

PERCIVAL P.50 PRINCE IN AUSTRALIA

By Geoff Goodall



Adastra Hunting Geophysics Prince VH-AGF at Essendon Airport, Melbourne 1957.

The Collection

Percival Aircraft Ltd's bid for the post-war medium range transport field was the attractive Percival Prince series, powered by Alvis Leonides 9 cylinder radial engines. It was of all metal stressed skin construction with fabric-covered control surfaces, designed for passenger appeal. The high wing gave good views and the roomy fuselage and retractable tricycle undercarriage provided a low level floor for ease of entry. A total of 31 Princes and the improved President models were built at Percival's Luton Airport works before production ceased to allow construction of large RAF orders for the military development, the Pembroke. In April 1954 Percival Aircraft Ltd, originally founded by Australian Edgar W. Percival, was taken over by the Hunting group and renamed Hunting Percival Aircraft Ltd, three years later changing to Hunting Aircraft Ltd.

The story of the Percival Prince in Australia goes back to 1951, when three Prince C Mk.1 transports (equivalent to civil model Series 3C) were ordered by the Australian Government. They were to support the Long Range Weapons Establishment at the Woomera Rocket Range in the north of South Australia, as well as British atomic test grounds in remote desert areas of the state.

Under contract No.6/Acft/6705/CB.10(d), the Australian specification was for 550hp Alvis Leonides 502/4 engines, solid nose without transparent panels, 8 removable passenger seats or cargo cabin, special fuselage side windows for oblique photography and fittings to allow its use for patients on stretchers. The three were assigned RAF serials during construction by Percival Aircraft Ltd at Luton but were delivered to Australia wearing RAAF serials A90-1, A90-2 & A90-3.

The delivery flights routed via France, Libya, Cyprus, Iraq, Pakistan, India, Burma, Siam (Thailand), Malaya, Indonesia to Darwin, then via Alice Springs to Mallala RAAF Station, north of Adelaide. At Mallala they were taken on charge by No.34 (Special Transport) Squadron which was tasked with air support for the Air Trials Unit at Woomera and Weapons Research Establishment. First to arrive was A90-1 delivered by a RAAF crew comprising pilot Squadron Leader C. R. Gallway, navigator Flying Officer E. I. Lane and engineer Sergeant H. V. Carne. They reached Mallala on 7 March 1952.



Prince A90-1 at the Percival factory at Luton prior to departure for Australia in February 1952. The RAAF delivery crew are (L-R): S/Ldr C.R. Galway, F/O E. Lane and Sgt H.V. Carne. On the right is Group Captain W.N.Gibson from RAAF HQ London who attended the departure.
Percival Aircraft Ltd photograph via Tom Singfield



S/Ldr C.R. Galway in the cockpit of A90-1, about to depart Luton on delivery flight to Australia.
Percival Aircraft Ltd photograph via Tom Singfield

The second Prince A90-2 departed the Percival works on 18 April 1952 but suffered significant delays en route to Australia. On 7 May 1952 after departing Koepang, Timor for the Timor Sea crossing to Darwin, RAAF pilot Flight Lieut. P. Badgery was forced to return due to failure of the port engine. A replacement Leonides engine was brought in by RAAF Dakota from Darwin and engine change made in the open weather. Badgery was still at Koepang on 23 May when newspapers reported that he had sent a message to RAAF HQ that a missing Scotsman who had sparked an aerial search of the Timor Sea after sailing from Darwin on a home-made raft, had been found alive and well at Koepang. A90-2 finally arrived at RAAF Mallala on 17 June 1952.

Meanwhile A90-3 had reached Mallala on 24 May 1952 after a 12 day uneventful ferry flight taking 72 flying hours. It had an all RAF crew from the Aeroplane and Armaments Experimental Establishment at Boscombe Down (AAAEE): Flight Lieut David W Colquhoun (Pilot), Flight Lieut Stanley C Crane (Nav) and Flight Lieut John Willis-Richards (W/OP).

The RAAF Princes were fitted out for passenger courier services from Mallala to Woomera Rocket Range. A90-1 had seats and folding tables, but the other two had just seating. They flew to Woomera along with No.34 Squadron's Bristol Freighters, Dakotas and earlier the RAAF's single Vickers Viking. During 1953 the Princes also made flights to the Emu claypan atomic test airfield in support of the first two atomic explosions held there in October 1953, and later to the permanent atomic testing facility established at Maralinga SA.

The Princes did not have long RAAF careers, suffering a series of undercarriage problems. During 1955 the Woomera courier was taken over by No.2 Air Trials Unit and its base moved from Mallala to the high security Weapons Research Establishment's Edinburgh Field at Salisbury on the northern outskirts of Adelaide. That same year A90-2 & -3 were damaged during landing by undercarriage failures.

A90-3 suffered serious structural damage when the nose wheel developed a severe shimmy during landing at Edinburgh at 7.15AM on 10 June 1955. The Prince was on an early morning short positioning flight from Mallala to Edinburgh, flown by F/Sgt Maurice J Kempfe, with navigator F/Sgt Patrick Kerr. They were to pick up four passengers at Edinburgh then fly to Woomera, returning later that day to Mallala. However on landing at Edinburgh the aircraft suffered severe damage to front fuselage plus buckled port side rear fuselage. The airframe's military radio callsign was VMVKV and its total flying time since new only 454 hours 10 minutes. The subsequent Court of Enquiry was told the cause was the design of the nose undercarriage and that A90-3 was "so seriously damaged as to be fit for conversion only to components and will have to be written off Air Force strength".

The damaged A90-2 & -3 were stored dismantled pending a decision on disposal. In December 1955 the remaining Prince A90-1 was retired at Edinburgh.



A90-1 at RAAF Mallala SA 1954

Rod Adam collection



A90-2 about to depart England on delivery.

RAAF Official via Neil Follett collection



A90-2 at RAAF Mallala SA in 1954

Photo by John M. Smith

First civil Percival Prince

Meanwhile the civil models of the Prince were being marketed around the world. In August 1954 Papuan Air Transport Ltd (Patair) of Port Moresby which operated a fleet of mixed aircraft types announced it was negotiating to purchase two Prince aircraft.

James Sinclair's book series *Balus* records:

"The Patair partners were well aware of the shortcomings of the Anson, but suitable alternatives at an acceptable price were not easy to obtain. The most promising Anson replacement when Patair was getting started was the Percival Prince. A Prince which made a demonstration tour of Papua and New Guinea in 1954 so impressed Cliff Jackson (Patair founder) that a provisional order for two was placed. At the same time Patair applied for an airline licence to operate the Princes on a regular service from Port Moresby to Popondetta , Kokoda, Bereina, Tapini and Embi.*

Sadly the Percival Prince failed to live up to its promise, particularly in regard to engine performance and the order was cancelled. Nor was the airline application successful. The company had little alternative but to build up its Anson fleet."

The first civil Prince seen in Australia was a British registered aircraft G-AMLW sent here in 1954 for a series of geophysical mineral survey contracts. First indication of its pending arrival was a press report on 12 March 1954 when the General Manager of Adastral Aerial Surveys Mr. H. T. Hammond said his company and Hunting Geophysics Ltd of England will begin an air search for uranium and oil in May. *"A Percival Prince of the Hunting group is on its way here for the survey. It will use a scintillometer for recording radio activity. This instrument, first of its kind in Australia, acts like a geiger counter. A crew of English scientists would be augmented by Australians."*

In a press report on 14 May 1954 Hammond stated that a Prince was now expected in Sydney in September that year. It was equipped with £70,000 worth of cameras and magnetic survey equipment. In a later press report on 31 October 1954, Hammond announced the formation of a new company Adastral Hunting Geophysics Pty Ltd as a joint operation of Adastral Aerial Surveys and Hunting Geophysics Ltd to search for areas of minerals and produce "aero magnetic maps" using a Percival Prince expected to soon arrive in Australia.

The aircraft was G-AMLW, a Prince Series 4 (550 hp Alvis Leonides 503/5) which arrived in Sydney in December 1954. It was owned by Hunting Aerosurveys Ltd, of Elstree, an associated company to the manufacturers Hunting Percival Aircraft Ltd, and was flown to Australia from Elstree by Hunting's Captain Robert Keeling with two crew: engineer Derek Middleton and electronics technician/operator Allan G. Palmer. The Prince was fitted with a magnetometer in the rear fuselage to detect changes in the earth's magnetic field caused by minerals beneath the ground.

Within days of its arrival in Sydney, G-AMLW commenced its first Australian survey contract on 15 December 1954, a magnetometer survey of the Sydney basin from an altitude of 4,000 feet for Australian Gas and Oil Corporation. Referred to by its British crew as *Loose Willy*, early the next year the Prince was based at Broken Hill for low-level surveys at 500 feet above ground level for the SA Department of Mines, followed by similar work based at Port Lincoln and Kimba SA searching for deposits of oil and copper. In April 1955 while stationed at Port Lincoln, Adastral Aerial Surveys' pilot Ted McKenzie was converted on to the Prince and took over from the British pilot for the next 18 months.

Ted McKenzie's logbooks show he flew surveys with the G-AMLW in many locations including Kiriwina, New Guinea, Gulf of Carpentaria, Longreach and Winton, Mount Gambier and Naracoorte, then most of 1956 was spent based Adelaide and Tasmania with several months at Cloncurry, Queensland. In February 1957 Adastral pilot Ted McKenzie was checked out on the Prince in Sydney and took over as pilot in charge, continuing surveys in Tasmania and SA, and endorsing several other Adastral pilots on the type.

The Prince was fitted with a belly opening with two hinged doors. This opening was used by the 35mm tracking camera. It was never used by Adastral for streaming a magnetometer "bird" as has been sometimes reported. The only magnetometer used on the Prince by Adastral was the one fitted in the extreme rear fuselage under the rudder.

After two and a half years operations under its British registration and British CofA, a formal application for Australian certification was submitted to DCA on 15 May 1957 in the name of Adastral Hunting Geophysics Pty Ltd, Sydney. Flown back to Sydney from Ceduna SA for certification inspection in the Adastral hangar at Mascot, its Australian CofA was issued on 24 June 1957 and it was added to the Civil Register the same day as VH-AGF, in the VH-AG series used by Adastral for their survey aircraft fleet of Hudsons and Ansons.

The Prince then continued a series of mineral surveys around Australia operated by Adastral crews, retaining the paintwork as delivered, except for a fairly rough replacement of the British registration with VH-AGF. By the end of 1958, survey contracts suitable for the Prince had been completed and it was to be returned to Hunting Aerosurveys Ltd in England. While being prepared for the ferry flight at Adastral's Mascot hangar, it was repainted into an attractive scheme of green with red and white trim, with the Adastral Hunting Geophysics Pty Ltd company logo on the nose.



The reasons for the Prince being repainted into such a lavish scheme at the very end of its Australian career have not been established. In a discussion on the origins of the *Adastral*

green, in which their Lockheed Hudsons were painted from 1959, the excellent Adastra Aerial Surveys website quotes Adastra navigator Joe Tidey:

"Formerly, G-AMLW, and painted an unobtrusive silver colour, this rather utilitarian aircraft began to take on something of the elegance of a peacock. The snow-white of the upper fuselage and fin, highlighted with stripes and flashes of blood-red, complimented by further touches of red and white on the engine nacelles, was accepted as bright, attractive, and unremarkable! It was only when the tint being used on the wings and lower fuselage was unveiled that there was a great surge of interest and speculation among those working in the hangar at the time. What colour might we call this strange shade? Blue-green, greeny-blue, teal and others were suggested and discarded. It was finally decided that it had to be turquoise. A faintly exotic name for what we regarded as a fairly exotic colour to paint a working aeroplane. Our curiosity next turned to the mystery of how such a colour came to be selected. To the complete satisfaction of some of us, this was solved when (Adastra Managing Director) Bunny Hammond's immaculate MG Magnette saloon was driven into the hangar and parked next to the Prince, to have its original showroom paint job over-sprayed TURQUOISE! Whether this was Bunny's choice or that of Mrs Hammond, I don't think was ever established. It is reported that when the Prince was returned to Huntings base at Elstree in February 1959, their hangar chief pronounced the colour to be 'horrible' and immediately expressed his intention to return it to plain silver."

VH-AGF departed Sydney on 26 January 1959 for the ferry flight to England, under the command of Adastra Captain Ken Rowlands. It was seen at Elstree a month later on 28 February, parked in the Hunting Aerosurveys hangar with another Hunting Aerosurveys Prince G-ALRY. VH-AGF went into the workshops for upgrading to Prince Series 6. It had been sold, along with G-ALRY to the French concern Societe Anonyme de Prospection Aeroportee (SAPA) based at the historic Le Bourget Airport, Paris. These two Princes went on to exciting lives on a range of activities, from airfield radar calibration duties to mineral survey in various areas of Africa. The ex Australian aircraft retained its green red and white colour scheme, the French owners cleverly using the Adastra Hunting Geophysics emblem on the nose as the "A" in their name "SAPA, Paris" !

** Author's note: the reference to a Prince making a New Guinea demonstration tour in 1954 is puzzling. The only Princes in the area at that time were the three RAAF aircraft, which would not have been released for a commercial tour. Demonstrations to Patair probably took place during June 1955 when Adastra's G-AMLW was operating in New Guinea, based at Kiriwina conducting a survey of Woodlark Island. Although DCA refused Patair an airline licence in 1954, they allowed scheduled services with Ansons on the company's charter licence. Cliff Jackson was also interested in the Scottish Aviation Twin Pioneer for Patair.*



G-AMLW at Parafield SA 1955 with original markings under the cockpit "Hunting Geophysics Ltd, London"
Photo by Jim Evans via Nigel Daw



Essendon 1955, with Adastr wings added and titles "Adastr Hunting Geophysics Ltd, Sydney – London"
The Collection



Essendon 1955

Photo by Eddie Coates



VH-AGF at Cambridge Aerodrome, Hobart

Ed Coates Collection



Cambridge, showing the rough application of the Australian registration.

Jeff Atkinson collection



VH-AGF repainted at Mascot January 1959.

Photo by Dave Eyre



F-BJAI with French owner SAPA, at Elstree in April 1962.

Photo by Gordon Reid

Our Second civil Prince VH-RSX

During 1956 it was decided that the RAAF had no further use for the three RAAF Princes stored at Edinburgh SA and they were prepared for disposal by the Department of Supply. In January 1957 they were offered for civil sale by tender as a package comprising A90-1 in airworthy condition and the damaged A90-2 & -3 for parts.

Such an offer was unlikely to produce a stampede of prospective purchasers, so the Department of Supply must have been relieved when officials of the Royal Aero Club of NSW expressed interest. The club needed to replace its aging and inadequate DH.84 Dragon VH-RSZ for twin engine IFR pilot training but had to ensure the Prince's much higher operating costs could be justified by the expectation of its use by military or airlines for advanced training.

After negotiations, during which it has been reported that the original purchase cost was dropped to *gratis* by the Government, on condition that the club make one Prince available as a flying classroom to train military navigators, the package of three Princes was acquired by the Royal Aero Club of NSW. The ownership paperwork was signed by Sydney businessman Andrew Thyne Reid, a patron of the club who kept his Dragon VH-AFH and later his DHA-3 Drover VH-BMU with the club at Bankstown.

All three Princes were moved to Bankstown. It is assumed that the airworthy A90-1 was delivered by air. The two dismantled aircraft A90-2 and A90-3 were transported by road. There has been a report that both were damaged in a road accident en route, but no confirmation has been found of such an event. The two dismantled airframes were stored in a spare hangar next to the Aero Club's main hangar at Bankstown

Meanwhile A90-1 underwent a three month inspection for Australian Civil Certificate of Airworthiness by the aero club's highly experienced Chief Engineer M. A. "Joe" Taylor and was registered VH-RSX on 15 January 1958. It was painted in an attractive colour scheme with the Royal Aero Club of NSW's winged emblem on the nose. A visitor's report at Bankstown in June 1958 recorded Prince RSX parked inside the aero club hangar while in the next hangar were A90-2 & A90-3 fuselages with their wings stacked alongside.

Whatever the club's expectations for advanced IFR training work for their new Percival Prince, they were apparently not fulfilled. A change in Government policy released it from the flying navigation classroom requirement, however its high hourly hire rate discouraged individual pilot training or its use by members for travel flights. In fact only Chief Flying Instructor Pat Gallagher and one of the Club's other ten instructors, Tom Long, was endorsed on the Prince. It is reported that the only club member to be checked out on the Prince was adventurous Sydney aviation veteran Joe Palmer, who usually flew his own Beech D17S VH-MJE and CAC Mustang VH-WAS. All indications are that the Prince spent most of its time with the club parked at the back corner of their main hangar at Bankstown.



A90-1 at RAAF Laverton Vic

The Collection



UNITED KINGDOM
MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION

CERTIFICATE OF AIRWORTHINESS No. A.3513
(Heavier than air.)

A - 90 - 1

1. Nationality and Registration Marks _____
- DESCRIPTION OF AIRCRAFT.
2. Name Prince 3. Type P.50 4. Series 30 5. Constructor's No. P/38
6. Name of Constructor : Percival Aircraft Limited.
7. Place of construction : Luton 8. Year of construction : 1952

Class of Aircraft.

9. Land and/or marine : Land
10. Number of planes : One
11. Number of engines : Two
12. Maximum number of seats authorised to be fitted (including seats for the crew) : Twelve

Classification of Aircraft.

13. Category : Normal
14. Subdivision : (a) Public transport for passengers
(b) Public transport for mails
(c) Public transport for goods
(d) Private (e) Aerial work
(h) Demonstration (i) Crew familiarisation

15. Maximum span (in flying position) : 56 feet 0 inches Span (wings folded) : _____
16. Maximum length (in flying position) : 42 feet 10 inches
17. Total height (with and without trolley in case of seaplanes) : 16 feet 1 inch

Engines.

18. Number installed : Two
19. Makes : Alvis
- Types : Leonides 502/4
20. Maximum continuous power of the engine or engines at 7,250 feet : _____
- 455 H.P. at 2,900 revolutions per minute and 3 1/2 lbs./sq.in. induction boost pressure.
- Hourly consumption at 7,250 at above-mentioned power per engine { 22. Fuel : 39 gallons
- { 23. Oil : 4 to 9 pints

Propellers.

24. Number fitted : Two Types : 3-bladed (metal)
- Design No. : FD158/313/1 Hub No. : _____ Blade No. : _____
- Pitch : Variable Diameter : 9.0 feet or any of the alternative propellers approved in the current Notices to Licensed Aircraft Engineers and to Owners of Civil Aircraft.

Weight Schedule.

25. Weight of aircraft empty, including the liquid in the radiators : 7,526 lb.
26. Weight of fuel (tanks full) : 1,627 lb.
(Calculated on a basis of 7.2 lb. per gallon.)
27. Weight of oil (tanks full) : 126 lb.
(Calculated on a basis of 9.0 lb. per gallon.)
28. Weight allowed for operating crew : 170 lb.
29. Weight allowed for removable equipment, excluding radio apparatus : 549 lb.
30. Weight of removable radio apparatus : 96 lb.



A90-1 civilianised as VH-RSX at Bankstown 1958

Geoff Goodall collection



A rare colour picture of Royal Aero Club of NSW's VH-RSX, at Hoxton Park airfield, near Sydney. Club CFI Pat Gallagher is at the controls.

Ben Dannecker collection

The Polynesian connection

Enter Sir Reginald R. Barnewall, son of a wealthy Victorian grazier who founded Goulburn Valley Air Services in 1954, reforming the following year as Southern Airlines Ltd, with Avro Ansons operating scheduled passenger services from Essendon Airport to Balranald NSW and Victorian country centres. Southern Airlines extended its network to SA and Tasmania, improved its fleet with de Havilland Doves and later Herons, but Barnewall's ambitious little airline was put out of business by bitter Ansett Airways competition on their main routes, finally ceasing operations in November 1958.

Reg Barnewall's plans to start a new career with Fiji Airways were dashed by the death of the airline's founder Harold Gatty, who had made him a management offer. Barnewall and his wife wanted a new tropical lifestyle and having visited Apia, Western Samoa, they decided to make it their new home. He quickly identified the need for a local airline to connect Apia with neighbouring Pago

Pago, American Samoa, and after encouraging local planters and businessmen, gained the finance to establish his concept, which he named Polynesian Airlines Ltd.

By 1959 Polynesian Airlines was ready to look for a suitable aircraft to commence its passenger services. Barnewall had the Percival Prince on his mind from the early days of Southern Airlines. He recently wrote of his recollections from that time:
"I knew - somewhat longingly - of Hunting's new aircraft, the design of which they took over from Edgar Percival and engined with a radial engine to be known as the Leonides – the basic design of which was developed by the Alvis Company from captured German design plans. A small company basically concerned with marine motors in North Melbourne by the name of Aeronautical Supply Co was Hunting's Melbourne agents. Through them I learned that a Prince was coming to Australia for a dry hire to an aerial survey company but was first doing a demo for the RAAF in connection with operations at Woomera. It was arranged that I would fly to Parafield and spend a day with the aircraft and make my own assessment. As a result, I was smitten and the Prince became my first choice for equipment when Southern Airlines' first prospectus was launched. However it failed to raise the necessary cash!"

(The Prince that he inspected at Parafield was G-AMLW of Adastra Hunting Geophysics Pty Ltd described above. His visit to Adelaide was probably in February 1955 when the Prince was based at Parafield during its South Australian mineral survey work. That it was being demonstrated to RAAF is intriguing because their three Prince aircraft were already used on the Woomera courier run. Perhaps the agents were hoping for an additional order for later models because G-AMLW had been updated to a Prince Series 4, while the RAAF aircraft were military Mk.1s, the equivalent of the civil Series 3).

When Southern Airlines issued its first prospectus to form a public company in May 1955, Barnewall specified the fleet as three Prince Mk.5s with rearward facing seats to replace its Avro Ansons on passenger services in Victoria and southern NSW. However the shares float failed, denying Southern Airlines the capital required to purchase Princes and in the event its Ansons were replaced by two DH.104 Doves purchased from Airlines(WA)Ltd and later two DH.114 Herons.

So in May 1959 Reg Barnewall arrived in Sydney from Samoa with the hope of purchasing the only Percival Prince in the region, the Royal Aero Club of NSW's VH-RSX. He had contacted the club by radiogram from Samoa and was heartened to learn the Prince was available for sale, total airframe time a low 1400 hours. It had full instrumentation, nav aids and radio, no accident history, and was fitted with seating for 10 persons with a toilet and spacious baggage hold. The former RAAF spares inventory included in the price was described by Barnewall as "enormous", featuring three new engines and five new propellers. Barnewall recalls:
"This was an almost unbelievable package. The large spares list of every radio component provided the immediate answer to my greatest technical problem, which was radio maintenance in such an isolated area. It would mean that we could be virtually free from having to buy spares for several years."

However the spare parts holding did not include the two dismantled RAAF airframes A90-2 and A90-3. Sir Reginald was recently asked about them and confirmed that he was unaware of such additional airframes and they were not present at Bankstown at the time of his purchase of VH-RSX. This indicates that the aero club must have stripped them of usable parts then disposed of as scrap.

In his book *Trade Winds*, Reginald Barnewall gives an entertaining description of his negotiations with aero club Manager Ken Hammond at Bankstown, and his first evaluation flight in VH-RSX on 1 June 1959. A deal was struck and the Prince was purchased by Polynesian Airlines. (The Aero Club was to replace the Prince with a Cessna 310 VH-RSY the following year for twin engine IFR training for their airline pilot training scheme)

Barnewall offered the position of Chief Engineer for his new airline to Bernie Beswicke, an experienced ground engineer who had been his Chief Inspector for Southern Airlines at Essendon. He had found Beswicke working for Helicopter Utilities, which by coincidence was using the Aero Club hangar at Bankstown as their Sydney maintenance base. Beswicke eagerly joined the new venture and his Sydney contacts proved invaluable in getting the Prince ready for ferrying to Samoa.

Two 44 gallon drums feeding a long range fuel system designed by Beswicke were installed in the cabin before Barnewall commenced his type conversion training on the aircraft at Camden aerodrome with an aero club instructor. Then the Prince was repainted including a hastily designed Polynesian Airlines badge incorporating the Western Samoan coat of arms, and TAA provided airline shirts with epaulettes and caps for B & B which were modified with the airline's insignia by a Sydney tailor, who also provided standard issue naval officer shorts which were to be the standard uniform for the tropics.

Polynesian Airlines' operations and aircraft were to be licenced by the New Zealand Civil Aviation Administration because Western Samoa had no aviation authority or civil register of its own. The Prince was allocated NZ registration ZK-BMQ which was painted on at Bankstown with "POLYNESIAN AIRLINES" on the fuselage and tail.

A retired Royal Australian Navy Fleet Air Arm air navigator was engaged to satisfy a requirement of the oceanic ferry flight. He accompanied Barnewall and Beswicke when they departed Bankstown on 4 July 1959 with spare parts and eleven folding passenger chairs tied down in the cabin. The first port of call was Hervey Bay, Queensland to visit Sir Reginald's parents before clearing customs at Eagle Farm Airport, Brisbane on 7 July bound for New Caledonia on the VFR delivery flight to Samoa. The ferry continued via Fiji then on to its destination Apia's Faleolo Airport, which had been constructed by US Marine Seabees during World War II. The single runway was still Marsden-matting, interconnected hinged sheets of stamped metal.



VH-RSX became ZK-BMQ with Polynesian Airlines. It is seen at Fiji in July 1959 during the delivery flight from Sydney to Western Samoa. Civil Aviation Historical Society of SA

The grand arrival of Western Samoa's first airline had been widely promoted. On Sunday 12 July, Barnewall landed at Faleolo. A big crowd of well-wishes surrounded the aircraft when the Prince was parked in front of the dilapidated terminal building.

Occasional charter flights were undertaken during the long wait to commence scheduled airline services. Landing rights and international air service approvals were negotiated with the NZ and US authorities, because Polynesian Airlines' first route was from Faleolo to Pago Pago in American Samoa. This was in competition with an a small American company Samoan Airlines with a leased DC-3 which was proving uneconomical for the low load factors of inter-island routes. Pago Pago provided connections to the Pan American World Airways DC-4 service between Honolulu and Auckland, and a TEAL flying boat service to Auckland.

Polynesian Airways finally commenced scheduled operations with ZK-BMQ between Faleolo and Pago Pago on 7 March 1960. However, less than 9 months later the flying days of Percival Prince *Princess Maureen* were ended. On Saturday 3 December 1960, Captain Barnewall was landing at home base Faleolo with a full load of passengers from Pago Pago unaware that the starboard mainwheel tyre had deflated. When the weight of the aircraft settled on the undercarriage, the flat tyre jammed in the undercarriage fork causing the aircraft to run off the runway into a deep concrete stormwater drain on the edge of the airfield. There were no injuries but the Prince was damaged beyond repair. It was moved to a corner of the aerodrome and stripped of all usable parts.

It has been reported that ZK-BMQ was named *Princess Maureen* in honour of Reg Barnewall's wife. However when asked about this recently, he explained: "The name "Princess Maureen" was on a plate attached to the instrument panel. (I did not have the hide to paint it on the fuselage!!!!). After the prang the plate was "souvenired" and returned to me many

years later. In 1989 Maureen and I returned to Samoa for the 30th anniversary of Polynesian's first flight during which visit we presented the airline with a painting of a Cavalcade of aircraft types flown by the airline during those 30 years as well as all the memorabilia which we had. This included my pilot's wings, Maureen's hostess half wing and cap, many documents and the name plate!"

Following the loss of ZK-BMQ, Barnewall convinced the Polynesian Airlines Directors that the Percival Prince series was still best suited for their operations. He immediately purchased two Princes which were being advertised for sale by the Government of Tanganyika, who had used them for survey work. They were then flown from Africa to Western Samoa wearing NZ registrations ZK-BYN & -BYO.

The delivery flight was conducted by Barnewall and Ken Rowlands who had many hours on the Adastral Aerial Surveys Prince VH-AGF, accompanied by Chief Engineer Beswicke. In late March 1960 they reached Darwin in formation from Timor and next morning continued to Daly Waters then Cloncurry for another overnight stop. The pair made a refuelling stop at Charleville before reaching Brisbane. In a TAA hangar at Eagle Farm Airport Beswicke supervised the installation of long-range fuel tanks in both cabins. On Saturday 8 April 1960 the two Princes departed Brisbane for the oceanic ferry to Noumea, Fiji and home to Western Samoa.

There was a final Australian connection to the Polynesian Airlines Princes: After the airline's first DC-3 5W-FAA entered service in 1963, the two Princes were retired and offered for sale through Australian aircraft brokers Central Aircraft Exchange at Bankstown in May 1965, each with the same listed price of 5,000 pounds (Australian):

- ZK-BYN Prince Mk.4E total airframe time 3059 hours
- ZK-BYO Prince Mk.3A total airframe time 3046 hours.

No sale was forthcoming, so the pair were dismantled at Faleolo airport, Apia and stripped of engines and parts. Their hulks could be seen in the tropical vegetation on the side of the airfield for some years. It is reported that the cabin roof of one was cut off and used as a boat.

Polynesian Airlines went on to expand their route network with DC-3s, a DC-4 and after many changes to management and aspirations, jet services across the Pacific in arrangements with NZ National Airways Corporation, later Air Nauru, Ansett Airlines of Australia and Air NZ. The restructured airline continues operating today on short-haul inter-island sectors using Twin Otters and Islanders.



Polynesian Airlines' Prince ZK-BYO visiting Auckland NZ for maintenance by TEAL. Photo by Mike Madden

Percival Prince c/n P50/43
G-AMLW, VH-AGF

Registration	Series	Date	Owner/Event
	Series 3	52	Built at Luton by Percival Aircraft Ltd. 550hp Alvis Leonides 502/4
G-AMLW		26.5.52	Shell Refining & Marketing Co Ltd, London: CofA issued
YV-P-AEB		6.52	Compania Shell de Venezolanos: delivered via Prestwick 18.6.52
		2.54	YV-P-AEB and another Shell Prince YV-AEC at Luton in crates after being shipped from Venezuela
G-AMLW	Series 3E	10.3.54	Shell Refining & Marketing Co Ltd, London
	Series 4	3.54	Upgraded to Prince Series 4, 550hp Alvis Leonides 503/5 engines
		26.3.54	Test flown with cabin door removed
		4.54	Advertised for sale
		21.5.54	Hunting Aerosurveys Ltd, Elstree
		12.54	Delivered from Elstree to Sydney
		12.54	Operated on lease to Adastra Hunting Geophysics Ltd, Sydney
VH-AGF		24.6.57	Adastra Hunting Geophysics Pty Ltd, Sydney: registered
		26.1.59	Departed Sydney on return to England as VH-AGF
		26.2.59	Arrived at Southend
		26.2.59	Struck-off Australian Civil Aircraft Register
G-AMLW		2.3.59	Hunting Aerosurveys Ltd, Elstree
	Series 6	3.59	Upgraded to Prince Series 6, 540 hp Alvis Leonides 504/5A engines
F-BJAI		17.3.59	Societe Anonyme de Prospection Aeroportee, Paris-Le Bourget
G-AMLW		30.3.60	Hunting Surveys Ltd, Elstree
F-BJAI		16.6.60	Societe Anonyme de Prospection Aeroportee, Paris-Le Bourget
		27.9.60	F-BJAI arrived Dakar, Senegal, with another SAPA Prince F-BJAJ
VP-KRN		17.7.61	Hunting Aerosurveys (East Africa) Ltd, Nairobi, Kenya
F-BJAI		12.61	Societe Anonyme de Prospection Aeroportee, Paris-Le Bourget
		3.68	Struck-off French Civil Register. Parked at Leavesden, England.
		8.5.68	College of Aeronautics, Redhill: ferried from Leavesden: last flight
		73	College of Aeronautics relocated to Shoreham: Prince moved by road
		75	Broken-up for scrap at Shoreham

*Full details of this Prince's Australian survey operations and subsequent career can be found at the Adastra Aerial Surveys website <http://www.adastra.adastron.com> This highly recommended site is maintained by AHSA member Ron Cuskelly.

Percival Prince c/n P.50/38
WZ409, A90-1, VH-RSX, ZK-BMQ

Registration	Series	Date	Owner/Event
	C Mk.1	52	Built at Luton by Percival Aircraft Ltd
WZ409		52	Allocated RAF serial WZ409 for administrative purposes
A90-1		28.1.52	Accepted by RAAF in England
		12.2.52	British civil CofA issued as A90-1, type quoted as Prince Series 3C
		7.3.52	Arrived RAAF Mallala on delivery flight from England
		1.4.52	nosewheel failed to retract Mallala: S/Ldr C.R.Galloway, with six passengers
		8.3.52	Taken on Charge by RAAF, received 34 Sqn Mallala
		28.1.53	Forced landing Mallala due engine failure in circuit. F/Lt A.K.Ware
		5.5.53	Received ARDU Laverton for performance evaluation
		27.5.54	Received 34 Sqn Mallala after overhaul at 2AD Richmond
		11.6.54	Damaged on landing at Mallala when nosewheel was unable to be extended
		8.7.54	Issued to DAP Parafield for repair
		16.9.54	Received 34Sqn Mallala ex DAP
		20.12.54	Asymmetric landing at Woomera with one engine feathered
		13.10.55	Received ATU (Air Trials Unit) ex 34 Sqn
		16.12.55	Received RAAF Edinburgh for storage
		22.1.57	Offered for disposal at Edinburgh: A90-1 airworthy condition with A90-2 & -3 as spares
		4.8.57	Sold by Dept of Supply to Royal Aero Club of NSW, Sydney
VH-RSX	Series 3C	15.1.58	Registered: Royal Aero Club of NSW, Bankstown Airport, Sydney
		17.6.59	Purchased by Polynesian Airlines, Apia, Samoa
		26.6.59	Struck-off Australian Register
		4.7.59	Departed Bankstown on delivery, arrived Faleolo, Apia 12.7.59
ZK-BMQ		30.7.59	Polynesian Airlines, Apia, Samoa
		4.12.60	Damaged beyond repair landing at Faleolo, Apia, Samoa. Ran off

			runway into a drain due to a flat mainwheel tyre.
		7.6.61	Struck-off Civil Register
			broken-up for parts at Faleolo, Samoa

Percival Prince c/n P.50/39

WZ410, A90-2

Registration	Series	Date	Owner/Event
	C Mk.1	52	Built at Luton by Percival Aircraft Ltd
WZ410		52	Allocated RAF serial WZ409 for administrative purposes
A90-2		15.4.52	Accepted by RAAF in England
		18.4.52	Departed Luton
		7.5.52	Returned to Koepang Timor after departure for Darwin due port engine failure on delivery flight, F/Lt P. Badgery
		17.6.52	Taken on Charge by RAAF, received 34 Sqn Mallala
		12.2.53	Port undercarriage collapsed on landing at Woomera. Group Captain R. B. Burrage with four passengers. No injuries
		28.1.55	Badly damaged Edinburgh SA when port undercarriage failed, damage to wings and fuselage
		13.10.55	Received ATU (Air Trials Unit) ex 34 Sqn for storage
		22.1.57	Offered for disposal at Edinburgh: airframe only, as spares for A90-1
		4.8.57	Sold by Dept of Supply to Royal Aero Club of NSW, Sydney
		.57	Moved by road to Bankstown
		6.58	A90-2 & -3 stored dismantled in hangar Bankstown
		by 5.59	Removed, sold as scrap metal

Percival Prince c/n P.50/40

WZ411, A90-3

Registration	Series	Date	Owner/Event
	C Mk.1	52	Built at Luton by Percival Aircraft Ltd
WZ411		52	Allocated RAF serial WZ409 for administrative purposes
A90-3		7.5.52	Accepted by RAAF in England
		5.52	Arrived RAAF Mallala on delivery flight from England
		24.5.52	Taken on Charge by RAAF, received 34 Squadron Mallala
		17.11.52	Nose-wheel would not extend for landing Mallala. F/Lt P.Badgery with six passengers. No injuries.
		3.5.54	Nose wheel collapsed Woomera
		18.5.54	Received by DAP Parafield for repair
		10.6.54	By now back with 34 Squadron, Mallala
		10.6.55	Fuselage damaged during landing Edinburgh due severe nose wheel shimmy
		13.10.55	Received ATU (Air Trials Unit) ex 34 Sqn for storage
		22.1.57	Offered for disposal at Edinburgh: airframe only, as spares for A90-1
		4.8.57	Sold by Dept of Supply to Royal Aero Club of NSW, Sydney
		.57	Moved by road to Bankstown
		6.58	A90-2 & -3 stored dismantled in hangar Bankstown
		by 5.59	Removed, sold as scrap metal

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