

# Australian Air-Ferry

## *May Newsletter*

### **The Admirals Table**

I've been wondering what this month's newsletter should be about, and an incident with the US naval warships stands out as the most significant event in May.

We were considered a threat to U.S.A national security and cannons were pointed directly at our small formation flight as it sailed through the middle of a large United States Naval convoy 1000nm from land in any direction.

It all started when Australian Air-Ferry agreed to ferry two new Cessna aircraft from the factory in Independence Kansas, to Australia.



Two Cessna 182T aircraft on the ramp at Norfolk Island

Pilots Michael Cooke and Garry Mitchell met in Independence 5<sup>th</sup> May, after catching some shut-eye we were ready to proceed to California where the aircraft would be readied for their oceanic crossing.

Greg Donovan purchased one of the 182s and he was the active co-pilot in VH-SYI, we headed for Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon. One day after taking delivery of his new Aircraft he was flying it through the Grand Canyon.



Asteroid hit in Mid West USA



Approaching the Grand Canyon

It's a majestic day when we arrive at the canyons edge, clouds hang lazily at 1000ft agl, underneath the cloud the visibility is unlimited and the 8,000ft drop over the edge as we fly into the canyon is really impressive.

Even though I've done it several times, it seems different every time and I've noticed different colours and features each flight.

After two days in California we headed further south to Santa Barbara where the winds were considered better for the Pacific crossing, which would be attempted the next day.

Before daybreak we're fuelling the aircraft, submitting flight plans and making last minute modifications to the aircraft load.

It's just after daybreak and the two Cessna 182 aircraft line up side by side on Santa Barbara's longest runway.

The duo rotate almost simultaneously and maintain runway heading for several minutes.

The robust Cessna's climb effortlessly towards their cruising altitude of 6,000ft.

With the first hour out of the way it's time to settle back and plug in some music, the next 14 or 15 hours would be spent transferring fuel and making HF calls to San Francisco.

Both pilots relax early in the flight, the Cessnas are great workhorses and with very few hours on the clock there's little that might go wrong, they've managed to impress so far.

Several hours into the flight as we monitor guard and the numbers, a stern voice came over the radio, “this is a US Warship, two aircraft at 6,000ft tracking south west, state your intentions immediately”.



Aircraft Carrier



One of the ships in convoy (to our right)

We're 1000nm from land in any direction and this is one of the most remote Oceanic regions in the world, it's very unusual to encounter anyone or thing out here.

We came back quickly with our intentions, which were simple really, we wanted to make it to Hawaii in one piece, safely.

Several minutes of information giving followed, the radio operator was getting instruction from behind and his returns were delayed, every word had been double checked with a superior officer.

We could not see anything in any direction and we started to wonder where these calls were coming from.

Fifteen minutes passed before we sighted the middle two ships of what we believe was a larger fleet of U.S Naval ships that were also headed west. We had flown right down the middle of a heavily armed flotilla heading in exactly the same direction as ours.

I keyed the mike and asked, “can we do a touch and go on the aircraft carrier”, to which there was no reply. “Please guys”, a touch and go in the middle of the Pacific, how amazing would that be. I guess they were way to serious for that.

Someone suggested that we should “buzz” the Cruiser in the middle, to which I decided might be rather risky given recent global events.

Our job was to get the aircraft to Australia without any additional lead, other than what they'd been manufactured with, so we stuck with our original plan, which was to get to Hawaii.

We assume the warships alarms were sounded bringing everyone to some higher level of awareness. Obviously a formation of low-level aircraft in the middle of the Pacific wasn't a normal occurrence for them, or us. Although how much damage could a 182 do to a large ship.

Luckily our names were Western, I think if they weren't we might have been in real trouble.

As we passed through the middle you could feel several eyes upon us as we were closely monitored passing.

I think the Admiral himself may have been on deck with binoculars thinking what the hell are two 182 Cessna's doing out here.

As we pull in front of the fleet a familiar voice came back on the radio, the Admiral would like you guys to join us for dinner.

We responded with our contact details and the warships were very guarded with their information and timetable. However we made contact at our next destination (Hilo) and unfortunately our travel plans did not co-inside with the fleets.

That little encounter woke us up and the second half of the flight was filled with discussions regarding the naval warship fleet (touch and gos on a carrier).

The next day we departed Hilo with the second aircraft owner, Greg Mortimer (co-pilot).



Greg Mortimer on Christmas Island



182 Wingman - Michael Cooke enjoying Christmas islands hospitality

Greg Mortimer, a geochemist by profession, lives in Australia and is also one of the world's foremost mountaineers. From 1979 to 1984, Greg worked as a geologist, a survival training instructor, and a Scientific Affairs Adviser for the New Zealand Antarctic Division.

His many achievements in mountaineering include: the first ever ascent of the South face of Annapurna Two in 1983; the first Australian ascent of the North face of Mount Everest, without the use of supplementary oxygen, in 1984; the first Australian ascent of Vinson Massif, the highest mountain in Antarctica, in 1988; and in 1990 the first Australian ascent of K2, the second highest mountain in the world.

In 1988 Greg organised and led the Australian Bicentennial Antarctic Expedition. These journeys have been covered in two documentaries, which have been distributed worldwide - "The Loneliest Mountain", by Film Australia and "Everest - The Australian Assault", by the Australian Television Channel Nine Network.

Greg's remarkable accomplishments have been recognised by the Australian government with the Order of Australia Medal for mountaineering. He is also the recipient of three Australian Geographic Society medals.

With the infamous Greg Mortimer on board we departed Hilo for Christmas Island, somewhat of a culture shock for the pole lover.



Christmas Island natives perform their traditional dance for Greg



Christmas Island just prior sunset

We asked and got a clearance to depart Hilo via the active volcano, a very impressive site from the air. There's hot lava flowing into the sea a few miles from the volcano's hot centre, so the islands are growing daily.



Approaching the active volcano



Inside the volcano

The proceeding days were spent extracting Amazon stories from Greg, his company Aurora Expeditions (1800 637 688) runs tours up the Amazon, and to the north and south poles. And yes he had encountered Anacondas and flesh eating fish in the wild, very interesting.

The Pacific crossing went quickly and the aircraft performed like thoroughbreds, they were delivered to their new homes in Australia seven days after we had accepted them from the Cessna factory in Kansas.



Bull Head City – Land in Arizona and cross the Colorado river to gamble in Nevada



Wingman Cooke gives the “thumbs-up”



Hoover Dam, Nevada

### **Little Boy Lost**

Whilst we're talking about US security, recent events in Washington State might also be of interest to some of you.

An instructor drew a line on his (Sectional Chart) map that took his aircraft and student right over the top of The White House. This was the shortest route from A – B.

His sectional clearly had the restricted area marked and in light of recent events in the US, you'd think a local would have had more sense.

He departed and proceeded directly over The White House in broad daylight. Fighter jets were scrambled to intercept the aircraft, which could not be contacted by radio due to an army radio jamer, used to jam all transmissions over the area.

The White House was evacuated and many productive work hours were lost.

Australian Air-Ferry had the opportunity to discuss the situation with a FAA spokesperson in Oakland.

The instructor has lost all his flying privileges, in fact they're addiment he will never hold a licence to fly an aircraft again.

The moral of this story, is don't get lost in the US at the moment, it could cost you your life.

### Surplus Equipment

We have a 406 Mhz (digital) PLB locator beacon for sale, this is the latest in search and rescue niceties, it transmits your lat/long via satellite to NOAA every few minutes for 24 hours. We'll sell it near-new to you for \$950 Australian dollars and you can register it to your own person / organization. A must have for bush walkers and outback Australia flights.

We also have a black and white Lowrance 1000 GPS available for \$1,150 Australian. They're equipped with a pacific international database, and have seen very little service. We've also got a six-man life raft that has all sorts of inclusions, never used. Talk to Darren Gibson about these items.



FastFind 406 ELT With GPS



AirMap 1000 GPS

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