

## **ANSETT VISCOUNT CATCHES FIRE AND BREAKS UP IN MID-AIR. ALL 24 KILLED**



On 22 September 1966, Ansett-ANA Flight 149 took off from Mount Isa QLD at 12:08 for a 73-minute flight to Longreach with 4 crew and 20 passengers. The crew consisted of Captain Ken Cooper, First Officer J F Gillam and Hostesses Beverley Heescham and Narell Davis.

The flight progressed, apparently uneventfully, until 12:52 when the Longreach-Flight Service Unit heard the crew of VH-RMI say that it was on an emergency descent and to stand by. Two minutes later the aircraft advised that there were fire warnings in respect of number 1 and 2 engines, that one of these warning conditions had ceased and that the propeller of the other engine could not be feathered. At 12:59, information from the crew of VH-RMI, relayed to Longreach through the crew of another aircraft in the vicinity, indicated that there was a visible fire in number 2 engine and that the aircraft was diverting below 5,000 ft to Winton.



Vickers Viscount 832 VH-RMI was descending at an indicated airspeed close to 170 knots between 3500 and 4000 ft above ground level. At this point the port wing failed upwards between engines 1 and 2. It struck the top of the fuselage, which at the same time was cut open by the blades of the number 1 engine, and fell away from the remainder of the aircraft. The cabin shell above floor level was quickly broken away by air loads until eventually the rear fuselage and empennage also separated from the

aircraft. The remaining forward fuselage, with the lower mid fuselage, starboard, wing and engines and port wing stub with the number 2 engine still attached, struck the ground at the edge of a clay pan and was immediately engulfed in flames.

### **Investigation and Board of Accident Inquiry**



Reconstruction of VH-RMI in a Footscray wool shed

The investigation was the longest and most detailed of any aircraft accident investigation conducted in Australia. It concluded that the probable cause of the accident was:

*The means of securing the oil metering unit to the no 2 cabin blower became ineffective and this led to the initiation of a fire within the blower, which propagated to the wing fuel tank and substantially reduced the strength of the main spar upper boom. It is probable that the separation of the oil metering unit arose from an out-of-balance condition induced by rotor break-up but the source of the rotor break-up could not be determined.*

The Inquiry first sat on 26 April and concluded on 31 August 1967. Its findings mirrored those of the investigators' Report. There was a recommendation that Cockpit Voice Recorders be installed in all commercial aircraft weighing over 12,500 lbs, in addition to the Flight Data Recorder.

### **The Mail**

A small amount of mail was salvaged in a distressed condition and was forwarded to Brisbane for treatment.

The Brisbane GPO produced a duplicated letter date 30 September, size 207 x 260 mm, which was forwarded with damaged covers in a reforwarding envelope.

The following cover from Townsville could not be delivered to the addressee and was being returned via Longreach QLD when the accident occurred.





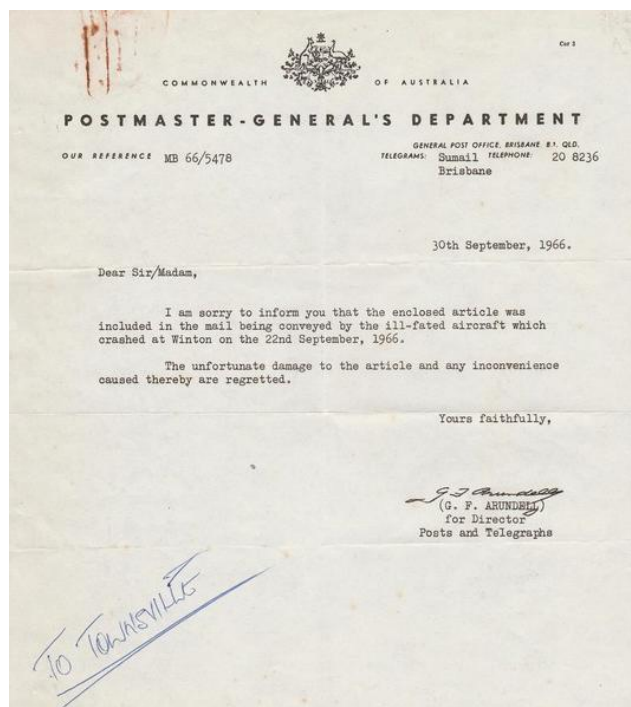
Cancelled **LONGREACH** (4d meter mark), **MOUNT ISA 22SE66**  
with boxed **NOT KNOWN**



Back-stamped **MOUNT ISA 7-P-9SE66**



Townsville receiving stamp



Duplicated letter size 210 x 270 mm from GPO Brisbane dated 30 September

The author has a report of, but has not seen, only one other cover from this incident.