

# Norman Gunn Padgett

*The story of an Australian aviation adventurer by Geoff Goodall*

Australian timber merchant and aviator Norman Padgett has been described as a "buccaneer" who led an extraordinary life in many parts of the world before his untimely accidental death in Queensland at age 44. He was an adventurer who travelled extensively, was a competent sailor and maritime navigator, flew as an airline pilot for ANA twice, served in Royal Australian Air Force twice and was awarded the Air Force Medal for his courage during World War II. Back in civilian life after the war, he purchased several aircraft to fly to Borneo where he developed a timber mill in the wilds of North Borneo, before moving to Singapore to manage a ship yard and more airline flying in Malaya. He purchased a Miles Gemini in England and flew it back to Singapore, then on to Queensland where he was killed in December 1952 while clearing an airstrip on his cattle property.



**The Miles Gemini VR-SDC which Norman Padgett flew from England to Singapore in November 1951 with his wife as passenger.**

Norman Gunn Padgett was born on 1 December 1908 at Mount Cole, near Ballarat, Victoria, the only son of Isaac and Barbara Padgett who later had two daughters. His parents were pioneer irrigation settlers at Werribee South on their property *Braemar* and were active in state politics, his mother becoming president of the women's section of the Victorian Country Party.

After schooling at Geelong, young Norman had a fascination for flying and commenced flying lessons at age 19, later gaining his pilot licence with the Tasmanian Aero Club at Launceston. Boxing and wrestling were his favourite sports, and in his teens he participated in boxing competitions in Victoria. After winning the amateur middle-weight wrestling championship of Australia, the venture-some youth celebrated his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday while in charge of a logging camp in Borneo. He is reported to have lived in Hong Kong before taking a ship to USA in 1929 to work for logging operations in Canada and Alaska. He took part in National Amateur Wrestling Championships of America, and was judged runner-up. He then returned to Victoria to continue working in the Australian timber business.

In 1932 Norman married Marjorie Minchin and the first of their three daughters, Sylvia, was born on 24 November that year while they were living in New Zealand. Returning to Australia again, he developed a timber business on the slopes of Mount Barrow, Tasmania. During 1935 while living in Tasmania he joined Holyman's Airways as an airline pilot and flew DH.50, DH.83 Fox Moth and

DH.86 types on passenger services. When Holyman Airways merged with Adelaide Airways to form Australian National Airways in 1936 he continued for a period with ANA before leaving to concentrate on his timber mills. He was a personal friend of Tasmanian shipping and airline businessman Ivan Holyman, to whom he sold the Mount Barrow timber business in 1940.

Always an adventurer, in 1938 Norman made at least one parachute drop at Essendon Aerodrome, Melbourne. After establishing Padgett's Sawmills at Narbethong, he moved his family to a farm at nearby Yea, Victoria. Disaster struck in January 1939 when the sawmill was destroyed by fire. Bushfires were burning in the nearby forests at the time and a sawmill worker died. At the resultant Coronial Enquiry, a witness claimed that he observed mill owner Norman Padgett and other men pour liquid into a tin and set it alight with matches. The mill manager strenuously denied this and said that the owner and his employees had done everything possible to extinguish the fire. The Coroner found the arson allegation unproven.

Thanks to the *Examiner* newspaper at Launceston, which published passenger lists for airline flights, we find that Mr. N. G. Padgett departed on ANA Douglas services to Melbourne on 23 August 1939 and again on 4 July 1940.

During 1940 he was back living in Launceston, where he flew as an instructor for the Tasmanian Aero Club which at the time was busy training RAAF Cadets prior to the establishment of the military EFTS schools. He was a member of the Citizen Force and applied to join the RAAF, having a medical examination at No.6 Recruiting Centre at Hobart on 17 July 1940. The report recorded a cauliflower left ear, probably as a result of his boxing and wrestling. At this time Padgett wanted to fly his own aircraft and was negotiating with Victorian and Interstate Airways Ltd at Essendon to purchase their **Desoutter Mk.II VH-UPR** cabin monoplane for his private use. VIA wrote to DCA on 27 August 1940 seeking approval under wartime regulations to sell the aircraft to Padgett, who they said was a member of the Launceston Aero Club and would base the Desoutter at Launceston for his private use. However in the meantime he cabled VIA that he was unable to finalise the purchase "due to a problem of military housing at Launceston". It is not clear whether he was referring to his own ac-



**The Desoutter VH-UPR which Padgett wanted to purchase in July 1940 but the sale was not finalised due to the war situation (The Collection)**



commodation, or lack of hangarage for the Desoutter because that was the month that RAAF took over Western Junction Aerodrome at Launceston to establish No.7 EFTS.

#### WARTIME FLYING

Norman Padgett's enlistment into the RAAF occurred on 3 January 1941 at Hobart when his previous trade was recorded as "Timber merchant and sawmiller (own business)" and Special Qualifications were "flying experience Tasmanian Aero Club and America and New Guinea: 20 hours Dual, 120 hours solo. A Licence, B Navigation Course. Diesel engineer."

Because of his flying experience, Norman was mustered as Aircrew with rank AC2 and appointed to No.1 Initial Training School, Somers, Victoria. On 6 February 1940 he was posted to No.1 Wireless Air Gunners School (1WAGS) at Ballarat Victoria as a pilot and on 31 March promoted to Sergeant and posted to Central Flying School at Camden NSW. Known as "the country club", CFS at Camden had taken over the prewar hangars and club houses from the pioneer sheep grazier Macarthur-Onslow family, who had established Camden aerodrome on their own land near the town for their Macquarie Grove Flying & Glider School Pty Ltd and other aviation enterprises. Central Flying School trained experienced pilots in all aspects of airmanship to qualify them as flying instructors.

However, during his course at CFS, Padgett incurred the disapproval of senior officers, details of which are not recorded in his RAAF service file. It must have been serious, because effective 4 June 1941 he was discharged from RAAF as "not likely to become an efficient aircrew". The decision to discard an experienced pilot at that stage of intense wartime training must have come from a high level, and remains one of the unexplained chapters in this man's story.

With his military flying career dashed, in the same month of his discharge Padgett purchased his own aircraft in Sydney, **Rearwin Cloudster VH-ABL**. It was a side-by-side two seater with 125hp radial engine, which he flew to Melbourne where he based it at Coode Island aerodrome. His address was now 54 Buckley Street, Essendon Vic where he moved his wife and daughters. After offering the Rearwin to the home defence authorities, he flew VH-ABL on extensive searchlight cooperation work, acting as a target at night for the searchlight defence ground stations. Maintenance on the Rearwin was carried out as favour "on the side" by DCA aircraft engineer Harry Moss, using the DCA hangar at Essendon.



Padgett's Rearwin Cloudster VH-ABL at RAAF Cootamundra NSW in 1942 (David Vincent collection)

Padgett applied to re-join Australian National Airways at Essendon as a pilot. Later in 1941 ANA employed him to fly DH.89 Rapides on Bass Strait services, which he maintained for the following two years. He also flew as

Second Pilot on ANA Douglas DC-2, DC-3, DC-5 and C-39 types and flew for three months in New Guinea on ANA Douglas military charters. Following the deaths of his parents, Norman and his sisters inherited the family farm at Werribee South. He then moved his family from Essendon to the farm where he constructed a hangar for the Rearwin and used it to commute to Essendon when rostered to fly for ANA.

The daily "Islands Service" from Essendon with DH.89 Rapides are described by Vern Polly in his book *Roll Back The Skies*. Polly was a newly hired ANA pilot in January 1943 when he started on the DH.89 Rapides: *"The Islands (Flinders Island and King Island.) The route included the Tasmanian coastal towns of Launceston, Wynyard and Smithton. Norm Padgett and I were the two pilots who flew that route on alternate days - three days a week clockwise and three days anti-clockwise. The average flight time each day was 7 hours. As there was no automatic pilot and very little time on the ground, I used to eat my lunch while flying between stops."*

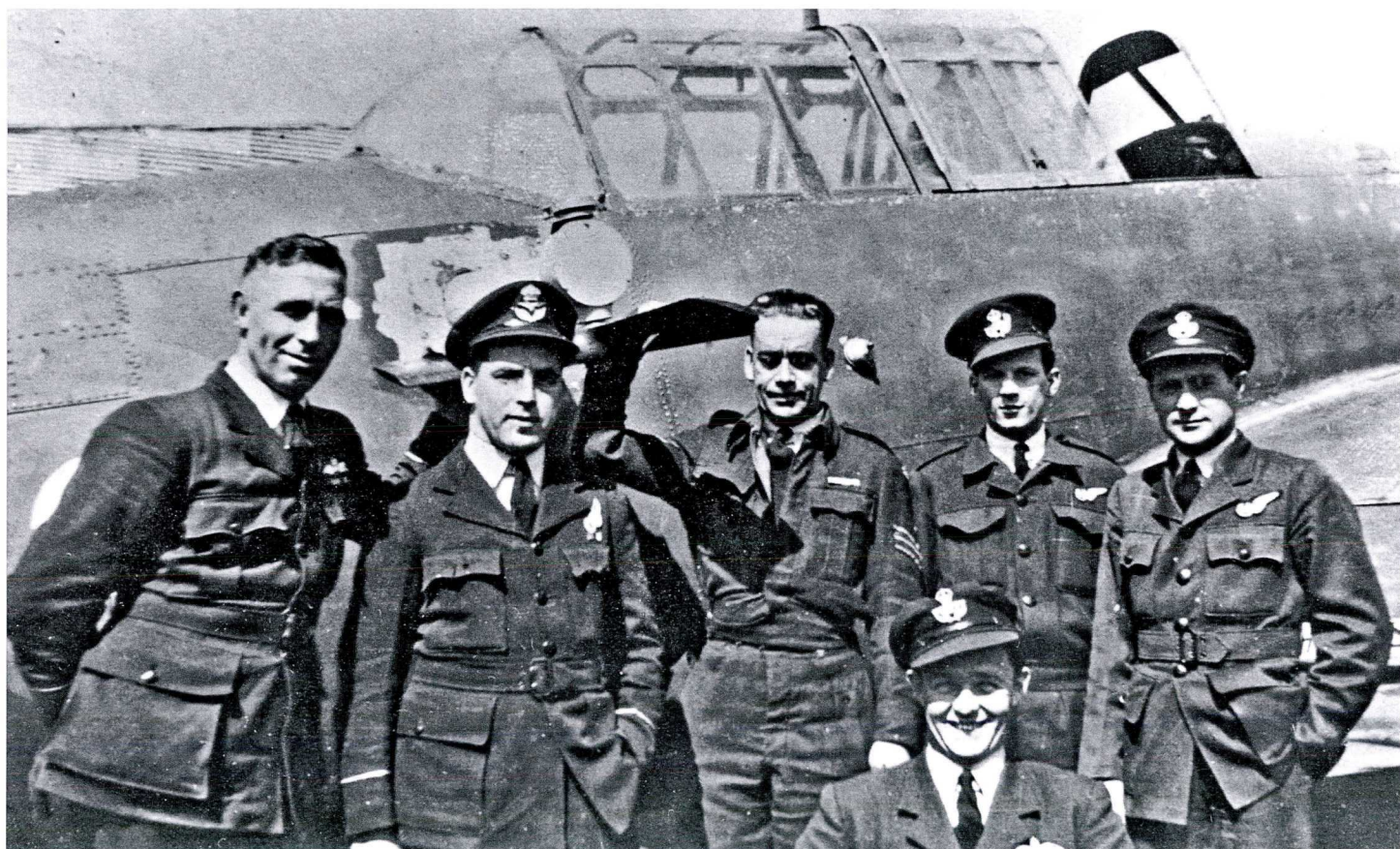
Meanwhile in January 1942, Norman had submitted a new application for a commission in RAAF, quoting his current employment with ANA and giving his address as Werribee South. He was passed over at that time, probably because he was considered to be in an essential occupation due to the dire shortage of civil airline pilots. But past indiscretions seem to have been forgiven because he was told that he would be considered in the future. In July the following year he sold his Rearwin, in which he had logged 250 hours flying. A few weeks later on 9 August 1943 he enlisted in RAAF at No.1 Recruiting Center, Melbourne, by which time his flying experience had grown to 3,000 hours. A week later, N.G. Padgett was posted to No.34 Squadron at Parafield flying Douglas Dakota transports. His first trip departed Parafield for the North West Area on 30 August, returning to Parafield five days later. He did a two-day trip to West Area leaving on 23 September 1943 before being posted to No.1 Reserve Personnel Pool at Townsville.

On 9 October 1943 Padgett departed Townsville for New Guinea where he was moved between RAAF units in quick succession: No.33 Squadron at Milne Bay on 27 October, No.9 Communications Unit at Port Moresby on 14 December, then attached to No.4 Squadron at Port Moresby from 20 January 1944 for the next six months.

On 23 January 1944 he commenced 6 weeks of intense operational flying while attached to Headquarters 9th Australian Division AIF at the front line of fighting against the Japanese. Aircraft flown included US Army Air Force Piper L-4 Cubs, Stinson L-5 Sentinel and various other Stinson observation types on army liaison duties. During this attachment to the Army, the RAAF promoted Padgett to Flight Sergeant effective 4 February 1944. His skilful flying during the Army attachment included a mission to rescue a wounded radio operator from behind enemy lines and resulted in him being awarded the Air Force Medal which was gazetted on 19 October 1944 with the following citation:

*Flight Sergeant Padgett commenced operational flying on 23rd January 1944, when he was stationed with Headquarters, 9th Australian Division AIF, and in six weeks completed 242 hours of operational flying. His duties consisted of flying staff officers of the 9th Australian Division, and later 5th Australian Division, over their forward troop positions, enabling them to make reconnaissance of enemy territory beyond their forward troop positions. When wireless communication between Divisional Headquarters*





Flying Officer N. G. Padgett is at the left of this group of pilots with a 1AD Vultee Vengeance target-tug at Laverton in 1945. Note the blades of the wind driven winch. Photo: David Vincent Collection.

and forward patrols were difficult or impossible, he flew orders and instructions to these patrols to enable them to continue their operations. This frequently meant flying from dawn to dusk under most severe weather conditions and landing on emergency strips. During this period, with only meagre facilities, and with practically no assistance, he carried out all the maintenance on his aircraft. Flight Sergeant Padgett's exceptional courage, determination and skill, together with his outstanding devotion to duty, contributed considerably to the successful completion of the 9th and 5th Australian Divisions' campaign against the enemy.

Back with No.4 Squadron on 7 April 1944 he was landing CAC Boomerang A46-156 at Gusap when an earthmoving grader was driven on to the airstrip ahead of him. He attempted to go-around, managed to miss the grader, but the Boomerang stalled on to the ground, ran into soft surface and nosed over on to its back. Padgett was unhurt and the RAAF accident report quotes his flying hours as 4000.

19.9.44 Departed Essendon to Perth by air on temporary duties .

His attachment to No.4 Squadron ceased in June 1944 and he was promoted to Pilot Officer on 1 July. His next posting was No.37 Squadron, Laverton and he left New Guinea by troop ship to Brisbane, where he disembarked on 5 July and proceeded on leave. He commenced with 37 Squadron on 21 August, the transport squadron's main task being courier services transporting men and supplies to New Guinea and on to Labuan in Borneo with Lodestars and Dakotas. Being based at Laverton allowed him to ride a bicycle home to the family home at Werribee South on weekends. However Padgett spent time away from Laverton on temporary duties:

19.9.44 Departed Essendon to Perth by air on temporary duties

17.11.44 Departed Essendon to Brisbane by air on temporary duty at Archerfield with No.37 (Transport) Squadron. Returned 21.11.44

30.11.44 Departed Essendon to Brisbane by air on temporary duty at Archerfield with No.37 (Transport) Squadron. Returned 30.12.44

Padgett's Air Force Medal was presented at a ceremony at Laverton in February 1945. Because he was away on flying duties, his medal was accepted by his eldest daughter Sylvia.

#### POSTWAR PLANS - BORNEO

During this period, with the war turning to the Allies' advantage in all theatres, Padgett was making plans for his peacetime life. His trade was timber milling, and with the expectation of an Australian housing boom when the war was over, timber would be in great demand. Having worked in his youth at a timber camp in Borneo, and seeing the vast forests around Labuan on his regular Dakota courier runs to Labuan airfield, he set his sights on Borneo. But how to get there?

He was aware of a Scion VH-UTV, which was parked disused in the Guinea Airways hangar at Parafield. The airline had no further use for the aircraft, was keen to sell and a low price could be negotiated. During October 1944 he wrote to DCA for permission, under wartime restrictions applying to civil aircraft, to purchase VH-UTV, and an aviation fuel allowance to permit him to ferry it to Victoria for CofA renewal. He added that if the cost of overhaul was not practical, he would store the Scion until the end of the war. DCA approved and on 23 November VH-UTV was sold to Padgett, quoting his Werribee South address. He ferried it from Parafield to Belmont Common aerodrome at Geelong where it was stored.

The New Years Day 1945 RAAF list promoted him to the rank of Flying Officer, and he was posted the next day



from 37 Squadron to RAAF Station Flight, Laverton. His personnel report by 37 Squadron Commanding Officer Squadron Leader R. R. Law-Smith at that time shows he still had not won the approval of the RAAF establishment:

*"P/O Padgett learnt most of his flying with civil airlines, and has done quite an amount of private flying. He finds it difficult to do things the Air Force way, although he tries hard, and this has seriously handicapped his progress in the Service. He is our experienced pilot on light or single engined aircraft."*

Padgett spent his last year of military service with RAAF Station Flight, Laverton, flying a variety of tasks, mostly Army Navy Cooperation in Avro Ansons and Vultee Vengeances. Some of the Vengeances had been modified by 1AD for target towing, fitted with a wind-driven winch on the starboard side of the fuselage to extend and retrieve the target drogue on a long cable.

On 2 May 1945 he was flying target tug Vengeance A27-560 on a Naval Cooperation flight over Flinders Naval Depot when he diverted back to Laverton because of dropping engine oil pressure. With the engine running rough and prop in fine pitch, he elected to make a forced landing with undercarriage retracted near Carrum, Victoria. He was not injured and a farmer made him breakfast while waiting for the recovery crew to arrive from Laverton. The Vengeance was moved back to Laverton by road and converted to components.

The RAF Half-Yearly Return of Flying Hours form on 30 June 1945 for Flying Officer N. G. Padgett gave the following summary:

Types flown during Last Six Moths:

Anson: 146 hours  
Oxford: 16.00  
Tiger Moth: 3.15  
Vultee Vengeance 38.00

Padgett's Total Flying Hours listed as in this table, aircraft types quoted verbatim: (see next column.)

Padgett's adventurous attitude to flying is confirmed by his short flights in fighter types Brewster Buffalo, Curtiss P-40 and Lockheed P-38 Lightning.

Transferred to Mascot for two months temporary duties, he departed from Essendon on 26 June 1945, returning to Laverton on 28 September. Fellow RAAF officer Ron Benson recalls Norman Padgett from that time:

*"I first met him at Point Cook when I was on an elementary flying instructor's course from October to December 1944 after an operational tour in New Guinea, and visited his home. I next knew him as a ferry pilot at Laverton when I led a flight of 3 Vultee Vengeances to Bankstown on October 6 1945. On October 9, we three pilots were ferried back to Laverton in a Dakota flown by an English Sergeant pilot. Within a few minutes of take-off we were in cloud and climbed until we could almost not breathe. The pilot then descended through cloud until we were appalled to see we were in a valley. Norm immediately spoke to another pilot passenger, Group Captain Clive 'Killer' Caldwell, and they both persuaded the English pilot to hand over to Norm who immediately "poured on the coals" and got us all to safety. All on board agreed it was possibly the nearest to death any of us had ever been - and Norm had saved us. I remember him as a very likeable man and good pilot with a delightful family, and was particularly sorry that I was unsuccessful in contacting him after the war."*

With his RAAF discharge approaching, Norman had

one more military mishap. On 15 November 1945 he was pilot of Beaufighter A8-244 attached to No.1 Aircraft Depot at Laverton when it crashed on takeoff at Laverton.

The accident report states that a momentary failure of the starboard engine on takeoff caused a swing, which damaged the port undercarriage which subsequently collapsed when the aircraft returned for landing. The Beaufighter was a write-off. The pilot was quoted as having 25 hours on type, all of which must have been gained since the June report.

Types qualified to fly	Hours of each type as of June 1945
Airspeed Oxford	20
Avro Trainer (Cadet)	30
Avro Anson	150
Brewster Buffalo	2
CAC Boomerang	150
CAC Wirraway	150
Curtiss P-40N	1
DeHavilland DH50	40
DH60 Moth	25
DH82 Tiger Moth	12
DH83 Fox Moth	150
DH86 & DH89	1000 combined
DH90 Dragonfly	15
Douglas DC-2	400
Douglas DC-2 & a half	200 (Douglas C-39s)
Douglas DC-3	1400
Douglas DC-5	55
Hillson Praga	30
Lockheed 14	55
Lockheed Hudson	60
Lockheed Lodestar	150
P-38 Lightning	1
Percival Gull	15
Percival Vega Gull	5
Rearwin	250
Short Scion	400
Stinson L-5 & Piper L-4	230 combined
Stinson S/E	15
Stinson 2/E	55
Stinson 3/E	120
Vultee Vengeance	40
Total flying experience	3226 (203 hours in past 6 months)



Flying Officer N. G. Padgett was discharged from RAAF on 2 January 1946, when his private address was Duncan's Road, Werribee South Vic. He now turned his attention to completing the overhaul of his Short Scion VH-UTV which had been stored at Belmont Common aerodrome, Geelong. From his experience on ANA Scions (including this particular aircraft) he was well aware of the type's poor performance in warm weather and the lack of parts for the original small radial Pobjoy Niagara engines. Mechanics for the Scions used to joke that they needed a watchmaker's certificate to work on the Pobjoys.

Within days of his release from the RAAF he contacted DCA Head Office in Melbourne on 6 January to request approval to change the engines on his Scion to either De Havilland Gipsy Majors or Gipsy Minors. DCA wrote to the Scion's manufacturer Short Brothers in England asking for their advice. Shorts promptly replied with a detailed letter, setting out the additional weight of each engine type and the effect on airframe structure, payload and Centre of Gravity. They concluded that the 130hp Gipsy Major would add 370 pounds to the aircraft empty weight and result in a payload reduction of 420 pounds and wing structure would be below strength requirements. However Short Brothers did not oppose Gipsy Minors which would add only 100 pounds weight and require only minor strengthening of three wing structural members. The manufacturer thoughtfully provided a draftsman's engineering drawing showing the wing strengthening work required.

DCA approved the Gipsy Minor conversion subject to the Short Brothers drawing, and Padgett gave the job to Brown & Dureau Aviation Ltd to carry out while they renewed the Scion's CofA. Gipsy Minor engines were plentiful at that time, being used in Moth Minors and other types. Brown & Dureau were Melbourne aircraft agents and importers who had established a thriving Aviation Division at Belmont Common aerodrome during 1945, concentrating on civil conversions and resale of a range of RAAF disposals aircraft, commencing with the purchase of all RAAF Ryan STMs and spares.

The Scion's CofA was renewed in April 1946, painted in an allover silver scheme, and Padgett used the name SOUTHERNAIRE CHARTER SERVICE for charter work with the Scion. He also flew it to Tasmania and Queensland on family holidays. On 5 October 1946 Padgett flew VH-UTV to an air pageant at Colac Vic where he conducted joy flights.

By October 1946 Norman Padgett was completing his preparations to fly the Scion to Borneo to have talks with the Sarawak Government regarding timber concessions and establishing a timber milling operation. A telegram from DCA to Department of Foreign Affairs, Canberra dated 31 October 1946 stated:

*"N. G. Padgett holder of Commercial Licence wishes to fly Short Scion aircraft VH-UTV holding current Certificate*



VH-UTV after being re-engined with Gipsy Minors.

*of Airworthiness from Australia to Sandakan in British North Borneo via Wyndham, Koepang, Marrmoe, Lombok Island, Macassar, Balikpapan, Tarakan then Sandakan. Two passengers Messrs B. Hardy and D. B. J. Oldham will be carried all British subjects. This Department approves of flight subject to approval N.E.I. authorities for permission to transit through Netherlands Territory and advice to British authorities for entry into British Borneo. Would appreciate necessary approaches to authorities concerned and advice as to whether landing grounds at proposed stops are suitable. Padgett proposes leave Wyndham early November and more definite date will be advised later."*

The Department of Foreign Affairs responded on 26 November 1946. *"Reference flight N.G.Padgett. Although reply has not been received from Netherlands East Indies but having in mind that Australia and N.E.I. are parties to the transit agreement Padgett has been advised he may proceed on flight on the understanding that he is leaving at own risk of hold up in N.E.I. and possible alteration of route by N.E.I. authorities. Padgett leaving Melbourne 26 November and Wyndham 28 November for Koepang, Suggest N.E.I. authorities be advised so Koepang and other places on the route may be informed."*

Another cable from Department of Foreign Affairs the following day added: *"Information has been received from the United Kingdom High Commissioner indicating that the United Kingdom has no objection to the flight. Following is extract from report from Governor of British North Borneo: "There is no airfield at Sandakan. Refuelling and maintenance do not exist. Labuan has refuelling but airstrip there is suitable for emergency landing only due to non maintenance and poor surface. There is no flare path. Radio frequency RAF radio section Labuan should be obtainable from ACSEA Singapore."*

Undeterred by such gloomy advice, Norman Padgett departed Melbourne in late November 1946 for Borneo in the Scion VH-UTV with two business associates as passengers: timber merchant Mr. Bruce Hardie of D. Hardie & Sons, Sydney and Mr. Bruce Oldham of Australian Furniture Timbers, Melbourne. Padgett, who had maintained his civil ground aviation engineer licence, had installed an additional fuel tank inside the cabin. At Oodnadatta SA the starboard wing fuel tank was found to be leaking, so Padgett flew the aircraft on to Alice Springs hoping that Connellan Airways would be able to repair the fuel tank. However they did not have the required equipment, so Padgett removed the tank and sent it by rail to Whyalla for repair by Jack Kellow's Gulf Aviation Services.

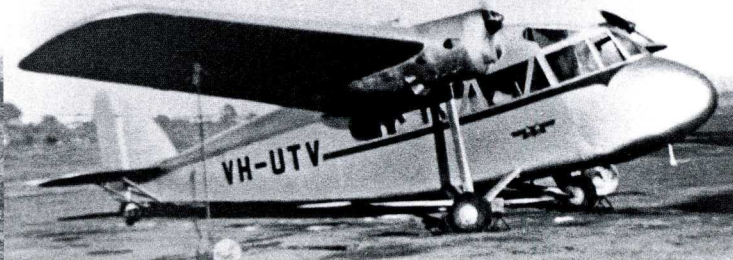
The repaired fuel tank was received back at Alice Springs on 3 December 1946 and installed in the Scion by Padgett. He took off from Connellan Airways' Townsite aerodrome for a test flight, and landed at Seven Mile Aerodrome where the two passengers boarded. At 4.04pm they departed bound for Tennant Creek then Darwin.

90 minutes later, while flying near Barrow Creek NT in extremely high outside air temperature and convective turbulence, the engines began running roughly due to fuel boiling and vapourising in the fuel lines to the engines. Padgett was concerned by the high cylinder head temperatures indicated for both engines. After encountering an area of severe turbulence, the starboard engine failed, and he continued for ten minutes on the port engine at full power but was unable to maintain altitude. He decided to make a forced landing in desert country in the Crawford Range and chose a clear area. However towards the end of the





The Short Scion VH-UTV which Padgett purchased from Guinea Airways, Adelaide. It is seen at Parafield with Guineas Airways titles circa 1944 with the original Pobjoy Niagara engines. (Alan Betteridge via Civil Aviation Historical Society)



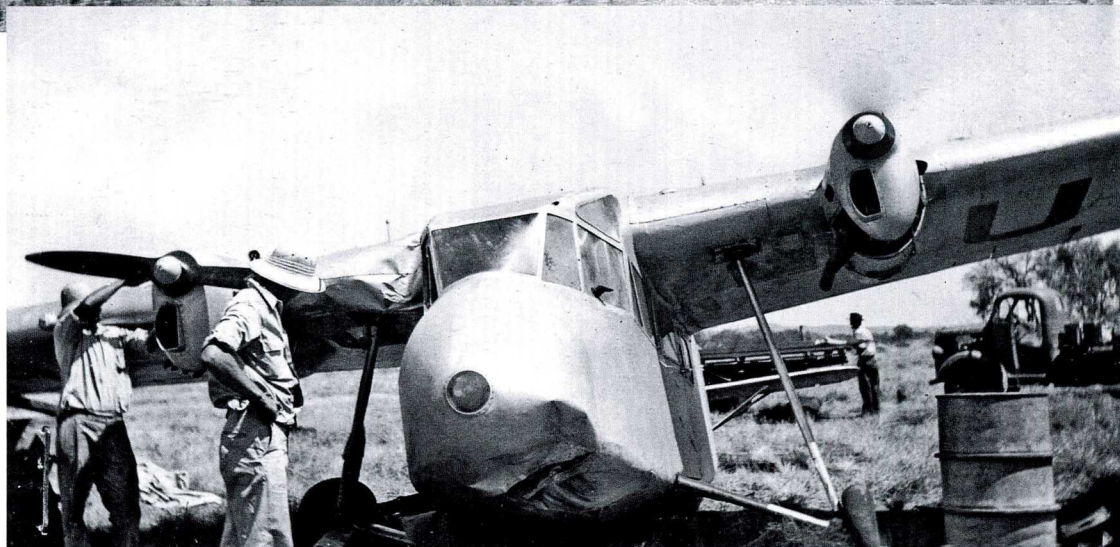
The Scion in 1946 after Padgett had it re-engined with Gipsy Minor engines. The significance of the "AA" emblem on the fuselage is not known. (David Vincent collection)



Damage to the starboard undercarriage and wing root. (Civil Aviation Historical Society of SA via SA Aviation Museum)

Several days later a recovery team from Connellan Airways arrived to collect the aircraft. The right wing was lifted from the ground and port engine started and found to run correctly.

Civil Aviation Historical Society of SA via SA Aviation Museum





landing roll, the Scion struck an ant hill and a mulga tree. The starboard undercarriage leg was torn from the fuselage, starboard wing damaged, fuselage wooden formers displaced and the nose dented. The occupants were unhurt and Padgett set off with his passengers to walk overland to Barrow Creek.

On return to Alice Springs by road, Padgett came to an agreement with Eddie Connellan for him to salvage the aircraft with an option to purchase. Padgett and his two associates then travelled by train from Alice Springs to Melbourne.

A few days after the forced landing, a ground party of Connellan Airways staff reached the Scion in a truck. Both engines were started and ran smoothly. The aircraft was dismantled and moved to Alice Springs Townsite aerodrome and stored pending a decision to rebuild.

Within days of his return to Victoria from the loss of the Scion, Padgett purchased retired RAAF Avro Anson MG998 from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission at RAAF Station Ballarat Victoria for 250 pounds. He contacted DCA requesting an urgent Short Term CofA for the Anson to cover the period while his Scion was undergoing repairs at Alice Springs from its recent forced landing. After arranging a remarkably quick civil conversion, Padgett personally presented the Anson to a DCA airworthiness inspector at Essendon on Christmas Eve for inspection and weighing on DCA scales. It was configured for only two passenger seats. It was registered VH-BAV in the Private category and granted an Interim CofA that same day, valid for only three months.

Early in the New Year Padgett and the same two business associates set off on an apparently uneventful flight to Borneo in the Anson. They headed back to Melbourne after successful talks with the Sarawak Government over the granting of timber concessions. Norman made a second trip to Borneo in February 1947 in VH-BAV carrying his 14 year old daughter Sylvia and Bruce Hardie again. Sylvia recalls the Anson having its underside fabric damaged at Labuan due to the poor condition of the airstrip and her father repairing the damage using a bed sheet from the rest house on the airfield and some dope. They were still at Labuan with the Anson on 20 March 1947 when Padgett sent a cable to DCA: *"Circumstances prevent return before expiry of CofA for VH-BAV. Please extend three weeks. Aircraft excellent condition: Padgett, Labuan."* DCA promptly cabled a reply granting the extension.

Padgett was back in Melbourne by 8 April 1947 when he attended an interview at DCA Head Office at Albert Park barracks in relation to the investigation into the Scion's forced landing. He was called in again on 21 May to discuss Departmental concerns arising from their investigation into the Scion's forced landing. His cabin fuel tank modifications had not been approved as required by the regulations and there were missing entries in the airframe and engine log books. Padgett stated that the cabin fuel tank had not been connected at the time of the forced landing. It was his intention to connect it only for ocean crossings between Darwin and Borneo to allow fuel from the cabin tank to be pumped to the wing tanks by a hand pump.

Subsequently, DCA wrote to the Crown Solicitor in October 1947 to take action against Padgett for breaches of the Air Navigation Regulations arising from the Scion forced landing. The fuel system had been modified without DCA approval, and he had not complied with requirements

for log books and signing the daily Certificate of Safety. After deliberation, the Crown Solicitor decided not to proceed with the matter. Norman Padgett was probably unaware of these actions.

#### A NEW BUSINESS IN BORNEO

Meanwhile the Baram Timber Company had been formed as a partnership between Norman G. Padgett and timber businesses D. Hardie & Sons of Sydney and Australian Plywood Manufacturers, Fishermans Bend, Melbourne. The company had timber rights on the Baram River at Miri, Sarawak, North Borneo where a timber mill was established.

In April 1947 Padgett applied to the Department of Works in Melbourne to purchase two large winches listed for sale. His application was in the name of Sylvia Timber Mills with an address in Port Melbourne.

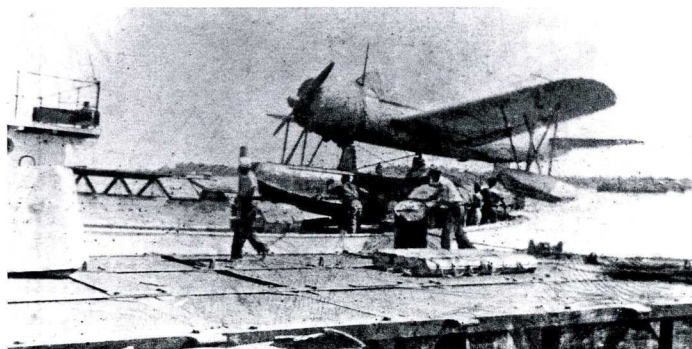
He had also purchased from the Commonwealth Disposals Commission a former Royal Australian Navy 70-foot 24 ton general purpose launch located at Brisbane. He would use this vessel to take his family and equipment to Borneo. His thoughts turned to a floatplane to operate from rivers and when a disposals list from the CDC invited offers for 12 RAAF Vought Sikorsky Kingfisher floatplanes held in storage at RAAF Care & Maintenance Unit Lake Boga, Victoria where No.1 Flying Boat Repair Depot operated during the war. Padgett submitted a bid of 400 pounds for one aircraft. The CDC wrote to him advising that his bid was successful and that A48-2 had been allocated to him, one of six aircraft with engines still installed. However his pleasure was short-lived because a following letter from CDC advised that RAAF had just withdrawn A48-2 and the other Kingfishers with engines from disposal. They were to be held for possible use in forthcoming Antarctic expeditions.

Unhappy with this turn of events, Padgett went to the offices of the Department of Air in Albert Park Barracks, Melbourne on 28 May 1947 and again the next day to lobby for a Kingfisher. His personal representations paid off and on 29 May no less than Air Commodore Operations, Air Commodore F. R. W. Scherger, (later Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger who happened to be a personal friend from Norman's air force days), wrote a memo recommending that Mr. Padgett be permitted to purchase one Kingfisher. Unfortunately fate was not on Norman's side, because the very next day 30 May a RAAF policy decision was made that all six Kingfishers with engines were required for Antarctic flying.

Having made up his mind that a Kingfisher was what he needed for Borneo, Padgett told the Department of Air that he wished to now purchase one of the engineless airframes at Lake Boga, and with the Department's approval, the CDC allocated him the best available airframe A48-5 for a reduced price of 275 pounds. It was issued to him at Lake Boga on 12 June 1947. Padgett had located a suitable Pratt & Whitney R.985 Wasp Junior engine from an undisclosed source, and quickly installed it in A48-5. He then flew the aircraft to Williamstown boat harbour in Melbourne. The Lake Boga Operations Record Book records these events as *"One Kingfisher purchased by Mr. Padgett who installed an engine, flight tested and flown to Melbourne."*

DCA approved his application for a ferry permit to fly the Kingfisher to Brisbane, where his navy vessel, which he named *Elwing* was berthed. Like many aspects of Norman Padgett's life, nothing is known of this flight to Brisbane in his military disposals floatplane. It must have presented





**Kingfisher A48-5 loaded on the stern of Padgett's launch *Elwing* at Brisbane June 1947 for the voyage to Boneo .**

some demanding operational problems en route finding suitable landing locations and arranging refueling. However he reached Brisbane a week later in June 1947 and landed the Kingfisher on the Brisbane River at the docks of Hamilton Reach. Here the floatplane was lifted by crane on to the stern of the *Elwing*, which was being made ready for the voyage to Burma.

The *Courier Mail* newspaper in Brisbane published a report on 20 June 1947, the day that Padgett departed Brisbane for Borneo in *Elwing*. Obviously he had enjoyed pulling the reporter's leg with some serious disinformation that they were on a holiday cruise rather than a seriously planned business trip. Of those quoted in the story as being part of the travel group on *Elwing*, Mr & Mrs Edwards were not on board when it departed Brisbane, and Mr & Mrs Macadie disembarked at the first available Queensland port.

*"A novel holiday is planned by a group of Victorians, who will leave Brisbane today in a converted 24 ton ex Navy launch. With a single-float seaplane strapped to the launch, they aim to spend part of the holiday in the air, part on land, and the rest sailing casually around the Pacific.*

*On the launch, the *Elwing*, are Mr. N. G. Padgett, Melbourne sawmiller, his wife and three daughters Sylvia 14, Judy 13 and Janice 10, Mr. & Mrs. D. Edwards and Mr. A. Macadie. Mr. Edwards, a former Royal Australian Navy*

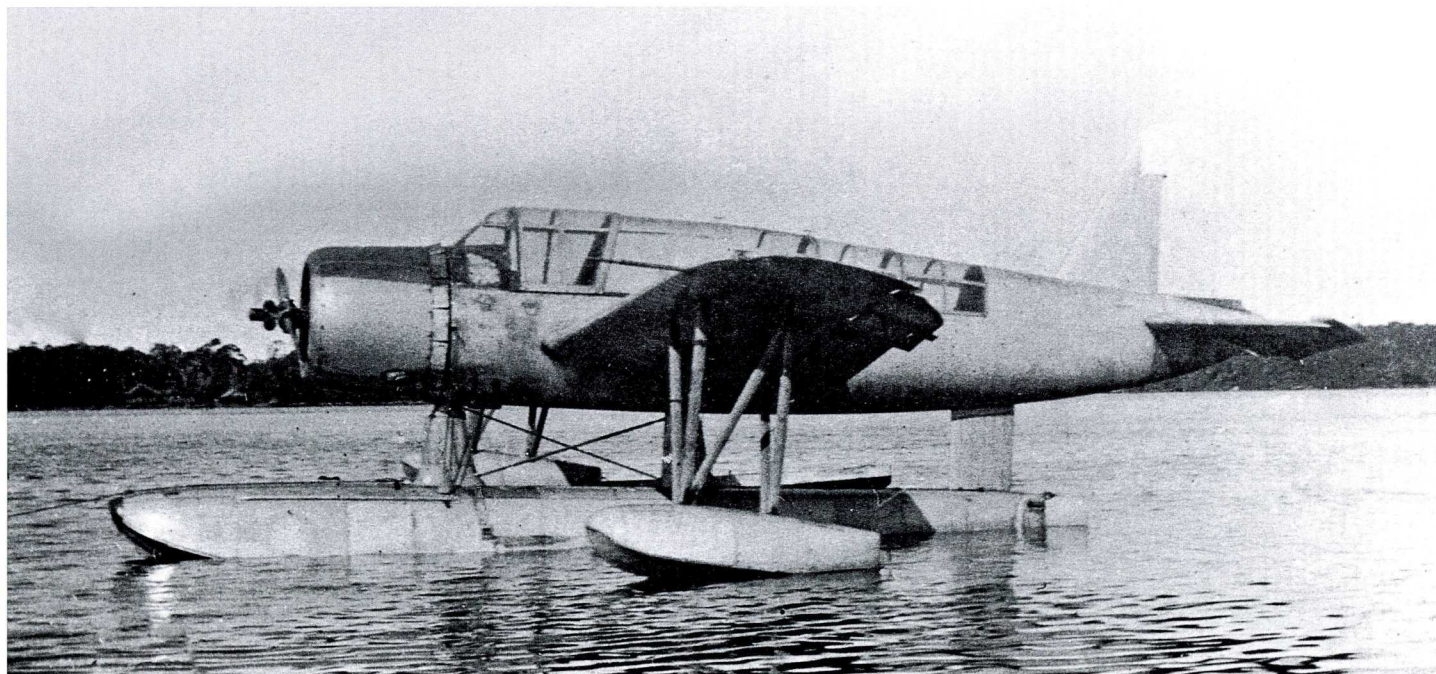
*officer, will be in charge of navigation. Mr. Macadie, who was an instrument maker in the RAAF, is also an experienced sailor. The seaplane was flown from Melbourne by Mr. Padgett. His friends travelled by train. He says he will be able to slide the plane from the rear of the launch into the water.*

*Yesterday the group made last-minute arrangements and purchased provisions and equipment. Neatly arranged beds, a refrigerator, and stocks of fruit and tinned foods ensure good living on the launch. Mr. Padgett said "We have no idea yet where we will end up, but we might sail and fly around the Barrier Reef for a while."*

Their voyage to Borneo in *Elwing* appears to have gone smoothly, going north along the Great Barrier Reef then west through Torres Strait into the Arafura and Bunda Seas to Amboina where two natives were taken on board as deck hands. They continued through the Flores Sea, Makassar Strait and Celebes Sea and around North Borneo to the island of Labuan where the Kingfisher was unloaded. The *Elwing* continued up the Baram River to Merudi, where the Padgett family lived in a house at Kuala Bartam constructed by Norman. A year later the Padgetts moved to a house at the town of Labuan, where Norman built a hangar on the beachfront with slipway and winch for the Kingfisher.

Meanwhile his Avro Anson VH-BAV had been left in the hands of Brown & Dureau Ltd at Geelong to sell on his behalf, and on the same day that they sailed from Brisbane it was sold to Guinea Air Traders Ltd who were rapidly building up internal services in New Guinea as a serious rival to Qantas. GAT purchased no less than 17 Avro Ansons over two years because of a high attrition rate due to accidents and wooden airframe deterioration in the tropic climate.

In Borneo the enterprising Padgett built the timber milling business into a thriving enterprise and employer of local labour. Along the reaches of the Baram River, softwood trees mainly Meranti, were cut down and the logs floated downstream to Merudi where they were gathered then towed to the river mouth as rafts behind *Elwing*. There



**Padgett's former RAAF Kingfisher A48-5 moored on the Miri River at his Barram Timber Company mill in North Borneo 1947.**



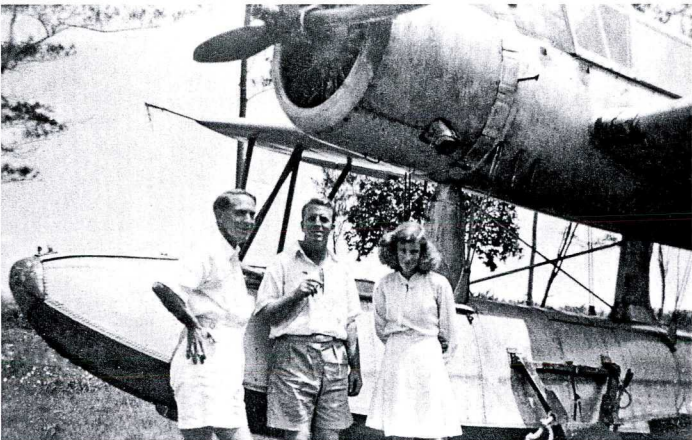
they were loaded aboard an ex Army landing craft, an LCT, and carried to Labuan where chartered ships took the wood to Australia for the furniture plywood market. Pagett flew the Kingfisher as a personal transport across a country where the only other means of travel was by boat, and A48-5 is known to have visited Merudi, Labuan, Kuching, Bintulu and Jesselton.

The question of civil registration of the Kingfisher seems not to have been considered, probably due to its remote location in such an undeveloped country. RAAF markings were removed and it flew in allover metallic finish. Norman's daughters went on flights with him and remember swimming to shore after most river landings because rarely was a boat available.

On occasions the main float struck submerged logs or crocodiles, causing minor damage with Norman patched temporarily with chewing gum. It flew for at least four years, and sustained serious damage to its starboard wingtip float and strut during 1950. On a visit back to Melbourne in November 1950, Mrs. Padgett sought the assistance of the Department of Air to locate a Kingfisher starboard wingtip float. It is believed the required parts were subsequently purchased from Kellion Brothers Pty Ltd of Marrickville NSW who had just purchased the airframes of A48-6, -12, and -15 when released by RAAF from Antarctic use in March 1951. Two of these aircraft are reported to have been stored in the Kingsford Smith Aviation Service hangar at Bankstown as late as 1957.

An article in a 2002 edition of the Sikorsky staff magazine reported *"The first amphibian to operate in Brunei after World War Two was a Vought Sikorsky Kingfisher powered by a 600hp Pratt & Whitney R-985 Wasp, owned by Australian timber merchant Norman Padgett."* The article included a photograph of a Shell Oil Company Supermarine Sea Otter VR-SOL in 1951 when used by subsidiary Sarawak Oil Fields Ltd – the Sea Otter is moored on the Baram River with the Kingfisher in the background tied up

at the edge of the river. The Sea Otter's British pilot Captain J. Davis, D.F.C. recalled that neither aircraft had radio fitted: *"Padgett and I had an arrangement to search for each other should the need arise. Norman Padgett and his Kingfisher were a legend in North West Borneo."*



**Norman Padgett (left) with his Kingfisher A48-5, location unknown. Note the beaching gear attached to the float.**

From the early 1950s the Shell Oil Co based three Percival Princes and even a Short Sealand amphibian in Borneo, operating company flights between Seria, Brunei and Lutong, Sarawak. The Princes made connections at Labuan with international air services by Qantas Empire Airways and Malayan Airways.

During 1951 the Baram Timber Co was sold to a Shanghai based timber firm and the name changed to Sabah Timber and Trading Co. The Kingfisher went to the new proprietors as part of the mill assets but never flew again because no pilot could be found. A last report from a Malayan Airways pilot circa 1953, was of the Kingfisher neglected and abandoned on the beachfront at Labuan.



**Captain Padgett in Malaya 1952 with Federation Air Service Beaver VR-RBS Chamar . This Beaver later came to Australia to become Aerial Agriculture's VH-AAK.**



## FROM BORNEO TO SINGAPORE

The Padgett family now moved to Singapore where Norman became a partner in Merton Brown & Company shipyards, which built luxury boats and Government ordered high-performance pirate chasers. In characteristic fashion, Norman made the move to Singapore by sailing a boat he had purchased, carrying his wife Marjorie and youngest daughter Jan. One afternoon they anchored at an island only to discover three pirate boats were already moored nearby out of sight, however they escaped without being raided.

Norman began flying for Malayan Airways as co-pilot on Douglas DC-3s, and was involved in the establishment of an associate company Federation Air Service. At that time the British colonial government services along the Malayan peninsula were under increasing attack by communist rebels and road transport in remote areas was being held up and robbed. Federation Air Service was tasked by the British High Commissioner to provide an "anti-bandit" service to rubber estates, flying in payroll, personnel and supplies. DHC-2 Beavers were purchased and Captain Norman Padgett became a senior pilot on scheduled Beaver services between Kuala Lumpur and Singapore stopping at smaller towns.

During leave from the airline in June 1951, he sailed a small boat from Australia to Singapore. His eldest daughter Sylvia married in Singapore that same month, and remained there for some years. That year when Federation Air Service based Norman in a dangerous bandit area north of Kuala Lumpur, he sent his wife Marjorie and their two youngest daughters back to Australia. The British Army issued him with special infrared optical equipment to detect rebel camps in the jungle. Sylvia recalls *"he used to finish his day's flying and get a ride to Singapore on the newspaper plane, arriving late at night and return on the early morning flight, staying the night with me. During this period he spotted a very large bandit camp and was instrumental in its destruction for which he was awarded a cash reward."*

In early 1952 *The Straits Times* newspaper in Singapore published a story by journalist Ivor Kraal on airline pilots. He covered Australians Norman Padgett and Greg Board, as well as KLM's Constellation pilot Jan Moll and BOAC's Stratocruiser Captain O.P. Jones. The latter two had strong historical connections with Australia. This is a summary of the report on Norman Padgett:

### Meet Four Air Pilots of Distinction

**BEAVER PILOT:** *If you happen to catch one of those sturdy feeder planes of the Federation Air Service you may be greeted by a friendly, stocky Australian flier. He is 43 year old Norman Padgett – typical bush pilot – tough, resolute and self-made, and you couldn't find a better type of airman.*

*Don't think that Norm is just a small plane pilot. In his logged 6,000 flying hours he has flown dozens of types of aircraft from Tiger Moths to the wartime long range Liberator bomber. Norman's heart is with the countryside and he'd rather be in command of a good little 'ship' like the Beaver, than be flying in the big-town hopping Dakota. Timber made his money back home and in Borneo. And flying for the most part of his life has been his great pleasure – a most successful side-venture.*

*Besides endorsements on his licence to fly a good number of planes, Norman holds licences on engines and airframes, and a first-class navigator's certificate. He returned to the timber business in Borneo and did "very well"*



**Norm Padgett in characteristic casual pose with hands in pockets, with friends after a flight in the Gemini.**

*during the four years he was there. His transport was a Kingfisher seaplane, and he also sailed a couple of ships from Australia. Norman has also skippered small vessels to Borneo and Singapore from Down Under on the strength of his navigator's ticket. Right now he is building a 36 foot yacht in Singapore, a modified Gauntlet class which he hopes to enter in the annual racing classic in Australia – the Sydney-to-Hobart race.*

*Norman has his family in Singapore – three daughters – and is itching to get down to work on his cattle station in tropical Australia, and just hates the word "retiring"*

## BACK ON THE LAND IN AUSTRALIA – AND AN ABRUPT END

While working at Merton Brown & Co shipyards in Singapore and flying for Malayan Airways, Norman purchased a cattle property inland from Rockhampton, Queensland where he planned to start the next stage of his life as a beef cattle producer. His wife and two youngest daughters now lived on the property "St. Clair" at Princhester, Queensland, The nearest town was Marlborough, and the closest large town was Rockhampton 60 miles to the south.

Because of the remoteness of the Queensland property he decided he would need an aircraft and engaged the established aircraft brokers W.S.Shackleton Ltd of London to find him a suitable twin engined Miles Gemini. In August 1951 Gemini G-AKEH was transferred to Padgett's ownership at his Singapore address and re-registered with the Singapore marking VR-SDC. With his wife as passenger, Norman flew the Gemini to Singapore in easy stages as a three-week trip with sight-seeing stops at Paris, Rome, Nice and Naples along the way. They arrived in Singapore on 20 November 1951.



**Miles Gemini G-AKEH at Jinnai Airport, Karachi, 24 February 1950.**



During the following year Padgett wound down his business activities in Singapore and finished flying for Malayan Airways. Next he had to move his completed yacht and the Miles Gemini VR-SDC from Singapore to Queensland. On 12 September 1952 he departed Singapore's Kallang aerodrome in the Gemini at 6.30am flying solo, refuelling at Jakarta then on to Den Pasar. After an overnight stop at the Bali Hotel, he departed early next morning for Koepang, Timor with 15 knot headwind, continuing to Darwin that same day. Next morning he flew on to Cloncurry, experiencing severe heat turbulence, and after refueling there and Emerald, reached Rockhampton late on 14 September 1952. On the final leg he climbed to 11,500 feet to pick up a 55 knot tailwind and flew Emerald-Rockhampton in just over 6 hours.

Earlier that year there had been reports in *The Straits Times* newspaper in Singapore of excessively heavy-handed officialdom experienced in Indonesia by RAAF pilot Flt Lt James "Wac" Whiteman when ferrying his Fairchild Argus VR-RBE from Kuala Lumpur to Sydney. He had purchased the Fairchild from the Kuala Lumpur Flying Club and was delivering it to Sydney in May 1952 when he was arrested and held for 3 days at Besar, Indonesia. (The aircraft became VH-AIO with Fawcett Aviation at Bankstown).

The *Straits Times* edition of 5 October 1952 carried a report by Ivor Kraal to balance impressions about difficulties faced by pilots in Indonesia:

*"It came in a letter to me from good friend Norman Padgett, Malayan Airways Beaver aircraft pilot who is now in Queensland. Norman left for Australia last month in his twin-engined Miles Gemini, the same plane which he had flown out to Singapore from England. Said Norman: "I thought I would write to let you know of my experiences, or rather lack of them, as so many have complained of their treatment in Indonesia. I met with the utmost courtesy and help at every place I called at, and at Den Pasar (Bali) was loaded with gifts of fruit and sandwiches plus four bottles of very good coffee, and all this at 0530. The Customs people were most obliging and the immigration people were, if possible, even more so. In fact, most other countries I have been in could learn a lot in that respect from them."*

Norman immediately returned to Singapore to sail his 30 foot yacht *Sri Maraud* to Australia. He bade a final farewell to Singapore when he set sail in late October 1952, using a bubble sextant for navigation and taking a 16 year old schoolboy Peter Haggie as a deck hand. The *Straits Times* newspaper reported on 23 November that the yacht *Sri Maraud* and its crew had been seized at Sourabaya by Indonesian authorities. The irony of the report was obvious, coming so soon after Norman's letter of praise for Indonesian officialdom, however five days later the newspaper stated that the report had been incorrect and that Padgett had already departed Sourabaya for Australia. Just what really happened on that voyage is now lost to time.

At the beginning on December 1952 Norman Padgett, his wife and two youngest daughters were living on their cattle property "St Clair", inland from Rockhampton. A high priority was to clear an airstrip so that he could base his Gemini on the property for easy travel. Unfortunately he had only a matter of weeks before fate dealt the final unexpected blow. On 10 December 1952 he was working on "St Clair", using a bulldozer to construct an airstrip when he was crushed by a falling tree and died from severe chest injuries. Norman Gunn Padgett was only 44 years of age.

## KINGFISHER POSTSCRIPT

Last reports of Padgett's Kingfisher A48-5 were circa 1953 when it was seen abandoned on the beachfront at Labuan, Borneo. Interestingly, 40 years later parts of the aircraft were tracked down to a Singapore scrap metal yard.

John Bell, founder of the Whale World Museum at Albany WA was on a world-wide hunt for genuine Kingfisher parts for his restoration of A48-2, the sole survivor of the RAAF's Kingfishers. John was a former whale-spotting pilot on Cessna floatplanes for Cheynes Beach Whaling company at Albany where he later established the museum on the site of the closed whaling station. An avid aviation historian with a particular interest in seaplanes, in 1987 he had purchased the incomplete hulks of a Catalina and Kingfisher A48-2 from the closed Warbirds Aviation Museum at Mildura Vic. He was restoring them for display inside the museum, alongside several other aircraft exhibits.

John was hoping that substantial parts of the Kingfisher might remain in Borneo, and in April 1988 he travelled to North Borneo where he talked to people who remembered Norman Padgett and his Kingfisher. He was told that the abandoned Kingfisher had been sold during the 1950s to scrap metal merchant who were clearing Labuan and other wartime strips in Borneo of aircraft wrecks. All was not lost however, because a Singaporean metal contractor's name was remembered, Sim Khang Chiang.

John Bell visited Singapore, where he located an extremely elderly Sim Khang Chiang who had indeed been in the metal business and remembered adding the Kingfisher to his ship loads of wartime remains in Borneo. He recalled the aircraft was almost complete and that he had unsuccessfully attempted to start the engine before it was dismantled for shipping to Singapore. It was promptly scrapped in his salvage yard but he retained the stainless steel main float bracing wires, which he gave to a friend and the intact wing float, which he gave to another friend to make into a small boat. John Bell was still looking for a genuine main float for his project, and his search took him across USA and South America before he acquired a spare main float from Kermit Weeks' aviation museum in Florida. It had been cut in three sections, and still had its US Navy paintwork visible. Back at Albany John repaired the float and A48-2 was mounted on it inside the Whale World Museum.

Earlier and much closer to home, John Bell had located the crash site of a US Navy OS2U-1 Kingfisher landplane version on rising terrain on the coastline south of Exmouth WA. The wrecked tailplane, engine, both undercarriage oleo legs and sections of wing complete with US Navy star insignia remained at the site. These were salvaged in April 1977 by wartime aircraft wreck specialist Stan Gajda and the author and taken by road to Perth, then donated to Pearce Dunn for his Warbirds Aviation Museum at Mildura.

These Exmouth crash parts were among the collection of Kingfisher parts that John Bell acquired with the fuselage of A48-2 from Pearce Dunn at Mildura after he closed the Warbirds Aviation museum. John Bell commenced a static restoration of the Kingfisher. Unfortunately he did not live to complete the Kingfisher. John Bell was killed while flying a Cessna 337C VH-FAM on a low-level clandestine police operation near Albany on 13 March 1996, the accident also claiming the lives of three police officers.



## AIRCRAFT OWNED BY NORMAN G. PADGETT

### Rearwin 8135 Cloudster VH-ABL:

29.1.40 Built Fairfax Airport, Kansas City, Kansas by Rearwin Aircraft & Engine Inc. C/n 820 125hp Ken-Royce (Le Bond) 7F radial engine. 3 new Rearwins were shipped to the Australian agents National Aircraft Pty Ltd Sydney. All assembled at Sydney Aerodrome, Mascot to become VH-ABL, ADL & ADM.

3.6.40 Registered VH-ABL and CofA issued National Aircraft Pty Ltd Sydney

2.41 National Aircraft Pty Ltd are in liquidation and their 3 Rearwins are grounded pending mandatory modifications.

6.41 VH-ABL sold by the liquidators to Sergeant Norman G. Padgett, Melbourne Vic

6.41 Delivered Sydney-Melbourne by Padgett. Based at Coode Island Aerodrome because hangar space at Essendon has been taken over by RAAF

24.7.43 Sold to Fred H. Edwards, Melbourne Vic



VH-ABL went on to many owners before being destroyed by fire during refuelling at Wave Hill NT while owned by wartime legend Group Captain Keith M. Hampshire DFC.

### Short Scion VH-UTV.

31.10.44 Purchased by Padgett from Guinea Airways Ltd, Adelaide.

11.44 Ferried from Parafield to Melbourne by Padgett, stored until end of war.

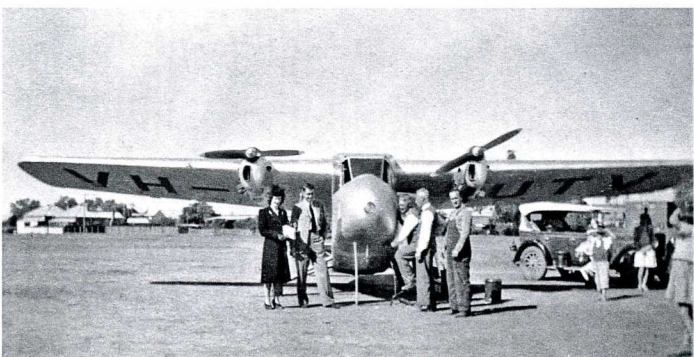
4.46 CofA renewed at Geelong by Brown & Bureau Ltd, Gipsy Minor engines replacing original Pobjoys.

11.46. Departed Melbourne for Borneo flown by Padgett carrying two business partners.

3.12.46. Damaged in forced landing in desert near Barrow Creek NT, no injuries.

12.46. Sold "as is where is" to E. J. Connellan of Connellan Airways, Alice Springs

14.7.49 Test flown Alice Springs after rebuild. Sold to Chart-Air Aviation Service, Meekatharra WA .



### Avro Anson VH-BAV:

.44 Built by A. V. Roe at their Yeoman factory as a production Anson 1 to RAF order. Serial MG989 Shipped new to Australia under the Empire Air Training Scheme

15.5.44 Taken on RAAF strength as MG989. Assembled at No.2 Aircraft Park Bankstown NSW Served with No.8 Service Flying Training School at Bundaberg, No.1 Radar School, Maryborough, and Air & Ground Radio School, Ballarat. Retired by RAAF at Ballarat, stored under cover.

19.12.46 Sold by Commonwealth Disposals Commission for £250 to Mr. N. Padgett, Werribee Vic Sale description quotes aircraft as good condition, only 500 hours airframe time.

24.12.46 Registered VH-BAV and CofA issued at Essendon: Norman G. Padgett, Werribee South Vic. Padgett flew VH-BAV on two return flights from Melbourne to Sarawk, North Borneo.

5.47 Left with Brown & Dureau Ltd at Belmont Common, Geelong Vic to arrange resale.

20.6.47 Sold to Guinea Air Traders Ltd, Lae, New Guinea.

### Vought-Sikorsky Kingfisher A48-5

.41 Built by Vought Sikorsky as an OS2U-3 to US Navy order, Bu5988. Diverted to Netherlands Navy (MLD - *Marine Luchtvaart Dienst*) for Netherlands East Indies. Assigned MLD serial V-23

3.42 24 Dutch Kingfishers being shipped to Netherlands Navy in Java were off-loaded in Australia because of the Japanese advance in Netherland East Indies. 18 were issued to RAAF.

22.4.42 Taken on RAAF strength at RAAF Rathmines as A48-5 Operated by No.9 Squadron, Seaplane Training School renamed No.3 Operational Training Unit, and No.107 Squadron, all at Rathmines. Last flight 24.9.43, retired at Rathmines

17.8.45 Arrived No.1 Flying Boat Repair Depot at Lake Boga Vic. One of 12 delivered by air from Rathmines for storage and disposal.

6.47 Airframe without engine sold by Commonwealth Disposals Commission for £275 to Mr. N. Padgett, Werribee Vic.

Padgett installed a P&W Wasp R-985, test flew it at Lake Boga and flew to Williamstown harbour, Melbourne. The same month he flew it to Brisbane where it was loaded on the stern of Padgett's Navy disposals launch *Ewing* for the voyage to North Borneo.

47-48 Based at Baram River, Miri, North Borneo where flown by Padgett in support of his Baram Timber Co at Miri. From 1949 housed in a hangar with slipway on Labuan beachfront.

.51 Baram Timber Co sold to a Shnaghai timber operation. Sale included in the Baram assets but abandoned in hangar at Labuan because no pilot was available to fly it.

c53 Collected by Singapore scrap metal merchant who was shipping wartime aircraft wrecks at Labuan airfield to a Singapore metal yard. Broken up for scrap.

### Miles Gemini 1A VR-SDC, VH-ALP

8.47 Built at Woodley Aerodrome, Reading by Miles Aircraft Ltd as a production Gemini 1A. c/n 6473.

4.9.47 CofA issued G-AKEH: Miles Aircraft Ltd

9.48 Sold to Captain Henry H. E. R. Winch, Guards Boat Club, Maidenhead. Based White Waltham.

8.51 Sold via brokers W.S.Shackleton Ltd to Norman G. Padgett, Singapore. Registered VR-SDC.

20.11.51 VR-SDC arrived Singapore after a 3 week delivery flight by Padgett and his wife. Based Kallang airport, Singapore.



12.9.52 Departed Singapore for Rockhampton Qld flown solo by Padgett  
10.12.52 Padgett killed while felling trees to make an airstrip for the Gemini on his property St Clair, 60 miles from Rockhampton.  
30.4.53 Registered VH-ALP: Estate of the late N. G. Padgett, c/- Mrs. M. R. Padgett, "St Clair", Princhester via Rockhampton Qld.  
16.10.5 Sold to Charles W. Russell, Dalby Qld, Later moved on to three other owners.  
.62 Retired at Archerfield Airport, Brisbane due DCA Grounding order. Burnt for fire practice.



Norman Padgett's Miles Gemini, which he flew from London to Singapore in 1951 as VR-SDC and on to Australia the following year to become VH-ALP. Pictured at an airshow at Cootamundra NSW in March 1962. (Photo by Bob Neate.



Norman Padgett and his eldest daughter Sylvia about to go flying in a borrowed DH.94 Moth Minor 1946.

Author's note: My thanks to David Vincent who supplied all pictures unless credited otherwise. Photographs come from the Padgett family photo album courtesy Norman Padgett's daughter Mrs. Sylvia Bairstow nee Padgett. Special thanks also to John Willis for sharing his research into the flying life of Norman Gunn Padgett.



RAAF Vultee Vengeance A27-560 after Norman Padgett's gear-up forced landing on a dairy farm near Carrum Victoria on 2 May 1945. The farmer later received compensation from the Air Force for the two cows struck during the landing. (RAAF Official)