



UIVER MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

THE LONDON-MELBOURNE RACE

An event of worldwide significance

Mildenhall, October 20, 1934.

This is the day on which the international air race from Europe to Australia began. The official registration records listed 64 participants. Because of strict admission requirements for the race, there were eventually only 20 ready for departure to Melbourne at Mildenhall, a military aerodrome outside London. The organizers wanted to exclude adventurers from the race to limit all unnecessary risks.

Australian Sweets Manufacturer

MacPherson Robertson, a chocolate manufacturer from Melbourne, organized the race on the occasion of the centenary of Victoria State. His intention, moreover, was to prove that a scheduled air service between Europe and Australia was possible. The competition consisted of a handicap section, whereby it was possible to make 23 intermediate stops, and a speed section for which only 5 intermediate stops were allowed.

MacPherson Robertson put up £15,000 in prizes.

The participants

Most were interested in speed. Aircraft were designed especially for the race. The De Havilland Comet was one of these extremely rapid aircraft. Three Comets took part in the race from England.

Pilots included Mr. and Mrs. Mollison, Scott with his partner Campbell Black and Owen Cathcart-Jones. The Americans, the French and Australians had also all entered special competition aircraft.

From the Netherlands, two airplanes took part: the rapid Panderjager, piloted by Geysendorffer and Asjes. And KLM took part. President Plesman especially wanted to emphasize the element of reliability of his airline by taking part in the race. Speed came second. His entry was the Douglas DC-2, a brandnew type from the American Douglas Factories.

This aircraft was piloted by Koene-Dirk Parmentier.

Special aircraft

The Douglas DC-2 PH-AJU was called "Uiver". Uiver is an old Dutch word for stork. A bird name, just like all KLM aircraft bore on the route to the East Indies.

For its time, the DC-2 was a very special aircraft. It was the first all-metal aircraft, equipped with two Wright Cyclone engines and a retractable landing gear. For the passengers, this aircraft offered unexcelled comfort, including adjustable seats, reading lamps, a rack for hand luggage, a toilet and walls insulated against noise.

The airplane could accommodate 6 to 14 passengers and 4 crew members.

The cruising speed was some 270 kilometers per hour.

The race

On Saturday morning at 6.34 hours the Uiver took off with Captain Parmentier, Co-pilot Moll, Mechanic Prins and Wireless Operator Van Brugge. There were also 3 passengers on board, Mrs. Thea Rasche and Messrs. Domenie and Gillisen. As if that were not enough, 256,000 letters to Melbourne also went along. The Panderjager took off somewhat later.

How would it all end? All of the Netherlands was caught up by the spirit of the race and followed it closely by radio and newspapers. Special news bulletins were distributed in front of KLM's office at Leidseplein in Amsterdam. Everyone had the utmost confidence in these proficient KLMers.

The Mollisons from England did extremely well with their rapid Comet. They arrived first in Baghdad. Scott and Campbell Black followed them closely, landing there after some 14 hours of flight.

Although the Comets were extremely rapid aircraft, they were uncomfortable and made considerable noise. While the English had arrived after half a day of flying, already tired, somewhat deaf and hungry, the Uiver crew arrived three hours later as fresh as a daisy, as the third in Baghdad. They had made intermediate stops in Rome, Athens and Aleppo. A few hours later, the Panderjager also landed in Baghdad.

Batavia

After a total of 52 hours of flying, the Uiver landed in Batavia. The Netherlands rejoiced: this was an enormous achievement when considering that the Fokker F-XVIII "Pelikaan" had still needed more than 100 hours to fly to the East Indies just one year before.

Captain Parmentier had still only one opponent in front of him. It was the Comet of Scott and Campbell Black, who, after landings in Allahabad and Singapore, was

on its way to Port Darwin. They still had a 8 hour headstart on the Uiver. The Mollisons already had to give up the battle in Allahabad because of engine problems. Geysendorffer and Asjes also stayed behind there with their Panderjager. The aircraft had burst into flames after colliding with a "lost" tractor on the runway. Fortunately, the pilots were saved.

The loss of the Panderjager hit the homefront hard. Just on more Dutch aircraft in the battle. Would the Uiver have a chance of winning the race to Melbourne?

Engine problems

On Sunday night, word arrived that Scott and Campbell Black had arrived in Port Darwin and were having engine problems. These men had already proven that they were courageous. They had flown the entire night with a faulty engine over the Timor Sea, also called the "shark sea". They had to keep on going and, totally exhausted, they just did make it to the airport of Port Darwin.

It seemed as if the Dutch would come in first in Melbourne after all. Yet, Scott was successful in starting his Comet again and on Monday evening, a cry resounded over the world: Scott and Campbell Black had landed in Melbourne after 63 hours and 23 minutes. They had won the speed race.

Where was the Uiver?

Tuesday was a day of anxiety of the Netherlands. The Uiver, which had been flying with clockwork regularity and had always reported on time, was now silent. Where was the aircraft?

Thousands of people waited for news in front of KLM's office at Leidseplein in Amsterdam. Because of the excited pushing of the crowd, one of the windows of the office even broke.

Then, at 15.20 hours Amsterdam time, the message came: The Uiver has made an emergency landing at the racetrack of Albury. Two hundred fifty kilometers from its goal!

What had happened?

Albury illuminated

Because of lightning and storm, the Uiver had lost radio contact with the ground. Parmentier felt flying on to Melbourne would be irresponsible for safety reasons. Because of ice formation on the wings, the Uiver could not fly high enough. It was decided to interrupt the race temporarily and to land. Parmentier figured that the Uiver had to be above Albury. When they flew lower, they suddenly saw a city light up. Someone was at the main switch of the City lighting and was signaling A-L-B-U-R-Y in morse code. In addition, the city's radio had called out all car owners to light the race track with their headlights, as an alternative to a runway.

The Uiver was able to land safely. The bad weather, however, had made the race-track muddy and the Uiver sank into the mud up to its axles. The following day, the aircraft was pulled out again by people of Albury with ropes. Holland was very grateful to Albury!

The Uiver took off again, leaving behind two crew members, passengers and the mail. After one hour, they reached the finish line: Melbourne. The PH-AJU Uiver had won the handicap race and came in second in the speed race!

The 19-year old Australian Melrose came in third with his remarkably small Moth, an aircraft which he had received from his mother. Without adversity worth mentioning, he had made a very exceptional accomplishment for his age and time.

KLM, reliability through quality

Albert Plesman had achieved what he wanted! The crew and the aircraft had both given top performances. In 3 days, 18 hours and 17 minutes, a distance of 19.877 km had been flown. 18 intermediate stops had been made, so that the crew stayed in the best of spirits. Quality and safety were prime factors. Plesman showed the world that KLM was a reliable airline, with aircraft capable of bridging large distances quickly, comfortably and on schedule.

50 years later, KLM -- the oldest airline still operating under its own name -- is still doing so. A Boeing 747 now flies with 390 passengers and 33,000 kg of cargo, only somewhat faster, from Amsterdam to Melbourne. Traveling time is now 22 hours and 25 minutes, with two intermediate stops.

The thing which used to be a celebrated exception, is nowadays daily work. Now, the more than 18,000 people at KLM see to it, with the assistance of 65 modern aircraft, that 188 cities in 85 countries have a regular air link with its home-base, Schiphol.

Every year, five million passengers make use of KLM's services. This means that every four minutes, both day and night, a KLM aircraft is landing or taking off somewhere in the world.

Amstelveen, October 25, 1983

AMS/DR/LF/ans