1926

2 January 1926

TWO POLAR FLIGHTS

Captain Wilkins’s Plans

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 slated 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.

ORIGIN OF OUR WEATHER

It should be clearly understood, however, that Captain Wilkins has no intention of flying across or anywhere near the South Pole. What he does propose is to fly along the edge of the Antarctic continent from the Ross Sea to Graham Land, situated south of South America, where he hopes to be picked up by whalers which are engaged there at that season of the year.

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, Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 2 January 1926, page 5. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/24387966

4 January 1926

Polar Flight

Captain Wilkins Lionised

Australian Press Association.

NEW YORK. January 2.
Australian Press Association.

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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. L. 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.

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. 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. 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.

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.

Many people were asking, said Captain Amundsen, "What was the result of the expedition?" His reply, briefly, was, "Two hundred thousand square kilometres of new territory."

Alluding to the future, Captain Amundsen expressed his conviction that at the present time aeroplanes could not be used for Polar work. Aeroplanes must always be prepared for landing, and landing upon Polar ice was not practicable. He believed, however, that in a few years aeroplanes would be able successfully to undertake the task.

A member of the audience was Captain G. H. Wilkins, who has made arrangements with Captain Amundsen to purchase the aeroplane used in the Arctic trip for exploration work in the Antarctic next year.

Captain Amundsen, who lectured in Edinburgh on his Polar flight before an audience of 3000, was presented by Lord Salvesen, President of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, with the Livingstone gold medal, the highest award of the society, in recognition of the explorer’s work on behalf of science. Captain Amundsen had a great reception. "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. 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.

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 he will 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.

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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. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/181447102

19 January 1926
Captain Wilkins’ Plane.
DAMAGED BY FIRE AT DETROIT.
(Australian Cable Service).
DETOIT, 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.

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 Vardoe, via Oslo and Sweden.
There will be 16 or 17 persons aboard, including, besides Captain Roald Amundsen, Mr. Lincoln Ellsworth, Lieutenant Risser-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.

21 January 1926
SNOW-MOTORS FAIL.
WON’T STEER ON ICE.
WORRY FOR WILKINS.
(San 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.

22 January 1926
AIRPLANE DESTROYED BY FIRE
DETOIT, 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. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/177835749

23 January 1926
POLAR AIRPLANE 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.

Mr. Lincoln Ellsworth from the (West Australian (Perth, WA), Thursday 15 April 1926, page 9).

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

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 Nenana, from which supplies will be transported to Point Barrow. The party is confident that with sledges and snow motors they will make the journey.

30 January 1926.
The news of the week.
Wilkins to fly to the 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.”

Captain Wilkins.
“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
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the Bar of the Wilkins’ Article)

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 Spitzbergen. The distance is about 2000 miles. Our Fokker planes will travel 2500 miles without refuelling.

If we strike head winds and run out of fuel we shall land on the ice and get to Spitzbergen 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’ 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 from the air in the near future, the unknown coastline of the great continent surrounding the South Pole.


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 he continued on Saturday.

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 were ready to sail from Seattle yesterday for Alaska, where they will begin their aerial search for the supposed Arctic continent. If land is found, Captain Wilkins says the United States will have first chance to claim it.

The advance party, with the snow motors hauling petrol and other supplies, is on its way from Nenana to Point Barrow, the expedition’s real starting point. (“Exclusive to The Sun by Special Arrangement.”)

SEATTLE, February 12.

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.”

(Sun (Sydney, NSW), Sunday 14 February 1926, page 1.). https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/24067472

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.
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the Day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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

15 February 1926

Race for North Pole.

CONTEST BETWEEN CAPTAIN WILKINS AND AMUNDSEN
(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 labour his aeroplane. Captain Amundsen hopes to outmanoeuvre his rival’s start by an all-air route, and reach Spitsbergen by the time Captains Wilkins is ready to leave Alaska.

Captain Wilkins’ 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, Alaska. 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. Heating 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 magnets.

Captain Wilkins and his party must be content for warmth with render 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.

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’ 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.

Detroict, 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, Major 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.

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,

5
and the flight of the King eiders, the Robs gulls, and the Hutchins gesees!

“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 rakiishly. 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.

17 February 1926

POLAR FLIGHT.

Supply Party in Difficulties.

SLEDS’ STALL IN SNOW.

(AUSTRA LIAN CABLE SERVICE): Vancouver, Tuesday.

A message from Nenana, Alaska, states that the supply party of Captain G. H. Wilkins’ 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 recoup for an order to prevent outsiders from taking moving pictures.

Daily Standard (Brisbane, Qld), Wednesday 17 February 1926, page 5.

The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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.

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.

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 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.

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.

19 February 1926

LURE OF ADVENTURE

Wilkins’s Stirring Career

ARCTIC AND ANTARCTIC EXPLOITS

Accomplished Airman and Explorer

(Copyright—Exclusive to The Daily Mail)

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

How many of those who met Captain Wilkins when he was in Brisbane recently would recognize him in his polar garb.

Daily Mail (Brisbane, Qld), Friday 19 February 1926, page 8.

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 Australian 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 the nations.

26 February 1926
AIRSHIP AND PLANES TO RACE ACROSS POLAR WASTES
Captain Wilkins Readies Fairbanks

AMUNDSEN STARTS FROM SPITSBERGEN 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. (Herald Special Representative)

Fairbanks (Alaska) Feb. 25 —

Capt. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, arrived at Fairbanks today, after a seven hours' trip in the guard’s van of the freight train which brought his aeroplane from Seward. 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.

28 February 1926
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 Centro Celle, Italy, under the direction of Colonel Nobile, chief of the Italian Air Service. The crew of the Amundsen dirigible will consist of 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 navigator. He was commander of seaplane N24 in the last Amundsen expedition.
COLONEL NOBILE, pilot.
LIEUT. RISER LARSEN, pilot.

He was pilot of the seaplane N25, on the former Amundsen expedition.

NAVAL LIEUT. HORGAN, steersman. He is a Norwegian.
NAVAL LIEUT OMBAHL, steersman. He also is a Norwegian, and was a member of the former Amundsen expedition.

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

Two enginemen. Two riggers. Two radio operators. One photographer. One meteorologist.

Mr Ramm is going to Centocelle 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 sledges, skis, sleeping bags, and provisions for two months. Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Friday 26 February 1926, page 5. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/244059443

6 March 1926
WHERE CAPTAIN WILKINS WILL FLY

The Wilkins’ Chronicle
(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

8 March 1926
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, 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-over. 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


The interpid 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.”

Photograph showing the three-engine equipment of the type of Fokker aeroplane which will be used in the flight. (Advertiser (Adelaide, SA), Thursday 4 March 1926, page 16.)

Photograph showing the three-engine equipment of the type of Fokker aeroplane which will be used in the flight. (Advertiser (Adelaide, SA), Thursday 4 March 1926, page 16.)

Photograph showing the three-engine equipment of the type of Fokker aeroplane which will be used in the flight. (Advertiser (Adelaide, SA), Thursday 4 March 1926, page 16.)
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 “nigisk.” “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 steamer 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 because it solves some of the amateur caster’s problems automatically. The reel, lines and baits will be carried on Captain Wilkins’s person in case he finds it necessary to walk back to his base. The rod will be carried in a standard aluminium rod case. It is a short rod, but the case chosen would cover the longest fly rod made. The butt end of the case has been loaded with a wooden plug.

The plug carries a steel shaft. As a result, Captain Wilkins has a fish rod inside a steel shod ice staff. The point of the ice shaft has been machined to carry a walrus harpoon, so that if the Detroit Arctic expedition reaches the walrus country the case of the seal retrieving 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.

Advertiser (Adelaide, SA), Monday 8 March 1926, page 12

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 freezeable 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.

Furs for Engines

Captain Wilkins feared that the forward sides of the cylinders would chill so much more rapidly than the after sides, that the pistons would soon score the cylinder walls. Consequently strenuous efforts are being 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.

The oil tanks on both planes have been blanket ed 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 for each engine, so that when the planes are on the ground they may be kept warm with the heat from flameless lamps.

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.

WILKINS’S PLANE CRASHES.
Undercarriage Wrenched Off.
EXPLORERS UNINJURED.

(Adelaide, SA), Monday 15 March 1926, page 11

20 March 1926

The Fokker machine which fell 100 feet at Fairbanks, Alaska, with Captain Wilkins in the cockpit.

Furs for Engines

Captain Wilkins feared that the forward sides of the cylinders would chill so much more rapidly than the after sides, that the pistons would soon score the cylinder walls.

Consequently strenuous efforts are being made to build aluminium shrouds for each 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. Nelson was piloting the machine. Both escaped injury. In a test flight lasting half an hour the aeroplane attained a speed of 130 miles an hour. The machine was landing when the accident occurred. The
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the bar of the Wilkins’ Article)

condition of the ground prevented a test flight of the three-engine aeroplane.

Captain Wilkins and another member of his party, each astride a snow plough, spent Wednesday and Thursday clearing the landing field to enable the aeroplanes to be brought out of the hangars for testing. Several days more will be occupied in getting the mechanism into shape for the flight to Point Barrow, the starting point of the flight to Spitsbergen.


22 March 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS’S MISHERS

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. Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate (NSW), Monday 22 March 1926, page 5. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/137516542

26 March 1926
TRAIL-BLAZER. CAPTAIN WILKINS’S PILOT KNOWS ICE LAND CHALLENGE TO ‘MALAMUTES’.

(Copyright 1926 by Sydney Sun for Australia, and elsewhere by North American Newspaper Alliance.)

NEW YORK, February 24.

Carl B. Eielson, telegrapher 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 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. Nowhere is there a pilot better fitted 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 tramping, 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 places through which Eielson intended to carry the mail. But there were rivers which offered ice-ways, and valleys which offered frozen plains. 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 leave 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 flyers, passed 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.

It was he who designed the runners used on the Selfridge 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 displacement of the dog team mail carriers, and the insinuation 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.

Sun (Sydney, NSW), Friday 26 March 1926, page 8.


6 April 1926
WHERE IS CAPTAIN WILKINS?
Absence of News Causing Anxiety to Polar Expedition.
GRAVE PLIGHT OF OVERLAND PARTY.

Anxiety is felt regarding Captain G. H. Wilkins, leader of the expedition which is to attempt to fly across the North Pole from Alaska to Spitzbergen. It is feared that he has met with serious trouble.

Last week, with Carl Eielson, chief pilot of the expedition, he flew to Point Barrow from Fairbanks in the single-engine monoplane Alaskan. Since a wireless message was received on Friday no word has come from him. He was expected back at Fairbanks on Sunday. The dog sled supply train, which has been held up by deep snow, is also in serious danger, and a radio message states that, failing an immediate rescue, it will be necessary to shoot the dogs.

SUPPLY TRAIN'S PLIGHT

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 chance of moving 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 Detroiter 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 Yukon sled 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 Detroiter 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 Detroiter 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 sailly 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.
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 also 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.

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 Antarctic Expedition which went to Graham Land in 1921.

Since then he has explored the little-known parts of Australia on behalf of the British Museum of Natural History. He is an experienced and qualified airman. He flew, fifteen years ago, the first monoplane with a hundred horse-power engine. He commanded a squadron of six planes of the Australian Army during the Great War, and he was in charge of aerial photography for the Australian forces. His attempted a flight from London to Australia, which ended accidentally in the Mediterranean, was a daring but unlucky venture.

Sir John Monash, the Australian Commander-in-Chief, said of him. “If I had to select the bravest, most soberly sensible man of my entire force I would name Wilkins.” It will be seen that Captain Wilkins yields nothing in strength of body and character to his famous competitor. Moreover, he has peculiar experience of the Polar Regions of which even Amundsen, it is said, cannot boast, despite his many adventures.

“Flying Light”

The British explorer has learnt one of the greatest lessons an Arctic explorer has to learn—how to live off the country. It was Stefansson’s belief that by living on game, etc., which can be secured from place to place in the Arctic, it was possible to make one’s way over regions not accessible by ship or means of docks. That belief he put into practice during five years in the Arctic, and Wilkins spent those years with him. He will go into the white desert of the North with only two weeks’ food: he is “flying light” to prove the Stefansson theory.

Amundsen, as he did last year, will have ample provisions with him, but this impeded progress. Captain Wilkins is prepared to come down anywhere and catch his food. The successful land ice journeys Amundsen has made have no parallel in the Northern Polar regions, where the sea ice is comparatively strange to the Norwegians. “I think Captain Wilkins has at least three chances out of four of success,” says Vilhjalmur Stefansson.

The man who will pilot the aeroplane, which is the second largest monoplane ever assembled in America, has flown
three times many miles in Arctic regions as any airman alive.

He is Carl Nielson, a university man of the campaigning type, who, after meritorious war service, turned commercial pilot and has specialised in flights to Alaska and the North. He has sixty thousand miles to his credit in these districts alone, and night landings in snow and keen weather have no terrors for him.

The Loneliest Spot
As for the objects of the expedition, there are several regions in the Arctic, apart from the Pole itself, awaiting discovery. There are, for example, what are termed the “Cold Pole” — the coldest spot on earth — and the “Wind Pole”. Captain 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.

(AUSTRALIAN 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.

STEFANSSON'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.

V. STEFANSSON.

“I am not surprised that he saw no trace of land. Sixty-five miles north of Barrow the ocean is 5000 to 6000 feet deep. This we knew in 1913 from soundings taken on the Karluk.”

DOGS IN BAD SHAPE.

Vancouver, Wednesday.

With Captain Wilkins safely returned interest swung today to the predicament of the overland party found itself in. Rossmann and Waskey reported by radio early this morning that they are feeling well, and getting plenty of birds to eat, but the dogs are in a pitiful shape. These three men can easily get away safely, they declare, if they kill the dogs, and abandon the supplies which might be picked up later.

However, they will hold on for a few days yet. They didn’t see Wilkins’s plane at any time.

(Daily Standard (Brisbane, Qld), Thursday 8 April 1926, page 1).


10 April 1926
VILHJALMUR 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).

14 April 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS CARRIES ON

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

By the late Palmer Hutchinson, special correspondent with the Wilkins Arctic Expedition. Copyright Exclusive to the correspondent with the Wilkins Arctic Expedition. Wednesday 14 April 1926, page 1.

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 planes on or near the new land.

One of his two Fokker planes has been fitted with a Fairchild aerial camera. The camera weighs 46 lb., a substantial weight considering that the Detroit Expedition is filling every available corner in the planes with auxiliary gasoline tanks. Moreover, the camera peers downward 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 routes is practicable. The discovery of land may be hailed as the discovery of a mid-Arctic landing place, and a landing place 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 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 recognize him.


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 rejoined 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.

15
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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 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 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.

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 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 pastime. 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 had 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 not 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 whiskeys from the car of the balloon instead of 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.

There are certain types born to be stifled by civilisation—rare men whose pleasure 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

Illustration from the article below.

15 April 1926
Prominent Personalities
CAPTAIN G. H. WILKINS
A REMARKABLE AUSTRALIAN
Illustrated by WILL DYSON

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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.

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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 himself, his 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, and by 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. Their 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
WILKIN’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 Captain G. H. Wilkins. Exclusive to the Sun, 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 that 100-mile wing across the range of jagged peaks that rival the Alps, the Rockies, and the Andes, and even portion of the Himalayas.

On the last trip out we were heavily laden with gas, fuel, and other supplies, so when we encountered the fog and tried to rise we could not attain the elevation that meant assured safety in crossing. The ceiling of fog was 9100ft., and that was the best the monoplane would do.

Travelling light upon our return, we reached 12,000ft. without difficulty. Now, those mountains where we crossed are more than 10,000ft. high in some places, so it was a ticklish problem flying through.

A Perilous Passage
At times, on top of that billowing misty mass, the wheels and landing gear were in the clouds, while the fuselage was out in the clear. It was like sailing through a breast-high mist. Eielson would do his best to lift the Alaskan’s nose a few feet higher, but it was no use. Ahead would roll up a higher mass of mist, and we would butt through to clear sailing on the other side. Occasionally glimpses showed us the deadly jagged rocks below, but we just kept on northward. Once a rift in the fog disclosed a high wall directly ahead. The pilot banked sharply, and we skimmed along the face of the mountains and headed west until we followed a pass into lower altitudes, and were safe once more. The sameness of the tundra, with a snow-covering that is becoming deeper at this season of the year, has nothing to relieve it.

Flying over the Australian desert, the traveller has a pleasant contrast of browns, yellows, and occasional greens to break the monotony, and has friendly guides on the sun-baked tawny plain, but with the white Arctic desert not even the courses of frozen river beds are distinguishable. I never saw a bird or other living wild creature while crossing the monotonous or flying over the tundra, except some caribou. For hundreds of miles, going and coming, there was nothing in the sky or on the earth except the great droming bird that carries us, or its fluttering shadow on the snow waste or darting along the grim canyon walls.

Travelling over the Arctic ice, one knows he is above sea level, and can judge his distance in the air with much less difficulty than when trying to navigate the rolling tundra, where the blending of the sky and earth gives both pilot and observer 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, shadows 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 frozen sea 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 sploth 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 hoarfrost. 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 physical 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 gasoline hand-pump to operate, to keep the upper tank filled from the reserve. We found time to cut 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 communicate 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.

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.
Returning to Fairbanks Captain Wilkins piloted the craft with his left hand. The
replacing the Italian instrument, which was urgently installed aboard the
from Pulham, a British steering compass
Science in Kensington today that, in
convention at the Imperial College of
British Compass Needed

arrived over the Citadel, the
regarded as a national event. The voyage
out to Leningrad will be resumed tonight
wind and had to make two attempts. The
airship, experienced the same difficulties
in reaching its mooring mast here as it did

Norge
Norge

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Norge
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The plane is now practically in
flying condition. The one
accident. The plane is now practically in
flying condition.

A photograph from the Detroit Arctic Expedition 1926 -
38 from the ISO Polar Archives

Alaskan left 400 gallons of gasoline at
Point Barrow, where other supplies are
stored. It has been planned for Captain
Wilkins and Lieutenant Eielson to fly out over
the Arctic in one plane, leaving 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
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 wood
en 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 armén. 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-flagged 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 aperiodic steering compass. Both
these on the Norge now are British.

Geelong Advertiser (Vic.), Friday 16 April
1926, page 5.

17 April 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS’ 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.

Australian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday
17 April 1926, page 42.

20 April 1926
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY IN
ARCTIC.

Special Camera for Capt. Wilkins
NAVIGATING THE WINDS

Modified Naval Method of Calculation
(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
airplanes on or near the near land.

One of his two Fokker planes has been
fitted with a Fairchild aerial camera. The
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considering that the Detroit Expedition is
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Moreover, the camera peers downwards
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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
take a survey from the air and record it by
aerial photography. From photographs, it is
believed aviators and map-makers could
calculate whether it would be possible to
build a landing field on the new land. The
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and oiled surfaces become sticky. But
aerial cameras of the Fairch Child 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 unfound lands, Captain
Wilkins will attempt to measure the
altitude of the sun. For these observations, he
will use a new system of calculation
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’s altitude on the
compasses which will be placed in all the
acrengraved 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
horizon and so it will not be necessary for
Captain Wilkins to bring the sun’s image
down to the hazy, ice-cut horizon of the
Polar area. But, having ascertained the
altitude of the sun, he will use it almost
exactly as the ship navigators of the navy
use it. He, too, will make out a Sumner line
of position.

SIMPLER NAVIGATION.
Sumner was an American seaman. He
weared in making the long astronomical
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, moves 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 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 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.

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 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 longitudinal. 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.

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ZENITH TAKES THE PULSES OF THE EXPLORERS.

“Let’s see, says Captain G. H. Wilkins, who has shaved his beard, and Malcolm Smith inspecting the ice of the Tanama River and appraising it as a possible landing place for the expedition’s plane. A photo on the same page from (Daily Mail (Brisbane, Qld), Tuesday 20 April 1926, page 13.)

A map from the article from the (Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Wednesday 21 April 1926, page 7.)
21 April 1926

WILKINS LOST AGAIN
LACK OF NEWS FROM ARCTIC WILDERNESS

Sighted Off His Course

AUSTRALIA'S INTREPID EXPLORER, CAPTAIN G. H.
WILKINS, WHOSE AMBITION IS TO REACH THE NORTH POLE BY AEROPLANE, IS AGAIN POSTED AS MISSING.

ACCOMPANIED BY HIS PILOT,
CARL EIE E LSON, HE LEFT FAIRBANKS (ALASKA) LAST THURSDAY FOR POINT BARROW, ON THE SHORES OF THE ARCTIC OCEAN, ON AN AEROPLANE FLIGHT ACROSS THE SNOWBOUND AND FOG INFESTED 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 from New York, for the Detroit. He will take the radioman, Mason, and Earp, the press correspondent, to Point Barrow direct.

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 have 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 Ektvilk 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.”

CAPTAIN WILKINS’S WALLABY.

The adaptability of some Australians is well illustrated by Captain Wilkins, who is now amid the Arctic snows, but who was collecting for the British Museum 12 months ago in the tropical regions of 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.
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.

1 May 1926
CAPTAIN WILKINS SAFE.
WIRELESS PLANT DAMAGED
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.

The following is the first direct message from Captain Wilkins since he left Fairbanks for Point Barrow on April 15. The message was sent by wireless from Point Barrow to Fairbanks by telegraph to Seward by cable to Seattle; by telegraph to Vancouver; by cable to Sydney, and thence by telegraph to Melbourne. From Capt. G. H. Wilkins.

Point Barrow (Arctic Circle), April 30

Our expected positions were reversed yesterday, when I was able to welcome “Sandy” 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 hauling 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. Awe of silence prevails while we communicate with the outside 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 split 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.
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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

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

Major Lanphier fears that it will be impossible to fly 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.

NEW YORK, Monday Night.
CAPTAIN WILKINS TO CONTINUE
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 Poker 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 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.

8 April 1926
STEFANSSON’S VIEW
Wilkins’s Feat 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 Sunner 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 Sunner 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. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/243584804

Route by which Capt. Wilkins’s special cable message reached The Herald Office from Point Barrow, on the shores of the Arctic Sea. Wireless, cable, and land telegraph were all used in transmission.

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

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CAPTAIN WILKINS TO CONTINUE
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Daily Telegraph (Launceston, Tas.), Wednesday 19 May 1926, page 5

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

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 Pole 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 — everything that is interesting and everything geographical.

“All 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 considering 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 flyer 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.

“Lieut. 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 was reserve pilot on the last expedition, will be the navigators.

“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 supply, 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 Mahngraen. “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 penicillin, dried and ground meat mixed with fat; oatmeal crackers, chocolate, milk powder, and melted 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”.

23
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the Bar of the Wilkins’ Article)

“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 must travel light. We will doubtless 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 it. 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.


7 June 1926

CAPTAIN WILKINS

It is reported from Fairbanks that the Associated’s quartette, headed by Captain Wilkins, returned on Saturday from Barrow in the Detroiter, which flew there on May 8 for a flight in the Arctic wastes. The return is taken to mean the abandonment of exploring in that region this year. The men are tired of the frozen country. The Arctic coast has been shrouded in fog since May.


10 June 1926

A Great Adventurer.

Captain George Hubert Wilkins, who attempted a dash by aeroplane over the frozen wastes between Canada and the North Pole, is a slim and bearded man of 38 with that calculated bravery which led Sir John Monash to describe him as the most coolly intrepid man in the Australian Army.

By temperament and training Wilkins is well qualified for such a desperately hazardous exploit, for there is not much about flying or about exploration that he has not learned in the hard school of experiences. He knows most of the races of the world from Australian aborigines to the Esquimaux. Soldiers and sailors have been his comrades and friends, and he is equally at home driving a dog team or addressing the Royal Geographical Society.

“Certainly do think we shall succeed. Last year, with the aeroplane, I thought we had fifty chances out of a hundred. But we hadn’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.


CAPTAIN H. F. WILKINS

22 May 1926

PNEUMATIC BOATS.

SAFETY AMONG THE FLOES.

INTEREST IN WILKINS’ 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.

One of the ice breakers used during the Wilkins – Detroit Expedition 1926-28. From the ISO Polar Archives
Wilkins intended, when he returned recently after leading a natural history expedition through the least known parts of Northern Australia and its islands, to undertake research in the Antarctic, but owing to lack of financial support he turned his face northwards.

He knows the Arctic well and learned that most valuable of lessons—how to live on the country—when with Stefansson in 1913-17. Wilkins has crammed into the 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-Rowell Expedition as naturalist; and now he is attempting to explore from the air a region which may prove even his nerve, daring and resource.

Mar. 3. Wilkins’s Chronicle

12 August 1926

METEOROLOGICAL Forecasting Droughts CAN BE AVOIDED, THINKS WILKINS.

(Reuter)

NEW YORK. Tuesday.

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, is directing attention to the possibility of forecasting far in advance when certain parts of the world are likely to be subject to drought. He has firm faith that these disasters can be avoided, also that the paths of storms may be mapped out before they make themselves felt. He thus expects that science will be able to afford exact information and that it will be possible to adjust conditions.


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.

FIRST PLANE CRASHED

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.
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' 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 85°N., and the exploration of about two-thirds of the unexplored 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 at 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.


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 near 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

The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)
on drifting ice, and from whom no tidings were received for some little time, eventually succeeded in reaching Beechy 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 sonic 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 3000 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 skillful 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, each 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 pressuring ice.

Crossing the moving pack I fell and got wet to the waist. After changing our socks we built a snow house and partly dried out. For three days we battled over the rough frozen pack, crawling on our hands and knees most of the time. We crossed many leads in young ice and passed round much very open water. We saw several seals, but as we had sufficient food in our packs we did not care to delay to get more.

Two more sights gave us our position, and we headed for Beechy 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.


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 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.

CROSSES ENDICOTT AGAIN

This year Captain Wilkins’s plans were quietly resumed. He took two Stinson planes to Fairbanks, and he had one Fokker there already. Then, with two of his own planes and one hired at Fairbanks, Wilkins took again the 5550-mile flight across the Endicott range and the northern prairies to Point Barrow, once more without accident or any trouble.

Then, on March 20, with fuel for 1400 miles in calm weather, Wilkins and Eielson took off in a Stinson plane, intending, if all went well, to fly 600 miles north-west then 200 miles south, and back to Barrow, more than half this distance over territory never seen by human beings, thus making a great inroad into the largest unexplored area north of the equator. They had flown 550 miles, and had almost completed the outward flight, when engine developed and they had to make a forced landing.

There have been two theories regarding the safety of landing on 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
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

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 was a year ago, in the Fram, and similar soundings. This landing 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 ten minutes’ flight, the engine gave trouble once more. There was a second forced landing. Again Eielson made a perfect landing.

This time they 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 realized 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 it 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 have to land in Wrangel Island, but instead it now drifted rapidly east. When they had broken up the wooden parts of the plane and made them into sledges, they found themselves 100 miles east of Barrow instead of several hundred miles west (it might easily have been the case that the drift was 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 had they 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 felt 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 recognized 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 probably 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, if everything goes like clockwork. 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 that 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 sea game. Wilkins estimates the maximum time necessary for such a return on foot will be two years.

Herald (Melbourne, Vic.), Thursday 30 June 1927, page 23.

11 July 1927

Expedition to the Arctic Adventures of Flying Explorer Graphic Account of Roaring Blizzard

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 non-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

so numerous that there seldom is a five-mile stretch without a fairly good one.
miles along the coast to south-west, and then 150 miles along the coast to the east, following the coast carefully.

"If we are unable to return we will try to communicate by wireless for ten minutes of every hour, five minutes before the hour, and five minutes after the hour. "If wireless messages are received, you will then act as requested by wireless. If nothing is heard from us after we leave, and no trace of us can be found along the coast, it may be taken for granted that we are making out way on foot, and in that case I wish it to be clearly understood that I do not wish a rescue expedition. "If we do not return, so far as I am concerned, you, Graham and Mason (Howard Mason, the expeditions radio operator), will then be at liberty to return to Fairbanks.

You should, however, look to the Detroit News for final instructions." These instructions were part of a letter which also included instructions regarding the disposal of Captain Wilkins’s business affairs in the event of his failure to return.

On the following day, when he was over 20 hours overdue, his headquarters caught a radio message from him announcing that engine trouble had forced him down 100 miles north-east of Point Barrow. Then days of silence followed by fruitless scutings 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.

**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 safety 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, near the ground the air was rough, and the plane pitched and swerved. Ben was calm, and he corrected with the controls each uneven movement; 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 wireless antenna, 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 and I climbed from the plane, and, in the thick, drifting snow, we could see our safety 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. We had 10 lbs. of biscuits, 20 lbs. of chocolate, 5 lbs. of army emergency 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 ice. 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 our plane and over the sleds we had made. The wind veered 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 of snow 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 were on to the trail by 8.15 a.m. A sharp wind north by west nipped our cheeks, chins, and noses. The snow, dripping 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
good enough to go back to 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
choosing 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 dragged over the
ice-floes and pressure ridges us 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 baying crossed a broken and seething
mass of ice, we cut a hole through a
frozen-over crack and found the floe was
drifting slowly in a westerly direction. I
feared the drift might take us west of Point
Barrow, but our eastern 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
showing the seals to obtain rain fuel and food.
But there was a good reason for haste, as Ben’s
fingers were badly frozen. All except one
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
cheeks and under our arms. It was a cold-
fingered job and not especially a pleasant
pastime, but care of one’s clothing is a
most essential part of the day’s work
during Arctic travel.

For nine years Ben had done no harder
physical work than handling the controls of
an airplane.

But he got used to downright work after

a few days of travelling over lines of
moving ice pinched between solid floes.

Photo taken during the Wilkins – Detroit
Polar Archives.

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 hoped to walk, but much of our
way was so rough, 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
steril 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.

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 skidding 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 out feet spread wide and
e-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:

Transfix With Horror

“Ben was transfixed with horror.

Fortunately the ice was thicker where he
stood, and did not fall in. My weight was
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 footwear 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 practise
to follow on a long journey.

I had little sleep that night because of my
saturated clothes, but after another day
of struggling through soft snow my clothing
was almost dry.

For several days after leaving our plane we
crossed many bear and fox tracks. In the
terribly broken ice and snow near the coast
not even bears and foxes were to be found,
but it was a characteristic I expected to
find nearer shore. Ben stuck manfully to the job with much fortitude and courage. We would take ten 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, April 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.

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The forecast on the page from (Daily News (Perth, WA), Tuesday 27 September 1927, page 1.)

START THIS MONTH

"They’re wanting me, they are calling me, the useful lonely places. They’re whining, they are whimpering as if each had a soul. They’re calling from the wilderness, the vast and Godlike spaces, The stern and sullen solitude that sentinels the Pole.” (A poem in the article.)

(Sun Special) LOS ANGELES, Tuesday.

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the noted Australian Polar explorer, is ready for another attempt to conquer the Arctic region. Lieutenant Eielson will accompany the expedition as pilot, the position he held in the previous attempts.

Captain Wilkins completed the flight tests today of the plane in which they will commence the new expedition early in February. The tests were declared so successful that the plane was immediately crated and shipped to Seattle.

The actual date of the departure of the aviators from that port has not been announced.

Captain Wilkins has made two previous attempts to conquer the Arctic Region. His first attempt reached its climax in May of 1926, when all was ready for the final dash over the Polar ice with the object of finding land in the unexplored northern regions. Captain Wilkins established two bases, completed the one at Fairbanks, and a temporary one at Pt. Barrow, both in Alaska.

From the latter place, he intended to fly northward in his plane for several hours and then to cruise back and forth. Lieutenant Eielson was the pilot on that occasion, and, in a Detroit plane, he successfully took Captain Wilkins over the Endicott Mountains to the jumping off place at Pt. Barrow. There the party became fogbound,
and anxious weeks passed while they waited for suitable weather. Several short flights were made, and in one of these the engine coveling 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.  https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/24222221

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.

The Wilkins’ Chronicle
(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the daf of the Wilkins’ Article)

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 exployt, 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 whole-heartedly the high degree of courage associated with this endeavour to follow, under more perilous conditions, the route taken by Amundsen in his airship the Norge. Wilkins’s first step in a career probably unparalleled in variety and incident gave promise of a determination that time and adventure have proved to be his most outstanding characterisitic.

Leaving Adelaide as a youth of 18, with small capital but large ambition, he determined to see the world. Advertised beauty spots and the halting points of conducted tours held no interest for him. Little-known corners of the globe, unspoiled by the hand of civilisation, virgin in their natural appeal — these were the places that called to him, and the manner of his answering 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 gazette, 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 United Press Association 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 Mejideh. 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 firm had conceived a unique advertising stunt, and on the afternoon preceding 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, noted 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 parachutist snapped a perfect photograph of the take-off, and then proceeded to unload 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 basket at the cheerless sea below.

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 hedges. 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’ 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 by a pompous member to enumerate various colours alternately exposed on a revolving disc. Wilkins’ scientific 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 commissioneer permitted him to appear in most unexpected places. A “hop over” is in full swing; Wilkins’ 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’ camera records an embarrased 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.

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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 passage across the world, has been brought nearer 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 Continent caravans will meet, shortening the distances 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 1928, page 13.


23 April 1928

WILKINS BEATS ITALIANS
Great Polar Race
WAY NOW CLEAR FOR ANTARCTIC PLANS

Explorer’s Big Ambition

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the heroic Australian explorer, airman and photographer, and his American companion, 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 Doedman 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 2½ 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 (Wilkins’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.

Ross Sea thither has already been traversed a dozen 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 capturing it with a similar feat in the south before the American Expedition, which is well equipped and supported by wealthy backers, forestalls him.

A map allowing the route followed by Capt. Wilkins in his flight across the North Pole.

PROUDEST MOTHER

Mrs. Wilkins Active Woman at 86

ADELAIDE, Monday.—

There was no proud woman in South Australia today than Mrs. Harry Wilkins, mother of Captain G. H. Wilkins, the famous South Australian explorer, who successfully flew across the North Pole. She would not admit it, but her flushed face and shining eyes told her story.

“We mothers,” she said, “do not say much, but we feel a lot. I am glad that George has done what he set out to do, but it was an anxious time while he was away. I wish he was at home now. He was only 20 years of age when he first went away 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.

COLD LAND OF MINING CAMPS

Spitsbergen’s barren wastes

Uninhabited, barren of all vegetation except flowers, dark for four months of the
year except for the Arctic Moon and the frequent Northern Lights, Spitsbergen was left undisturbed for hundreds of years until early this century, when coal mining was started. Norwegian interests in coal are now predominant since Norway was given a mandate over this group of Arctic islands after the war.

Except for a few trappers, its population of a thousand consists of miners. Wives and families of some officials live there, but many return to Norway for the winter. So severe are the conditions of life that miners are enlisted for a definite period.

Nevertheless there are many volunteers. Moving pictures provide amusement, and high wages are paid. During four months of the year it is accessible only to colliers and a supply ship. For the rest of the year it is cut off from all communication with the outer world except wireless.

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 is more profitable than any other means of communication in that part of the world. He hopes to have a station on Spitsbergen, which is the nearest point to the North Pole.

The Wilkins’ Chronicle

24 April 1928

THE FAR-SEEING EYES OF CAPTAIN WILKINS

Herald (Melbourne, Vic.,) Tuesday 24 April 1928, page 7.

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

25 April 1928

AVIATION AFFAIRS.

FLIGHT OVER NORTH POLE

CAPTAIN WILKINS’S STORY.

Montreal, April 23. (Copyright: Australian 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 sledge equipment, and staunchly built to withstand extreme conditions and rough usage. It is, moreover, so constructed as to eliminate the confusion of compass interference as 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 indicators, stoves for heating over the engine instruments, one large ships sextant, a pocket sextant, four special charts and tables.

The machine and engine were thoroughly tested before leaving Los Angeles for Alaska, for airplanes have never risen above the horizon. From the North Pole hill in fine shape. When our bubble pressure ridges were noticed at its edges, 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 lead. It stretched from the neighbourhood of Cape Columbia to Greenland.

We shipped 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.

Kalgoorlie Miner (WA), Wednesday 25 April 1928, page 6.

The Wilkins’ Chronicle

25 April 1928
Wilkins’ 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 Dasholmen, a small island north of Spitsbergen, in 21 hours, there to remain for five days before continuing, owing to tempestuous weather.

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 everywhere the experts join in hailing Wilkins’ persistence and courage.

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

CAPTAIN WILKINS AND HIS ARCTIC PLANE.

26 April 1928
ARCTIC AVIATORS.
STEAMER TO BRING OUT
Wilkins Refuses Join Byrd
HAS ANTARCTIC PLANS.
OSLO, Tuesday.
The Northern Exploration Company’s steamer Njöna has left Norway and will proceed as near as possible to Green Harbour to pick up Wilkins, Eielson and the aeroplane and bring them to Norway. The vessel is due to arrive on Saturday. Thus the explorers are expected at Tromsø early in the coming week.

Captain Wilkins today refused an offer from Commander Byrd to join his 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’s 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.”


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* has 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."

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**Triumphs of Australians**

**Wilkins Praised as Explorer**

London, April 23.

The *Times* makes the following comment: — "The achievements of Wilkins and Hincker are remarkable triumphs for Australian aviation. Captain Wilkins’s preparations were very complete, and in making him set an example to everyone who engages in perilous adventures in the air.

Moreover, he conducted his observations with unremitting care and accuracy. He has stamped himself not only as a man of initiative, but as explorer in whose judgment it is possible to place complete confidence."

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**Reply to Mr. Bruce**

Canberra, Wednesday. —

The following cable message has been received by the Prime Minister (Mr. Bruce) from Captain Wilkins, dated Svalbard, April 23: — "I much appreciate your message. If I but uphold Australia’s reputation I am well pleased." Mr. Bruce has also received the following message from the British Secretary of State for Air (Sir Samuel Hoare): — "The Air Council tenders warmest congratulations on Wilkins and Eielson’s splendid Arctic flight."

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**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 airmen, 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.

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**Bremen Stormbound**

In the meantime a report from Greenly Island states 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.

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**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 filiip 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 Nobile, 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.

*brisbane Courier* (Qld), Friday 27 April 1928, page 15.

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 wastes 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.

Dungog Chronicle: Durham and Gloucester Advertiser (NSW), Friday 27 April 1928, page 2.

28 April 1928
WILKINS’ ARCTIC FLIGHT.

Captain G. H. Wilkins, the Australian explorer, and Lieutenant Eielson (U.S.A.) have flown across the Arctic Region from Point Barrow (Alaska) to Spitsbergen, north of Norway. The flight was accomplished in 20½ hours. A delay of five days in receipt of the news was due to bad weather, though the aeroplane was equipped with wireless apparatus.

27 April 1928
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 make a pauper or debase, or ruin its own object.

Endowing universities, missions, 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 weather stations, on condition that he flew from Alaska to Spitsbergen, which he has now accomplished in spite of the big difficulties, and amid the acclamation of the world. It has been pointed out that his feat has a very great practical value, on the score that for the first time the great dream of communicating via the Pole on the part of countries far removed in longitude has been fulfilled.

Stefansson sees in Wilkins the first lonely pioneer of argosies of commercial and passenger planes which have shortened the track from country to country by thousands of miles by crossing the Pole rather than flying round the earth.

Anybody who takes the trouble to examine an orange will see that the semi-circle to opposite points in the temperate zone is more than half again as long as the straight course over the poles represented by the stem of the orange.

Thus the Poles, hitherto for all time the most important crossing stages on the earth, and it will pay an enterprising man to put up a bowser and refreshment rooms, with central heating accommodation. One suggests, with all due respect, that the time has come for Adelaide to honour Captain Wilkins for his distinguished services to humanity, and if knighthoods cannot just now be secured at two a penny, then maybe it would be possible to put up another statue somewhat after his likeness.

The aeroplane in which the flight was accomplished was a Lockhead Vega, a new aeroplane just put on the market, and, compared with the Dornier used by Amundsen, and Commander Byrd’s triplane Fokker, this monoplane appears insignificant.

Stefansson the explorer expressed delight at the success. He said that Wilkins was the best man he had in the Canadian Arctic Expeditions from 1913 to 1918, and he referred to Sir John Monash’s statement, that Wilkins was the bravest and ablest man Sir John Monash had under him.

Wilkins and Eielson will be obliged to stay at a small village called Long Year City, near Green Harbour, until the first few weeks in May, when there will be a general thaw in the Polar Sea. Here 400 men from the surrounding mines spend the winter, as the terrible conditions make work impossible. The airmen have no means of reaching Long Year City at present, but, however, they will be well entertained. The workmen keep dog teams and carry on hunting.

Captain G. H. Wilkins told a thrilling story by wireless from Spitsbergen. The object of the flight was to traverse in reverse direction the route followed by the airship Norge, when in May, 1926, Amundsen (Norway), Nobile (Italy), and Ellsworth flew from Spitsbergen across the Pole to Alaska.

Captain Wilkins states:

“With good weather and good luck and by careful navigation we travelled 2,200 miles above the Arctic ice from Point Barrow to Green Harbour, Svalbard where three quarters of the area has never been seen before by man.

We are thankful that the aeronautical and engineering skill of conscientious workmen and our accumulated Arctic experience have brought us through in comparative comfort and safety. Yet the trip was not without adventure. It took us two days to get into the air before we were finally able to lift the machine, which weighed 3,400 lb., into the air on April 15 and we headed straight out on the Great Circle course that would change 22 times in 22 hours.

For the first 500 miles the air was clear. Then clouds arose, but we overcame them at an altitude of 3,000 ft. We saw no signs of islands, but we saw frequent leads of open water, and would like to have made soundings but the landing was too hazardous in view of the possibility of broken skis. The engine functioned perfectly. The sun was clear and the light even. I took frequent sextant observations but by compass.”

Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 28 April 1928, page 11.
1 May 1928
CAPTAIN WILKINS HONORED
The King has approved of an award to Capt. G. H. Wilkins the South Australian explorer of the Royal Gold Medal of the Geographical Society in recognition of his many years of systematic polar work, culminating in his great flight over the North Pole.


2 May 1928
“MY POLAR FLIGHTS.”
WILKINS WRITES A BOOK.
OSLO, 2nd May.
Captain Wilkins, the Australian explorer, who recently flew over the North Pole, is spending his time while waiting for a ship in writing a book, entitled “My Polar Flights.” Wilkins thinks it would not be impossible to live in the Arctic regions near the Pole. He is strongly of opinion that future air routes should follow his, because of the excellent landing bases in Alaska.

KINGSFORD SMITH’S PACIFIC FLIGHT.
SAN FRANCISCO, 2nd May.
Captain Kingsford Smith left Santa Monica (California) in his plane the Southern Cross, for San Francisco. This is the first leg of his projected flight to San Francisco, 2nd May 1928, page 11.

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 ARCTIC “TOPSY-TURVY” WORLD (Pictorial Special Service, Copyright) KING’S BAY (Spitzbergen), 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 Città 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 Città di Milano will be deprived of all leisure.

4 May 1928
THE BRITISH ADVENTURE.
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.


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.
Advocate (Burnie, Tas.), Wednesday 30 May 1928, page 1.

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.

In his latest message Commander Nobile wirelessed: — “We reached the Pole and dropped the Italian flag, also the Cross which the Pope gave me for the purpose. “Am sending reverent message to the King of Italy, one to Signor Mussolini informing him that the Italian flag flew over the Pole, and one to the Pope announcing that the Cross has been dropped.”

The Wilkins’ Chronicle
(Selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)
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 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.

Oslo, Norway. He also paid a tribute to the work of the Norwegian Polar explorers. Three naval
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(a selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the Bar of the Wilkins’ Article)

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.


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.

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.


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-Royd 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. Blinman (Under Secretary) has been created I.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 the

Right Honourable, Isaac Alfred Isaacs,
Senior Puisne Justice of the High Court of Australia.
The Wilkins’ Chronicle
(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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 I.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.
To be Commander of the British Empire.
Dr. William Henry Aitken, M.B., C.B.E.
Mr. John McIlroy, of Uooloo.

Companion of the Imperial Service Order.

9 June 1928
THE ARCTIC

GREAT IMPORTANCE TRIBUTE TO WILKINS
Government Entertainment
LONDON, Thursday. —
A most interesting Anglo-Australian lunch was held at the Savoy Hotel to-day, when the Government entertained Captain Sir George Wilkins and Lieut. Eielson in celebration of their transpolar flight.
Sir Samuel Hoare (Secretary of State for the Air) presided. He paid a tribute to the exploits of the guests, who together had flown 18,000 miles in the Polar Regions, and accomplished three historic Arctic journeys. Not only had they flown over a part of the world hitherto unseen by the human eye, but had accomplished observations of the greatest value to the whole world.

Stefansson had emphasised that the Arctic could be an important source of the world’s food supplies, even supplanting the Argentine. The Polar Regions would probably become the principal West-East air route.
It was 6,500 miles from England to Japan via the Pole whereas it was 11,000 miles by ordinary ship flying routes, which indicated that these regions might, with the progress of aviation, become the regular route between Europe and the Far East.

Sir Samuel Hoare added that Sir George Wilkins’ flight demonstrated that man had conquered not only the machine, but, by its aid, the Pole. The Point Barrow Eskimos named Sir George Wilkins “Inakuta”—otherwise strong, wise man—and they are right. Mr. L. S. Amery (Secretary of State for the Dominions) said nobody could foretell how much human communication had been expedited by this daring flight.

DESPITE MISFORTUNES.
Sir George Wilkins, in his reply, traced the whole misfortunes of the years 1926/27, when he had to face the criticisms of his friends and the world at large. He said the flight was not made to prove that aeroplanes could fly under polar conditions, which had already been established.
He had the fixed idea that meteorological stations, both Arctic and Antarctic, would have far-reaching effects on the world; for example, they might prevent the cruel sufferings in Australia due to droughts.
The flight revealed that it was impossible to establish a meteorological station in the area, north of Point Barrow, except on a moving ice floe.
The next stage was the Antarctic, where, he hoped a more permanent situation may be discovered. In any event, so far as he was able to say, it might soon be possible to forecast the weather for Australia’s benefit.
Lieut. Eielson, in response, confessed that he was unable to grasp the meteorological and scientific features of the flight as Wilkins did. “My thoughts were hundreds of miles behind the fast-moving plane, with an Eskimau girl on the coast of Alaska,” he said.
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.

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 …………Kingsford Smith

Over the Pole…………………Sir George Wilkins
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 other records 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 scroll 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 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 Atlantic ended in the sea whence he was fortunately picked up by a passing steamer. But he was showing the way and the world did not hesitate to recognise HIS SPORTING ATTEMPT
Unhappily the dauntless Hawker crashed in 1921, having succumbed to heart trouble—it was believed—while taking part to a race. The flight of Sir Ross Smith (killed in a crash in 1922) and his brother, Sir Keith Smith, and Lieutenants Shiers and Bennett from England to Australia knocked every other great aerial achievement endwise.
In 28 days the four daring Australians flew from England to Australia winning the Commonwealth’s prize of £10,000.
Next year Lt. R. Parker followed their example, this time with one companion (the late Lt. McIntosh) and in a machine that threatened TO FALL TO BITS any minute.
This was another magnificent achievement against almost overwhelming odds. Over the route these men had...
pioneered nearly eight years before Bert Hinkler in March last dashed out alone from Britain to Bundaberg in a shade over fifteen days, leaving non-stop records shattered all the way along his line of flight and achieving it all unaided and unaccompanied.

Australia, first circumnavigated by a Point Cook Aerodrome crew, has since been encompassed by a number of other Aussie fliers, notably Kingsford-Smith and his Airways. The latter is the bearded State, where till recently he was employed and the calibre of her airmen. But it is not surprising to find many other records of lesser known Australians there.

And now there is no State than cannot point to at least one outstanding Aussie aviator, whose practical pioneering feats are unexcelled anywhere in the world. In the West Major Brearley and his Airways pilots have established a record that is probably not bettered anywhere, and from the other capital cities, Australian pilots are speeding along in the services of commerce enthusiastically and as courageously as in the more hectic times of war.

**Made First Trans-Pacific Flight**

“The Southern Cross,” in which Kingsford Smith flew across the Pacific.

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 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 sporting gent who devised the celebrated “Bitza” car so well known in Perth.

Probably 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-Ocean 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 latest 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.

**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.

**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.).

**Wireless by Wilkins**

An advertisement from the (Mirror (Perth, WA), Saturday 9 June 1928, page 12.)

10 June 1928

**Wilkins to Lead Antarctic Epic Ahead**

Wresting fame and a knighthood by his splendid jump of 2,200 miles from Alaska to Spitsbergen, skimming the cold bald crown of the world, Sir George Wilkins is planning a new adventure.

When he reaches New York on July 2, he will launch his plane straight towards King Edward VII Land. The journey is expected to be made through Bransfield Straits to South Shetland Island.

As always, Sir George will carry wireless and his ever reliable Burgess Radio Batteries. Like Kingsford Smith, Hinkler, Parer, Lancaster, Ross Smith, Keith Smith and Hurley, the new Knight once wore Australian khaki, winning distinction by superb courage.
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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”.

Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), Monday 11 June 1928, page 9.

11 June 1928
To the Ends of the Earth.
SOUTHERN CROSS HAS FLOWN.
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.

15 June 1928
AUSTRALIAN COMPANY’S GIFT TO CAPTAIN KINGSFORD SMITH.
In the dramatic days when Captain Kingsford Smith was struggling to raise funds to buy and equip Wilkins’s huge Fokker one of his chief anxieties, was the installation of complete radio sending and receiving equipment.

Then a cable message, signed by New System Telephones Pty. Ltd., of Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide instantly removed all his radio worries by providing free of cost a complete sending and receiving outfit, and a third emergency watertight transmitting set for use in the remote event of a forced landing in the ocean.

This latter set was equipped with a collapsible mast for an aerial. In an interview Captain Kingsford Smith stated that the radio equipment placed in his plane was acclaimed by wireless experts as “the most complete ever installed in any aircraft,” and Warner, the operator, now holds a world’s record for transmitting and receiving.

Daily Examiner (Grafton, NSW), Friday 15 June 1928, page 6.

18 June 1928
HONOURING SIR GEORGE 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 horse-power.

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 Mattland and Hagenberg on their first successful flight, from U.S.A. to Hawaii.

Advocate (Burnie, Tas.), Monday 11 June 1928, page 5.

18 June 1928
TRANS-PACIFIC FIERS 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 Phillips Ulm, in recognition of the distinguished service rendered to aviation by their recent trans-Pacific flight from San Francisco (U.S.A.) to Brisbane.
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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.


22 August 1928

RUINOR UNTJRE.

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.”


24 August 1928

Sir George Wilkins

Portrait for N.S.W Art Gallery

London. August 22.

Sir William Orpen, R.A., on behalf of the New South Wales Art Gallery has purchased Phillip Conard’s portrait of Sir Hubert Wilkins, the famous Australian explorer and airman.


24 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 (Qld), Tuesday 4 September 1928, page 12. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/21326518

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.


24 September 1928

Sir George Wilkins

Engagement Announced

New York, September 22.
Jeffrey’s Crew
Jeffrey expects to sail directly southward, visiting Argentina 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 seventy 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 an 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’ 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, centring about the general term “exploratory.” 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 further 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.

Elaborate Expedition
Any adequate description of the almost innumerable details of preparation for these explorative trips would require volumes. Commander Byrd’s Expedition is by far the most elaborate. It is estimated it will cost £100,000. It has been under way since the intrepid voyager of the air returned to Spitsbergen from his flight over the North Pole.

Resources of the entire world have been called upon. In his head-quarters in the Biltmore Hotel in New York he seems less an adventurous young scientist and more like the head of a great business or commercial organisation, with staffs of secretaries, stenographers, clerks, and...
27 September 1928
Mother of Explorer
Burial of Mrs. L. Wilkins

Mrs. Louisa Wilkins, whose death at the age of 86 years occurred yesterday, was the mother of Sir George Wilkins, the famous explorer. Born in Britain, she came to South Australia with her parents at an early age. Many years were spent at Mount Bryan East, and more recently she lived at Parkside.

There are six sons and a daughter, comprising Sir George Hubert Wilkins, Messrs. H. W. Wilkins (Victor Harbor), F. E. Wilkins (Glenelg), F. J. S. Wilkins (Malvern), T. W. Wilkins (Tusmore), A. Wilkins (Goolwa), and Mrs. J. H. Cockshell (Forestville). In accordance with the wishes of the children, the burial at West Terrace Cemetery this afternoon was practically a private ceremony. Rev. C. E. Schafer conducted the service at the graveside. Among the senders of floral tributes were Sir John Melrose, Emulation Lodge, Norwood, Rigby Limited, and Sunset Lodge.


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.

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

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 resultant saving to Australia from foreseeing a drought year would more than pay 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
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(An selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

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.

Cheered Frantically

The pier was lined with people, who
cheered frantically at the bow of the
City of New York, in her big guns, and swept
slowly around for the run down the bay.

Sir Hubert’s Preparations

Sir Hubert Wilkins will arrive at
Deception Island, their main base, in the
spring of the Antarctic with two Lockheed
monoplanes. Plane No. 1 is the trusted
veteran of his Arctic flight this year. It will be
fitted with skis, wheels, and pontoons.

The other plane will be, with few minor
exceptions, a duplicate of the first.

Riddles of the Antarctic

The most important questions exercising
the minds of geographers today are, says
Sir Hubert: “—1.— is there a large
Antarctic continent 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 when
large masses of coal were laid down there
was little ice on what is now the South
Pole, and the question is as to whether vast
coal deposits exist near the South Pole Region.

Headling 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.

Sir Hubert says geologists say when
the Ross Sea ice barrier of Antarctica.

In the party were Mrs. Byrd, wife of the
Commander, and their young son, Dickie;
Mrs. Frederick Gies, 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.

Sir Hubert says geologists say when
large masses of coal were laid down there
was little ice on what is now the South
Pole, and the question is as to whether vast
coal deposits exist near the South Pole Region.

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 selected. 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.

Sir Hubert is convinced that with
adequate preparation, experience sensibly
accumulated and the perfected machinery
available today are not needed, 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 Transarctic flying is
much safer than flying over established air
lines, which shortly will be crowded with
aircraft.

Headling 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
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Taking the salutes of all sorts of harbour
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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.
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, 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 banner 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 at sea. 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 Melville, 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. 

An advertisement from the (Brisbane Courier (Qld), Wednesday 3 October 1928, page 3).

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.

Border Watch (Mount Gambier, SA), Thursday 1 November 1928, page 1.

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—depleted 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.

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.

By continuous observations at these stations it is hoped to coordinate Antarctic weather conditions with those observed simultaneously in Australia, New Zealand, South America, and South Africa, and establish a sounder basis for long-range weather forecasts.

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 Antarctica 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 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 authorities in Sir Hubert Wilkins’s Antarctic Expedition, believing as I firmly do that no country stands a better chance to benefit by his investigations in those high southern latitudes.

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, 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: — “...long Lockheed seaplane 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, and 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 Antarctica 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
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

Edward VII Land and Graham Land.
Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld), Wednesday 7 November 1928, page 12.

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 taxed 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.

As a whole, it is a lofty continent, high above the ocean, with many ranges of huge 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.

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 observances 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.

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 degrees east longitude; and Graham Land, to the south of Cape Horn. Its shores are beset by snowstorms and fogs and winds continually blow with the violence of hurricanes.

The whole vast region is one of howling gales and incessant bad weather. Drift ice reaches the Cape of Good Hope and the coast of Tasmania.

Captain Cook sailed all around the Antarctic Continent in 1773, and described it as of an inexpressibly horrid aspect, buried in everlasting snow and ice. He wrote: — “The ports which may be on the coast are entirely filled with ice and snow. If one of them should be so far open as to invite a ship to enter it, the vessel would run a risk of being fixed there forever, or, perhaps, coming out some day as an ice island. The land will never be explored.”

The first exploring expedition in far southern seas was undertaken by Alvaro Mendana, a Peruvian, in 1567. In 1598, the South Shetland Islands, to the south of Cape Horn, were discovered by the Dutch. Eight years later the New Hebrides were located by a second expedition from Peru. In 1672, La Roche, a Frenchman, reported the finding of South Georgia Island.

Ten years later, a French ship put down on the map of the world Kerguelen Land, in latitude 49 south and longitude 60 east—named after its discoverer, de Kerguelen.

The latter thought he had found the long-sought Antarctic continent, but it proved to be only a barren island of large size. A colony of about seventy people maintains itself there now by hunting seals and other animals.

Antarctica is a continent on which nothing lives apparently, except penguins and a few other birds. It has no vegetation. Human beings could not possibly live there. One might wonder therefore, of what use its exploration would be.

The answer is that whatever may add to human knowledge and to acquaintance with the globe on which we dwell is worthwhile. Also, it is conceivable that great stores of valuable metals might be found in Antarctica. Geologists declare that to be altogether likely.

“One fact,” says Commander Byrd, “lures me to Antarctica, and that is that there are many thousands of square miles of land left in the world that have never been seen by human eyes—an area larger than that of the United States and Mexico—and I wish to plant the Stars and Stripes there.”

Sir George Wilkins’s objects in the Antarctic are mainly scientific. He wishes to find the best place on which to erect meteorological stations.

“This mysterious Antarctic continent,” he says, “is surrounded by open seas, to the north of which lie the great producing countries of Australia, New Zealand, South...
The Wilkins' Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the day of the Wilkins’ Article)

Africa, and South America. A knowledge of weather conditions in a mysterious continent would greatly benefit these lands. For instance, if it were possible to forestall 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—is it 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.

The Naturalist at Home, Poe and His Followers, and a Pawky Scot


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, the book 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. It is 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 “undiscovered.” It is little known certainly—portion of it is almost terra incognita — but only a very small portion, and even that 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 we 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 extraordinary value to science of the expedition’s accomplishments.

In almost every department of natural history, in geology, in botany and in ethnology, the specimens collected and the data obtained were of the most varied and complete character and the originators of the expedition in general and the authorities of the British Museum in particular have surely every reason to congratulate themselves both on their selection of Sir Hubert as leader, and on the unrivalled addition which he has made to their great storehouse of treasures.

Although “Undiscovered Australia” is necessarily scientific in style and subject and although much of it is fairly “stiff going”, yet over and over again one comes across pages of delightfully easy — and often humorous — reading.

For a clever and lively description of a back block picnic race-meeting I do not think I have ever read anything better than the chapter in this book which describes such a function, witnessed by the author at the little settlement of Katherine River in Northern Australia. And as a sample of his easy manner as a natural historian let me quote his paragraph referring to the cus-cus, which he found while exploring the reaches of the Olive and Macmillan River.

By the way, 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, because until Sir Hubert went there, there seems to have been considerable doubts as to its actual position: but when he goes to such trouble to describe the stream, to expatiate upon its magnitude and the character of the country through which it runs, and even to give as a number of unique photographs of the scenery thereabouts, it is rather irrational to be unable to find its position on his map—and the oversight strikes one as being rather extraordinary.

However, this is by the way — here is the paragraph I promised you: — “It was while investigating the river that we collected the first of a series of a most interesting mammal known as the cus-cus, or the short-eared opossum. The Australian opossum is a marsupial which varies considerably in its colouring 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 were 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 fell right into our boat. That night we decided to try possum stew. Young prepared the mess—and what a mess it was! I have eaten all sorts and sizes of animals, from frozen fragments of a mastodon discovered in the Arctic to whales and rats and mice but nothing that I had ever tried was so horrible or as tough as that cus-cus stew.”

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 chagrin 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 dissuaded several “promising young fellows” from joining the expedition because “there is no money to be made in expeditionary 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 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 that 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 justified to say 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 mediocire” 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 mediocire,” and what are the higher things?” Can Sir Hubert or anyone tell us for certain?

Sydney Mail (NSW), Wednesday 21 November 1928, page 18.

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 reasons 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 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 — he does 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 that the epic quality of the first discovery noted is that the Arctic has moods 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 carefully 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, take up too much space. Sir Hubert suffered more from the earthly humiliations necessary to raise funds — 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: Our copy from the publishers.

“Undiscovered Australia”: by Captain Sir G. H. Wilkins: London: Benn, 26/’s. Copies from Albert and Sons and Book Lovers’ Library and Book Store, Perth.

West Australian (Perth, WA), Saturday 24 November 1928, page 5.

Photo taken in the Arctic 1913-15. From ISO Archives.

29 November 1928
RECENT BOOKS REVIEWED

By “PAPERCUTTER”

“Flying the Arctic”, by Captain Sir G. H. Wilkins (G. Putnam’s Sons).

In “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
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(Selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the ‘Wilkins’ Article’)

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 realising 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-bound 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.


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: — “Plane Spirit and Mohilol 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 REPORT.

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 perch how to be content with pemmican. There was a high wind, with low clouds and 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 Graham Land but there are signs of clear weather tomorrow. The aeroplanes are standing on wheels on the runways, 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.”

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 flights, 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 tacked 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
Wilkins Expedition.
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 sank through soft ice, has been salvaged on the beach, and is little worse for being partly immersed in the sea.

The message adds:—"The weather is fine, but the harbour is treacherous. We are concerned at our inability to leave, but the actual salvage work has not worried us."

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?"

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 under took the leadership of an expedition sent out by the trustees of the British Museum to collect natural histories 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 H. R. Mill, speaking as vice-president of the Royal Geographical Society on the occasion on which 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 fairyland, no more perilous sea, ever loomed tho’ 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 Land — unexplored heavy pack ice which has made it unconquerable 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 Alonzo, 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 11deg. S. But in 1774, 1774, 1774, the wing

Barrier? Are the lands, if there be any, South Pole to Spitsbergen, a distance

of which his recent Arctic flight was the

established at the most conspicuous point

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store the

Wilkins as a man of vision. Even if

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.

The outstanding merit of the plan is the choice of an unknown area in the Antarctic over which to carry out the flight. This stamps Wilkins as a man of vision. Even if
The Wilkins’ Chronicle

(A selection of Trove Articles, Incorporating Advertisements and Cartoons from the bar of the Wilkins’ Article)

he be not fortunate enough to carry out his full programme, whatever portion of the area he is able to describe for us will be a new contribution to polar geography.

Were he and the hardy Norsemann, his pilot, men of less experience, one would be tempted to describe their task as impossible but both have just returned from an equally hazardous flight over a similar distance in the Arctic.

With fine weather and a moderate amount of good fortune, they may reach the Bay of Whales in time to welcome Commander Byrd and the other Americans who are at present on the way south.


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:

“The weather was such that all three whale-catchers had to spend today in harbour. It was not done unwillingly because the Norwegians here, their people at home and we ourselves respectfully paid tribute to Amundsen’s memory.

Our search fails to reveal a suitable snow-covered field for the ‘take-off’ on skis with a heavy load or with any load at all. The records and statements of visitors to this place in the last 10 years indicate that the season is a month earlier than usual.

Normally the harbor ice would still be perfect for landing either with wheels or with skis but the ice has already disappeared and although rain usually does not fall until after the New Year, this year we have had much rain on the soft snow.

While Lieutenant Carl Eielson and I were aboard the whale-catcher yesterday we vainly searched Snow Island 50 miles off shore and other places for a ‘take-off’ field but the snow had melted on all the flat surfaces leaving black patches of volcanic tufa. The sloping surfaces where the snow accumulates are too sloping or scarred by 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”. Australian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 15 December 1928, page 16. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/14153980

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, whether ice would form on the machine, with skis but the ice has already melted on the 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.

We are all pleased to hear that Lieutenant Eielson has been awarded the United States Congressional Medal.

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 snow storms Crossan and I flew over Snow Island.

When we were alighting an enormous albatross of the species Oisifraga gigantus, known here as “Nellies”, of which there are thousands about the harbour, smashed into the butts of our propeller. The bird weighed between 10lb. and 12lb., and had a wing spread between 8ft. and 10ft. If it had struck the propeller tips or the pilot’s windshiel it was probable that there would have been a disaster. It was impossible under the low clouds and without sunshine to judge the surface of the island accurately.

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”. Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 15 December 1928, page 16. https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/14153980

The Wilkins’ Chronicle

An advertisement from the Australasian (Melbourne, Vic.), Saturday 15 December 1928, page 16.

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 seeks it in the most diverse climes, being equally at home amid Polar ice and tropical jungle.

In “Unknown Australia” he gives an account of his experiences when collecting specimens of the rarer native fauna for the British Museum in 1923, ’24, and ’25. His first expedition was to the remote parts of Queensland, and subsequently he visited the Northern Territory.

Cape York Peninsula yielded little. It is a sterile place, and his party, which had hoped to eke out their supplies with game for the pot, were often on short commons. He came across several old miners, each working alone and jealously guarding the secret of his wealth. Sworn to silence, he was allowed to inspect several of the shafts from which the gold is being won. He betrays no confidences, but says that these men live fairly well for bush conditions, and are satisfied with their lot.

Incidentally, Sir Hubert disputes the statement that the aboriginal does not take kindly to agriculture.

It is true that as a hired labourer he is useless, but he will work for himself. At Cowal Creek Mission Station, of which a native teacher is in charge, there is quite a flourishing community, a clean village, with well-kept plantations and garden plots.

From the collectors’ standpoint Central Queensland is far more interesting. The Flinders country is extraordinarily rich in fossils. On one basalt hillock Sir Hubert

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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”.
Wilkins traced the outline of a huge ichthyosaur, about 35 feet in length, the head, shoulders and hips of which were plainly visible.

In other instances, only the head and shoulders are visible, but excavation would probably uncover the complete remains. Unfortunately, as the larger fossils weigh many tons, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to remove them, but the field deserves investigation by a skilled geologist.

Sir Hubert spent some time in the virtually unexplored Arnhem Land. The natives there are entirely untouched by the influences of civilisation. Most of them had never seen a white man, and they are warlike and fierce. Several of them stalked his lonely camp one night, and he thought that his last hour had come.

But next day he established friendly relations with them, and he describes many strange customs and superstitions. One of their beliefs is that you must be careful to burn the shells of turtle eggs, after eating them.

Otherwise someone who bears a grudge against you may find them, and place them between two trees which rub together. The trees will grind them to powder, and when it has blown away the negligent one will lose his powers of speech and hearing. In proof whereof the author was shown a dead and dumb boy.

Although Sir Hubert was on the best of terms with the natives as a whole, he happened to incur the displeasure of one of them, who promptly went to the tribal “rainmaker” and asked him to punish the white man. That obliging functionary performed various rites accompanied by magic invocations.

Shortly afterwards a violent storm broke. It lasted for a week—an unusually long period for this district—in which 30 inches were registered.

Collecting was out of the question in such a downpour, and the rainmaker’s prestige was greatly enhanced.

Sir Hubert mentions a curious example of the relation of cause and effect. Australian native animals carry little fat. In the King River district wild bees are not plentiful. The inhabitants of this region are well fed. The enforced living upon lean meat and roots, a dietary deficient in fat and sugar, has led to the development of several peculiar customs, one of which is promiscuous cannibalism.

With most of the peoples among whom this practice prevails it has a symbolic significance. But these are prompted by the unconscious wish to satisfy a chemical need. They do not kill to obtain human flesh, but eat dead bodies and even disinter buried corpses to appease their appetites.

The consumption of human flesh is governed by strict rules. Anyone may eat murdered persons and grown men and women. But only men may eat babies; women may not eat young boys, and the flesh of young girls is retained for the exclusive use of the old men of the tribe.

Sir Hubert is a good Australian, and his exploits have conferred distinction upon 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.

“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 lessured 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 uncultured 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

26 December 1928

First in Queensland

The Brisbane Courier

83rd Year of Publication

Wednesday, December 26, 1928.

In the Antarctic

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 cabled 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 time honoured 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 Great Britain. That is, roughly, 1,400 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 return 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 paddling explorer.

Despite all that, and the discovery of six new islands, Sir George says, “We have settled the most interesting of our problems. We have returned gloomy, depressed, 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 of his trusted men, the intrepid explorer 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 be, 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 approaches to the South American type; on the Ross Sea side it approaches 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 wait with interest for his further messages.

Brisbane Courier (Qld), Wednesday 26 December 1928, page 10.

28 December 1928
Sir Hubert Wilkins

Captain Sir George Hubert Wilkins, M.C., whose messages from the Antarctic flier 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’ 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 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 fearful 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. Injuy, minor, or fatal, seemed imminent but we were resigned helpless in the hands of our Maker. His to dispose of without effort on our part. There was nothing we might do to help ourselves.”

The courage of such adventurers as Sir Hubert Wilkins consists first in a kind of passionate devotion to the work in hand, and second in a discipline of intense concentration which while enduring torment from sensitive nerves, can maintain the judgment’s grasp of the detail, of the business.

It is not because Britons excel other races in courage that they have produced the peculiar type of adventurer of which Sir Hubert Wilkins is an example.

Rather it is the prosaic and matter of fact strain that belongs to their temperament

and work that gives what they do its special value.

From the days of the Elizabethan seamen to the present, British adventurers have never sought glory but the plain and simple discovery.

Drake’s famous voyage round the world was made owing to the fact that he could not hope to get home the glory that came.

British adventurers have always had some definite, limited personal objective in the region or on the frontier of practical possibilities—a North-West passage to discover, or a colony to plant—some new thing to find: a task as yet undone to do.

The large guesswork of the Spanish and the Portuguese was not for them.

The British adventurer having fixed on his purpose carefully calculated how many sides of bacon and barrels of powder he would need to carry it through.

Sometimes the planning seems in the light of events to have been pitifully inadequate, but at least the carefulness of it ensured a workmanlike start.

Then the difficulties of each day could be taken as they came, and met with firm resolution, level judgment, and extraordinary “staying power.”

Captain Wilkins stands in the succession to these gentlemen adventurers. He has always desired to know closely and thoroughly something not known before.

Before his Arctic adventure, he was in Northern Australia collecting specimens for the British Museum in just those regions which was least explored.

There are one or two graphic descriptions of the terror that flith by night in those passages of his book wherein he tells of blacks crawling round his camp during the night. They are classic descriptions of fear, but only a very brave man could have waited calmly for dawn and gone to meet his enemies unarmed.

Captain Wilkins went from the Northern Territory to the Arctic Circle, to answer the question important for science: whether there was any land mass round the North Pole.

After two disastrous failures in the air, and a complete financial crash, he and his wonderful Norwegian pilot Eielson succeeded in flying 2,200 miles across this great “blind spot” of the world from Alaska to Spitsbergen.

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 miles, 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."


29 December 1928
Wilkins's Flight

Until the flight of Sir George Hubert Wilkins, it was supposed that Graham Land was portion of the Antarctic continent, the surmise being that the land continued to King Edward VII Land and Leopold Land along the dotted lines. The black line shows the previous limit of exploration. The letter "A" in the map denotes the position of Weather Island mentioned by Sir George Hubert Wilkins, and the letter "B" marks the approximate southern limit of his flight. From "B" to the South Pole is about 1,600 miles.

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".