

Of camels, jumbos and other birds

By TONY STEPHENS

Some magnificent men and women came together yesterday in a brand new flying machine.

They went up, down, round and around, without leaving the ground. It was their talk that soared, their tales of derring-do.

The brand new Qantas 747, in which they sat for the launch of an ABC radio program on the social history of Australian aviation, stayed firmly on the Kingsford Smith Airport tarmac.

All in all, they helped put the importance of aviation in isolated Australia into perspective.

Take Mrs Mary Yeoman, who turns 89 on Anzac Day, and is believed to be Qantas's oldest passenger.

She took a joy flight with Hudson Fysh at Charleville in 1921, helping the young pilot pay for his second aircraft and, therefore, contributing in a small way to the formation of Qantas. The 10-minute flight cost her several weeks' pay.

"I was curious about everything in life," said Mrs Yeoman. "I still am. A farmer had to move his sheep out of a paddock so we could fly. I just closed my eyes and when I opened them I was in the air. I thought then I would like to fly round the world."

Take Captain G. U. "Scotty" Allan, who turns 90 tomorrow.

Capt Allan left the western isles of Scotland to enlist in World War I, expecting to join the army. He ended up in the Royal Flying Corps, piloting Sopwith Camels over Europe.

"When you are 18, you don't think," he said. "The average life of a Camel pilot was 19 days."

After the war, Scotty flew in the Australian outback, guided by the Shell road map and the names on railway stations. "You'd come down to make out the lettering."

He flew the first Qantas flight out of Australia — to Singapore — in 1935. How and where would he like to make his last flight? "To heaven," said the old captain, "with my own wings."

The magnificent flying people met at the launch of Radio National's *Rag, Sticks and Wire*, made by Bill Bunbury, and which begins on Sunday.

Mr Bunbury offers a couple of correctives to conventional history.

First, he says that while Hudson (later Sir Hudson) Fysh is entitled to much of the credit for forming Qantas, the role of Paul McGinness is underrated. McGinness was a pilot before Fysh, and it was his drive, said Bunbury, that won Queensland graziers' support for Qantas. He resigned after two years and died in obscurity.

Second, Charles Ulm provided the entrepreneurial drive in the Kingsford Smith/Ulm partnership.

Much of the eight-part radio series, however, is devoted to those magnificent men and women.

As Gaby Kennard, Australia's solo round-the-world flyer, pointed out yesterday, much of the adventure has gone out of flying.

The very first flight, by Orville and Wilbur Wright, in 1903 covered 40 metres. Qantas's latest Boeing 747 is 70.4 metres long.

Jack Hazlitt, who was a signals runner at Gallipoli, became a pilot and then — because a doctor decided he had heart trouble — an engineer. Now 92, he is Qantas's oldest ex-employee.

"There was nothing funny about it," said Mr Hazlitt. "It was disaster after disaster. What I remember most is the dust, the flies, the heat and the broken down engines."

Captain "Lennie" Grey, 75 next month, flew with Kingsford Smith for nothing. He would like his last flight to be over Australia, in an open cockpit. "You could reach out and touch the gum trees."



Soaring tales of derring-do ... Captain "Lennie" Grey, perched inside the engine of a new 747, reminisces with Mrs Mary Yeoman, who is believed to be Qantas's oldest passenger.

Picture by STEVEN SIEWERT