

# Forced Landing at Murray Bridge

by Lloyd Butler VK5BR

It was an exciting event for me (13 year old Lloyd) to see. Early in the evening of Saturday March 5, 1938, the plane flew around and around above the town, clearly in some sort of trouble.

The plane was a Lockheed Electra 10, clearly identified by the twin tails. The lockheeds operated essentially on the Guinea Airways Adelaide Darwin route in the era of 1938 to 1947. However for a short time in late 1930's, Guinea Airways operated between Adelaide and Sydney, but this route was abandoned when their Darwin service increased. Here is the story as recorded by the Adelaide newspaper "The Sunday Mail" at that time :

With a parachute flare dropped from the plane and the headlights of 150 motor cars to guide him, pilot H. Hughes landed a Guinea Airways Lockheed Electra 10 passenger plane on the local race course at 7.45 tonight. The plane, which was on its way to Parafield from Sydney, developed engine trouble after having left Mildura, and sought to land rather than risk crossing the Adelaide Hills on one engine.

Pilot Hughes decided to land at Murray Bridge. He had been in radio communication with Parafield all the way from Mildura, and he circled Murray Bridge for 15 minutes while getting from Parafield officials complete directions as to the location of the racecourse.

In the meantime, the people of Murray Bridge had not been idle. Sgt. F. W. Weidenhofer and Mounted Constable F. Lodge spoke to every motorist they could see, and headed a procession to the racecourse, which is one & a half miles from the town.

Other motorists, who had been watching the plane circling over the town, and had realised that the pilot apparently was looking for place to land, joined in the procession and on reaching the race course, formed a giant circle round the centre of the course with their headlights pointing inwards.

A parachute flare fell from the plane as it circled the course before making a perfect landing. A crowd of more than 400 people cheered Pilot Hughes as he stepped from the plane. He spoke in appreciation of the prompt action of the townspeople of Murray Bridge in sizing up the situation and facilitating the landing.

The five passengers in the plane were laughing and joking as they alighted. They left for Adelaide later by car. Before the Lockheed appeared over Murray Bridge, reports had been received from Mannum, so paving the way for the assembling of the motor cars on the racecourse.

The night's landing was similar in some respects to that made at Albury (New South Wales) during the England-Australia air race in October 1934, when the Douglas air liner was lost over the Victorian Alps at night. It picked up its bearings when a Wangaratta engineer turned the town's lights on and off to flash the name of the town in Morse code. It then flew back to Albury, with motor car headlights to illuminate the ground, it landed on the Albany Racecourse.

Our plane stayed at the Murray Bridge racecourse for quite a number of days. I wasn't at the racecourse to see the night landing, but I was up there every day on my bicycle to see what was going on. The faulty engine was removed from the parked plane and taken away (probably off to Parafield) and a new one arrived. The plane flew away to continue its life in the air.

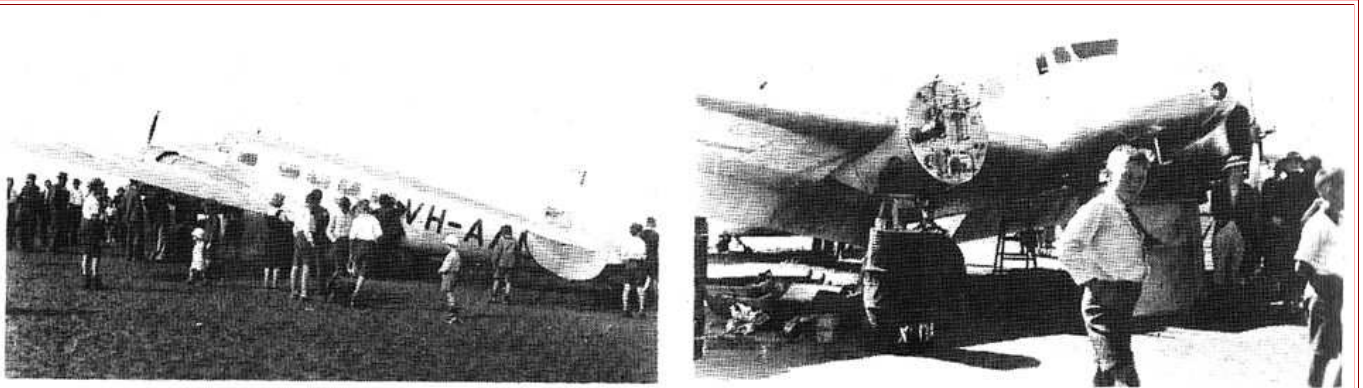
As a Radio Old Timer, I have since wondered what radio facilities the Electra used on that night. HF radio communication with aircraft and a direction finding (DF) AWA receiver were first set up at Parafield in 1937 (a year earlier than that event). VHF was not installed at Parafield until 1949. The Airaco Homer (NDB) LF/MF beacons were not installed at general aerodromes (including Parafield) until 1943. So the aircraft used HF radio to communicate with Parafield Aeradio who probably contacted the Murray Bridge police by telephone. One can imagine that the aircraft used the Broadcast Stations (and perhaps 5MU Murray Bridge), to home in with their on board DF, and navigate to the Race Course destination.

## Newspaper Cuttings of the event



*On the evening of March 5th 1938 this plane (Guinea Airways) circled the town until those watching realised it was in trouble and looking for somewhere to land. Local people with their cars formed a makeshift runway at the racecourse, with their lights on. It was able to land without incident. A plaque was presented to the Council thanking the citizens of Murray Bridge for their help. This plaque is on display at the Council Office.*

**The Lockheed 10 Electra aircraft of the Guinea Airways fleet forced landed at the Racecourse, Murray Bridge**



**The Guinea Airways plane under repair at the Racecourse, Murray Bridge**

I had seen before, at Murray Bridge, various aviators who landed their flying machines on our soil. But this was the first time I had seen an airline passenger aircraft. With just ten passenger seats, I had seen what would develop, 80 years later, to the mighty passenger aircraft we have today.