1926

2 January 1926

TWO POLAR FLIGHTS

Captain Wilkins's Plans

Captain G. H. Wilkins, who already has a very creditable record as an explorer, expects to make two great Polar flights this year.

The first will be across the North Pole, from Point Barrow, Alaska, to Spitsbergen. In this venture Captain Wilkins has received the support of Mr Henry Ford and Stefansson, and the flight will be made in a machine fitted with the new Ford aero engine.

Captain Wilkins is not the only aspirant for Polar honours. Three other explorers have announced their intention to fly to the Pole this season.

Nansen, doyen of Polar explorers, is preparing to make the flight in a German machine. Amundsen has announced his intention to again attempt to reach the Pole by airship.

There is also a French expedition being prepared under the auspices of the Ministry of Marine, and consequently there is every prospect this year of an exciting race to the Pole.

Most of the flights will be begun in late May or early June, this being the most favourable season from an atmospheric and climatic point of view. Already there is speculation as to which explorer will be first "off the mark."

Captain Wilkins has stated that his projected Antarctic flight would be proceeded with after his flight across the North Pole. This expedition is scheduled to leave New Zealand in one of the whaling depot ships in October next, and he has announced that he will use the same Ford machine in the Antarctic in which he hopes to fly across the North Pole.

Much of the coastline over which he hopes to fly is quite unknown, and has never been seen by human eye. The flight will be in the nature of a reconnaissance for his major scheme, which includes the establishment of meteorological stations along the continental edge from which wireless weather messages would be sent to South America, South Africa and Australia.

Captain Wilkins's hope is that the governments of these countries would be induced to provide funds for the maintenance of these stations.

Briefly, his theory is that the weather in the southern hemisphere is largely determined by the weather conditions prevailing over the Antarctic continent, and if regular bulletins could be issued thence to the meteorologists in Melbourne, Cape Town and Buenos Aires, weather forecasts could be both lengthened and improved.

These theories do not commend themselves to the meteorologists, who maintain that the world's weather has its origin about the Equator, and, secondly, that if any funds are available for meteorological research, there is ample scope for their employment within the countries concerned.

The projected route of Captain Wilkins's proposed flight around the Antarctic continent is shown on the attached map. The expedition is scheduled to leave New Zealand for the Cape of Good Hope, and the flight of the expedition to the Pole is expected to be made just after the departure of the French explorer.

The speakers declared that Captain Wilkins probably would discover new land for the United States. Dr. I. Bowman, director of the American Geographical Society, said that Captain Wilkins was not only an experienced aviator, but a gallant officer.

Captain Wilkins, speaking of the proposed Arctic venture, reiterated his belief that he would secure valuable data, useful for an Antarctic venture. He emphasised the economic importance to the world of knowledge of what both Polar Regions could offer in the way of development.

Moreover, the coming venture in the Arctic and Antarctic regions would give extensive opportunity to gather meteorological data by which the seasons may be forecast. This was one of the principal reasons for undertaking the flights.

Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld) Monday 4 January 1926, page 8.
They were compelled to make for a small channel with walls of pack ice. “We were caught like rats in a trap,” he added. The other aeroplane, N24, had also been compelled to land, and the Norwegian flag, waving over a tremendous ice wall about four and a half miles away, indicated the position of the men of the other machine. Communication was established, and the members of the party joined forces in an endeavour to save the aeroplane N25.

Captain Amundsen gave a vivid and detailed account of the difficulties experienced by the party when fighting the ice in their attempts to free the aeroplane. Time after time they levelled the surface for hundreds of feet, only to find their labours in vain owing to the sudden change in the formation of the ice.

“It was,” said the explorer, “a battle for life.” Near them was a huge mass of ice, which seemed to watch them like a sphinx. There was a critical period when the main body of the pack of ice had forced itself close to the aeroplanes and was but a few yards away. They imagined they could see the sphinx nodding its head and chuckling with joy; now it was going to get them. But it was mistaken.

The six men on whom it was gazing were not the same six as had come through the air from climes serene and filled with the good things of life. The men it saw were six who hardened by bad luck, utterly exhausting work and hunger, did not fear anything on earth—not even the sphinx. For the arduous work of clearing a slide way for the plane, one member of the party used a camera stand, another a flag pole. They worked day after day with only a little food on the drawing board. The lecturer kept his audience deeply interested while he described in detail the clearing of the tracks. At last, at the fifth attempt, they tried a new plan. They trampled the snow down for 1500 ft., and waited for the surface to harden with the frost. Fortune favoured them in the early morning. The wind was from the south-east.

Everything that could be dispensed with was thrown out of the plane. The engines were set full speed at 2000 revolutions a minute. The plane rolled and jolted. It had to cross several chasms in the ice. It cleared them, and just before the track was covered the plane left the ice free.

The Wilkins Chronicle
A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

8 January 1926
FLIGHT OVER POLE

NEW YORK, December 30.

In an interview with a representative of the Australian Press Association, Captain G. H. Wilkins, who is to lead the projected Polar flight, stated that his association with the Detroit Arctic Expedition did not mean that he had abandoned his Antarctic plans for an Australasian Polar-Pacific expedition, leaving New Zealand about October, 1926.

He expects that his Arctic work will be completed before then. All the profits he is able to save from the Arctic expedition, he stated, will be used in connection with the Australasian Expedition. The machine he will use in the Arctic flight will he afterwards use in the Antarctic, expedition, in place of N25, for which he negotiated, but which he failed to secure, owing to lack of Australian financial support.

Dr. Vilhjalmur Stefansson, when interviewed, stated that the Arctic flight would be of great benefit to Captain Wilkins’s further work in demonstrating that Polar air conditions were no worse and possibly better than elsewhere, and that the Poles were not barren ice-covered wastes. Explorers long had known of that fact, but it was necessary actually to demonstrate the fact to convince the public and arouse interest in support of further exploration and development in the Polar Regions.

NEW YORK, January 2.

Captain G. H. Wilkins the well-known Australian explorer was lionised by scientific men at a dinner by the Detroit Aviation Society, preliminary to his departure on a trans-Polar flight. The speakers declared that Captain Wilkins probably would discover new land for the United States.

Dr. I. Bowman, director of the American Geographical Society, said that Captain Wilkins was not only an experienced aviator, but a gallant officer.

Captain Wilkins, speaking of the proposed Arctic venture, reiterated his belief that he would secure valuable data, useful for an Antarctic venture. He emphasised the economic importance to
The world of knowledge of what both Polar Regions could offer in the way of development.

Moreover, the coming venture, in the Arctic and Antarctic regions would give extensive opportunity to gather meteorological data by which the seasons may be forecast. This was one of the principal reasons for undertaking the flights.

LONDON, January 4.

Spring will witness what will virtually be a race to the Arctic. Men are already working on a hangar for Captain Roald Amundsen’s airship for the projected flight in April and Captain G. H. Wilkins hopes to start in an aeroplane from Alaska in March.

The Arctic authority of the Daily Express points out that each will fly in different directions. Wilkins is starting early in order to avoid the thaws. In the event of Amundsen’s ship being unable to enter King’s Bay, where he proposes to take the air, Wilkins has every chance of winning. On the other hand it is possible that Amundsen will fly from Spitsbergen.

Week (Brisbane, Qld.), Friday 8 January 1926, page 24.


19 January 1926

Captain Wilkins’ Plane. DAMAGED BY FIRE AT DETROIT. (Australian Cable Service.)

DETROIT, 18-1-26.

A disastrous fire occurred here yesterday when a large triple engine metal aeroplane, intended for Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer’s polar flight, was damaged beyond repair. This machine was one of ten destroyed.

He had planned to make it in a flight of 2100 miles from Alaska across to the North Pole, starting on the 1st March. The expedition is being financed by American capital. Captain Wilkins had arranged to send two machines to Alaska, and use which proved best suited to the conditions.

The origin of the fire is unknown. It laid waste the entire experimental plant in the aeroplane division of the Ford works. Evening News (Rockhampton, Qld.), Tuesday 19 January 1926, page 5.


20 January 1926

Trans-Polar Flight
Amundsen-Ellsworth Plan
Italian Airship to be Used

Reuter.

OSLO, January 18.

As the result of a conference in the past few days a contract has been agreed to, under which the Italian airman, Colonel Nobile, will command the airship Norge in the Amundsen-Ellsworth Polar Expedition.

The route taken will be from Rome to Spitsbergen, via Marseilles, Paris, Pulham, Leningrad, Vardoe, and Kings Bay. If mooring space in Leningrad is not available the Norge will go from Pulham to Vardoie, via Oslo and Sweden.

There will be 16 or 17 persons aboard, including, besides Captain Roald Amundsen, Mr. Lincoln Ellsworth, Lieutenant Riser-Larsen, and Lieutenant Omdal, of last year’s expedition, and Captain Misting, of Amundsen’s ship Maud. The remainder comprise scientific experts and an Italian crew.

AIRPLANE DESTROYED BY FIRE DETROIT, January 18.

The all metal three-engine airplane, just completed for the use of the Detroit Arctic expedition, has been destroyed by fire. The Commander of the Expedition (Captain G. H. Wilkins) said that the loss of the plane would not delay the start.

Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld.), Wednesday 20 January 1926, page 9.


22 January 1926

SNOW-MOTORS FAIL WON’T STEER ON ICE. WORRY FOR WILKINS. (Sun Special)

FAIRBANKS (Alaska), Thursday.

Snow motors of the type to be used by the Australian explorer, Captain G. H. Wilkins, to haul supplies from Fairbanks to Point Barrow, the northernmost point of Alaska, in preparation for his flight to the Pole, are declared by observers to be unsatisfactory.

The motors were given a 60-miles test. The steering-gear failed to guide them over ice and bare ground.

Sun (Sydney, NSW), Friday 22 January 1926, page 1.


23 January 1926

POLAR PLANE BURNT

The great triple-engine metal aeroplane in which Capt. G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, was to have attempted a flight across the North Pole was damaged beyond repair in a fire at Detroit (U.S.A.).

Nine other aeroplanes were destroyed in the fire, which lay waste the entire experimental plant of the stout metal aeroplane division of the Ford works.

The cause of the fire is unknown, and the extent of the damage has not yet been determined.

Captain Wilkins planned to fly from Point Barrow (Alaska) across to Spitsbergen (Norway), the flight to commence from Point Barrow on March 21.


27 January 1926

SUPPLY PARTY REACHES ALASKA. (Australian Cable Service.)

VANCOUVER, 20-1-20. — Headed by Mr. Malcolm Smith, the supply party of Captain G. H. Wilkins’s North Polar Expedition has reached Anchorage, Alaska. They expect to arrive tomorrow at Nome, from which supplies will be transported to Point Barrow. The party is confident that with sledges and snow motors they will make the journey.

Evening News (Rockhampton, Qld.), Wednesday 27 January 1926, page 5.


30 January 1926

The news of the week.

WILKINS TO FLY TO POLE.

Plans for big adventure.

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, will attempt in March to fly across the North Pole as a representative of the United States, by which country he will be financed.

The American organisations which are supporting him say that Captain Wilkins is better qualified than any other man to make the attempt.

Writing to a friend in Melbourne Captain Wilkins said he would begin his flight across the North Pole from Alaska to Spitsbergen on March 21.

“When we start,” he said, “it will be with the understanding that if our plane fails to reach Spitsbergen or return, no rescue expedition will be sent out for two years.”
“My first goal is the ice pole, but many geographers believe that I shall discover new lands before reaching the Pole. If so, I shall drop an American flag on it, claim it for the United States, take photographs and return to Point Barrow, my starting place.”

Seals for Food

“If I do not sight land I shall continue across the North Pole to Spitsbergen. The distance is about 2000 miles. Our Fokker planes will travel 2500 miles without refueling.

If we strike head winds and run out of fuel we shall land on the ice and get to Spitsbergen the best way we can. We can live on the ice indefinitely. Seals and polar bears will supply food; their hides will be material for boots and clothing, and their blubber will supply fuel.

Amundsen succeeded in getting his plane away from the ice after a forced landing and we see no reason why we cannot do the same.”

The expedition is sponsored by the American Geographical Society and the Detroit Aviation Society.

A Board of Control has been formed which is co-operating with Government officials, air plane manufacturers, scientists and explorers.

£25,000 Raised in One Day

Captain Wilkins, who has created a great impression in America—£25,000 was raised for his expedition in one day—has been placed in command of the party which will go to railhead in Alaska and then fly to Point Barrow.

Captain Wilkins writes that the two planes will be single engine water-cooled Liberty Fokker machines. A three-engine, air-cooled Ford machine will be used as a standby. Although the expedition is purely an American one, Captain Wilkins will carry an Australian flag to the North Pole. President Coolidge, in a letter to the chairman of the Board of Control, says: “The flight has aroused the keenest personal interest, and it is fitting that we should strive to be the first to open these unknown lands to the knowledge of the world.

The importance to commercial aviation in the possible development of air routes across the Arctic region makes the proposed enterprise of particular value.”

The chairman of the Board, referring to Captain Wilkins’s qualifications said: — “We believe him to be better qualified for the flight than any other man alive. He has had more aviation experience than any other explorer. He was with Stefansson on the Canadian Arctic expedition, with Shackleton in the Quest—second-in-command of the British Imperial Antarctic expedition, and has recently returned from an expedition in little known parts of Australia, undertaken for the British Museum.”

Captain George Hubert Wilkins (M.C. and bar), began photography from aeroplanes 16 years ago. In 1911 he was in the first mono-plane ever fitted with a 100 h.p. motor. He served with the Australian Flying Corps during the war and participated in the attempts to fly from England to Australia.

His “Kangaroo” machine was forced to descend in the Mediterranean. He is an expert pilot, navigator and mechanic and has commanded ships at sea.

Captain Wilkins makes it clear that his North Pole flight is only a preliminary to his more ambitious project of exploring the unknown coastline of the great continent surrounding the South Pole.

Weekly Times (Melbourne, Vic), Saturday 30 January 1926, page 5.


Route of proposed flight

14 February 1926

Captain Wilkins and His Party Sail For Alaska.

Arctic Continent? America’s, If Found Leader Discusses Sovereignty Question

Captain G. H. Wilkins and his Polar exploration party are ready to sail for Alaska on Saturday. The transfer of the giant Fokker plane from the railway to the ship was successful, after a narrow escape.

It dropped several feet, but was held by the cable. Interviewed on the question of the sovereignty over any land that may be discovered, Captain Wilkins said: “I am a British citizen, but this is an American expedition, so the United States should have the first opportunity to claim any land that may be found in the blind spot, of a million square miles, between Alaska and the Pole.

My own nationality will, not be involved. Anyway, if, all goes well, the theory of an Arctic continent should be proved or disproved.”

Advance Party’s Progress

NENANA (Alaska), February 12.

The advance party of the Wilkins Expedition, with the snow motors drawing 15 tons of supplies, has reached a point a dozen miles north of Nenana. The motor trains are working well. They rested for the night, and in the morning found that one casting of each machine was broken, but spare parts were soon substituted. The advance towards Point Barrow will be continued on Saturday.

One of the Fokker triple-engine planes to be used by Captain Wilkins in his Polar flight.

Sun (Sydney, NSW), Sunday 14 February 1926, page 1.


15 February 1926

TOWN TALK (Part article)
Wilkins and the Eagle.

That restless, dare-devil Australian, Captain G. H. Wilkins, has the eyes of the world on him at present by reason of his attempt to cause the American eagle to fly over Polar lands — his expedition by air is now on the way. Let us hope that the adventurous ex-soldier has more success
with the emblem of the United States than he did with a certain eagle when last in Australia.

He was working for the British Museum at the time, and was seeking birds and mammals in West Queensland. A shot brought down a wedge-tailed eagle—our biggest bird of prey—and Wilkins tucked the gun under one arm and went along to pick up the bird. A bushman would have known better. Wilkins knows better now.

No sooner was the seemingly dead bird touched than it turned quickly, struck upwards, as eagles will, and the great claws tore the man’s trousers to ribbons and badly gashed his legs. But incidents like that are mere trivialities to a man of Wilkins’s temperament.

Daily Telegraph (Sydney, NSW), Monday 15 February 1926, page 6.


15 February 1926
Race for North Pole.

CONTEST BETWEEN CAPTAIN WILKINS AND AMUNDESEN
(Australian Cable Service.)

SEATTLE, 14-2-26. —

A perilous and thrilling race for the honour of being the first to fly over the North Pole will engage the two noted explorers Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian, and Captain Roald Amundsen, the Polar veteran, in aeroplanes. Captain Wilkins will start from Alaska, with Spitsbergen as his objective, while Captain Amundsen, who is flying in the opposite direction, will make his first attempt by airship.

Captain Wilkins will make an earlier start from outposts of civilisation, but will have greater, initial difficulties to launch his aeroplane. Captain Amundsen hopes to overtake his rival’s start by an all-air route, and reach Spitsbergen by the time Captains Wilkins is ready to leave Alaska. Captain Wilkins’s two Fokker aeroplanes made the first stage of the journey by rail from the factory in New Jersey. It was a race against time to reach Seattle, whence a steamer was scheduled to leave for Point Barrow, and few steamers on the coast are capable of stowing the huge wings or the machine.

Captain Wilkins and his engineers are confident that the Fokker machines will not fail; they declare the rail journey to be the most hazardous stage of all. The special truck, built for the planes, was the longest on any American railways.

in the Polar Regions occasions the greatest problem. The most serious danger or the polar flight would be the freezing of certain parts, such as the oil tanks and magneto.

Captain Wilkins and his party must be content for warmth with reinder skins and furs. The engine itself will be contained in an aluminium shroud for further warmth. The journey from seaward across Alaska to the starting point entails a trek of 1000 miles, which will be made by motor tractors mounted on revolving drums, and drawing trains and sledges loaded with stores, including 15 tons of petrol.

The Eskimos declared that nothing could equal dog traction, but preliminary tests seem to have converted them. The Amundsen airship was sold to the expedition by the Italian Government.

Captain Amundsen hopes to accomplish the 1800 miles flight to Alaska in 24 hours if he is able to keep a straight course. NENANA, 14-2-26. —

Captain Wilkins’s advance party with snow motors and 15 tons of supplies has reached a point 12 miles north of Nenana. The motor trains are working well. It was found that one casting of each machine had broken, but spare parts had been substituted.

Evening News (Rockhampton, Qld), Monday 15 February 1926, page 5.


16 February 1926
WILKINS’S FLIGHT. INTO THE WHITE SILENCE. NORTH POLE EXPEDITION. LURE OF SUPPOSED POLAR CONTINENT.

(Copyright — Exclusive to The Sun.)

World interest is being taken in the hazardous attempt by Captain George Hubert Wilkins to reach the North Pole by aeroplane. Wilkins leaves Point Barrow, in Alaska, on March 1, and his expedition will be under the joint auspices of the American Geographical Society, the Detroit Aviation Society, and the North American Newspaper Alliance, of which The Sun is a member.

Detroit, January 26.

The Wilkins expedition has already been completely financed, and is directed by a board of control headed by William B. Mayo of Detroit, general manager of the Ford Motor Company.

The scientific purposes of the expedition are attested by the presence on this board of Dr. Isaiah Bowman, director of the American Geographical Society; Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the explorer; and Captain Wilkins, who was one of the chief scientific aides of Shackleton on his South Polar expedition.

The idea of an aeroplane flight under Captain Wilkins’s command from Alaska to the Ice Pole occurred independently and almost simultaneously to Wilkins and to Stefansson.

Captain Wilkins was in London at the time, endeavouring to negotiate the purchase of a plane suitable for an Antarctic flight. When Wilkins learned that such a plane could not be secured, he turned to the London office of the North American Newspaper Alliance for information as to the possibility of securing it in America.

He inquired from Loring Pickering, general manager of the North American Newspaper Alliance, who was then in London, whether the American public would be interested in the more ambitious project of an Arctic flight, rather than the Antarctic project.

Wilkins had long dreamed of pursuing his earlier explorations in the north, but the cost of such an expedition had seemed prohibitive without financial assistance.

MYSTERY OF POLAR CONTINENT

While the matter was being discussed, a cablegram arrived from Mr. Stefansson, suggesting that Wilkins come to New York to discuss the possibilities of an Arctic flight. It was decided that Wilkins would proceed at once to the United States, to go over the proposal with various interested parties, including Dr. Bowman, Mr. Stefansson, and representatives of the Detroit Aviation Society, which was actively seeking plans for promoting the development of commercial aviation.

Following a series of meetings in Detroit, in which Dr. Bowman, Mr. Stefansson, and Loring Pickering, and Captain Wilkins participated, the expedition was formally organised and the Board of Control was named.

Although it is not Captain Wilkins’s purpose to hunt for land, many able scientists believe that he will find land. They have many reasons for believing that a polar continent exists between Point Barrow and the Ice Pole. Roughly, these reasons are concerned with the following facts: —

First, the prevailing Arctic winds, as observed and recorded by many explorers, indicate the possibility that a high land point exists in the neighbourhood of the Ice Pole.

Second, the Arctic tides, as charted by Harris, the American oceanographer, indicate the presence of a mass of land between Point Barrow and the geographical pole.
The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

Third, the formation of the earth’s surface in other parts of the world, taken with proved geological theories, makes it seem possible that land exists in the unexplored area.

Fourth, birds—geese, gulls and eider ducks—have been observed flying northward into the Polar Sea from Alaska and Siberia during the early summer. They have been observed returning with fledglings in late summer.

Fifth, Polar soundings, taken by several explorers, indicate that the water of the McKenzie River, pushing its way out under the ice of Beaufort Sea, is divided by some land mass.

Sixth, Arctic whalers who have returned from the edge of the ice pack, believe that land exists somewhere within that pack. Their reasons? Intangible traditions, founded on the drift of the ice, the winds, and the flight of the King eiders, the Robs gulls, and the Hutchins geese!

“The Undiscovered Pole”

Some of the whalers have reported that they saw black masses which may have been land, which may have been nothing but the black Polar mists. “Keenan’s Land” was on the maps for many years, but Storkerson, standing on the Polar ice, took observations which showed that there was no land where Keenan’s Land was supposed to be.

Stefansson calls the Ice Pole the Pole of Relative Inaccessibility. It is, when considered from the old viewpoints of Polar travel, the most difficult place to reach in the Arctic. It is the point most distant from all the points reached by ships. It is the centre of the frozen sea, into which no surface ship has steamed.

This is the pole which Captain Wilkins will seek from the air. It would be identical with the geographical pole if the ice cap fitted squarely on the globe’s head. But the ice cap is worn rakishly. Its one edge reaches up across the bald spot that is the geographical pole; its other edge reaches down to the ear, which is Alaska and the Siberian coast. And so, instead of being at 90 degrees north, longitude 00, the ice pole is near 84 degrees north, longitude 160.

Stefansson’s book, “The Friendly Arctic” begins with a discussion of this fact when it is recalled that until recent years all Polar travel demanded a ship for a base. It is apparent that it was vastly more difficult to reach 84 north 160 west, than it was to reach the geographical pole. None had reached it. The Ice Pole is the undiscovered pole.

Wilkins’s Expedition has succeeded in releasing five of the 10 sleds which have been stalled in snowdrifts for nearly two days, 20 miles from Nenana, their point of departure.

The temperature is 15 degrees below zero. The party, with two snow motors, hopes by this afternoon to release the remaining five sleds of the supply train. Holding that the expedition is a public, and not a private enterprise, the Court has dissolved its injunction, with leave to the promoters to amend their material, and reapply for an order to prevent outsiders from taking moving pictures.


17 February 1926

FROZEN NORTH.

WILKINS'S FLIGHT TO POLE.

MAN OF MANY PARTS.

PREPARATIONS FOR LEAVING

POINT BARROW.

(Exclusive to the Sun)

2

Captain Wilkins, who is now leading an aerial expedition to the North Pole, made his first flight in 1912 in a balloon in the depths of winter. For days he was posted as missing. His previous experience in the Arctic will stand him in good stead in his present attempt to reach the North Pole. His expedition is now putting the finishing touches to its equipment before setting out from Point Barrow, Alaska, on St. David’s Day, March 1.

Captain George H. Wilkins, who will lead the North Polar flight, under the auspices of the American Geographical Society, the Detroit Aviation Society and the North American Newspaper Alliance, is described as “the greatest aviator of all world explorers, and the greatest explorer of all aviators.” He has been flying in balloons and aeroplanes since 1910.

Captain Wilkins first came into the international public eye in 1912, when he drifted over the South of England in a balloon and was posted as missing by the cable correspondents throughout the world.

A few days before, the London billboards had announced: “Santa Claus has ballooned from the Pole to London. See him drop from the sky!” It was to be a Christmas show, one of those stunts that aeroplane pilots and balloonists were doing.

Cinema Advertisements in (Sun (Sydney, NSW). Tuesday 16 February 1926, page 15.)

Captain Wilkins in Arctic kit.


17 February 1926

POLAR FLIGHT.

Supply Party in Difficulties.

SLEDS’ STALL IN SNOW.

(AUSTRALIAN CABLE SERVICE).

Vancouver, Tuesday.

A message from Nenana, Alaska, states that the supply party of Captain G. H.
in the days when any sort of flight was stunt enough to draw a crowd.

Thousands gathered near London to witness the exploit and hear Santa Claus tell about the Pole, the parachute, the clump of trees, 50 miles from London. The outdoor was his back yard.

But, instead, it started off across the December sky, and the crowd grew silent, watching the pilot and the young photographer, who had taken pictures of Santa Claus in the air, make countless unsuccessful efforts to free a tangled release cord. Today the Santa Claus photographer is known to scientists and explorers as Captain George Hubert Wilkins, explorer, aviator and engineer. As commander of the Arctic expedition he is completing the plans for the expedition's aeroplane flight from Point Barrow, Alaska, to the Pole of Relative Inaccessibility, the centre of the Polar ice pack. He plans to leave Point Barrow in March. The Santa Claus incident was not the first of Captain Wilkins's adventures in the air. It made him a three-day celebrity, however, because the balloon went drifting about over England until Santa Claus himself was certain that Wilkins and the pilot had been lost at sea.

PREVIOUS ADVENTURES IN THE ARCTIC

But when the Mary Sachs, one of Stefansson’s three boats, put into Teller, near Nome, Alaska, where her engineer became incapacitated, the expedition was delayed. Wilkins announced casually that he could run a gasoline engine. He took the throttle, and the Mary Sachs went to sea. Later Stefansson transferred Wilkins to the Karluk, and when the Karluk jammed into the polar ice pack, Stefansson took Wilkins and two other men and went ashore. The four men headed west, and walked to Point Barrow, a journey of 200 miles. There they learned that the two smaller ships had gone east, and so, they started east again. They walked 300 miles on this trip.

Wilkins meanwhile had given up his position with the Gaumont Company to accompany Stefansson. The party went on to Coronation Gulf, living off the land and the ice. They made no pretence of carrying supplies. When on the land they shot caribou. When on the ice they shot seals and polar bear.

Stefansson said recently that Wilkins and Storker T. Storkerson are the only other Arctic explorers who have practised the Stefansson method. This method will be followed by the Detroit expedition in case it is found necessary to make a forced landing on the ice. Wilkins was sent back by Stefansson to bring up the ships which were then in the command of sea captains.

He navigated the Sachs and the North Star across the polar seas, and made contact with Stefansson. The sea captains had believed this trip impossible, and had refused to make it.

F a t e n

A fleet of trawlers searched for them in the North Sea and the Channel.

Ultimately the balloon came down in a clump of trees, 50 miles from London. Wilkins was born on an Australian sheep station in 1888. His boyhood was spent astride a horse, mustering sheep, boundary riding, and so on. He handled a rifle when he was ten. The outdoor was his back yard. He went to the State school and studied electrical engineering at the Adelaide School of Mines.

He learned photography for the purpose of working his way around the world, and in 1911 he found himself in London, preparing to start for the Balkans to take action pictures of the Turks and Bulgars. In London he had proved himself an accomplished air and land photographer. He had photographed the German army manoeuvres from the air, the naval review at Spithead, and had seen Algiers, the Sahara, Vienna, and Portugal from a plane.

With a British naval lieutenant he had flown the first non-stop monoplane equipped with a 100-horse power motor. The French had watched him sitting on the wing of a Maurice Farman plane, photographing, a hare hunt.

The Turks with whom Wilkins was billeted had three aeroplanes. But he found them, unsuitable for photographic purposes. And so he loaded his movie camera on a horse and rode along with the Turkish cavalry. At Tchatalja in 1912 he took what were said to be the first action films of a battle. His camera caught a dozen Turkish soldiers as they fell dead. He obtained a panorama of a battle and of the Turkish retreat.

Following the Balkan War, the Gaumont Company of London gave him other hazardous assignments. Later he went to the West Indies, and while there was asked to go to the Arctic with the Canadian Arctic expedition of which Stefansson, the American-Canadian explorer, had been named commander. Stefansson accepted him for what he was—a movie cameraman.

During the winter of 1915 he freighted supplies across Melville Island, and in the spring went north with Stefansson on another 600-mile ice trip.

SOME OTHER ADVENTURES

Word of the World War reached the explorers, and Wilkins headed back to join the Australian army. He was given command of the Australian’s photographic section on the Western Front, and is said to have participated in more major offensives than any other Australian army officer. He received the Military Cross with one bar, and was twice mentioned in despatches.

After the war he went to Turkey to photograph the Gallipoli front. He went on from there through Anatolia, Syria and Palestine, and arrived in Cairo in time to take part in dispersing the anti-British riots. He was back in London in time to command the Kangaroo, one of the planes that started on the London to Australia flight. A broken oil line required a forced landing at Crete.

After this venture he became the second-in-command of the British Imperial Antarctic expedition, which went to Graham Land in the autumn of 1921. While on this cruise he made a 300-mile trip along the Antarctic coast in a whaleboat. In 1922 he joined Sir Ernest Shackleton on the Quest Expedition, and was with Shackleton when the British explorer died. Ten days after he reached London he left for Russia to do special service work for the British Government.

He returned from Australia last autumn, after spending two and a half years in command of the Wilkins Australian and Islands Expedition. This expedition was organised by the British Museum of Natural History for the purpose of studying bird and animal life in little-known parts of Australia.

Sun (Sydney, NSW), Wednesday 17 February 1926, page 14.

background of the northern Polar Regions. Described in America as a man of many parts, Captain Wilkins is also a man of many climates; he knows both Arctic and Antarctic conditions, having been with Stefansson in the north, and with Sir Ernest Shackleton when that explorer made the Antarctic his last resting place. Captain Wilkins is one of the three explorers who have proved that it is possible to live on the natural resources of the Arctic. Having that experience he is not taking elaborate food supplies on his polar flight, but in case of wreckage will subsist on seals, bears, caribou and others creatures of what Stefansson calls the “Friendly Arctic.” Thus the boy who was born on a South Australian sheep station in 1888 has become a world famed figure. He ranks with other Australians amongst the world’s great men. Probably in proportion to the population, more Australians take their place in the world’s front rank than those of any other nation. That is the result of British stock in a new and ideal environment. So the world press has recently spoken of the late Professor John Hunter, Captain Wilkins, Dame Melba and others more or less illustrious. Nurtured in Australia humanity claims them.

Captain Wilkins, after concluding his natural history investigations in Australia, returned to London. There he was studying the possibilities of an Antarctic flight when Stefansson cabled to him to visit America with a view to an Arctic flight.

The outcome is the present expedition, undertaken under the auspices of the American Geographical Society, the Detroit Aviation Society and the North American Newspapers Alliance. Captain Wilkins is now completing the arrangements.

Next month he will take off from Point Barrow, in Alaska. Between there and the North Pole is a huge unexplored region. There have been controversies as to whether this region is land or sea. Tides, winds, movements of birds and other phenomena indicate the existence there of a polar continent.

Captain Wilkins should solve this problem. The American explorer was recently described as the one of all most qualified, to undertake the task. He left his boyhood’s sheep station and studied electrical engineering at the Adelaide School of Mines. He also studied photography. In 1911 he was taking motion pictures of the Balkan war. When the Great War broke out, he was with Stefansson in the north and until 1916 did not know there was a war on. In France he became the Australian official war photographer. After the war he left for the Antarctic.

With so much achieved at 37 years of age, the name of Captain George Hubert Wilkins has become one of the most honoured in Australian annals and world famous, adding to Australia’s status among others more or less illustrious.

Described in America as a man of many backgrounds, Captain Wilkins has become one of the most famous, adding to Australia’s status among others more or less illustrious.

Captain Hubert George Wilkins is a great Australian. He looks like an Australian of 30 or 40 years ago, because of his beard. Shaving is dispensed with on exploration tours, and returning to civilisation the beard remains. In a city street people turn and gaze after the tall spare figure clad in tropical garb.

So he appeared a couple of years ago when he passed through Brisbane after a solitary investigation of the little known plant and animal life of North Queensland. Cornered at his hotel, and interviewed, Captain Wilkins seemed wholly a scientist. His scientific knowledge was profound. Because of that and other qualities he was working for the British Museum authorities adding to the world’s knowledge of natural history. The specimens collected during the arduous North Queensland trip made a bulky consignment and included many new zoological and botanical varieties. Now Captain Wilkins has turned up again. That type of man does—unexpectedly and dramatically.

The setting of the Queensland tropics has been exchanged for the icebound and exotic conditions of the North Pole. Captain Wilkins is now completing the arrangements under the auspices of the American Geographical Society, the Detroit Aviation Society and the North American Newspapers Alliance. Captain Wilkins is now completing the arrangements and gazette will be assembling and testing the planes. Captain Wilkins will hop off then for Point Barrow.

19 February 1926

LURE OF ADVENTURE
Wilkins’s Stirring Career

CAPTAIN WILKINS, AUSTRALIAN EXPLOITS

Accomplished Airmen and Explorer

(Exclusive to The Daily Daily Mail)

The article was exactly the same as the previous article without the below photo and caption.

26 February 1926

AIRSHIP AND PLANES TO RACE ACROSS POLAR WASTES
Captain Wilkins Readies Fairbanks

AMUNDSEN STARTS FROM SPITZBERGEN ON APRIL 1

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, in the first stages of his race with Captain Roald Amundsen, the Norwegian, to the North Pole, has reached Fairbanks, Alaska. Captain Amundsen leaves Spitsbergen on April 1 in a dirigible specially being built in Italy. Wilkins is flying from Alaska to Spitsbergen, using two Fokker planes.

(a) FAIRBANKS (Alaska) Feb. 25 — Capt. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, arrived at Fairbanks today, after a seventeen hours’ trip in the guard’s van of the freight train which brought his aeroplane from Washington. For the next two weeks the flying division will be assembling and testing the planes. Captain Wilkins will hop off then for Point Barrow.

NENANA (Alaska), February 25.—Two snow motors, with sleds carrying a petrol supply for aeroplanes for Captain Wilkins, the Australian who is flying to the North Pole, went the 65 miles to Telovana in 14 days, using 400 gallons of petrol. A wireless message was received here from Gordon Scott, who is with the motors at Molovana.

Scott said: “We can pull three sleds per motor if we obtain more front castings and radiators. We could reach Point Barrow, but we fear we will burn up the entire petrol supply in making the trip.” It is believed that Captain Wilkins may decide to pick up the petrol supply and make the aeroplane flight to Point Barrow. Captain Wilkins leaves on Thursday for Fairbanks in a freight train carrying the planes.
AMUNDSEN’S PARTY OF 16

(Copyright)

For his dash across the North Pole from Spitsbergen to Alaska, Captain Roald Amundsen, the famous Norwegian explorer, will use a dirigible which is now being reconditioned at Cento Celle, Italy, under the direction of Colonel Nobile, chief of the Italian Air Service. The crew of the Amundsen dirigible will consist of 8 March 1926 the following 16 persons: —

CAPTAIN ROALD AMUNDSEN, in command.

Mr LINCOLN ELLSWORTH, leader of the scientific work and navigator. Mr Ellsworth was a member of Captain Amundsen’s aeroplane expedition last year. He is a wealthy American, and his father died at Florence while anxiety existed regarding the fate of the explorers on that occasion. Mr Ellsworth is bearing much of the expense of the new expedition.

LIEUT. LEIF DIETRICHSEN, alternate navigating officer. He was commander of seaplane N24 in the last Amundsen expedition.

MR FREDERICK RAMM, correspondent. He held the same position with the former Amundsen expedition.

Two engineers.

Two riggers.

Two radio operators.

One photographer.

One meteorologist.

Mr Ramm is going to Cento Celle immediately, and will remain with the dirigible until it reaches Alaska. He will supply a full copyright description of the flight for publication in The Herald. The dirigible will be ready to sail on April 1, weather conditions permitting. It will then go to England to a mooring mast, where it will refuel and proceed to Trondhjem, Norway, where the expedition is constructing a mooring mast. Here it will refuel once more and go to Spitsbergen, where the expedition is constructing a special mooring mast and hangar.

The objective of the expedition is to reach the North Pole, and then to fly over the enormous unknown portion of the Polar Basin between the North Pole and North America, heading for Point Barrow, Alaska. It is believed that the actual flying time will be 48 hours. It is of course impossible to determine in advance whether wireless communication will be uninterrupted during the flight. The airship that will be used by the expedition is a semi-rigid dirigible of Italian construction and manufacture. It belonged to the Italian Navy, and formerly was known as N1. Its length is 116 metres (approximately 380ft.). It is thus a large airship, though not so large as a Zeppelin.

During the winter it is to undergo a complete overhaul and partial reconstruction—new motors and new cabins being installed—under the supervision of Colonel Nobile, the original constructor. With the weight it will have to carry on the voyage to Alaska the dirigible will be capable of remaining in the air 68 hours. This type of airship has been found especially well adapted for the projected voyage, and when a landing is made it will be easier to handle than the rigid type. The ship will have gas enough to proceed to Nome (Alaska) under favourable circumstances, i.e., given a supporting wind.

If Nome can be reached it will be possible to retain possession of the airship intact. If a landing has to be made at Point Barrow this ship will have to be abandoned, but the expedition is prepared for this. A complete Polar outfit will be carried, including sledge, skis, sleeping bags, and provisions for two months. Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Friday 26 February 1926, page 5.


6 March 1926 WHERE CAPTAIN WILKINS WILL FLY

The intrepid Australian explorer, Captain Wilkins, proposes to fly over the area indicated on the map by arrows. Amundsen will proceed by airship in the opposite direction, crossing from Europe over the Pole, and landing in Alaska. The exclusive rights of both, explorers’ stories, have been secured by “The Sun.”

Newcastle Sun (NSW), Saturday 6 March 1926, page 1.


No “Nigsiks” Wilkins’s New Scheme.

Landing Food, Casting Rod and Tackle No. X.

(Copyright. Exclusive to the Advertiser in South Australia.)

When Captain George Hubert Wilkins, leader of the Detroit Arctic expedition, flies north from Point Barrow, Alaska,
The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

seeking undiscovered islands in the Polar Sea, he will carry with him a fish rod, a casting reel, band lines, and a plug trimmed with the heaviest of triple-gang hooks.

New York, February 18, 1926.

The streams that flow from Alaska to the Polar Sea abound in Dolly Varden trout. The Eskimo uses the most primitive of tackle, but the Arctic trout are not wary; they are caught by the thousand. The Polar Sea itself is the feeding-place of Tomcod. They are caught through the ice with band lines and unbaited hooks. But the fishing tackle that Captain Wilkins will carry is neither trout tackle nor cod tackle. It consists of a short steel bait-casting rod, a level-winding reel, bait-casting lines, and bass plugs. It is entirely suitable for catching small or large mouth bass. It would be standard equipment for an angler going to the bass rivers of the Middle West, the lakes of Maine, or the Michigan cut.

It is Captain Wilkins’s intention to use his bass fishing outfit for retrieving seals from the open water of the far north. For years the Eskimo has been shooting seals in open water and retrieving them by the “nigsik” method. A “nigsik” is a small block of wood fitted with two iron hooks. It is attached to a hand line. Standing on the ice near the open water the hunter seeks to throw his “nigsik” beyond the dead seal, and then drag it over the carcass and set one of the hooks. “It is a clumsy method,” Captain Wilkins says. “Sometimes one must throw the “nigsik” twenty or thirty times before he is successful. But when one depends on seals for food, clothing, and fuel, one must have some means of landing them after they are shot. “I watched a fisherman in Australia last year dropping his bait on a spot the size of a hat.

In so far as I know none of the explorers or traders who have gone to the Arctic in the past have found any implement that was an improvement on the Eskimo “nigsik.” “Our experiment with American bait casting tackle will be unique. If it works, it will save us much time and much discomfort.” Captain Wilkins himself has never handled a short bait-casting rod. But he expects to practise on the streamer that will take him and his men north from Seattle. He has chosen a steel rod, because he believes it will stand rougher usage than any of the split bamboo sticks. He is taking a level winding reel and unbaited hooks. But the fishing retrieval of tools may be thrown through the air and made to serve as a weapon. It will be the American bass rod’s first adventure in the North Pole pool.

15 March 1926

KEEP WILKINS’S PLANES WARM.

SKIN TENTS FOR ENGINES.

SPRAYED WITH HEAT.

(Copyright, 1926, by the Herald for Australia, and elsewhere by North American Newspaper Alliance).

New York, February 10.

Oil tanks and magnetos on the two Fokker aeroplanes which Captain George Hubert Wilkins takes to Point Barrow, Alaska, for the Detroit Arctic expedition’s proposed flight over the Polar Sea will be kept warm by heat sprayed from the exhaust pipes. Heating pipes on Fokker planes of similar design lead from the exhaust pipe housings to the cabins, raising the pilot’s quarters and passenger rooms to a comfortable temperature; no matter how cold it may be outside.

On the Detroit expedition’s planes the pilots and navigators must depend on their parkas of reindeer skin and fur to keep them warm, because all the exhaust heat will go to the freezable engine parts. Liberty engines have been thoroughly tested in the Arctic and found capable.

The smaller monoplane of the Detroit Expedition carries a Liberty engine, but even this ship has been refitted against the sub-zero temperatures of the Polar Regions. It has an adjustable radiator shutter and an auxiliary water and glycerine tank. If the radiator springs a leak or loses its mixture through overheating, it can be refilled from the pilot’s seat.

The three Wright engines on the larger plane are air-cooled. Consequently they offer no radiator problems. But although one Wright engine withstood a temperature of 27 degrees below zero on an accidental flight over the Atlantic, engines of the air-cooled type have not had a thorough test in the Arctic. No one knows how they will perform.

The oil tanks on both planes have been blanketeted in cold-resisting material, and the oil pipes have been lagged. Pipes from the exhaust housings throw warm air inside the blankets, and will, it is believed, prevent the freezing or gumming of the lubricating material while the plane is in motion.

Reindeer skin tents have been made to build aluminium shrouds for each engine. These shrouds were not ready when the planes were shipped west; they will not reach Fairbanks until a week after the planes are there.

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Reindeer skin tents have been made for each engine. These shrouds were not ready when the planes were shipped west; they will not reach Fairbanks until a week after the planes are there.
Thus the expedition engines will never need to “conquer the Arctic.” They will be operating in an artificial temperate zone. The cabin of the three-engine plane has been filled with an 800-gallon auxiliary gasoline tank. There will be no passenger room in this plane except in the pilots’ station and in a boxlike cavity behind the big tank. Two gravity feed tanks above the pilot’s seat will supply the engines with their first 180 gallons of gas, after which either or both of the feed tanks will be refilled from the auxiliary tank by hand pump.

The single-engine ship will have two interchangeable feed tanks and a small auxiliary tank. If this plane is chosen for the long hop to Spitsbergen the cabin will be filled with gasoline in ton-gallon drums. Poured from the drum into the auxiliary tank, this gasoline will then be forced into the feed tanks by hand pump.


22 March 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS’S MISHAPS

A message from Fairbanks, Alaska, says that the last of the three aeroplanes of Captain Wilkins, the Australian aviator, who was attempting the North Pole flight, was wrecked on Friday, when landing. The gear of the Detroit, a three-engine machine, buckled, throwing the plane on its nose. An engine was thrown out, and the propellers were bent. The plane, on being started on its first test flight, travelled only 40 feet along the ground when the mishap occurred.

The accident temporarily delays Captain Wilkins’s party from starting on the expedition. The Detroit was scheduled to leave in a day or two for Point Barrow, the Arctic coast supply base of the enterprise.

On Thursday the single engine of the plane was partly wrecked by lightning after a trial test. Another was destroyed by fire in Detroit on January 17. — Reuter.


20 March 1926
WILKINS’S PLANE CRASHES. UNDERCARRIAGE WRENCHED OFF. EXPLORERS UNINJURED. (Herald Special Representative) FAIRBANKS (Alaska), March 19.—Failing to respond to the controls, the single-engine monoplane to be used by Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, in his Polar flight, fell 100 feet. The undercarriage was wrecked off, and will have to be replaced with a new one before the flight can be made from Fairbanks to Point Barrow.

Capt. Wilkins was in the cockpit and Mr Nielson was piloting the machine. Both escaped injury. In a test flight lasting half an hour the airplane attained a speed of 130 miles an hour. The machine was landing when the accident occurred. The condition of the ground prevented a test flight of the three-engine airplane.

Captain Wilkins and another member of his party, each astride a snow plough, spent Wednesday and Thursday clearing the landing field. Under present conditions it will have to be replaced with a new one before the flight can be made from Fairbanks to Point Barrow.


26 March 1926
TRAIL-BLAZER. CAPTAIN WILKINS’S PILOT KNOWS ICE LAND CHALLENGE TO ‘MALAMUTES’. (No. 15) (Copyright 1926 by Sydney Sun for Australia, and elsewhere by North American Newspaper Alliance.) NEW YORK, February 24.

Carl B. Eielson, trailblazer of Alaska's air routes, will pilot the Fokker monoplane in which Captain George Hubert Wilkins, commander of the Detroit Arctic expedition, will take off from Point Barrow, Alaska, in March on his flight across the Polar Sea.

If Captain Wilkins sights new land, Eielson will be the co-discoverer. If land is not discovered, it is Captain Wilkins’s intention to wing on across the North Pole in hope of making a non-stop flight from Barrow to Spitsbergen. In case this long flight is made, Captain Wilkins will do the navigating and Alaska’s air trail-blazer will be in the pilot’s seat. “Lieutenant Eielson has flown 60,000 miles in the Arctic and near-Arctic,” Captain Wilkins said today. “No other pilot has flown a third as far under like conditions.

He has faced the fiercest weather the north has to offer, has made landings on rough, unlighted fields during the Arctic night, and has served as his own mechanic and rigger when a snowbank was his hangar and the temperature was far below zero.

“Other excellent pilots will accompany the expedition, and I know that I shall not disappoint them when I say that Lieutenant Eielson will make the main flight. But nowhere is there a man who has had his flying experience in the Arctic. There is no other pilot better fitted than Eielson by temperament for the work I have in mind. Unless he becomes incapacitated it will be he who will accompany me.”

A “Gypsy of the Air”

Eielson is a graduate of the University of North Dakota, and has taken post-graduate work at Georgetown University and the University of Wisconsin.

He was born at Hatton, N.D., July 20, 1897. Like Captain Wilkins, he spent his boyhood camping, camping and hunting. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Service at the outbreak of the World War, and did his first flying at Rockwell Field in California. He was commissioned a first-lieutenant.

Following the war, he became a commercial flier. He organised a dozen little companies, and flew throughout the West and Middle West, carrying passengers, instructing amateurs and doing stunts. He says that during this period he was an “air gypsy.” His “gypsy” experiences taught him how to choose new landing fields from the air, a thing he had to do many times while he was pioneering among the mountain peaks of Alaska.

When the U.S. Post Office Department decided in 1923 that the aeroplane might solve the department’s winter problems in Alaska, Eielson was made air experimenter. He boxed a plane at Chicago, and travelled by rail and steamer to Fairbanks. He found no competent mechanics and riggers there, and so was required to assemble the plane and mount the engine by himself. His subsequent adventures startled the flying world and brought congratulations from President Coolidge.

There were virtually no landing fields near any of the little Alaska towns to which Eielson intended to carry the mail. But there were rivers which offered ice-ways, and valleys which offered frozen planes. Roaring down from cruising heights Eielson sighted these places, and was never at a loss for a landing field. He flew 60,000 miles and made but one forced descent. This landing cost him his only mishap, a broken propeller.

Sweating Below Zero

“I struck temperatures as low as 28 degrees below zero Fahrenheit,” he says, “but I never had what one might call trouble with my Liberty engine. Sometimes, of course, it was hard to start the engine. Ordinarily I had no one to help me. I would spin the propeller and then run back to the control board and feed the gas. Sometimes I would make these sprints twenty or thirty times.

“I wore heavy flying clothes, of course, and my efforts to start the motor would
leaving me wet with perspiration. When I took the air after such exercise the moisture would freeze and I would be most uncomfortable. But if I could have had someone to start the engine, so that I could have kept cool and dry, I would not have been troubled by the cold.”

It is 300 miles from Fairbanks to McGrath, and Eielson carried the mail between these towns regularly. He made the round trip in two days. The dog team drivers who had been carrying the mail over the same route had thought themselves fortunate when they were able to race their malamutes across and back in 22 days. Eielson was never halted by the weather.

The day Major Frederick Martin, leader of the Around-the-World fliers, pierced a fogbank and crashed into an Alaskan mountain peak, Eielson flew 600 miles without adventure.

His regular route took him around Mt. McKinley. It and a score of other mountain peaks were the beacons by which he picked his way through the winter clouds.

**Work on Skis**

Following his Alaskan work Eielson re-enlisted in the army to do experimental work with aeroplane skis. He designed skis for many types of ships, and while stationed at McCook Field, Dayton, collected considerable data on ski performance.

Aviators who designed the runners used on the Seldrife Field pursuit planes which the army sent to Van Etten Lake in the Michigan wilderness last winter.

Captain Wilkins met Eielson in New York. The young flier was here completing arrangements with John A. Hambleton, the Baltimore and New York financier, for the formation of a company which would bid on the Government’s Alaskan mail contracts.

This company’s bids have been made. If they are accepted, Eielson will return from the Polar Sea to realise his dream—the displacement of the dog team mail carriers, and the institution in Alaska of a mail service which in the future can “carry the anti-toxin to Nome” in two hours. Should the bids be rejected, Eielson says, he and Hambleton will institute a free aeroplane freight and passenger service for Alaskan prospectors, who have been kept from the untouched Alaskan goldfields because those fields have been inaccessible.

It is his plan to carry the prospectors afield in the spring and pick them up in the autumn—asking in return that if they discover gold they stake out the adjacent claim for the owners of the planes. Eielson is now at Hasbrouck Height, N.J., working on the two Fokker planes which the Detroit Expedition will take to Barrow.

He will go to Langley Field and do 50 hours of flying on heavy ships before he starts north.

An advertisement from the (Sun (Sydney, NSW), Friday 26 March 1926, page 8.): An advertisement from the

**SUPPLY TRAIN’S PLAIGHT**

With the serious uncertainty existing about Captain Wilkins, there is, at the same time, no doubt whatever concerning the bad plight of the overland expedition in charge of Malcolm Smith, a veteran with 20 years’ experience in Alaska. They left weeks ago by dog-sled for Point Barrow, and, with their 50 dogs, made fairly good time until they crossed the Endicott Mountains.

Here they encountered heavy spring snows, which made travel impossible. Smith and another set out for help and provisions. They reached Point Barrow, but just where they are today is not clear. It is certain, however, that they have been unable to return to the main expedition with food. Major Lanphier has been somewhat anxious regarding them for several days, but on Sunday night the climax came when Robert Waskey, radio monitor with the dog teams, sent the following wireless message: “We must have food for the dogs at once, or shoot the animals.”

**KILLING RABBITS FOR FOOD**

They have been killing rabbits recently for dog food, but it would take hundreds daily to satisfy the hungry huskies, and to slaughter anything like that number is impossible. Altogether the overland party’s position is bad. They are marooned more than 100 miles this side of Point Barrow.

There will be little change in provisions for a month or six weeks, and it is assumed that they must have food this week or their motive power will be gone.

Major Lanphier is considering all kinds of methods of rescue. Possibly he will drop supplies from the Detroit if he can find the party in that vast northern wilderness. Altogether the prospects of the expedition during the next few days include many disagreeable possibilities.

A further message came from Waskey, as follows:—”We have 27 dogs here at the Anaktuvuk River camp. They have had nothing to eat for four days. If we don’t get help at once we will have to shoot them and start out with one Yokut man and brought down the river over the ice to try to make Jones Island, in the Arctic Sea. “Smith and Anderson took sleds and 17 of the best dogs with them. They expected to get provisions at Stevenson’s road house, but it has been snowing so hard lately that they also, are evidently unable to travel. “We have heard nothing from them for more than a week.

In the last few days we have killed plenty of ptarmigan and rabbits for our own food, but it has been impossible to feed the dogs.”

This morning everything is activity here, rushing preparations for the departure of the Detroit on its double mission of succour. Careful maps are being prepared showing the location of the Waskey party from his description over the radio.

If it is impossible to land the airplane there, and Major Lanphier believes that would be too risky, the Detroit will drop them a big package of emergency rations, and let them try to work themselves out,
perhaps shooting half their dogs. Then
Major Lanphier will continue on to Point
Barrow, and if conditions are propitious,
will sally 100 miles or so over the Arctic
ice before returning to see what is wrong
with Captain Wilkins.

Waskey reckons his camp is 65 miles
east from the straight air line between
Fairbanks and Barrow, so Major
Lanphier’s course, if he gets away on
Wednesday, will cover more than 600
miles before he reaches the shores of the
Arctic. With Waskey are Earl Rossman,
the photographer to the expedition, and one
other man.

The cross marks the approximate position of the overland
party.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE SILENCE

“I cannot understand Captain Wilkins’s
silence, taken together with his failure to
return,” said Major Lanphier “I feel
anxious. I think that Wilkins has probably
attempted a trip out over the ice at Point
Barrow, and was forced down. In that case
we shall have to search for him.”

Malcolm Smith’s party took two radio
sets including one big Kohler outfit, which
they were compelled to leave on the trail. It
is now some distance behind them.

Waskey is now using a smaller set.

He reported early this morning that he
doing was unable to hear Wilkins, as he did
formerly, so it is assumed in Fairbanks that
something has happened to Wilkins which
precludes him from sending anything.

Despite their troubles, Waskey reported
himself and his companions in a cheerful
frame of mind. He declared that their
partridge stew for Sunday’s dinner was
particularly tasty. Three excellent receiving
sets in Fairbanks are listening nightly for
messages from Wilkins and Waskey.

The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

CAPTAIN WILKINS

Herald (Melbourne, Vic.: 1861-1954),
Tuesday 6 April 1926, page 1.
43501165

6 April 1926

POLAR FLIGHTS.

THE RACE TO THE NORTH.

WILKINS AND AMUNDSEN.

Supplementing recent cables telling of
the arrival of Captain Wilkins at Point
Barrow, the base for the Polar expedition,
the following article by the New York
 correspondent of the Central News
(London) is interesting and opportune: —
The rival explorers—Captain George
Hubert Wilkins and Captain Roald
Amundsen, the hero of last year’s failure—
have been quietly pressing ahead with their
preparations, and their plans are now
settled for the double dash to the Arctic
(says the correspondent).

Captain Wilkins made the first move
today when his “iron dogs,” or snow
motors, set off from Fairbanks for Point
Barrow, the Alaskan town near the famous
cape, whence the British explorer will take
the air on March 21. The main idea of
Captain Wilkins is to fly from Cape
Barrow northward to the Ice Pole,
otherwise the centre of the ice pack. If no
land is discovered the flight will be
continued straight on across the Polar Sea
to Spitsbergen, passing over the
Geographical Pole en route. “If land is
discovered,” said Captain Wilkins, “we
shall drop a flag on it, photograph it from
the air, and return to Point Barrow. A
second plane will land and establish a base
and I shall resume the flight to
Spitsbergen.”

Meanwhile, clothing supplies and
equipment are being rushed across the
American continent in special freight cars
in a race for time to catch an Alaskan
steamer.

Captain Wilkins is an Australian whose
record is an imposing one. He was with
Stefansson on the Canadian Arctic
Expedition and with Shackleton on the
Quest to the Antarctic, while he was
second-in-command of the British Imperial

MALCOLM SMITH

MAJOR LANPHIER

CARL EILSON
Wilkins is said to be particularly interested in these atmospheric mysteries. Then there is the “Pole of Inaccessibility” — the loneliest place in the world. This spot has been geographically defined as the one most remote from human reach and Captain Wilkins proposes to fly from civilisation straight into the heart of this great unexplored wilderness. The achievement of their ambition will bring within human knowledge some of the last remaining mysteries of the North.

(Daily Express (Wagga Wagga, NSW), Tuesday 6 April 1926, page 2.):

8 April 1926
WILKINS MAKES MORE HISTORY.
FULL STORY OF EPIC JOURNEY.

The recent flight into the Arctic by Captain Wilkins constituted a record, and will rank as one of the finest feats in the annals of aviation.

(AUSTRAILIAN CABLE SERVICE).
Fairbanks (Alaska), Wed.

Captain G. H. Wilkins and Lieutenant Ben Eielson today returned to Fairbanks, thus completing the round trip to Point Barrow and back.

Captain Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson on their return trip were forced to descend at Circle City, 150 miles north-west of Fairbanks.
The life and death tension was relieved when the Government radio picked up a message that a strange aeroplane had been sighted in the sky over Circle City.

A few minutes later a message came from Mrs. Barnett, wife of the operator at Circle City, that she had watched the plane descend on a sandbar in the Yukon River, opposite the town.

Mrs. Barnett hurried down and assisted Captain Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson, who were numb with cold and fatigue. They had been eight hours steadily in the air, coming since early morning from Point Barrow against headwinds, and fighting squally weather all the way.

Captain Wilkins told Mrs. Barnett that they had had a successful trip, landing their supplies O.K., but today, on their protracted return trip, they ran out of gasoline and oil. That was why they had descended at Circle City. All Alaska is rejoicing tonight at the return of the fearless aviators, for many had given them up for lost.

Captain Wilkins penetrated 75 miles seaward from Point Barrow, but saw no sign of land there.

STEFFANSON’S TRIBUTE.
The noted Arctic explorer, Professor V. Stefansson, says Captain Wilkins’s dash beyond Barrow is particularly interesting and important because he saw a great area never before visited by man.

Incidentally the length of his flight from Fairbanks in a single hop of 700 miles equals, and probably exceeds, Amundsen’s flight last May, and for a preliminary dash is a wonderful performance, promising greater results.
12 April 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS CARRIES ON

After initial setbacks in which his three planes crashed or were damaged, Captain Wilkins, the famous Australian explorer, has already added much to his record of Arctic exploration.

Leaving Fairbanks, in Alaska, some days ago, his safe arrival at Point Barrow was announced. Then there was a silence and disaster was feared for the explorer and his hardly less famous pilot, Carl Eielson.

Now Captain Wilkins is back at Fairbanks, having made the longest aeroplane flight of Arctic history. Upon reaching Point Barrow the flying conditions were so favourable that, with the impulse of the true explorer, he flew on into unexplored regions, eventually returning to Point Barrow.

The mishaps to the planes some weeks ago indicate the risks which must be braved in a polar flight. Captain Amundsen, who has lost faith in planes in Arctic exploration, openly predicts disaster.

But Captain Wilkins is concerned with the achievement and not with possible failure, and is not daunted by pessimistic rivals. His expedition has the dual purpose of the first flight over the North Pole, and to ascertain whether land or sea exists in the great unexplored region between Alaska and the Pole.

Already world-famed for his many successes, Captain Wilkins may within a few weeks have earned for Australia the laurels of one of the world’s most, daring and important triumphs.

10 April 1926
VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON

V. STEFANSSON.

“The famous Arctic explorer, who described Captain Wilkins’s recent flight as a wonderful achievement. (Geelong Advertiser (Vic.), Saturday 10 April 1926, page 1.).

Hence it is Captain Wilkins’s hope that he will be able to map and explore any new lands that he may find. If it is possible for him to land his planes he expects to move his base from Point Barrow to the new land and send mapping and exploring parties in all directions.

But the new land may be rugged and torn; the area around it may be a succession of ice ridges and gullies. If so, he must make a survey from the air and record it by aerial photography.

From photographs it is believed aviators and map-makers could decide whether it would be possible to build a landing field on the new land.

The builders could go in later on, either by dog team or snow motors, or by aeroplane, at some season when there was smooth ice or open water near the land.

If Captain Wilkins should sight a relatively small island he may be able to photograph it in its entirety and show it on one print. Captain A. W. Stevens, of the U.S. Army Air Service, photographed the entire city of Dayton, O.—an area of 19 miles—on one negative with the very camera which Captain Wilkins will use. The ordinary ground camera cannot be used in the far north, because of the low temperatures. Lens mechanisms freeze up, and oiled surface become sticky.

But aerial cameras of the Fairchild type have already proved that they can stand the cold. They have taken pictures in temperatures of 67 deg. below zero.

The Captain had shaved off his beard the night before, and at first Mr. Smith did not recognise him. (Advertiser (Adelaide, SA), Wednesday 14 April 1926, page 16.)
**The Wilkins Chronicle**

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

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14 April 1926

Captain Wilkins’s Doings

FAIRBANKS (Alaska), Monday.— Captain G. H. Wilkins, with Carl Eielson as pilot, has arrived at Point Barrow on his second trip in the single engine Fokker monoplane *Alaskan*. The airmen failed to find Earl Rossman, the photographer, and Robert Waskey, radio operator, who were marooned with dog teams about 60 miles east of the direct route from Fairbanks to Alaska. However, Malcolm Smith, leader of the overland party, who went to Point Barrow for provisions, has re-joined the party with ample supplies for the dogs, which were starving.

There was matchless flying weather, and the thermometer was at zero when Captain Wilkins and Eielson made their second hop-off for Point Barrow at 9.40 a.m. yesterday. Little ceremony marked the departure, but the entire population of the town cheered enthusiastically, as they did on the first day.

Within two hours a radio message from Wiseman reported that the *Alaskan* was heading across the forbidding heights of the Endicott Mountains into the snow-covered tundra which spreads like a white blanket toward the frozen sea.

Including many packages of miscellaneous freight with a total weight of two tons, the *Alaskan* carried 150 gallons of extra petrol for use later in the trip across the Pole. There are 18 hours of daylight at Point Barrow, and 14 at Fairbanks, and it would be quite possible to start from Point Barrow early in the morning, return to Fairbanks, and, without stopping the engine, load another cargo, reaching Barrow again before dusk.

Captain Wilkins carefully considered the chances of finding Waskey and Rossman in the frozen waste north of Brooks Mountains. Frozen rivers covered with snow are difficult to locate, and Captain Wilkins hesitated to go 60 miles off the direct route to Point Barrow with a very slim chance of ever delivering dog feed. Their flying height would be least 5000 feet, and they, might get into a serious position if they descended within 100 feet of the ground to drop packages.

*Advocate* (Burnie, Tas.), Wednesday 14 April 1926, page 1.


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15 April 1926

Prominent Personalities

CAPTAIN G. H. WILKINS

A REMARKABLE AUSTRALIAN

Illustrated by WILL DYSON

There are certain types born to be stifled by civilisation—rare men whose pleasure is hazardous adventure in the waste places of the earth. Captain G. H. Wilkins is one of these. All his adult life—and he is only now 37 years old—he has cheerfully abandoned home comforts for all manner of risky enterprises in all manner of places. In this there is no suggestion of vainglory, no hope of reward.

What he has done and further expects to achieve are probably inspired by an insatiable scientific curiosity and a no less besetting thirst for experience. The felicity of a discovery, the thrill of a danger faced and overcome, he must always enjoy—or die. If he should bring off his present aeroplane dash to the Pole, he won’t be long before he will be attempting some other spectacular feat, perhaps climbing Mount Everest, or ascending the Amazon to wrest the mystery of its source from the jungle.

The possibilities of disaster during his advance on the Pole have been well weighed by him, but he is never daunted by anything. Even the fact that Amundsen failed to reach his objective by the very means which the Australian is employing will probably be regarded as lending additional spice to the venture. And if fortune smiles on him, as she has done in the past, he will get there to prove once more his race’s reputation for courage, endurance and tenacity.

It is just about 14 years ago that his name was broadcast on the cables of the globe. It was a Christmas ballooning feat over London. Father Christmas, gaily announced us a traveller from the Pole, was expected to parachute in his red uniform and foaming white whiskers from the car of the balloon as it drifted over the metropolis. His Excellency landed in good order and disposition—he was privately a daring young man who delighted in these journeys—but the balloon blew away with Wilkins and another in it.

For some days it was lost even to the prying eye of *The Daily Mail*. Trawlers searched for it round the coasts of Britain—in true December weather, let it be mentioned. Then one day it came down within 50 miles of London with Wilkins and his companion smiling and intact. This was not his first escape from death, but it was big enough to assure him that fate had granted him an all-lines pass to safety. He had always been interested in the air. The first monoplane flown in England with a
100-h.p. engine carried Wilkins as one of its passengers. Photography in the air was another of his great diversions. He was one of the pioneers in this highly useful military purpose. Lying out on a plane he had photographed the German army manoeuvres, and the movements of the British Fleet at Spithead were also recorded from the same precarious perch. In planes, too, he peeped at various Continental capitals, and he also went to Algiers to whizz over the frontiers of the Sahara. There is a story of his securing a ride in a French Maurice Farman plane and photographing a hare-hunt whilst lying prone on the wing of the machine. But in this he would almost rudely disclaim any intention of performing a stunt. Stunting is his detestation. Inevitably his repute as a photographer grew; so when Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece united to attack Turkey in 1911, the Turks engaged him to take pictures for them. They had three planes but they were of no value to the Australian for the intimate studies which he desired. He therefore took to horseback as a semi-detached unit of the Turkish cavalry, and made the first close-up movie studies of men in battle. He was through all the terrors of Tchatalja, where the Turks were beaten, and at infinite risk snappethed men toppling under the ram of bullets which were singing all round him. Just as conscientiously he shared all the dangers, with his camera relentlessly glued to valid a purpose of the Turkish retreat. The world war found him with the same determined nose for front-line news, and few people are aware that he was wounded nine times as official photographer to the A.I.F. He had more than the ordinary soldier’s share of trouble, for he was in every offensive, and his restless energy carried him in to minor disturbances where the chance of fatality was almost equally great. Sir John Monash pays an eloquent tribute to his services in the preface to his book on the Australian campaigns in France, and every Australian who was associated with him speaks of his quiet valour in the warmest terms.

Another of Wilkins’s admirers is Vilhjalmur Stefansson. This famous explorer has good reason to know the Australian’s full worth. When Stefansson left Alaska in March, 1914, with the idea of crossing the ocean ice for Banks Land, he took with him only a month’s provisions for the sustenance of himself, two companions, and dogs. Everybody believed he was mad, and even Wilkins, who had been left behind in command, with instructions to bring two ships to meet Stefansson when the ice moved in the spring, gave little credence to his chief’s belief that seals might be discovered under the ice.

When Stefansson was absent three months without news, Wilkins, who believed that the leader was dead, still considered it his duty to carry out his orders. So with all the volunteers that he could muster he took a small ship, which was soon badly damaged by the ice—to such an extent, indeed, that the pumps had to be kept going 40 minutes out of every hour to prevent the vessel founding. Ultimately Wilkins reached Banks Land, dragged the sinking vessel ashore with a windlass, and a miracle discovered Stefansson and party, who had so amply proved their theory that they had killed enough meat and blubber to last them through the following winter, if need be. This rescue by Wilkins in the teeth of depression and all manner of adversity is rightly classed by Stefansson as one of the greatest examples of loyalty and devotion in the history of the world.

**Table Talk (Melbourne, Vic.), Thursday 15 April 1926, page 15**

15 April 1926

**OVER THE SNOW WILKINS’S STORY OF THRILLING FLIGHT.**

**FOG PERILS FORBIDDING MOUNTAINS; MONOTONOUS FROZEN WASTES.**

The fascination and peculiar dangers of flying in the Arctic are graphically described by Captain Wilkins. He finds the perils of crossing a lofty range in a fog much on a par with the disabilities of flying over seemingly interminable frozen wastes, where all sense of location is lost. (By Capt. G. H. Wilkins. Exclusive to the Sin. by Special Arrangement.)

**FAIRBANKS (Alaska), April 13.**

Navigation over the Arctic mountains and the wilderness of the snow-covered tundra is not only depressing, but mysterious. Driving steadily into the bewildering whiteness where there is no earth, no sky, no horizon, brings a semi-consciousness that one must continually fight off.

Hours of such travel are almost maddening, and would be almost impossible to bear, without the hood of the plane before one’s tired eyes. I have been flying for many years in every portion of the globe and under almost every condition imaginable, but I don’t hesitate to say that there is no more trying experience than crossing the Endicott Mountains. There are heights that are beautiful and terrifying in the same breath, and one must continually fight off false ideas of height and position. With the smooth ice one also misses the horizon line, but where the ice is rough and hummocky, and pressure ridges rise, one has landmarks.

**A Complete Rainbow**

When it is smoky overhead and the fliers are over clear ice, the colours below are confusing. Dark masses of shadow represent anything from open leads to land and moving floes, when, as a matter of fact, everything below may be smooth. Above the clouds over the face of the world takes on a dark blue tone. We experienced the phenomenon of seeing a complete rainbow—an entire circle with the sun as a darker blue splotch in the centre and four distinct rings in all their prismatic beauty. Flying in Arctic temperatures is not uncomfortable. It is so warm in the Alaskan’s enclosed cockpit that we seldom resort to mittens, but the outside gear may be covered with hoar-frost. It is only when I go back in the cabin of the ship for photographic work or handle the radio that I notice the cold. The warm blast from the engine keeps the cockpit warm. Flying over hot desert lands is more trying on the physiological senses than over the Arctic, with the thermometer below zero. We found many things to keep both of us occupied.

When not checking the course or using the radio, there was the galley-hand-pump to operate, to keep the upper tank filled from the reserve. We found time to eat a sandwich when we thought of it, and
Ben and I would change over on the controls occasionally to allow him to stretch his arms or snap a picture with the camera. The roar of the engine drowns all sounds, so we converse only by signs or written messages. It is wonderful how much one can say after some practise by merely nodding or shaking the head, smiling or setting the lips grimly, or by a flip of the hand. (Sun (Sydney, NSW), Thursday 15 April 1926, page 1.).


An advertisement from the (Sun (Sydney, NSW), Thursday 15 April 1926, page 1.).

16 April 1926
ARCTIC EXPLORATION
Rival Aviators

Captain Wilkins Delayed by Injury to Arm (Reuter.)

FAIRBANKS (Alaska), Ap. 14. The Associated Press states that, suffering from "a slightly sprained wrist and a badly bruised arm," Captain G. H. Wilkins said today that he will not take the air again until his right hand is healed. Captain Wilkins was injured on Saturday when he was caught in the running gear under the aeroplane Alaskan while guiding it on the lagoon on which it alighted at Point Barrow, Alaska. Returning to Fairbanks Captain Wilkins piloted the craft with his left hand. The other, under the command of Lanphier, in reserve to return to Fairbanks a week after the "hop-off" if no word is received from the explorers. The Associated Press correspondent says the final flight north from Fairbanks and the dash into the polar regions of the Arctic air expedition under Captain Wilkins will soon be made. The engines of the expedition's three-motor plane have been tested and found in good condition. The metal propellers have been replaced by wooden ones in order to make damage to the plane less probable in case of accident. The plane is now practically in flying condition. The one-engine machine has been supplied with fuel and tuned up ready to take the air.

The Norge's Flight (Reuter) OSLO. April 14. The Norge, Captain Roald Amundsen's airship, experienced the same difficulties in reaching its mooring mast here as it did at Pulham on its arrival from Italy. The ship was driven out of its course by the wind and had to make two attempts. The King arrived to greet the airmen. The flight to Leningrad will be resumed tonight owing to the meteorologists expressing the opinion that it is risky for the Norge to remain till tomorrow. (Australian Press Association)

Practically the entire population turned out to greet the Norge, and the city was lavishly be-flagging in honour of what was regarded as a national event. The voyage from Pulham was uneventful, though windy. Arriving over the Citadel, the Norge saluted the King, who acknowledged by waving a handkerchief. After two hours manoeuvring the Norge was safely moored, and re-filling commenced immediately.

British Compass Needed

It was announced at the optical convention at the Imperial College of Science in Kensington today that, in response to a telephone message received from Pulham, a British steering compass was urgently installed aboard the Norge, replacing the Italian instrument, which was stated to have been unsatisfactory during the flight from Rome to Pulham. The airship required a standard compass and an aeropilotic steering compass. Both these on the Norge now are British. Geelong Advertiser (Vic.), Friday 16 April 1926, page 5.


17 April 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS'S EXPEDITION. (Reuter.)

An Associated Press message from Fairbanks (Alaska) states that Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, left on Saturday morning in the aeroplane Alaskan, on a second journey to Point Barrow (more than 500 miles), from where he will later attempt to fly to Spitsbergen over the North Pole. The main object of the present journey is to rescue the party which is endeavouring to carry supplies overland to Point Barrow from the Alaskan railway. The members of this party are reported to be staying. Captain Wilkins intends to drop food when the party is sighted. (By the late Palmer Hutchinson. special correspondent who was killed while with the expedition. Copyright in Queensland by The Daily Mail, and outside Australia, by the North American Newspaper Alliance.)

If Captain George Hubert Wilkins, commander of the Detroit Arctic Expedition, finds islands or a miniature continent in the unexplored area between Point Barrow, Alaska, and the North Pole, he will be equipped to bring back tangible proof of his discovery, even though he finds it impossible to ground his aeroplanes on or near the land. One of his two Fokker planes has been fitted with a Fairchild aerial camera. The camera weighs 46½lb, a substantial weight considering that the Detroit Expedition is filling every available corner in the aeroplanes with auxiliary petrol tanks. Moreover, the camera peers downwards through a vent in the passenger cabin, and so will expose the pilot and navigator to the cold.

But it is one of the purposes of the Detroit expedition to demonstrate that aeroplane travel over the short trans-Arctic route is practicable. The discovery of land may be hailed as the discovery of a mid-Arctic landing place, and a landing plug in the centre of the Polar Sea would, admittedly, speed the day when commercial aeroplanes could soar over the peak of the globe on regular schedules. Hence it is Captain Wilkins’s hope that he will be able to map and explore any new lands that he may find. If it is possible for him to land his aeroplanes; he expects to move his base from Point Barrow to the new land and end mapping and exploring parties in all directions.

COLD-DEFYING CAMERA.

But the new land may be rugged and torn: the sea around it may be a succession of ice ridges and gullies. If so, he might make a survey from the air and record it by aerial photography. From photographs, it is believed aviators and map-makers could decide whether it would be possible to build a landing field on the new land. The builders could go in later on, either by dog team or snow motors or by aero-plane at some season when there was smooth ice or open water near the land.

If Captain Wilkins should sight a relatively small Island, he may be able to photograph it in its entirety, and show it on
one print. Captain A. W. Stevens of the U.S. Army Air Service photographed the entire city of Day ton, O.—an area of 19 miles—on one negative, with the very camera which Captain Wilkins will use.

The ordinary ground camera cannot be used in the far north, because of the low temperatures. Lens mechanism freeze up, and oiled surfaces become sticky. But aerial cameras of the Fairchild type have already proved that they can stand the cold. They have taken pictures in temperatures of 67° deg below zero.

THE SUMNER LINE.

Once every hour, while he is flying over the Polar ice pack seeking to substitute concrete discoveries for the theories of the geographers, who believe the ice pack is spotted with unfolked lands, Captain Wilkins will attempt to measure the altitude of the sun. For these observations, he will use a new system of tabulations special prepared for Arctic use by the chief surveying expert of the American Geographical Society.

Once or twice each day, the navigating officers of American dreadnoughts, cruisers, and destroyers, mount the bridges of their ships, peer through the telescopes on their sextants, and bring reflected images of the sun-ball’s lower edge down to the horizon. Reading the sun’s altitude from the engraved scales on their sextant arms, they proceed to mark out what sailors call a Sumner line of position.

Captain Wilkins will use a bubble type sextant. This sextant carries its own calculations which were in vogue in the navy and merchant marine of his day. He reasoned that at any given instant the sun, being directly over some point on the surface of the globe, would give equal altitudes to all observers standing on a circle around that surface point. This meant, he pointed out, that any altitude of the sun would show that the observer was on a huge circle of known radius.

For practical purposes Sumner assumed that if he drew a short tangent to the altitude circle, and made the tangent perpendicular to the sun’s line of bearing from the Poles, his vessel would necessarily be somewhere on the tangent line.

Nowadays, the navy navigator draws a Sumner line, based on dead reckoning position, and then calculates a new Sumner line from the altitude of the sun or one of the stars. The intersection of the two lines gives true position.

When Osborn Miller, head of the school of surveying of the American Geographical Society, was asked to supply a quick navigational procedure for the Detroit Arctic Expedition, he immediately turned to the navy method. He has modified it so that Captain Wilkins will have only one astronomical calculation to make.

ERRORS THAT CREEP IN.

The sun does not circumnavigate the heavens in a true circle. It weaves back and forth with the seasons. Its track, when projected on to the surface of the globe, drifts first north, then south to the equator. Hence the sun has latitude. This sun latitude or declination, as navigators call it, added algebraically to the corrected observed altitude of the sun, gives Polar distance, the sun’s distance from the Pole. Declination changes constantly and ship navigators carry tables, from which the declination at any given instant may be ascertained.

Captain Wilkins will use a constant declination figure for all the hours of each day. Errors will creep in here, but calculation will be simplified. The observed altitude of any celestial body is open to many errors. In the case of the sun there is the error refraction. It is caused by the heavy atmospheric gases along the horizon: the gases distort the sun’s image. There is the sextant’s own intrinsic error, and the error which arises because the centre of the earth, the proper measuring base for altitudes, is far from the horizon.

In the Arctic the refraction error is certain to be large, because, during the spring at least, the sun never rises far above the horizon. Likewise, the sextant error increases as the sextant arm contracts with the falling temperatures.

Captain Wilkins must make corrections for these errors, but he may apply them to his declination before he starts his flight. While in the air he will be able to avoid all computations save the simple addition of declination, pre-corrected for altitude, errors and observed altitude.

THE SUN IN A BUBBLE.

As soon as he catches the image of the sun in his sextant bubble Captain Wilkins will glance at a chronometer strapped on his arm. The chronometer will give the time for the longitude of Greenwich. But on the edge of the Detroit expedition’s charts, Mr. Miller has inked in circles of Greenwich Time figures and related circles of degree figures. This degree figures show the sun’s true bearing from the Pole, for the meridian which the Detroit expedition will seek to follow northward.

And so, glancing from his chronometer to his chart, Captain Wilkins will be able to find the sun’s bearing from the North Pole of the moment of his altitude observation. He will place one point of his dividers at the point on the chart which is representative of the Pole and step off a distance equal to the sum of the corrected observed altitude and the declination.

At this point he will place a celluloid curve representing a Sumner line and will make a tangent to that curve perpendicular to the bearing line or meridian. Fortwith he will know that he is somewhere on that curve.

Meanwhile, at five minute intervals he will have been drawing in his dead reckoning line. The dead reckoning line and the calculated Sumner line will cross, and the point of crossing will be the approximate true position. From this position he will proceed with his dead reckoning for an hour, and then take new observations of the sun.

Unless the sun is obscured by fogs or clouds, Mr. Miller declares the maximum errors of calculation will invoke only a 30-mile error of latitude and longitude. A 30-mile error would, perhaps, have been too great an error in the old days when explorers travelled northward by dog sledge, watching for new lands, or lands once observed, from the surface of the ice.
Captain Wilkins does not believe that such an error is a serious error today. The well-equipped Arctic explorer of today, he points out, looks down on the polar sea from the pinnacles of the clouds. Daily Mail (Brisbane, Qld), Tuesday 20 April 1926, page 13. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/19032293

AREAS OF NORTH ALASKA. THEY WERE SEEN BY ESKIMOS, SOME DISTANCE OFF THEIR COURSE, BUT MAKING FOR THEIR OBJECTIVE.

THEY CARRIED SUPPLIES AND FUEL FOR THE EXPEDITION, AND THEIR SILENCE IS CAUSING ANXIETY.

(COPYRIGHT.)

(By Mr. Earp, press correspondent with Wilkins’s Expedition).

Fairbanks (Alaska), Tuesday.

Robert Waskey, the radioman, with the Wilkins overland party, got on to the air last night, reporting that an aeroplane had been sighted by natives last Thursday, near Thetis Island, which is 140 miles east by south of Point Barrow.

Captain Wilkins and Carl Eielson had hopped that morning from Fairbanks, and have not been directly heard from since; but undoubtedly this plane seen by the Eskimos was theirs. They were on the right course as far as Wiseman, where the Government radioman saw them, two hours after leaving. Evidently they encountered fog later, and got off the course.

A later message at dawn today from Waskey says that the aeroplane was seen dimly toward the sea through the haze by Eskimo hunters, who believed that it was flying westward, meaning towards Point Barrow.

Major Lanphier believed that this is most hopeful, for in case of accident they would be able to make Point Barrow on foot, encountering Eskimos at a number of places from whom they would obtain assistance.

Another Cruise over Arctic?

Waskey reported that the overland party was in good spirits. It is conjectured here that Wilkins got temporarily lost, and may have gone for another cruise over the Arctic ice. Lanphier still hopes that he safely reached Point Barrow. All Lanphier is now waiting for is a new compass, which will arrive any day.

If Wilkins is not there Lanphier will return to Fairbanks immediately for a full load of gasoline, and will then start with as little delay as possible on the expedition’s main tour over the polar basin. There is no real worry regarding Wilkins or Eielson. If they were compelled to make a forced landing they are probably “O.K.,” and will report themselves at some coast settlement within the next few days”.

Waskey reported that while Smith’s overlanders are in good health, they are having their own troubles, suffering numerous hardships, but are still ploughing along the deep coast snows. Smith and Rossman are temporarily snow-blind, and their tired dogs are barely able to travel. They camped last night on the confluence of the Etvikik and Colville Rivers, and hoped to make the coastline by Thursday, for the Arctic shores are still two days’ hard journey away from them.

OVERLANDING PARTY’S TRIALS.

Earl Rossman’s voice was heard over the radio after Waskey had explained that they were resuming the trail this morning, and probably would not set up the radio again until they reached the coast line. “Some of our fellows are scarcely able to see, so blind are they from constant staring in the snow,” said Rossman, in describing how they staggered into camp.

He added: “The dogs so far are spent. One or our sleds had to be pulled in by hand. We were all very tired, but we came upon native hunters and a good supply of food is now assured.”

“A stiff breeze blew during Monday afternoon, when the temperature was four degrees above zero. The indications are that more snow is following. It has been very unsettled weather lately.”
The Wilkins Chronicle
A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

Northern Australia. In April, 1925, he collected two rock wallabies on the Roper River, in the Northern Territory.

Mr. Oldfield Thomas, of the British Museum, who is the special authority in the world on species of marsupials, has pronounced these Roper River wallabies to be new to science, and has named them Petrogale wilkinsi. In the preceding month Captain Wilkins collected some wallabies at Groote Eylandt, off the Northern Territory coast, which Mr. Thomas named Petrogale longmani, after the director of the Queensland Museum. Specimens representing these two new species have been received at the Queensland Museum from London.

FURTHER EXPEDITION.
Chicago, Tuesday.
Field Museum of Natural History is sending an expedition into the Arctic this summer in charge of Donald McMillan. Daily Standard (Brisbane, Qld), Wednesday 21 April 1926, page 4.

21 April 1926
For the Pole: Captain Wilkins's Expedition
Interest during the week has been turned towards the North Pole, Captain Wilkins with his aeroplane expedition having given a thrill by a long flight out across the frozen sea.

The pictures, on this page, received last week from Nenana, Alaska, show the extensive preparations that were made for the transport of his equipment to Point Barrow, whence he intends to fly across, or over, the Pole to Spitsbergen. Wireless will play its part, so that the explorer-aviators will not be lost so completely to the civilised world as those who have gone before them.

A wireless message on April 2 stated that the aeroplane, which is named Alaskan, had arrived at Point Barrow from Fairbanks with Capt. Wilkins and Carl Eielson, the pilot. It was an interesting story in aviation and Polar exploration when they landed after having flown 150 miles out into the Arctic regions. No land was sighted, but unbroken stretches of ice were noted as possible places for alighting.

Cigarettes seemed to be the chief worry of Wilkins and Eielson, as they did not take any with them, expecting to get some from Charles Brower, a veteran trapper at Point Barrow, but the latter's supply was exhausted. The men were not forced to go without, however, as a woman writer, Miss Wallace, who is wintering at Point Barrow, came to their rescue.

On April 11 it was stated that the aviators had made a second flight in an attempt to locate the overland dog team division of the expedition, en route to Point Barrow from Nenana, and which was reported to be short of food. The aeroplane carried a cargo mainly of gasoline, to be used by the two planes of the expedition in the land-hunting trips into the Arctic wastes.

EARL ROSSMAN, PHOTOGRAPHER AND WRITER ACcompanying the expedition.

WARMING UP THE SNOW MOTOR AT NENANA.

Sydney Mail (NSW), Wednesday 21 April 1926, page 15.

1 May 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS SAFE.
CAPTAIN WILKINS SAFE.

A cablegram received in Melbourne yesterday states that Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, is safe, although stormbound, at Point Barrow (says a Melbourne message in the Adelaide News). News of him was heard on Thursday for the first time since he left Fairbanks (Alaska) to fly to Point Barrow a fortnight ago.

It is now learned that the aeroplane nearly crashed in a snow mountain 9,000 feet up.

Flying through fog, the machine almost completely flew through. The machine was seen by telegraph to Melbourne. From Capt. G. H. Wilkins, Point Barrow (Arctic Circle), April 30 (Copyright)

Our expected positions were reversed yesterday, when I was able to welcome 'Sandby' Smith, Earl Rossman and Robert Waskey here, after the terrible trip on the overland trail. Smith and Rossman, particularly were suffering severely from eye strain, and had snow blindness many times on the trail. They are gallant fellows, who must have overcome untold hardships, in maneuvering the sledges over the winter trail. We were ready again yesterday to get into the air and return to Fairbanks with the
Alaskan, but the weather was too broken to make flying at all safe.

NATIVES DANCE ROUND PLANE
“Tingmezon,” as the natives call the Alaskan, is still the centre of interest amongst the Eskimos. Every boy in this settlement has made himself a toy flying machine. With the almost continuous daylight of this time of the year, “Tingmezon” is under inspection 24 hours daily. The natives are preparing for summer sealing, and spend the long twilight evenings playing football and dancing about the plane.

Waskey (the radio expert) is regarded as a great magician, because of his ability to pick messages out of the air. Awed silence prevails while we communicate with the out-side world. The natives follow Ben Eielson (the chief pilot), all around the village. They regard him as a messenger from the gods.

ARM MENDING
On April 15, the morning we left Fairbanks, I realised for the first time that my right arm was broken, and again that day I re-fractured it. When we arrived that night, Mr Charles Brower, the superintendent of the trading station here, set the bone, which is now improving rapidly. Yesterday was the first time I could hold a pencil or write.

In our first attempt to return to Fairbanks this time, we were lost in the clouds over the Endicott Ranges. When we turned and tried to find our way back, we got over open water, but descended through a hole in the clouds, and flew back to Point Barrow at an altitude of only 50 to 100 feet above the ice.

On the second attempt to return to Fairbanks the propeller spilt in the air. We had a narrow escape from absolute disaster. On the third attempt the propeller spilt again, and before we could land the machine was vibrating so much that we could scarcely see. We spent long hours on the beach repairing the propeller and building a shelter for the plane.

Knowing that the weather must be right for flying before we can start, every native is a volunteer meteorological prophet.

DETROITER MAY FAIL
(By Special Cable from Frederick Earp)
(Cable) FAIRBANKS (Alaska), April 30.

— Major Lanphier fears that it will be impossible to try the three-engine monoplane Detroit over the Endicott Mountains to Point Barrow. In that case Captain Wilkins will have to cross the Arctic Sea to the Pole in the smaller plane Alaskan.

Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 1 May 1926, page 9.

19 May 1926
ARCTIC EXPEDITION
CAPTAIN WILKINS TO CONTINUE
NEW YORK, Monday Night.— Mr S. Evans, manager of the Detroit Arctic expedition, has telegraphed to Captain Wilkins stating that the expedition will probably continue the Polar ice explorations through the summer. Mr Evans pointed out that the main results of the Byrd and Amundsen expeditions have been published, and do not seem to necessitate any change of plans or lessen the importance of Captain Wilkins’s objective, which is to discover land and plant on it the American flag.

Mr Evans stated that the expedition’s board of control has agreed that the scientific and discovery programme should be pressed forward, modified only by avoiding flights on the north and south strip already traversed. Mr Evans estimated that there are still 800,000 square miles of unexplored Arctic territory in which to seek land and study storm origin which is also contemplated.

Daily Telegraph (Launceston, Tas.), Wednesday 19 May 1926, page 5.

8 April 1926
STEFANSSON’S VIEW
Wilkins’sFeat Promises Greater Results
(Special Cable from Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the famous Arctic Explorer) (Copyright)
NEW YORK, April 7.

The dash by Captain Wilkins beyond Point Barrow is particularly interesting, because he saw a great area never before visited by man. Incidentally, the length of his flight from Fairbanks in a single hop equals and probably exceeds Amundsen’s flight last May, and for a preliminary dash it is a wonderful performance, promising greater results. I am not surprised that he saw no trace of land. Sixty-five miles north of Point Barrow the ocean is 5000 to 6000 feet deep.

This we knew in 1913 from soundings then taken of each day. Errors will creep in because of this, but calculation will be simplified. The observed altitude of any celestial body is open to many errors. In the case of the sun there is the error of refraction.

It is caused by the heavy atmospheric gases along the horizon; the gases distort the sun’s image. There is the sextant’s own intrinsic error, and the error which arises because the centre of the earth, the proper measuring base for altitudes, is far from the horizon. In the Arctic the refraction error is certain to be large, because, during the spring at least, the sun never rises far above the horizon.

Likewise, the sextant error increases as the sextant arm contracts with the falling temperatures. Captain Wilkins must make corrections for these errors, but he may apply them to his declination before he starts his flight. While in the air he will be able to avoid all computations save the simple addition of declination, pre-corrected for altitude errors, and observed altitude.

THIRTY MILES MAXIMUM ERROR
As soon as he catches the image of the sun in his sextant bubble Captain Wilkins will glance at a chronometer strapped on his arm. The chronometer will give the time for the longitude of Greenwich. But on the edge of the Detroit expedition’s charts, Mr. Miller has inked in circles of Greenwich Time figures and related circles of degree figures. This degree figures show the sun’s true bearing from the Pole, for the meridian which the Detroit expedition will seek to follow northward.

And so, glancing from his chronometer to his chart, Captain Wilkins will be able to find the sun’s bearing from the North Pole of the moment of his altitude observation. He will place one point of his dividers at the point on the chart which is representative of the Pole and step off a distance equal to the sum of the corrected observed altitude and the declination.

At this point he will place a celluloid curve representing a Sumner line and will make a tangent to that curve perpendicular to the bearing line or meridian. Forthwith he will know that he is somewhere on that curve.
Meanwhile, at five minute intervals he will have been drawing in his dead reckoning line. The dead reckoning line and the calculated Sumner line will cross, and the point of crossing will be the approximate true position. From this position he will proceed with his dead reckoning for an hour, and then take new observations of the sun.

Unless the sun is obscured by fogs or clouds, Mr. Miller declares, the maximum errors of calculation will involve only a 30-mile error of latitude and longitude. A 30-mile error would, perhaps, have been too great an error in the old days when explorers travelled northward by dog sledge, watching for new lands, or lands once observed, from the surface of the ice.

Captain Wilkins does not believe that such an error is a serious error today. The well-equipped Arctic explorer of today, he points out, looks down on the polar sea from the pinnacles of the clouds.

Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Thursday 8 April 1926, page 7.

A forecast printed on the page of the (Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Thursday 8 April 1926, page 7.)

4 May 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS AT HIS BASE, FAIRBANKS, ALASKA.

(Cam’s studio, photo)
Photographs taken at Fairbanks, Alaska, of Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, and the plane in which he is attempting flights into the Arctic.

Captain Wilkins superintending the unloading of the Alaskan and men filling the tanks of the Alaskan before the first flight from Fairbanks to Point Barrow. In this plane Captain Wilkins returned safely to Fairbanks last week after being absent for a fortnight on a trip to Point Barrow. (next column.)

Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Tuesday 4 May 1926, page 9.

8 May 1926
The Forthcoming Polar Flight
Captain Amundsen’s Vision

Captain Amundsen told a Daily Chronicle representative his plans for the Amundsen-Ellsworth Spitsbergen-Alaska airship flight over the North Pole, upon which he is to start as soon as the season is sufficiently advanced.

It is hoped to find land, in the million square miles of unexplored area, about halfway between Spitsbergen (Kings Bay) and Alaska, that might serve for a permanent air station nearly central for three continents—Europe, Asia, and America—and would vastly shorten lines of communication in northern latitudes. This is how the interviewer describes Captain Amundsen:—

A tall, handsome man, with the blue eyes of a Viking, and a crown of white hair, his smart clothes and fawn gloves suggested Mayfair rather than the explorer who has faced a thousand hardships.

I asked him about his immediate plans, and suggested that the early attempt to be made by Captain George Hubert Wilkins, the Australian, to fly over the Pole by aeroplane, was in the nature of a race. “There is nothing in the nature of a race,” Amundsen replied.

Those who have been making in that strain forget that we have been quietly working out our plans for three years. Now we have everything ready and shipshape.

“We hope to start our flight from Italy, via France, England, Russia, and Spitsbergen, across the Polar Seas to Alaska and Nome. “All our plans are made:— all that is, except the atmospheric conditions. We have our hangar at Kings Bay, and have been working at it all the winter.”

Airship v. Aeroplane

I asked him whether he considered the airship a superior craft to the aeroplane for Arctic exploration, and he replied:— “I consider the airship is very much the superior for this work. With an aeroplane you have to keep going at a great speed, and you cannot get observation.

With the airship, you can go slowly, and get all the observation you want, and you are not troubled with the difficulty of finding landing places.

“Through Premier Mussolini of Italy we were able to obtain the only Italian naval dirigible that was suitable for our purpose; it is of 120,500 cubic yards capacity, and is about, 350ft. long. It will carry 18 men. It is driven by three Maybach motors.

“The ship will be stripped for action like a battleship. “I have made a journey in it over Rome. The large cabin held 12 comfortable chairs, and there were large windows.

“All needless trappings will be discarded. The cabin will be fitted with equipment, provisions, and instruments. If we want to sit down we will sit on boxes.

“There will be room to make all our photographs to do all the work that is necessary.

And this despite the fact that we shall carry a sled, tents, and other equipment, so that if we are forced down we can make our way to land.

“My interest in this expedition is purely geographical. We want to find out what there is in the one million square miles between the Pole and Alaska. That district is absolutely unknown.

“People may ask what advantage there is in this form of exploration work. I suppose Columbus was asked that same question. We are living in a time when we want to know everything about our globe.

“The world is getting smaller and smaller every day, and we have to know everything—all that is interesting and everything geographical.

“Any land that we discover would be of the highest importance. We do not expect to find any vegetation or animal life, but we hope to find some land there. Even if we do not, it will be a negative result, and therefore, of importance.”

“The conditions that we hope to discover will have the highest importance for future transportation across the world. This may sound like a fairy tale, but even Jules Verne is out of date now. If Jules Verne had one-twentieth of what we now know to be a fact would have been considered even more of a crank”.

Discussing the advantage of aerial flight in Polar exploration

Captain Amundsen recalled that in last year’s dramatic flight they actually saw the Pole from the air.

He added that in aerial work they had clear visibility for 50 miles, whereas, working with sledges and dogs, they could only see two miles ahead.

“With the airship,” continued Amundsen, “we shall have all facilities to get down close to the earth, the ice or the water. We can get down from the airship to any land by a basket, just as easily as you can go down a lift in a liner.

“We are conditioning the airship for two months, but I hope that the expedition will not take two months. I hope to keep up an economic speed of 40 to 50 miles an hour, and the crossing of the great Polar waste, 2200 miles should be made in two days.
“Ellsworth and I will be the leaders. We shall work, however, more as a team of specialists.

“Colonel Umberto Nobile, who constructed the airship and is a flier of great experience — he has made 300 flights — will be the first pilot.

“We consider ourselves unusually fortunate in obtaining his services, as he is an ideal man for the work.

“Lieu. Hjalmar Riiser-Larsen, who piloted the N25 on our last flight (the ship which returned), and is the only Norwegian dirigible pilot, will be our second pilot.

“Lincoln Ellsworth and Lieut. Emil Horgen, who were reserve pilot on the last expedition, will be the navigators.

“Then there will be my companion for so long, Lieut. Oscar Omdal. Captain Oscar Wisting, who has been commander of my ship, the Maud, will go along to take charge of our landing, if necessary.

“Our radio expert will be Captain Frederik Gottwaldt.

“We hope to be able to send as well as receive, and if we do we can promise an exciting narrative for 65 hours.

“Captain Gottwaldt will be assisted by G. Ollonkin, who was first engineer on the Maud, and whom we picked up at a Russian wireless station on the coast of Siberia. He is now a Norwegian.

“The historian will be Frederik Ramm, who was also with us in Spitsbergen.”

“Our meteorologist will be Finn Malmgren. “Ellsworth will be the only American on the trip. He deserves the honour. He has been a tower of strength to us, and he is a splendid fellow and an explorer of resource, courage, and ability.”

“We shall probably carry provisions for six months, which we could transport on a sled if necessary.”

“If by some misfortune we are forced to land, we should be able to keep ourselves alive until we reach Greenland or Alaska”

“Our ration consists of pemmican, a dried and ground meat mixed with fat, oatmeal crackers, chocolate, milk powder, and malted milk tablets. These are so nourishing that, although on our last trip we were reduced to eight ounces of food a day and became very thin, we never felt the pangs of hunger”.

“I certainly do think we shall succeed. Last year, with the aeroplane, I thought we had fifty chances out of a hundred. But we haven’t. I feel sure that we have ninety chances out of a hundred with the airship.”

Amundsen referred to the excitement which was caused by their non-appearance in the flight last year, and said: “We were very sorry indeed to have caused this concern among our friends, but we knew all the time we were in no danger. We knew the conditions, whereas our friends did not, but we had no opportunity of reassuring the public.”

Tribute to Captain Scott

Amundsen, who planted the Norwegian flag at the South Pole four weeks before the ill-fated Captain Scott arrived, told me that it would be one of the joys of his life to meet the dead explorer’s son, Peter Scott.

“I would very much like to see little Peter for his father was a great man,” he said.

“Scott was a splendid man. Take those men of Scott’s together. Take Bowers and Oates. You cannot replace them. You cannot find any more men like them.

“What other country than Britain could have produced such men?”

(World’s News (Sydney, NSW), Saturday 8 May 1926, page 21).


CAPTAIN H. F. WILKINS.

22 May 1926

PNEUMATIC BOATS.

SAFETY AMONG THE FLOES.

INTEREST IN WILKINS’S GEAR.

(Exclusive copyright in South Australia.)

Fairbanks; Alaska, March 29, 1926.

The population of Fairbanks watched Captain George Hubert Wilkins and Major Thomas G. Lanphier, of the Detroit Arctic Expedition, while the two explorers inflated and tested what are believed to be the lightest and most buoyant boats ever supplied to an Arctic Expedition. Each boat weighs five and a half pounds, yet when it is filled with air, it will support weight of between 500 and 600 pounds.

The pneumatic boats were made for the Detroit expedition by Svend Rasmussen, Detroit balloonist. They are constructed of rubber-covered balloon fabric and are without struts, bottom boards, or other stiffening members. In spite of the fact that they are mattress-shaped, it is said that they may be paddled at canoe speed, and that they will ride heavy and choppy seas like New England dories.

Captain Wilkins agreed with his Alaskan friends here that the ice fragments which are almost invariably round in the leads of the Polar Sea will chafe the boat material even if they do not puncture it. But they agreed with him that no very rugged craft could be carried on men’s backs throughout a long journey over the polar ice. The sturdy Eskimo kayak, a one-man boat of seal-skin, weighs upwards of 15 pounds, and is not collapsible. “If we wreck our planes on the near ice, Captain Wilkins explained, we will walk back to land. We will not have slopes and dog teams and so much travel light. We will double-strength encounter many open leads, especially if we try to approach Spitsbergen during the summer months. We must either wait for the leads to close or else ferry them (?) in our fabric boats. Much paddling against floating ice fragments will undoubtedly wear the material out, but we will carry patching material and will try to make it last for many days.

A Rasmussen-type pneumatic boat was given a vigorous test last fall, when W. U. Naylor, a Detroit balloonist, came down in Lake Erie during the Detroit News Balloon Trophy Race. Naylor and his companion inflated the boat while their balloon was descending. They landed during the night and rowed and paddled until they were picked up four hours later. Another unique piece of Arctic equipment exhibited to the Alaskans today by Captain Wilkins caused several to predict that the Detroit expedition will make every Eskimo desirous of owning a silk umbrella.

While outfitting in New York, Captain Wilkins ordered an umbrella frame seven feet in diameter. The frame was covered by an umbrella-maker who runs a little one-room shop off Broadway, and who could not understand why any rational person should want an umbrella so huge. That umbrella-maker used 20 yards of silk to complete the job.

Unfolded at the warehouse here today, the big umbrella looked like an Eskimo igloo. It will be used as such by Captain Wilkins and his fellow-explorers if they are required to land on the ice of the polar sea or at an outpost on land. In fair weather it may be used as an all-night shelter without a retaining wall of snow: in bad weather a snow house may be quickly built around it.

The Detroit Polar Expedition.

The snow motors breaking trail and hauling double-ended sleds through the woods — a bad place at Campbell, Alaska — where the snow motors left the Tanana River to take the mail trail, but were forced to return to the river ice because of the rough going. To the right is “Sandy” Smith, the leader of the party.

Copyright exclusive in South Australia.

Chronicle (Adelaide, SA), Saturday 22 May 1926, page 53.


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past 15 years the achievements of a dozen tolerably adventurous lifetimes. He was the first man to take moving pictures of troops in action—a feat he accomplished when with the Turkish forces in the Balkan War of 1912. Among other adventures in that campaign he was arrested and very narrowly escaped death.

Later, a balloon exploit in London led to his being blown out to sea and searched for by destroyers. Then, in 1913 after a visit to the West Indies, he joined Stefansson in the North. Long afterwards—for news travels slowly in those icy spaces—he heard of the war.

He hastened back to Australia, gained a commission in the Australian Flying Corps in 1917, and in the same year became Australia’s official photographer, in which capacity he obtained, by his daring, pictures of unique historic value. He was twice mentioned in despatches and was awarded the Military Cross and bar. Bored with peace, he has returned to his exploring.

In 1920-21 he was second-in-command of the British Imperial Antarctic Expedition. In 1921-22 he accompanied the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition as naturalist: and now he is attempting to explore from the air a region which may test even his nerve, daring and resource. Moree Gwydir Examiner and General Advertiser (NSW), Thursday 10 June 1926, page 5.


The first machine, a single-engine monoplane, crashed at Fairbanks on March 19, when landing after a test flight. Later, in May, Capt. Wilkins succeeded in flying to Point Barrow in the Detroit, a three-engine machine, after four attempts. On June 6, he returned to Fairbanks with three companions. The frozen Arctic country had been shrouded with fog without a break since May, and during the interval grave fears had been entertained for the explorer’s safety.

Later messages stated that Captain Wilkins had made another attempt to find land in the Arctic, and that necessary parts for the repair of the aeroplanes would be shipped from Seattle. Since the first attempt of Captain Wilkins, Captain Amundsen, the Norwegian explorer, and Lieut. Byrd, of America, have both succeeded in flying over the North Pole.


29 December 1926
CAPT. WILKINS TO TRY AGAIN
New Polar Flight
WRECKED PLANE TO BE REBUILT
(Herald Special Representative)
DETROIT. Dec. 28.
Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, is leaving shortly for Fairbanks (Alaska) with parts to rebuild one of his aeroplanes.

He will fly to Point Barrow, where ample supplies of gasoline are available for a wide exploration of the North Polar regions. Early this year Captain Wilkins, who was financed and supported by influential interests in Detroit, made several flights from Fairbanks to Point Barrow.

His ultimate object was to fly over the North Pole, and if he discovered land on the way drop the Stars and Stripes there and claim it for America. Captain Wilkins was equipped with two huge Fokkers, which had been specially built for the flight, but misfortune dogged his great adventure.

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5 February 1927
CAPTAIN G. H. WILKINS.
LECTURING IN AMERICA.

A letter has been received from Captain G. H. Wilkins, the well-known Arctic explorer, by his mother, Mrs. C. H. Wilkins, of Oxenbold Street, Parkside.

Captain Wilkins at the time of writing was in Detroit, where he had been lecturing to schoolchildren. Four schools a day were normally visited by him, in addition to which he often addressed adult audiences at night. The lectures were illustrated by moving pictures of his last expedition to the Arctic Circle.

On the conclusion of his lecture tour he will begin preparations for his next flight, on which it is his intention to take an additional small aeroplane, capable of accommodating two men. He hopes to continue his exploration of the Arctic Regions. By using the small plane he considers he will be able to make subsidiary flights from the advanced base of the expedition. He is of the opinion that the depths of water under the icefield will indicate whether there is likely to be land in the Arctic Ocean, and if so he hopes to be able to discover it.

The letter states that Captain Wilkins is disappointed at the attitude of the Detroit residents, as they had in most cases proved to be interested in his last flight solely from the publicity they got out of it. Americans were prepared to pay anything for publicity, he said, but at the same time they were accomplishing things that were big enough to speak for themselves without the need for any boasting.

Adviser (Adelaide, S.A.), Saturday 5 February 1927, page 17.

2 April 1927
WHAT WILKINS SEeks in ARCTIC Unknown Polar Lands
POSsible NEW AERIAL ROUTE
(Copyright by The Herald and the North American Newspaper Alliance)

DETROIT. March 1.

Mr G. H. Wilkins, the Australian scientist and explorer, who is flying over the Arctic, seeks as his objective the 80,000 square miles of unseen ice which furnish the last great geographical problem of the earth. Wilkins left Seattle on February 12 with two Stinson aeroplanes, bound for his last year's base at Fairbanks, Alaska. At Fairbanks he assembled his Liberty-engined Fokker monoplane, stored there since last year.

He flew with the three machines across the Endicott Mountains from Fairbanks to Point Barrow, where a northern base was established from which he hoped to make several trips into the unexplored areas. These lie in the general region north of Alaska. The purpose of the flight is the same which took Wilkins and Eielson over the ice north of Barrow last year to explore the unknown Arctic sea in which possible land may be found. It is believed that the rapid development of flying will make those islands, if they exist, important in the development of transcontinental, aerial short-cuts.

SAME CREW AS LAST TIME

Ben Eielson, the pioneer airman of Alaska, is Wilkins's pilot. It was Eielson who piloted the Fokker plane of last year's expedition seventy-five miles north of the line of previous exploration. Howard Mason, who was in charge of the wireless arrangements of last year's expeditions, is in charge of communications.

Mason last year brought in the messages which told of Wilkins's successful completion of the dangerous flight across the Endicott Mountains; of the flight accomplished by Wilkins and Eielson over the unexplored ice north of Barrow, and of the safe passage of the Norge, Captain Amundsen’s airship, over Point Barrow after her flight across the Pole and of her later arrival and descent in Teller, Alaska.

The accomplishment of last year's expedition was curtailed by the difficulty of ferrying adequate supplies of petrol from Fairbanks to Barrow, by air. During the past summer, Captain Wilkins sent 1500 gallons of petrol to Point Barrow by ship: other supplies are available at Barrow, so that he has a supply sufficient for his needs there. The Stinson standard planes which Wilkins is using have not been altered except for the addition of sufficient reserve tanks, to give a range of 1500 miles. The Fokker machine has a range in still air of 2200 miles. This will make possible a flight to latitude 85N., and the exploration of about two-thirds of the unseen area.

As deep soundings have been taken around three edges of the remaining one-third of the area, Wilkins's flights, if successful, should furnish a fairly conclusive answer to the question of the existence of any large land body in what is deemed the region of inaccessibility.

LIGHT TYPE OF PLANE

Eielson has been flying a Stinson plane of the type which the explorers will use, in Florida for several months. It is a light plane which the two men can handle readily when they land on the ice to take soundings, and which will take off with a much shorter run than was necessary for the heavy planes of last year's expedition. The American Geographical Society, which supplied the expedition with scientific apparatus last year, is this year providing a Sonic Depth-finding Apparatus—a time measuring device which will furnish data for computing the depth of the ocean by acoustical methods. Howard Mason, the radio operator, has installed improved apparatus in Barrow, from which station he will relay to Fairbanks the messages received from the plane in flight.

Last year’s installation was successful in spite of the crippling of the transmitting set at Barrow by the loss of the generator, which it was found impossible to carry to Barrow by sledge. The new and lighter type of generator to be used this year is carried in the plane. Last year’s expedition, though successful in establishing an air route from Fairbanks to the northern edge of the Continent, and in moving the lines of exploration to a “Farthest North” some 150 miles beyond Barrow, failed because of a succession of misfortunes to complete the larger explorations which are the aim of the present expedition.

LAST YEAR’S ACCIDENTS

After a series of minor accidents to the planes, the smaller of the party’s two planes was wrecked when it ran into a rut in attempting to take off from a soft landing field. The three motored plane with which the longer flights were to have been attempted, was unable to gain sufficient altitude to cross the high peaks of the Endicotts with an adequate supply of petrol and with the coming of the warm, foggy season the project was postponed.

The Detroit Aviation Society this year turned over its supplies of fuel and equipment to Barrow to Wilkins. Wilkins is providing two of the three machines, and the Detroit News will supply the further financing needed for the flights.
Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 2 April 1927, page 7.

8 April 1927
‘WILKINS MAROONED’.
Barrow, Wednesday.

Captain Wilkins is still marooned on the icefield one hundred miles north-east of Barrow.
Northern Standard (Darwin, NT), Friday 8 April 1927, page 2.

8 April 1927
‘Wilkins Catches First Glimpse’

It is reported from Alaska that Captain Wilkins, of Australia, was the first to see Captain Amundsen’s airship off the coast.
Advocate, 15 May 1926, page 5.

22 April 1927
WILKINS SAFE.
Barrow, Thursday.

Captain Wilkins and pilot, who were missing since April 1, after having made a forced aeroplane landing on an ice field have reached Beachy Point, Alaska, having walked 70 miles. They abandoned the aeroplane in the Arctic.
Northern Standard, 22 April 1927, page 5.

25 May 1927
ADrift ON ICE PACK. WILKINS’S STIRRING ADVENTURE.

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer and aviator, who in a flight over the Polar Sea last month was forced to land on drifting ice, and from whom no tidings were received for some little time, eventually succeeded in reaching Beachy Point. His story is a thrilling one, and is a tribute to the determination and courage of the explorer and his companion.

Captain Wilkins says: “leaving the coast on the morning of March 29, we kept out course for five hours until 11 a.m., when the engine began to give trouble, and we were forced to land. Landing fields were not difficult to find. As Eielson worked on the engine I took soundings with the sonar apparatus, sounding 5600 feet at 75 degrees north latitude, longitude for 77.45 hours degrees west.

Eielson worked for two hours and finally got the engine working fairly well. We took off, but the trouble developed again and we were forced to the ice. We worked for another hour and then took off at 2.15 in the afternoon and flew back on our course. A heavy south-west wind arose, reducing our engine speed of 90 miles per hour to an actual ground speed of 65.

Soon the weather became too thick to see the ice for landing. After trying several altitudes we decided that 3,000 feet was the best level and kept on towards the coast. The petrol gave out after seven hours flying, and we landed safely by good luck and skilful piloting by Eielson on a small patch of smooth ice. A blizzard was blowing.

It was now 10 minutes after nine. The night was too dark to see far. We could just discern the sun through the clouds on the horizon.

However, I got two sights, which gave our latitude 72.15 North. In the next two days there were stormy high winds and we could not see the sun, but figured we were drifting eastward. The next sight gave longitude 155 West, latitude 72.30 North. While fixing the engine Eielson froze four finger tips badly. They were black and blistered and he was scarcely able to use his right hand, but we started out, dragging an improvised sledge, travelling over old ice and pressure ridges.

At night we built snow houses and slept comfortably warm. After three days, with a reduced load, we both hauled one sled and crossed many leads of young ice.

After three more days we abandoned the sled and packed our food and clothing. The Norwegian chocolate and biscuits were satisfying foods. We did not stint ourselves. We saw many fresh bear and fox tracks and many seal breathing holes in the young ice. One week after we had started to travel we came to badly broken and pressing ice.

Crossing the moving pack I fell and got wet to the waist. After changing our socks and pressing ice.

Two more sights gave us our position, and we headed for Beachy Point, where we arrived tired out. The petrol supply had lasted just 15 hours. One more would have sufficed to have brought us to the coast, or if we had not had engine trouble we could have been back before the worst of the storm. The great drift to the east, after we landed, was as surprising as it was fortunate.

The radio apparatus was out of adjustment. I doubted if any message was being sent and we therefore did not send many full messages, but sent short ones many times each day and night until we left the plane.

As Eielson could not turn the generator he sent messages over the key. The night we landed I sent several messages, stating the position as 65 miles off shore. Eielson has done wonderfully well during the whole trip, both in the air and on the ice”.

Geraldton Express (WA), Wednesday 25 May 1927, page 1.

Polar Exploration.
CAPTAIN WILKINS’S MESSAGE. The Prime Minister.

Mr. Bruce has received the following radio message sent by Captain Wilkins from Point Barrow: Alaska: — “Our first flight this year of 550 miles into the unexplored Arctic north-west of Point Barrow was scientifically successful. I expect the next trip from Point Barrow to Greenland will furnish interesting and valuable results, completing my arctic work. I hope then to proceed with my Antarctic plans.”

Horsham Times (Vic.), Saturday 4 June 1927, page 2.

30 June 1927
WHERE CAPTAIN WILKINS IS AND WHAT HE IS DOING

Heroic Research Work in Arctic
STILL ATTEMPTING TO PROVE THEORIES OF GREAT POLAR LAND

(By R. E. BYRD and VILHJALMUR STEFANSSON) (Copyright by the Herald and N.A.N.A.)

Where is Captain Wilkins? Australia has heard little of Captain Wilkins since his unfortunate attempt last year to explore the Arctic, when his two aeroplanes were disabled.

This, however, did not dishearten the Australian explorer, and in this article the story is told of his exploits, and what he is now doing.

One of the most heroic and dramatic adventures of polar history is now going on in the Arctic north of Alaska where Captain. George H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, Lieutenant Ben Eielson and their associates have already made striking contributions to science and the progress of northern aviation, although their programme is only in its beginning.
Last year the city of Detroit endorsed Wilkins’s plans and sent out an expedition sponsored by the American Geographical Society of New York. They had much bad luck. Two planes were seriously disabled by unfortunate landings and one in an unsuccessful attempt to take off with a heavy load. These accidents, however, all took place on a regular landing field in Fairbanks, Alaska, which is in the temperate zone, and not in the Arctic. In the Arctic itself the Wilkins expedition last year had only one accident in 5,000 miles of flying: this was when Wilkins broke his wrist in taking off from a prepared landing place at Barrow.

The Wilkins expedition last year had no accident in the air or in landing. They crossed five times a range of Arctic mountains so little known that it had been given on maps as 5000 or 6000 feet high, while it proved to be about 10,000 feet.

One of those flights was from Fairbanks, 550 miles north to Barrow and thence 150 miles out over the ocean, and then back to Barrow, a flight on which 10,000 square miles of previously unknown territory were seen.

OUTWARD FLIGHT

Inroad into the largest unexplored area seen by human beings, thus making a great development and they had to make a forced landing.

There have been two theories regarding the safety of the engine oil in the frozen sea. One school has held that there are scarcely any safe landing places on the moving arctic pack, and the other school, to which Wilkins himself belongs, that landings are so numerous that an optional landing is a five mile stretch without a fairly good one.

In less than five miles they found a place that looked good to Wilkins. Eielson made a perfect landing on ice about three and a half feet thick Wilkins took two soundings and found the ocean there to be about three miles deep, which makes it unlikely that any land can exist in this direction, for their flight, if continued far enough in the same direction, would have taken them near where Nansen years ago, in the Fraum, took similar soundings.

This sounding made it probable that those are wrong who, following Harris, have maintained that there is a great unknown land in the Arctic, and that those are right who, following Nansen, have argued that it is in the main a deep sea.

AGAIN IN THE AIR

In two hours they were in the air again, flying back toward land. After, about 10 minutes’ flight, the engine gave trouble once more. There was a second forced landing. Again Eielson made a perfect landing.

This time both worked on the engine, and made a better job, so that when they took off a second time the machine hummed along smoothly. But clouds gathered, and the wind stiffened continually, so that they presently realised that they were unlikely to get ashore, owing to failure of supplies. It was after sundown, with heavy clouds in a thick blizzard, when the engine stopped suddenly. Petrol had run out.

This time they could not see anything, and the landing was pure luck. Instead of striking a smooth expanse, as might have happened by chance, they struck a rough, and it was as if by a miracle that they made a landing safe for themselves, although it crippled their plane.

Eielson had frozen his fingers severely when tinkering bare-handed with metal tools on the metal of the engine at 30 degrees below zero in a strong wind. Wilkins and Eielson spent five days on the floe, where they landed, and during that time another strange thing happened, for the ice in this quarter is usually drifting west, and Wilkins noted in his diary that they would therefore probably have to land in Wrangel Island, but instead it now drifted rapidly east. When they had broken up the wooden planks from the plane and made them into sledges, they found themselves 100 miles east of Barrow instead of several hundred miles west (as might easily have been the case had the drift been as usual) and 70 miles from shore, or 30 miles nearer than when they had been forced down.

SLEEP IN SNOW-HOUSES

They slept comfortably at night in the snow-houses they built. They saw plenty of game, and could have obtained seals for food and fuel indefinitely if they had needed it, but that they had with them enough biscuits and chocolate to eat and enough engine oil to burn. They were hurrying because Eielson’s hand had been frozen so severely that an amputation of fingers seemed necessary, and because they wanted to get back to Barrow so they could do more flying with their other planes before the summer fogs began.

This hurry made them take possibly unnecessary chances on this ice, and Wilkins fell through once, getting wet to the armpits at 62 degrees Fahrenheit below freezing. His only comment is that he knew his garments would dry better on his body than otherwise, and that he had no change of clothing anyway, but that he did have a change of socks and boots, which he made promptly in the lee of an ice ridge.

After several days’ travel the ice became so rough that the improvised sledge could not be pulled over it. Wilkins recognised that it was safe to leave the sledge behind.

So they took the more important baggage as packs on their backs and scrambled over ridges of slippery ice where the crevices between the broken pieces were filled with snow so soft that they had to crawl several miles. They would keep their hands on pieces ahead while their knees and feet were on the pieces they were just leaving.

Their course took them directly to the Eskimo settlement at Beechy Point, where there is a trading station. From here they made their way to Barrow, where Eielson’s little finger was amputated at the mission hospital. The other fingers were saved.

Wilkins now plans to cross the 300,000 mile [?] section to the north-east, where there is the best remaining chance of land. He expects to fly diagonally through the middle of it from Barrow to 84 deg. N lat; and 100 deg W long., and thence to Ellesmore Island, coming down when they have to, or possibly flying nearly if not quite all the way to Etah.

If the plane comes down anywhere on this route, Wilkins expects his party to live by hunting seals, and make their way to the nearest inhabited land. This will be Alaska, if they have hard luck and come down soon. It may be any of the Canadian lands, according to how far they succeed in flying. It will be Etah, North-west Greenland, or anywhere in Greenland, as the outcome of the adventure cannot be known before perhaps midsummer, when the Danish trading ships go up to Etah or the Canadian Government ships go to Ellesmere Island. If nothing is heard then or before the time, it will mean either a fatal ending or a successful landing at a distance from which the party are returning, building snow-houses in winter, using skin tents in summer, and living on seal game. Wilkins estimated the maximum time necessary for such a return on foot will be two years.
Forced down in a blizzard while soaring over the least known part of the Arctic Ocean in search of undiscovered land, Captain George Hubert Wilkins and his pilot, Carl Ben Eielson, learned what it was to be marooned on a drifting floe, and later to stumble and crawl for twelve days over the broken ice to the Alaska mainland.

In the course of that ordeal the pilot was afflicted with a severely frozen hand, and Captain Wilkins was treated to an involuntary sea bath, which he describes as an alarming as well as a decidedly uncomfortable experience.

The captain who commands the Arctic expedition organised by the Detroit News and himself, took flight (says the New York Literary Digest) from his headquarters at Point Barrow early in the morning of March 29 and soon disappeared over the polar horizon! “He had planned a fourteen hour flight which would carry him around the rim of a triangle enclosing an unexplored Arctic Ocean area of nearly 46,000 square miles, and this schedule called for his return at sunset, about 8 p.m.”

As explained by Mr. A. M. Smith, staff correspondent of the Detroit News in a radio dispatch from Point Barrow, this was the first of the captain’s proposed series of airplane flights “to unlock the last remaining secrets of the Polar Regions.” The weather was ideal at the start, but it changed during the day, and by nightfall the expedition’s base was being lashed by a blizzard. The explorer’s plane carried a radio transmitting apparatus, but no message had arrived since the early morning hours.

From that time Wilkins and Eielson were lost to the world for a fortnight. The captain had left instructions that, in case of his return, no rescue expedition was to be sent in search of him, but — to quote his own language, as given by Mr. Smith: “If the Detroit News No. 1 (the plane in which Wilkins took off) does not return before the night of March 31, please ask Graham [Alger Graham, pilot of the expedition’s relief ‘plane) to fly first 150 miles along the coast to south east Barrows, then 150 miles along the coast to east Barrows, then 150 miles north-east of Point Barrow. Then days of silence followed by fruitless scotings by the reserve aviator interrupted by renewed blizzard weather. And at last, on April 19, an anxious civilisation learned that the two adventurers had reached Beechy Point, 180 miles south-east of Point Barrow, having abandoned the now gasless plane and hoofed it 70 miles over the ice.

Here we take up Captain Wilkins’s own narrative (copyrighted by the North American Newspaper Alliance), beginning at a point when, after two landings on the ice to wrestle with engine trouble—in the course of which the pilot’s fingers were frozen—the adventurers were desperately heading for the coast after nightfall.

Engine Quits

“At 9.2 p.m. the engine quit as suddenly as if the switch had been snapped off. We had run out of gasoline. There was no sputter or gasp from the starved carburettor; it was sudden silence, except for the hum of the wind vibrating the wing wires. Ben snapped the switch from right to left, but there was no response from the engine.

We could feel the sag of the stalling plane. With coolness and skill Ben steadied the falling plane to an even keel and an easy glide. His eyes were glued to the turn and bank indicator, because it was too dark in the storm to tell otherwise whether or not our keel was even.

When we came to a few hundred feet from the ground the horizon neared, and we could dimly see it serrated with ice ridges, but they gave no idea of height or distance. Near the ground the air was rough, and the plane pitched and swerved. Ben was calm, and he corrected with the controls each unsteady move; snow was drifting heavily, and I could not see through the windows at the cabin. I felt Ben brace himself against the empty gas-tank behind him. I leaned my back against the rear partition wall of the cabin.

Then we waited for what fate had in store for us. The left wing struck. It bounced once, and then the plane landed as smoothly as if on a prepared landing field. I gripped Ben’s shoulder and slipped through the door of the plane to the ice. Driving snow filled my eyes. I could see dimly pressure ridges as high as the plane all around us.

The plane undoubtedly struck one as we came down, for the fabric of the left wing was torn at the tip. The plane still was on its skis, but they had turned on their sides, with stanchions twisted and broken. It was too dark and the snow-drift was too thick for us to give the plane a close examination. We could not determine our position, of course.

We climbed back into the cabin with few words. We discussed briefly our course and probable position. We remarked that we had little faith in our wireless. We sent out repeated short messages to Point Barrow, but had no confidence that they would be received. We tried to tell briefly all that had happened to us. The intense strain of the last two hours of flying over the Arctic Ocean through the blizzard after sunset had left us weak and tired. Ben looked at me and I looked at him.

Then we began to laugh nervously, and could not stop for about five minutes. Ben stretched out in a sleeping-bag on top of the empty gas tank, and huddled in a corner of the cabin. We went to sleep.

Roaring Blizzard

The day following Eielson and I awoke to find a roaring blizzard blowing from the north-west. Ben and I climbed from the plane, and even in the thick, drifting snow we could see our safe landing the night before was miraculous. Our plane was on a patch of smooth ice on which a skilful pilot might land a small machine only under the most favourable weather conditions.

We dug a hole through 6 feet of ice, and, dropping a short line, found we were drifting north of east two or six miles an hour. The wind was then blowing more than 30 miles on hour.

Late in the afternoon two sun observations gave us our position as approximately latitude 72 degrees 30 minutes, and longitude 355 degrees. If our wireless messages were received it was possible we might receive help from Point Barrow.

We repeatedly sent the message: ‘Now about 100 miles north-east Barrows Position tomorrow.’ Then we could only wait until the weather cleared. Draining the tanks, we collected little more than a half-gallon of gasoline. Fuel was our greatest concern.
rations, about 3 lbs. of mixed biscuit, chocolate, and pemmican”. Just before starting they had thrown away 15 lbs. of condensed food, as Wilkins felt certain that with time and patience they could find food and fuel on, the icefloes. He continues: “We improvised an oil-burner from a gallon can, using two slats of wood from the cabin roof for wicks. In this we burned lubricating oil from the piano. Water warmed on this stove and biscuits and chocolate comprised our meal.

All that night and the next day, March 31, a high wind was blowing. We selected from our gear what we needed for walking to shore, and we made improvised sleds from the lower part of the cowling and the other from the skis, to which we attached a section of the corrugated duralumin from the cabin wall. “We stripped wire from the wireless antenna, and with spare sealing lines and cord made a line seven fathoms in length, but with this, we could not reach bottom through a hole cut in the ice. Our drift then was almost due east.

About 6 p.m. that day the wind calmed slightly. Then it blew from the north, increasing to 30 miles an hour by 9 o’clock. April 1, we woke to hear the hum of wind through the wires on our plane; the machine rocking and shaking under the pressure. The wind was slightly north of west more than 40 miles an hour. The snow had drifted high, piling about 4 feet to the south-west by night, and next morning there was bright sunlight and a low wind. We found the sleds snowed under again and big drifts about the plane. We freed the sleds and packed everything for our tramp ashore.

An amazingly fortunate drift of the ice had carried us far to the east, and we found we were about 80 miles from the shore. We decided to head south for the trading post at Beechy Point. Sunday, April 3, we woke on that day about 8 a.m. A sharp wind north by west nipped our cheeks, and chins, and noses. The snow, dribbling over the ice ridges, was dry and hard, and the pack ice was drifting. By 1 o’clock we had had five hours of steady, hard pulling, and enough for the first day. We stopped, and Ben helped to build the first snow-house he had ever seen. It was 12 years since it had built one, but the principle was easy to grasp and easily executed.

**Hand Amputated**

That night I first realised how seriously he had been frozen. He could not hold a knife or saw, and was hardly able to carry snow blocks for building the house. Four fingers on his right hand were badly nipped, and the little finger was blistered and black.

Since the return to Point Barrow, it is here interpolated; the little finger on Eielson’s right hand has been amputated. Dr. Newhall, who performed the operation, hopes to save the other three fingers.

Resuming the captain’s story: — “Ben was agreeably surprised at the comfort our frozen house afforded. Without experience one never would realise the warmth an igloo can give, even without fuel. Within my experience it never has been possible to get any one at once to discard all civilised clothes and adopt the native-style dress. I did not ask Ben to do this until after two days’ slight inconvenience with riding breeches, woollen sweater and elaborate sheepskin jacket.

Then we threw away this clothing, and dressed in native fashion in complete sets of Eskimo clothes we had been carrying. We could now discard one of our sleds, through the lightening of the load we had been carrying.

Our remaining sled we dragged over the ice-floes and pressure ridges we resumed our trip back in shore. Rising steam showed we were approaching a narrow irregular lane of open water. A break in the cloud almost dead ahead assured me from experience that the water lane was closed there. This lead might open any minute, and we hurried along until we found a section of ice about 50 yards wide spanning the water. The ice bridge was crumbling rapidly, and ridges of ice were piling on both sides. We scrambled over a squirming block, ran over a few yards of unbroken ice and then over a seething mass, until we once more found ourselves on solid floes.

Finding ourselves on a solid ice-floe after having crossed a broken and seething mass of ice, we cut a hole through a frozen-over sea. The wind and found the floe was drifting slowly in a westerly direction. I feared the drift might take us west of Point Barrow, but our easterly position and nearness to shore gave assurance we could undoubtedly reach the coast. It was only a matter of time before we reached the shore, and we could conserve our supply of emergency rations by shooting seals to obtain fuel and food. But there was a good reason for haste, as Ben’s fingers were badly frozen. All except one were ached painfully; a good sign they were regaining life.

The little finger on Ben’s right hand, however, promised trouble. I have several times performed surgical operations, and we had a serviceable surgical outfit in our kit, but I hesitated to use it, as I hoped to avoid mutilating Ben’s hand if the finger could be saved.

While we were travelling our clothing was comfortable and warm but hoarfrost gathered on the inside of our boots.

Constant care was necessary to prevent them from becoming full of ice. Each morning we had to turn our boots inside out and beat and scrape them. Then we would dry them by winding them about our bodies. We had ample food in our packs and did not disturb them.

To cross this water lead meant a long detour to a place where the edges of the ice-packs were close together. It was less than 50 feet across the spongy ice, but a change of wind would have meant a greater separation and a wait for several days on the side we were on.

While I studied the conditions, Ben stepped on the ice to see if it was safe. He went in to the knees in a waterhole, but his boots saved him from a wetting. A careful test showed that by skipping around a little we might cross safely.

Soft snow had fallen, hiding the character of the ice, and it was necessary to test each step. As quickly as possible we edged across with our feet spread wide and ice-picks out-stretched in case we went through.

When within three yards of the other side Wilkins turned to speak to Ben. Suddenly the ice under foot gave way, and he went into water up to the waist. At which, he tells us: —

**Transfixed With Horror**

“Ben was transfixed with horror. Fortunately the ice was thicker where he stood, and did not fall in. My weight was

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**Land-Locked Ice**

We came to ice the character of which assured us it was land-locked and moving off and on shore. Then we encountered ice which was badly broken and crushed, with broad rough ridges at frequent intervals. It was no longer possible to haul our sled and keep it upright.

To have taken any type sled over some of the ridges, in fact, would have meant chopping a pathway through the ice. We decided to make camp and arrange our equipment on Indian-type packs which we had and carry our loads over the ice on our backs.

We had hoped to walk, but much of our way was so tough, with up-ended ice blocks surrounded with soft snow in which we sank to our waists, that it was necessary to crawl slowly ahead on our hands and knees. No pen picture can fully describe the state of ice we found.

A motion picture of our foundering would be considered much overacted, but it was stern reality for us, to be overcome only by persistence and toil.

Sunday, April 10, we came to a wide stretch of newly formed ice, still broken in places by open water. Several seals hopped through into the water to look at us, but we had ample food in our packs and did not disturb them.

To cross this water lead meant a long detour to a place where the edges of the ice-packs were close together. It was less than 50 feet across the spongy ice, but a change of wind would have meant a greater separation and a wait for several days on the side we were on.

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spread across the ice, and the ice about me held. I drew my feet out of the water quickly, rolled over and out to thicker ice. I went in again, but this time was near enough to haul myself to a solid floe. My clothing was soaking wet almost to the armpits, and my boots were full of water. The temperature was 10 degrees below zero. I slipped my 80lb. pack from my shoulders, and threw a line to Ben, which he fastened to his own pack. When that was hauled across, he spread-eagled over to sound ice. It was a narrow shave for both of us, caused by our necessary but dangerous haste to reach shore.

In the arctic it is necessary to bide your time and proceed with the utmost caution, and you cannot afford to rush things. The first thing I should have done after falling in the water was to roll in a deep, soft snow-bank. But I could find no soft snow near, and my clothing froze almost instantly. My feet and legs were slowly stiffening. We seized both packs and hurried to some rough ice for shelter. I had a pair of spare boots and two pairs of socks strapped at the top of my pack for such emergencies. Ben pulled my boots and socks off, and it was not long before they stood up stiff and solid. So we tossed them aside.

My fur parkas and breeches would dry as well on me as elsewhere, so after I had put on dry footgear we bundled up our packs and proceeded over the rough ice for two hours before stopping to build quarters for the night.

We had abandoned one sleeping-bag, and at night we slept in our parkas with our feet in the one bag we had left. We found this warmer and more comfortable than the individual bags. Such procedure is all right for a limited time, but it is not the practice to sound ice.

That night we camped near an old bear and fox tracks. In the evening the tundra beyond. At midnight we awoke with a start as the weight on our sledges was lifted, and we saw a star-shaped shadow on the ice. Two or more steps and then tumble, pinched between narrowing cracks hidden in the snow.

Then, perhaps, it would be a ten-minute crawl on hands and knees over ice ridges too steep for a dog to follow. This would be followed by a cautious slithering dash across young ice that bent beneath us like a stretched blanket when we slept on it.

Thursday, 15th, Sept. 14, we had to make a long detour to get around young ice too thin to walk on. Toward evening we came to pressure ridges higher than any we had seen before. Ben looked with misgivings, but my heart gladdened, for I recognised it was the edge of the shore ice. That night we camped near an old hummock, and built our last snow-house on the ice. The next night I knew we would camp on the bench if we were lucky, and if my navigation was correct. For two days the weather had been warm and hazy, but that night it was cold and clear. From the top of the hummock we could see far to the south an unbroken expanse of shore ice and low flat tundra beyond. At seven o’clock the next morning we shouldered our packs and trudged eagerly on, resting for it few minutes every half-hour. There was no more young ice to cross, and it was now not a question of danger, but one of endurance. We had not rationed our food and each one had eaten as much or as little as he wanted. We had drawn upon 38 lbs. of biscuits and chocolate, and had thrown away 3 lbs. of emergency rations. On this day we had 5 lbs. of food left, and this showed our average consumption was less than 16 ozs. of food a day.

Shortly before 10 o’clock I saw the distant shore line, and through field-glasses I could see two poles and timber that looked like the roof of a trader’s house. After resting for a few minutes we started on again, and before long struck a sled trail leading west.

Making toward the dark object we had seen through our glasses, we soon could see plainly the houses ahead of us. It was the trading-post at Beechy Point. Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), Monday 11 July 1927, page 5. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18213553

6 September 1927 PACIFIC FLIGHT Invitation to Captain Wilkins SYDNEY. Tuesday.

Good counsel and mature thought have persuaded Captain Kingsford Smith and Lieut. Keith Anderson that the best three-engine monoplane in the world would not be a safe conveyance in their trans-Pacifc flight, if they were not confident of their navigation skill.

Representations were made to them on this point by the Sun and the Melbourne Herald last month, and during last week close relatives stressed the necessity of sound knowledge of navigation. To these inquiries the airmen replied that they would not tempt fortune by taking any untoward risks.

On Friday, a leading Sydney business man cabled to Mr. Sidney Myer, head of the well-known Melbourne emporium, and who had contributed £1500 towards the expenses of the flight, when he met the aviators in San Francisco, reiterating this advice.

He has received a reply from Mr. Myer reading, “Smith fully alive necessity expert navigation. Captain Wilkins Arctic explorer invited to assist in navigation.” Newcastle Sun (NSW), Tuesday 6 September 1927, page 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/16362121

27 September 1927 U.S.A. TO AUSTRALIA KINGSFORD SMITH’S FLIGHT In Captain Wilkins’s plane SEATTLE, Sept. 26. Capt. Kingsford Smith; C. T. Ulm, and Keith Anderson state they will start, next month, for Australia in the three-motored Fokker plane used by Captain G. H. Wilkins in his polar expeditions. Mr. Anderson is now in Honolulu, and says he expects to take off from San Francisco if weather is favourable, otherwise from Seattle.

It is understood the flight will cover 9,500 miles from the United States to Australia via Honolulu, New Britain, and New Guinea.


1 February 1928 Capt. Wilkins Will Again Attack Arctic Barrier NORTHWARD! PLAN NOW TESTED START THIS MONTH
Both been lost.

In June the attempt was abandoned. His second attempt was equally unsuccessful, although he and his pilot suffered severe privations, and took great risks in their attempts to find land in the northern wastes. Several times it was feared that they had both been lost.

Several short flights were made, and in one of these the engine cowling of the plane was broken. In June the attempt was abandoned. His second attempt was equally unsuccessful, although he and his pilot suffered severe privations, and took great risks in their attempts to find land in the northern wastes. Several times it was feared that they had both been lost.

The plane used by Captain Wilkins in his Polar flights.

(Sun (Sydney, NSW), Wednesday 1 February 1928, page 1.).

8 March 1928

“FINE!”
Wilkins Preparing
TRIAL FLIGHT

Captain Wilkins is busily pre-paring for his Arctic flight. Yesterday’s test flight was a big success.

(Sun Special)
FAIRBANKS (Alaska), Wednesday.

“Fine, now we will soon be ready for the hop to Point Barrow.” said Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Arctic explorer, as he alighted from his Lockheed Vega monoplane after the first test flight in Alaska. He required five days to assemble the plane after it was given to him, and with his pilot, Lieut. Eielson, he will fly next week to his Arctic place where additional gasoline and other supplies are available.

5 April 1928

AVIATION.
REMINISCENCES OF THE AIR.
Aviators I Have Known.
CAPTAIN GEORGE WILKINS.

By “PROPELLER.”

A recent cable from Seattle states that Captain George Wilkins, the Australian airman-explorer, is proceeding to Point Barrow, in Alaska, whence he will essay a non-stop flight by aeroplane across the North Pole to Spitsbergen, a distance of 2400 miles.

A character analysis of the man himself, compiled as a result of intimate contact on a previous flying exploit, prompts a prophecy of ultimate success. It is not the actual performance alone, however, that will evoke admiration, but the characteristic determination that lies behind this, his third attempt to fly across the top of the world. Perhaps no man living appreciates the peculiar hazards of the North more fully than does Wilkins, and one commends the characteristic determination that lies behind this, his third attempt to fly across the top of the world.

5 April 1928

EXPLORER AIRMAN.
Wilkins’s Arctic Exploration.

Australians have figured prominently in great air flights, but one of the most persistent Australian explorers by air is Captain G. H. Wilkins. In war time he was official photographer to the A.I.F., and later searched out of the way corners of the earth, for botanical specimens for the British Museum.

The writer met him in Brisbane about four years ago, after he had spent several months in uninhabited portions of North Queensland. Although only a little over 30 years of age he wore a long brown beard, probably to dispense with shaving.

Later he turned up in the United States, and the story of his attempts to explore the Arctic regions by aeroplane a couple of years ago is well known. Now he is again cruising over the Arctic ice, and when the weather is suitable proposes to make a dash across the North Pole from Alaska to Spitsbergen.

Land (Sydney, NSW), Friday 23 March 1928, page 5.

23 March 1928

Aviators I Have Known.
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Captain Wilkins.

Captain Wilkins has decided on an early April flight over the blind spot in the Polar Sea to Spitsbergen, believing that time the best period to play the lengthening daylight against the annual fog. With longer days he can land on the ice north-east of Point Barrow, take soundings and look for the fabled Arctic continent to obtain scientific data.

Newcastle Sun (NSW), Thursday 8 March 1928, page 1.

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Land (Sydney, NSW), Friday 23 March 1928, page 5.
Little-known corners of the globe, unspoilied by the hand of civilisation, virgin in their natural appeal — these were the places that called to him, and the manner of his adventure may be best described in his own words: “The newspaper reporter gets a front seat at the important shows in his own town. But the man who gets right inside the barrier, who brushes sleeve to sleeve with kings and princes, and calls no place home, but is at home in all places, is the Press photographer. So I decided to be a Press photographer.” And he became a Press photographer.

For two years he roamed the world, “shooting” places and people of topical interest, and then, following the increasing popularity of the “movie” weekly, he joined the Gaumont Film Co. In the capacity of cinema operator Wilkins secured, from the deck of a following launch, the last pictures ever taken of the leviathan liner Titanic as she steamed down the Mersey on her maiden voyage to New York.

Three days later those few hundred feet of film were eagerly requisitioned as a prelude to the picturisation of one of the most tragic disasters in the history of the mercantile marine. By means of modes and a “property” iceberg, the collision was screened with effective realism. Then came the Turco-Balkan war of 1912-1913. As correspondent and photographer to the Australian Flying Corps Wilkins proceeded to the war area, and with his usual enthusiasm was soon right up in the firing line. Not for him to stand on a distant hill and through field-glasses secure a panoramic view of the battle. He wanted action and close-up movement, and it is interesting to note that in the Turco-Balkan war he secured the first moving pictures of troops in action. For rescuing under heavy gunfire a wounded Turkish officer, Wilkins was decorated with the Order of the Mejidah.

In 1913 he returned from Turkey, and was selected to accompany Stefansson on the Canadian Arctic expedition. The story of those four years in the Arctic Circle has been told too vividly by Stefansson himself to warrant comment, but this experienced explorer’s opinion of the young Australian bears repetition: “Wilkins is the bravest man I have ever met,” he said, and in these words we find an undoubted reason for Wilkins’s quick rise from a subordinate position to second-in-command of the expedition.

Cut off from the outside world by the loss of their schooner, it was not until October, 1916, that Stefansson and his companions learnt of the war raging in Europe. Further exploration work was immediately abandoned, and Wilkins returned to Australia to enlist in the Australian Flying Corps. His experience in aviation dated back to 1909.

A London emporium had conceived a unique advertising stunt, and on the afternoon of December 25th, Christmas Eve a gaily decorated balloon was seen floating over the metropolis. In the basket were two figures, one a professional parachutist, garbed in the conventional red robes, cap, and white beard of Father Christmas, the other a young photographer. The parachutist glanced over the side of the basket, and at the crowd of eager children assembled on Hampstead Heath, a thousand feet below, gave a last look to his harness, and grasping the bag of presents tightly in both hands, leapt into space. With a grin of satisfaction the photographer snapped a perfect photograph of the take-off, and then proceeded to reload his camera for another picture of the daring Father Christmas now floating slowly to earth. The second photograph was never taken.

Relieved of the parachutist’s weight, the balloon shot upwards at an alarming rate, and as the instinct of self-preservation crowded out the sense of duty to the daily Press the camera clattered unnoticed to the floor of the basket. Seizing the release valve cord, which normally permits gas to escape and a descent to be made, the photographer gave a desperate tug. Nothing happened. The cord had fouled the rigging.

The balloon had now ceased its upward flight, and caught in a strong westerly wind at the higher altitude was moving across the Thames estuary to the North Sea. All through year-long night the basket swayed and bounced as the balloon sailed along an unknown course, and with morning light the unwilling aeronaut gazed out of the long night the basket swayed and bounced as the balloon sailed along an unknown course, and with morning light the unwilling aeronaut gazed out of the basket into the dawn. Late in the afternoon land came into sight. A providential leak of gas had caused the balloon to lose height, and soon the basket was drifting low over the trees and hedgerows. Presently the anchor made fast in the branches of a tree, and a thoroughly exhausted photographer tumbled gratefully to the ground. “But where am I? Germany, Russia, Norway — goodness only knows!”

Overjoyed at his miraculous escape, it would be difficult to describe his feelings, when later, from a nearby farmhouse; he learnt that his descent had been made only a few miles from the starting point of the previous afternoon. That is the story of Wilkins’s first trip in the air, and I feel safe in asserting that by comparison his flight across the North Pole this year will be mere joy ride.

Wilkins proceeded to London, with the Australian Flying Corps. In June, 1917 and during the progress of a medical board, was ordered to a pomerous member to enumerate various colours alternately exposed on a revolving disc.

With the preliminary definitions of the colours proved exasperating to the examining “brass hat,” and as a result he was rejected for active service as a pilot, on account of “colour blindness.” Wilkins merely smiled, and a week later went to France as official photographer to the A.I.F. In this position he was thoroughly at home. A roving commission permitted him to appear in most unexpected places.

A “hop over” is in full swing: Wilkins’s camera slides over the edge of a shell hole in “No Man’s Land,” and snaps a “digger” making desperate efforts in the mud to emulate the borrowings of a mole, whose home a lately bursting shell has destroyed.

The Prince of Wales inspects an aerodrome; Wilkins’s camera records an embarrassed pilot shaking hands with Edward P. Here, there, and everywhere, Wilkins plodded in search of subjects, and that his wanderings were not confined to the back areas is evidenced by the Military Cross with bar awarded him.

The signing of the Armistice was received by Wilkins with somewhat mixed feelings. The Royal Air Force had assembled 50 super Handley Page and 100 Vickers Vimy bombers, each machine capable of carrying a ton weight of bombs, and preparations were well advanced for carrying out a terrific air raid on Berlin during a favourable night in December, 1918. Wilkins had secured the position of forward gunner in the leading machine, and on the enforced abandonment of what promised to be the most spectacular aerial stunt of the war his disappointment for a time was naturally keen.

Whilst political heroes were fighting desperately on the Versailles front, three young Australian pilots were tramping the streets of London in search of an aeroplane. The incidents of that five months’ search form a story apart; suffice it to say here that, almost at the point of desperation, we located a generous aircraft manufacturer, and in due course, the Blackburn Kangaroo was entered in the £10,000 England to Australia flight.
23 April 1928

“DREAM OF AGES”

NORTH-WEST PASSAGE.

STEFANSSON DELIGHTED.

(Australian Press Association.)

NEW YORK, April 21.

“The dream of ages, a north-west passag

age across the world, has been brought

easier to practical achievement through the

pioneering of Captain Wilkins,” said

Vilhjalmur Stefansson (the famous

explorer). “I am picturing Polar cross

roads, where future Continent to Continen

caravans will meet, shortening the dis

tances by hundreds of miles.”

Stefansson expressed delight with the

success, and said that Captain Wilkins was

the best man he had in their Canadian

Arctic Expeditions from 1913 to 1918.

He referred to General Sir John

Monash’s statement that Captain Wilkins

“was the bravest and ablest man he (Sir

John Monash) had had.”

Brisbane Courier (Qld), Monday 23 April


1245414

23 April 1928

WILKINS BEATS ITALIANS

Great Polar Race

WAY NOW CLEAR FOR ANARCTIC PLANS

Explorer’s Big Ambition

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the heroic

Australian explorer, airman and

photographer, and his American

compatriot, Ben Eielson, in crossing the

North Polar region from Pt. Barrow,

Alaska, to Spitsbergen have beaten their

Italian rivals, led by General Nobile, who are about to fly from Spitsbergen in the

opposite direction in the airship Italia.

“Wilkins thus has his revenge on Nobile,

who crossed in the airship Norge with

Amundsen in 1926, while Wilkins was

trying unsuccessfully to start, and captures

another air honour for Australia. If he

keeps to the plans he had in mind when he

was last in Australia, Wilkins’s

achievement becomes the stepping stone,

financially, to the realisation of his greatest

ambition, a great Antarctic conquest by

aeroplane to uncover valuable

meteorological data. The aviators are now

at Green Harbour, Spitsbergen, where they

arrived at 11 a.m. yesterday from

Doedeman Solera, an uninhabited island on

which they had been held up by storms.

The following wireless message has been

received by the Detroit (U.S.) News,

which helped Wilkins: — “Reached

Spitsbergen after 21½ hours flying. One

stop was five days on account of bad

weather. Greetings.” The flight is hailed in

America as one of the greatest

achievements of polar exploration.

APPEALED TO AUSTRALIANS

When Wilkins had completed his field

work for the British Museum in Arnhem

Land in 1924 he endeavoured to obtain

support and funds for his Australian trans-

Antarctic flight.

His purpose was the eventual

establishment of a series of weather

stations along the Antarctic coast, Wilkins

holding the view that Australian climatic

conditions were regulated in large measure

by those in the Antarctic, and that a prior

knowledge of what was occurring down

there would enable forecasts of great

economic value if such observations were

regularly made over a long period and

carefully co-ordinated and analysed. Such

views, however, are not endorsed by

Commonwealth meteorological officials,

to whom the Prime Minister referred

Wilkins’s plan.

Accordingly, Mr Bruce was unable to

assist him and attempts made by the

Geographical Society of South Australia

(Wilkin’s home State) to raise funds were

also abortive.

MAGNETIC PERSONALITY

Undeterred, Wilkins set out for the

States and here his magnetic personality,

past achievements and outstanding

qualifications secured a ready response.

In 1926 he made a first attempt at an Arctic

flight, but disaster dogged him. In 1927 he

succeeded in flying from Point Barrow,

several hundred miles out over the ice, and

landed and took off the ice with ease.

This year he has been entirely successful

in accomplishing the major and spectacular

flight across the ocean from Barrow to

Spitsbergen. He is the first airman to make

such a flight; he is the first to approach the

Pole from the west, he has made a longer

Polar flight (2200 miles) than any of his

predecessors, and in the course of his

journey he, has covered unexplored wastes

hitherto seen by no human eye.

As a result of this flight, Wilkins’s

prestige has been re-established and he

now has several material assets which will

enable him to prosecute his further designs.

Commander Byrd (centre) being interviewed. * OSU

Polar Archives [wilkins44_12_1]

PLANS FOR FUTURE

They include the aeroplane in which he

made the flight which now becomes his

property; exclusive book, magazine and

newspaper rights of his story and 50 per

cent, of the profits from lectures and

cinemas. Wilkins’s great rival is Lieut.

Commander R. Byrd (U.S. Naval Reserve),

who forestalled Wilkins in his attempt to

be first to fly an aeroplane to the North

Pole. Byrd now covets the prize of being

the first to fly to the South Pole, his

published plans including a mere dash to

the Pole and return—a venture of no

interest or value since the route from the

Ross Sea thither has already been traversed

dozens of times.

ONE REMAINING FEAT

Wilkins, on the other hand, cherishes a

more ambitious, a more spectacular and a

more worthy plan. He seeks to accomplish

the one great feat still remaining in

Antarctic exploration, flight from Graham

Land to the Ross Sea, the journey which

inspired Shackleton, but which that
intrepid explorer did not live to accomplish. Both Amundsen and Byrd forestalled him in the north, but Wilkins regards ‘The South’ as a territory peculiarly Australian in location, sentiment and future economic value. Doubtless he will strain every nerve to follow up his success in the north by capping it with a similar feat in the south before the American Expedition, which is well equipped and supported by wealthy backers, forestalls him.

and he has never lived at home since. Like all his brothers, he is a good son in both words and actions. George was a great reader, and he made more use of what he learned at a little country school than many a man has made of a college education.” Although almost 80, Mrs Wilkins is wonderfully active for her age. She is the mother of 12 children.

CONTINUOUS SUN
For four months of this time the sun never rises above the horizon. From the end of June until the end of August the sun is continuously in the sky. Beginning then with a momentary disappearance, its periods of absence increase until, about the middle of October, it appears only for five minutes. Then it disappears and is not seen until February 22. All labour and food has to be imported. Nature provides an automatic refrigerator for the food, and meat is kept in the mines.

Since Norwegian interests became predominant, the name has been changed to its old Scandinavian one of Svalbard, which means “the cold shores,” As a considerable part of the coast is lined with glaciers higher than a ship, the aptness of the name is apparent.

AMUNDSEN ADDS HIS PRAISE
“Remarkable Achievement”
(Herald Special Representative) OSLO (NORWAY), April 22.—
Capt. Roald Amundsen, the noted explorer, believes that Polar flying conditions are more favourable now than in May, when fog is prevalent.

Apparently Wilkins was not troubled by ice freezing on his plane, as befell the airship Norge on Amundsen’s Spitsbergen-Alaska flight in May, 1926. Amundsen says it is impossible to say whether the fliers crossed the Pole. They certainly crossed the Polar Basin, apparently following the same line as the Norge. “It was a splendid sporting enterprise,” he added, “valuable to geographical knowledge in view of the important observations probably made.”

He hoped the fliers would go to Norway, where they would be most welcome. It was only right that this pair of heroes should have succeeded in a remarkable achievement, which unlike trans-Atlantic flights, was un-aided.

Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Monday 23 April 1928, page 1.

24 April 1928
THE FAR-SEEING EYES OF CAPTAIN WILKINS

A photographic enlargement of the piercing eyes of Captain Wilkins, the Australian explorer and aviator.

Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Tuesday 24 April 1928, page 7.
25 April 1928
AVIATION AFFAIRS.
FLIGHT OVER NORTH POLE
CAPTAIN WILKINS’S STORY.
Montreal, April 23.
(Copyright: Australasian Press Association and New York Times).

The principal object of our flight, says Captain Wilkins, was to discover whether in the unexplored area of the Arctic existed islands on which meteorological stations might be placed.

For this purpose the machine needed to be very light and fast, and capable of covering long distances. It had also to be correctly equipped even to the point of including a Polar sledging equipment, and staunchly built to withstand extreme conditions and rough usage. It is, moreover, so constructed as to eliminate the confusion of compass interference is the case with metal machines.

We carried for directional instruments two compasses, one fast moving and one slow, two altimeters, turn and bank indicators, an air speed indicator, the usual engine instruments, one large ships compass, an English air force bubble sextant, a pocket sextant, four special watches, a drift indicator, a course and distance calculator, a nautical almanac, and special charts and tables.

The machine and engine were thoroughly tested before leaving Los Angeles for Alaska, for airplanes have individual traits and differ like humans. Our plane received three weeks’ adjustments under Arctic conditions.

The business of preparing our other equipment was long and careful. Old Eskimo women carefully examined and repaired the reindeer skin clothing, and young women stretched with their teeth and arms, our seal skin boots mittens, until they fitted perfectly.

An experienced Eskimo man sharpened the seal spears, fashioned the ice picks, and whittled the apparatus for receiving dead seals from the water. “If the machine fails,” said the Eskimo. “You must walk and carry the equipment necessary to maintain you.” Our Arctic food supply consisted of chocolate, 5 lb. of biscuits, 20 lb. of pemmican, 20 lb. of melted milk, 24 lb. of raisins. Other things included were medicines, a flask of ether, surgical instruments, stoves for heating over the fire, and chocolate ice cream.

On the 13th we tried again but failed again. It was on the 15th, with the weather in our favour, that we climbed into the air. Our machine acted absolutely perfectly. Our estimate of the weather proved correct.

A clear horizon greeted us, but soon icepack showed rough and jagged. There would have been no salvation if the engine had failed. There were open water leads at times and then no leads.

We saw ice conditions that would indicate that the ice was old, probably land-fast ice but later we determined that it was unquestionably sea ice then we met clouds that appeared stationary, and it was exasperating to meet clouds at this point. Land in that vicinity would best suit our meteorological purposes. Whether any lay beneath that 120 miles belt of clouds about 200 miles out from Point Barrow is still a secret; but when atmosphere cleared it was seen to be old heavy ice pack. Perhaps this heavy old ice rests on terra firma and is stationary, but my decision, judging from the fact that no great pressure ridges were noticed at its edge, is that it is floating.

It was when approaching Greenland that, we noticed a storm hovering there, and soon from an altitude of 6000 feet we could see high storm clouds 400 miles away, and as we swung away from clouded Grant Land, we saw what Peary had named the big ice. It stretched from the neighbourhood of Cape Columbia to Greenland.

We slipped into still cold, 48 degrees below zero, but only for a few minutes. The warm air current about the open water near Spitsbergen soon had us on its lap.

We were at our highest latitude and as Peary said, we were soon slipping down the North Pole hill in fine shape. When our observations of the snow drift and the ice movement are carefully plotted, some useful information should result from our experience of arctic navigation.

It was as we expected, no more difficult, perhaps easier than elsewhere. Our bubble sextant acted perfectly. Our charts and maps were well prepared. Our plane in normal air was steady in flight. Our compasses, while not perfect, were more or less dependable.

25 April 1928
Wilkins’s Great Arctic Flight
CAPTAIN WILKINS.

George Wilkins, the Australian photographer, naturalist, and airman, accompanied by Carl Eielson, of the U.S.A. Air Service, succeeded last week in making the first flight from Alaska across the Polar region, flying from Point Barrow to Spitsbergen, alighting at Dauholmen, a small island north of Spitsbergen, in 21 hours, having to remain for five days before continuing, owing to tempestuous weather and snowstorms.

Wireless messages state that both airmen arrived well and with their small aeroplane undamaged. The plane was fitted with special wooden skids to enable it to land on snow or ice. Comment by experts is that the flight is epochal, a definite contribution to science, and wherever the experts join in hailing Wilkins’s persistence and courage.

The machine was the smallest ever used for Arctic exploration, but extremely speedy. Wilkins telegraphed that he had discovered no land.

This picture shows Captain Wilkins on his plane at the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation: works at Los Angeles, California. It was stated at the time: “Captain Wilkins expects to fly from Point Barrow during April in an effort to lift over new land, which he believes is within a radius of 1000 miles of the base. The gas capacity of the ship is 370 miles, and a ‘musher’ speed of 115 miles an hour can be attained. Wilkins’ proposed route logs 2100 miles.”

(Wide World Photo.)
Antarctic Expedition. He also refused to sell the aeroplane to Byrd.

Wilkins says he does not want to divulge his Antarctic plans at present, but expects to start in September. Pending the arrival of the Njöna he is having a happy time at Green Harbour. He was surprised to find comfortable houses so far north. Wilkins, points out that their object was not to reach the actual Pole, but to survey unknown areas.


26 April 1928

Polar Flight

Pilot’s Impressions

Engine Gets Cold

Light Machine Tossed About

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, who flew across the Arctic polar region from Point Barrow (Alaska) to Green Harbour, Svalbard, a distance of 2,200 miles, with Lieutenant Eielson, has sent by wireless some impressions of the trip formed by his companion.

Green Harbour, April 24.

Well rested, we are enjoying the comforts of the mess at the Green Harbour radio station, and the splendid hospitality of the Norwegian officials. It is possible that we may not be able to leave until after the middle of May.

It would be impossible to take off in a machine fitted with wheels from snow and ice, and it would be hazardous to attempt a landing on any but snow-covered country with the skis we have.

So we must wait patiently for transportation by steamship. I include herewith Lieutenant Eielson’s account of our adventure:

“It occurred to me before starting that there were not many men with whom I would be willing to set forth on such a trip, where there was always the chance of a year’s walk back, but I had had before a thorough demonstration of Captain Wilkins’ ability on the ice as well as his accuracy in Arctic navigation.

Some of my impressions during the flight I may set down as follows: — when we ran into the first mass of clouds I began to wish that it had been my lot to be a chicken farmer and not an aviator, but the weather soon cleared and the sunshine was reassuring. I celebrated the return of the sunshine by having a stick of chewing gum.

After the first 13 hours of the flight had passed it became difficult to keep the engine warm, although it was wrapped in asbestos. The machine grew light when she had only 30 gallons of petrol left, and was approaching our goal.

She leaped and bucked like a vicious horse, and to add to it all, fine snow and the wind made everything invisible. My landing was lucky. I was reminded of Robinson Crusoe by our stay on Dead Man’s Island. It was, however, not warm there. You can imagine my consternation when I nearly left Wilkins behind on taking off to leave Dead Man’s Island. Our efforts to get started would have been extremely ludicrous had they not been so downright serious. We determined if necessary, since the Lockheed monoplane could not start without him pushing, and once started he was unable to get in, to drop him provisions and arms while I flew for help, but fortunately that did not prove necessary.

Our trip has successfully ended, and we have settled down to enjoy the comforts of Green Harbour, which to us has seemed like a foretaste of heaven.”

Steamer for Aeroplane

Despatch from Norway

Oslo, April 24.

The North Polar Exploration Company’s Ninja has left Norway with telegraphic instructions to proceed as near as possible to Green Harbour to pick up the aeroplane used by Captain Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson and bring it back to Norway. The vessel is due to arrive on Saturday.

Thus, the explorers are expected to teach Tromsø early in the coming week. Captain Wilkins today refused an offer from Commander Byrd, of the United States, to join his Antarctic expedition. He also refused to sell his aeroplane to Commander Byrd.

Captain Wilkins says that he does not want to divulge his Antarctic plans at present, but he expects to start in September. Pending the arrival of the Ninja the airmen are having a happy time at Green Harbour. They are mostly occupied in playing auction bridge. They were surprised to find modern and comfortable houses in a place so far north.

Captain Wilkins points out that his object was not to reach the actual Pole, but to survey unknown areas. Questions have been cabled to him from all parts of the world, and he has authorised the wireless operator to say that he is unable to answer further questions.

Morse Gold Medal.

American Society’s Award.

New York, April 23.

The American Geographical Society has awarded the Morse gold medal to Captain Wilkins, in recognition of his exploration work in the Arctic and his flight to Spitsbergen. The medal is named after the inventor of the telegraph, and Captain Wilkins is the first to receive the award.

Value to Science

General Nobile Dubious

New York, April 24.

A representative of the New York Times had an exclusive interview with General Nobile, the navigator of the airship Italia, which is to undertake exploratory work at the North Pole. General Nobile, while giving unstinted praise to Captain Wilkins for his feat in the face of adverse weather conditions, expressed himself guardedly regarding the scientific value of the enterprise.

General Nobile remarked that the failure of Captain Wilkins to sight land was not positive proof that there was no large island or even a continent between Alaska and Spitsbergen. He added: — “The fliers may have failed to notice the land they traversed on account of bad vision. The flight from Point Barrow to Spitsbergen was a great feat, but the trip in the opposite direction is much more difficult. I know what I will have to face, but I believe that the scientific results will be entirely satisfactory. An airship can halt or cruise over a certain point for a long time, while an aeroplane is unable to do this, and must continue on its course at top speed.

The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day
The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

United States Airmen Very Seriously Ill Long Flight with Serum Quebec, April 24.

Colonel Lindbergh and Commander Byrd have arrived at the bedside of the United States airman, Floyd Bennett, who became ill with double pneumonia when flying with spare parts for the *Bremen* in a Ford aeroplane. It had been arranged that Bennett should take part in Commander Byrd’s flight to the South Pole.

Colonel Lindbergh took off from New York for Quebec with a supply of serum, which will be used to aid Bennett in combating the attack of pneumonia. Lindbergh used an army observation aeroplane, which has a speed of about 50 miles an hour greater than that of his new Ryan aeroplane. When he left New York, he expected to average 130 miles an hour. The doctors say that Bennett’s condition is very grave.

*Bremen* Stormbound

In the meantime a report from Greenly Island stated that the repairs to the *Bremen* were completed this morning, and that the aeroplane would be ready to take off as soon as the weather became favourable, but there is at present no indication as to when this will be. The runners with which it was at first proposed to equip the *Bremen* have not been used, but the original wheels have been retained. No difficulty is expected from taking off from the ice, which is solid and smooth, with ample unimpeded space.

Baron von Huenfeld is suffering from the effects of the cold, but he is fit for the journey. Captain Koehl is in splendid condition. The latest report from Greenly Island states that the *Bremen* is stormbound.


27 April 1928 “GOLDEN CITY.” GREEN HARBOUR.

**FEELINGS OF ARCTIC EXPLORERS.**

(From Captain, H. G. Wilkins, Copyright.) GREEN HARBOUR, April 25.

Our first sight of Green Harbour from the air was a golden city paved with gold for us. Our five snowbound days on Dead Man’s Island was the fillip necessary, to help us to realise our wonderful good fortune, particularly in view of the storm that raged upon our landing.

The radio operator at King’s Bay, during that storm, lost his way en route to the village from the radio station, and was frozen to death.

We cannot thank each of the many persons who have sent us messages of congratulations, but we would like to express, through the medium of the Press, our sincere appreciation.

The flight we made may be the forerunner of Transarctic transportation on a scenic air route, which in years to come will serve curious sightseers, speeding from Alaska’s tundras to the awe-inspiring Greenland. There is, however, still much advance to be made in aeronautical engineering and weather forecasting. Many more chapters may still be written in the book of Arctic exploration.

**SNOW DELAYS DEPARTURE.**

General Noble, perhaps, will cover the route from Wrangel Island to Dixon, the Russian meteorological station near Novoya Zembla, and his expedition is more likely to result in the discovery of new islands. We wish him all success, but fear that his misfortune and delay will mean that it will be too late in the summer for productive long distance flying in the Arctic. Sounding of the Arctic Ocean depths is yet to be done. I feel certain that men of experience could fly out from Grant Land to the North Pole, land, make soundings, and return without too great a risk.

The conditions for engines and aeroplanes in the Arctic are not particularly different to anywhere else. We used the same quality of petrol and oil as in the United States. The Arctic is a mistress that will not be subdued by idle gestures. The depth of the snow probably will delay us leaving here.

One boat, which was a possible means of transportation, is frozen solid in King’s Bay, and another ship, that will call at Long Year City, about 50 miles from here, may arrive about the middle of May. It may serve to carry us to Oslo, from where we expect to ship our plane to New York, and proceed there ourselves.


27 April 1928 **OVER ARCTIC ICE.**

**WILKINS’ FEAT.**

The Australian airman, Captain Wilkins, successfully flew from Point Barrow across the North Pole regions to Green Harbor, three parts of which area have never before been seen by man.

The machine travelled 3000 feet above the Arctic waves and the journey was over 2200 miles. No land was seen on route, only frequent leads of open water. His accomplishment is acclaimed by the whole world.

**CAPTAIN WILKINS AGAIN.**

Mrs. Wilkins, the mother of the worthy captain, naively remarks that ‘George is a very determined boy.’ It may well be observed that he seems to be, with the projects he undertakes and the hair-raising performances he has to put through. It is very evident that in getting these American millionaires to finance him it is not altogether an easy job.

Anybody is a benefactor who shows an American a new and useful way to spend his money. That is evidently the difficult thing to discover an avenue of expenditure which will not pauperise or debase, or ruin its own object.

Endowing universities, mission, hospitals, and philanthropics, has been worked almost to death by millionaires, and now the object seems to be putting forward the aviation clock by financing big stunts, such as the race to Europe, or Polar expeditions.

Mr. Wilkins seems to have been promised funds for a chain of Antarctic
he referred to Sir John Monash’s Arctic Expeditions from 1913 to 1918, and was the best man he had in the Canadian delight at the success. He said that Wilkins Byrd’s triplane Fokker, this monoplane exploration in the Arctic. It is a Lockheed that he had seen no land in the Polar arranged where
of Spitsbergen.

It is interesting to note that the American Geographical Society received the following message from Captain Wilkins: “No foxes seen.” This was the code arranged whereby the explorer indicated that he had seen no land in the Polar Region.

The aeroplane in which the flight was accomplished in 20½ hours. A delay of two a penny, then maybe it would be possible to put up another statue somewhat on the lines of the Sir Ross Smith statue to one of South Australia’s noblest sons. Bunyip (Gawler, SA), Friday 27 April 1928, page 9. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/96671292

28 April 1928
WILKINS’S ARCTIC FLIGHT.

The King has approved of an award to Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, and Lieutenant Eielson (U.S.A.) for the first leg of his projected flight to South Pole, but their bases may be close together. Wilkins will fly from the west and follow the coast of Graham Land, while Byrd will fly inland and south.

KINGSFORD SMITH’S PACIFIC FLIGHT.

BERLIN, 3rd May.

AMERICAN COMPLIMENT TO GERMAN AIRMEN.
WASHINGTON, 2nd May.

Today President Coolidge received the crew of the Bremen, the German plane which recently crossed the Atlantic, and presented them with the Distinguished Flying Cross. This is the first time the American Flying Cross has been given to foreigners.

Afterwards the airmen placed a wreath on the grave of the ‘unknown soldier’ in Arlington cemetery.

25 May 1928
COMMANDER NOBILE FLIES ACROSS NORTH POLE IN ITALIA. HIS SECOND FLIGHT OVER ICY REGION IN AIRSHIP.
Followed Route That Led From Extreme North of Greenland along the 27th Meridian
ARCTICA “TOPSY-TURVY” WORLD (Pictorial Special Service, Copyright)

KING’S BAY (Spitsbergen), Thursday.
Commander Nobile, who cleared King’s Bay in the airship Italia at 4.28 a.m. yesterday, has crossed the North Pole. This is the second time he has visited the Pole.
The first time was in the airship Norge, on May 12, 1926, with Capt. Roald Amundsen. The Italia remained at the Pole from one o’clock till two o’clock this morning, and is now en route to Spitsbergen.
The Italia travelled from the extreme north of Greenland, and proceeded to the Pole along the 27th meridian. A wireless message from a special correspondent aboard the Italia states: Prior to leaving for the pole we spent most of our time aboard the supply ship Citta di Milano, where we enjoyed every comfort, though occasionally we were homesick. We have to consult the clock and a calendar in order to distinguish night from day. If we feel sleepy we must consider whether it is bedtime or rising time.
It is a topsy-turvy world, with sleep time and work time intermingled. One may go for a brisk walk at 2 a.m., and often he is in bed at 3 p.m. in order to begin work at midnight. Breakfast is usually at 1 a.m., when the sun is already high in the heavens.
When the Italia was resting in the hangar, 600 gas containers, weighing tons, had to be taken across the fields to the airship for the restoration of buoyancy when in flight. Another 600 must be prepared against the Italia’s return, so Commander Romagna and crew of the Citta di Milano will be deprived of all leisure.

The thick line on the accompanying map shows the route followed by Commander Nobile in the airship Italia from Spitsbergen to the North Pole. The dotted line shows the course taken by the Australian explorer, Captain G. H. Wilkins, on April 15, when he flew in his Lockheed monoplane from Point Barrow (Alaska) across the North Pole to Spitsbergen, after 2½ hours’ flying.


30 May 1928
WILKINS OFFERS HELP.
ROME, Tuesday.— Signor Mussolini has received a wireless message from Capt. Wilkins offering to organise an expedition to search for the Italia.
A cyclone at King’s Bay has caused an interruption in wireless communication. The station aerial is in danger of being blown down.

30 May 1928
ARCTIC FLIGHT.
Captain Wilkins’ Story.
“300 MILES FROM POLE.”
Full details of Captain G. H. Wilkins’s remarkable flight from Point Barrow, in Alaska, to Spitsbergen, reference to which was made in a summary of the aviators’ own story in the Herald of April 24, indicate clearly that the Australian and his companion, Carl Ben Eielson, did not cross the North Pole.
In a complete account of the flight, which has reached Sydney by mail, Wilkins states that they had planned to go no closer than 300 miles from the Pole. Heading out from Grant Land, which they sighted 13 hours after starting, the aviators flew close to latitude 85 north, which brought them as near to the Pole as they intended to go.
The full account, given with a wealth of description that subordinates the dangers of the journey to its scientific significance, casts a little more light on the difficulties of Arctic aviation. Three times before finally rising from the snow at Point Barrow the plane had failed to lift its enormous load.
At each try the pair of metal skis fitted to the undercarriage was broken. Thirty-three Eskimos, whose aid was sought at Barrow, shovelled snow from a laneway 500 feet long, but even this had to be abandoned, and the plane was hauled by ten men and 25 dogs over the snow to a lagoon five miles from Barrow village. Here another runway 6000 feet long was cut. The work occupied two perfect flying days, and it was not till they had been delayed a week in starting that Eielson guided the machine along the 14-foot wide ditch into the air.


2 June 1928
CAPTAIN WILKINS.
A REGAL RECEPTION
OSLO EN FETE.
OSLO, May 24.
Oslo today triumphantly received Captain George Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson on their arrival from Bergen.
The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

The president of the Norwegian Geographical Society headed the delegation which welcomed them, and crowds cheered them en route to the Grand Hotel where the Royal suite was placed at their disposal. The explorers were motored to the home of Captain Amundsen, who held a special reception in their honour. The American Minister tendered them a luncheon, and the city was in gala attire. The airmen-explorers were the chief guests at a banquet in the evening. Captain Amundsen, as president of the newly founded Norwegian Aero Club, decorated the airmen with the club’s gold medal, saying they were “two of the greatest fliers of our time,” and had covered more unknown territory than any other airmen.

He also paid a tribute to the work of the Norwegian Polar explorers. Three naval aeroplanes circled over Captain Amundsen’s home during the ceremony. At the banquet both Captain Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson were appointed honorary members of the Norwegian Aeronautical Association Major Tryggev Gran, who was a member of Scott’s South Polar expedition, proposed the toast of “Australia. Captain Wilkins’s Native Land,” and the British Minister, responded. Chronicle (Adelaide, SA), Saturday 2 June 1928, page 60. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/90414333

Captain George Wilkins, -

Captain Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson responded, the former remarking that Captain Amundsen had always been the hero of his youth. He also paid a tribute to the work of the Norwegian Polar explorers. Three naval aeroplanes circled over Captain Amundsen’s home during the ceremony. At the banquet both Captain Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson were appointed honorary members of the Norwegian Aeronautical Association Major Tryggev Gran, who was a member of Scott’s South Polar expedition, proposed the toast of “Australia. Captain Wilkins’s Native Land,” and the British Minister, responded. It is but natural that our hearts should go out to him and that we should be ready with big Australian cheers to greet him when he comes to us. Even if the last stage of the flight is not completed, Kingsford Smith already has earned the title of a distinguished Australian. Ross Smith, Keith Smith, Parer and McIntosh, Hinkler, Wilkins, and Kingsford Smith — what a roll of air heroes Australia has produced! It is good to think that Australia breeds men who find in adventure a challenge to their ability and resource. Queensland Times (Ipswich, Qld), Thursday 7 June 1928, page 6. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/114201102

7 June 1928

How Captain Kingsford Smith Tells By Radio the Progress of the “Southern Cross” Whilst in the Air.

4 June 1928

Birthday Honours
Captain George Wilkins
A Knight Bachelor
Sydney, Monday.

Lord Stonehaven, the Governor-General, has received advice that His Majesty the King has been pleased to confer the following Commonwealth honours: —— Knight Bachelor. Captain George Herbert Wilkins. Barrier Miner (Broken Hill, NSW), Monday 4 June 1928, page 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/46021136

7 June 1928

Kingsford Smith Flight.

The eyes of the world are on Captain Kingsford Smith and his gallant companions in their thrilling attempt to achieve another air triumph, the crossing of the Pacific from San Francisco to Brisbane. They have triumphed over the supreme difficulty, the non-stop flight of 3180 miles from Hawaii to Suva. The gap of 1508 miles from Suva to Brisbane remains to be bridged, and success seems certain. In considering air triumphs, people love to pit one hero against another; they love to discuss which achievement was really the greatest. It is a futile pastime, for there are such differences in conditions, equipment and organisation. Hinkler’s solo effort, for instance, cannot justly be compared with the Kingsford Smith flight, or with Captain Wilkins’s flight over the North Pole. Each of these achievements ought to have a special place in our respect, and we should be perfectly content with the thought that each was a triumph for Australian courage and resource. Each was a great feat, and each has its appeal to our imagination. It must not be forgotten that Captain Kingsford Smith is an Australian. His companions are glorious fellows and they will always be honoured, but flying to our shores out of space is a fellow Australian with eyes bent upon a great purpose, and with every nerve of his body directed to the task of leadership in an almost immortal enterprise.

Captains Wilkins. Oslo, Norway.
The Wilkins Chronicle
A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

To be Commander of St. Michael and St. George, Robert Boyne, Government Representative on the Canned Fruit Export Control Board.

To be Commander of the British Empire (Civil Division).
Frank Strachan, Assistant Secretary to the Prime Minister's Department.
George Shaw Knowles, Assistant Secretary and Assistant Parliamentary Draughtsman, Attorney-General's Department.
Henry John Sheehan, Assistant Secretary to the Department of the Treasury.

Order of the British Empire (Civil Division.)
Mrs. Effie Wilkinson.

Order of the British Empire (Military Division.)
Capt. Ronald Tracy Alexander McDonald.

Member of the Order of the British Empire (Military Division.)
Ordnance-Lieut.-Commander George Prideaux, R.A.N.

To be Knight Bachelor.
Capt. George Herbert Wilkins.

To be L.S.O.
Joshua Dyson Farrar, Chief Electoral Officer.
Henry Latimer Walters, Secretary to the Works and Railways Department.

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN HONOURS.
To be Knights Bachelor.
Dr. Henry Simpson Newland, C.B.E.
Mr. John Melrose, of Ulooloo.

Companion of the Imperial Service Order.
Mr. H. Blinnman (Under-Treasurer). Observer (Adelaide, S.A.), Saturday 9 June 1928, page 5.

9 June 1928
AUSTRALIA CONQUERS THE AIR
Just as Britain Conquered the Seas
KINGSFORD SMITH ADDS LAURELS TO AUSSIE'S WONDERFUL AERIAL RECORD
England to Australia ..............Sir Ross Smith
England to Australia (solo)........Bert Hinkler
America to Australia ..............Sir Charles Kingsford Smith

8 June 1928
Sir George Wilkins.

Captain George Hubert Wilkins, explorer and airman, has been knighted by the King. Sir George was born in South Australia on October 31st, 1888. His has been a life of thrilling adventure, of which the most spectacular and notable feat was performed last month when, after several thwarted attempts, he flew across the North Pole from Alaska to Spitsbergen. Sir George was second-in-command of Stefansson's Arctic expedition in 1913-1917.

In 1917 he was granted a commission in the Australian Flying Corps, Australian Imperial Forces, and was seconded to the Military History Department as official photographer, a position which he occupied from 1917 till the end of the war. He was awarded a Military Cross and bar.

He attempted a flight from England to Australia, and was second-in-command of the British Imperial Antarctic expedition in 1920-21.

In 1921-22 he was naturalist with the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition, and in 1926-27 was commander of the Detroit Arctic expedition.

Morning Bulletin (Rockhampton), Friday 8 June 1928, page 10.

9 June 1928
THE BIRTHDAY HONOURS.
CAPTAIN GEORGE WILKINS KNIGHTED.
SIR HENRY NEWLAND AND SIR JOHN MELROSE.

South Australia will claim three more knights in the Birthday honours conferred by His Majesty the King. They are Capt. Sir George Wilkins, M.C.; Sir John Melrose, and Sir Henry Newland. Mr. H. Blinnman (Under Secretary) has been created L.S.O.

His Excellency The Governor-General (Lord Stonehaven) received advice last Sunday that His Majesty the King had been pleased to confer the following Commonwealth honours:—

To be Knight Commander of St. Michael and St. George.
The Right Honourable, Isaac Alfred Isaacs, Senior Puise Justice of the High Court of Australia.

To be Commander of the British Empire (Civil Division).
The Prime Minister's Department.
George Shaw Knowles, Assistant Secretary and Assistant Parliamentary Draughtsman, Attorney-General's Department.
Henry John Sheehan, Assistant Secretary to the Department of the Treasury.

Order of the British Empire (Civil Division.)
Mrs. Effie Wilkinson.

Order of the British Empire (Military Division.)
Capt. Ronald Tracy Alexander McDonald.

Member of the Order of the British Empire (Military Division.)
Ordnance-Lieut.-Commander George Prideaux, R.A.N.

To be Knight Bachelor.
Capt. George Herbert Wilkins.

To be L.S.O.
Joshua Dyson Farrar, Chief Electoral Officer.
Henry Latimer Walters, Secretary to the Works and Railways Department.

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To be Knights Bachelor.
Dr. Henry Simpson Newland, C.B.E.
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Over the Pole...

He declared he is proud to have accompanied Wilkins, but does not accept any credit, for when Wilkins clamps his Australian jaw and says he is going somewhere, he dare not say he (Eielson) is not going.

Tweed Daily (Murwillumbah, NSW), Saturday 9 June 1928, page 5.

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Over the Pole...
All these and more great flying achievements stand to the credit of Australians, a nation of six million people having given birth to aerial heroes who have left very few odds raised for the rest of the world to capture. Australians have taken to the air as naturally as the English of King Alfred’s day first took to the sea. Are Australians going to rule the air as our ancestors ruled the waves?

Strangely enough Aussies have never favoured a nautical life like their British forefathers. But with the achievements of Sir George Wilkins and now Captain Kingsford Smith, to add to the roll of aerial fame it is obvious how eagerly and naturally Australians have gone into the air.

Before the war the air was a No Man’s Land as far as Australia was concerned. There were a few aeroplanes in the country but none of them could raise for any great enthusiasm among Australians. With the coming of the European conflict, however, things changed rapidly; Aussie fliers distinguished themselves in many a notable feat high up in the clouds above the warring armies. And Australian names began to figure in despatches as accomplished pilots and daring aviators. When peace was signed many of these proved fliers found themselves at a loose end.

After their ADVENTUROUS LIFE of the war years they had little inclination to go back to their pre-1914 occupations. And most of them seem to have gravitated back to the element that had previously been foreign to them. Some few adopted commercial aviation; others, notably Kingsford Smith, went stunting for the movies. And in the majority of Australia’s wartime fliers there remained that irresistible urge to be up—high up—and doing. They were not slow to start. In 1919 Harry Hawker and Sir Ross Smith startled the world with unprecedented feats.

Certainly Hawker’s effort to fly the “Bitza” car so well known in Perth, is another excellent example of the Australian’s aptitude for the air. Wackett is not only a notable flier but he has proved his capacity to build an airworthy, efficient plane. In fact the super-marine in which he flew to Perth is an amphibian of his own design.

Wackett just took to the air in his own mount as casually as the sportive gent who devised the celebrated “Bitza” car so well known in Perth.

By diligently searching the records of lesser known Australians there would be brought to light many other reasons why Australia should preen herself on the calibre of her airmen. But it is not necessary.

The more notable of Aussie airmen—most of them not giving flying a thought before the war—have already thrilled the world. Right in the public eye just now are Kingsford Smith and Sir George Wilkins.

The former, whose magnificent Trans-Pacific Flight is but little, if any, inferior to that of Lindbergh is well known in this State, where till recently he was employed by Airways, Ltd. The latter is the bearded Polar explorer, whose conquest of the Pole by air was the result of a serious of great achievements that earned him a knighthood on King’s Birthday.

What makes all these great flights the more noteworthy is that they were carried through in the face of grave odds. Hinkler struggled for years saving up enough money to fly to Australia. Parer, another unfinancial Aussie, flew here with McIntosh, in a machine that should never have left the scrap heap.

Kingsford Smith is £6000 behind on his Pacific flight. Even the studied opposition of a narrow minded section of the American press did not deter Smith who even strove for endurance and non-stop records to prove his capabilities to his reluctant backers.

Quite evidently the air is the natural element for the daring happy-go-lucky Australian. Our men have never taken to the sea. Our navy is manned largely by English ratings; our naval college has been filled with budding officers but there has been no eagerness on the part of young men to serve before the mast.

Perhaps after all it is best that it should be so. The vast distances of Australia, the natural isolation are gradually being broken down by the airmen.

Squadron Leader Wackett, now in Perth, is another excellent example of the Australian’s aptitude for the air. Wackett is not only a notable flier but he has proved his capacity to build an airworthy, efficient plane. In fact the super-marine in which he flew to Perth is an amphibian of his own design.

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Perhaps after all it is best that it should be so. The vast distances of Australia, the natural isolation are gradually being broken down by the airmen.
Keith Smith and Hurley, the new Knight once wore Australian khaki, winning distinction by superb courage.

**FLAMMENWERFERS!**

It is typical of the colossal audacity of the Digger, that Wilkins should contemplate suggesting to the Allied Nations that Germany might reasonably be expected to make him a few flammenwerfers (flame throwers) for the Antarctic!

Like immortal Drake, he plans to singe the beard of another Monarch—the icicles on the chin of the Ice King. Wilkins will seek by the fierce heat of flame throwers to melt the ice and snow so that a safe, smooth getaway can be formed for the big plane. If successful he will have eliminated perhaps the greatest dread of Polar Flying—the impossibility of rising from a forced landing on a rough surface. In his early attempts to reach the Pole before Byrd and Amundsen—attempts which were heroic failures—the one thing which did not disappoint the Australian was his fine wireless set (see photo.).

**FLAMMENWERFERS!**

An interesting ceremony took place at the Mount Bryan East School, on Saturday in honour of Sir George Wilkins, the polar

**Wireless Used by Wilkins**

Powered by Burgess Radio Batteries, it functioned perfectly. The most spectacular wireless success was the announcement of the passing of Amundsen’s huge airship near Point Barrow. A tiny radio sending set, with Burgess Batteries, on a dog sledge, sent the first news to the world. “The story of David and Goliath over again.” exclaimed the New York World, referring to the dog sledge set as compared with the immense radio equipment in the airship Norge.

**Wireless Used by Wilkins**

The climax of Sir George Wilkins’s ill-fortune on that occasion came when he crashed in the machine, and was forced to abandon his attempt to fly across the Pole. The damaged machine was later reconditioned on behalf of Capt. Kingsford Smith, and fitted with three Wright Whirlwind J.H. engines, each of 220 horsepower.

The Wright Whirlwind engines now have a remarkable record of achievement. They took Lindbergh and Chamberlain across the Atlantic, Wilkins across the North Pole, Byrd to the Pole, and back, and Maitland and Hagenberg on their first successful flight, from U.S.A. to Hawaii. Advocate (Burnie, Tas.), Monday 11 June 1928, page 5.


**11 June 1928**

**MESSAGE TO SIR G. WILKINS.**

During their stay in Brisbane, Captain Kingsford Smith and Mr. Ulm sent the following cablegram to Sir George Wilkins: “We both sincerely and heartily congratulate you on the success of your flight and the subsequent well-deserved knighthood. We wish you all the success you deserve, and will, we know achieve. (Signed) Kingsford Smith and Ulm”.

**11 June 1928**

**To the Ends of the Earth, SOUTHERN CROSS HAS FLOWN, USED BY WILKINS FOR POLAR FLIGHT.**

**MELBOURNE, Sunday. —**

It can be claimed the giant three-engine Fokker monoplane, the Southern Cross, has flown to the ends of the earth, for this identical machine was flown by Sir George Wilkins in a previous Arctic Expedition.

The Wilkins Chronicle

**A Selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day**
explorer, who formerly was a pupil there, and was born in the district. The above picture shows Sir George’s old home; and below is a photo of the school.


18 June 1928 TRANS-PACIFIC FLIERS HONORED, AWARDED AIR FORCE CROSS, DISTINGUISHED SERVICE TO AVIATION. MELBOURNE, Sunday.

The Governor-General (Lord Stonehaven) has received advice that His Majesty the King has been pleased to award the Air Force Cross to Captain Charles Kingsford Smith, M.C., and Lieut. Charles Thomas Phillip Ulm, in recognition of the distinguished service rendered to aviation by their recent trans-Pacific flight from San Francisco (U.S.A.) to Brisbane.

C. T. P. Ulm, U.S. PRAISE FOR AUSTRALIAN HEROES. NEW YORK, Saturday. “Australia has about New York’s population but in flying genius Australia’s 6,000,000 leave New York’s 6,000,000 far behind,” says Arthur Brisbane, in an editorial in the Hearst chain of papers. “Five of the world’s greatest fliers, Sir Keith Smith, Sir George Wilkins, Hinkler, Kingsford Smith and Ulm, are Australians,” he continues. “Good fliers are important to Australia, living in the shadow of 70,000,000 Japs, and 400,000,000 Chinese. “Six million people with the right flying equipment are more powerful than 100,000,000 without it.” Advocate (Burnie, Tas.), Monday 18 June 1928, page 5. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/67595081

28 June 1928 Sir George Wilkins Royal Geographical Society’s Award London, June 18. The Royal Geographical Society today presented the Patron’s Medal to Sir George Hubert Wilkins, in recognition of his Polar exploration flight. Sir George Wilkins, in responding, separated the Union Jack from the American and Australian flags, to which it had been attached throughout the 18,000 miles of Arctic flying, and handed it over to the president (Sir R. H. Charles) for the society’s museum. Queenslander (Brisbane, Qld), Thursday 28 June 1928, page 23. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/2950016

4 July 1928 Aviation Sir George Wilkins at New York New York, July 2. Sir George Wilkins and Lieut. Eielson, on arriving in New York today, were welcomed at the City Hall by the Acting Mayor. In replying to speeches of welcome and congratulation, Sir George Wilkins said: “I can never express my gratitude to the American people for the splendid cooperation they gave us. It was one of the greatest privileges of my life to carry the Stars and Stripes to the Arctic, and I appreciate the confidence which the United States placed in me.” Mr. William MacCracken, Assistant Secretary of Commerce, said that the recent Arctic flight had helped to promote international goodwill by demonstrating that men of different nationalities could work in harmony on scientific projects. Sydney Morning Herald (NSW), Wednesday 4 July 1928, page 15. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/16470697

22 August 1928 RUMOUR UNTRUE. Wilkins’s Engagement. LOS ANGELES, Tuesday. A report is being circulated that Sir George Wilkins the Polar explorer, is engaged to marry Miss Susan Bennett, an Australian actress now playing in New York. When questioned on the matter, Sir George Wilkins said: “We are very good friends, but the matter of engagement or marriage has never been discussed or suggested, and the rumour is untrue.” Advocate (Burnie, Tas.), Wednesday 22 August 1928, page 1. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/67606480


4 September 1928 Preparing for Antarctic Captain Sir George Hubert Wilkins, writes our San Francisco correspondent, plans to keep the world informed of his progress as he flies across the great wastes of the Antarctic, for, on his way to Seattle to inspect part of his equipment for the aerial exploration of the South Pole Regions, Captain Wilkins stopped in San Francisco long enough to arrange for radio receiving and transmitting sets to be used
on the two aeroplanes he expects to take south with him this month.

The sets will be constructed by a San Francisco firm, and will be similar to the instruments with which Radio Operator James Warner, of the historic Southern Cross, thrilled the civilised world in the detailed account of the plane’s flight from California to Australia. Radio communication with the Wilkins expedition will be made possible by the cooperation of the Norwegian whalers operating on both sides of the Antarctic continent.

These vessels are equipped with combination telegraph-telephone sets with which they keep constantly in touch with the larger “factory” ships in the Ross Sea and Weddell Sea territory, near the Antarctic Circle.

The bigger ships always are in touch with the shore stations of the whaling interests, and with the larger stations on Deception Island, in the South Shetland group, Sir George Wilkins has been assured.

It is from this region that the Wilkins expedition will make its first flights to establish a base for fuel and supplies somewhere in Graham Land, 600 miles south of the outposts of civilisation.

Nine “catchers” of the whaling fleet will be operating in the vicinity of Graham Land at the time Captain Wilkins and his pilot, Lieut. Carl Ben Eielson, begin their flight.

First arrangements for this service were made by Captain Wilkins in Europe last spring. Marconi personally discussed the problems involved in keeping in touch with civilisation.

The distinguished Australian explorer spent a busy day in San Francisco, talking with radio engineers, and navigators, and fulfilled several personal engagements.

The next day he proceeded to Seattle, flying over the Boeing air transport lines. Brisbane Courier (Qd), Tuesday 4 September 1928, page 12.

26 September 1928

The Antarctic Scientific Exploration Three Nationalities

Wilkins to Start from Tasmania

Three adventurous friends, natives of countries lying at opposite points of the globe, will within a few weeks be leading expeditions along routes as different as their native lands to spend a six-month-long summer day in the mysterious, south-Polar continent of the Antarctic.

One of them is Commander Richard Evelyn Byrd, United States Navy, retired, a native of the United States. Another is Captain Sir George Hubert Wilkins, a native of Australia, born of an old French family, the De Villiers. The third is Commander Douglas George Jeffrey, Royal Navy, retired a native of England.

Common Ties Bind Them

There are three strands in the tie that binds them together in the public’s mind: their common purpose of scientific exploration in the region of the South Pole, their friendship and admiration for one another’s previous accomplishments, and the American financial backing for the separate expeditions.

Individually and collectively they deny inferences and assumptions that their expeditions are to be in the nature of a momentous race into the unknown. Only Byrd will say definitely that he expects to pay a call at the South Pole. Wilkins does not intend to go near the pole. And Jeffrey says he “may possibly” fly over the pole if other phases of his plans are accomplished without mishap.

Byrd and Wilkins will start approximately at the same time from opposite sides of the North American continent, Byrd from New York and Sir Hubert from San Francisco. Towards the end of September Jeffrey will sail from New York. Despite the later date of sailing, Jeffrey expects to be on the field of operations earlier than his two friends, because he has less distance to travel.

Jeffrey’s Crew

Jeffrey expects to sail directly southward, visiting Argentine to co-operate with meteorological experts of that nation. Montevideo will be his last port of call and he will sail past the tip of South America, slip into the Antarctic Circle and establish his headquarters on Graham Land on the coast of the Weddell Sea. His crew, including ship hands, will number about twenty-five.

Commander Byrd with his fifty-five men, his Eskimo dogs, his airplanes, and his equipment for spending not only the coming summer day, but a six-months’ night and another day in the Antarctic, will take a much longer route, proceeding to New Zealand. Large quantities of his supplies, particularly foodstuffs, already have been shipped to Dunedin, New Zealand, to be taken on there, the last port of call.

Wilkins, from his Pacific coast starting point, expects to go to Panama, barter there for passage for his retinue, which will not exceed seven men, and go to Tasmania, where he will board a whaler bound for the Ross Sea in the Antarctic Circle, about November 1, beginning his flight from a point probably within 250 miles of Commander Byrd’s base about January 1.

Upon arriving in Ross Sea, Sir Hubert expects to drop overboard his Lockheed seaplane, similar to the Lockheed Vega plane in which he flew over the North Pole from Alaska to Spitsbergen last spring, and fly eastward along the coast towards Graham Land, landing beside one of the forty whaling vessels usually operating at that season. Aboard the whaler he expects to be taken back to Montevideo.

To Remain 18 Months

Jeffrey will spend only the Antarctic summer season in his explorations, returning to civilisation next May. Byrd expects to remain in the unknown ice continent 18 months with approximately 25 of his men. The remainder will take his ship, the Samson, a whaler, out of the dangerous ice pack during the winter nights.

While Byrd and Jeffrey are working inward from the great ice barrier from opposite sides of the Antarctic continent, Wilkins’s flight will almost draw a line as the base of a triangle connecting their operating bases, the apex of the triangle being the South Pole.

The fact that the three expeditions will be in various parts of the Antarctic at the same time is expected to result in a great addition to the world’s fund of meteorological knowledge.

Each expedition will be supplied with complete and modern radio equipment. Radio communication between the expeditions is expected to enable the scientists who are members of the respective parties to gain greater value from their own immediate observations.

The South Polar Region is the home of the blizzard; it is the birthplace of the Indian monsoon; it is definitely related to floods on the River Nile and to weather conditions throughout the world. If these
explorers wrench from the Antarctic grasp the secret of much of the world's bad weather, they will have performed a monumental task.

No Animal Life
Aside from this meteorological data, the aims of the expeditions are many: all, however, centering about the general term "explorative." The region of the Antarctic is the last challenge to the adventurous exploring spirit of man. The Antarctic continent is an area as large as the United States and Mexico combined, upon the major portion of which the eye of man has never looked.

So far as is known from the records of Amundsen and Scott, whose expeditions fought their ways to the Pole and back, Scott giving his life in the return trip, no animal life larger than a spider exists beyond the rim of the Antarctic continent. It is considered certain that the great Andes mountain range of South America extends into the continent which caps the South Pole. Geologists will seek to determine whether the Polar Mountains contain the same rich veins of valuable mineral ore that are found in the Andes farther north towards the tropics. Other scientists will seek to determine if there are any fossils in the great expanse indicating that thousands of years ago, perhaps before the glacial age, the continent may have been inhabited or used as a way of travel between other continents. The first assault upon the mysterious icy realm by airplanes also is expected to clear up a disputed point among experts—whether the continent is one body of ice-capped land or whether it is two huge islands separated by an immense river, canal, or natural strait.

purchasing agents busily engaged from dawn to dusk.

Furthermore, representative in a dozen different countries are using the cables and the mails and the trans-oceanic express to obtain for him the most perfect equipment of suitable food, clothing, scientific instruments, dog-sleds, Eskimo dogs, and other paraphernalia. A huge tri-motor Ford plane and two smaller ones will be used. "Success in exploring expeditions," he says, "like wars, is won in the preparations made in advance."

Tons of Supplies
The following is a list of the supplies and provisions already ordered by the Byrd expedition:

- Three phonographs.
- One hundred and fifteen records.
- A small piano.
- A library of 2,000 books.
- A ukulele.
- A banjo.
- Five hundred thousand cigarettes.
- One ton of tobacco.
- A supply of chewing gum, candy, pines, etc.
- An artificial sunlight machine for sun baths and other purposes.
- Two tons of ham.
- Three tons of bacon.
- Five tons of beef.
- Two tons of pork.
- Five hundred cases of eggs.
- Two tons of tin butter.
- A ton of powdered milk.
- A proportional supply of condensed, evaporated, and malted milk.
- Fifteen tons of flour.
- A ton of kitchen utensils.
- Sixty thousand sheets of writing paper.
- Eight hundred bed sheets.
- Four hundred pillow cases.

The Jeffrey expedition, the former British naval commander estimates, will cost approximately £40,000. He will use a steel shipsteam for the first time in exploration history to penetrate the icefields. He will have a Bellanca J-5 airplane, similar to the one used by Chamberlin and Levine in flying from New York to Germany, and will have two other planes, one smaller, for reconnaissance work, which probably will be an amphibian.

The other plane may be larger. The Bellanca J-5 will have a cruising radius of 4,400 miles. Commander Jeffery is a veteran of the second Shackleton expedition, and will have with him four or five others of that expedition.

The Wilkins expedition will be the least elaborate of the three, but it may prove the most colourful, inasmuch as the daring aviator proposes an aerial photographic and mapping flight along the coast of the icebound continent, with no goal but an uncertain whaling fleet ahead.

Mercury (Hobart, Tas.), Wednesday 26 September 1928, page 6.

3 October 1928
Racing for the South Pole
Byrd and Wilkins Expeditions

From Our Correspondent
San Francisco, September 5.

Despite the constant denials there appears every prospect of a decided race for the South Pole on the part of Commander Richard Byrd and Sir George Hubert Wilkins, the latter having rushed his preparations on the Pacific coast coincident with the departure of the American explorer’s ship from New York.
Sir George has been rushing hither and thither between New York, San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles, superintending the building of his two aeroplanes, which he is determined he will pilot to the Antarctic regions, and endeavour to head off Commander Byrd in his quest of honours of reaching the South Pole and uncovering its secrets.

Geographers and meteorological experts are watching Sir Hubert Wilkins’s preparations with the keenest anticipation, and experts in Great Britain and throughout the world hope that the hero of the first transpolar flight in a heavier-than-air machine from Point Barrow, Alaska, to Spitsbergen, will succeed in obtaining important information from the vastness of the Antarctic Continent.

Sir Hubert believes that his researches South should be much more productive of results than similar North Pole study. He found no land near the North Pole on which a meteorological station could be established, whereas the known presence of land to the south renders this project likely.

Although the North Polar Seas are surrounded by a belt of cold, barren lands—Siberia, Alaska, &c.—the Antarctic Continent is girdled by open seas to the north of which lie the fertile countries of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and South America.

The absence of a barren belt of land is taken as indicating, Sir Hubert believes, that conditions in the Antarctic will be more productive of results than has been found possible in the North. That, at least, is the confirmed opinion of Sir Hubert.

To Employ Aeroplanes

A plan is under way which, if carried out, will provide for meteorological collecting stations at Buenos Aires, Melbourne, and Cape Town. Each of these stations will gather information from four stations on the Antarctic continent or on adjacent islands.

These last named stations would employ aeroplanes and balloons to examine the weather conditions in the upper air. A head station in London would complete reports from the data thus gathered, and, it is thought, would be able to make rather accurate forecasts of South Polar weather.

The importance of an exact forecast, it is pointed out by experts, can hardly be overestimated.

For instance, the resultant saving to Australia from foreseeing a drought year would be more than pays for the installation and upkeep of the stations.

Before this work can be carried out it will be necessary to obtain a more detailed knowledge of Antarctic geography. At the present time the shores of Ross Sea, south of New Zealand, are fairly well known: also King George V. Land to the west, and King Edward VII Land to the east are known.

Sir Hubert Wilkins says the Antarctic continent, rising as it does to a plateau about 10,000 feet high at the Pole, and covered with ice averaging perhaps 2000 feet thick, is the greatest refrigerator in the world, and the temperatures in this vicinity, even during the height of summer, are rarely above freezing point.

He says that in the Arctic during summer the land is generally free from snow, and more than 500 species of flowering plants are found. Only two flowering plants have been seen on the Antarctic continent, and these are found only on its most northern areas. He declares many species of moths, butterflies, bumblebees, and mosquitoes abound in the Arctic, while only a few mites and spiders and other insects which live in the feathers of birds are found in the Antarctic.

Riddles of the Antarctic

The most important questions exercising the minds of geographers today are, says Sir Hubert:—1. Is there a large Antarctica as large as the whole of the United States, as has long been supposed, or is this continent divided by ocean currents flowing beneath the solid sea of ice?

In other words, is the Antarctic land mass divided by ocean streams connecting the Ross Sea with the Weddell Sea, leaving Graham Land an archipelago of islands? “This question, technical at first glance, may hold in its answer a key to weather forecasts, years in advance.” “The observations taken by scientists on Shackleton’s Endurance expedition, which drifted after the ship was wrecked throughout the length of the Weddell Sea, indicated that their drift was influenced by a current running beneath the ice mass south of Graham Island.”

“2. —does the huge mountain system, which includes the Rockies and the Andes, and the Great Dividing Range of Australia, continue across the Antarctic continent and so form a continuous mountain circuit about the Pacific Ocean? Another question, the answer to which may supply the missing chapter in the complete history of the world’s formation and its past.”

Sir Hubert says geologists say whenSir Hubert is convinced that with adequate preparation, experience sensibly accumulated and the perfected machinery available today, there is no need, except through unfortunate accidents, for the modern explorer to suffer the untold trials and tribulations suffered by explorers of years ago.

With the solid ice Sir Hubert does not fear forced landings, and he says the world will soon realise that Transantarctic flying is much safer than flying over established air lines, which shortly will be crowded with aeroplane commuters. The other plane will be, with few minor exceptions, a duplicate of the first.

Lieutenant Carl Ben Eielson, the Polar pilot, will be chief pilot, and the other pilot has not yet been chosen. Along with the planes will go the necessary equipment, gasoline, scientific instruments, food supplies, which will be assembled and taken to Deception Island.

With everything in readiness, the Wilkins party will proceed to survey and lay out their first depot, somewhere in Graham Land, and approximately five or six hundred miles south of Deception Island.

The North Pole plane (No. 1) is already equipped with large gasoline tanks. This is the plane Wilkins will use to make the final “jump” across the uncharted territory of the Antarctic, to seek, if possible, some answer to the great scientific problem of the South Pole.

Plane No. 2 will be used to carry petrol and supplies to this base. In all probability two flights will be made between Deception Island and the depot. While the primary purpose of these flights will be “air-trucking” of the supplies, the explorers will take his opportunity of thoroughly surveying Graham Land.

Both monoplanes will be installed with pontoons in these preliminary flights, although conditions encountered in the South may change plans. When the final jump is made skis will be used for the take-off and landing. Sir Hubert planning to fly to Ross Sea, on the Pacific side, where three of the Norwegian whalers will be awaiting him with petrol and supplies.

In the meantime the plane remaining at the depot will stand by until word is flashed by radio that the explorers have landed safely on the other side.

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Heading for Dunedin

A dingy little three-master named City of New York strutted proudly down the busy bay of New York carrying the American colours on its first voyage of exploration to Antarctica in more than three-quarters of a century.

Taking the salutes of all sorts of harbour craft, the sturdy 160-foot barque put out to sea with Commander Richard E. Byrd and thirty-two of the seventy men who are to accompany him to the South Pole continent for two years of hard work and high adventure.

The leader had planned to leave his flagship at quarantine, where half a hundred of his guests bade her goodbye, but at the last minute he decided to stay.
aboard until the vessel’s routine had been established, and she was well on her way to Dunedin, New Zealand, the take-off point for the South Polar continent.

Slipping away from the docked pier shortly after one o’clock in the afternoon the City of New York was attended as far as the Narrows by the official city tug Macom, which was to accommodate the many friends of Commander Byrd and the departing explorers.

No one, however, wanted to ride on the Macom, and everybody swarmed aboard the barque, prying into every corner of the stocky boat that is to convey the expedition from Dunedin across 3200 miles of Southern Ocean, to the Bay of Whales on the Ross Sea ice barrier of Antarctica.

In the party were Mrs. Byrd, wife of the Commander, and their young son, Dickie; Mrs. Frederick Guest, backer of Miss Amelia Earhart on the flight of the Friendship to Europe, and a host of wives, sisters, sweethearts, cousins, uncles, and aunts, all eager to stay as long as possible with the men, who are to be gone so long on the South Pole quest.

Cheered Frantically

The pier was lined with people, who cheered frantically as the City of New York backed into the Hudson River, and swung slowly around for the run down the bay. A troop of Boy Scouts from Erie, Pennsylvania, led in the yelling. Their shouts were particularly meant for the ears of Paul Siple, their 19-year-old comrade, whom Commander Byrd selected from all the scouts of the United States to act as his orderly on the expedition.

Paul, however, was not an orderly on the day of sailing. He was just an ordinary seaman, giving a hand at the hawsers, putting a final polish on the deck, and doing other useful work. When he went aboard on the previous night, his first words were: “Well, give me some old clothes.”

He got them, and a mop and pail. Too. As the barque pointed her stout bows down the stream whistled a noisy greeting. A big monoplane, one of the four aircraft that will serve Byrd on the southern continent, cut capers overhead.

The aircraft’s controls were in skillful hands, however, for she was manned by Bernt Balchen, Harold I. June, and Dean Smith, the expedition’s pilots, who dipped their machine across the City of New York’s bows, banked at dizzy angles over her stern, and then sped ahead again to repeat the spectacular performance.

Near the Narrows, the Antarctic bound boat and the escorting Macom stopped, so that the guests might be taken off. When the barque resumed speed her crew screamed from her yardarms to wave farewells to the shore party, and then the boat put out for Gravesend, Bay to have her compasses corrected.

Salute of the Sea

As she was pulling away the great Leviathan, outward bound, slid gracefully past giving her the salute of the sea—three long toots of the liner’s bass-voiced whistle.

The City of New York’s answer was pitched in a high soprano. Passengers on the Leviathan from which would come back to New York and be off again for Europe long before the City of New York had reached the Panama Canal, came to the rails, and, seeing through their glasses the blue and gold burning out the legend “Byrd Antarctic Expedition,” waved at their momentary neighbour. Captain Frederick C. Melville, a relative of the famous Melville who wrote “Moby Dick,” was taking the City of New York on her 9,200 mile run to Dunedin, and will also pilot her to the Antarctic continent, through the treacherous pack ice that reaches for hundreds of miles off the shore of that white land of silence.

He has full confidence in his craft’s stamina, however, for in her youth and middle age she has sailed northern seas, under the name of Samson, as the mother of a Norwegian whaling fleet. An auxiliary engine was installed for this trip.

Captain Melville himself, although only in his early forties, has spent more than thirty years afloat. He now wore for the first time the uniform of a lieutenant-commander in the Naval Reserves, a ranking given him recently by authority of the Secretary of the Navy, Judge Wilbur.

A Stowaway

One item not on the cargo list was stowed away on the City of New York. It consisted of one small boy, who was found in the coal bunker just before the Macom and the barque parted company. He cried bitterly when they put him on the shore-bound boat. Nobody got his name.

Sitting dolefully on a coil of rope, as the City of New York stood out to sea was a black and white pup, of doubtful ancestry.

Samson by name. On the top of a companionway lay Minnie, a grey and white kitten, whose folks for generations back have been habitués of New York’s back ways. Puppy and kitten were rather neglected amid all the tear-shedding and farewell-taking.

Captain Melville hopes to reach Dunedin late in October, and when the expedition has been reunited at the New Zealand port preparations will be made for prompt departure across the ice-burdened Southern Ocean to the Ross Sea, 3600 miles distant.

Commander Byrd hopes that Skipper Melville can get the City of New York, which will transport all the men and supplies over this last leg of the long journey, to the shore of Antarctica by the first of January. This would give the expedition advantage of a good share of the Antarctic summer, and perhaps permit an immediate attempt to reach the South Pole by means of the flying boat.

Commander Byrd admitted that he would like to be the first to carry the American flag to the South Pole, just as he was the first to fly it to the North Pole, but the primary purpose of the expedition is to glean scientific knowledge of the world’s most southernmost continent, but the sporting question is “Will Sir George Hubert Wilkins get there first?”

Later another boy stowaway was discovered and sent ashore, and still a third was uncovered, a husky 20-year-old negro, who for three days had fasted and had survived the cyanide gas fumigation of the boat.

Commander Byrd greatly admired the negro, who declared he wanted to be the first negro to reach the South Pole. He was given work and permitted to accompany the expedition.


1 November 1928

Antarctic Survey

Sir Hubert Wilkins on his Way

London, Wednesday.

Sir Hubert Wilkins, the Australian explorer, left the Falkland Islands today on his way to the Antarctic to conduct survey flights. His next stop will be at Deception Island, where a base will be established.


7 November 1928

Sir Hubert Wilkins

Antarctic Expedition

Dr. J. P. Thomson, C.B.E., writes: —

some months ago a writer to the metropolitan Press—Mr. Lethem, Tambourine, I think—deplored the absence of Australian financial support to Sir Hubert Wilkins in his South Polar Expedition, regretting that such an important enterprise should have to depend upon American backing.

Alas this is too true and deplorable in a movement so full of promise to Australian meteorological research and its probable effects on the economic life of the continent at large. Having for many years entertained and expressed the view that the key to long range weather forecasting in this country awaits the investigator of the South Pole ice movement and relative climatic conditions, I have lately endeavoured to interest the Australian
The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day

**The Antarctic in the region between King Edward VII Land and Graham Land.**

*Telegraph* (Brisbane, Qld), Wednesday 7 November 1928, page 12.


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**14 November 1928**

Two great adventurers, one British, the other American, are preparing to follow in the footsteps of Scott, Shackleton, and Amundsen; and, with expeditions fitted out with the best that modern science has to offer, they will attempt to solve the mystery of a continent of frozen desolation which is known to lie round the South Pole.

Sir George Wilkins is leader of the British expedition, and Commander Byrd, U.S.N., of the American venture, both of whom are known to readers of *The World’s News*.

Land of frozen nightmare. So might be called the strange south polar country over which those intrepid air pilots, Commander Byrd and Sir George Wilkins, will soon be flying. It is a vast region of everlasting ice, amid which many mighty volcanoes uplift their peaks, belching fire and molten rocks.

Much less than two centuries ago no human being had ever seen it. There was a fable that told of a great land mass surrounding the South Pole, but no ship had sailed far enough south to get sight of its mysterious shores.

It was spoken of as the South Land, and Captain Cook, the famous navigator, seeking to find it, made the discovery of 1773. His ship was the first in history to cross the Antarctic Circle. The continent was there, but he found it unapproachable because of the wide belt of ice which guarded its coast line.

Since then Antarctica, as the South Land is now called, has been circumnavigated by exploring vessels. Its area is over five million square miles. It very nearly fills the space enclosed by the Antarctic Circle.

As a whole, it is a lofty continent, high above the ocean, with many ranges of huge

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**We came ashore as soon as possible, seeking landing fields and beaches suitable for launching the seaplanes. Eventually we discovered a convenient place near the whaling station, where the machines can be dragged from the water and have their pontoons exchanged for wheels. They will then be taxied 300 yards to the snow-slopes, where skis can be fitted and trial flights made. At the far end of the harbour the ice flat is unbroken.

How long it will remain so nobody knows, but at present it will serve for long take-offs with big loads. The second machine will be brought ashore tomorrow. We expect to make the first flight ever made in the Antarctic within a few days.”**

Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs Gazette (Qld), Wednesday 14 November 1928, page 7.


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Much less than two centuries ago no human being had ever seen it. There was a fable that told of a great land mass surrounding the South Pole, but no ship had sailed far enough south to get sight of its mysterious shores.

It was spoken of as the South Land, and Captain Cook, the famous navigator, seeking to find it, made the discovery of 1773. His ship was the first in history to cross the Antarctic Circle. The continent was there, but he found it unapproachable because of the wide belt of ice which guarded its coast line.

Since then Antarctica, as the South Land is now called, has been circumnavigated by exploring vessels. Its area is over five million square miles. It very nearly fills the space enclosed by the Antarctic Circle.

As a whole, it is a lofty continent, high above the ocean, with many ranges of huge

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**The expeditions of both Sir Hubert Wilkins and Commander Byrd for scientific exploration in the Antarctic in 1928-1929, have the support and endorsement of the American Geographical Society of New York, to both of which a substantial monetary contribution has been made by that institution.

In a recent cable dispatch Sir Hubert Wilkins says: — “Using Lockheed seaplane for flight from Ross Sea following coast to Graham Land. With machine I myself take Norwegian whaling ship for Antarctic, remaining, with ship until commencing flight in January ending beside one of forty whalers operating near Graham Land and with who will return Montevideo May next.” In length the flight will equal or slightly exceed the one just finished from Point Barrow to Spitsbergen. The coast of the Ross Quadrant that it will cover is very little known”.

Sir Herbert Wilkins will photograph the details of ice border, glacial tongues, mountains, and other features visible from his plane. In this way he will be able to select sites for the meteorological stations that he has long planned to establish.

By continuous observations at these stations it is hoped to coordinate Antarctic weather conditions with those observed simultaneously in Australia, New Zealand, South America, South Africa, and establish a sounder basis for long-range weather forecasts.

Commander Byrd, on the other hand, is making not a single long flight but a series of flights, along the line of which a number of supply stations will be laid down for the benefit of the geologists and other specialists who will prosecute detailed studies on the ground.

The personnel will also include both a meteorologist and an aerologist, and a number of high altitude flights will be made for the study of weather conditions aloft, upon which light will thus be shed for the first time.

The Antarctic experiences confirmed in Wilkins the desire to prosecute in particular one phase of polar exploration, the reconnaissance study of meteorological conditions with a view to practical application, notably in relation to the forecasting of Australian weather.

He says the science of meteorological forecast has been through the ages one of the most absorbing occupations of humanity, and its possibilities, the prevention of suffering from unexpected droughts and subsequent famine, are humane in the extreme, and its economic advantage, enormous.

It has been my desire to foster the development or polar meteorology by making it possible to carry out a series of prolonged investigations in Polar Regions. The Arctic expedition of 1920 was planned as a preliminary to a longer expedition to the Antarctic in the region between King
mountains, the valleys beneath them filled with slow-moving rivers of ice. All along its coast are lofty ice-cliffs, forming the so-called “ice barrier.”

Glaciers project themselves far out into the sea, their fronts constantly breaking off to make icebergs, which, floating amidst a vast expanse of pack ice, are sometimes as much as fifty miles long.

No wonder that Captain Cook in his sailing ship found it impossible to approach the shores of Antarctica. For steam-driven vessels such an adventure is much easier, though not without its dangers. At Cape Adair there is a large bay, into which flows a warm current. It was here that Borchgrevink, the first human being to set foot on the unknown continent, made a landing, on February 23, 1895.

Most interesting of all the animals of that frozen South Land are the penguins, whose rookeries are scattered all along its coasts. There are several species of them, the largest being the Emperor penguin, which stands four feet high and weighs eighty to ninety pounds. It has a jet-black head, a lemon-yellow breast, a streak of vivid red on its lower bill, and feathers with the glossy sheen of satin.

The penguins live on fish, which they catch in ice-cracks and seals’ blow-holes. Their nests are little heaps of pebbles, and they are constantly chasing and scolding one another for stealing pebbles. A penguin rookery is a noisy place, vociferous with the cries of the birds.

The female penguin lays only one egg, which cannot be left uncovered for a minute, lest it freeze. Other penguins, however, are always eager and ready to act as nurses, and thus the egg is freely passed about. Scrimmages for the possession of a chick are frequent. The chick, for protection against the cold, squats on the feet of the parent, or nurse, and is kept warm by a loose fold of feathered skin.

In the water the penguins, swimming powerfully with their wings, move as fast as any fish. But great numbers of them are captured and eaten by seals, the biggest of which is the so-called “sea-leopard,” twelve feet long when full-grown.

In their turn, the seals are preyed upon by killer whales, which, in Antarctic waters, are extraordinarily numerous, hunting in packs of ten to twenty, and sometimes nearly a hundred. They may constantly be seen prowling along the edge of the ice-floes, their high dorsal fins rendering them conspicuous. The killer whale weighs about a ton, and is the most ferocious creature in existence.

In that region a frequent and wonderful spectacle is the Aurora Australis, which sometimes assumes the shape of a vast curtain made up of vertical beams of pale golden light, now and then varied with rose and green. The curtain seems to hang from the sky in enormous folds, running up and down. As it folds in one direction, it is waved out of sight in another, never for a moment at rest.

The pack ice that stretches far out to sea keeps ships at a distance of scores or even hundreds of miles. Volcanoes are numerous on the Antarctic continent, and off its coasts are many islands that have “burning mountains” of their own. The mystic South Land is a land where fire and frightful cold wage an everlasting conflict. Here and there along the coast may be seen glaciers sealed beneath sheets of lava. In that strange land mountains are actually built to some extent of ice and snow.

Ashes thrown out by the volcanoes fall cold, forming a solid frozen cake which is the best of non-conductors. Hence a mountain may be formed of a series of alternate layers of snow and ashes, the latter keeping the snow from melting when torrents of molten rock flow out of the numerous craters.

Exploring vessels cannot steam along the coast of Antarctica for purposes of near-at-hand observations and mapping. The great ice-barrier and the pack ice that stretches far out to sea keep ships at a distance of scores or even hundreds of miles. Only in a few places has the barrier been penetrated and the actual land reached. The path to the South Pole followed by Shackleton, Scott, and Amundsen leads from an opening, at Cape Adair, directly south of New Zealand.

Hence it is that very little is known of the geography and topography of the South Polar Continent. Nearly all of it is a blank on the map. Its future exploration and mapping, presumably, must be accomplished by observations from the air, such as Commander Byrd and Sir George Wilkins are about to undertake on the flights to the south end of the earth’s axis.

A land mass equal in size to two Europes, Antarctica challenges the curiosity and adventurous spirit of the explorer. An object of importance from the scientific viewpoint is to locate the southern magnetic pole, which is believed to be only about a hundred miles distant from Cape Adair. It was through that break in the environing ice-pack that Sir James Ross, in 1842, accomplished so amazing a voyage.

Ross, though he did not attempt to land, actually reached a point considerably further south than Cape Adair, has two sailing ships, the Erebus and Terror, lodging in and out through the ice pack. In later days the same ships carried Sir John Franklin’s ill-fated expedition to the Arctic, where they were lost, no trace of them being ever found.

Sir James named after his two ships the twin volcanoes which he discovered in Ross Bay, Mount Erebus, 12,400 feet high, was at the time of his visit belching flame and dense volumes of smoke—a colossal pyramid of snow and ice, with the fires of hell raging out of its summit.

Separated from it by a saddle of ice-clad hills, on the east rose Terror, the sister mountain, 10,900 feet high. Borchgrevink, the Columbus of Antarctica, was a Norwegian naturalist, who, for the sake of a voyage to the south polar continent, shipped as a foremast hand on a steam whaler bound thither from Australia in speculative pursuit of right whales. The whaler made a landing at Cape Adair, and men were sent ashore in a boat. One of them was Borchgrevink, who jumped over-board before they reached the pebbly beach, and so managed to get there first.

The Cape is a huge square block of basaltic rock 3780 feet high, with almost vertical sides. It conspicuously marks the entrance to the bay already mentioned, in the near vicinity of which Borchgrevink counted twenty glaciers.

Back of the belief, held from very early times, that there was a continent, as yet unknown, at or near the South Pole, was a supposition that there must be a great land mass in that region to counterbalance the vast extent of terra firma in the Northern Hemisphere.

Australia, when discovered, was declared to be the missing continent, but when Tasman sailed all round it in 1642 that idea was weakened. The finding of Antarctica was reserved for Captain Cook.

The continent has been touched by explorers in three widely separated regions—Enderby Land and Kemp Land, 40 to 60 degrees east longitude; Wilkes Land and Victoria Land, 100 to 170
For instance, if it were possible to foretell a drought year in Australia, the saving in kind would pay for the outlay required to erect meteorological stations in the Antarctic. There are, however, great blanks to be explored before this can be done. The mystery of Graham Land also remains to be solved—it is an island or a peninsula?"

Sir George proposes to fly considerable distances during his voyage of discovery. One of the flights that he proposes to make is almost as far as from London to New York. If he is forced down he believes that he will be able to live on seals and penguins and walk across the wastes until he gets in touch with whaling ships. Sir George faces the prospect of three years in an uncharted land with calm. Commander Byrd, with 14 members of his expedition, reached Wellington (N.Z.) last week in the Norwegian whaler Larsen. He will await there the arrival of his own two ships from America. Stores will subsequently be taken aboard at Dunedin, and the equipment assembled, after which the expedition will leave for the Ross Sea early in December.


21 November 1928 The Library
By S.E.N.

Sir Hubert Wilkins—to give his new title in the way he has expressed his desire that it should be given—is so particularly famed for his association with Arctic exploration that we are apt to forget that the northern wastes are but one of many of the venues wherein he has conducted his manifold activities. Consequently his book, just issued, entitled "Undiscovered Australia" (Ernest Benn—Dymocks), if it should carry no other claim upon our attention, would have at least this one that it draws attention to the fine exploratory and research work that Sir Hubert has done in the virgin spaces of his native Commonwealth.

However, one might doubt that the author has many other direct qualities to attract our interest and hold our attention than this negative one. It gives an account of an expedition of which Sir Hubert was the leader, and which travelled during the years 1923-1925 through the almost unknown areas of northern Australia for the purpose of collecting specimens of the rarer Native fauna for the British Museum.

And a very valuable and interesting account it is. Is it possible, however, to quarrel a little with Sir Hubert on his choice of the word "Undiscovered" in his title. The term is an exaggeration, for the country through which the expedition travelled can in no sense be deemed to be 'undiscovered.' It is little known certainly—portion of it is almost terra incognita—but only a very small portion, and even that which had known, before Sir Hubert went there, the foot of the white adventurer.

However, this is perhaps to criticise over strictly and Sir Hubert’s volume is really so fine an addition to the list of Australiana that it would be ungrateful to press so small a point unduly.

Before referring to the text in any detail I would like to add here that the book itself, qua book, is all that such a volume should be.

It is finely printed; its illustrations are numerous, and from a scientific and particularly from an ethnological point of view of the greatest value: there is a good map of the route covered, a very complete index and to crown the whole an appendix has been added showing the detailed results of the expedition. To read this appendix is a revelation of the

For example, this river is over a mile wide at its mouth in Temple Bay: yet although the expedition was in the neighbourhood for some time and actually ascended the
stream for a considerable distance neither river nor bay is marked on the map which purports to trace the party’s route. I could understand the river’s absence from the ordinary atlases, as known as the cus-cus, or the short-eared opossum. The Australian opossum is a marsupial which varies considerably in its coloring in the different species: the eyes are large, indicating its nocturnal habits, and its tail is prehensile at the tip.

A member of this family was the first Australian mammal known in Europe, and was brought over in the seventeenth century. The cus-cus differs in its habits from most others of the family, for it is variegated in colour and makes its home in the branches of the trees and in dense scrub—not in hollow branches, as do the squirrels and other opossums. We were, rowing steadily up-stream when Young’s sharp eyes detected something unusual in the upper branches of a densely foliaged tree.

It differed in appearance from the usual green-ants nest: so we fired a shot at it to see what it might be, and was considerably astonished, when the form of an opossum unfolded itself and came tumbling down. In its fall it struck a branch of the tree and in dense scrub—with which it was variegated, and made its home in the branches of the trees and in dense scrub. It was not in hollow branches, as do the squirrels and other opossums. We were, rowing steadily up-stream when Young’s sharp eyes detected something unusual in the upper branches of a densely foliaged tree.

Sir Hubert has done good work here, and when the occasion has demanded it—seemed to demand it, in his opinion—he has freely spoken his mind. In his introductory “Preparation,” he describes his chargin at finding that it was almost impossible to get trained Australians—that is, scientifically trained—to accompany his expedition. He says that the reason was explained to him by a professor at one of the leading Australian universities, who said that he had discussed several “promising young fellows” from joining the expedition because “there is no money to be made in expeditory work today or even in the study of natural history. They can earn decent livings at other things.”

Whereupon Sir Hubert comments: “No doubt they can get well paid jobs and a comfortable living according to their estimation, and they are apparently quite content with this: they have little desire to develop into highly trained investigators commanding high salaries and special opportunities or correspondent to salary, to devote themselves to science. Most Australians are well-off in regard to creature comforts, and many of them soon reach independent means: yet the absence of the expressed desire for culture and for higher things, and their contentedness with the mediocre, make them perhaps the poorest rich people in the world today.”

This is a hard saying and the reasoning which leads up to it does not seem to me to be either quite logical or quite fair. Surely it is not much the fault of the “young fellows”—this disinclination to take up the life of scientific researcher—as of the conditions which force this disinclination upon them. Or which force it upon them as Sir Hubert seems to admit by his failure to deny the assertions of his professorial friend, in so great a majority of cases.

Can a man—let alone a people—be justly said to lack a desire for “the higher things”—“the higher things” meaning, presumably, the ways and wonders of scientific research—when to devote himself to them would mean in all probability a life of penury and want? How does Sir Hubert know that many a man apparently “contented with the mediocre” is not really longing for “the things that are more wonderful,” but lacks the means wherewith to go in search of them?

And, anyway, what is “the mediocre,” and what are the higher things?” Can Sir Hubert or anyone tell us for certain? Sydney Mail (NSW), Wednesday 21 November 1928, page 18. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/158403186

Photo from Antarctic, 1928. *GSE Polar Archives [wilkins33_5_JF].

24 November 1928

A Scientific Adventurer

Captain Sir George Hubert Wilkins is at the moment in the Antarctic, where he is continuing the work that he performed in the Arctic in 1926 and 1927, when in the latter year he flew from Barrow in Alaska to Green Harbour in Spitsbergen across the North Pole, a flight described by Amundsen as the greatest ever made. His motive in both expeditions, though he admits that strict terms for Polar Expeditions are hard to find, is to contribute to the possibility of long range weather forecasting. As he puts it himself: “From evidence collected many years ago, scientific meteorologists deduced the theory that data collected in Polar Regions and correlated with meteorological information from other latitudes would enable as to forecast the seasons with comparative accuracy. The maintenance of polar meteorological stations during recent years has proved that there is a direct relationship between the Arctic, the Antarctic and subsequent conditions in the great producing areas of the world.”

Long range weather forecasting would indeed save civilisation many millions a year. There does not, however, appear to have been any great urgency about either expedition, the object of which is to find suitable spots for meteorological stations, for in the present state of knowledge even a great number of these costly and uncomfortable locations would improve our present-day to-day forecasting by only ten or fifteen per cent.

However, it is clear that Captain Sir Hubert Wilkins is filled with an ardent desire to explore the Polar regions by aeroplane, and has found a reason for doing so that keeps sober and sensible people at bay, and almost—does he not claim quite—satisfies his own rational self.

The results of these two years of mortal struggle during which two serious failures were suffered seem very meagre, as they are candidly stated—that is, if one concludes their epic quality. The first discovery noted is that the Arctic has no moss beds in which it is not a very bad place for flying.

“Eighteen hundred miles of the way was traversed in clear sunshine. A little more than one hundred miles of cloud-covered ice in the centre of the hither to unknown region between Point Barrow and Greenland was the blot on an otherwise clean page of exploration. The clouds met in other latitudes were over well-known ground and were only interference because of their obstruction. We had noted the trend of the drift of the ice, and the direction of the snow drifts, which gave us an idea of the movement of the air currents near the surface throughout the season.”

We had failed to find a suitable land mass on which to establish a meteorological station, but our observations show that it might be possible to establish that station on the floating ice. We demonstrated that it is possible to find one’s way in an aeroplane on a cross-longitude course in the Arctic regions—even when that course was half-way round the world, and lay over the area where compass declination is at its maximum. Eielson (his pilot) and I have learned, at all events, the sincerity of friendship.”

The story is told in plain fashion. It would be better told if it were a little shorter. The politics of the expedition were difficult. Rivalry between aeroplane firms, discontent among backers, quarrels about money, took up too much space. Sir Hubert suffered more from the earthly humilations necessary to the preparation of the land—such as the sale of autographed photos—than from any of his misfortunes in the sky.
The fifty-page story of the flight over the Pole is excellently done. There were two crises, the getting away, when the heavily laden machine made its run between walls of snow fourteen feet apart, and the end of the journey, when they met with a storm owing to shortening supplies of gas, hesitated whether to land in Grant Land, and chance being able to get off again. They had had enough of walking, however, and decided to go on, making a final landing on the mountain enclosed shore of a bay in Spitsbergen, nearer to Green Harbour than they thought. King’s Bay was the objective. Getting under way again was the difficulty. Captain Wilkins several times failed to clamber into the plane as it was rising, and gas was nearly exhausted. Prior to his two years in the Arctic, Captain Wilkins spent (1924-5) two years in the tropics of his native land, collecting specimens for the British Museum in North and Central Australia. His wonderful nerve served him well in dealing with hostile blacks who frightened him more severely than Polar ice appears to have done. This book is a record of daily detail, much of it very interesting.

The description of the great fossil beasts of the Fitzroy River area is particularly fascinating. There is a good deal of close but rather superficial observation of native customs in Groote Eylandt and Arnhem Land. The work of the missionaries is praised. Captain Wilkins relied on collecting an expert paid staff of naturalists in Australia, but was disappointed. Not one qualified naturalist applied.

Captain Wilkins’s contention that “adventures” were always due to bad management is scarcely borne out by his experiences. Wild nature is full of unexpected offences. The photographs in both books are excellent.

“Flying the Arctic”: Captain George H. Wilkins: G. F. Putnam’s, Sons: New York: “Flying the Arctic.” Sir G. Wilkins tells the story of his 2200 mile flight across the Arctic wastes between Point Barrow, Alaska, and Spitsbergen. In itself it was a remarkable feat of navigation and augurs well for the expedition he is now leading in Antarctica with the same capable pilot. From beginning to end it is a story of the triumph over obstacles both physical and financial. In 1926 Sir George set out as leader of the Detroit Arctic Expedition, with three planes, a staff of experts and a blaze of publicity.

The purpose of the expedition was “to explore that area of the polar ice-pack never before seen by man.” The object of the expedition was never realised. Fate was against them.

First a man was accidentally killed, then, one after another, the three planes were crashed. The accidents were due to those errors of personal judgment which are impossible to avoid. Reading between the lines, it is easy to see that there was an undercurrent of dissatisfaction throughout the members of the party.

Returning under a cloud, Sir George lost the sympathy and support of his Detroit supporters, and much bickering was indulged in. Disappointed, but undaunted, he set out to find new backers, and by realizing all his assets and finding new friends in Los Angeles, he became the proud possessor of another plane. April, 1927, saw him and his old pilot, Carl Ben Eielson, again at Point Barrow.

After weeks of waiting for favourable conditions they set out. The record of their wonderful flight over barren icy wastes, with their light plane buffeted by tempestuous weather, their perilous landing on the rock-hound Spitsbergen coasts, their halt in the snow and their arrival at Green Harbor, makes thrilling reading.

While according due honour to the author, it is impossible to praise too highly the skill and judgment of his pilot. He accomplished the seemingly impossible and demonstrated the practicability of aircraft under the worst conditions in the world.

At times they flew in comfort when those on the ground found it impossible to move outdoors. This book adds a new chapter to the history of modern aeronautics. There are many illustrations, but no maps.

20 Hrs. 40 Min. Our Flight in the Friendship, by Amelia Earhart (G. Putnam’s Sons).

In “20 hrs. 40 min.” Miss Earhart, the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, tells the story of the flight of the Friendship in charge of Wilmer Shultz and Slim Jordon. As is inevitable, the worst feature in a flight of this nature is the monotony. Sea, sky and clouds form the never-changing background.

Conversation, smoking and comfort are impossible. There is little to write about and it is obvious that Miss Earhart was faced with this difficulty.

To overcome it she has given us a gay, inconsequential account of her life and flying experiences: she holds a pilot’s certificate and eked out the scarcity of her material with a profusion of photographs and much gossip.


An advertisement from the Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Thursday 29 November 1928, page 38.

29 November 1928 Message from Wilkins

The Vacuum Oil Company has received a wireless message from Sir George Hubert Wilkins, now proceeding with his survey of the Antarctic, from his base at Deception Island.

The message reads: — “Pompey Spirit and Mobilol contributed perfectly to first Antarctic flight in history.” The news is an indication that the aeroplanes are ready for their long flights across the unexplored regions of the south. The Vacuum Oil Company was called upon by the explorer to lay down supplies of fuel and oil for the expedition.


3 December 1928 IN THE ANTARCTIC.

SIR HUBERT WILKINS’S REPORTS. UNFAVOURABLE WEATHER.

LONDON: Friday. —

The Australian explorer, Sir Hubert Wilkins, who is leading an expedition in the Antarctic, yesterday sent the following wireless message from Deception Island: — “We did not have turkey for our celebration. We tried to get seal steaks, but the roughness of the sea prevented them from coming inshore, and we perfvere had to be content with pemimmic. There was a high wind, with low cloud. A heavy snow last night followed by a few hours of sunshine this morning, but the weather continues unfavourable for aviation. The harbour ice is breaking and crowding about the Hektoria, for quarter of a mile, eliminating the possibility of transporting gasoline from the ship to the solid ice by motor boat. Low storms are hanging over Graham Land but there are signs of clear
weather tomorrow. The aeroplanes are standing on wheels on the runway, but before they can be started, they must be fitted with skids and filled with gasoline. A whale catcher is now approaching the harbour for coal. Bad weather prevented her shooting any whales. She may serve to break a passage in the ice for the motorboat. If so and the weather is good, we will fly south tomorrow.”

Sir George Hubert Wilkins, M.C. and Bar, Gold Medallist of the Royal Geographical Society of London, whose thrilling adventures in many lands have made him one of the greatest of Australia’s sons, is well-equipped for the hazardous Antarctic Expedition upon which he is now engaged.

Born in Australia, he served as second-in-command to Stefansson during the second part of his Arctic expedition of 1913-17, and thoroughly mastered Stefansson’s methods.

On his return from this expedition he joined the Australian Imperial Force as photographer and observer with the Air Force, and was awarded the Military Cross and bar.

After the war he joined Sir Ernest Shackleton’s last expedition, serving as naturalist on board the Quest. Afterwards he undertook the leadership of an expedition sent out by the trustees of the British Museum to collect natural histories specimens in the tropical regions of Australia.

In 1926 he organised the Detroit Arctic Expedition, and in 1928 with Carl Eielson as pilot, flew from Point Barrow across the Polar Sea to Spitsbergen, a distance of more than 2,000 miles.

Sir George Hubert Wilkins received the Patron’s medal for 20 years’ work, of which his recent Arctic flight was the culmination, remarked: — “I believe there are now only three knights who won their spurs in polar service.

All are Gold Medallists, all Australians—Sir Edgeworth David, Sir Douglas Mawson, and Sir George Hubert Wilkins. Surely these are the very most intelligent of the British residents in the remote settlements of the Empire with whom our founders in 1830 were so solicitous that we should keep in touch.

In our Patron’s medalist we welcome one of those born explorers who seemed to have looked on life first — "Through magic casements opening on the foam of perilous seas in fairylands forlorn’. But, surely no more forlorn fairytale, no more perilous sea, ever loomed thro’ the lists of poetry than that which Stefansson, his first leader, dares to call the friendly Arctic.

We rejoice to know that he has no intention of resting on his laurels, and we wish him the best possible success in his projected Antarctic enterprise.”

Across the Polar Continent

Sir George Hubert Wilkins, who is at present at Deception Island, proposes to fly across the South Polar continent from Graham Land to the Ross Sea, a distance of more than 2,000 miles across territory that no man has yet seen.

Carl Eielson is with him again as chief pilot, and one of his two Lockheed Vega aeroplanes is the machine in which they successfully flew from Point Barrow to Spitsbergen early this year. Both aeroplanes are to be flown from Deception Inland down the eastern side of Graham

4 December 1928
Wilkins’ Expedition
Series of Mishaps

London, Monday

Sir Hubert Wilkins, in a wireless message from Deception Island, says: — “We spent Friday trying to take off on trial fights, but the treacherous ice shore proved too much for us,” Sir George says.

“Everything looked fine on Saturday, but Deception Island is well named, conditions changing daily.

Our aeroplane, Los Angeles, sustained a bent propeller and a hole in the wing, and its pilot, Lieut. Carl Eielson, suffered a ducking in the icy sea, delaying aerial operations for a week. “We took what we thought was a 50-50 chance, but it turned out to be a 50 to 1 chance against the planes. With only the pilot and a few gallons of petrol, the Los Angeles took the air at 5.30 a.m., intending to land on the ice with wheels, after which it would be equipped with skis.

“The Los Angeles came down beautifully, and tailed several hundred feet. Then the wheels struck a hole in the ice, through which they sank until the wing and fuselage held the plane. The machine slowly nosed over, and Eielson fell through the ice, but clambered out no worse for his wetting.”

Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate (NSW), Tuesday 4 December 1928, page 5.

4 December 1928
Sunken Aeroplane Salvaged.

London, Dec. 3.

A message sent by Sir George Hubert Wilkins from Deception Island states that the aeroplane Los Angeles, which was nearly lost when it sunk through soft ice, has been salvaged on the beach, and is nearly lost when it sunk through soft ice, but clambered out no worse for his wetting.”

Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Tuesday 4 December 1928, page 8.

8 December 1928
The Mysterious South
What Can It Reveal?
Wilkins’ Great Venture

By Captain John K. Davis

“Whom shall we send?”

“In search of this new world, whom shall we find sufficient?”
The Wilkins Chronicle

A selection of Wilkins-related Trove articles, incorporating advertisements and cartoons from the day.

Land — unexplored heavy pack ice which has made it unapproachable in ships. The first and only depot will be established at the most conspicuous point 300 or 400 miles south of Deception Island.

Further ferrying flights will depend on discoveries made and on local conditions. Finally, one machine will be filled with a full load of petrol and Wilkins and Eielson will set out for the Ross Sea. After 24 hours, the second aeroplane will return to Deception Island.

On arrival at the Bay of Whales in the Ross Sea, communication will be effected by wireless with the Neilson Alonso, one of the whaling ships which left Hobart last month with petrol and stores for the explorers.

If Wilkins is successful in crossing the continent, the first news will probably be waved to Australia by the powerful wireless set carried in this vessel.

A glance at the map of the Antarctic regions will show what is being attempted. What will have been accomplished if Wilkins is successful?

A flight of this nature can only be, of course, a reconnaissance, but it is a very important one, as the region flown over is wholly unknown.

Moreover, the land hereabouts has always been unattainable in ships, although Captain Cook in H.M.S. Resolution in 1774 reached 11° S. Bellinghausen, Commander Byrd and the other Americans who are at present on the way south, and also to examine the island on foot before using it as a base.

As Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 15 December 1928, page 16.


17 December 1928
Wilkins Expedition
Weather Causes Delay
Lack of Landing Grounds.

“Although there has been light, hard snow all day, I went up in an aeroplane with Joseph Crossan as pilot, to ascertain whether ice would form on the machine, and also to examine the island for snow-covered landing fields.

The temperature at a height of 1,000ft. was 2deg. below zero, but no ice formed on the machine. We did not discover a suitable field for skis. The next fine day I intend to visit Low Island and Snow Island, 30 or 50 miles distant respectively, to examine the surfaces there.

The outstanding merit of the plan is the contribution to polar geography. We think that nobody is worthier of it not only for his polar flights, but for his several years of pioneering aviation in Alaska and other places. In an interval in the snowstorms Crossan and I flew over Snow Island.

“Conspicuous near its edges, however, were crevasses many hundreds of yards long and wide enough to engulf an aeroplane. We must examine the island on foot before using it as a base”.

As Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 15 December 1928, page 16.


Sir George Hubert Wilkins and Lieut. Eielson propose to fly from Deception Island for 300 miles southward along the coast of Graham Land, where a depot will be established. From this depot Wilkins and Eielson, in one of the aeroplanes, will endeavour to fly across the Antarctic Continent to Deception Island, a distance of over 2,000 miles. Captain Cook, with H.M.S. Resolution, reached 11° E. in the position marked on January 26, 1774, but was unable to get farther south, his way south being barred by an immense field of pack-ice.

What lies beyond?

What does lie south of this impenetrable barrier? Are the lands, if there be any, insular or continental? Is the dominant feature of the Antarctic continent a high range of mountains extending from Cape Adare to Graham Land? Given 24 hours’ clear weather after he leaves his base Wilkins should be able to supply answers to all of these questions and will be able to complete a pioneer survey of one of the largest remaining unknown areas in the world. Detailed work must be done later. The great desideratum at present is to lay down the outline of the south polar continent.

Further ferrying flights will depend on discoveries made and on local conditions. Finally, one machine will be filled with a full load of petrol and Wilkins and Eielson will set out for the Ross Sea. After 24 hours, the second aeroplane will return to Deception Island.

On arrival at the Bay of Whales in the Ross Sea, communication will be effected by wireless with the Neilson Alonso, one of the whaling ships which left Hobart last month with petrol and stores for the explorers.

If Wilkins is successful in crossing the continent, the first news will probably be waved to Australia by the powerful wireless set carried in this vessel.

A glance at the map of the Antarctic regions will show what is being attempted. What will have been accomplished if Wilkins is successful?

A flight of this nature can only be, of course, a reconnaissance, but it is a very important one, as the region flown over is wholly unknown.

Moreover, the land hereabouts has always been unattainable in ships, although Captain Cook in H.M.S. Resolution in 1774 reached 11° S. Bellinghausen, Commander Byrd and the other Americans who are at present on the way south, and also to examine the island on foot before using it as a base.

As Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 15 December 1928, page 16.


17 December 1928
Wilkins Expedition
Weather Causes Delay
Lack of Landing Grounds.

(Copyright by the Australian Press Association.)

London. Dec. 15

Sir George Hubert Wilkins in a message from Deception Island dated to-day, states:

“Conspicuous near its edges, however, were crevasses many hundreds of yards long and wide enough to engulf an aeroplane. We must examine the island on foot before using it as a base”.

As Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 15 December 1928, page 16.


15 December 1928
Wilkins Expedition
Sir George Hubert Wilkins, in a message from Deception Island dated December 9, states:—

“Although there has been light, hard snow all day, I went up in an aeroplane with Joseph Crossan as pilot, to ascertain whether ice would form on the machine, and also to examine the island for snow-covered landing fields.

The temperature at a height of 1,000ft. was 2deg. below zero, but no ice formed on the machine. We did not discover a suitable field for skis. The next fine day I
possible time, with the heaviest practicable load, and make a tour into the Weddell Sea.

Hours of sunshine encouraged us to pour 200 gallons of gasoline into the Los Angeles which is now riding on floats. We also re-stowed our personal belongings aboard the machine, but before the first hour had passed long stratus clouds, resembling bulky streams, streaked from the west across the sky. Storm clouds, wind and rain followed closely. I, with Mr. Crossan as pilot, at the first indication of 12 hours flying weather, will set off towards the Weddell Sea. If the machine will lift the load and carry it there we hope to solve the important geographical question whether Graham Land is part of the Antarctic continent."

Homage to Amundsen

Homage was paid to Amundsen’s memory on the seventeenth anniversary of the discovery of the South Pole. All traffic was stopped for two minutes at Oslo and Copenhagen. The King, the Crown Prince, and members of Amundsen’s family were among the gathering at Oslo. At Copenhagen the gathering was addressed by the Crown Prince, who declared that the northern light was writing Amundsen’s name in flames on the horizon. Amundsen lost his life when endeavouring to find by seaplane, the crew of the airship Argus (Melbourne, Vic.), Monday 17 December 1928, page 7. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/975858

21 December 1928
Unknown Australia
As Seen by Sir G.H. Wilkins
“Herald’s Review”

Captain Sir George Hubert Wilkins has been everywhere and done everything, Adventure is meat and drink to him, and he has been everywhere and done everything.

As Seen by Sir G.H. Wilkins

Sir Hubert mentions a curious example among them of several peculiar customs, meat and roots, a dietary deficient in fat and lacking in iron. They do not kill to obtain human flesh, but eat flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but they will not kill to obtain human flesh, but the Wilkins plane was never to return to the land of his birth. But he is not blind to certain traits and tendencies in which the national character is not seen to the best advantage. He deplored the fact that so many go on the land hoping that in a few years they will have made enough to live on their means.

“The one of the most disappointing things to me as an Australian,” he writes, “was to find that so many able-bodied men ‘retired’ from productive work with only just enough money for a bare existence. They form a leisureed class without high culture and without the desires or inclinations that foster art and learning; a class that, while physically comfortable, have no desire for more than the material and are interested only in the every-day concerns of life.”

Again, to the Northern Territory he found “conspicuously exemplified that which is most typical of the habits of the Australian junior public servants. If one is known, by sight or reputation to be an important personage, then the way is made astonishingly easy and pleasant, but if one is suspected of being a foreigner or even an ordinary Englishman, then the ‘boots’ at the hotel, the Government clerk, or the train conductor will treat one with insulting disrespect. The obtrusive insularity of the cultured but untraveled Englishman is as nothing to the aggressive independence of the ignorant Australian.”

White men, he says, can work in the Territory, but whether they will work is another question. He considers the White Australia to be a wonderful ideal, but doubts whether much progress can be made in the north without the introduction of coloured labour.


24 December 1928

WILKINS’ FLIGHT ACROSS GRAHAM LAND: An artist’s conception of Sir George Wilkins’s plane as it must have appeared on his great 1200 miles flight in Antarctica.
Sir George Hubert Wilkins, the intrepid Australian explorer, has opened a completely new chapter in Polar exploration. A few months ago he flew across the North Pole: and now, according to the interesting cable announcement that we published on Monday, he has flown 1200 miles across the Antarctic wastes; he has discovered six new islands; and he has definitely established the fact that Graham Land is an island, separated by an ice-channel fifty miles wide from the great Antarctic continent, a problem that has baffled explorers and geographers for centuries.

He has proved that even in the Antarctic, admittedly the most inhospitable region in the world, the aeroplane can be harnessed for service and that the timehonoured methods of Polar exploration by snow-shoes have passed. In a few hours Sir George and his trusty companion, Lieutenant Eielson, covered a distance that would have taken weeks of terrible privations by the old methods; and in those few hours he has changed the map of the Antarctic in many important particulars.

Geographers estimate that the Antarctic continent, supposed to be considerably larger than Australia, and the most mountainous area in the world, has a coastline of about 12,000 miles. But no more than 500 miles of that coastline had been seen by man. In one day’s flight Sir George Wilkins has been able to complete more accurate mapping of the Weddell Sea and the Antarctic continent from the South American side than has been achieved by all the previous explorers.

Sir George has substantiated the opinion of previous explorers about the mountainous, jagged, inhospitable nature of the country.

It is entirely different, of course, from the Arctic regions. The area within a radius of more than 1000 miles of the North Pole is a very deep ocean, probably of a depth of two miles or more. That ocean is partly landlocked by Asia on the one side and by Greenland, Baffin Land, and the Hudson Bay Archipelago of islands on the other side.

This has a warming influence on the atmosphere, which is about 20 degrees warmer than the atmosphere at the South Pole, which consists of rugged mountainous land. Near the South Pole the land rises to an altitude of about 11,000 feet, and the atmosphere is several degrees below freezing point. Possibly it is this intense cold that discourages both animal and vegetable life.

Sir George tells us that in the Arctic pack-ice there is no scarcity of game; but the Antarctic, he says, is destitute of animal life, excepting here and there along the coastline.

Sir George has established his main base on Deception Island, which lies between Cape Horn, the extreme southern point of South America, and the most northerly point of Graham Land. That is, roughly, 1400 miles from the South Pole.

Another base will be established on land in the Ross Sea, which is on the New Zealand side of the Pole; and working between those two points Sir George hopes to survey that enormous tract of mountainous land that is vaguely mapped as King Edward VII Land.

In their great flight last week Sir George and Lieutenant Eielson swept for 600 miles over the Weddell Sea and along the ice-bound coast of King Edward VII Land, mapping land that had probably never before been seen by human eyes.

Then they noticed signs of a blizzard, and were forced to turn again for their main base. Though they were flying at a height of 8000 feet, many of the mountains towered above them, and they swept over numerous glaciers, with gaping crevasses, the terror of the old-time plodding explorer.

Despite all that, and the discovery of six new islands, Sir George says, “We have settled the most interesting of our problems, but we returned glumly, depressed, find disappointed because there was not sufficient petrol to take us to Ross Sea.” Sir George is not an impatient man; he is content to wait weeks for a propitious opportunity.

But certainly when he is on the job he likes to complete a lot at once. Above all he has the true geographer’s passion for discovery and accuracy; and although the risks are tremendous, especially from the blizzards that arise so quickly in that region, it is obvious that he is concerned principally in the scientific observations that he is making.

On the New Zealand side of the Pole another intrepid explorer, and a friendly rival of Sir George in both the North and South Pole explorations, has established his main base somewhere in the Ross Sea, close to the main base used by Captain Scott.

He is Commander Byrd, an American aviator and a courageous explorer. He intends to devote his energies and observations to King Edward VII Land and Victoria Land, and the area between his main base and the South Pole. In such a vast area, about which so little is known, there is ample room for the two expeditions.

Commander Byrd, however, has selected the side about which the world has heard most, however little that may he, and it is doubtful if his discoveries will be as dramatic as those of Sir George Wilkins.

Most Polar scientists agree that the most interesting point in dispute is whether the “Andes” of Graham Land form part of the Antarctic continent.

On that side the land approximates to the South American type; on the Ross Sea side it approximates to the Australian type. Where was the break? That was the point in dispute.

Sir George Wilkins has settled that by his discovery that Graham Land is an island, and separated from the main continent. The scientific world will await with interest his later messages.

28 December 1928
Sir Hubert Wilkins

Captain Sir George Hubert Wilkins, M.C. whose messages from the Antarctic flicker daily into print, is an Australian who first made a name for himself as a war photographer with the Imperial Force in France.

A war photographer’s work is what he makes it: his orders are his own, and such a work is not easy when nerves are exposed to heavy bombardment. There is all the difference in the quality of courage that is brave under orders, and the kind of courage that is self-directing.

An Australian general declared Wilkins to be the bravest man he had ever known. Owing to this intrepid photographer, Australia has a pictorial record of the war that must be unique. Wilkins’s camera did not lie because he forced it to speak the truth in the face of the stark realities of war.

To the understanding observer, the quality of Wilkins’s pictures of battle realities tells the plain and impressive truth of the courage of the man who made a brilliant use of the complicated technique of the expert photographer in photographing shell bursts which threatened himself and his instruments with flying slivers of red-hot steel. A man who sees and thinks with an imagination so sharp does not belong to the fearless type. Fearlessness is the compensation for defective intelligence.

Captain Wilkins tells of a forced landing in the Arctic darkness in terms of nervous suffering: — “For twenty minutes we floated down through utter darkness: a grey forbidding darkness. Not black like a winter’s, night, but a nerve-wracking, sense-dulling density. Beneath us lay what? Rough ice we knew and perhaps a lane of open water. Injury, minor, or fatal, seemed imminent but we were resigned helpless in the hands of our Maker. His to...
The long accounts that he writes of the two “takes off”, one at the beginning, the other within sight of the goal, are revelations of that kind of nerve that can think in accurate detail under the stress of imminent peril. He prefaces that book with St. Paul’s sentence. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

Having made all plans, defined his objective and acquired the necessary skill, Captain Wilkins casts himself into the void on the wings of faith, and connects plan and achievement with the strong and slender thread of resolution.

The long message published last Monday is an account of his typical kind of triumph. A “take-off” on wheels began the flight of twelve hundred males, skirting carefully along the edges of storms which might have wrecked the enterprise, while the careful eyes noted the bearings of shores and mountains never before seen by human eyes. Graham Land came into geography as an island.

Other parts of what was thought to be a solid continent broke up into island groups. Geological and meteorological observations were meticulously recorded. Such men require the excuse of utility for their discoveries.

But their utilities are far in advance of what their fellows desire at the time to use. Raleigh dreamed of a colonial empire and strove unsuccessfully to found one while those who financed him thought only of gold.

Captain Wilkins dreams of meteorological stations in the Antarctic which will make possible long distance weather forecasting. That aim is practical enough when it is realised it will mean millions of pounds in money and security to farmers and pastoralists. But as an objective it is far in advance of present weather knowledge.

Under present conditions, Antarctic meteorological stations would have only an immediate research value. They could not yet forecast crop prospects. But Sir Hubert Wilkins sees that one day they will. No government is likely to follow up his findings at once, and spend the money necessary to establish these stations. But some day they will be established.

Meantime the questing spirit, sustained by its own reasoning, blazes its own trail of knowledge through the unknown, steering by “the light that never was on sea or land.”

West Australian (Perth, WA), Friday 28 December 1928, page 8.


29 December 1928
SIR HUBERT WILKINS.
PORTRAIT IN OILS BY MR. PHILIP CONNARD, R.A.

Purchased by the Trustees of the National Art Gallery.
Sydney Morning Herald (NSW), Saturday 29 December 1928, page 16.


The following wireless message from Deception Island was received on December 20 from Sir George Hubert Wilkins, the explorer, who is leading an expedition to the Antarctic to make meteorological observations: — “Graham Land is separated from the great Polar continent by an ice-filled channel. A question that has puzzled geographers for ages was solved today by a flight in the Lockheed monoplane San Francisco beyond the volcanic mountain of Graham Land, enabling us to see 650 miles south over the Antarctic continent.

It was proved conclusively that the range does not extend uninterrupted. It had previously been the belief of science that the mountains of Graham Land extended towards the Pole, and perhaps beyond.
A fortunate set of circumstances enabled us today to disprove that, and also gain an important sight of the geographical formation of the little-known land of ice. Had the flight been made from Ross Barrier it would have enabled us to see the vicinity of the Pole, but we are very happy over the discovery that the day has brought”.

Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 29 December 1928, page 11.