

Day 43 (Saturday, 11/01/08) At Sea, Flying Doctors

On this day at sea the temperatures were in the mid 50s with low humidity and calm seas. We are coming to the eastern end of "The Great Australian Bight" in the Indian Ocean on the way to Melbourne, Australia. In the captain's navigation report he said the Amsterdam was about 150 miles south of Australia.

This morning at 11am Dr. Jay Wolff gave another lecture in his series on Australian history. Today's story was about the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Many persons contributed to the Flying Doctor Service over the years but John Flynn, a Presbyterian minister was the key player in creation of the service in its current form. In 1917 John Flynn heard of a sick stockman who died of a ruptured appendix because he was in a remote location without medical services. Flynn worked to improve the medical services in the Outback and in 1920 the founders of Qantas Airline, Fish and McGinnis, donated an airplane that was the first used in providing improved medical service. Communication was still a problem because radio and telephone was not available to most of the Outback inhabitants. The communication problem was reduced somewhat in 1929 when a bicycle pedaled generator connected to a radio was invented and made available to remote locations.

The service was supported by non-government sources and grew slowly during the Great Depression until 1936 when the Australian government started support for the Flying Doctors. In 1955 the official name of the service became The Royal Flying Doctor Service and the headquarters are now located in Alice Springs, Australia. In order to improve the likelihood of acceptable landing strips in undeveloped areas there is now a policy of the Australian government to clearly mark the country roads that are suitable as landing strips. The only airplanes used by the Flying Doctors are the Pilatus PC12 and the Beach Craft B200. All planes are pressurized so they can fly high enough to avoid turbulence frequently found near the hot desert surface. There have been standardized diagrams of the human body distributed throughout the country showing parts of the body identified with numbers. When people in remote areas call to report a medical problem they can tell the doctors precisely where in the body the concern exists. Most of the flights now carry nurses and the doctors stay in the city hospitals except in very severe injury cases. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is the first and largest medical ambulance service in the world.

The founder, John Flynn, died in 1951 and he has been honored by having his picture put on the Australian 20 dollar bill as shown below. Also shown in this view of the bill is an image of the bicycle pedaled generator-radio device and the human body profile with numbered parts. Dr. Wolff didn't mention the camel shown on the bill but perhaps they were also used to get medical service to the Outback.



Before dinner we dropped in on friends Ray and Ann for drinks conversation. They had visited some friends in Perth. The lady friend is an accomplished potter whose work is highly regarded. She had given Ann a large cup that had been artistically formed using some termite eaten wood for molding a part of the outer surface. The cup had been fired in large kiln at their home. The cup makes a nice souvenir of their visit.

Tomorrow about 6am we will be entering the harbor at Melbourne, Australia. We have a tour to the Blue Dandenongs. These are scenic mountains north of Melbourne. In the afternoon we will explore Melbourne.