



TASMANIAN AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY Incorporated

IVAN HOLYMAN AND THE BIRTH OF AN AIRLINE

Ivan Holyman and the Birth of an Airline

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Tasmanian Aviation Giants – The Holyman Family

Ivan Nello Holyman (1896 – 1957) and the Birth of an Airline

In the last newsletter, Part 1 of series on the Holyman Family was presented, which told the story of Victor Holyman and the birth of Tasmanian Commercial Aviation. That article ended with the loss of Victor in crash of the *Miss Hobart*. In Part 2, we start the story of Victor's brother, Ivan, and the birth of Australian National Airways.

Born in August 1896, Ivan was the youngest son of William junior, served at sea as a purser and worked in the firm's offices before joining the AIF as a private in 1914. He had a distinguished war career, serving from the landings at Gallipoli to the last actions of the AIF in France in September 1918. He was wounded four times, twice mentioned in despatches, and was awarded the Military Cross, finishing the war as a company commander at the age of 22 with the rank of Captain.

After the war, Ivan returned to the family shipping business in managerial positions, based in Devonport and then in Launceston.

Following the death of his brother in the *Miss Hobart* crash, the loss of the *Loina* off Whitemark and the force landing of the *Lepena* en-route to King Island, it would have been understandable had Ivan Holyman given aviation away and returned to a career in shipping. Fortunately, he decided to stay in aviation and that the answer to the problem of safety lay in buying "*bigger and better planes.*" His vision was to develop an airline company of sufficient size and financial strength to provide the necessary infrastructure of workshops, engineers and staff.

After the non-fatal accident in Bass Strait to the *Lepena*, Ivan Holyman used his influence with the Australian Government to have an official ban on the importation of US built commercial aircraft lifted. Although it is hard to be definitive about Ivan's responsibility for the change in government policy, such policy being lifted on 30 November 1935, the airline was prepared for the announcement and placed an immediate order for the recently introduced Douglas DC2. It entered service as VH-USY *Bungana* on 18 May 1936 and completely justified the job it had been bought for. It proved Bass Strait could be flown in safety and with the regularity of a suburban train service.



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Early in 1936 Ivan Holyman approached the Adelaide Steamship Company, owners of Adelaide Airways, with a view to an amalgamation aiming to become Australia's most powerful airline. Adelaide Airways had recently taken over West Australian Airways and the new combine would thus effectively control airline traffic between Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. With funding from the Orient Steam Navigation Company a new **Australian National Airways** was registered on 13 May 1936, and began services under its new name on 1 July 1936 with Ivan Holyman as General Manager. It acquired a second DC-2 VH-UXJ *Loongana* that began a twice-weekly service between Melbourne and Perth on 21 December 1936

The same expansionist philosophy continued after the formation of ANA. The reason for this was not expansion for the sake of expansion, but because Ivan Holyman saw clearly that the key to success in aviation lay in mobilising large amounts of capital to provide the most modern aircraft and develop the routes to use them intensively.

Meanwhile, efforts to expand operations northwards to Queensland were being thwarted by Airlines of Australia (AoA), its main competitor. Established in 1931 as **New England Airways** by G.A. Robinson and Keith Virtue of Lismore, it operated services in northern New South Wales and between Sydney and Brisbane, Queensland, expanding further into Queensland by taking over a number of struggling regional airlines during the mid-1930s. It was restructured as AoA in 1934 with funding by an investment group the British Pacific Trust. In 1936 it introduced Stinson Model A airliners in a regular service between Sydney and Brisbane, and later acquired Douglas DC-2s and Douglas DC-3s. After several months of fruitless negotiations with its financiers, ANA managed to gain a controlling interest in AoA in April 1937, although the two airlines retained separate public identities until 1942. Between them the two airlines operated four DC-2s and four DC-3s by the time of the outbreak of World War II, as well as several other aircraft including nine de Havilland D.H.84s, two D.H.86s and nine DH 89 Rapides.





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In 1938 the airline suffered a tragic blow with the loss of the *Kyeema* with all its passengers and crew. Following this disaster an intensive study of the civil aviation systems in Australia was undertaken with a view to the taking of all measures possible to prevent a recurrence.

Out of it came safety provisions which had not existed before the accident and the continual application of the latest scientific aids to navigation. In addition to this ANA set up a School of Aeronautics to train pilots in all branches of aviation, including navigation, radio, and engineering.

ANA grew up very much in the image of Ivan Holyman who was constantly displaying his personality, drive, enthusiasm and vision. He was a hands-on boss, he knew everyone connected with the airline and could chat happily with any of them. He was an extraordinarily loyal person and this loyalty was reciprocated by the staff resulting in a sense of excitement and vitality throughout the company.



Ivan Nello Holyman

So, ANA had what no other organisation had, a continent-wide range business to keep its planes flying to the optimum, and the ground organisation to ensure the two prime essentials of civil flying, safety and reliability.



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ANA DC-2 VH-UYB "Pengana" at the ANA terminal Essendon Aerodrome Circa 1937