

***A note from Mike Feeney in Hamilton, New Zealand. I thought I would send this item (the last for 2011) out now because it is nearly Christmas and I know that many of you will know, or will remember Maurie McGreal when he was active in the old TEAL company (now Air New Zealand) and then for so many years with the NZ Civil Aviation Division. I chat on the phone to Maurie and Mary every week or two and Email him my ramblings. They really are such a pleasant couple that I thought it would be rather nice to have this wandering about the ether as a sort of modest tribute to them both....still happy together down all the years since WWII. Should anyone wish to send a cheery message to them, Email it to me and I shall ensure that they receive it.***

***Well, all the usual Merrie stuff...fa la la etc.***

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### **"Memorable Flights". A tale of an 'electrifying' Tasman Sea crossing.**

Recounted by Captain (retired) Maurice E. McGreal; Fellow of The Royal Aeronautical Society.

With an introductory preamble and aircraft notes by Mike Feeney.

It has been a privilege to have known Maurie since working with him in the Civil Aviation Division at the MOT's Head Office in Wellington in the late '70s and early 1980s. Maurie joined the NZ Civil Reserve of Pilots while at Teachers College in Auckland. He went to the UK where he joined 75 (NZ) Squadron, then flying Vickers Wellington bombers. On return from his second raid (as co-pilot) they crashed and Maurie spent a few months in Ely RAF hospital recovering from a leg injury. He then spent over a year flying DH Dominies whilst waiting for a posting to train on Catalinas and Sunderlands. He was posted to 490 (NZ) Squadron at Freetown, Sierra Leone, where he flew patrol and anti-submarine missions for the rest of WWII.

Returning to New Zealand after the war with his English wife Mary, Maurie gained a pilot position with Tasman Empire Airways Ltd. at the end of 1946. Having gained a First Class Navigator Licence (in addition to an Airline Transport Pilot Licence) and with 2,200 flying hours he was soon promoted to the command of the Short Sandringham followed by, as they were purchased, Short Solent flying boats, Douglas DC-6Bs and Lockheed L-188 Electras. His career as a pilot was cut short by serious illness in 1962. Maurie then joined the CAD where he performed 21 years of useful work in the Flight Operations branch until his retirement, at age 65, in 1983 with the rank of Asst. Director.

Of particular note was his excellent work on establishing sound aircraft performance requirements for NZ registered aircraft. Many readers will recall

the extensive Civil Aviation Safety Order, CASO 4, which was mainly Maurie's work.

After his retirement, Maurie has undertaken various tasks as a consultant and also set about researching and writing books such as his autobiographical "A Noble Chance", "Fiji's Aviation Story" and "A History of Civil Aviation in New Zealand"; all well worth a read. The photograph below is one I took of the rear cover of his "A Noble Chance" which I can only commend to you again as it is a truly significant work.

Now well into his 90s, Maurie and Mary live in Auckland where Maurie continues to follow aviation standards matters and is a regular contributor of 'Letters to the Editor' of such journals as "Flight International" where his succinct and incisive views are widely noted. He sometimes talks to various groups such as The Brever Club and Royal Aeronautical Society. His "Tale of a Crossing" is one he presented to the "Solent Society" and which he sent to

me as a result of chats we had been having following the Air France accident over the Atlantic during its penetration of the Intertropical convergence Zone (ITCZ). I had had routine experience of the South-West Pacific ITCZ during years of flying in PNG.

The Short S.25 Sandringhams were converted WWII Sunderlands that underwent a major refit and were not, in the opinion of many, the ideal aircraft for long-haul peacetime airline operations. However, the NZ politicians (being all-wise) forced the purchase of these slow machines because they were British and NZ governments were pursuing a "Buy British" policy for trade reasons. The TEAL Chief Pilot, Captain Oscar Garden, had strongly urged the purchase of modern land-planes such as the Douglas DC-4 or its pressurised variant, the Canadair North star/Argonaut which BOAC were operating. But his totally logical flight operational and economic reasoning was disregarded and he resigned in frustration.

The Sandringham pictured below shows the higher density seating configuration used by operators engaged in short-haul and tourist operations in locations such as the West Indies. The TEAL 'boats had more space for passenger luggage, mailbags, diplomatic bags and high-value urgent cargo.

The 27 tonne 'boat was fitted with excellent powerplants, the 1,200 bhp, 14 cylinder Pratt & Whitney R-1830 air-cooled radial which enabled a maximum level flight true airspeed of 185 knots with typical cruise speeds ranging from 120 to 150 knots depending on the degree of urgency, wind components, necessity for range optimisation and the operator's overall economy policy. Maximum range was about 2,100 nautical miles. I don't know what power settings the TEAL chaps used but the engines are identical to those on a DC-3 and we used a manifold pressure of 27" and rpm of 2,050 which resulted in 35 Imp. gallons per hour per engine. So if the Sandringham was burning 140 gph, that would make it a 1.0 air nautical mile per gallon aeroplane; pretty good for such a large and bulky airframe. The DC-3, at half the weight, could do 2.0 anmpg.

The S.25 could creep-climb to 18,000 feet but, being unpressurised, rarely flew above 10,000 feet with passengers. Some Sandringhams were configured for up to 48 passengers but the TEAL aircraft carried about 30 passengers in roomy comfort on two decks. But their slow airspeed often resulted in very long flight times across the Tasman due headwinds. For example: A 50 knot headwind component could result in a 12 hour flight to Sydney but only 6 hours for the return. They were replaced by the larger (35 tonne) and faster (160-180 knot cruise) Short Solents and then the superb pressurised DC-6B which reduced the Tasman crossings to Sydney to about five hours, or less. The only advantage the TEAL 'boats provided was that they could service Wellington, prior to the construction of the airport, and were useful on sectors of the Pacific "Coral Route" prior to the construction of aerodromes suitable for large land-planes.

But let us now read Maurie McGreal's account of a memorable Tasman Sea crossing. I should mention that Maurie is a gentleman from the "old school" and is a master of the under-statement.

"Each evening as I study the TV weather map as the young lady details the good and the bad that we can expect, and there are some cumulo-nimbus thunderheads in the forecast, I often recall an event that we experienced on the night of Armistice day in 1949.

The aircraft was a TEAL Short Sandringham, ZK-AMH, and the Captain flying the scheduled service was the late Jim Kennedy. We had departed from Sydney's Rose Bay at midnight with all passenger seats occupied. A distinguished passenger was Sir Len Isitt, TEAL's Chairman of Directors. Jim, naturally, invited him to visit the flight-deck; although there was not a lot to see outside in the dark over the ocean. The veteran pilot was standing on the flight-deck with his hands resting on the two pilot's seat-backs about an hour after take-off and the night was pitch dark. However, the eastern horizon was already showing indications, from the frequency of the lightning flashes ahead, that the front we had seen as a few dark clouds when we had arrived in Sydney the previous afternoon, had grown into something apparently rather vigorous. Looking thoughtfully out into the night, Jim reached up and flicked on the "Fasten Seat Belt" sign. The closer we came to the front, Sir Leonard seemed more fascinated by the scene and continued to stand gripping the backs of our seats.

Jim was doing his best to select a path through the line of the front and, as we entered the first of the towering cloud banks, the aircraft executed a few vigorous bounces and Sir Leonard exclaimed, "This is no place for Directors", or some such comment, as he scuttled back and climbed down the access ladder to get himself belted in for the transit through the front.

The Met.men at Rose Bay had briefed us that the cloud tops in the front would be about 15,000 feet but we could see that they were some 20,000 feet too low with their estimate. The ones that reared ahead were towering high in the dark sky and, in the lightning flashes, we clearly saw that this was a **"big**

**one"**. Lap straps "ON" and the cabin crew took their seats to prepare for several minutes of a bumpy ride.

The Sandringham had no electronic aids, such as weather radar, to assist us in our selection of the pathway through the front that Jim was trying to identify so the radio-compass needle was about all we had to indicate just where the core of the next thunderhead was as it flashed and lighted the great bastions of cloud through which Jim was trying to locate a path.

The radio-compass was tuned to a New Zealand station and, with each flash of lightning, the head of its needle would swing to point to the fiery discharge that emanated from the most powerful active cumulo-nimbus. The propeller tips of our four engines were now glowing like huge Catherine-wheel fireworks as they became charged with "St. Elmo's Fire". I reached up and turned the cockpit lights to their brightest setting and checked the Aldis lamp again to ensure, that, in the event of a lightning strike which would momentarily "blind" our vision, I could switch it on to ensure that, despite the glare, Jim would still be able to see the flight-instrument panel. He had disengaged the autopilot and was manually hand-flying the heavy aircraft through this critical section of our frontal passage.

The windscreens were now flickering with darts of electric light squirting across the glass and then, with a great crash of thunder (which we heard 'mentally') there was attached to the aircraft's nose a great, what I can only describe as "a telephone pole of fire", and then as Jim steadily flew the aeroplane as I lit his instruments with the powerful beam of the Aldis lamp the Steward came on the speaker and said, "There's a great ball of fire running down the aisle". Then there was a **'Thud'** and all became quiet.

All four engines were purring along quite steadily; the aircraft was in clear air and the gigantic thunderhead was behind us. We had surged up several thousand feet and then down again but everything seemed OK. Jim plugged in the autopilot and our navigator climbed up to the astro-dome and took a star sight to establish what the electric input from the thunderhead had done to the magnetic compass. This procedure showed that our magnetic compass was now taking us towards New Plymouth. A quick course correction and Auckland again lay ahead of us.

As we touched down on our home harbour there was a loud **"Bang"** as the electrically charged fuselage discharged with a flash to the water. But we were all safe and well with no injuries to passengers due turbulence. But they certainly had an interesting conversation topic to recount to those awaiting our arrival.

"Whew! Another Tasman crossing is over." The flight had taken nearly 9 hours.

Ah; Those were the days!"

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The artist's picture below is a TEAL promo. item used to advertise their 'Coral Route' which serviced Fiji and the various Pacific islands to the east. The Short Solent was a new design and was considerably heavier, more powerful and faster than the Sandringham. They served well until modern aerodromes could be constructed to take land-planes, such as the Douglas DC-6B, the Lockheed L-188 Electra and eventually TEAL's first turbojet, the Douglas DC-8.