



## **The Desoutter Comes to Tasmania**

*Author: C Byrne, December 2020*

### **Recap**

In the last [article](#), the Desoutter G-ABOM was flown from London to Essendon by Harold Jenkins and Harold Jeffrey, arriving on 18<sup>th</sup> February 1932. Upon arriving in Essendon, they sold the plane to Hart Aircraft Services, who were the Australian agents of Desoutter.

An interesting side story is that Jenkins and Jeffrey piloted the second flight of a Desoutter from England to Australia. A year earlier, two New Zealand Pilots, Piper and Kay had flown from London to Sydney in a Mark I Desoutter. Their story is available [here](#).

### **Commercial Tasmanian Aviation in 1932**

Aerodromes or landing strips which had been certified by the Civil Aviation Department could be used for passenger aviation services.

When Western Junction aerodrome at Launceston was completed and certified in late 1930, (it was officially opened in February 1931), then the opportunity for commercial passenger aviation to fly to Tasmania was available.

(The first) Australian National Airways ANA operated by Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm, operated the Brisbane – Sydney – Melbourne route in 1930 using the Avro X monoplanes. ANA extended their operation to include the Melbourne to Launceston route from January 1931. ANA operated this route, and extended the service to Brighton in the south, until the end of June 1931 when the company's financial problems forced the flights to stop.

Another of the early commercial aviation companies that was operating in Tasmania was Mathews Aviation. Based at Essendon, its founder, Captain Mathews wanted to start a service between the mainland and Tasmania. (They did operate a flying boat for a short time).

The Australian Aero Club (Tasmanian Section) employed Mathews Aviation staff to maintain their planes and train pilots. The Tasmanian Manager of Mathews Aviation was Laurence McKenzie Johnson, who was an experienced pilot. L. M. Johnson was based at Western Junction from late 1930.

In November 1931, the Flinders Island Council commenced the clearing of a landing strip at Whitemark, which was licenced for commercial flights in March 1932.

With the activity on establishing the Flinders Island aerodrome, L. M Johnson decided to start a passenger flight service between Western Junction and Flinders Island.



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### MISS FLINDERS - THE DESOUTTER COMES TO TASMANIA

#### VH-UEE Comes to Tasmania

L. M Johnson purchased the newly registered VH-UEE on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 1932, flew the plane to Western Junction on the 15<sup>th</sup>, and commenced a bi-weekly service on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March. The fare for the trip was £2 10s (\$250 today).

The value of having a plane available in for medical evacuations was immediately shown on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1932, when a patient was flown from Whitemark back to Western Junction. (See below).

A reporter from the Local newspaper "The Examiner" flew in VH-UEE on the return flight from Western Junction to Whitemark in May 1932 and described the trip in this [article](#).

The biweekly service, normally leaving Western Junction at 9.00 a.m., arriving at Whitemark at 10.45, departing at 11.00 a.m. and arriving back at Western Junction at 12.15 p.m.

Miss Flinders was also available for charter flights.



Commercial Aviation.—The de Soutter monoplane which is used by Mr. L. M. Johnson in the Launceston-Flinders Island air service. This picture was taken during a recent trip to Melbourne by Mr. Johnson.

#### VH-UEE Flying over Melbourne (Weekly Courier - 07 July 1932)



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#### **Holyman Brothers and Tasmanian Aerial Services**

Victor and Ivan Holyman formed Holyman Brothers Pty Ltd and establish an airline to also provide passengers services within Tasmania. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1932, Captain Victor Holyman flew the inaugural flight on their service between Western Junction and Flinders Island in the DH 83 Fox Moth (VH-UQM), "Miss Currie".

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1932, just two weeks after the Holyman commenced flying, a new Company, Tasmanian Aerial Services was formed by merging the operation of L.M. Johnson and the Holyman Brothers, using Miss Flinders and Miss Currie.

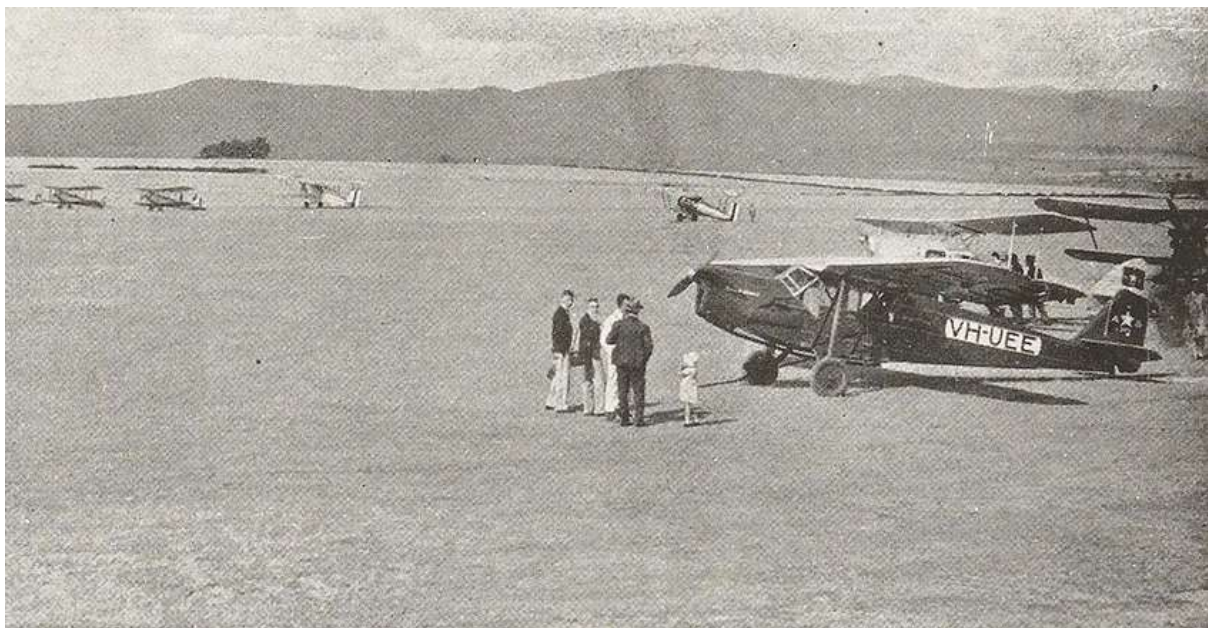
The Tasmanian routes expanded with services to Brighton, La Trobe, Wynyard and King Island later in 1932.

The two planes were named "Miss Flinders" and "Miss Currie") in October 1932.

In July 1934, Tasmanian Aerial Services was renamed as Holyman's Airways after L.M. Johnson left the company.

The story of the Holyman Brothers, L.M. Johnson, Tasmanian Aerial Services, Holyman's Airways and then (the second) Australian National Airways will be told in more detail in later articles.

Miss Flinders was used routinely on flights between Western Junction, the other northern aerodromes and Flinders and King Island. It was also used on the Western Junction to Hobart service.



**Miss Flinders, with Miss Currie behind, at the Western Junction Air Pageant 1934  
(Weekly Courier 04 March 1934)**



### **Aeromedical Evacuations**

Before the Royal Flying Doctor Service was operational in Tasmania, the commercial airlines often undertook flights to assist in medical emergencies. Here are two examples involving Miss Flinders.

#### Evacuation from Flinders Island: March 1932

At 7 p.m. on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 1932, only 6 days after arriving in Tasmania, L. M. Johnson received an urgent telegram from Dr. Connell, of Flinders Island, that his patient, Mr. Alfred Cook was in urgent need of an operation in Launceston.

At daybreak, Miss Flinders left Western Junction and flew through heavy rain and bad visibility, arriving at Whitemark after a flight time of the 1hr 15min.

Mr. Cook was taken to the Whitemark aerodrome on an improvised stretcher, and placed in the plane, it being big enough for the patient to lie at full length at the floor of the plane.

Mr. Johnson left Whitemark at 9.20 a.m. and after piloting the machine through some very heavy weather, arrived at Western Junction at 11 a.m. The Launceston city ambulance was waiting on the field and Mr. Cook was rushed into the Launceston Public Hospital for the operation.

“The Examiner” reported on the views of the patient:

*Before he left the aerodrome Mr. Cook was asked his opinion of the trip. In spite of the pain he was suffering, he had nothing but praise for the pilot, who had handled the machine during the difficult journey, in the course of which they had flown through numerous rain ' storms and squalls. Mr. Cook also stated that he was very interested in seeing from the air the islands that he knows so well.*

#### Evacuation from King Island: February 1933

On Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1933 (immediately after the third air pageant held at Western Junction the previous day), Capt. V. C. Holyman of Tasmanian Aerial Services, received an urgent message from King Island on that a man was in a critical condition and that it was necessary for him to go to Melbourne for an immediate operation.

In answering this call, L. M. Johnson departed Western Junction at 5 a.m. on the Monday and flew to King Island in Miss Flinders, arriving at 5.30 a.m. After picking up the man, he then flew to Essendon, arriving at 10.30 a.m.

Upon arrival at Essendon, he flew to Yarrum in Gippsland to visit his father, Mr B. P. Johnson who was a Solicitor in the town. The following day, Miss Flinders returned to Western Junction, flying directly, taking 2 hours 20 minutes, with Mr Johnson senior and daughter Enid as passengers.



### **“Firsts” involving Miss Flinders**

The first night flight over Launceston was carried out by Miss Flinders and L. M. Johnson on 01 May 1932. Six electric lights were placed on either side of the plane with a 12 volt accumulator in the body of the plane. The flight was made just after 8.30 pm. and was about 20 miles in duration.

Miss Flinders, piloted by L. M. Johnson was the first plane to land on Cape Barron Island on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1933. A landing field had just been cleared on the island and during a routine trip between Flinders Island and Western Junction, the plane diverted and landed on Cape Barron. As well as providing the opportunity for general aviation, the landing strip provided an additional landing strip for planes to use in an emergency for planes flying across Bass Strait

### **Miss Flinders is Sold**

By the mid-1930s, commercial aviation was moving ahead quickly with bigger planes being available.

Tasmanian Aerial Services purchased its first De Havilland DH 84 Dragon “Miss Launceston” in August 1933. This plane could carry six passengers and a pilot.

In June 1935, the usefulness of Miss Flinders to Holyman’s Airways was limited with the bigger passenger planes now available, and so was sold to De Havilland and departed on its delivery flight to Sydney on 11 June 1935.