

## *The Southern Cloud.*

*The Southern Cloud* was one of five Avro three engine aircraft, Registered VH-UMF, flying daily airline services between Australian cities in the early 1930's. It was owned by *Australian National Airways (ANA)* and a part owner was Charles Kingsford Smith.

On the 21 March 1931 it departed at 8am from Sydney bound for Melbourne. On board were 6 passengers and 2 crew. The pilot was Travis "Shorty Shortbridge and the weather conditions were much worse than had been predicted.

It never reached Melbourne.

The search lasted 18 days and involved 25 aircraft one of which was flown by Charles Kingsford Smith.

No trace of the missing aircraft was found.

It was Australia's first major air disaster and would cause *ANA* to go into liquidation later that year.

A film, "*Secret of the Skies*", was made in 1934.

One of the passengers was a man named Stan Baker and he did not like the bad weather, cancelled his flight and went to Melbourne by train. He said that he had a fear of flying.

However, he was killed in 1950 when the DC 4 *ANA* plane that he was flying in crashed in Sydney.

Don Bradman wrote in his book that he had flown in the *Southern Cloud*, with "Shorty" Shortbridge as pilot, from Adelaide to Melbourne, only 2 weeks before the disaster.

He described his trip as "*a bumpy journey*".

The mystery of the *Southern Cloud* was finally solved in October 1958. A Surveyor, working on the *Snowy River Scheme*, was mapping a new road through the mountains when he found, hidden under dense undergrowth, some twisted burnt metal and the remains of some engines, half buried in the ground. He searched further and found some human remains.

After 27 years the *Southern Cloud* had been found,

The plane had hit the mountain with full force and had burned, cremating the passengers and crew.

The country where the plane was found is some of the most rugged mountain terrain in Australia.

Several watches were found and they had stopped at 1.15 pm.

The human remains were carefully removed and the plane was left as it was.

[ **John Imrie 17/3/21** ]