

Radio Equipment Essential for Trans-Tasman Fliers... Lack of News Causes Anxiety on Recent Flight

(Specially Written for the "Radio Record")

For the sixteenth time the once-dreaded Tasman Sea has been flown and it can safely be assumed that with modern aeroplanes in the state of perfection they have reached to-day a sea trip of this description has lost its terrors. The flight of Whitehead and Nicholl in their ancient Puss Moth is notable for the fact that they were not equipped with radio and although they arrived safely, the absence of communication in flight proved a source of great anxiety to relatives, friends and officials concerned.

AN obvious conclusion to be drawn from the flight is that radio communicating apparatus should be made compulsory on all machines attempting any long journey over sea or deserted country. From the point of view of the broadcasting authorities it is most unsatisfactory when no progress reports are forthcoming from a plane flying over such a bad route. Such flights are usually well publicised in the Press of the Dominion, and naturally thousands of listeners are awaiting news of the fate of the pilots concerned.

This was the position with the latest flight of Flight Lieutenant Whitehead and Mr. R. Nicholl, who left Gerrin-gong Beach, New South Wales, early on the morning of Thursday, November 22, and of whom nothing was heard until they arrived at Auckland on Friday morning.

Their machine was not one that could be considered eminently suitable for the flight, as it was the oldest Puss Moth in Australia and still used the original power plant. In fact, it speaks volumes for the construction of the plane and the reliability of the engine that they were able to reach New Zealand at all. Nevertheless, experts considered the attempt as "very foolhardy."

The effort of Whitehead and Nicholl brings to mind the tragic flight of Hood and Moncrieff, who left Sydney in the Ryan monoplane "Aotearoa" on January 10, 1928, with the intention of landing at Trentham racecourse, but their wireless messages faded out early in the trip and no more was heard of them or their machine. Had Hood and Moncrieff carried a reliable radio outfit and a competent operator, their fate would probably not have been the mystery that it remains to this day.

Another outstanding crossing made without the assistance of radio was that of Mr. Guy Menzies in 1931. On January 6 of that year, in the Avro-Avian monoplane "Southern Cross Junior," he flew from Sydney to the West Coast, landing at Harlhari. His time for the trip, 12 hours 15 minutes, stood as the record for crossings either way until Flight Lieutenant C. T. P. Ulm broke it on April 14 this year. On that date he flew the big Avro Ten, the "Faith

in Australia," from Ninety Mile Beach, North Auckland, to Sydney in 11 hours 58 minutes.

These are the only three flights out of the 16 crossings of the Tasman Sea that have been accomplished without the assistance of radio, and in each case the absence of news proved a worrying feature for all concerned.

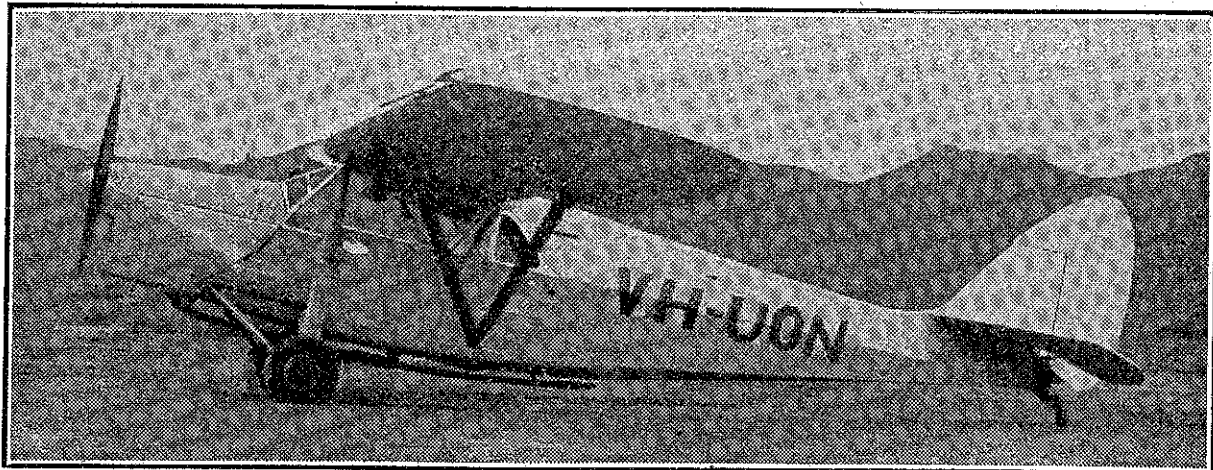
At New Plymouth many people waited patiently till a late hour for news of Whitehead and Nicholls's progress. Airport officials waited at the aerodrome with floodlights and flares ready for a possible night landing, but their hope of welcoming another pair of conquerors of the Tasman gradually diminished. No arrangements had been made by the airmen for their landing, but nothing was left undone that could have assisted them had they arrived. The day was perfectly fine, with a cloudbank visible over the horizon, and a few clouds floating inland.

At Wellington considerable anxiety was felt for the safety of the two men, although it was realised that they might have landed at some point on the New Zealand coast remote from means of communication. Keen interest was taken by people in Wellington, and the news, when it arrived, of the safety of the airmen, was very welcome indeed.

Throughout the night the aerodrome telephone buzzed continually, many people telephoning to inquire if anything had been heard of the airmen. Arrangements were made for an aerial search to be made by Squadron Leader Stedman, pilot-instructor to the Wellington Aero Club.

The foregoing reports serve to show quite distinctly the difficulty and anxiety occasioned by the fact that the airmen carried no radio. A great deal of time and money was wasted, and, in the future, to avoid similar trouble, it should be made compulsory for trans-Tasman machines to be properly equipped with an approved type of radio installation.

Aviation in New Zealand is just coming into its proper place in the limelight, and flights of this kind are very apt to over-emphasise the risky side of flying in the eyes of the general public. Under those conditions, the sport cannot progress, and they must be avoided.



"THE OLDEST PUSS MOTH IN AUSTRALIA."—The machine in which Flight Lieutenant Whitehead and Mr. R. Nicholl made their flight from Australia to New Zealand last week.