



Australia's First Seaplane

AHSA (NSW) publication May 2014

BN 978-0-980369-37



9 780980 369373

About this book

This booklet was developed by AHSA to mark the centenary of seaplane flight in Australia, commemorated at Rose Bay on 11 May 2014 by a seaplane fly-past conducted by the Seaplane Pilots Association of Australia. Commemorations also involve the French community in Australia, AHSA, the Wollahra Council, The Australian Aviation Museum Bankstown and the Rose Bay RSL which has a fascinating display of seaplane and flying boat memorabilia.

We have endeavoured to identify the source of photos, but there is not room in a publication such as this to give full references. Material has come from the NLA website *Trove*, Keith Isaacs' book *Military Aircraft in Australia, 1909*, AWM 1971; the AWM official WWI history Volume X and many other sources. John Scott, AHSA historian, has provided a great deal of information. We have tried to preserve all material upon which this booklet is based on our website www.australiasfirstairmail.com

A major aim of the centenary commemorations is to gather and preserve material from this exciting, but little-known, period of Australian aviation history. If you have comments, corrections, additions or informed criticism, we love to hear from you.

Thank you for reading our book

Tom Lockley
PO Box 301 Pymont, guillauxcentenary@gmail.com

May, 2014

Australia's First Seaplane....

(and related matters)

Tom Lockley

May, 2014

Produced for the centenary commemorations of the first seaplane flight in Australia, made by French airman Maurice Guillaux, 8 May 1914.

ISBN 978-0-9803693-7-3



Aviation Historical Society of Australia (NSW) inc
Airmail Centenary Commemoration Group
PO Box 301 Pyrmont NSW 2009
guillauxcentenary@gmail.com

Cover photo from <http://www.adf-gallery.com.au/>

Largely because the flying boats did not need elaborate airports, there was a boom in their use during the 1930s, culminating in the establishment of the C Class Empire flying boat service from Australia to the UK in August 1938. These



wonderful aircraft carried mail and provided a luxurious mode of transport for a very few wealthy people. However, during World War II, airports throughout the world were vastly improved, and the relative inefficiency of the flying boat caused it to be replaced by ordinary aircraft.

Rose Bay began to be developed as a flying boat base in about 1938, the major international airport in Sydney. It was in use until 1974. (www.airwaysmuseum.com picture)

Seaplanes are relatively uncommon of recent times. The convenience and the thrill of seaplane flight, however, cause seaplanes to have an enthusiastic and growing following. The next century will not be uninteresting in this regard.

wife secured a divorce from her husband, with an alimony payment of 'no less than £10,000 a year'.

Mrs. Hordern emigrated, and later became the wife of Signor de Romero, Spanish Ambassador at Paris.

After the war Lebbeus married again, the bride on this occasion being Miss Francis Barry, daughter of Mr. Gerald Barry, a well-known Sydney solicitor. He continued his hectic lifestyle and no more descendants were born.

He was found dead in his home at Darling Point on September 19 1928, and the coroner's verdict was that he had died of an overdose of barbiturates, self-administered. It is not clear whether this was accidental or deliberate.

Heyday of the flying boats



C-class flying boat Coolangatta, (Ed Coates Collection).

Introduction

French aviator Maurice Guillaux spent less than 200 days in Australia in 1914. In his Bleriot IX aircraft, specially built for aerobatic displays, he thrilled hundreds of thousands of people with his performances. He also carried Australia's first official air mail, from Melbourne to Sydney, in July 1914. It is less well-known that he was the first person to fly a seaplane in Australia.

This booklet outlines the work of Guillaux and his team in assembling and flying the aircraft, and outlines the contribution made to Australian aviation by the wealthy visionary Lebbeus Hordern.



Photographs of the time are scarce, and usually of poor quality. An exception is this study of the 'hydro-aeroplane' by Sam Croft, preserved in the collection of the State Library of NSW, catalogue # a128591.

The Airmail Centenary Commemoration Group

In June, 2013, the Aviation Historical Society of Australia, (NSW) inc decided to investigate the possibility of re-enacting the first airmail flight in Australia, and a special subcommittee was formed for this purpose.

From the outset, the idea has been enthusiastically adopted by the light and recreational aircraft community. On 12 July of this year, mail-carrying aircraft will leave Essendon airport, Melbourne. The aircraft will follow the original route as much as possible and the mail will be delivered to the French community's Bastille Day celebrations being held in Centennial Park on Monday, 14 July 2014.

Australia Post is releasing commemorative stamps on 1 July, and the flight is being financed mainly by the sale of a very special philatelic item. Guillaux carried 1785 specially printed, individually numbered, postcards, and this year's flight will carry exactly the same number of postcards, modelled on the originals, with special postmarking, commemorative imprint, and backstamping.



These unique items are available from the website

www.australiasfirstairmail.com

Thank you for your support!

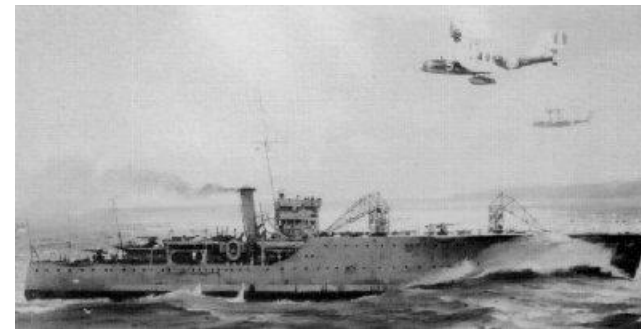
More information? email guillauxcentenary@gmail.com

this was the smallest flying-boat ever built at that time.

The Satellite never reached Australia.

HMAS Albatross

All these aircraft created considerable interest, and it is not drawing too long a bow to suggest that this was a factor in the courageous decision of the Australian government to build a seaplane carrier, *HMAS Albatross*. Construction was begun at Cockatoo Island Dockyard, Sydney, in 1925 and the ship was commissioned early in 1929.



However, there were various technical problems with aircraft and also financial problems

created by the depression, and the ship was demoted from seagoing status in 1933. It was given to the Royal Navy as part payment for the light cruiser HMAS Hobart which entered service in 1938. *Albatross* survived the war, entered civilian service in 1948 as *Hellenic Prince* and was eventually scrapped in 1954.

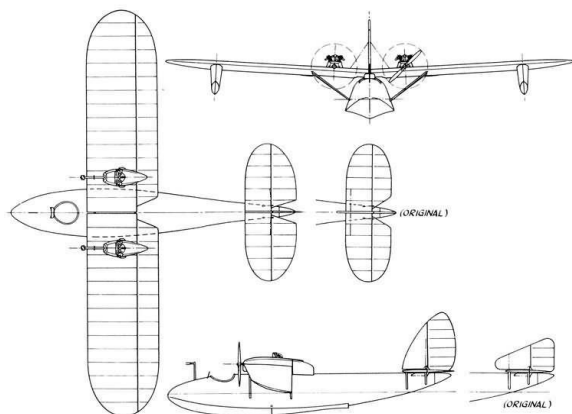
The death of Lebbeus Hordern

Lebbeus had a turbulent private life, with an early marriage and divorce. His first wife was the beautiful Olga Clare Monie, of Concord, but after the birth of a son (Lebbeus) his

Lebbeus also commissioned a very light flying boat. From the website 100aircraftphotos.com :



02/28/2014. In early 1924 Oswald Short of Bros. Ltd. at Rochester received a request from Lebbeus Hordern to build a small sporting seaplane for cruising and fishing around Botany Bay. Oswald Short and Francis Webber designed the *Satellite*, the first Short product to receive a design index number: S.1;



The young Lebbeus Hordern



Anthony Hordern, an English free settler, set up a drapery shop in Sydney in 1823. The various succeeding generations developed the business, despite various intra-dynastic feuds. In 1905 a six-storey department store was erected on the present site of World Square, George Street, Sydney. Horderns also had a huge mail order business and was one of the world's great emporiums.

'Lebbeus' was a common given name in the family, and in 1891 the name was given to a baby who would grow to be a joint heir of this huge business and one of the wealthiest people in Australia.



From an early age he was an adventurer, in cars, fast boats and travel. His yacht, 'Bronze-wing II,' was at the time the largest and most luxurious boat of its

kind in the southern hemisphere. He had a luxury home, 'Hopewood' at Darling Point and a stud farm at Bowral where he raised Shorthorn cattle and thoroughbred horses.



Hopewood House, Bowral, is still standing, but Hopewood, Lebbeus' home on 2½ acres at Elizabeth Bay, has long since been demolished.

His interest in cars led him to Jules Maillard, who owned a motor garage, first at 35 Pitt Street and later at 156A Phillip Street. Maillard sold fast cars such as the Brasier, from France, and took part in races and rallies.

In 1913 Maillard, at the request of Lebbeus Hordern, ordered a Maurice Farman seaplane from France. It arrived early in 1914. In preparation for the delivery of his aircraft, Lebbeus Hordern had acquired a large block of land at the bottom of Bay Street on the foreshore of Double Bay, upon which he had built a shed and a launching ramp.

First registered in 1920 to Australian aviation pioneer Lebbeus Hordern of Sydney, this aircraft was previously G-EAPZ. The CAB allowed him to retain its UK 'last two' to minimize repainting (!) even though this registration was completely out of sync with the series being assigned at that time. The images, from the Geoff Goodall collection, show the Shrimp at Port Moresby, NG in 1922 on the first aerial exploration of the country. The photos are classic Captain Frank Hurley pictures, an Australian adventurer who specialized in photographs of New Guinea and Antarctica. The lower one shows either its arrival or departure to/from the Territory. This aircraft was originally built by Short Brothers Ltd as a 'Sporting Type Seaplane' and was first flown on 10 December 1919 at Rochester. The Shrimp floatplane was shipped back to Sydney in Dec 1922 following the New Guinea expedition (where it was accompanied by Curtiss Seagull G-AUCV), but after assembly was wrecked on its first takeoff on Sydney Harbour on 20 January 1923.





These were imported by Lebbeus and were widely used for surveying and map-making flights, and some sources state that they were often flown by Lebbeus himself.

He also imported a Short Shrimp seaplane (G-AUPZ, below) which Captain Frank Hurley used for his 1921 New Guinea film *Pearls and Savages*.



The original photo caption, from the wonderful Ed Coates collection, merits inclusion here:

Preparing the aircraft



Lebbeus Hordern enlisted the services of the visiting French aviator Maurice Guillaux and his team. They had arrived in Sydney on 8 April 1914, with their Bleriot XI aircraft which had been specially prepared for stunt flying. Their

aircraft was assembled and prepared at premises owned by Maillard, but it is not certain that this was done at Phillip Street. For his Sydney displays Guillaux was based at Victoria Park racecourse, at Zetland, an inner city suburb.

After an 'invitation only' display at Victoria Park on Monday 21 April 1914, the Guillaux roadshow had an 'off Broadway' opening with its first public aerobatic performance at Newcastle on the following Saturday. They returned to Sydney for a major performance at Victoria Park on Saturday 2 May, and straight after this Guillaux and his team began to erect and prepare the seaplane at the Double Bay premises.

The machine was packed in four large cases, and weighed over three-quarters of a ton, about 750 kg. Wingspan was 57 feet (17.3 metres), it was 35 feet (10.6 metres) long, and 16 feet (4.0 metres) high. Engine was an eight cylinder Renault rotary engine, developing 70 horsepower, 51 kw. Maximum

speed was 60 mph, about 100 km/hr. The *Herald* said that the machine was capable of carrying 'two men, each of 17 stone (108 kg) or three men of lighter build'.

It took four days to assemble. At the time, it was very important that the aircraft was 'rigged' properly, with exactly the right tension on the rigging wires that supported the wings. The trade of 'rigger' is vital to aircraft that are not of modern all-metal construction.

The first flights



¹Maurice Guillaux flew the Farman for the first time on May 8 1914, as described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter:

Mechanics moved about in an orderly sort of disorder. Wire stays were tightened, ash props were tested, nuts were screwed up or slackened as required, levels were taken, the great polished propeller was tried. It was a general tuning up of the white-winged flying machine. And over all, Guillaux kept a hawk-like supervision. No



trainer if the Bristol Boxkites were unserviceable. On 20 July 1916 it was re-equipped with an Australian licence-built Renault engine, constructed by Tarrant Motors in Melbourne. The last recorded mention of the aircraft as on 30 June 1917 when it was officially listed as one 'Maurice Farman Biplane (converted)—for instructional use'.

Hordern himself went to war, serving in the British Royal Field Artillery as a lieutenant, and was invalided home in 1917 suffering from gas poisoning.

After the war

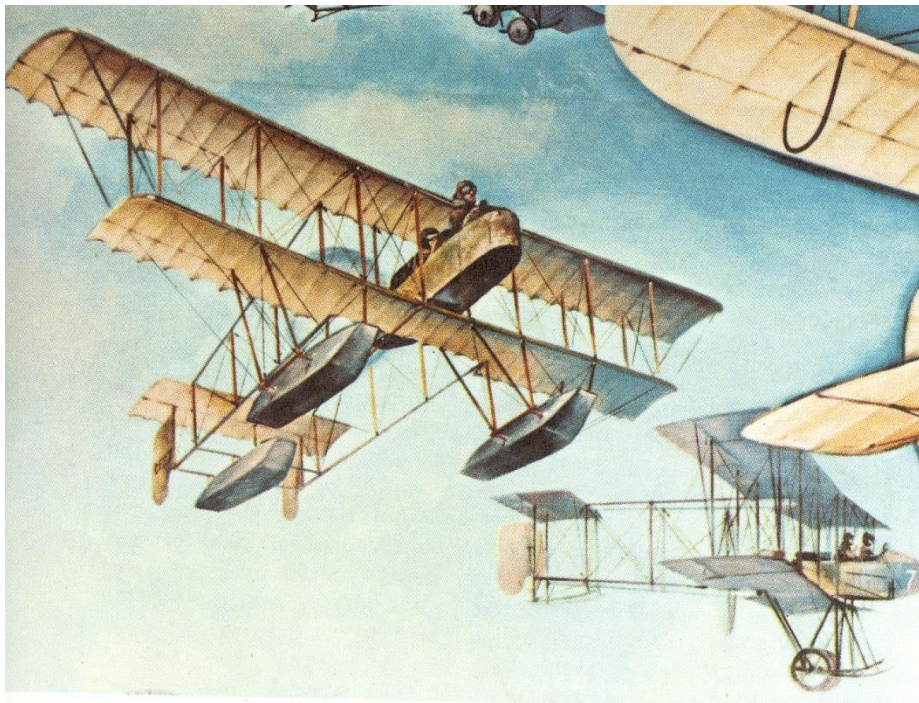


In post-war years Lebbeus imported a Felixstowe F.3 twin-engined flying-boat (G-EAOT of 1920), of which there is little record. However, photos exist of two Curtiss Seagull flying-boats bought in 1921 (G-AUCU, MF419/29, above, and G-AUCV, MF419/28 seen in less happy circumstances on the next page).

¹ Pictures of the general scene at Double Bay: State Library of NSW, 188944, 198746

The German possessions received new names eg the Admiralty Island group (principally Manus Island), New Ireland and New Britain. After the war, they became 'mandated' territories, ruled by Australia and nominally under the control and supervision of the League of Nations. Under the same procedure, Japan retained control of many other former German possessions.

Return to Point Cook



The Farman seaplane is seen, both in its seaplane and landplane forms, in this picture from Military Aircraft of Australia, 1909-18, by Keith Isaacs, AWM 1971.

During 1915 the Farman returned to Point Cook and was reconstructed as a landplane. It was occasionally used as a

detail was too small for his personal attention. At last all was ready.

'Right to a millimetre' was Guillaux's comment after he had subjected all to a minute scrutiny..... nothing could be left to chance. Up into the pilot's seat he mounted, the hydro-aeroplane having been wheeled down to the water's edge by many willing hands. Petrol was poured into the tank, and a mechanic [Repousseau], who looked as if he came well up to the 17 stone standard, climbed into the passenger's seat behind Guillaux, a dapper figure in a tweed suit, who made no sartorial preparation for the flight beyond casting aside his Homburg hat.

The mechanic set the propeller whirring at top speed. So strong was the air-current which its revolutions set up, that a shower of sand and hats was blown into the shed behind, small children were thrown to the ground, and the crowd holding the 'tail' were almost forced to let go their hold.'

Guillaux sat himself firmly in his seat, gave the order for release, and immediately afterwards the 'plane was skimming along the waters of Double Bay at breathless speed. For a few hundred yards it rushed along, spurning the water, in a direct line for Clarke Island.

'There she goes!' shouted the spectators, as they saw the far-spreading wings lifted slowly into the air. By degrees it rose, like a great bird stretching its pinions for height, and up it soared, its white wings showing clearly against the dark green foliage which clothes the slopes of the opposite shore. Away over towards Mosman it glided, as easily as if it were a bird, and then, with a wide sweep towards the right, it sailed

in the direction of Manly. It seemed to soar right over one of the Manly boats, which sounded its siren in salutation. For a few minutes it was lost to view, and then it re-appeared over Point Piper. Right over the heads of the watchers at Double Bay it flew citywards, and after a circular movement, came back to the starting point. Landing on the water some distance out, it made its way to the point of departure, covering the intervening distance at the speed of an express train.

Guillaux then took Lebbeus Hordern for a flight. He came back enraptured. 'Flying is the sport for me after this' he said. The next passenger was the French Consul, M. Chayet. Guillaux took the *Herald* correspondent for a flight, and the reporter noted the vulnerability to bombing attacks of the Australian naval ships at anchor below.



The following Monday Guillaux made twelve flights, On one of these the passenger was Miss Louise Carbasse, then a 19 year-old Australian actress. After the war, she became a well-known Hollywood actress under the name of Louise Lovely.

Three days later, in a flight above the harbour, he travelled at over 100 miles an hour, thanks to strong tailwinds.

first in the British Commonwealth to be sent overseas for action.

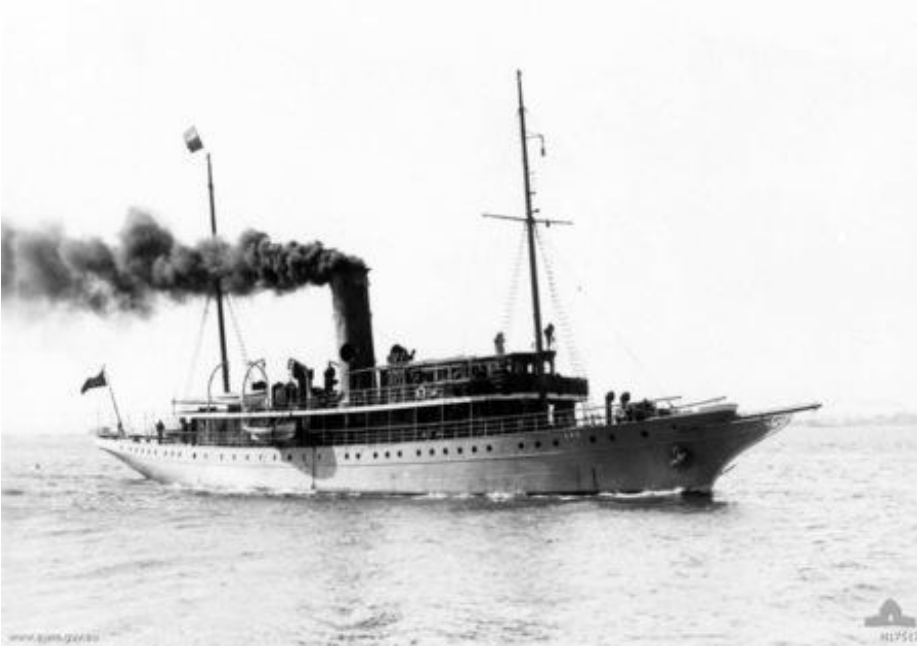
Australia at first planned to take German positions such as Yap Island, and *Una* was to be part of this force. However, Japan (a naval ally of Britain in World War I) was moving into these areas, and on December 3 the British Government asked Australia not to intervene, because it was important to keep a good relationship with Japan. Australia was to restrict itself to operations south of the equator.

There was some radio communication among the ships of the force, and even with Australia, but it was not reliable. Sometimes it took days for a message to be received, because of 'atmospherics', ('static' and other interference), the primitive quality of the equipment, and of inexperience of the operators. Messages, when received, were often garbled. The result was that coodination of forces was very difficult.

Una, with its aircraft, arrived at Rabaul on December 17. It had been delayed by the need to load 200 tons of coal fuel. With other vessels, she was then sent to take over, and if necessary to subdue, the remaining German settlements throughout Kaiser Wilhelmsland.

Una visited many former German settlements, but there was no resistance to an Australian take-over, and the aircraft were never used. The main task of the administrators carried by *Una* was to explain to the natives that they had new colonial masters.

captured by the Australians. *Komet* was quickly equipped with three 4-inch guns and other weapons, and commissioned as *HMAS Una* on 17 November.



At noon on 27 November orders were received at Point Cook to send the Farman seaplane and a BE 2C aircraft to Sydney to be loaded on *Una* for military service. The aircraft were dismantled and a few hours later were on the train to Sydney. By 2 30 on 29 November the *Una's* captain reported that the aircraft, the airmen, and the necessary spare parts, supplies etc were on board. This was a remarkable feat of logistics. Members of this first expeditionary force were Lieutenant Harrison, officer in charge, Lieutenant Merz as the second pilot, Sergeant Shortland and, Private McIntosh, Private Mason and Private Pivot. These two aircraft were the

After the first flight

On 22 May Guillaux and Lebbeus Hordern announced their intention to fly the seaplane from Sydney to Melbourne, with only one stop en route, but this flight was never attempted. At about this time, Guillaux also announced his intention to remain permanently in Australia, making his home in Sydney. He had purchased some more aircraft that would arrive in about three months.

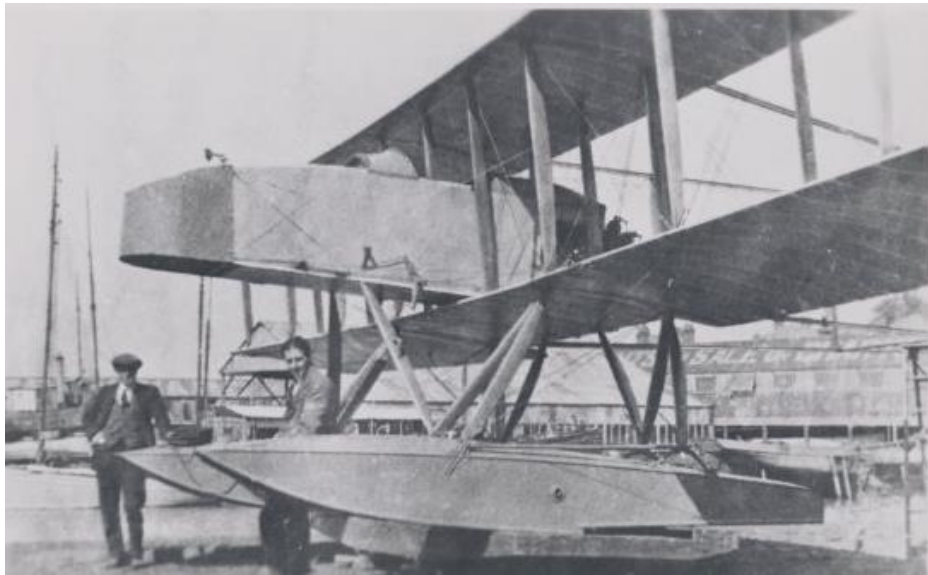
During June Guillaux was largely occupied with giving his performances. He travelled south, performing at Wagga Wagga, Albury, Melbourne, Bendigo, Ballarat, Adelaide and, after returning to Melbourne, at Geelong. Then on July 16-18 he made an epic flight in his Bleriot from Melbourne to Sydney, carrying Australia's first air mail and air freight. This was claimed to be the longest such flight that had been made in the world at the time. Liptons tea and O.T. juice, sponsors of the flight, mounted huge advertising campaigns and the entire population was aware of this great achievement.

Meanwhile the seaplane was used intermittently. Guillaux himself had returned to Sydney from Melbourne by train for a few days before his performance in Bendigo (8 June) and made several flights with the seaplane. He is also recorded as flying the seaplane in the week beginning 24 July.

The outbreak of World War I

Only a fortnight after the mail flight, war broke out. This completely dominated the newspapers, and largely for this reason Guillaux' mail-carrying feat is now not widely known.

The Herald reported Guillaux' eagerness to return to France, but these plans were delayed by a bad crash on August 1 in his Bleriot, at Ascot Racecourse in Sydney. This area is now part of Kingsford-Smith airport. Guillaux was incapacitated for a few weeks, then, when his aircraft had been repaired, he performed in Newcastle and Bathurst. Guillaux eventually sailed for Europe on HMAT *Orvieto* on October 22. He accompanied the Headquarters staff of the First Australian Division, listed as 'Aviator', and travelled with an unnamed attendant. He was killed in France on 21 May 1917, while testing a new aircraft.



CFS 7. Picture: <http://www.adf-gallery.com.au/>

At the outbreak of war Hordern presented his seaplane to the Australian Government and the aircraft was taken on strength at Point Cook as CFS7, in other words the seventh aircraft, and the first seaplane, of what eventually became the RAAF.

It was fitted with two main sprung floats and a small tail float. The crew nacelle was positioned on the lower wing, and carried two seats with the pilot in the forward position. The seaplane was meant for use as a two-seat training and reconnaissance aircraft.

The seaplane goes to war

In 1884-5 Germany had colonised Kaiser Wilhelmsland (north eastern New Guinea) and the Bismarck Archipelago (New Britain and New Ireland), Nauru, the Marshall Islands and the northern Solomon Islands (Buka, Bougainville and other islands). When the war broke out in 1914, the German settlements were potential, and in some cases actual, calling places for German raiding ships. Many Australians had regarded the German colonies as intrusions on Australia's sphere of influence, and there was strong support for an expedition which was sent to capture them.

The capital of the combined German colonial area was Rabaul, and it was captured by Australian forces during the period 11-13 September. There was a minor conflict with, on the Australian side, six men were killed and four wounded. Only a few hundred Australian troops and sailors were involved in the fighting, and the Germans had less than 100 soldiers plus a native levy of about 110 men. The natives were, not surprisingly, not very enthusiastic soldiers. Madang was taken without resistance on 24 September.

The following month the *Komet*, a modern a service vessel for the German possessions in the area, was