



TAA / Australian Airlines 25 Year Club

Newsletter No. 105

March 2020

Editor: John Wren

President's Report

Museum Closed from Thursday 19th March until further notice.

After careful consideration, your Committee decided to close the Museum due to the virus COVID-19 until further notice. We looked at:

- a. The medical reports from around the world citing the extreme danger to people aged 60 +, and
- b. Most of our Volunteers operating the Museum are people aged 60 +, and
- c. The very high number of domestic and foreign aircrew and engineers that are at the Flight Training Centre daily, and who drop into the Museum, and
- d. The visitors, Members and Tour Groups who visit the Museum are generally aged 60 +, and
- e. Over the weekend 14 / 15 March the number of confirmed cases doubled with over half the cases from people with no history of international travel. Things have only got worse since.

The Committee will monitor the matter closely and recommend when to re-open the Museum to the public again. Incoming Museum emails and mail will be monitored. You will be able to track any news through our web site www.taamuseum.org.au and for those without computers, there will be a mail-out when the Museum is back in operation. The Newsletter will continue and provide updates.

We apologise for any inconvenience the Museum closure may cause.

We hope all our Members / Volunteers and their families stay safe.

- Despite the virus our **AGM** was held on Wednesday 18th March without any drama. As there was only one nomination from Geoff Kerton [to fill the vacancy when Jim Collins retired] the other three Committee Members, who indicated they were again available, were all [Geoff Kerton, Arnold Rogers, Eddie Creaney and John Wren] elected. See report elsewhere in the Newsletter.
- Not much has happened with us about the plans for **QF's 100th birthday** celebrations [the actual birthday is in November 2020]. With what is happening to QF and all the other airlines in the world because of the virus, it may turn out to be a low key event which is a real shame. More later. Check-out the new **QF in-flight safety briefing** with a 100th birthday theme <https://youtu.be/rLq8if1nkTM>. Much of the filming was done at HARS using their aircraft.
- The **Club tour** that was all planned and ready to go will have to be deferred until another time as everything starts to shut down to curtail the virus.
- Just a friendly reminder if you are **having a clean up at home, or downsizing**, we will look after your donations of TAA and Australian Airlines memorabilia at the Museum. It would be a shame to have the family throw it out.

- We have been invited back to participate in the **Avalon Air Show** in Feb / Mar 21. Volunteer Frank Greco and team are already planning our display.
- Over the Xmas break some of our Volunteers cheerfully gave up their time to take part in a **working bee** [7, 8 & 9 Feb and 15 Jan]. We got a lot more of the time line done thanks to Terry Masocco, Arnold Rogers, Eddie Creaney, Libby Watkins, Geoff Kerton, Vicky Kerton, John Booth, Duncan Cameron, Barry Gawne, Jim More, Frank Greco, Ron Hee, Ronny Reiss, Rick Schembri, Frank Sullivan and John Wren. Wow, the Museum is really looking sharp now.

Newsletter

This is our 105th Newsletter issued by the 25 Year Club. We hope you have been enjoying the content over the years and, if you would like to write an article, just send it to the Newsletter Editor at the Museum.

The envelope your Newsletter arrived in has your 25 Year Club financial status printed on it, so you will know if you need to help us with another donation now, or when in the future. The Newsletter will be emailed to members who request it in lieu of surface mail [saves on postage]. The email group will also be able to click on links to various movies, and establish their financial status from the covering email. Surface mail will always be available.

[Financial status marks on the envelope [FM xx = Financial Member to 30 June 'xx' year, and UFM = Unfinancial Member now]. A few Members are still using the old Commonwealth Bank electronic transfer details. It is now Qudos Bank electronic transfer [BSB: 704 865 Account No.: 02190853] when paying your membership. For some, when using Qudos for the first time [only], they ask for an account name. Insert "Trans Australia Airlines Museum Acct".

AGM

The TAA 25 Year Club Annual General Meeting was held at the Skyways Hotel, Airport West on Wednesday 18 March 2020.

It was a very small gathering of Members due to everyone's virus concerns however we were fortunate that many Members were kind enough to send in Proxy Votes by mail and email to allow the AGM to function; and we were well over the numbers for a quorum.

As the number of nominations equalled the number of vacant positions for Committee, all those nominated were elected – Arnold Rogers, Eddie Creaney, Geoff Kerton and John Wren.

There was significant discussion regarding the virus and the decision to close the Museum to the public until further notice which is consistent with other Museums around not only Victoria, but also Australia.

After the AGM there was a general question time and matters like 'Hawdons' activities were high on the list. It would seem HARS are determined to fly Hawdon regularly and it features in every one of their Newsletters.

After the discussions we enjoyed a great lunch and catch-up, partially sponsored by the 25 Year Club.

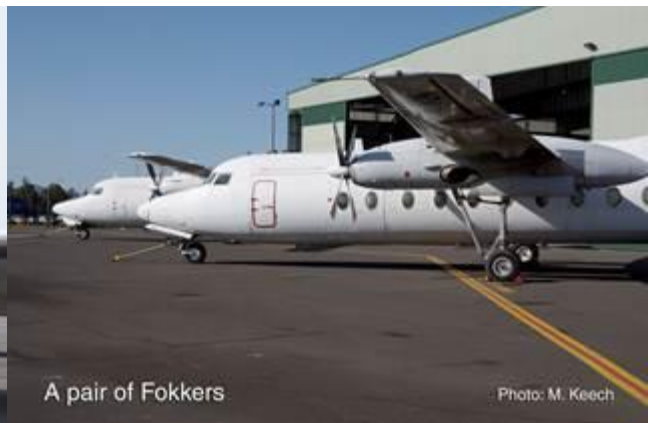
Following the AGM a special Committee Meeting was called [as required by our Constitution] to **elect office bearers**. The result of that Meeting was President: John Wren, Vice President: Terry Masocco, Secretary: Arnold Rogers and Treasurer: Paul Gluschenko.

News from HARS



“Douglas DC-3 ‘Hawdon’ took to the sky in a stream take-off with Douglas C-47B VH-EAF; the pair stunning our visitors and the wider community as they flew in company in a rarely seen gathering of Dakotas.”

At left – the view from VH-EAF looking at Hawdon ahead of it ready for the “stream take-off”



[above left] ‘Hawdon’ on the flight line. [above right] One of these F27’s is to be painted in TAA colours.

Foundation Day Lunch – major prize.



At our Foundation Day lunch back in September 2019, Alan Evans won the major prize – time in the QF [ex TAA] B737 simulator. It has taken a while to coordinate Alan’s availability with the sim program however we finally did it on 10 December 2019.

Alan [R/H seat] is pictured here with Stephen Caruana guiding Alan to a perfect landing

A History of TAA Bristol Freighters flown in New Guinea.

By Ron Austin (Bristol Captain 1963-1966)

This is a story of how it came to be that TAA pilots in NG were flying 2nd hand freighter aircraft purchased from Pakistan.

Some background.

The introduction of Bristol Freighters into Pakistan was a political decision of the British Government. In 1948 the Pakistan Air Force had ordered a batch of Bristol Brigand fighters from England and then cancelled the order. The British demanded compensation and substituted the order with Bristol Freighters. These strange aircraft were unwanted but the contract was completed. The Freighter aircraft apparently did provide satisfactory service for their Air Force. A total of 71 Freighters, Mark 21's and 31.s were ferried from England, to the Pakistan Air Force.

The majority were used for general Air Force operational flying but many were converted for special projects. Some were modified for VIP travel, five of them were fitted with spray equipment to spray plagues of locusts and several aircraft were modified in 1953 to carry a 4000 lb. bomb. These special "bomber" aircraft had been fitted with under wing hard points to carry the bombs and had a clear plastic panel built into the bottom of the large front clam shell doors. One can assume, to be used with a bomb sight.

With this background, in 1961 Trans Australian Airline joins the story as part of the B170 history.



TAA Bristol VH-TBA

Early in 1959 the Australian Federal Government had made a decision to replace Qantas, who operated within New Guinea, with the domestic airline Trans-Australian Airlines; they were to be the "carrier" responsible for all passenger and freight flights. At that time the largest aircraft Qantas used in NG was the Douglas DC3's. TAA soon realised that an aircraft larger than a DC3 was needed to move the heavy cargo expected to be delivered to NG in the near future.

Ansett Airlines (operating as Mandated Airlines) were also flying in NG in opposition to Qantas. It was decided that TAA and Mandated Airlines, as potential competing freight carriers in NG, would make a joint purchase, from Pakistan, of surplus Bristol Freighter aircraft. Australian crews flew these to Australia in 1961. There were three aircraft for MAL and 4 for TAA. After arrival, selected aircraft were serviced by their respective Airlines and then flown to NG. The aircraft for TAA were registered in Australia as VH-TBA, VH-TBB, VH-TBC and VH-TBD. TAA planned to use the first two in NG and to retain C and D in Australia for replacement parts. We discovered these ex-Pakistan aircraft were not the first Bristol Freighters to fly in NG.

In 1963, having been posted to New Guinea for 3 years, my flying endorsement training in NG was conducted by experienced pilots who were due to return to Australia at the end of their three year posting. They taught us, not only to find our way around the un-mapped Highlands, but also how to survive this different aviation environment while flying in the extremely dangerous mix of mountains, rocks and cloud.

During this introductory period on DC3's, as part of an overall endorsement, we were taught to land on the steep 8% slope at Wau. We learned to increase the engine power immediately on touchdown to maintain our rolling inertia up the slope to the top of the grass field. We then swung the tail around until the aircraft was facing across the slope. The locals native Bois would then duck in under the engines with the wheel chocks, fit them tightly against the front and back of the wheels and only then, securely held, could we stop the engines. During discussion about the very steep slope on the field my instructor told a story of the Bristol Freighter which ran uncontrolled down the hill to crash at the bottom of the airport. He said "now it is used by the natives as a Boi house"

Recent research has uncovered the true story of this first Bristol in NG and its early demise. A demonstrator MK-1A, with registration G-AIMC, was prepared by Bristol in England to undertake a sales tour of Australia and New Guinea. It departed England in March 1947, arriving in Darwin after 19 sector stops on the journey.

On take-off from Darwin for Melbourne, the upper access hatch behind the pilots broke off. I can relate to this as I also lost a hatch, having failed to check that it was locked after our radio had been serviced in Madang. In my case there was no damage but in the Darwin incident the "flying" hatch detached and damaged the tailplane. The demonstrator aircraft was repaired, and although this delayed the New Zealand tour, it commenced on July 1947. Back to Australia in October, the demo aircraft was serviced and then loaned to QANTAS New Guinea for evaluation. Qantas flew it up to New Guinea for trials.

Part of the overall assessment was operating in the highland goldfields of NG. It made several flights into grass strips at Wau and Bulolo. Of interest, the Wau strip is a steep 1 in 12 slope and is 3400 feet above sea level.

On this day the aircraft landed up the slope and stopped at the top facing up the slope, not across the slope parking as used by other aircraft. After stopping, chocks were fitted under the wheels and then the parking brake was applied. However, in this case the nipple on the parking brake became detached from the brake lever and the aircraft ran backward down the hill with the personnel still on board. The engineer and one other jumped clear but the rest were carried down the hill and over a 20 foot drop at the bottom. No one was injured.

Apparently, the reason they did not park across the slope on this occasion was because previously the side parking method had been tried, but the effect of the slope distorted the aircraft fuselage and made it difficult to lock the front clam shell doors. On this occasion the nose up parking was tried as a remedy. On impact with the ridge, the fuselage broke in the region of the rear door and the aircraft was declared damaged beyond repair. All equipment, including the engines, was removed for re-use. The fuselage remained there on site and is used as quarters for native employees of an adjacent coffee plantation. The aircraft had only flown 250 hours and was valued at 50,000 pounds.

The two TAA operational aircraft commenced their flights in NG, VH-TBB in June 1961 and VH-TBA in September 1961.

The Bristol's large load capacity was required because the NG Administration intended constructing a road suitable for trucks, from Lae Township to Goroka and Mt Hagen located in the centre of the Whagi valley in the Highlands. This was a very major undertaking. For the project they needed trucks, bridge girders, bulldozers, tractors, graders and similar gear which could only reach the Highlands of NG in an aircraft as large as the Bristol.

Other non-government contracts were also planned, one being to move the components of a complete new tea factory from the Madang wharf to the town of Mt Hagen, located in the Highlands at an elevation of 5500

We discovered the purchase order to the manufacturers in England for the tea factory included the specification that "every component must be designed to fit inside a Bristol Freighter". When loading the 'factory' we found the large round condensers fitted into the aircraft hull almost like a cork in a bottle.

Other heavy freight items I have flown into the Highlands include complete D4 Caterpillar tractors; another was a road grader [stripped of its engine] but complete with the blade still attached to enable the unit to be unloaded with our portable ramps at destination. When carrying trucks as cargo, the wheels were often removed and they were rolled in on their brake drums. This reduced the height of truck to enable it to be moved far enough into the

hull, below the wing structure, to be able to shut the door. Our cargo staff became quite versatile at finding solutions to loading difficulties!

In preparing the aircraft for NG operations, some upgrade modifications were completed in Australia by TAA to improve the overall safety of the proposed operations.

A major change was to remove the Bristol brakes. Originally, they were fitted with typically English un-reliable air activated bag brakes and TAA replaced them with DC6 hydraulic brakes. To actuate these new brakes a converter was fitted which turned the original air pressure brakes, into hydraulic pressure. The original air brakes had already dangerously failed during a training flight at Mangalore airport.

A hair-raising story of this brake bag failure was later described by Captain Ivan Neil.

When the aircraft first arrived in Melbourne, Ivan was one of two new Bristol Captains being converted to the type under the supervision of a senior TAA check pilot. During this conversion training at Mangalore, when the 2nd trainee was in the Captains seat doing circuits and landings, Ivan decided to watch a landing by lying down below on the floor of the cargo hold, and looking through the Perspex panel fitted into the lower part of the door. After a smooth touch down, the brakes were applied and the pressure bag in one-wheel brake failed. Ivan hung on to the floor as well as he could while the aircraft turned left, ran off the edge of the runway then was steered, by rudder, back onto the hard stuff. Ivan said he would never go down there again.

When all necessary work was completed the aircraft were flown to Lae to commence the freight operation. TAA made a decision that the first flight in NG would be celebrated by an invitation to all local dignities. At the insistence of TAA management Captain Neal departed for this flight in very marginal weather conditions. Immediately he departed the Tower declared "Lae airport is closed to all operations". Shortly after, on climb out, one engine failed and had to be shut down. Capt. Neil advised by radio "returning to land at Lae". The tower advised him the airport was closed and his reply was "Well, I am just about to reopen it." This was typical of Ivan's very positive approach as a Captain. All ended well.

Later the two Bristol's were based in Madang as this town was the centre of the freight transfer into the interior of NG. The advantage of the airport at Madang was being adjacent to a cargo wharf and closest to the airstrips in the Highlands. The airport had a single runway used for all departures and arrivals, and was sealed with bitumen. Most of the other landing strips used by us in the Highlands were either loose dirt or grass which was very slippery when wet. Many strips were one-way operations; you land uphill and then take off in the reverse direction, downhill.

The TAA pilots required to fly the Bristol in NG usually completed a ground theory course in Australia before their posting. The in-flight training for the endorsement was conducted in Madang. Those pilots converted to fly the Bristol soon appreciated the suitability of this aircraft to carry freight, it was easy to load and unload, and the power /weight ratio was superior to the DC3's making it much safer to fly in marginal conditions.



[left] loading aviation fuel drums.

[right] On final approach to Wabag



The large Bristol Hercules sleeve valve engines were powerful and rather more complex to handle than the DC3 Pratt and Whitney engines.

First flight of the day required a very long idling period to raise the temperature of the thick engine oil to a satisfactory viscosity. To start the engines at the high-altitude strips, the priming of the fuel system was radically different to the procedure used to start at sea level. We could not rely on the petrol gauges fitted in the aircraft because, after refuelling, the small quantity of fuel we carried could only be reliably guaranteed if the total in each tank was measured by hand with a wooden dip stick. This task usually fell to our young First Officers.

After each refuelling at Madang the F/O's would climb past the radio rack behind the crew seats, open a hatch and climb out on top of the fuselage. From here it was a dangerous walk along the top of the wings to reach the fuel caps and check the quantity of petrol with the dip stick. When looking into the large wing tanks the amount of fuel in the bottom always seemed tiny. For the First Officers there was a very real danger of slipping off the wing or the fuselage top. This was in 1963 and would not be allowed in today's Health and Safety requirements.

Our Engineers coped very well, with absolutely minimum equipment, with their job of keeping the Bristol's flying. Most daily maintenance was done in the heat of the sun, without any cover for shade. A partial solution to this was to keep their spanners cool in a bucket of water while working in the open.

We experienced many serviceability problems not expected by the designers. For example, the tail wheel had an electric solenoid lock that could be released for taxiing and then

before take-off it was locked to help keep the a/c straight on the runway. When landing and taking off on wet grass strips in the Highlands, the mud would cover the solenoid. During the flight back to Madang the mud would solidify and after landing, on some occasions, the electric solenoid was not strong enough to withdraw the lock and enable us to swing the tail to taxi. This fault required the aircraft to remain on the runway while the First Officer exited by the top hatch, walked down the fuselage and jumped off at the tail, He then lay on the ground with the aircraft fire axe and hammered the locking pin to loosen the mud. This problem was probably unknown to the Bristol designers.



Pushing the aircraft up to the ramp to unload motor vehicles.

Another incident may illustrate how the lack of freight handling equipment affected the job. On one flight two large steel underground fuel tanks were carried to a grass strip at Minj which served a tiny coffee growers' district. The cylindrical tanks were loaded in Madang using fork lifts but we had no such equipment at Minj. After some discussion, the agent made contact with the local Patrol Officer. One of this Officer's responsibilities was supervising the Bois in that district who were committed to jail for minor offences.

He appeared at the airstrip with 27 of these men from the gaol. Having rope available in the cargo bay, we formed a bridle around the back of the tank, attached 2 long ropes to this, and with 13 Bois pulling on each rope they extracted the tank from the hull pulling, in unison, to a loud sing-sing cadence. These rhythmic chants were similar to the method used by the wind jammer sailors when hoisting sails, singing and pulling.

The first tank fell to the ground and was rolled away. The second now further down the sloping fuselage, was more difficult. One rope broke, spilling our willing assistants in a heap, but, with much laughter and a reef knot repaired rope, they extracted the second tank. Because of the longer ropes, when falling to the ground, this tank lacked directional control and rolled sideways. The tank fell against one open front door.

Before departure, when closing the doors, we found, with the distortion of the door, the locking dogs to secure the door could not be moved over centre into safety. Obviously, we could not fly in this condition, so after more discussion, the solution was to place half the number of Bois on the outside of each door to force them tightly together so the locks could be moved into safety. We then returned to Madang where our Engineers, after our explanation, took great care unlocking the dogs before readjusting the geometry of the swing doors.

Completion of the road to Mt.Hagen did reduce the quantity of air freight required to be carried from Madang into Goroka, Mt Hagen, Minj, Banz, Baiyer River and the other major towns. We seem to have created a rod for our own backs by lifting all that heavy gear into the highlands. The transport system could now run without the assistance of the Bristol Freighters.

To conclude, in 1967, after 5 years of intensive work in NG. TAA decided to remove the Bristol aircraft from New Guinea and sell them in Australia, to Air Express. Of our two Madang based aircraft, VH-TBB continued flying with Air Express and VH-TBA was stripped for spares in Brisbane.

TAA Engineers and crews involved in the operation of the Bristols.

Our research was assisted by the joint memories of those persons still surviving 42 years after leaving NG . Names may be missed. Perhaps we have an excuse.

Ground Engineers: Graeme Buntrock, Bob Harvey-Hall, Hans Helberg, Jim Littimore, Ron Mathews, Ian Johnson, Bruce Satchell, Alec Topp, Alan Thompson, Fred Nott.

First Officers: Fred Fethers, Darrell Mitchell, Peter Brown, Lance Grant, Eric Wiltshire, Barry Adamson.

Captains: Ivan Neal, Bob Slater, Jack Curtis, Frank Savage, John Guggenheimer, Ron Austin, Aart Hofman, Barry Stewart, John Herrick, Tony Armstrong, Bob Frazer, Daryl McKenzie, Nial Sullivan, Charlie White. END

[Ed. what a great story about NG and the TAA Bristol freighters – thanks Ron for the article and the time and dedication putting it all together. Hopefully the Newsletter will fit in the envelope!

Anyone else out their care to put pen to paper – even if it's just a short story?]

New to the Museum

This month we had a visit from one of our Members - **Alan Swann**, and did we get a surprise. Alan has given a permanent loan of all the paintings in the picture below to the Museum!

From top left there is a TAA Bristol B170 Mk 31 Freighter [very topical given the feature article about this very aircraft in this issue of the Newsletter], a TAA Catalina VH-SBV, a TAA DH-3 VH-SBQ, a TAA Dragon DH84 VH-ALL, a TAA Drover DHA-3 VH-DRB, a TAA Tiger Moth, a TAA B727 and a TAA Convair [in Royal livery].

This is a fabulous collection of paintings which can be seen in better detail on the 25 Year Club web site at <http://www.taamuseum.org.au/gallery/Whatsnew.html>

And this is not the first time Alan has similarly made a permanent loan to the Museum – we have another 5 of Alan's pictures [featured in a previous Newsletter].

When Alan retired from TAA he was GM – MEL Maintenance Facility. A keen supporter of the 25 Year Club and Museum, Alan is doing some more paintings for us, if he can fit us in, as his expertise is in demand from former staff and the public for aircraft paintings.



Vale

Our sincere condolences are extended to the families and friends of past TAA/Australian Airlines work colleagues. Fond memories will remain. [FM = Foundation Member]

Ian Eckersley	Finance	Aged 78	31/12/19
Robert (Bob) Jones	LAME MEL	Aged 88	17/01/20
Erkin Casperz	Intl. Travel HO	Aged 84	11/01/20
Frank Hunter	LAME MEL	Aged 81	02/02/20
Chris Strzelicki	Hostess		03/02/20
Peter Charmers	LAME MEL & BNE	Aged 70	05/02/20
Barry Elkington	Instrument Maker AMD	Aged 74	25/02/20
Cpt. Chris Gobel	Flt. Ops. MEL	Aged 79	19/02/20
David Boyle	Catering Sup. MEL	Aged 77	26/09/19

.....

*** Note the change from Commonwealth Bank electronic transfer details to Qudos Bank details. ***



TAA/AUSTRALIAN AIRLINES 25 YEAR CLUB INC. MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Name:Spouse's name:
 Address:
 City:State: Postcode:
 Phone:
 Mobile:Email:
 TAA/Australian Airlines/QANTAS service: Start date: Finish date:
 Primary area of work & where:
 Preferences (Please circle) Newsletter: Mail / Email Other correspondence: Mail / Email
 Additional comments:

 Donation: 1 year - \$20...3 years - \$60.....5 years - \$100.....Other amount \$.....Gift: \$.....

Cheque – payable to ‘TAA 25 Year Club’ mailed to:
 Membership Co-ordinator, TAA 25 Year Club, Qantas FTC, 7 York St, Airport West, Vic. 3042
Bank transfer – to ‘TAA 25 Year Club’: Qudos Bank BSB: 704 865 Account No.: 02190853
 Please include your name on bank transfers and, return this form by mail **OR** send by email to:
taamuseum@bigpond.com . **For enquiries:** Phone: 03 9280 8113 / 03 9280 8114.