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October 2008 NEWSLETTER

Woody's Airline Tales

As the SAAB 340B leaves Burketown heading north towards Mornington Island it passes over a downed USA B24D bomber, that was named Little Eva. The aircraft crashed into this remote area December 3, 1942.

The US bomber took off from Iron Range on a bombing mission, it became lost and ended up over the Gulf of Carpentaria. The pilot ordered a bail out and the crew to meet at the crash site to regroup.



First Officer Simon Loyd (Yogie Bear), and Flight Attendant Reanna heading through the Gulf

The aircraft, flying on its own, performed an almost perfect landing. Near Moonlight Creek. Crosson and Wilson were the only two to reach the crash site – they headed east and were rescued. Grimes, Dyer, Speltic and Gaston decided to head west, in the end only three crew members survived.

On 16th December 1942 Lt N R Crosson (Pilot) and Lt Wilson were accidentally found walking across Escott Station, 15 km west of Burketown.

Grady Gaston was found by an aboriginal tracker, and rescued from a paper bark hut on Seven Emu Station 23rd March 1943. He had grey hair and only weighed 80lbs, the Outback ordeal had taken its toll. After being nursed back to health by the locals, he went home to Alabama, worked for UPS, and passed away in 1998.

The fate of the crew is a sad tale, Lt McKeon, Lt Hilton and Cpl Gurdas did not bail out. These three were killed in the crash. Lt Workman's parachute caught on the rear door framework, killing him when the aircraft hit the ground.

Lt Grimes had been one of the survivors but was swept into the ocean after getting caught in Robinson River around December 25th.

A civilian search party went out looking for survivors, but the imminent wet season forced them to return. Police Officer Bob Hagarty with two aboriginal trackers and a colleague carried on and led a four man search.

The aircraft was located January 15th 1943, the B-24 Liberator was Serial No: 123762, had crashed December 4th 1942, six of the crew had parachuted to safety, four had not.

After inspection of the site Bob Hagarty sent an aboriginal tracker south west, and another north and east. The trackers returned to the camp later that evening, they had found tracks and they informed Bob Hagarty in which direction the survivors were headed.

The wet season set in January 19th 1943, heavy and continuous rain obliterated the last tracks, and finding anyone with the trackers was not an option.

Midday on the 20th January Bob Hagarty's horse was bitten by a King Brown snake and it bolted into unbroken scrub and died. The search party lost another horse 26th January. Bob Hagarty arrived back to civilisation February 4th 1943. They had endured sand flies and mosquito in plague proportions, they'd lost two horses and were deflated after being unable to find any more survivors.

The Great Australian Outback

“The Gulf run clockwise starts with a 6:00am departure from Cairns,” Graham Woods (Woodsy) said. It arrives at Mt Isa, unloads and reloads and heads north towards Doomadgee and then onto Burketown. After a quick unload and re-load, it's onto Mornington Island. By now its lunch time so the crew have lunch while the local agent unloads and loads the aircraft. We're only on the ground for 40 minutes and then it's across to Normanton and then back to Cairns, arriving at around 14:30.”

Burketown, one of Woodsy's stops

Barramundi Fishing Capital of Australia, its small population of only 235, lead an isolated life in the Gulf of Carpentaria in far north-western Queensland, Australia.

Burketown is located 2115 kilometres to the north-west of the States capital, Brisbane, with the nearest larger town being Cloncurry, located 410 kilometres to the south.

If you needed to drive to the next nearest town for a carton of beer, its 410km away, more than a four hour drive.

The town is named in honor of ill-fated explorer Robert O'Hara Burke following the overland expedition in 1861.

The first European settlers arrived in the region not long after Burke and partner William John Wills' expedition to the Gulf of Carpentaria. By the mid 1860s, several cattle stations - including Gregory Downs, Floraville, and Donors Hill - had been founded inland from the present site of Burketown.

The town of Burketown was developed around a site on the Albert River where supplies for these stations landed. At first, it was hoped the town would develop into a major settlement in north-western Queensland.

Unfortunately, tropical diseases ravaged the population in 1866 and the town was hit by a damaging tropical cyclone in 1887 resulting in the destruction of 98 percent of Burketown. Burketown's population peaked at 265 in 1911.

Burketown is believed to be the basis of 'Willstown' (note the name of Burke's partner, above), the town fictionally developed into a successful and growing community by Jean Paget, a character created by Nevil Shute in his bestselling novel "A Town Like Alice".

In more recent times, Burketown is known as the Barramundi capital of Australia and holds an annual Barramundi Fishing Competition during Easter each year.

Tales of Global Aircraft Relocations

Australian Air Ferry has been extremely busy the past few months moving aircraft across the pacific in both directions.

We have delivered some of the highest performance single engine aircraft in the market today with recent deliveries of a Cessna 400 (Columbia 400) and the First Mooney Acclaim Type S to venture to Australia.

The Acclaim commenced its journey from Kerrville in Texas, and our Crew took the opportunity to tour through the very impressive Mooney factory.



Mooney's Factory workers can best be described as craftsmen (and women to be politically correct), with much of the aircraft being produced in an "old school" way. The work and care that goes into creating these

aircraft is truly amazing. It is a complete contrast to the manufacturing techniques utilised by new age, mass production manufacturing.

The New Accliam's journey started from Kerrville with only 10.4 hours on the Hobbs metre, representing the test flight program and the new owners factory training. It was flown to California via Albuquerque and North Las Vegas Airports.



Other aircraft making the hop across to Australia included a factory new Cessna T206H, the first of this model to be imported into Australia.

Oshkosh Air Show

Again this year we managed to supervise an elderly bunch of old aviators as they made their way through the greatest General Aviation Air Show in the world.

It never ceases to both impress and amaze all who attend, again hundreds of exhibitors turned up with their best and latest.

From the Boeing "Dreamlifter" to John Travolta's private 707, and the Red Bull Aerobatic Helicopter. The awesome display put on by the USAF F22 raptor, left us all feeling like a beer or two. Or in our case a XXXX, because we cannot spell Beer in Queensland.

This year seemed to be the year of the Jet, with the diamond D jet nearing certification, The Cirrus SJ50 "Vision" Jet making a public appearance. Eclipse showing the new Eclipse 400 and news that the Piper Jet flew for the first time during the week. The next few years are defiantly going to be an exciting period.



MacAir Airlines

MacAir Airlines new owner Terrence Byrt, is passionate about the Australian icon, Ansett Airlines. We have it from a reliable insider that the airline will be re-named next year Ansett – MacAir. We can expect to see Ansett Airlines iconic logos on the tail of a fleet of SAAB340, ATR, and Q400 aircraft.

MacAir also announced the commencement of runs from Cairns to Bamaga. These new flights compliment the already busy Edwards River, Kowanyama flights operated into the far northern Peninsula region. MacAir commences runs to Mackay from Townsville on a Saturdays. And UYN, another SAAB340B arrived from Florida recently, with a second one in transit.

Airshow Attendance

If you'd like to attend the North American Airshow this year, and you need assistance, please send us an email and we'll be happy to help you. We're able to organise cheap accommodation in local houses and we'll steer you in the right direction for cheap flights. It's not that expensive and worth every cent. Oshkosh starts 27th July 2009 and runs to August 02 2009. Also visit www.airventure.org/

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