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## MARALINGA DOVE

### The adventurous life of de Havilland DH.104 Dove 6 VH-DHF

By Geoff Goodall



VH-DHF at Adelaide in 1962 wearing her final TAA style paint scheme for the UK Ministry of Aviation. The name *Tietkens* was painted on the nose on the port side only. Photo by John Hillier

Based at Adelaide Airport, this Dove operated a regular courier service between Adelaide and the Maralinga atomic test range in the South Australian western desert for seven years. Owned by the UK Ministry of Supply, it was maintained and crewed by TAA under an agreement referred to as the UKMOS contract. When Maralinga's activities were wound down, it began a new life in the tropics as the first aircraft of a new airline in the Solomon Islands.

In the late 1940s the British Government gave high priority to developing its nuclear weapon research program and needed test grounds to explode their devices. When Canada declined a proposal to use its northern Arctic territories, the loyal Australian Government enthusiastically offered Australian soil for the atomic tests. The first British atomic bomb was exploded on a retired Royal Navy frigate *HMS Plym* moored in the Monte Bello Islands on the WA coastline near Onslow WA in October 1962. A land site was then chosen on a remote desert claypan in western South Australia, given the name Emu, where construction began on an all-weather runway and village to house 400 military men and atomic scientists. Two devices were detonated on towers at Emu a year later.

Despite the massive cost of establishing the Emu test ground, for reasons never satisfactorily explained, Emu was abandoned and a new site chosen 250 Km to the south. Theories abound for the real reason for the move, but given the sensitivities involved, they almost certainly will never be disclosed at an official level.

The new permanent British atomic test facility was named **Maralinga** as a joint project between the British and Australian Governments along similar lines as the Woomera Rocket Range. Both desert sites came under the control of the newly formed Long Range Weapons Research Establishment at Salisbury, north of Adelaide at what was to become Edinburgh RAAF Station. RAF Transport Command Hastings and Yorks now repeated their shuttle of long haul flights from Britain to South Australia carrying personnel and equipment needed to construct the new Maralinga runways and test grounds. They were supported by RAAF Dakotas, Bristol Freighters and Percival Princes which were part of the Australian input to Woomera.

By 1955 as Maralinga facilities were being completed and the program of British atomic experiments and detonations would soon commence, the RAF and RAAF transport aircraft could be replaced by a regular scheduled air service to the nearest city, Adelaide to carry

personnel and urgent supplies. The United Kingdom Ministry of Supply was tasked with establishing such a service, and after evaluating the predicted demands, placed an order with de Havilland Aircraft Company for a new DH.104 Dove then in full production at Hatfield and Hawarden. The order specified a Dove Series 6 with an early delivery date, which de Havilland satisfied by modifying a freshly built Dove 4 G-AOAG to Series 6 standard by installing more powerful 380hp models of Gipsy Queen engines, which allowed a higher payload.

The British Certificate of Airworthiness as a Dove 6 was issued at Hatfield on 24 May 1955. It was seen at Hatfield two days later, just prior to departing on the delivery flight to Australia. Its customer preparation and Australian certification was handled by the Australian associate company de Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd at Bankstown Airport, Sydney. It was parked in front of their Bankstown hangar by 19 June, unpainted except for the British Registration. It was then painted glossy grey with white roof and blue fuselage flash with the name "De Havilland Dove" on the nose. On 15 July 1955 it was registered VH-DHF in de Havilland Aircraft's sequential registration block, owner U.K. Ministry of Supply (Australia), Adelaide. Three days later it was test flown at Bankstown and Australian C of A issued.



G-AOAG at Bankstown in 1955 outside the de Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd hangar after delivery from England, In metal finish. Photo by Jim Dyson



Now registered VH-DHF, at Bankstown later in 1955 outside de Havilland Aircraft's hangar, now painted grey, white and blue with *De Havilland Dove* on the nose. Photo by Eddie Coates

### The Dove commences Maralinga services

The Dove was stationed at Adelaide Airport and operated by Trans Australia Airlines under the terms of the UKMOS contract. The British Ministry dictated the schedule and loadings, vetting the security clearances of the passengers, while TAA was responsible for flying operations and maintaining the aircraft, charging the Ministry at an hourly rate for maintenance, and a fixed rate for each flight for each pilot involved.

Normal seating was for 9 passengers and although the Dove was approved for single-pilot operation, the contract stipulated two pilots be carried. Passengers were processed at the TAA passenger terminal at Adelaide's West Beach Airport. TAA was a logical choice because of its experience in operating similar light aircraft contracts for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and NT Medical Service, which included Drover and Dove aircraft. A later repaint saw VH-DHF with "UK Ministry of Aviation" above the windows (following a reshuffle of portfolios back at Whitehall), an orange dayglo tail in keeping with the TAA fleet scheme of the late 1950s, and the name "Tietkens" on the port side of the nose. The name followed TAA practice of naming their aircraft after Australian explorers and was cleverly chosen to honour W. H. Tietkens who was second in command to Ernest Giles on his 1879-80 expedition into the Maralinga Tjarutja lands in the north west of SA.

Given the military secrecy that surrounded all aspects of Woomera and Maralinga, no details of the Maralinga courier service were published at the time, only receiving a minimal mention in the TAA annual reports. However, thanks to recollections of TAA pilots who flew the Maralinga run, we learn more of how it was operated. TAA rotated pilots to be based in Adelaide for the contract but also called on a pool of Dove endorsed pilots from the other TAA contracts with RFDS and NTMS. Captain Stewart Spencely recalls that at the time he flew VH-DHF he was a Queensland-based pilot flying the TAA DC-3 channel country service from Charleville to Broken Hill. He would fly from Brisbane to Adelaide the day before a series of Dove flights to Maralinga and then return to Brisbane after his time on the Dove.

Captain Harry Moss who was TAA Port Captain Alice Springs, flying the NTMS Dove clinic runs, recalls being in Melbourne for DH.104 refresher training at the TAA engineering school. One day the flight superintendent sought him out urgently to tell him he was being sent to Adelaide immediately for several weeks to replace an ill pilot on the Maralinga service. In his book *10,000 Hours*, Harry Moss writes of a typical Maralinga service in the Dove, including the classified materials carried in the nose locker in containers nicknamed "bombs":

*"At 7.45am next morning, out to the aircraft in full uniform. The Dove was owned by the British Air Ministry and operated by TAA for the Weapons Research Establishment at Maralinga. Everything was highly secret and subject to strict security. Commonwealth Security Officers loaded the "bombs" as we called them in the front locker, locked the door and kept the key. We neither knew or cared whether the bombs were lethal or not, just so long as we had their weight. The passengers and catering were loaded, engines started, and we taxied out to be off the ground punctually at 8am. The passengers looked after their own morning tea and we landed at Maralinga at 11.20. The Maralinga Security Officers opened the nose locker with their key and took out the bombs. Another nuclear device was soon to be exploded and activity was intense. Most of the top British scientists were there and I must say that I became an ardent admirer of the English "boffin" type. All hands had lunch in the Army type mess, cafeteria style. Most of the officers had tabs on their lapels to indicate whether they were radioactive or not. When the Tannoy announced in thick North Country accent that the "Doove be departin' at thirteen hundred", we drove out to the airstrip. Security Officers loaded more "bombs" in the front locker, the passengers came aboard, we took off and climbed high to ride back to Adelaide on the prevailing westerly wind. The bombs were unloaded, the passengers mostly transferred to intercapital flights, and I went back to the hotel for tea. I liked that Maralinga run and the people. This was a neat and orderly life: something new to me."*

The passengers' point of view is described by Bureau of Meteorology officer Peter Broughton, returning to Adelaide in the Dove after an eight month posting to the Maralinga Met Office:

*"There were nine passengers happily waiting in the departure room to return to civilization. The mess had provided an urn of tea, an urn of coffee and a hamper of sandwiches to see us through to journey's end. We were warned that it would be extremely turbulent flying over the*

*desert until we reached cruising level but after that it would be safe for us to unfasten our seat belts and unpack the refreshments. We settled ourselves and the aircraft took off in a surprisingly steep climb from the airfield. It wasn't long before the aircraft started shuddering and bumping its way up through some of the most extreme turbulence I have ever experienced. None of us were feeling the best when the aircraft levelled off. I remember I was the first to make my way to the back of the aircraft and unlash the containers of tea and coffee."*



A rare view of Maralinga airfield, with VH-DHF.

Photo via Peter Broughton

### **Ministerial concern**

An interesting side bar to the main story is a 20 June 1961 letter from the Minister for Civil Aviation, Shane Paltridge to the Director-General of Civil Aviation:  
*"When I was recently at Maralinga I was surprised to learn that T.A.A. were conducting a charter service between that Airport and Adelaide by Dove aircraft. I was under the impression that the terms of the legislation prevented them from doing this.  
I wonder if you would look at the matter and fully advise me please."*

The DGCA, Donald Anderson, took advice from within the Department of Civil Aviation and replied to the Minister on 29 June:  
*"The Dove aircraft that operates between Maralinga and Adelaide (VH-DHF) is owned by the United Kingdom Ministry of Supply and is used for its purposes only. TAA merely crews and maintains the aircraft. TAA carries out similar functions with the aircraft belonging to the Department of Health and some Flying Doctor aircraft.  
In view of the circumstances, you may not wish to pursue the question whether the Airlines Act specifically permits TAA to undertake the work."*

However the implied question of TAA operating an intra-state air service was referred to the Crown Solicitor for a ruling. A Minute to the Minister from the Assistant Crown Solicitor dated 18 July 1961 set out the legal position. It found that the aircraft was used on a private operation by the UK Ministry of Supply to carry staff for no payment and that TAA had legal authority to operate the aircraft under the Act. It did not constitute an intra-state air service, which would have been beyond TAA's legal powers

### **A log of events**

Details of the Dove's daily flying is provided by a routine Department of Civil Aviation file which recorded reports of unserviceabilities and incidents for all airline operated aircraft. Ceduna SA was the preferred diversion airfield probably because of a resident maintenance hangar for the Bush Church Aid Society's Lockheed 12A, Dragon and later Cessna 210s. These maintenance reports must be viewed in the context that they cover extensive flying over a 6 year period and that mandatory reporting of events, even minor, was required. Weather related and Air Traffic Control incident reports are also included:

- 6.1.56 Maralinga-Adelaide, diverted to Whyalla due fuel. Captain R. Newman
- 23.5.56 Maralinga-Adelaide, starboard prop feathered. Captain Newman
- 5.6.56 Returned to Ceduna, due poor weather. Captain Newman
- 10.7.56 Maralinga-Adelaide, diverted to Ceduna due weather, Captain Newman
- 12.8.56 Returned to Perth after departure, due faulty fuel gauge. Captain Newman
- 14.10.56 Returned to Adelaide, undercarriage failed to retract. Captain Newman
- 17.1.57 Adelaide-Maralinga, radio problems en route. Captain J. K. Dawe
- 18.3.57 Maralinga-Adelaide, port engine feathered due fire warning. Captain Dawe
- 3.5.57 Adelaide, takeoff abandoned due power loss starboard engine. Captain Dawe
- 7.6.57 Ceduna-Maralinga, VHF radio u/s. Captain D.H. Rogers
- 21.6.57 Adelaide, returned after departure due low cloud. Captain Rogers
- 10.10.57 Maralinga-Adelaide, returned Maralinga due undercarriage warning. Captain Dawe
- 11.11.57 Woomera-Adelaide, faulty undercarriage brakes. Captain Dawe
- 18.12.57 Maralinga, fuel from drum found to be contaminated. Captain Dawe
- 6.2.58 Woomera-Maralinga, starboard prop feathered. Captain Dawe
- 13.5.58 Adelaide-Maralinga, low oil pressure en route. Captain Rogers
- 14.5.58 Adelaide, returned to tarmac due u/s altimeter. Captain Rogers
- 30.5.58 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due oil loss starboard engine. Captain Rogers
- 23.7.58 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due poor weather, Captain Rogers
- 12.8.58 Adelaide-Ceduna, precautionary landing Minnipa SA due to suspected oil leak on to exhaust. Captain Newman
- 13.8.58 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due weather. Captain Rogers
- 15.8.58 Adelaide-Maralinga, returned to Adelaide due weather. Captain Rogers
- 26.8.58 Adelaide-Maralinga, port prop feathered. Captain Rogers
- 18.3.59 Maralinga. Defective oil seal in port engine. Captain Rogers.
- 13.4.59 Maralinga-Adelaide, diverted to Ceduna due u/s radio. Captain Dawe
- 14.4.59 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due port engine problems. Captain Rogers
- 15.4.59 Maralinga, malfunctioning port propeller on ground. Captain Dawe
- 15.4.59 Diverted to Ceduna due u/s radio. Captain Dawe
- 15.4.59 Ceduna-Adelaide, returned to Ceduna due port engine shut down and propeller feathered. Captain Dawe
- 22.4.59 Ceduna, faulty undercarriage indicator. Captain Rogers
- 31.5.59 Adelaide-Mount Clarence Station, returned to Adelaide due rough running starboard engine. Captain Dawe.
- 2.6.59 Adelaide-Ceduna, returned to Adelaide due rough running engine. Captain Dawe.
- 8.6.59 Diverted to Ceduna due to fog at Maralinga. Captain Dawe.
- 9.6.59 Diverted to Ceduna due to heavy rain at Maralinga. Captain Dawe
- 15.6.59 Adelaide, returned after departure due fire warning in No.2 engine. Captain Rogers
- 18.9.59 Adelaide, returned after departure due maintenance problem. Captain Dawe
- 23.9.59 Maralinga, faulty brake pressure. Captain Dawe
- 30.9.59 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due rough running port engine. Captain Dawe
- 20.10.59 Maralinga-Adelaide, diverted to Ceduna due wing-fuselage sealing strip coming loose. Captain Rogers
- 27.10.59 Maralinga-Adelaide, nose gear retraction fault. Captain Rogers
- 4.11.59 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due oil leak. Captain Newman
- 14.12.59 Adelaide, returned after departure due faulty undercarriage retraction. Captain Dawe
- 28.1.60 Maralinga-Adelaide, diverted to Ceduna due oil pressure drop. Captain Rogers
- 29.2.60 Adelaide, returned to tarmac due propeller pitch control faulty. Captain Rogers
- 8.3.60 Adelaide-Maralinga, returned to Adelaide with port prop feathered. Captain Dawe
- 17.3.60 Ceduna-Maralinga, returned to Ceduna due smoke from port engine. Captain Rogers
- 18.3.60 Maralinga-Adelaide, radio problems en route. Captain Rogers
- 6.4.60 Maralinga-Adelaide, port engine shut down and prop feathered. Captain Newman
- 29.4.60 Maralinga-Adelaide, engine feathered. Captain Newman
- 8.6.60 Maralinga-Adelaide, radio communications loss en route.
- 14.6.60 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna. Captain H. W. Moss
- 20.6.60 Maralinga-Adelaide, ATC incident due change of flight plan. Captain Rogers
- 8.9.60 Adelaide-Maralinga, loss of undercarriage compression. Captain Paull
- 20.9.60 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due weather at Maralinga. Captain A. Judd

- 8.11.60 Adelaide-Maralinga, generator u/s. Captain Dawe
- 9.11.60 Cleve-Adelaide, faulty radio. Captain Judd
- 19.12.60 Adelaide, undercarriage warning light u/s. Captain Judd
- 19.1.61 Adelaide, oil leak in port engine, prop feathered. Captain K. Knappstein
- 26.1.61 Adelaide-Maralinga, returned to Adelaide due dust storm at Maralinga. Captain Knappstein
- 9.3.61 Adelaide, undercarriage warning light u/s. Captain Knappstein
- 16.4.61 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due rough engine. Captain Judd
- 2.5.61 Adelaide-Maralinga, diverted to Ceduna due fog at Maralinga. Captain Knappstein
- 30.5.61 Adelaide, port magneto u/s. Captain Knappstein
- 19.6.61 Adelaide, aircraft unserviceable. Captain Judd
- 2.7.61 Maralinga-Adelaide, loss of radio communications enroute.
- 5.7.61 Adelaide, returned after departure due icing and heavy rain. Captain Spenceley
- 27.10.61 Adelaide-Maralinga, returned to Adelaide due rough running engine. Captain Judd
- 7.12.61 Adelaide, suspected undercarriage fault. Captain Knappstein
- 31.1.62 Adelaide, ATC incident report of taxiing conflict. Captain Judd
- 7.2.62 Maralinga-Adelaide, ATC incident report due incorrect cruising level
- 7.3.62 Adelaide, undercarriage fault warning light u/s. Captain Knappstein
- 19.3.62 Adelaide, returned due oil dripping on port exhaust. Captain Knappstein
- 22.3.62 Adelaide-Maralinga, returned to Adelaide due oil leak. Captain Judd
- 26.3.62 Adelaide-Maralinga, returned to Adelaide due undercarriage indicator faulty. Captain Judd
- 13.4.62 Adelaide-Maralinga, returned to Adelaide due magneto u/s.
- 8.5.62 Adelaide, minor damage when forklift vehicle struck wing

During 1961 two other TAA pilots, Jim Murtha and Luchius Heinz were given Security Vetting for the Maralinga contract. If they did fly the route, their services evidently were trouble free, not appearing in the incidents log above. For the rest of 1962 VH-DHF spent most of its time parked in the TAA hangar at Adelaide. The requirements for services to Maralinga had reduced and were handled by on-demand charters of Airlines of SA DC-3s. Towards the end of the year the Dove was advertised for sale.



VH-DHF at Adelaide-West Beach Airport in 1959 in its original colour scheme.

Photo by Allan Fraser



VH-DHF at Adelaide in 1962, dayglo orange tail.

Photo by Rod Adam

### **VH-DHF moves to the Tropics**

In January 1963 Laurie Crowley, owner of charter company Crowley Airways of Lae in Papua New Guinea finalised negotiations to purchase VH-DHF from the British Government. He travelled by airline to Adelaide and arranged a pilot endorsement on the Dove type. After a test flight at Adelaide on 1 February 1963, early next morning he departed on the ferry flight to Lae, staging Horn Island to Daru on 7 February. On arrival at Lae he requested DCA to cancel VH-DHF's registration because it would be operated overseas.

For some time Laurie Crowley had been contemplating starting an airline in the Solomon Islands, which at the time had no air service. All travel between islands was by boat. The then colonial administration, The British Solomon Islands Protectorate, indicated it would support an airline service and Crowley was keen to enter a new market. When he learnt that the Dove was available in Adelaide, he acted to secure an impressive aircraft for the new operation. Over the next six months he negotiated approvals from the administration and registered the business name Megapode Airways. The new airline took its name from the megapode bush turkey birds found in the Solomons.

With his charter business at Lae keeping him busy, Crowley needed an experienced Chief Pilot and offered the job to Captain Harry Moss who had just reached mandatory retirement age from TAA at Alice Springs. Harry was a popular character with 20 years of outback flying starting with Connellan Airways, his own charter business at Darwin, then NT Medical Service and TAA. Importantly he was also a licenced aircraft engineer and was very familiar with the engineering of the Dove. As engineer, Crowley sent Phil Bennett down to Honiara - Bennett and Crowley had both started working in New Guinea just after the war as ground engineers with the dynamic Guinea Air Traders.

On 19 October 1963 the Dove was officially registered VP-PAA to Megapode Airways, Honiara, British Solomon Islands Protectorate. It was the first aircraft entered on the hastily activated British Western Pacific High Commission civil aircraft register. The Dove was taken out of storage at Lae and prepared by Crowley Airways engineers, then ferried to the Solomons. Home base was the wartime Henderson Field at Honiara on the island of Guadalcanal and initial airfields were other wartime strips Yandina, Munda, Barakoma and also Mono in the Treasury Islands. New airfield were prepared at Auki on Malaita and later, Kira Kira on San Christobal.

On 10 December that year, Harry Moss took off from Honiara in the Dove on Megapode Airways' inaugural service, to Auki and return. Routes then expanded to the other available airfields. Crowley was well aware that an airline could not operate effectively with a single

aircraft, and rotated Piper Aztecs VH-CSA and -MEA from his Lae charter fleet to Honiara to fill in when required. As a low-cost permanent back-up to the Dove, Crowley purchased Piper Apache 150 VH-FAD from Fawcett Aviation at Bankstown - this humble Apache had been modified by Fawcett with an extended Aztec "B" nose section, which gave a boost to performance and load carrying capacity. To add to the effect the Apache was painted in the current model Aztec colour scheme, and in Megapode Airways service was registered VP-PAB. Laurie Crowley also had his favourite black Holden FJ sedan (once used by the Morobe District Commissioner) moved by ship from Lae to Honiara to become Megapode Airways' service car to carry passengers and freight from the airport to the Honiara town office. When Harry Moss was away on leave, he was replaced by Captain Harry Purvis, an experienced pioneer Australian airline pilot.

### **Megapode Airways becomes Solair**

Megapode Airways continued relatively unchanged until 1968 when the operation was bought out by veteran New Zealand born pilot, Bryan McCook. He had established a strong new charter company in Papua New Guinea, Macair at Goroka. Macair's full name was Melanesian Airline Charter Co Pty Ltd, which as well as reflecting McCook's name, also gave an indication of his future plans to fly in the Melanesian islands chain including the Solomons and New Hebrides.

On 1 March 1968 McCook formed a company Solomon Island Airways Ltd - Solair - as a wholly owned subsidiary of Macair. Macair injected new funds and Solair commenced operations from Honiara on 1 June 1968 with a fleet of Dove VP-PAA and a Macair Beech Barons. The inaugural two Solair pilots were John Seaton as Manager and Chief Pilot, and Graham Syphers. Megapode chief pilot Harry Moss retired to follow his passion for sailing.

Laurie Crowley later summed it up in his usual matter-of-fact style:

*"In 1963 I purchased a Maralinga de Havilland Dove. Harry Moss, who had flown Doves with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (sic), was working at Cootamundra when I dropped in there. Harry joined me to fly the Dove in my new venture, Megapode Airways, in the Solomon Islands.*

*On one occasion, after a flight, I asked a native Solomon islands lady how she had enjoyed the flight. She said it was fantastic especially as she was allowed to sit inside. On boats natives had to sit outside. I sold the airline to Bryan McCook, who renamed it Solair."*

VP-PAA's ownership was transferred to Solair effective 11 June 1968 however it had earlier been ferried to Lae for a mandatory major inspection required by a wing spar flying hours limit. Corrosion and other deterioration was found which made it uneconomical to return to service, so Megapode acquired Dove 5 VH-RUN from Australia, which became VP-PAL. However during 1968 the replacement Dove developed serious nose gear problems and it was decided to replace it with the complete nose wheel assembly from the grounded VP-PAA at Lae. Rather than sending the parts by boat, Bryan McCook decided that VP-PAA was good for one last ferry flight, back to Honiara where it could be stripped for spare parts as required.

### **Maralinga Dove's final flight**

To Graham Syphers, who had been flying the replacement VH-RUN at Honiara went the honour of that final flight. His later recollection of the experience gives us the final fate of this hard worked Dove:

*"VP-PAA was corroding on the ground at Lae in 1968, at Crowley's hangar. All thought it had seen its last flight. I was current on Doves, and someone (Bryan McCook) chose me to ferry the machine from Lae to Honiara. Looking back, I should have declined. How the ferry permit was authorised, I shall never know. My logbook shows 19.7.68 "Test flight, Lae. Compass U/S, fuel tanks corroded, filled with water and leaking fuel, both engines running rough, with Ki-gas priming showing a propensity to light a fire during start, left engine wouldn't idle and mostly the undercart would not lock down until at least two cycles were attempted". Despite this, I ferried it from Lae to Buka, Kieta, Munda and then to Honiara !*

*At Kieta one of the undercarriage doors blew away upon extension. Approaching Honiara township, just north of the coastline, 21.7.68 - Point Cruz - I was joined in formation by John Seaton in Dove VH-RUN and a Cessna 182 camera aircraft flown by Ian Purdy. The picture of the two Doves at low level with Honiara in the background is the one most portrayed in Solair brochures, calendars, office displays, etc. It was VP-PAA's last flight. She was stripped of nosewheel, instruments and nearly everything else to stock Solair's meagre spare parts store. Its hollow shell was thereafter displayed in a rough museum, near the Lunga River at the Seventh Day Adventist Mission for some years before being transferred to Honiara's War Museum where it resides to this day, though still scrap."*

Graham Syphers was to log 500 hours on the two Solair Doves, and went on to a long airline career. His sense of adventure saw him ferrying the RAAF Museum's Lockheed PV-1 Ventura VH-SFF across the Pacific to RAAF Point Cook in 1979. Solair was later taken over by the New Guinea airline Talair, and continues today with inter-island and internal jet services.



The former VH-DHF, now VP-PAA of Megapode Airways, seen retired at Lae on 18 August 1968 in the faded paintwork from its Maralinga days. A month later it was ferried back to Honiara to be stripped of parts to keep its replacement Dove VH-RUN in service in the Solomon Islands  
Photo by Roger McDonald



Solair Doves VP-PAA and VH-RUN photographed off Point Cruz, Honiara on 21 September 1968 on the occasion of VP-PAA's last flight before being retired. It retains the same paint scheme with dayglo tail from its days on the Maralinga run, but Megapode Airways titles.



Another view from the same air-to-air sequence off Honiara on VP-PAA's last flight. VP-PAA is being flown by Graham Syphers, VH-RUN by John Seaton.  
Both photos via Graham Syphers

#### **DH.104 Dove 6 VH-DHF c/n 04457**

- 55 Built as a Dove Series 4 by de Havilland Aircraft Co Ltd at Hawarden factory, Chester
- 3.55 Registered **G-AOAG** de Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd, Sydney NSW
- 4.55 Converted to Dove Series 6, by installing 380hp Gipsy Queen 70 Mk.2 engines which allowed an increased AWW to 8,800 pounds.
- 24.5.55 British C of A issued as a Dove 6
- 5.55 Delivered by air to Bankstown Airport, Sydney
- 8.7.55 Australian Registration application: de Havilland Aircraft Pty Ltd, Bankstown
- 15.7.55 Added Register **VH-DHF**: [U.K. Ministry of Supply \(Australia\), Adelaide SA](#) later changed to [U.K. Ministry of Aviation \(Australia\), Adelaide SA](#)
- 18.7.55 Test flown Bankstown
- 18.7.55 Australian C of A issued
- 2.63 Change of ownership: [Crowley Airways, Lae, Papua New Guinea](#)
- 2.2.63 Departed Adelaide on ferry flight to Lae, pilot Laurie Crowley
- 2.63 Struck off Australian Register.
- 19.10.63 Registered **VP-PAA**: [Megapode Airways, Honiara, British Solomon Islands Protectorate](#)
- 68 Ferried Honiara-Lae where retired due spar time limitations
- 11.6.68 VP-PAA change of ownership to [Solomon Islands Airways Ltd – Solair, Honiara.](#)
- 19.7.68 Departed Lae for Honiara on ferry permit, arrived Honiara 21.7.68 Flown by Graham Syphers  
Stripped for parts at Honiara: engines, undercarriage and other parts removed  
Airframe dumped at war museum, Honiara

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#### **Footnote: A second Maralinga Dove**

In 1959 another Dove was used to support the atomic tests at Maralinga. The circumstances of this additional role have not been established, but a Dove for Maralinga charter work was purchased by Robby's Aircraft Co Ltd, an established maintenance and aerial agricultural company at Adelaide's Parafield Airport. It was a significant financial investment for the relatively small company, so it must be assumed considerable flying hours were expected for the Dove. Robby's had previously operated Avro Ansons VH-RAS & RAU on a 5 year survey contract for the SA Department of Lands. The company also maintained a Canadian-crewed Anson 5 CF-HOT while it flew a

magnetometer survey for radium and other minerals in SA and WA during 1957/59 before returning to Canada.

MacRobertson Miller Airlines Dove 5 VH-MMP was purchased on 9 April 1959 and re-registered VH-RAJ in the name of a Robby's associate company Air Charter Ltd. It was delivered to Parafield from Perth and entered service with Robby's Aircraft. It retained its airline seating and interior and was maintained in immaculate condition with polished metallic finish with white roof.

During 1962, just like VH-DHF at Adelaide Airport, VH-RAJ was retired at Parafield and parked in the Robby's hangar at Parafield. Without the Maralinga flying, insufficient ad-hoc charter work could be found for the Dove and in October that year it was sold to SA Air Taxis.



Dove 5 VH-RAJ of Robby's Aircraft Co Ltd at Parafield, February 1962.

Photo by Geoff Goodall



VH-RAJ at Adelaide-West Beach in January 1963 after sale to SA Air Taxis Ltd.

Photo by Geoff Goodall

<b>British Atomic Bomb Tests in Australia</b>			
Operation Code Name	Date	Platform	Location
<i>Hurricane</i>	3.10.1952	HMS Plym	Monte Bello Islands WA
<i>Totem 1</i>	15.10.53	Tower	Emu SA
<i>Totem 2</i>	27.10.53	Tower	Emu SA
<i>Mosaic G1</i>	16.5.1956	Tower	Monte Bello Islands WA
<i>Mosaic G2</i>	19.7.1956	Tower	Monte Bello Islands WA
<i>Buffalo One Tree</i>	27.9.1956	Tower	Maralinga SA
<i>Buffalo Marcoo</i>	4.10.56	Ground	Maralinga SA
<i>Buffalo Kite</i>	11.10.1956	Air Drop	Maralinga SA
<i>Buffalo Breadaway</i>	22.10.1956	Tower	Maralinga SA
<i>Antler Tadge</i>	14.9.1957	Tower	Maralinga SA
<i>Antler Biak</i>	25.9.1957	Tower	Maralinga SA
<i>Antler Taranaki</i>	9.10.1957	Balloon	Maralinga SA
Nuclear experiments	1956-1963	Ground	Maralinga Range SA

#### **References:**

- Australian Civil Aircraft Register, Department of Civil Aviation
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