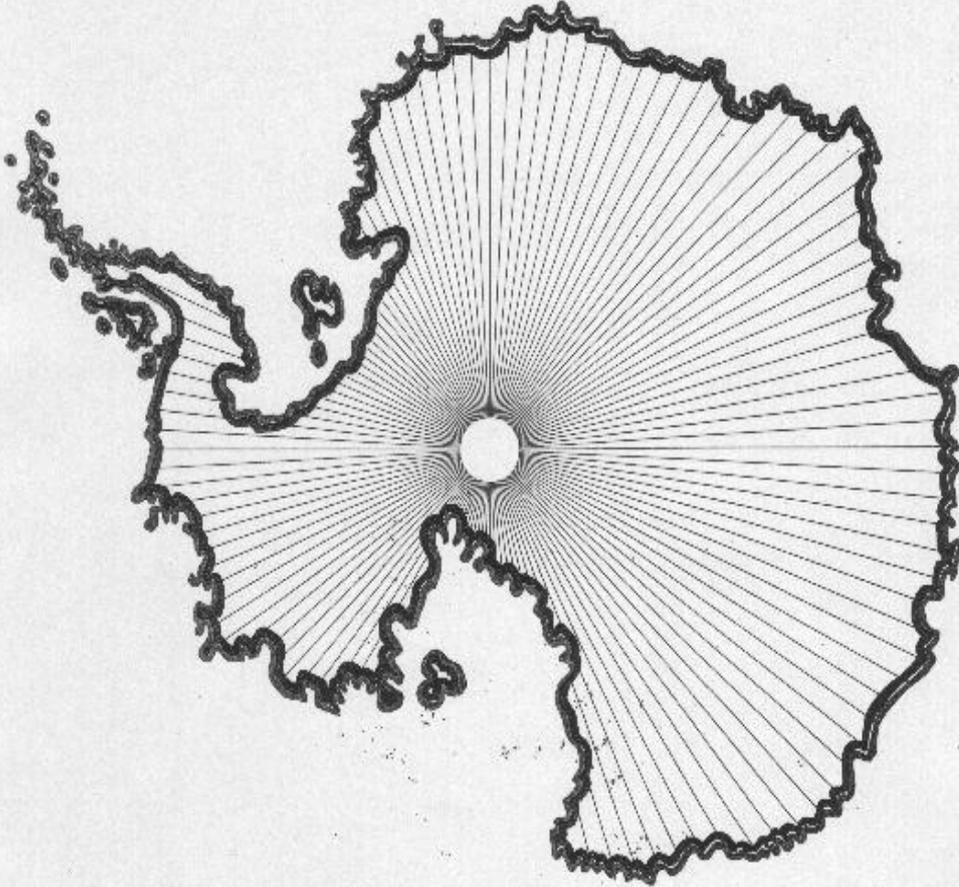


ANTARCTIC COVER

A little more of BUSHIES history by Ron Entsch - 2008



BPA 1978 ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1978



A fund raising project for the Royal
Flying Doctor Service of Australia

FLYING QANTAS 141



ANTARCTIC COVER

This is a sequel to the piece of history contained in *BUSHIES - A History of Bush Pilots- Air Queensland* about the Royal Flying Doctor Service. What is not in the book is the subsequent drama involving the illegitimate sale of a First Day Cover (FDC) on the flight and, separately, the subsequent hassle with the Tax Commissioner over the eligibility of the airfare as a tax deduction. Here are the facts.

Fund raising project

A special effort to raise funds for the occasion was made by a Cairns fund-raising committee which included Sydney Williams OBE (later to be Sir Sydney) and Ron Entsch, Chairman and Manager respectively of Bush Pilots Airways (BPA). Apart from running a number of other minor events, Ron was responsible for organising a flight over the Antarctic which was thought to be a novel and exciting adventure. Indeed it was.



Syd Williams told the passengers “Since this is the Golden Jubilee of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, it is very appropriate that Bush Pilots Airways should join with Qantas in conducting this first Antarctic expeditionary flight for Queenslanders. All three organisations were founded in Queensland’s ‘bush’ and it is now with considerable pride that we can reflect on the achievements of each”.

Chartering the aircraft

Operational details were finally worked out with Qantas and Trans Australia Airlines (TAA). Only a Boeing 747 was able to do the flight because of the fuel range. Sydney to the Antarctic and back to Sydney would take 11 hours. Consequently, the larger aircraft meant that more seats had to be sold! Was this possible?

After a long wait, almost to the last deadline for decision, the USA’s polar base at McMurdo agreed to provide emergency services, if required. Although the passengers dressed casually and comfortably for a very long day, the aircraft carried appropriate equipment. However, without McMurdo’s readiness, approval for the flight would not have been given.

TAA provided two chartered Boeing 727s to haul the Queenslanders from Brisbane to Sydney early in the morning, and back early in the evening. Of course the complication of domestic jets having to drop passengers at the international terminal where the B747 awaited, and the flight being an international one though not landing in a foreign country and returning back to a Customs controlled terminal for re-boarding the domestic B727s made for an interesting logistical exercise in carefully handling 330 passengers who were blissfully unaware of the backroom tensions.

Financial commitment

To obtain definite bookings for the aircraft, BPA had to commit to pay for them from the sale of tickets. This heavy burden and risk just had to be met. Unfortunately, the initial local demand was very disappointing with only about 30 tickets sold. In desperation the advice of Ken Campbell an advertising specialist in Brisbane was called upon.

He said “Give me 30 free tickets and I will fill the aircraft!” That needed some rapid digesting so it was decided to increase the total capacity from the comfortable 300 to the maximum uplift of 330, and the freebies were given. North Queenslanders simply had to be supported by South Queenslanders where the target market was much greater.

Ken Campbell was as good as his word. The aircraft was filled with a ‘wait list’. Arguments arose from a few prospective passengers who had enquired but did not commit, and then later claimed that they intended to make a booking! Of course that was a ridiculous claim and it consumed precious staff time.

First Day Covers drama

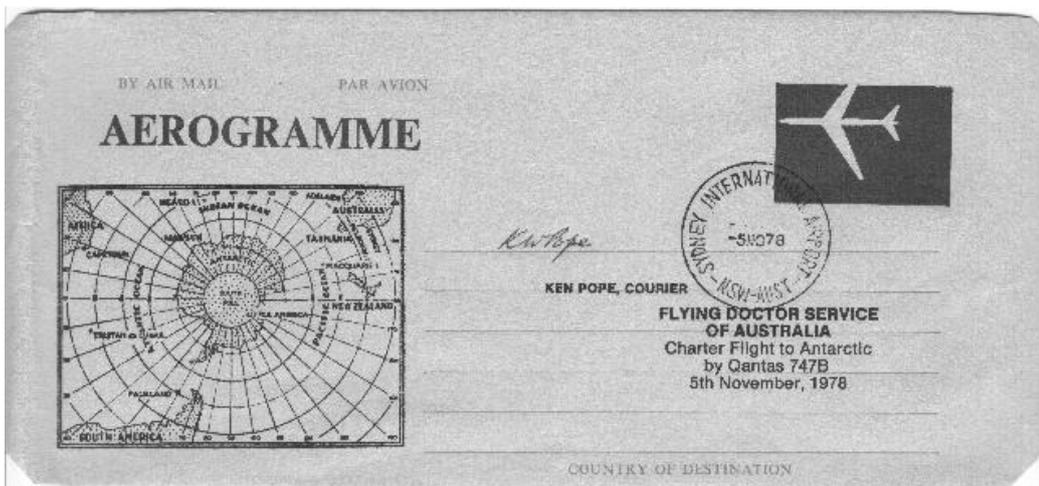
The sale of FDCs was a lucrative sideline which BPA intended to control to maximise the donation to the RFDS. These had to be numbered, date-stamped on the day of the flight, and physically carried by an authorised person travelling on the aircraft, to have collector value. This was our legitimate FDC which was sold onboard to passengers -



On 12 October 1978, 3 weeks before the flight, Bay Stamps from Glenelg in South Australia proposed that it would sell Silk Cachets, a fancy style FDC, and offered 15% of the profits. BPA had already arranged its own FDCs with all profits to go to the RFDS. No agreement was given to Bay Stamps but they went ahead anyway, in an underhand way.

This was discovered when Ken Pope wrote to BPA on 16th January 1979 and this is an extract of his letter:

I was told you already had covers arranged.
 As an Antarctic courier for Bay Stamps of Adelaide, I arranged for some covers to go on the flight. As circumstances were I was unable to go with you but heard from crew members that you had a good trip once you got below the Antarctic Circle.
 I thought you might like a copy of the cover and vignette that Jack Koch (Bay Stamps) produced for your flight in the hope of selling some on board.



Trade Practices Commission



BPA cried foul and complained to the Trade Practices Commission on 25th July 1979. It claimed that the Cachet was phony as it was not carried on the flight and that permission was not given by either BPA or RFDS for the use of their names for this commercial use. The Commission finally responded on 8th April 1980 and this is an extract:

The investigation – which involved Australia Post, Bay Stamps and the alleged courier – revealed:

- A) The items offered for sale by Bay Stamps were aerogrammes and flight covers (not first day covers).
- B) Bay Stamps did not infringe any postal regulation in the preparation and/or sale of these covers and aerogrammes.
- C) Bay Stamps did not receive permission to use the names “Bush Pilots of Australia” or “Flying Doctor Service of Australia” from either of the organisations concerned.
- D) The covers and aerogrammes were carried on the flight but not by the person represented as being the courier.

Whilst the complaint may reflect a possible breach of S53© of the Trade Practices Act 1974, for the reasons outlined above it is not a matter I would be prepared to recommend to the Commission that legal action be taken.

I should point out that provisions exist within the Act for companies and individuals to take civil action seeking damages and/or injunctions if they wish and you wish to avail yourself of this right.

Subsequently, we had reason to believe that the phony material was carried on board the flight by the Qantas Flight Engineer, perhaps unwittingly, although his name appears on the top of the phony FDC. Having regard to our commercial relationships and elapsed time, and the value quantum involved, the matter was dropped.

Tax Commissioner

About the time this wrangling was occurring, some passengers on the flight had claimed the full value of the ticket as a tax deduction. They received a curt request from the Tax Commissioner requesting that they quote the reference by which they thought the amount was deductible.

Of course the rockets were deflected in BPA's direction because we had told the passengers that the fare was tax deductible, as we were advised by Brigadier Max Simkin the Queensland Manager of the RFDS. He later apologised for this errant advice.

In fact, only the profit element of the fare was tax deductible. So an explanatory letter was sent from BPA's Chairman, Syd Williams, to each passenger, and this is an extract:

The actual distribution was made up as follows:

Profit from the flight	\$19,575
Profit from sale of souvenir stamped envelopes	\$ 1,200
Profit from Melbourne Cup sweep (held on board)	\$ 425
Total	\$21,200

This amount has been paid to the Royal Flying Doctor Service and a souvenir photostat of the cheque appears on this letter.

The Melbourne Cup was run on the same day and in the air we received the names of the winner and place-getters to pay out to the happy fliers. Also, we ran a raffle "Name the time when we would sight the first iceberg or ice-flo". The closest guess got all the money!



Happy Ending

The happy ending to the whole affair was the significant contribution to the RFDS, a safe and enjoyable journey for 330 Queenslanders, and a lasting memory of the wondrous land to the south of our great country.

COMPARISONS	Antarctica	Australia
Area	13,200,000 km ²	7,686,848 km ²
Greatest Distance	5,230 km	3,862 km
Coastline	22,210 km	19,650 km
Highest mountain	5,140 m	2,228 m