



(McLintock, 1966I)



AIR TRANSPORT AND AIRPORTS

Early Companies

During the 1920s a number of companies provided commercial air services, but these were short lived.

The credit for organising the first regular scheduled passenger service in New Zealand appears to belong to F. Maurice Clarke and Squadron-Leader Malcolm McGregor who, in 1930, formed Air Travel. These two borrowed a DH 50 from the Government and on 6 November 1930 began a tri-weekly service between Christchurch and Dunedin. The public, however, was not yet ready to give their support to a scheduled air service and, after nine months, Air Travel had to close down. Seven weeks after Air Travel began its regular services, another company, Dominion Airlines Ltd., inaugurated a regular daily service between Gisborne and Hastings. This service, which began on 22 December 1930, proved particularly valuable in maintaining contact between the areas ravaged by the Napier earthquake and the rest of New Zealand. On 8 February 1931, just five days after the earthquake, the company's Desoutter monoplane crashed at Wairoa killing its three occupants. This was the first fatal air service accident in New Zealand and, as a result, Dominion Airlines was forced into liquidation.

It was in December 1934 that a Christchurch company, registered as Air Travel of New Zealand Ltd., began operations on the west coast of the South Island, where the lack of roads made other forms of communication difficult. The company's activities were maintained and extended until the outbreak of war in 1939, when the company owned 3 DH Fox Moth aircraft and 2 DH Dragonflies. East Coast Airways of Gisborne operated the Gisborne-Napier services with DH84 aircraft in 1935 and, later, extended its services to Palmerston North. (In 1938 East Coast Airways were amalgamated with Union Airways.) Cook Strait Airways, of Wellington, began in 1935 to provide successful services with DH Rapide aircraft between Wellington, Blenheim, and Nelson, later extending to the west coast of the South Island to link up with Air Travel of New Zealand.

The major company of the 1930s was Union Airways of New Zealand Ltd., which on 5 January 1936 opened services between Palmerston North and Dunedin via Blenheim and Christchurch. In June 1937 a twice-daily service, Auckland-Wellington, was added. By 1939 the company was maintaining services on the routes Auckland-New Plymouth-Palmerston North-Wellington-Christchurch-Dunedin, Palmerston North-Blenheim-Christchurch, Palmerston North-Napier-Gisborne, and Auckland-Tauranga-Opotiki-Gisborne. At the outbreak of war in 1939 there was already a considerable network of regular air services within New Zealand. In addition there was widespread

charter and air-taxi activity.

Regular air services across the Tasman did not begin before the Second World War, in spite of a number of gallant pioneer flights. The first successful crossing of the Tasman, from Sydney to Christchurch by Kingsford Smith and crew on 11 September 1928, took 14 hours 25 minutes, the return journey taking 22 hours 51 minutes.

As early as 1935 Union Airways and the Union Steam Ship Company negotiated with the executives of Imperial Airways, London, to form a company to fly passengers across the Tasman. The outcome of these negotiations was the formation on 26 April 1940 of Tasman Empire Airways Ltd. (TEAL), which was jointly owned by Union Airways, Imperial Airways, Qantas Empire Airways, and the New Zealand Government.

Between 1935 and 1940, however, the interested parties had investigated the problems involved in crossing the Tasman and had cut the flying time. By 1937 Captain J. W. Burgess had flown the Tasman in an Empire flying boat, the *Centaurus*, reducing the crossing time to 9 hours 15 minutes, and in the following year Clouston and Ricketts achieved a time of 7 hours 10 minutes in a DH 88. In 1937, also, a Pan-American *Clipper* (Captain Edwin Musick) had planned an inaugural flight from the United States to New Zealand. Unfortunately, however, the PAA flying boat crashed between Pago Pago and New Zealand, which caused further services to be postponed until July 1940.

How to cite this page: . 'Early Companies', from An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, edited by A. H. McLintock, originally published in 1966.

Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 22-Apr-09

URL: <http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/1966/air-transport-and-airports/2>