

## DOUGLAS DC-6 & DC-6B IN AUSTRALIAN SERVICE (PART 2)

### Introduction

The Douglas DC-6 was introduced to Australian domestic routes in December 1953 in the livery of ANA (Australian National Airways). This brief history outlines the aircraft's selection, service life and involvement of Sir Ivan Holyman, co-founder and chief executive of ANA.

Part 1 of this series tells the story of the DC-6's introduction to Australian international services with British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines in 1948.

### Pre-WWII Background

In 1854, William Holyman arrived in northern Tasmania where he settled following a voyage from England. There he established a small coastal shipping company that over the following decades

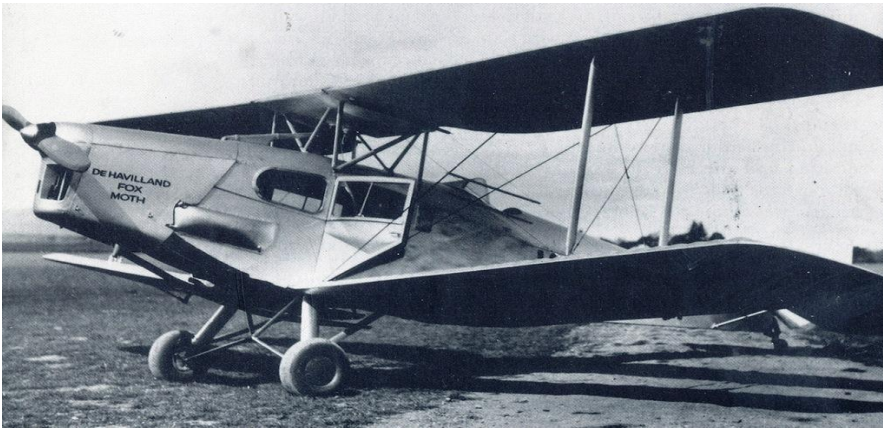


*Sir Ivan Holyman  
1896-1957*

expanded considerably. Agreements with shipping companies Union Steamship Company of New Zealand and Huddart Parker & Co of Melbourne in 1902-1904 saw Holyman vessels operating to Adelaide and Melbourne. As the 20<sup>th</sup> Century dawned, so had a third generation of the Holyman family, most of whom were employed in the family shipping business. The advent of WWI would eventually lead two members of this generation into the realm of aviation. Victor Holyman trained and qualified as a Royal Naval Air Service pilot, serving in France and as a test pilot in England, before returning to Australia and rejoining Holyman as a sea captain. His younger brother Ivan (born in 1896) served throughout the war from Gallipoli to France. Entering as a private, rising to captain, he was wounded four times and awarded the Military Cross. On his return to Tasmania and Holyman, he shared his brother's interest in aviation though never learnt to fly.

Following WWI, several attempts had been made by small companies to operate aviation services across Bass Strait. For various reasons, not the least being the vagaries of weather, most proved to be unreliable or short lived. Into this scene stepped the Holyman brothers who could no doubt see the

direction in which aviation was travelling. In 1932, they purchased a single engine de Havilland DH-83 Fox Moth biplane, initially to operate a twice-weekly Launceston-Flinders Island service. The aircraft could uplift three passengers and baggage or four passengers and no baggage, cruising



*The first venture into aviation by Holyman brothers Ivan and Victor was with the purchase of DH-83 Fox Moth named "Miss Currie". The aircraft was initially used on twice weekly services between Launceston and Flinders Island*

around 86kt/157km/h. This small airline, Tasmanian Arial Services, slowly expanded its staff, aircraft and routes flown. In 1934, with silent partner backing from Union Steamship Company and Huddart Parker, the Holyman brothers tendered for the carriage of mail between Melbourne and Hobart as part of the Empire Air Mail Scheme. Their successful bid saw a name change to

Holyman's Airways Pty Ltd and two de Havilland DH.86 aircraft ordered. The DH-86, a four-engine biplane, could carry up to 10 passengers, cruising at 125kt/230km/h.

Less than a month after commencing service, DH-86 VH-URN "Miss Hobart" disappeared without trace near Wilson's Promontory (Vic) on 19 October 1934. Victor Holyman, co-founder of the airline was one of the two pilots and ten passengers on board not to survive. The cause of the crash could not be determined. Barely a month later, on 15 November 1934, another DH-86 (one of five ordered for Qantas) on ferry to Sydney, crashed shortly after departing Longreach, Queensland, with the loss of all five aboard. Though not proven, doubts arose over a manufacturing fault in the tail assembly and weight and balance problems regarding the aircraft's centre of gravity.

Despite a poor press and a drop in passenger loadings, Holyman's Airways ordered another two DH-86s and announced in June 1935 that the airline would extend air services from Melbourne to Sydney via Canberra. A large hangar and adjoining passenger facilities would also be built at Essendon Airport. As Holyman's Airways began to settle into "routine operations", disaster struck yet again. On 2 October 1935, DH-86 VH-URT "Miss Loina", on route from Melbourne to Flinders Island, crashed into the sea. Again, there were no survivors among the three crew and two passengers and no specific determination as to the accident's cause. On 13 December 1935, DH.86A VH-USW "Lepena" made an emergency landing on Hunter Island in Bass Strait, after the crew mistook the movement of a loose fairing on a wing strut flapping in the wind. The aircraft was retrieved and repaired, returning to service three months later.

For Ivan Holyman, the events during this period must have been extremely stressful, with the loss of his brother, two fatal aircraft accidents and the forced landing of a third. Any shadow of doubt over his continuance with the airline was cast aside, although he realised changes were necessary, particularly regarding aircraft types. By the mid 1930s, the United States had taken the lead in both design and manufacture of commercial passenger aircraft. Boeing's 10 seat 247 first flew in February 1933, followed shortly after by the Douglas Aircraft Company DC-1 (Douglas Commercial 1). Both aircraft were twin engine, of all metal construction. From the DC-1 (only one was built), Douglas developed the DC-2 and immediately received orders for the 14 seat aircraft from American and overseas airlines. The type's reputation for reliability was further enhanced when, in October 1934, a KLM (Royal Dutch Airlines) DC-2 entered in the MacRobertson Centenary Air Race from England to Australia finished in second position.

Until then, Ivan Holyman's hands were tied by the Australian government policy prohibiting the importation of non-British transport aircraft. Fortunately for Holyman's Airways and the travelling public, the Australian government rescinded the policy on 30 November 1935. Holyman's Airways promptly ordered the company's first DC-2, VH-USY "Bungana", setting a precedent for all future aircraft to be given a name ending in ANA. Priced at A£30,000/A\$60,000, the aircraft was shipped to Melbourne and then transported to Holyman's Essendon hangar for assembly, making its maiden Australian flight on 29 April 1936. Prior to the arrival of the airline's first DC-2, Holyman's Airways employed two young women to commence training as air hostesses, the first airline in Australia to do so.

Between May 1936 and March 1937, Holyman's Airways underwent further expansion and another name change. In May 1936, Ivan Holyman announced the amalgamation of his airline with Adelaide Airways. Similar to Holyman's Airways, Adelaide Airways two major shareholders were the Adelaide Steamship Company and the Oriental Steam Navigation Company (the latter owned by the British P & O group). Adelaide Airways, through its financially strong shipping base, purchased Western Australian Airways (WAA) in June 1936. The combination of the two airlines led Ivan Holyman to further announce that the new entity would be renamed Australian National

Airways (ANA), to better reflect the enhanced route structure of the two airlines. The name had other connotations as famous Australian aviators, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm, had used it previously when they established their original ANA in October 1928. ANA reflected both sentimentality and tribute.



*Adelaide Airways DH-89 Dragon Rapide. In mid-1936 it had been merged into Holyman's Airways*

During the latter half of 1936, Ivan Holyman began negotiating with G.A.

Robinson, the managing director of Airlines of Australia (AOA). The Robinson family had, by the early 1920s, established the New England Motor Company dealing in heavy transport vehicles, based in Lismore, NSW. By the late 1920s, the family's interests had turned to aviation and in January 1931, they established New England Airways (NEA) providing regular services between Lismore and Brisbane. Over the next few years, NEA experienced a number of changes: aircraft types added to the airline fleet included Avro Xs (Fokker F-VIIs built under license in England by Avro) and, in 1936, American Stinsons; route expansion through the acquisition of smaller airlines; and a name change. In order to achieve these goals, Robinson secured financial assistance from a British based firm, British Pacific Trust (BPT), which became a 60 per cent majority shareholder. Its stake was to later have major ramifications. Effective from 1 January 1936, the airline was renamed Airlines of Australia (AOA).



*Rita Grueber, one of two air hostesses employed by ANA in 1936 – the first Australian Airline to do so*

Unfortunately for AOA, fate interceded in early 1937 with the loss of two Stinsons with a number of fatalities. AOA suffered a further blow in March 1937, when ANA purchased BPT's 60 per cent shareholding. ANA had now become Australia's dominant airline, with a nation-wide route structure. George Robinson, despite the losses suffered, still retained his interest in aviation. To replace the two Stinsons, he placed an order for both a DC-2 and a DC-3, the latter being the first of its type to operate in Australia. AOA continued to operate under its own name until mid 1942, when ANA purchased the remaining shares.

From mid 1937 until September 1939 was a golden period for Ivan Holyman and ANA. Apart from the DC-2 fleet of four aircraft, DC-3s were now introduced, the first being VH-UZJ "Kylla", originally ordered by AOA, which commenced flying in November 1937. Another three DC-3s were soon to follow as these new American

aircraft proved popular with the travelling public. Figures indicate the number of passengers (77,000) and freight carriage (1,000,000 lb/454,000kg) in 1939/40 were almost double those of 1936/37. This otherwise successful period for ANA, was marred by the fatal crash into Mt Dandenong of DC-2 VH-UYC "Kyeema" on 25 October 1938. There were no survivors from the three crew and 15 passengers in Australia's worst air disaster prior to WWII.

In September 1938, in a "back to the future" moment, Ivan Holyman made an offer to Reg Ansett to buy the fledgling Ansett Airways, followed by another in early 1939. Reg, however, refused to budge and, as fate would have it, in 1957 he reversed the roles with his purchase of ANA.

## **The War Years**

With WWII commencing in September 1939, industries worldwide, friend or foe, were required to direct their total resources to support the war effort. To this end, ANA was no different. Yet unlike other companies, ANA and to a larger extent Qantas were required to place their assets, both aircraft and personnel, directly into harm's way. By the end of September 1939, ANA's four DC-3s and crew were found at RAAF No8 Squadron based in Canberra (ACT). The aircraft were utilised in maritime reconnaissance and escort duties as, at that time, the RAAF had no comparable aircraft to match the DC-3's airborne endurance of up to ten hours. In May-June 1940, the RAAF began receiving Lockheed Hudson patrol aircraft, allowing the return of ANA's DC-3s. In early 1940, the RAAF took over ANA's Victorian flying school including its four DH-60s and, in mid 1940, four DH-89 Rapides went to the No1 Air Observers School. ANA's two DH-86s were impressed into the RAAF Middle East as aerial ambulances. Only one of these aircraft, a DH-89, returned to ANA.

Japan's entry into the Second World War on 7 Dec 1941 and rapid southern advance saw further ANA involvement. By late December, two DC-3s had evacuated over 700 civilians from Port Moresby to Cairns, sometimes cramming up to 53 passengers into the 21 seat aircraft. Further

civilian evacuations took place from Rabaul, New Britain, in late December, when two ANA DC-3s landed on a golf course because the Rabaul airfield had been bombed.

In January 1942, the allied forces established the Directorate of Air Transport (DAT) to co-ordinate



*One of ANA's DC-3 courier aircraft operating under DAT control (Directorate of Air Transport) at Finschafen*

air transport in the South West Pacific Area (SWPA). ANA served under the DAT umbrella until the end of hostilities, providing aircraft, crew, training and engineering services. In the critical year of 1942, there were occasions when almost the entire fleet of ANA aircraft were committed to DAT. ANA aircraft were directed by DAT to numerous locations, ranging from north-western Australia i.e. Wyndham and Broome, to various locations in New Guinea. Troops

or supplies would be flown in and the return flight would carry out wounded servicemen or women and children, often in marginal weather conditions and usually with minimal or no navigation aids. With the additional loss of many ANA personnel to the armed forces, ANA's domestic operations became understandably disrupted during the war years.

The year 1943 began to see Japanese military forces halted and the commencement of a slow withdrawal from previously occupied territory. Accordingly, the number of hours flown by ANA aircraft for DAT dropped considerably, as large numbers of Douglas C-47 aircraft (militarised version of the DC-3) arrived in the SWPA. These aircraft were absorbed primarily into United States Army Air Force (USAAF) units and a limited number of RAAF transport squadrons. As DC-2s and DC-3s returned slowly to



*With the outbreak of WWII, ANA's four DC-3s were attached to No 8 Squadron RAAF for reconnaissance and escort duties*

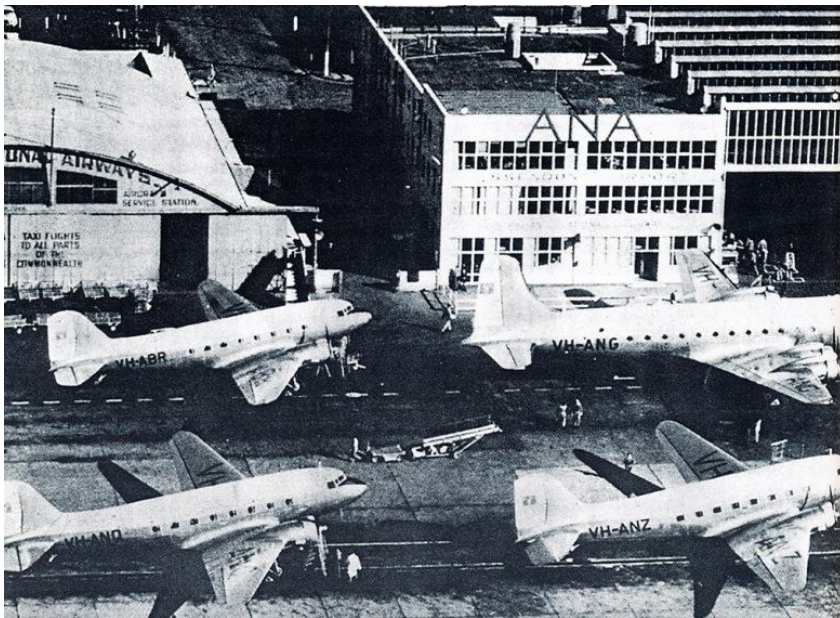
Australian domestic schedules (though passenger/freight uplift was still heavily slanted towards priority military traffic), by the war's end ANA captains found themselves in command of up to seven DAT controlled C-47s engaged in a courier service. The RAAF provided co-pilots and wireless operators, while ANA engineers gave maintenance support. Commencing in late 1942, the courier service followed the Australian advance through New Guinea and the islands to the north, finally extending through to Manila in the Philippines. Apart from the usual uplift of military personnel and freight, space could also be found for the carriage of Australian newspapers and packaged Peters Ice Cream covered by dry ice and delivered in canvas containers.

ANA experienced significant growth during WWII. From a relatively low base in September 1939, the airline employed well in excess of 4,000 staff by mid 1945. No doubt a contributing factor was

the huge amount of aircraft maintenance work: in early 1939 Brisbane's engineering staff comprised a total of five, increasing to 2,500 by 1944. Throughout the war, ANA provided a full range of engineering services to both the RAAF and the USAAF. Apart from ANA's own aircraft, other types ranged from B-24 Liberator/B-17 Flying Fortress heavy bombers to Curtiss Kittyhawk fighters and ex-KLM Douglas DC-5s. By the end of the war, some eight million-man hours were spent working on various military aircraft by ANA maintenance staff. As with other nations, large numbers of women were absorbed into the war effort, with ANA's female numbers climbing from the mid teens in 1936 to over 500 plus in 1944.

## Planning for Post War and a Return to Reality

Although during 1943 Japan's military forces were in retreat, there would still be a number of



*Late 1940s Essendon Airport. From a single four-seat biplane in 1932, ANA had grown substantially*

bitter campaigns fought before Japan's surrender. From 1943, Ivan Holyman led his management team in planning ANA's post-war future. No doubt his confidence would have been buoyed by the airline's strong position as the war years passed. ANA's finances improved considerably due, in large part, to various Australian and US government contractual requirements: mail contracts in 1945 were worth almost £800,000 /A\$1,600,000, with ANA receiving the majority. With a large number of highly trained personnel, particularly pilots and engineers, ANA's

infrastructure was well positioned to handle post-war expansion. Ivan Holyman envisioned further development of both domestic and international operations, including the United Kingdom, USA, China, Japan, Indonesia and the Philippines. It was estimated that 18 aircraft would be required for domestic use and 12 for international schedules. Aircraft types to operate this flying would initially be DC-3s, supplemented by DC-4s, followed by the DC-6. When ANA management were laying out their future plans, the DC-6 hadn't yet flown. The aircraft was initially known as the XC-112, designed in response to a USAAF request for a long range, pressurised transport. The prototype first flew in February 1946 although by that time USAAF interest in the aircraft had diminished due to the end of WWII. Douglas continued its development, with the aircraft now being referred to as the DC-6. In that guise, it first flew on 29 June 1946.

By the end of the war, ANA owned nine aircraft and operated another 17 under lease or charter. In a strong financial position and looking ahead confidently, it placed orders for five DC-4s and four DC-6 aircraft with Douglas. The federal Labor government, led by Ben Chifley, saw matters differently. Labor's view was that all interstate airline services should be nationalised under a government-owned statutory authority. Although the *Australian National Airlines Bill* was passed in August 1945, ANA, Guinea Airways and MacRobertson Miller Aviation launched a vigorous

constitutional challenge to the legislation. While the High Court agreed that the airlines could maintain their independently operated interstate schedules, the court also found that the government was entitled to establish its own national airline to compete against the private operators. ANA objected unsuccessfully to the latter part of the High Court's decisions. Estimates of ANA's legal fees were in the order of A£1,000,000/A\$2,000,000.

In February 1946, the Australian National Airlines Commission (ANAC) was established, from which Trans Australia Airlines (TAA) evolved. Ironically, Ivan Holyman was offered the position of chief executive. He refused the offer.

On 9 September 1946, TAA's first service departed Laverton (VIC) for Sydney (NSW) with DC-3 VH-AES "Hawdon". The aircraft, originally purchased by the Commonwealth government in 1944, had been leased to ANA for two years, having been converted from a C-47 configuration to a DC-3. Some 13 DC-3s/C-47s, leased by the Commonwealth government to various Australian operators, were recalled and placed at TAA's disposal, VH-AES being one. TAA's management were not only new, their ranks included many who were far sighted, technically endowed and who responded

quickly to the government's directions to establish a successful and professional airline, much to the detriment of ANA. Federal backing seemed readily available whether via policy or funding. The government directed that carriage of airmail and travel by public servants be with TAA wherever possible. Four DC-4 aircraft were delivered in 1946. They had been ordered by the government a year before



*Essendon Airport, Circa 1950s – a collection of ANA aircraft on the tarmac. Foreground is DC-6 VH-INW "Kurana) with a DC-4 behind. Both are surrounded by DC-3s*

TAA's birth, presumably with the yet to be born airline as the potential operator. In 1948, TAA received five Convair CV-240 aircraft (an excellent choice) that cost A£750,000/ A\$1,500,000, this at a time when Australia's dollar reserves were critically low. The pressurised, 40 seat Convairs proved to be popular with the public and were an accountant's delight as a revenue earner.

During this fascinating period in Australian civil aviation, ANA's fleet expansion was led by the purchase of five DC-4s in the first half of 1946. These aircraft were rotated through a trans-Pacific service on charter to British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines (BCPA) from May 1946 to April 1948<sup>1</sup> when BCPA acquired its own aircraft. When not operating on behalf of BCPA, the aircraft were deployed on ANA's Australian domestic services.

## The DC-6 Fiasco

<sup>1</sup> *Props & Mags*, South Australian Aviation Museum newsletter, November 2016

And what of ANA's order for four DC-6 aircraft? Considering the effort made by the Labor government to launch and ensure TAA's success, it was not surprising that the government refused to grant ANA a US dollar license to buy the aircraft. Conversely, TAA's US dollar license was granted in the same period and, in September 1948, it received its first CV-240. Pitting its pressurised CV-240s, with a cruising speed advantage of approximately 40kt/70km/h, over ANA's non-pressurised DC-4s, gave TAA and its passengers a decided advantage. One wonders what might have been if ANA had been given approval to buy DC-6s. It would have possessed an aircraft with the capacity to uplift almost double the Convair's passenger numbers, cruising approximately 50kt/95km/h faster. The four-engined DC-6 also had a superior range capability over the Convair. Whether the government's actions were deliberate or not, one can only speculate on what a difference a 1948/49 arrival of DC-6s would have made to ANA.

ANA would have looked on in further amazement when, in June 1948, rival TAA leased the services of a BCPA DC-6 to operate its Sydney-Perth service for a short period. This arrangement occurred several times, over holiday periods or when passenger demand built up. It should have come as no surprise, considering TAA was BCPA's Australian sales agent and maintenance provider.



*Along with other ANA staff members, technical and cabin crew trained Air Ceylon personnel*

With ANA engaged against its new competitor, TAA, Ivan Holyman looked for other opportunities, including overseas involvement. To this end, ANA purchased a 49 per cent interest in Air Ceylon, the aim being to operate on the Kangaroo Route between Australia and the United Kingdom via Ceylon<sup>2</sup>. ANA provided various personnel to train Sinhalese in all aspects of running an airline. A 10-year agreement was signed in 1948, but by 1953, for various reasons, the Singapore-Sydney service was suspended and ANA sold its 49 per cent share to Dutch airline KLM.

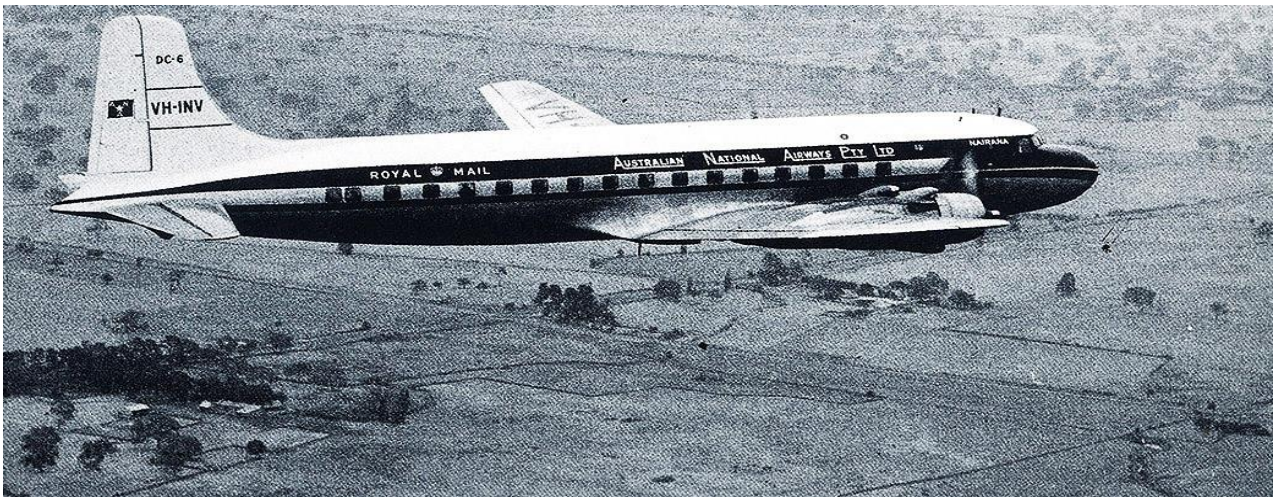
In 1947, ANA became involved with Hong Kong based airline Cathay Pacific and by mid 1948 had acquired a 35 per cent share holding, rising eventually to 40 per cent. ANA personnel were dispatched to Hong Kong to provide assistance in aircrew, engineering and administrative training in order to raise levels of skill and professionalism. Fate played a part when, in 1949, the Chinese Communist party came to power in China. Cathay Pacific's fortunes changed dramatically as the airline was denied access to its lucrative mainland market. By the early 1950s, Cathay's financial position had deteriorated to a such a point that only a large capital injection would save the company. P&O, a major and silent shareholder in ANA through the Union Steamship Company, purchased almost a third of Cathay's shares, with additional funding being placed during the

<sup>2</sup> A British Crown colony 1802-1948, now the nation of Sri Lanka



1950s. By 1957, ANA's share holding had declined to 16 per cent. In both instances, with Air Ceylon and Cathay Pacific, ANA's desire to operate in conjunction with the two airlines as a shared route carrier was thwarted continually by both Labor and Liberal federal governments. Qantas was re-emerging following WWII and, in 1947, was nationalised by the federal Labor government that became the airline's majority shareholder. Both political parties supported the policy of endorsing Qantas as Australia's sole international airline. When viewed from that perspective, ANA's hopes of operating scheduled international services in its own right appeared to be negligible.

Ivan Holyman's ongoing issues with the federal Labor government and the challenge of TAA's increasing popularity would have been compounded by a spate of ANA aircraft accidents between March 1946 and June 1950. While it is outside the scope of this article to describe each accident and its cause, suffice to record that there were six major accidents and 70 fatalities. The worst occurred on 26 October 1950. DC-4 VH-ANA "Amana" departed Perth for Adelaide and Melbourne just after 2200 local time, with five crew and 24 passengers. Approximately 30 minutes later, the aircraft crashed near York (WA); there were no survivors<sup>3</sup>. At the time, it was the largest loss of life suffered in an Australian air crash. VH-ANA was the first of its type the company introduced into Australia and heralded as the ANA flagship. Accompanied by a considerable amount of press coverage, the aircraft registration proudly reflected the company name. The tragedy left staff unsettled and doubts in passengers' minds as to the airline's reliability. The series of accidents could have played a major part in ANA reporting financial losses between 1949-1953. In this period, TAA reported its first profit for the financial year 1949/50, just three years after commencing operations.



*ANA DC-6 VH-INV "Nairana". One of two DC-6s bought from US carrier National Airlines in 1953 due to delays in the availability of new aircraft*

In 1949, ANA endeavored to raise capital through a company share float but it drew a poor reaction. Public wariness of ANA's poor safety record and TAA's strengthening image may have led to the offer being withdrawn.

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<sup>3</sup> A 67-year old male passenger actually survived the immediate crash. Rescuers found him in a state of shock and suffering from severe burns and he died in hospital a few days later (Macarthur Job. *Air Crash*. Vol 2 p121, 124 & 128).



*ANA DC-6B VH-INH "Bungana", Adelaide Airport 1955*

Due to ANA's continuing financial losses, the federal Liberal government proposed the introduction of a Bill that, in effect, assisted ANA and kept both major airlines flying in competition with one another. The fear was if ANA were to collapse, the country could be left with one domestic monopoly airline. The *Civil Aviation Agreement Act 1952*, introduced in October, was to ensure "the continued existence of the Company [ANA] as well as of the Commission [TAA]". In essence, the act gave ANA equal access to the carriage of mail, government business and, importantly for ANA, guaranteed the loan of up to A£3,000,000/A\$6,000,000 for purchasing new aircraft. By 1959, the act, with further amendments, was better known as the highly regulated Two Airline Policy.

In mid 1952, TAA placed an order for six Vickers Viscounts, the government believing at this time that ANA would do likewise. Needless to say, Ivan Holyman ordered the Douglas DC-6 instead. Why? Accounts vary with different authors. One suggestion was that, as a result of TAA having placed their Viscount order first, ANA would not receive their aircraft until after TAA's order had been completed. Faced with this delay, Ivan Holyman departed for the US, where he placed an order with Douglas for four DC-6Bs. Another version has it that ANA management preferred the DC-6, as the aircraft had already proven itself as a sound, reliable performer and, being a further development of the DC-4 already flying with ANA, should make for an easier transition into its fleet. At this stage, ANA still held hopes of operating internationally, where the DC-6B would be more suitable. In 1953, the Viscount, as the first of a new type, was experiencing developmental problems (think A380/B787), all of which made ANA's decision to purchase the DC-6 not unreasonable. Due to delays in the delivery of new DC-6Bs, ANA bought two second hand DC-6 aircraft from US carrier, National Airlines, followed by four new DC-6Bs from Douglas. The aircraft were:

DC-6	VH-INV	NAIRANA	delivered	September 1953
DC-6	VH-INW	KURANA	delivered	September 1953
DC-6B	VH-INH	BUNGANA	delivered	February 1955
DC-6B	VH-INU	KWINANA	delivered	February 1955
DC-6B	VH-INS	BELTANA	delivered	August 1956
DC-6B	VH-INT	OLYMPIANA	delivered	October 1956

The DC-6 proved to be a winner, configured to carry 58 passengers and four tons of freight, as against the Viscount's 44 passengers and two tons of freight. As a long-range aircraft, the DC-6 could operate direct Melbourne-Perth or Sydney-Perth. In comparison, the shorter range Viscount operating to Perth was normally restricted to 30 passengers, personal baggage and no freight. Departing from Adelaide, the Viscounts were often required to stop at Kalgoorlie to refuel. Throughout 1954, ANA's DC-6 aircraft continued to be popular with the travelling public, taking traffic away from TAA. This dominance included the important east coast triangle of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, then and now, the heaviest travelled sectors in Australia. ANA recorded profits for the financial years 1954/55 and 1955/56, yet fissures were beginning to appear. Foremost, was the requirement to service the government's loan that had been used to purchase the DC-6s.

The latter half of 1954 saw ANA facing increased opposition. With the introduction of Convair CV-340s by Ansett Airways and Vickers Viscounts by TAA, ANA began to feel the effects of load factor penetration from its competitors. In the latter half of 1955, another competitor, Butler Air Transport (BAT), began operating the Sydney-Melbourne sector with two Viscounts. The 1952 Civil Aviation Agreement was only designed to cover two airlines i.e. ANA and TAA. The likes of Ansett and BAT could more or less choose to operate without constraint. ANA owned almost a 50 per cent interest in BAT through its Bungana Investments; the competition from "one of its own" must have been frustrating.



*ANA DC-6B VH-INU "Kwinana", the second of two DC-6Bs delivered in February 1955*

## **The Demise of ANA**

In the 1956 Queen's Birthday Honors List, Ivan Holyman was knighted for his services to aviation. Inevitably, though, it seemed that ANA's time was drawing near. There still remained an extremely high debt to be serviced arising from the loan to buy the DC-6s and DC-6Bs and passenger load factors were falling. Many felt that ANA was run like a large family, with Ivan Holyman, at times, rewarding loyalty over ability which, in turn, affected correct analysis and decision making. Nevertheless, his contribution to Australian aviation cannot be underestimated. The opposition that confronted him in the years immediately following WWII would have tested the entrepreneurial abilities of aviation's best.



*ANA DC6B VH-INH "Bungana", delivered new in February 1955*

Ivan Holyman's death on 18 January 1957 created a vacuum in ANA management, as no plan of succession appeared to exist. 80 per cent of ANA's ownership was held silently by shipping companies that were not overly interested in aviation. They had been content to leave the running of the airline to Ivan

Holyman, as long as profits and dividends were maintained. By July 1957, ANA was losing over A£40,000/A\$80,000 per month. Despite the efforts of Holyman's son, Ian, and his supporters to retain an interest in ANA, the strongest representations were being made by Reg Ansett in his quest to secure the failing airline. His approaches to ANA board members (the silent shipping partners) in regard to takeover negotiations were met with an almost dismissive attitude. Finally, agreement was reached and on 21 October 1957 the newly created airline, Ansett-ANA, commenced operations. ANA's fleet of six DC-6 and DC-6B aircraft, having served the airline for just under four years, were now to resume their careers under a new master.

## **A Change of Owners**

When Reg Ansett took control of ANA he was 47 years old. He was self-driven and almost remorseless in his will to succeed. Learning to fly in 1929, he endured and overcame a number of hardships on his way to becoming managing director of Ansett Transport Industries (ATI). For four decades Reg Ansett controlled his empire through determination, acquisition, political astuteness and the *Airline Equipment Act 1958*, the latter continuing for the next 32 years. From February 1936 until January 1980, he had created an aura of the archetypical self-made man who, from humble beginnings, became an aviation mandarin. Then, in a familiar scene witnessed many times by Ivan Holyman and himself, joint ownership of ATI passed to Peter Abeles and Rupert Murdoch, respective owners of Thomas National Transport (TNT) and News Corporation. Sir Reginald Ansett retained the position of chairman until his death in December 1981; he was 72.

The *Airline Equipment Act 1958* imposed various limitations on the nation's two domestic airlines, Ansett-ANA and TAA. Aircraft numbers, types and therefore seat numbers had to be compatible. Likewise, trunk route structures and scheduled services over those routes required parallel scheduling by both airlines. Profits were virtually guaranteed. The *Airlines Agreement Act 1961* resulted in further regulations covering the simultaneous ordering of jet aircraft and their placement in service.

Following the ANA takeover, Reg Ansett began acquiring intrastate airlines, along with aviation interests in New Guinea and New Zealand. These included BAT in NSW and QAL (Queensland Airlines) in which BAT owned a majority shareholding; Guinea Airways (SA); MacRobertson Miller Airlines (WA); SPANZ (South Pacific Airlines of New Zealand); and Mandated Airlines (MAL) in PNG.

Ownership of these airlines avoided the possibility of poaching by other parties and guaranteed a very large percentage of oncarriage traffic and freight.

Ansett-ANA's newly inherited fleet of DC-6/DC6B aircraft continued as the airline's "front line aircraft" until March 1959 when superseded by the arrival of the Lockheed L188 Electra. Great fanfare surrounded the introduction of the Electra, a four engine turboprop aircraft able to carry 78 passengers (18F/60Y), cruising at 350kt/650km/h. Both domestic airlines had introduced tourist class (economy) in 1955 although it was not successful until 1957/58 when the fare differential of 30 per cent between the two classes increased the numbers of passengers travelling in tourist/economy. In time, cabin seating allocated to tourist class rose substantially. With the introduction of the Electra, the DC-6/DC-6B aircraft were relegated to secondary route structures.

In February 1960, the federal government introduced the Cross Charter Agreement to address fleet parity between the two airlines. TAA was required to exchange three of its Viscount 700s for two Ansett-ANA DC-6Bs. TAA were not pleased, believing that the overall loss of one aircraft would reduce fleet flexibility and result in passenger overflow to Ansett-ANA. At that time, the DC-6B's worth was less than what was still owed on them. Accordingly, it suited Ansett-ANA for TAA to retain the aircraft until the agreement terminated in 1963 when their debt to equity ratio would have improved significantly. This arrangement left Ansett-ANA with two DC-6Bs in its fleet. Two DC-6 aircraft, VH-INV and VH-INW, originally purchased in 1953, were sold in March 1960.



*The Federal Government introduced the "Cross Charter Agreement" in 1960 to bring about "fleet equality" between TAA and Ansett-ANA. Above is DC-6B VH-INH, one of two ex-Ansett-ANA aircraft allocated to TAA. In return, Ansett-ANA received three Vickers Viscounts from TAA. The agreement remained in place until 1966*

The early 1960s brought further DC-6B route expansion, when Reg Ansett pressured the government to approve services to New Guinea. Previously the domain of Qantas, its company chairman Hudson Fysh expressed his displeasure when it was announced that both Ansett-ANA and TAA would be given the rights to operate between Australia and New Guinea. Both domestic airlines commenced operating Sydney-Brisbane-Port Moresby-Lae in July 1960 using DC-6B aircraft, until replaced later by Electras.

In October 1961, Reg Ansett challenged the validity of TAA's sole operating rights into and out of Darwin. Under the Australian National Airlines Act 1945, only a government airline (TAA) could operate into a commonwealth territory, i.e., the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), Northern Territory and New Guinea. Recognition of Darwin's growing importance as an administrative hub and international airport was seen as a valid reason for granting Ansett-ANA traffic rights to Darwin to compete with TAA. Ansett-ANA soon commenced scheduled services to Darwin from

Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney with DC-6Bs on what was known as the “Golden Boomerang Service”.



*DC-6B VH-INU  
“Kwinana”  
introduced by  
ANA in 1955, then  
to Ansett-ASNA in  
1957. This aircraft  
was placed with  
TAA under the  
“Cross Charter  
Agreement”, and  
returned to  
Ansett-ANA in  
1966*

As a result of rapid passenger growth at this time, both airlines sent technical delegations to visit and evaluate aircraft development in the US and Europe. Their interests centred on jet aircraft to replace their all propeller-driven fleets. Contenders included the Boeing B727 (US), BAC One-Eleven and Hawker-Siddeley Trident (UK) and Sud Aviation Caravelle (FRA). In mid November 1962, the Minister for Civil Aviation announced approval for both airlines each to buy two B727s. The estimated arrival time in Australia was to be late 1964, early 1965, with each aircraft costing approximately A£2,500,000/A\$5,000,000.

Before the arrival of the B727s, both airlines had a “back to the future moment” when, in 1963, each airline bought a DC-6B. This was necessitated by a sharp rise in passenger numbers that had stagnated for the previous two years. For the first time in Australian domestic air travel history, over three million passengers were carried.



*Ansett-ANA DC-6B VH-INS “Beltana”, photographed on the tarmac at Adelaide Airport in the mid-1960s*

Ansett-ANA’s DC-6B VH-INA, purchased in 1963 to provide additional fleet capacity, featured in the only major domestic incident involving the type during its Australian career. On 14 April 1964, just after takeoff from Essendon airport to Perth via Adelaide, the No 3 engine suffered the loss of a propeller blade. Shortly after, the remaining two

blades and hub detached from the engine, resulting in the engine being pulled out of its mounting. To effect a safe landing, the captain made a number of steep dives over Port Phillip Bay, which resulted in the engine falling clear of the aircraft. VH-INA, with six crew and 59 passengers, then landed safely at Essendon. This incident was a wonderful illustration of the engineering soundness Douglas built into its aircraft. Following repair, the aircraft returned to service with the airline.



*Ansett-ANA DC6-B VH-INA at Essendon after losing no. 3 engine propeller, then the engine, on 14 April 1964*

Australia's domestic aviation scene changed dramatically on 16 October 1964, with the arrival of Ansett-ANA's first Boeing B727-100, VH-RME, at Essendon airport. In keeping with the Two Airlines Policy, TAA's B727 landed minutes later. Interestingly, VH-RME's captain was Authur Lovell who had joined ANA in 1937 as a DC-2 first officer.



*Captain Arthur Lovell (Rt) Photographed in the cockpit of a DC-6. He joined ANA as a first officer in 1937, eventually becoming a management pilot for both ANA then Ansett-ANA*

### **Goodbye and Good Luck**

As both airlines introduced B727s on Australian routes and with the first Douglas DC-9s due to arrive in April 1967, the DC-6B's days were numbered. The Cross Charter Agreement, finally terminated in late August 1966, left TAA one and Ansett-ANA five DC-6B aircraft to dispose of. By 1968, Australia's DC-6 fleet was gone. Sadly their fate was to follow the path flown by many | them, often winding up scrapped.

Although Ivan Holyman's selection of the DC-6 in 1953 was maligned by many as outdated, had the government of the day approved ANA's US dollar license earlier, the aircraft may have graced our skies as early as 1947/48. We will never know what outcome may have resulted. A final word comes from Arthur Lovell, a management pilot for both ANA and Ansett-ANA, with

many hours on DC6/DC-6Bs. His view, supported by other pilots, was that the DC-6 was a “most beautiful aircraft to fly and operate, and probably for its time, one of the best aircraft built”.

**Dean Robinson**  
**History Group Member**  
**April 2017**



## APPENDIX

### Specifications

	DC-6	DC-6B
Wingspan	35.84m (117ft 6in)	35.84m (117ft 6in)
Length	30.65m (100ft 6in)	32.20m (105ft 7in)
Height	8.87m (29ft 1in)	8.74m (28ft 8in)
Engines	Pratt & Whitney R-2800-CA-15 2100hp (1575kW)	Pratt & Whitney R-2800-CB-17 2500hp (1875kW)
Empty weight	24,345kg (53,623lb)	25,132kg (55,357lb)
Gross weight	44,129kg (97,200lb)	48,578kg (107,000lb)
Cruising speed	285kt (528km/h)	273kt (507km/h)
Rate of climb	900ft/min	1120ft/min
Range with max fuel	3400nm (6300km)	4100nm (7595km)
Accommodation	48-80	54-102



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Photographs were sourced from various of the above publications and Dean Robinson's personal collection.