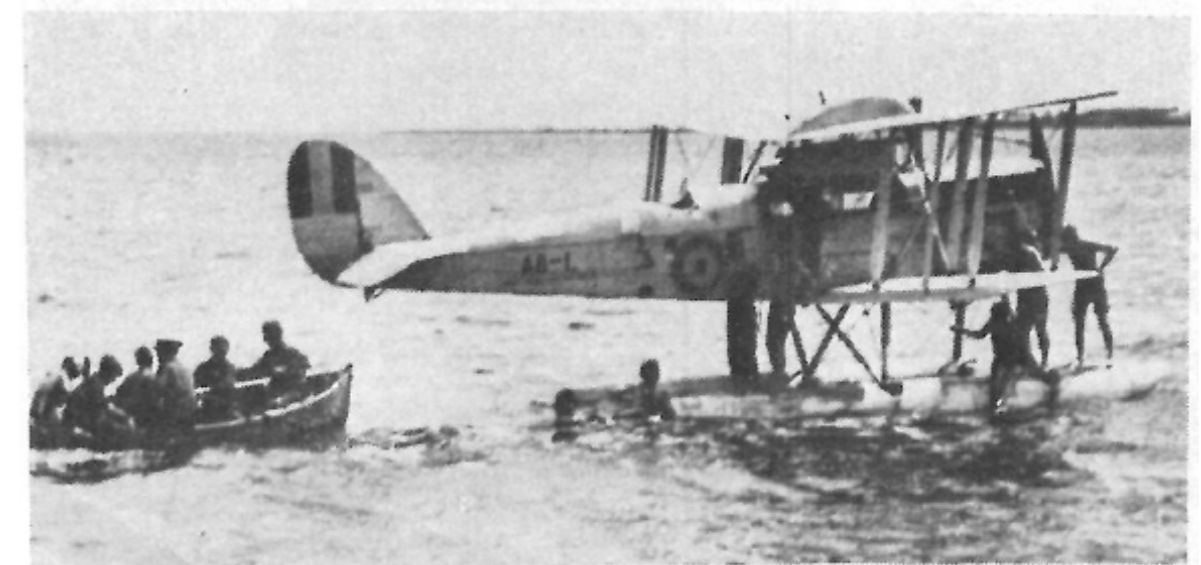
*other had what we might now call a crew cut.*

*As this was the first time I had seen a native with such short hair, I asked whether there were amongst the Papuans those who cut their hair short. I was told that there was no such division but that this girl had misbehaved herself in some way and the clipping of her hair was a punishment. This seemed to me rather a cruel punishment for although it caused no physical pain it would take some little time before her hair again reached its normal condition and during that time it was obvious to all who saw her that she had been a naughty girl – in what way I did not learn. We arrived at Samarai that afternoon and I was invited to stay overnight with the Anglican Bishop, Dr Henry Newton, who was, I believe the Bishop of Melanesia. 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 to the beach to step out on to the float and there remove the overalls before stepping ashore.*

*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!'*

**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 A8-1 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:** The flight continued to Morobe, via Baniara. 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