

MAURICE GUILLAUX: FRANCE'S FORGOTTEN PIONEER AIRMAN IN AUSTRALIA

TOM LOCKLEY

Between 16 and 18 July 1914 Maurice Guillaux made the most significant flight of early Australian aviation history, carrying mail from Melbourne to Sydney, the first such flight. But the world was hurtling towards the outbreak of World War I and his feat became largely forgotten. Most Australians know little of his exploits, and in his home country he is almost entirely unknown.

The result is that, as we try to piece together his life story and assess his influence, there are many gaps in our knowledge. In this centenary year this article aims to summarise the basic information we have, and to indicate areas that need further investigation.¹

Early life

Ernest François Guillaux, later known as Maurice Guillaux, was born on 24 January 1883 at Montoire in Picardy, north west France. His father was a wheelwright and, according to his marriage record, he too became a wheelwright.²

¹ We are particularly grateful to M. André Michel, local historian at Montoire, for generously making his research on the life and career of Maurice Guillaux available to us. We also thank John Scott and Keith White from the Aviation Society of NSW, Gary Sunderland and Kevin O'Reilly from AHSA Victoria, Chris Matts and Perce Lyell from the Australian Aviation Museum Bankstown, Lorraine Harrison and Kate Ward from the Harden-Murrumburrah Historical Society, Bill Woerlee from the website of the Australian Light Horse Studies Centre, Canberra, Bob Saunders from Goulburn's Rocky Hill Museum and Mr Eric Berti, Consul-General of France.

² We are indebted to Michel Guillaux, grandson of Maurice, for this and other information on his grandfather (see letter of 13 March 2014). Michel Guillaux himself worked in the aviation industry for Turbomeca at their factory at Mézières until he retired in 1991.

At the age of nineteen he married H elo ise Anne-Marie Langot, a farmer's daughter. They had a son, Bernard, born about 1902. Several sources claim that he worked in the auto industry before becoming an airman but no official record has been found of his activities between his marriage and when he gained his French pilot's licence n  749 on 19 February 1912.

Guillaux is reported to have bought a biplane with which he gave displays, charging the onlookers one *sou* each (*Nouvelle R publique*, 22–23.8.1964). He quickly succeeded in becoming chief pilot of the Caudron aircraft factory at Le Crotoy in the Somme department.

Aviator in France

On 7 and 8 April 1912 he took part, 'on' a Caudron biplane, in an aviation display at Savigny-sur-Seine where he impressed the onlookers by his ability to fly in bad weather. This was the first of many such appearances.

The aviators of the time were celebrities, and Guillaux was among the elite group that received a great deal of publicity. His career at Caudron was brief, but exciting. He set new records for altitude and in July 1912 flew to England to participate in more displays.



Maurice Guillaux in February 1913 ( tampes, greater Paris region)

In August he became chief pilot for the Clément-Bayard factory of Levallois-Perret, to fly their 'all metal' monoplane. He also gained qualifications as a military pilot.

Guillaux participated successfully in many aviation displays and set several new records in his Clément-Bayard, but his chief claim to fame at this time came from another achievement. At the time, the Pommery Cup competition attracted a great deal of interest among aviators and the public in general. It was awarded twice a year to the pilot who, during the current period, flew the longest distance, measured in a straight line, between sunrise and sunset on one day. On Tuesday 1 May he flew 1250 kilometres from Biarritz in the south-east corner of France to Kollum in the Netherlands. This was the winning flight for the first competition in 1913.

Disgrace: a change of career

For the competition which occurred in the second half of 1913, rivalries were intense. Guillaux and Marcel-Georges Brindejone des Moulinais³ were the main contenders. On 16 September 1913 Guillaux flew from Biarritz to a small town in Germany. Brindejone des Moulinais flew from Villacoublay to Warsaw in Poland. The distances were similar, and the army surveyors were called in to adjudicate. In the process, it was found that although Guillaux's records indicated that he had reached the town of Brackel, in fact he landed at Brockel, some 60 kilometres closer to his starting point. This difference was crucial, and Brindejone des Moulinais won the cup. It cannot be determined whether Guillaux and his supporters had deliberately tried to cheat or had made a careless error, but Guillaux was suspended from the competition for ten years.

Public interest in the Pommery Cup was declining. The most popular aeronaut of the time was Adolphe Pégoud, the first airman to 'loop the loop'

³ Marcel-Georges Brindejone des Moulinais (1892–1916) was best known for pioneering long distance flights, such as crossing the Baltic Sea and flying from Paris to London to Brussels and back to Paris. He was the youngest *chevalier* in the order of the *Légion d'honneur* (at the age of 21). Brindejone des Moulinais died in World War 1 while serving in the French airforce.

in France⁴ in a specially modified Blériot XI. His amazing aerobatics were drawing huge crowds. Guillaux soon purchased his own Blériot XI aircraft that had been specially built as a ‘looper’, an aerobatic machine. We do not know whether he financed the purchase himself or was financed by a backer. With this, he gave an aerial display involving the first ‘loop the loop’ to be performed over Paris;⁵ he made other display flights and became famous for looping the loop over Paris fifteen times in a row.⁶

The aeroplane

Louis Blériot had several attempts at making an efficient aeroplane before he became the first person to fly the English Channel on 25 July 1909. His aircraft, the first Blériot XI, has been preserved in the Musée des Arts et Métiers in Paris. After the Wright Flyer in the Smithsonian Institute in USA, it is probably the most significant pre-World War I aircraft still in existence.

Blériot retained the label Blériot XI for all the aircraft that were made on the basic plan of his original aircraft. Over 500 were built, some in overseas factories.

Modern writers tend to scoff at these early aircraft. The pilot sat ‘on’ rather than ‘in’ the aircraft and control was achieved by warping the wings by means of a complex set of bracing wires. The aircraft is often described as being ‘frail and primitive’. This description is ill-informed. Each aircraft was specifically designed and built for its intended purpose. The purchaser could choose from a whole range of wing sections, for example. Sydney enthusiast David Kelly has gone back to the wind tunnel data that was obtained by the Blériot factory (in 1913) and demonstrated that the company could tailor lift, drag and speed characteristics with a great deal of precision.⁷ The ‘looper’ aircraft could fly upside down. When the concave wing section is taken into

⁴ A ‘loop’ occurs when the aviator flies the aircraft in a vertical circle, or ‘loops the loop’.

⁵ *Le Carillon*, 29.1.1913.

⁶ <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=288461>

⁷ Some of David Kelly’s investigations can be accessed at <http://lockoweb.com/03%20the%20aircraft/index06aircraft.htm>

account, this was a particularly remarkable feat, involving major warping of the wings.

Other Blériot aircraft were produced up until the late 1930s, when the French aircraft industry was nationalised and the Blériot factories were absorbed into SNASCO, now part of Airbus Industrie. The Blériot XI is a worthy ancestor of today's sophisticated aircraft, and is neither primitive nor frail.

The World Tour: Guillaux and his companions

Late in 1913 Guillaux began a world tour with the Blériot. Here again we encounter a gap in our knowledge: was Guillaux the mastermind of the expedition, or was he just a brilliant pilot and technician exploited by others? Piecing together the genesis of the expedition is almost like an ancient history research project: we have to interpret scraps of information and assemble them as best we can.

He was a superb pilot and a skilled technician. This is how a press reporter describes him at work:

Mechanics moved about in an orderly sort of disorder. Wire stays were tightened, ash props were tested, nuts were screwed up or slackened as required, levels were taken, the great polished propeller was tried [...] over all, Guillaux kept a hawk-like supervision. No detail was too small for his personal attention. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, henceforth *SMH*, 9.5.1914.)

Another proof that he was a 'hands-on' person is the fact that he is reported as dismantling the aircraft at Ballarat when his companion's wallet was stolen (*Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, 17.6.1914).

He also had a dashing 'matinee idol' appearance, though he was not a tall man. He was popular with the ladies: he gave one interview in which he said that airmen should not be married (*The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 17.6.1914), though he himself had been married in 1902, at age 19. The Melbourne scandal sheet *Truth* published details of an alleged liaison with one Bessie Harrigan, a waitress in a Sydney coffee shop, claiming that she travelled with Guillaux as his wife. Another story claimed that a lady had shared hotel accommodation

with Guillaux's group. *Truth's* coverage of Guillaux was always viciously critical (*Truth*, Melbourne edition, 30.5.1914; 18.7.1914; 15.8.1914), in line with its settled preference for scandalous and mendacious stories, as well as for xenophobia. However, it may be noted that the passengers in Guillaux's aircraft were often beautiful women.

Apart from Guillaux, there were four in the touring party. François Repousseau is sometimes referred to as the manager of the group. According to some reports he had been involved in motoring activities. Lucien Maistre was the son of a former French consul in Melbourne: Paul Maistre had been vice-consul in 1903 and consul in 1905.⁸ Lucien is often credited with being a representative of the Gnome aero-engine company (e.g. *SMH* 1.4.1914.). Occasionally he is also referred to as manager of the group. Guillaux spoke little English, and both Maistre and Repousseau often acted as interpreters. Of the other two in the party, Cominos and du Coque, we know little, but we can infer that they were mechanics. They both had roles in the air mail flight as supervisors stationed at various stops to assist refuelling etc.

An Australian entrepreneur seems always to have arranged events for visiting celebrity airmen. Arthur Rickard, a land developer in NSW responsible for subdivisions from Woy Woy to Penshurst, sponsored events for the American Arthur Burr 'Wizard' Stone. Albert Sculthorpe, a municipal councillor of St Kilda, Melbourne, was 'manager' of Guillaux's performances for most of his time in Australia, the first record of this being *The Sydney Morning Herald* of April 22. Sculthorpe was a personage of some importance: when he visited the Albury Council meeting on 20 May 1914, his remarks at the meeting were recorded in the newspaper in a tone which suggested that his visit had been a great honour (*The Border Morning Mail and Riverina Times*, Albury, 21.5.1914).

Guillaux was internationally known. He had been mentioned in Australian newspapers at least eighty-four times before his visit had been announced—usually brief mentions of his exploits, but the suspension

⁸ Paul Maistre was *chancelier* at the Melbourne consulate from the eighteen-eighties. After serving at Cardiff and Swansea, he returned to Melbourne in 1901. He was married to an Englishwoman, hence their son's good mastery of English. See C. B. Thornton-Smith, 'Paul Maistre, Vice-Consul and later Consul for France in Victoria, 1886–1898, 1901–1908', *Explorations* 17, 1994, pp. 4–47.

scandal of 1913 was widely reported.⁹ Interestingly, Brindejone des Moulinais had forty-eight citations. However Pégoud¹⁰, the aerobatic specialist and parachutist, first mentioned on 20 August 1913, was cited in over 500 articles during the remainder of the year. There were even rumours that he intended to visit Australia.

It was customary at the time for reporters to interview passengers recently arrived on ships so as to get a more expanded version of overseas news than was available by telegraph and to get news of celebrity arrivals. Guillaux was interviewed by a journalist in Fremantle on 2 April, and this article was widely reprinted. Australians had recently been visited by Melbourne born Harry Hawker, who had created a sensation with his speedy Sopwith Tabloid aircraft. Guillaux was asked his opinion of Hawker, and wisely declared his admiration for him (*Albany Advertiser* 4.10.1913). The reporter explained how aerial prowess was a characteristic of the French. He enumerated Guillaux's past exploits and raised expectations of the displays to come.

In Sydney, the French-language weekly, *Le Courrier Australien*, was caught napping by the arrival of Guillaux. There was less news of him in the *Courrier* than in the English-language press. However, on 23 April an extensive coverage was provided of his 21 April 'preview' display. On Tuesday 5 May the French community gave Guillaux a ceremonial dinner, hosted by the French Consul-General Alexandre Chayet. On 13 May he had been the guest of honour at the Australian Aerial League, a group of aviation-minded people whose aim was to lobby the government to develop aviation, civil and military. The *Courrier* gave good coverage of Guillaux's displays in Sydney, much the same as those in the English-language press but with obvious pride in the skill of 'notre compatriote'. As Guillaux moved away from Sydney, coverage became scantier. Further, as the war grew nearer, the attention given

⁹ These figures were obtained by using the 'advanced search' facility of the *Trove* archive of the National Library of Australia, <http://trove.nla.gov.au/> : complete accuracy is not guaranteed, but the data thus obtained are robust enough to enable conclusions to be drawn.

¹⁰ Adolphe Pégoud (1889–1915) served in the French army from 1907 to 1913 when he took up flying. He soon became a test pilot and a flying instructor. He was well known for his airplane manoeuvres and was the first pilot to make a parachute jump from an airplane. At the start of World War 1 he volunteered for flying duty. A year later he was shot down by one of his pre-war German students.

to their countryman declined; coverage of the mail flight was not elaborate, and once war broke out the coverage was non-existent.¹¹

The early displays

Guillaux's Bériot XI¹² was unloaded from the liner *Orontes* and probably was assembled at premises owned by Jules Maillard, who had showrooms and a garage at 186a Phillip Street, Sydney. This would have been a major task, especially because of the precise setting-up that was required.

The first newspaper report of a flight described the events of Monday April 21 when Guillaux gave a display at Victoria Park, a racetrack at Zetland in Sydney, now an inner city suburb. Only invited observers attended the exhibition. The *Evening News* noted the quick take-off and climb, with sharp banking turns. Guillaux then exhibited a manoeuvre that became a trademark feature—a vertical dive towards the earth, from which he pulled out at the last possible moment. He made a figure 'S' in the sky and performed some loops, both 'inside' and 'outside'¹³. The 'outside' loop was rarely done by any aviator. He also flew upside-down. He was in the air for eighty minutes. In a second flight he flew off into the distance over the entrance to Sydney Harbour, returning to give another aerobatic display before landing.

This programme became a standard for later displays. It was first used at Newcastle, on 25 April 1914 (*Sunday Times*, Sydney, 26.4.1914). Guillaux's aircraft was the first to be seen over Newcastle, and at least 4,000 people paid for entry to the Showgrounds, with large crowds outside.

¹¹ The Sydney French weekly did not report his death in 1917. These impressions of *Le Courrier Australien* were gathered from reading a microfiche copy held at the NSW State Library. As the reproduction is of poor quality and not searchable, our conclusions may have limitations.

¹² Guillaux's Blériot XI monoplane is on display at the Sydney Powerhouse Museum. See: <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=288461>

¹³ A 'loop-the-loop' occurs when the aircraft makes a vertical circular trajectory, completing a full circle. The 'inside' loop is so-called because the pilot is on the inside of the circle, and thus is pushed into his seat by centrifugal force. In the 'outside' loop the pilot is on the outside of the circle, and thus is subject to 'negative g-force' as his body is being pushed away from the aircraft. There is also much more strain on the aircraft in an 'outside' loop.



Guillaux's Blériot XI above Sydney's Victoria Park Racecourse, now Green Square
(Courtesy Powerhouse Museum, Sydney)

This 'off-Broadway' opening show was followed a week later by a major display back at Victoria Park in Sydney. It was widely advertised, and special trams were run. The enthusiastic *Courrier Australien* estimated the crowd at 60,000 but the *Sunday Times* estimate was only 10,000 (3.5.1914), which seems to be a bit small, judging by the photograph published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (4.5.1914). The *Herald*, which had blandly announced the display in a four-line article, went into raptures when describing the performance (*SMH* 30.4.1914 and 4.5.1914). On 5 May the *Queanbeyan Age*, comparing the Australian Harry Hawker to Guillaux, claimed that Guillaux had 'demonstrated the daring possibilities of aerial acrobatics in a manner that Hawker's feats never suggested'.

In the week after the first display at Victoria Park Guillaux and his team were busy working on Lebbeus Hordern's seaplane (see below). On 9 April Guillaux gave a second display at Victoria Park, advertised as the last

chance to see him in action. The display was again very well attended, and the programme was as before, with the unintended addition of a near catastrophe when the aircraft hit and carried away telegraph wires strung between two grandstands.

Lebbeus Hordern's seaplane and the journey south

Anthony Hordern and Sons was the biggest department store in Australia at the time, and one of the biggest in the world. In early 1914 Lebbeus Hordern, a member of the Hordern dynasty, had imported a Farman seaplane. In the week beginning 4 April, Guillaux and his team worked to assemble the aircraft at Hordern's Double Bay home. The skill personally exhibited by Guillaux during this operation has already been described above. The aircraft first flew on 8 May, with Guillaux at the controls—the first flight by a seaplane, or 'hydro-aeroplane', as it was called, in Australia. He took up Lebbeus Hordern, the French Consul-General Alexandre Chayet, some naval officers, and a good proportion of ladies, including Mme Maillard and Louise Carbasse, later to become famous as the Hollywood movie actress Louise Lovely. The flights were sensational news, widely reported in the newspapers.

Hordern and Guillaux seemed to get along well. They announced plans to fly the seaplane from Sydney to Melbourne and foreshadowed that more aircraft were being ordered from France and would arrive a few months later. Guillaux re-established the use of Ham Common, Richmond, NSW, as an airfield, and announced plans to stay in Australia to establish a flying business (*SMH* 22.5.1914).

The Farman seaplane was donated to the defence forces at the outbreak of World War I, becoming CFS 7, the seventh aircraft of Australia's military forces. It was sent on HMS *Una* to take part in the capture of German possessions in New Guinea. Hordern imported four more seaplanes after the war, and the decision, announced in 1935, to build the Australian seaplane carrier HMAS *Albatross*, may well have been influenced by the publicity gained from Hordern's aircraft.¹⁴

¹⁴ Keith Isaacs, *Military Aircraft of Australia 1909–1918*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1971, p. 28.

Guillaux's aviation performances were not confined to New South Wales: it was rumoured that Guillaux had been offered a guarantee of £1000 to visit Melbourne, and plans were quickly made accordingly. En route to Melbourne, on 16 May he performed at Wagga Wagga, and on 23 May at Albury. These wealthy provincial centres welcomed the events, almost closing down normal business so that everyone could see the show. Special trains were run to both centres and crowds of about 6,000 attended.

Albert Sculthorpe, a Melbourne promoter and St Kilda municipal councillor, was listed as 'director' of the displays and was accompanied by his daughter Milly. Lucien Maistre and François Repousseau were present, and an interesting member of the support team was a certain Mr Kyrle. He was listed as 'manager' but in fact he worked for a film-making firm called 'Panama Expositions', and had been doing this since at least 1908. He showed 1,000 feet of 'living pictures' of Sydney, and took other films of both Sydney and Melbourne and Guillaux's displays. These were sent to Sydney for processing, and shown a few days later in both cities. Sadly the National Film and Sound Archive has none of these films: indeed, there is only a total of less than two minutes of movie film depicting Guillaux in Australia.

At Albury the party was welcomed by Lionel C. Griffiths and by Alderman Frère, who were credited with arranging the performance. Guillaux obviously was pleased to meet Alderman Frère, who was of French origin and could converse with him in his native tongue.

Victoria and South Australia

Guillaux announced his arrival in Melbourne in spectacular fashion. Having set up his aircraft at the Flemington Showgrounds, he flew to Government House on Thursday 28 May, landing in the grounds. At the time, this was the residence of the Governor-General as Parliament met in Melbourne in the years before the creation of Canberra. The Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, the Governor of Victoria, Sir Arthur Stanley, and his wife were present. Lady Stanley conversed with Guillaux in French. The machine was carefully inspected, Lady Stanley calling for a chair upon which she stood to get a better view of the controls.

Guillaux performed an aerobatic show, and then returned to his base, the Flemington Showgrounds, where he was congratulated by Lieutenant

Harrison, of the Aviation Corps. The following day, obviously at Harrison's invitation, Guillaux flew to Point Cook (about 30 km from central Melbourne), where the first military flying school in Australia had commenced operations on 1 March 1914. Guillaux gave a flying display and also rode in one of the Point Cook aircraft over the Point Cook area. He congratulated the government on its establishment of the base and gave his opinion that Point Cook was an excellent site for the purpose. This praise was very tactful: the administration of Point Cook had been criticised by Hawker for not purchasing his speedy Sopwith Tabloid aircraft. The current policy had decreed that only training aircraft were required.

The Governor-General was among the huge crowd attending the display on the following day. For once, estimates of the crowd agree at around 25,000 to 30,000 people. The usual show was performed, with the usual very positive reporting by the newspapers (*SMH* 25.5.1914). *The Sydney Morning Herald* (30.5.1914) published a long interview with Guillaux, which the *Truth* ridiculed on the basis that he had very little English.

The aircraft was sent north to Bendigo by train, and a display was given on Monday 8 June, the King's Birthday holiday. Sculthorpe had to enter into negotiations with the local football club so as not to interrupt the game, but all was resolved, and the display was received with the usual acclaim. To this time, the aircraft had always been transported from town to town by train, but on this occasion Guillaux flew from Bendigo to Ballarat (about 80 km) on Tuesday 9 June. This received wide press coverage including in the towns that the aircraft flew over. On this flight he carried a message from the Mayor of Bendigo to his Ballarat counterpart and also some postcards. Only one postcard survives, and it was sold in 2008 for \$35,000.

On 13 June Guillaux gave another typical performance at Ballarat racecourse. There was some added excitement when he made a low pass over a mullock heap near the racecourse on which a number of non-paying spectators had gathered. The reporter of the *Daylesford Advocate* (16.5.1914) wrote that 'one portly individual who attempted to run down the heap fell down and rolled to the bottom. In the rush to get away from their seemingly safe position, two women and several children fainted, but they soon recovered. The mullock heap crowd will not quickly forget Guillaux's visit to Ballarat'.

He then flew west. Newspaper accounts of his display in Adelaide on 20 June were glowing. 'Every movement was exceedingly graceful' (*The*

Advertiser, Adelaide, 20.6.1914). *The Mail* front page story was headed ‘Master of the Air: Guillaux and his Wonderful Bird. Spectators Astounded’ (20.6.1914). The *Daily Herald* was similarly impressed: ‘Remarkable is a word hardly expressive enough to describe these wonderful aerial evolutions’ (22.6.1914). It seemed that the whole city was highly excited.

In the context of Guillaux’s visit to South Australia it is worth mentioning that subsequently his Blériot passed into the hands of Graeme Carey who on 23 November 1917 flew it from Adelaide to Gawler, carrying the first official air mail delivery within South Australia, 100 souvenir postcards (which sold at 2/6d. each) and some other official messages.¹⁵

The next display was at Geelong on 4 July. Guillaux flew the aircraft from Melbourne to Geelong (about 60 km) for the event, carrying a few messages. The display was as usual, with the usual reactions, but for the first recorded time Guillaux took up passengers in his aircraft. It is difficult to see how this was managed! The passengers included a young lady, Miss Jetta Tivey, daughter of the manager of the Colonial Bank, who ‘enjoyed every moment’ of her twenty minute flight. Mr R. N. Tourneur of Ballarat was told to hold on to the pilot while he looped the loop.

There were no more displays in Melbourne, though Guillaux made a few flights for social reasons, including one to a coursing meeting near Ballarat to see Gordon Chirside, a wealthy grazier with whom he had become friendly a few weeks before (*The Argus*, Melbourne, 10.7.1914). He also made a few flights over Melbourne, almost bringing it to a standstill.

The Melbourne–Sydney mail flight

The Melbourne–Sydney mail flight was Guillaux’s main achievement in Australia. The story of how it came about, however, is not simple. Entrepreneur Arthur Rickard had contracted American flyer ‘Wizard’ Stone to fly the mail service, but on 1st June he crashed his aircraft in Rockhampton, Queensland, damaging both it and himself. Rickard then entered into negotiations with Guillaux, but these broke down. On 9 July 1914 Messrs C. H. Powys and R. Sissons of Melbourne wrote to the Postmaster General: ‘With the authority of Mons. A [sic] Maistre, manager for Mons. M Guillaux, we propose to place

¹⁵ http://www.gawler.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/Gawler_s_First_Air_Mail.pdf

on sale postcards for conveyance from Melbourne to Sydney. We should be glad to learn whether the Department would permit us to issue these cards and co-operate by placing the cards in a special bag [...] and using a special stamp at this end'. The Department approved within days, on condition that a special cancellation stamp was provided by Messrs Powis and Sissons (*Australia Post Philatelic Bulletin* n° 66, June 1964).

The financial aspects of the arrangements are not clear. There were nine stops and the flight would have to take more than one day. The postcards sold for a maximum of two shillings each, and even if the Guillaux organisation got all the money thus collected, this would compare unfavourably with the amount received from thousands of people at a single display.

Fuel and oil, as well as a landing venue, were arranged at each spot by François Repousseau. Sponsorship was obtained from Lipton Tea, O.T. Juice and Shell Oil. The entire organisation of the event was completed within ten days.¹⁶

The flight began from Flemington Showgrounds at 9.12 am on 16 July 1914. Guillaux flew first to Seymour and Wangaratta, where he landed in paddocks near the town centre. His was the first aircraft to land at these centres. He could have by-passed Albury, but wanted to land there to renew his friendship with Alderman Frère. No-one from Guillaux's staff was there to meet him, but the Shell dealer provided the necessary fuel and oil, and assisted with the starting of the engine. After a quick lunch with Alderman Frère, he flew on to Wagga Wagga, where he actually landed on the wrong racecourse, in the middle of a race meeting. Having refuelled at the correct racecourse, he flew on to the small town of Harden. He tried to fly on to Goulburn, but was driven back by bad weather, which persisted the following day. He gave a flying display for the locals and took a few of them for a flight.

Eventually, on 18 July, just after dawn at 7 am, he took off for Goulburn, where he landed a few hours later. Frozen, he rushed to the beacon fire to warm up. After a brief pause, he flew on. He was scheduled to land at Moss Vale, but because of bad weather, poor visibility or some other reason, he did not land there but flew on. He claimed to have climbed to 18,000 feet in an effort to find Moss Vale, one of several rather suspect statements made at various

¹⁶ A speed that is the envy of the present writer, who battled with twenty-first century bureaucracy for over a year to plan the centenary re-enactment.



The mail flight on its way to Sydney: stopover at Goulburn, 18 July 1914.
 Guillaux is at the right of the central group.
 (Courtesy Rocky Hill War Memorial and Museum, Goulburn)

times during his career. He landed in a paddock just behind the main street of Liverpool approximately forty kilometres from Sydney.

After dinner with a local family, he flew on to Moore Park in Sydney where he landed at 2.55 pm, to a pre-arranged reception from a huge crowd and dignitaries including the Governor-General.¹⁷ The messages were handed over, and the official party adjourned to the area under the grandstand for drinks and toasts to the success of the flight. On that day Guillaux made an appearance on-stage at a matinee at the Tivoli Theatre, and though he only spoke a few words, his reception was rapturous (*The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 20.7.1914).

After the mail flight

Guillaux had been a celebrity since his arrival in Australia. He appeared in his first endorsement advertisement, for Phillips Tailors on 15 May (*SMH*). Later advertisements included one for Hupmobile Cars (*The Mercury*, Hobart, 27.6.1914) and after the mail flight huge programmes of advertising were

¹⁷ H. N. Eustis, *Fifty Years of Australian Air Mails*, 1964, reprinted by Aviation Historical Society of Australia, NSW, 2013, p. 15.

begun for Lipton Tea and O.T. Juice. At least 600 placements were made of the O.T. advertisement. Many newspaper articles carried accounts of the flight and indeed general comments on aviation (e.g. *Goulburn Evening Penny Post* 4.8.1914).

However the shadow of the European war was beginning to dominate the news, as the implications of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 June started to make themselves felt. On 20 July Austria's 'July Ultimatum' brought the probability of war to the world's attention. War 'officially' broke out on July 28, with Britain (and consequently Australia) becoming involved on 4 August. The French Consulate-General ran advertisements requiring all Frenchmen of military age to return to France (e.g. *Courrier Australien* 5.8.1914).

Guillaux did some more flying with the Farman 'hydro-aeroplane' and staged another flying display at Ascot (now part of Kingsford-Smith airport, Sydney) on 1 August. On this occasion his aircraft crashed from a height of about 100 feet, and the aircraft was badly damaged. Guillaux was pulled from the wreckage with bad cuts to his head, but after quick treatment from doctors on the ground was able to walk to a car which rushed him to hospital.

The aircraft was repaired (contrary to some reports) and Guillaux recovered enough to give a display at Bathurst on 12 September. There was a new and fateful feature—a demonstration of how aircraft could be used for bombing. There was also a new business manager on the scene, the firm being McCallum Brothers and Treacy, with A. McLaughlan and R. H. Treacy handling the Bathurst arrangements (*Leader*, Orange, 7.9.1914).

However the time for displays was over: a new mood of enthusiasm for the war was in the air. Lucien Maistre quickly returned to France, followed by François Repousseau and newspaper articles widely reported Guillaux's desire to return (*Sunday Times*, Perth, 30.8.1914). On 22 October he sailed with the headquarters group of the first Australian Division, listed on the embarkation list as 'aviator'.¹⁸

¹⁸ http://www.awm.gov.au/people/roll-search/nominal_rolls/first_world_war_embarkation/?unit=HQ+1+Australian+Division+%28October+1914%29&op=Search

Guillaux after Australia and the ‘shot as a spy’ rumours

After Guillaux left Australia, we have very little information about him. On 20 February 1914 the Melbourne suburban newspaper the *Moorabbin News* reported that he had flown, in France, at 144 mph from Savigny-sur-Seine to Paris, thanks to a strong tail wind. The *Geelong Advertiser* reported on 27 February 1915 that local man Mr Tivey had received a postcard from him saying that he was off to the front to undertake reconnaissance missions. On 10 May 1915 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that he had begun work testing Blériot aircraft.

In his book *Flying Matilda* (1957) the Australian author Norman Ellison gives a detailed account of Guillaux in the company of Australian airmen in 1917, when he is alleged to have taken five (named) Australians into the air on a Farman aircraft. The story is undated, has discrepancies and is not supported by any official source.

Nothing more was heard until 21 July 1917 when Private G. A. Oliver, ‘Motoring Editor of the *Mail*’ (Adelaide), wrote a rambling article from London, in which he said ‘Guillaux is now rumoured to be taking an active part in the war on the German side’.

At this stage Guillaux had already been dead for two months. The authoritative Paris daily *Le Temps* had reported on 24 May 1917 on p. 3 that ‘Sergeant Maurice Guillaux died while testing a new aircraft’.¹⁹ The journalist of *Le Temps* added that because of his exceptional skills he was entrusted with the testing of the latest model aeroplanes. The following day, 25 May, on p. 2, in its Aviation column, *La Presse* also reported Guillaux’s death, highlighting his earlier accomplishments and the fact that this pre-war champion carried out his duty unpretentiously and with courage, concluding that France was much in his debt.

Guillaux’s death and its circumstances were ignored by the Australian press. The only item of ‘news’ was the detailed description of his activities as a spy and his consequent execution, printed in the Melbourne *Punch* on Thursday 15 November 1917 (p. 8), reproduced below. The *Punch* allegation is

¹⁹ According to his death certificate Guillaux died on 22 August 1917 at 3 am in the Versailles Military Hospital. He is referred to as having served in the 116th Infantry Regiment but seconded to the Morane-Saulnier aircraft factory as an ‘aviation pilot’.

GUILLAUX, THE AVIATOR.

Shot as a German Spy.

Was Treated Like a Lord in Australia.

Melodrama has forsaken the stage these last three years, and has become a part of the daily life of millions. The wildest and wierdest drama ever put on the stage pales into insignificance when compared with the actual happenings of the last three years. The most involved and intricate story of international intrigue ever spun by the imaginative, sensational novelist is meek and mild in comparison with actual facts. Even here in far-off Australia we have played our part in the spy drama. A few months ago in France, an aviator, who was thought to be French, and who had been on active service with the French Flying Corps for two years, was tried by Court Martial and shot as a German spy. The enemy always seemed to have a premonition of projected movements on a certain sector of the French front. Suspicions were aroused, and a watch set. An aviator was discovered one night flying to the German lines, alighting, and giving papers. His name was Guillaux, and he carried the first aerial mail from Melbourne to Sydney.

This "French" aviator was quite a lion when he was out here, was made much of by the Powers-that-be, and shown everything he wanted to see. His French was perfect, and quite deceived even the French people. He did not speak English, and always had an interpreter for converse with people who did not speak French. It has now transpired that he spoke English quite well, only with a perceptible German accent—hence his extreme care never to use it in English-speaking countries. The outbreak of war found him in Australia, and, unlike the other French flying men—a real French one—he did not leave to join his corps for over a month afterwards. What was he doing here in this time?

Before his execution Guillaux confessed that he was one of twelve German aviators who were specially trained two years before war, and despatched to join the flying corps of different countries in the world. All twelve were linguists, and were allotted to the country whose language they spoke without any foreign accent. This spy had spent much time in France and, consequently, spoke pure Parisian French; but his English though good was accented.

scurrilous and totally without foundation. Also, Canberra historian Bill Woerlee has forensically dissected the article, pointing out ubiquitous discrepancies and impossibilities within the article.²⁰

The story need not be dignified with further comment, but its reception in Australia is interesting.

The allegation was taken up by the *Euroa Advertiser* the day after the *Punch* story was printed (Friday 16 November 1917), and in the following six weeks it was reproduced by at least thirty-nine other newspapers. The first denial of the story did not appear until December 1917 (*The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser*, NSW, 21.12.1917) and an official denial did not come until the middle of 1918 (*The Argus*, Melbourne, 30.7.1918).

On 23 May 1918 *Punch* itself retracted its story. On page 8, without a special heading, in the middle of a column entitled ‘Views and News’, the following may be found:

Some months ago ‘Punch’ published a statement that Guillaux, the flying-man who visited Australia prior to the outbreak of war, and gave a series of exhibition flights, had been shot in Paris as a spy. M. Raoul Lambert, of Middle Brighton, states that he had made inquiries from a former Consul General for France, who is now in Paris, and he has been informed that the statements concerning Guillaux are untrue. On the other hand, Guillaux was killed, M. Lambert is informed, while ‘trying out’ aeroplanes for the French Government, and was awarded a military funeral. We are pleased to give Mr. Lambert’s denial as a contradiction to the statements and rumours that were current not only in Victoria, but in other States.

Fifty-one retractions or corrections were published in various newspapers before the end of the war, but even after 23 May 1918 the ‘shot as a spy’ story was also repeated at least eight more times. Perhaps its last iteration was twenty-two years later by a John Morris on page 1 of the ‘Saturday Weekend Magazine’ of the Melbourne *Argus* of 23 November 1940, even though *The*

²⁰ See: <http://lockoweb.com/04%20Social%20and%20personal/The%20spy%20story.htm>



‘A L’AVIATEUR M. GUILLAUX 1883–1917 SA VEUVE SES AMIS’
Neuilly Cemetery, Paris

Argus had rejected the spy story in its 25 July 1918 edition. Resurrecting it so many years later might well reflect anti-French feelings in the media shortly after the surrender of France in 1940. It is interesting that this is the only time the rumour was published by papers of the standing of *The Argus* or the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Guillaux was buried in the cemetery of Neuilly-sur-Seine: his grave is marked with an elaborate monument, with an inscription from his friends and his widow.

According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* (25 July 1918), the funeral took place in the presence of a representative of the French Ministry of War.

Guillaux’s grandson has provided an obituary notice for his grandfather. The mourners were led by Guillaux’s father and his son Bernard, then about fifteen. The notice describes Guillaux as a Flight Sergeant and chief test pilot of the Morane factory. The brothers Morane, founders of the Morane-Saulnier

operation, attended the ceremony. It was also attended by M. Caudron, Guillaux's former employer, M. Marlin from the Rhône engine factory and many famous aviators such as Edmond Audemars and Georges Guynemer, himself to die later that year. Many French and British officers were also present and the hearse was covered with wreaths including those from French and English military pilots.

Guillaux's widow, Héloïse, died on 28 April 1966. His son Bernard worked in the aero industry, as did his grandson Michel, who lives in Mantes-la-Jolie, aged 82 at the time of writing.

Guillaux's name is listed on an honour board in the French Consulate-General offices in Sydney, as a French-Australian victim of the war. He was not Australian, but the entry is a fitting tribute to a man who made a significant contribution to the development of Australian aviation during his two hundred days in Australia.

As an unexpected result of the interest that has been aroused by the re-emergence of the Guillaux story in Australia, a street will be named in his honour in Montoire, his birthplace, later this year.²¹

Australia after Guillaux

Jacques Marduel, a French pilot with whom Guillaux had become associated, briefly carried on Guillaux's flying activities on Ham Common (*Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, NSW, 30.10.1914) and later was attached to Australian units overseas: he was associated with aviation until his death (*The Argus*, Melbourne, 14.7.1939).

A new generation of Australians went to war, and the survivors such as Ross and Keith Smith, Charles Kingsford-Smith and many others became the leaders of a huge upsurge in Australian aviation, and Guillaux's contribution was lost to public attention. Yet it is remarkable how many aviators and people connected to the aviation industry traced their interest to having seen Guillaux's extraordinary feats. Kingsford-Smith himself was one of these: 'the flight which appealed to him most was that of the Frenchman Maurice Guillaux from Melbourne to Sydney in 9 hours 25 minutes in July 1914'.²²

²¹ Personal communication from André Michel, 18.5.2014.

²² Article by Hugh Buggie, *The Argus*, 7.1.1956, p. 9.

Australians in general were excited and impressed by his activities: my father, who watched him land in Goulburn as a twelve-year old described to me the excitement of seeing the Blériot as a little dot in the sky, which became larger and finally landed on the racecourse to the cheers of the crowd. He remembered every detail of the occasion even in old age.

Guillaux's story may have been hitherto ignored by history, but his influence on Australian aviation is undeniable. It is hoped that the historical record can be made more complete, and adequate recognition of his influence can be achieved, as a result of the commemoration of this centenary.

Sydney

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Much of the material used in this paper comes from two online sources: the Australian National Library's *Trove* collection of newspaper articles at <http://trove.nla.gov.au/> and the Flightglobal archive of the British *Flight* magazine at <http://www.flightglobal.com/pdfarchive>.