

# Skyland News

PAPUA NEW GUINEA'S LEADING  
AVIATION & TRAVEL PUBLICATION



*Special Edition 4 January 1996*

**Captain Bill Johns :30,000 hrs**



## **Bill Johns Does It Again !**

Once again **SkyLand News'** raving reporter scoops the pool reporting another first in the Land of the Unexpected with the unprecedented logging of 30, 000 flying hours by a pilot in Papua New Guinea!

On Thursday 12 December 1995, flying a MBA Super Kingair Captain Bill Johns logged his thirty thousandth flying hour creating another PNG record. The First Officer was reported as saying that Captain Johns displayed little emotion passing the magic minute. Bill did not even spray the expectant passengers with a magnum of Bollinger '29 nor offer a warm orange juice let alone a dollop of Beluga on a soggy cracker biscuit.

**SkyLand News'** data research department calculates that Bill Johns has flown some 66 hours 40 minutes per month (11.25 months per year) for an average of 750 hours per year to reach his career total in forty years. Over 24,000 of those hours have been logged in the skies over Papua New Guinea, another record! During his career to date, Bill has filled 8 log books and worn out nearly 250 Parker refills. His 30,000 hours may indicate that the present day airline pilot logging some 500 or so hours per year will not only never equal Bill's record even if they flew 'till their 80's !

### **Fourty Years On..**

Recalling the odd words of a school day song...."Fourty years on when afar and asunder, parted are those who are singing today,...."

One wonders where all the people are now that were around when the young Bill Johns first came to Papua New Guinea forty years ago. Many no doubt have passed on to that great hangar in the sky but there must be a multitude still active. Names that readily come to mind are Tommy Deagan, Rowdy Reagan, Dick Glassey, Dave Campbell, Gordon Biggs, Mal Shannon, Bill Ticehurst, Bob Hay, Peter Manser, Bobby Gibbes, Bill Rodgers, Barry Rogers, John McDermott, John Kessey, Adrian Nisbet, Neale Keag, Tom Drury, Forgie Smith, Laurie Crowley, Paul Bolger, Jim Perry, Helly Tschuchnigg, Arne Rasmussen, Allan Mossman, Dave McClure, Bertie Heath, Tom Spiers, Ray Harris, Dave Robertson, John Simmler, Jasper Maskelyne, Frank Goosens, Vince Saunders, Cliff Jackson, Doug McGraw, John Downie, Jack Stammer, Lloyd Moss, Gerd Franck, Joe Wallachy, Frank Newell, Paul

Raasch, Black Jack Walker, Lindsay Mullan, Gus Swinbourne, Brian McCook, Brian Mathews and a few hundred more. These people formed the backbone of PNG aviation from the 1950's through to Independence and Bill Johns was one of them and is still here, a remarkable achievement.

Captain Johns, was born at Proserpine, Queensland way back in 1928, time bilong Tumbuna tru. When men were men and hand clipped a thousand sheep a day. Bill started flying training somehow or other in 1950. **SkyLand News'** Historical Research Department could not confirm the rumour that young Bill bashed drums and clashed cymbals and rattled tamborines outside Brisbane pubs to raise sufficient funds for flying lessons.

After gaining his Commercial Licence and Instructor's Rating in 1953 Bill became an honorary Instructor with the Aero Club of Southern Tasmania, about the same time that the Tasmanian Tiger disappeared and the famous Lenny Cleaver started flying lessons. **SkyLand News** could not link either occurrence to Bill Johns. After a year or so of terrorising a vast number of Taswegians, Bill thought that he should depart for warmer climes and like Errol Flynn before him, sought shelter and sustenance in Papua New Guinea.

Captain Bill Johns arrived in the then Territory of Papua New Guinea in 1955, a land truly of the unexpected and like nowhere else you have never been, long before the tourist industry thought up the words. Accepting a flying position with Mandated Airlines as a DC3 First Officer was the commencement of a long and successful airline career. A airline career that was to continue for over thirty years, culminating when retired in 1984, along with a number of other pilots by the then Air Niugini KLM management team.

Not long after joining Mandated, Reginald Ansett purchased the airline from Carpenters and some month or so later, Reg was surprised to receive aircraft leasing accounts from Carpenters. It transpired that Reg forgot to buy the aircraft along with the other assets when negotiating the deal. Bill Johns strongly denied any involvement in this dastardly deal. The fact that MAL's tail logo was a Star of David may have had something to do with it.

Bill's natural ability was quickly recognised by his peers and he was lent to Buchanan's Territory Airlines for a while during a pilot shortage (Sackem-All had just got rid of another fifteen pilots) driving underpowered de Havilland Dragons and Tiger Moths in and around the highland valleys, rarely over the top. Valuable mountain experience was gained during this period along with a few firsts, including flying Snake Giregire of Kerowagi on his first Waghi Valley flight.

Returning to MAL, Bill quickly checked out in command of the Douglas DC3 and became part of Ansett after MAL was purchased by Reg Ansett with the airline renamed Ansett - MAL. Some years later, the airline changed its name to Ansett Airlines of Papua New Guinea. A name kept until the start up of the National Airline, Air Niugini.

With Independence on the horizon, Bill became one of the few Ansett pilots who elected to remain in PNG after 1973 and help with the formation of Air Niugini. His valuable experience and knowledge of the country was well utilized, training a multitude of new pilots from all walks of life and aviation backgrounds, from US Air Force high performance jet jockeys, to PNG experienced light aircraft pilots, to low hour instructors.

The fact that this group of such diversified pilots was moulded so quickly into an efficient and well-trained airline unit, was a direct result of the ability and dedication of Bill Johns and other training captains like him. A remarkable achievement that astounded many a bar room critic who had forecast doom and gloom for the fledgling airline.

For a little relaxation from the rigors of flying training, Bill was often observed putting John Close's Tiger Moth through a medley of aerobatic maneuvers over Jackson's Airport. Climbing, diving, looping, rolling, spinning, stall-turning and inverted flight. (Ah Confucius say...Lady who fly upside down must have clackup!) Bill's polished handling of the little bi-plane brought great delight to the admirers below. When he was not flying the Tiger for relaxation, Bill would often be seen sailing on Port Moresby harbor or enjoying music of his own making.

Apart from flying, Bill's greatest love is music, playing in a number of bands in the Brisbane area as a young lad. In 1944 he was employed by the American Armed Forces Entertainment Division, playing at the American Centre emulating the great Gene Krupa. Oh! Shades of Golden Wedding or the sounds of the big band era with Tommy Dorsey

and Glenn Miller hits. He also played with the Queensland Symphony Orchestra throughout the 1940's as a percussionist.

Bill's musical interests and talent gave him the opportunity to travel extensively and he toured with J.C. Williamson. Bill performed as a drummer in a number of shows including, 'No No Nanette', 'The Girl Friend', 'Annie Get Your Gun' and 'Hellzapoppin' 1949 - 1950. Bill played Timpanist in 'La Boheme' Opera followed by Vaudeville at the Brisbane Theatre Royal in 1950. He was posted to the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra in 1951 and later employed with the ABC symphony Orchestra.

During his years in Papua New Guinea, Bill retained his life long interest in music, playing in numerous brass, orchestra and dance bands throughout the country. In his spare time teaching percussion and brass instruments as well as composing music for the Brisbane Symphony Orchestra.

After retiring from Air Niugini in 1985 Bill Johns accepted a position in Tonga with Friendly Island Airways for two years before returning to Brisbane. There he joined Dennis Buchanan's Flight West Airlines operating de Havilland Dash 8 and Kingair aircraft, remaining for seven years.

During his career, Bill has flown a multitude of aircraft. These include the de Havilland Caribou, Dash- 8, Tiger Moth, Dragon, Fokker F27 Friendship, F28 Fellowship, Boeing 707, Casa, BN Islander, Beech Kingair and a few others thrown in for good measure.

Forty years on after first coming to Papua New Guinea, having logged over 30,000 accident free hours, equal to 10,000,000 miles. Or twenty return trips to the moon, or some 200 orbits of the earth, we find this remarkable person, this aviation enthusiast and professional pilot still enjoying flying to the full, this time with John Wild's Milne Bay Air - MBA.

In an exclusive interview with **SkyLand News**, Captain Johns stated that he never set out to create any records but a bit like Topsy, the hours just grewed. Asked if he had any definite answer to his longevity in aviation, his reply was to know fully the aircraft that you fly, the country over which you fly, do not stick your neck out and be moderate in your habits.

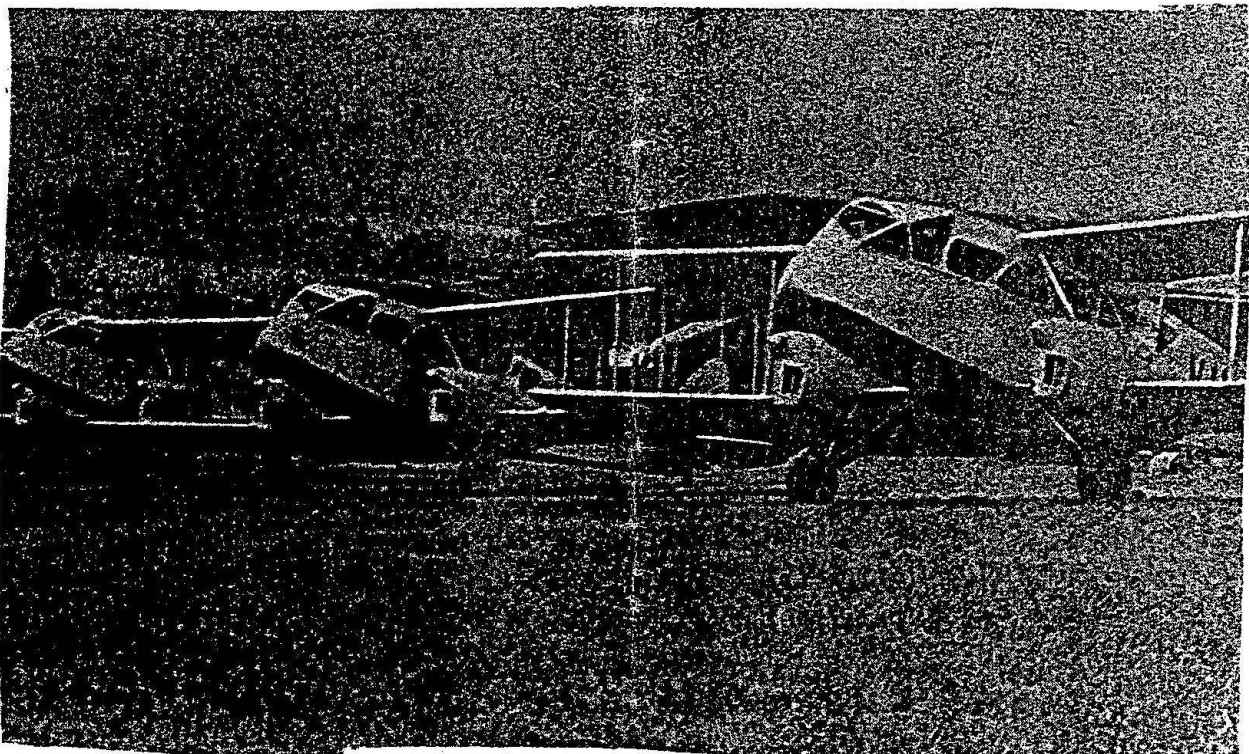
Bill plans on flying for a number of years until he has logged his 35,000 hour after which he may consider hanging up the well worn leather helmet and goggles to spend a little time with his two other loves, his beautiful wife, Estelle and music.

Captain Bill Johns will gather together with a few 'bald eagles' and other friends on 4 January to celebrate this momentous achievement. This group of friends will acknowledge his achievement in a manner most befitting the occasion and the gentleman that Captain Johns is.

On his return to Brisbane for a well earned rest after the PNG festive season, Captain Bill Johns will be the guest of honour at a special function organised by a number of compatriots who were unable to attend the PNG occasion.

**SkyLand News** has been advised that Captain W.J. Bill Johns has been recommended to the prestigious Guild Of Air Pilots And Navigators for the high honour and award of "Master Air Pilot" The patron of which is Her Majesty The Queen and the Master AT Arms, The Duke Of Edinburgh.

The Management and Staff of **SkyLand News** extend to Captain Johns their heartiest congratulations for such a magnificent achievement and wish him continued success in his chosen career as a professional air pilot.





**Bill Johns with Mandated Air lines Port Manager  
Paul Bolger 1956**

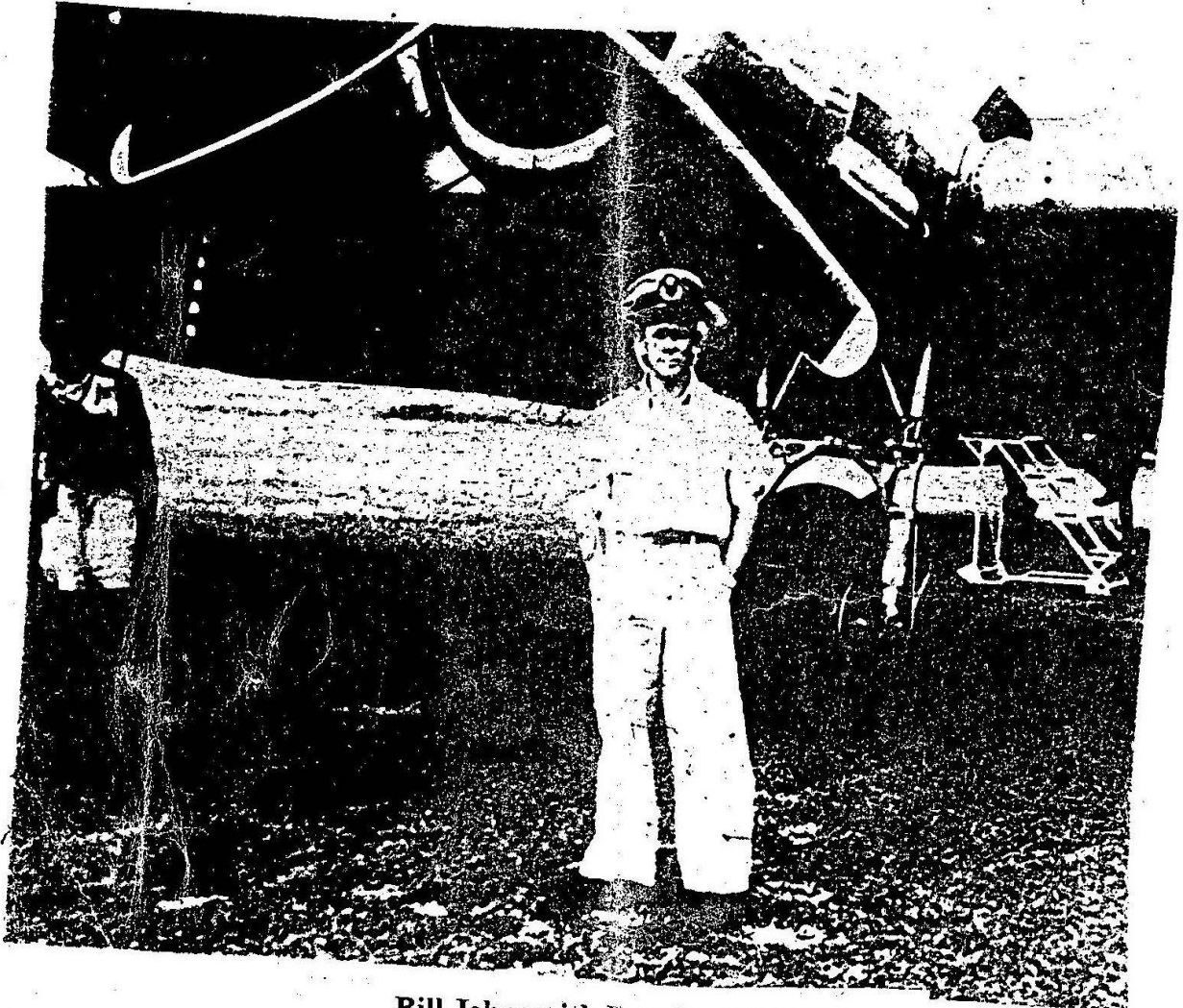


**Captain Bill Johns with leader and future politician  
Sinake Giregire Kerowagi 1956.**

**De Havilland DH84 Dragon was powered by two 145hp  
4 cylinder Gypsy Moth engines and was considered to be  
a little underpowered for Highland or altitude operations.**

**ALPHA....**

**Where it all began forty year ago.**



**Bill Johns with Douglas DC3 1955**

*We few, we very few  
we band of brothers  
we salute you.*