

Roelof Jan Domenie

Dutch banker and adventurer

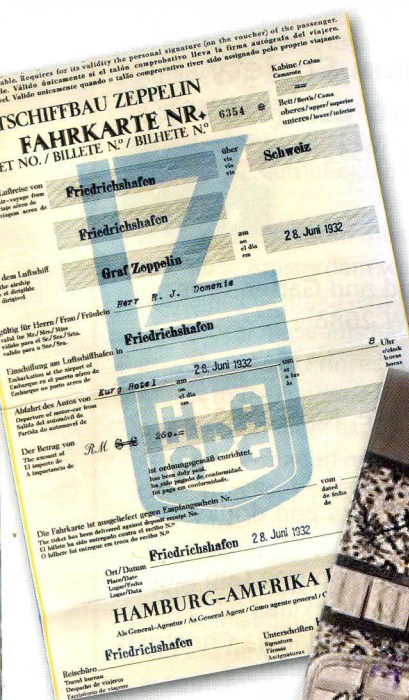


When Roelof Domenie stepped on board the KLM *Uiver* at Mildenhall near London on 20 October 1934 and took off for Melbourne at 6:35 am, he completed a rare quadruple—he had flown on all four major forms of air transport, zeppelins, flying boats, wood and fabric planes and all-metal planes.

On 28 June 1932, Roelof and his wife Jakomina took a flight over the Swiss Alps in the *Graf Zeppelin*, the 250th flight of the *Graf Zeppelin*, departing Friedrichshafen at 8:27 am and arriving back at Friedrichshafen at 4:16 pm. Departing 29 June 1934, Roelof flew in the same machine on the inaugural zeppelin flight from Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires. This was a demonstration flight, so Roelof was probably an invited guest on a return flight.

On interview in Holland early in October 1934, Roelof Domenie said that he frequently flew from Rio de Janeiro with Condor and Pan Air, and commented that they flew flying boats. One of Roelof's sons recalls his father getting down on to a flying boat prior to his father going to Holland on this occasion.

words Noel Jackling





Then on 19 October 1934, Roelof flew on the wood and fabric KLM Fokker Trimotor F.XVIII *Snip* from Rotterdam to Mildenhall and on the following morning, boarded the all-metal KLM Douglas DC-2 *Uiver* for its flight half way around the world to Melbourne.

So, Domenie flew in zeppelins, followed by flying boat, followed by wood and fabric plane, followed by all-metal plane. To these journeys we can add more. On 29 October 1936, just six months before its final disastrous flight, Roelof flew on the *Hindenburg* from Rio de Janeiro to Frankfurt via Recife (Brazil), Cape Verde Islands, Morocco, Gibraltar, Spain, France and Switzerland, arriving in Frankfurt late on 2 November 1936. The journey from Recife onwards was on the *Hindenburg*, but the journey from Rio to Recife was either on the *Hindenburg* or on a connecting Condor flight from Rio to Recife that would have given Roelof an extra day's work in Rio. It is most likely that Roelof's return flight to Rio was on the *Graf Zeppelin*, departing Frankfurt on 11 November 1936.

Given this extraordinary list of flights at the dawn of commercial passenger air services, one can ponder on how Roelof felt about air travel. Some of his motivation to fly is explained by a work-related need to cut the time of travel taken by sea travel from Rio de Janeiro to

Lisbon, or a strong desire to see the Dutch West Indies in circumstances where the bank for which he worked sent him west. When on the *Graf Zeppelin* flight from Rio to Buenos Aires, he wrote an illuminating note that details his attitude.

On this trip we are helping the world to take one step forward. We are showing the people of the solid earth that it is necessary to support present technology to go ahead.



Roelof Domenie was born in Middelburg in 1898. He became an accountant and, at the age of 19, joined the *Hollandsche Bank voor Zuid Amerika* in Amsterdam. He was thrust into establishing financial controls and reporting systems in the Milan, Hamburg and Barcelona branches of the bank. And soon after his marriage to Jakomina van Hoeflaken in 1922, he was given the major job of trouble-shooting the bank's operations in Rio de Janeiro, Santos and São Paulo. He found them to be in a parlous state, and a planned six months' stay was extended indefinitely and proved to be permanent, at least until September 1944. He was based in Rio de Janeiro and his two sons Rudy and Johan were born there. Fortunately, when the Germans invaded Holland on 10 May 1940, the family was in Rio. The boys were immediately shifted from the *Deutsche Rio Schule* to the American School in Rio, and Rudy and Johan began to add English to their existing languages of Dutch, German and Portuguese.

In consultation with the Dutch government in exile, Roelof immediately transferred the bank's assets to a new banking entity to avoid any possibility of the assets falling into German hands. At a time when USA was not at war, he travelled to New York and all the South American branches to re-establish credit lines for the bank. He became Supervising Manager of the Western Hemisphere of the bank, with branches in Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and the Dutch West Indies. Roelof became heavily involved in the war effort through the Fellowship of the Bellows, loosely organised international groups formed during World War II to collect funds for the purchase of aircraft for the Royal Air Force. Roelof's group raised funds to buy 23 Spitfires, Hurricanes and Typhoons, at a cost of about £5000 each.

In September 1944, the Domenie family moved to New York, where Roelof established a small office in anticipation of an early liberation of Holland following the rapid advancement of Allied troops towards the Dutch border after the Normandy landing. But the full liberation of the whole of Holland was delayed until the surrender of German forces in the Netherlands on 4 May 1945 (hostilities ceased early on 5 May), and it was not until then that Roelof could go to Amsterdam to report on the status of the branches overseas, which had had no contact with the Head Office since May 1940. Senior management was surprised that not only had the branches survived, but that other offices had been opened and flourished.

On 26 August 1959, Roelof Domenie became an Officer of the Order of Oranje Nassau in recognition of his



...passenger at
...A special ticket is valid only for the date
...special agreement (Article 2 par. 4 sub-par. 1).
...Return-tickets are valid for the period specified
...Article 2 par. 5).
...If there is any question of an aircraft being
...overloaded the parties authorised by the carrier to
...supervise the loading of aircraft shall decide which
...persons or articles shall be carried (Article 13 par. 3).
...Baggage will be carried when possible in the same
...aircraft as the passenger, if the load of the aircraft
...permits, without the carrier being under any obligation
...in this respect (Article 8 par. 4).
...IV. The regulations concerning persons who and
...objects which are excluded from flights, or who are
...accepted conditionally (Articles 5 & 8), and con-
...cerning articles which passengers are forbidden to
...take with them into an aircraft (Article 6) should
...be consulted especially. The passenger is entirely
...responsible for the supervision of articles which he
...takes charge of himself. The carrier accepts no
...responsibility for the supervision of such articles even
...if his employees assist in loading, unloading or
...transporting them (Article 8 par. 5).
...V. Passengers must observe the instructions of the
...officials of the carrier concerning all matters con-
...nected with the airservice (Article 7 par. 1, sub-
...par. 1). Passengers must only enter or leave air-
...craft at the request of such officials. Passengers are
...forbidden to open exterior doors during flight; when
...the aircraft is on the ground passengers are per-
...mitted to open these doors in case of danger. It
...is also forbidden to throw articles from aircraft
...during flight (Article 7 par. 2 sub-par. 2). Any person con-
...travening these regulations is responsible for all

K.L.M. ROYAL DUTCH AIR LINES

PHN 002257/8

Naam v. d. Passagier **MR. DOMENIE** Passageprijs/Fare

Passenger's Name **MR. DOMENIE**

Van/From **LONDON** (Plaats van oorsprong)

Naar/To **MELBOURNE** (Plaats van bestemming)

Overeenkomstig dienstregeling **K.L.M.**

Overeenkomstig dienstregeling **K.L.M.**

Naam en adres van de afzender **ROYAL DUTCH AIR LINES, THE HAGUE, HOLLAND**

Name and address of Carrier or Carriers **K.L.M. Maatschappij-Company**

Voor Vervoerwaarden z.o.z. - For Conditions of Carriage: See

Geldig voor **20/10/34** (Datum)

Valid for **20/10/34** (Date)

Dienst **K.L.M.** (Dienst)

Service **AMSTERDAM** (Service)

Plaats van afgifte **THE HAGUE** (Plaats van afgifte)

Place of issue **THE HAGUE** (Place of issue)

Datum van afgifte **12/10/34** (Datum van afgifte)

Date of issue **12/10/34** (Date of issue)

Voor luchthaven van vertrek **K.L.M.**

For Airport of departure **K.L.M.**

BILLET ALLEZ RETOUR

ALLER

ROF WEG 9 - DEN HAAG

symbolising Australia.


Roelof Domenie never returned to Australia, but in June 2011, over seventy-six years after the flight of the *Uiver* to Albury, his son Johan Domenie, accompanied by his son Douglas, visited Albury from Florida, USA. Johan Domenie paid his personal homage to the Mayor of Albury, Alice Glachan, on behalf of the Domenie family, and presented his father's memorabilia to her for the Albury

services to the Dutch government in exile during the war.

Roelof continued supervising the Latin American branches until 1954, when he decided to stop the many long and difficult trips to South America, and opted to remain in New York as a Representative. He retired in 1963 and he and Jakomina then travelled several times to Europe, the Middle East and Brazil. He died in Tarrytown, New York, in 1970. Roelof Jan Domenie had led a full and adventurous life.

Some would see the flight of the *Uiver* from London to Melbourne in the MacRobertson International Air Race as the pinnacle of Dutch aviation achievements in the golden years of aviation. That flight was the first commercial passenger flight in an all-metal plane from Europe to Australia and was the precursor to international passenger airline traffic as we know it today, despite an emergency landing on the racecourse at Albury, New South Wales. With fellow passengers Thea Rasche and Piet Gilissen and crew members Koene Parmentier, Jan Moll, Cornelis van Brugge and Bouwe Prins, Roelof Domenie was on that history-making flight.

In August 1935, the Mayor of Albury, Alfred Waugh, went to Holland to thank the Dutch people for their generosity in the presentations they had made to Albury people following their timely actions when the *Uiver*, its crew and passengers were in dire need. He also expressed commiserations at the loss of lives in the crash of the *Uiver* in the Syrian Desert in Iraq on 20 December 1934. Mayor Waugh paid homage to the Mayor of Amsterdam, Dr W. de Vlucht and presented his Amsterdam counterpart with a bronze statuette, designed in Melbourne, of a Dutch lion and draped, protective female figure

Library Museum. It was a generous gift to the community that had saved his father's life. 

Acknowledgements: To Dan Grossman of USA and Dieter Leder of Germany for valuable information concerning the zeppelin and flying boat flights of Roelof Domenie, and to Robert Bom of Rockhampton for his helpful comments and translation.

photos starting page 46: Roelof Jan Domenie (1898–1970), *Uiver* passenger in Melbourne, wearing his gold medal, presented to him by Sir Macpherson Robertson. Thirty-one gold medals were struck. One went to each crew member or passenger who completed the MacRobertson International Air Race and one medal was incorporated into the gold trophy for the race winner. The *Uiver* was the second plane to arrive in the race and took the handicap prize; Graf Zeppelin Ticket. On 28 June 1932, Roelof and Jakomina Domenie went for a joy flight to Switzerland. This is Roelof's ticket.; postcard of sleeping quarters in the Graf Zeppelin—a picture. On the flight from Rio to Buenos Aires, Domenie slept in a top bunk; The Graf Zeppelin over Rio de Janeiro; page 47: The wine list for diners on the Hindenburg. The most expensive white wine is described as a 1931 Wehlener Lay Auslese Mosel at 6.50 Reichsmark; The Hindenburg dining room—a picture postcard; Domenie's MacRobertson gold medal showing the race route. On the head side is the head of race sponsor, Sir Macpherson Robertson; this page: Domenie KLM ticket London to Melbourne: At 6:35 am on the morning of 20 October 1934, in Mildenhall, the Dutch *Uiver* is flagged off at the start of the MacRobertson International Air Race by the Union Jack, representing the British Empire.