

EMERGENCY LANDING AT THE BALNARRING AERODROME

In the late summer of 1935, newspapers from Townsville to Tasmania carried the story of an emergency landing of a plane at the Balnarring aerodrome. The plane, the *Golden West*, on the mail flight from Launceston to Melbourne via Flinders Island, had run into bad weather.

The plane, flown by Pilot Paterson, carried the mail and four passengers (some reports stated twelve). When it left Launceston at 9.00 a.m. weather conditions had been excellent but misty rain, which greatly reduced visibility, had moved in before the plane reached Flinders Island an hour later. There the pilot received news that Wilson's Promontory was fog-bound and damage to the plane's wireless aerial was discovered. Thus, it was unable to receive or transmit messages.

The *Golden West* left on time to continue its flight to Melbourne. Conditions worsened and visibility was extremely poor when the plane flew over Westernport and as it proceeded towards Port Phillip, the land fog became denser. Pilot Paterson made the decision to turn back to Somers where he landed the plane without incident. About an hour and a half later, after having waited in vain for conditions to improve, the plane took off again for Melbourne.

By hugging the coast where visibility was relatively good, Pilot Paterson landed the *Golden West* at Laverton at 3.25 in the afternoon after "one of the most unpleasant flights" he had had.

The airliner, a De Havilland DH 84, belonged to Holyman Airways, a company started by two brothers that was registered just the previous year. They had two planes, one that left from Launceston and one that left from Melbourne on the same day. Both stopped at Flinders Island. The other plane, the *Loina* had "battled her way through rain and fog" after a delayed start from Melbourne and had remained at Flinders Island until conditions improved before completing the final leg.

'Balnarring aerodrome', as some of the newspapers termed it, was rather a grandiose name for the area where the mail plane set down. It was a paddock on the west side of Camp Hill Road between the township and Sandy Point Road. The land here was flat, allowing the planes to taxi and the paddock was marked with a big carbide ash circle. The area was used mainly for sports as the football ground was nearby. It was used by the mail planes as a temporary stopover if the weather was bad.

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