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AN AIRPORT FOR WELLINGTON

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE
WELLINGTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
AT RONGOTAI

A thesis presented in partial
fulfilment of the degree of
Master of Philosophy in History
at Massey University.

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Palmerston North, 1994.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
ABBREVIATIONS	ii
ILLUSTRATIONS	iv
CHAPTER	
1 Introduction	1
2 Early Days of Aviation 1911 to 1936	5
3 The 1937 Development Proposals	25
4 Wartime and Post War Developments to Late 1948.	46
5 Developments from Late 1948 to September 1950	72
6 1950 to the Opening of the Wellington International Airport, 1959	99
7 Conclusion	121
NOTES	126
BIBLIOGRAPHY	156

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.F.C.	Air Force Cross
<i>AJHR</i>	<i>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</i>
A.M.I.Ae.E	Associate Member of the Institute of Aeronautical Engineers
A.M. I.C.E.	Associate Member of the Institution of Civil Engineers
B.Sc.C.Eng.	Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering
C.A.A.	Civil Aviation Administration
C.B.	Companion of the Bath
C.B.E.	Commander of the Order of the British Empire
C.M.G.	Companion of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George
D.S.O.	Distinguished Service Order
F.R.Ae.S.	Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society
Flt. Lt.	Flight Lieutenant
Hon.	Honourable
I.C.A.O.	International Civil Aviation Organisation
K.B.E.	Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire
K.C.I.E.	Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire
L.M.(U.S.)	Legion of Merit, of the United States of America
M.C.	Military Cross
M.I.C.E.	Member of the Institute of Civil Engineers
M.M.	Military Medal
M.O.W.	Ministry of Works

M.N.Z.I.E.	Member of the New Zealand Institute of Engineers
M.N.Z.I.S.	Member of the Institute of Surveyors
M.P.	Member of Parliament
NAC	New Zealand National Airways Corporation
<i>NZPD</i>	New Zealand Parliamentary Debates
O.B.E.	Officer of the Order of the British Empire
P. and O.	Peninsular and Orient (Shipping) Line
P.W.D.	Public Works Department
PAR	Precision Approach Radar
R. N. Z.A.F.	Royal New Zealand Air Force
Sqd.Ldr.	Squadron Leader
STOL	Short Take Off and Landing
TEAL	Tasman Empire Air Lines
VTOL	Vertical Take Off and Landing
WArc.	National Archives, Wellington
W.C.C.	Wellington City Council
W.H.B.	Wellington Harbour Board
Wing Cdr.	Wing Commander

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Page 6	Arthur Shaef's New Zealand Vogel at Wellington - from Rendel, David, <i>Civil Aviation In New Zealand, An Illustrated History</i> , p.6, attributed to the <i>Auckland Weekly News</i> . (In <i>New Zealand Heritage, Volume 5</i> , p.2080, Alexander attributes this picture to A. N. Breckon.)
Page 7	Supermarine Channel G NZAI on Wellington Harbour after the flight from Auckland - from Rendel, David, <i>Civil Aviation in New Zealand - An Illustrated History</i> , p.18, Wellington 1975.
Page 9	Wellington Airport at Rongotai in the late 1920's - Rendel p.100. (courtesy of George Rooker)
Page 14	Rongotai Aerodrome from the Air - <i>Evening Post</i> , 22 December, 1932, p.9.
Page 15	Wellington Chamber of Commerce proposals - <i>Dominion</i> , 26 September, 1934, p.7.
Page 20	Plan showing Pattern of Turbulence at Rongotai, Wellington City Council, from Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part1, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1934-1937.
Page 21	Plan showing boundaries of Rongotai 1935 and 1936, and the proposed reclamation in Lyall Bay - <i>Dominion</i> , 15 August, 1936.
Page 22	Moth ZK-ADE approaching Rongotai airport circa 1936, Rendel p.34.
Page 28	Proposed extension to be financed by loan, February, 1937. - <i>Dominion</i> , 23 February, 1937.
Page 38	Proposals of the Rongotai Investigating Committee, February, 1938. - Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission 1937-1939.
Page 43	Wellington Territorial Squadron, R.N.Z.A.F. at Rongotai, June, 1938. - <i>Brochure and Official Programme for the Opening of Wellington Airport</i> , p.35, Wellington 1959.
Page 44	Street map prepared by the Wellington City Electricity Department showing the location of the airport in June, 1939. - Public Works Department file, WArc., W1 23/381/18 part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1937-1939.
Page 48	No. 42 Transport Squadron, R.N.Z.A.F. - <i>Programme for the Opening of Wellington Airport</i> , p.41.
Page 53	Post War Passenger Handling Facilities at Rongotai. - <i>Programme for the Opening of Wellington Airport</i> , p.43.
Page 54	Plan of proposed aerodrome prepared by the W.C.C. Engineer. - W.C.C. Airport Committee minutes, July 1946.

- Page 55 Passenger lounge at Paraparaumu Airport showing quality of furnishings, Keith, Hamish, *New Zealand Yesterdays, A look at our recent past*, p.250, Sydney 1984.
- Page 70 Photograph of Rongotai and the surrounding area with proposed four stage development superimposed,. from Wellington City Council Airport Committee minutes.
- Page 88 Public Works Department plan based on the City Engineers proposals showing the reclamation required and the houses to be removed. WArc., W18, P,W.D.130010, Plan of Rongotai Airport.
- Page 95 Evans Bay Flying Boat base - *Dominion* 28 September, 1950.
- Page 100 Salek Street site and the newly proposed runway centred on Rongotai Terrace. - *Dominion* 27 September, 1950.
- Page 103 An aerial view of the airport site before construction, -Photo News Ltd., reproduced in Roberts, J. S., 'Wellington Airport, The City Council Responsibilities,' in *New Zealand Engineering* Vol, 16, p.326. Wellington 1961.
- Page 117 Tiger Moth factory subsequently converted into the terminal building - Rendel, p.126, (courtesy of R. Davis-Goff).
- Page 118 Wellington Airport from a northerly angle, showing the position of its main features, *Programme for the Opening of Wellington Airport*, p.13.
- Page 119 Air force Vulcan clipping the runway at the airport opening air pageant, Keith, p.63.
- Page 119 Drawing of the airport looking south from Evans Bay. Annual Report of the Ministry of Works, *AJHR*, Volume III, 1959, D1, P.22.

AN AIRPORT FOR WELLINGTON

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Air transport services have four main components - aircraft, runways with the corresponding handling facilities on the ground, the system installed to ensure safety of the aircraft in flight, and staff to operate the service. This study will focus on the provision of landing and take off grounds and airport facilities for aircraft operating at Wellington up to the opening of the Wellington International Airport in 1959. Reference will be made in passing to aircraft and their needs because airports must be designed to cater for their requirements. Reference will also be made, but only briefly, to the services needed to provide for safety, such as radar and weather forecasting.

Aircraft operated at Rongotai from 1911, but little air activity occurred for many years. In 1934, an investigation was undertaken to select a site for an airport to serve Wellington, and Rongotai was recommended but many years were to elapse before the Wellington International Airport was opened in 1959. Prior to this, Wellington was served by a variety of facilities - Rongotai aerodrome, a twin airport complex of Rongotai and Paraparaumu, Paraparaumu alone as an interim airport while the Wellington International Airport was under consideration and construction, and the flying boat base at Evans Bay. Two years

after the opening of the airport, the Director of Civil Aviation, Air Vice Marshal Sir A. De T Nevill stated that he had

...been associated with Rongotai for 25 years. Over...[that]... period the airport ... presented a confused medley of problems, political, administrative and technical, which ... tended to induce slight hysteria and dizziness in the minds of those ... required ... to tender advice... more especially since the vehicle for which the airport had to be designed was being transformed at a rate quite beyond reasonable predictions....¹

In this study, the factors promoting and retarding the development of the Rongotai airport will be examined at each stage of this long process. No study has yet been published on the aspects considered in this thesis but, as one would expect with such a contentious local issue, there was a great amount of newspaper comment and parliamentary debate. Several articles have been published in journals on specific engineering problems encountered when construction had begun, such as locating base course material for the runway which could withstand the impact of planes landing, or material capable of supporting a heavy static load in the terminal area, and the relocation of a 21 year old hangar with a floor area of 14000 square feet. Even the selection of engineering staff caused problems; there were many good civil engineers who felt they could design and construct an aircraft landing ground satisfactorily but a few insisted decisions on aerodrome design and location required a specialised knowledge of aviation.² There are also a vast number of biographies of aviators, histories of aviation in general, books on particular airlines and aircraft which have some references to airfields but these are mainly anecdotal on the problems encountered in using particular landing grounds and do not refer to the process involved in providing those landing grounds.³

The main sources used are the official files of the Public Works Department/Ministry of Works, which was the main Government negotiator and supervisor of construction work, supplemented by files of the Education Department, the Department of Civil Aviation, minute books of the Airport Committee of the Wellington City Council and personal papers of Walter Nash. Other sources include Annual Reports of Government Departments, records of

Parliamentary Debates, newspapers and other publications, and miscellaneous official reports.

Before construction of the airport could begin, political problems at both national and local level had to be overcome, finance was short and had to be found, some proposals involved the removal of many houses at a time of a severe housing shortage and the demolition of a college and its replacement when building materials were in short supply. The Government had many other competing policy matters to consider and changes of Government and minister created delays. New ministers had to be briefed and they could have different policy priorities. There was the overt hostility of some ratepayers who did not wish to meet the cost and delays were caused by people giving lip service to the development but making unreasonable demands for compensation. The apathy of many of the Wellington public had to be overcome. Some had no interest in air travel so did not mind whether the airport went ahead or not, while others only wanted a clear decision one way or another so they could get on with their activities. Until they knew what was happening they could not plan for their futures. A war intervened and developments in aircraft design necessitated changes of plans on a number of occasions. Even when the development had been approved, technical problems were encountered.

On the other hand, there was a recognition that Wellington needed an air link and Rongotai was recommended by many experts and influential people as the best site for its airport. While the war did cause disruption to civil aviation activities, Rongotai was used for military purposes and some extension work was done. The existence of the early aerodrome was a factor in its subsequent development because it was easier to get money for a small extension onto contiguous relatively undeveloped land than to obtain much larger sums for a new airport as Rongotai was developed in stages. Some aviation sources said Rongotai would be able to cater for the Vertical Take Off and Landing (VTOL) or Short Take Off and Landing (STOL) planes they expected to be introduced but aircraft manufacturers put their efforts into designing larger, heavier and faster planes which needed longer and stronger runways. The development of Precision

Approach Radar (PAR) reduced the width of runway needed so fewer houses had to be removed and this made development more acceptable.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the people advocating development of Rongotai. While few in number, they clearly had a significant influence because development did proceed, albeit in stages. As every decision taken was the result of the various pressures imposed, each stage reflects the balance of political power at that time.

CHAPTER 2. EARLY DAYS OF AVIATION - 1911 TO 1936

Prior to 1929 there was no airport at Wellington. Some planes had flown from there before that date first using the Lyall Bay foreshore¹, then the Lyall Bay recreation ground,² Wellington harbour and sports fields. Aviation made great strides and the introduction of more efficient aircraft and the prospect of commercial air services led to the progressive extension of landing grounds. In the early days these never seemed to be up to the standard aviators and prominent citizens wanted but from time to time, specific events occurred which precipitated development. In 1934 the Wellington Chamber of Commerce set up a technical sub-committee to investigate and report on the best site for a Wellington aerodrome and in 1937 the Wellington City Council (W.C.C.) asked its ratepayers to approve a loan to finance what it thought would provide a satisfactory solution.

In 1911 Arthur Shaef, a Wellington photographer, built a plane which made several short hops at Lyall Bay. No information has been disclosed as to why Shaef chose Lyall Bay beach for his flights, but it was close to home, sparsely populated, and he must have believed there was sufficient firm sand there for take offs and landings. Unfortunately, a number of these 'hops' ended up in the sea so he moved his operations to Christchurch, where the plane was wrecked. After 1911, the Lyall Bay foreshore, which has been described as being '...a wasteland of overgrown sandhills - a place to attract the adventurous...',³ does not seem to have been used for flying for many years. Shaef's second plane, built in 1913, and fitted with floats, was based at Evans Bay in Wellington harbour and was more successful,⁴ but was destroyed by fire.⁵ Shaef himself does not seem to have been affected physically, only financially, and he did not build another plane. The engine for Shaef's second plane had been built by Percy Fisher, a Wellington

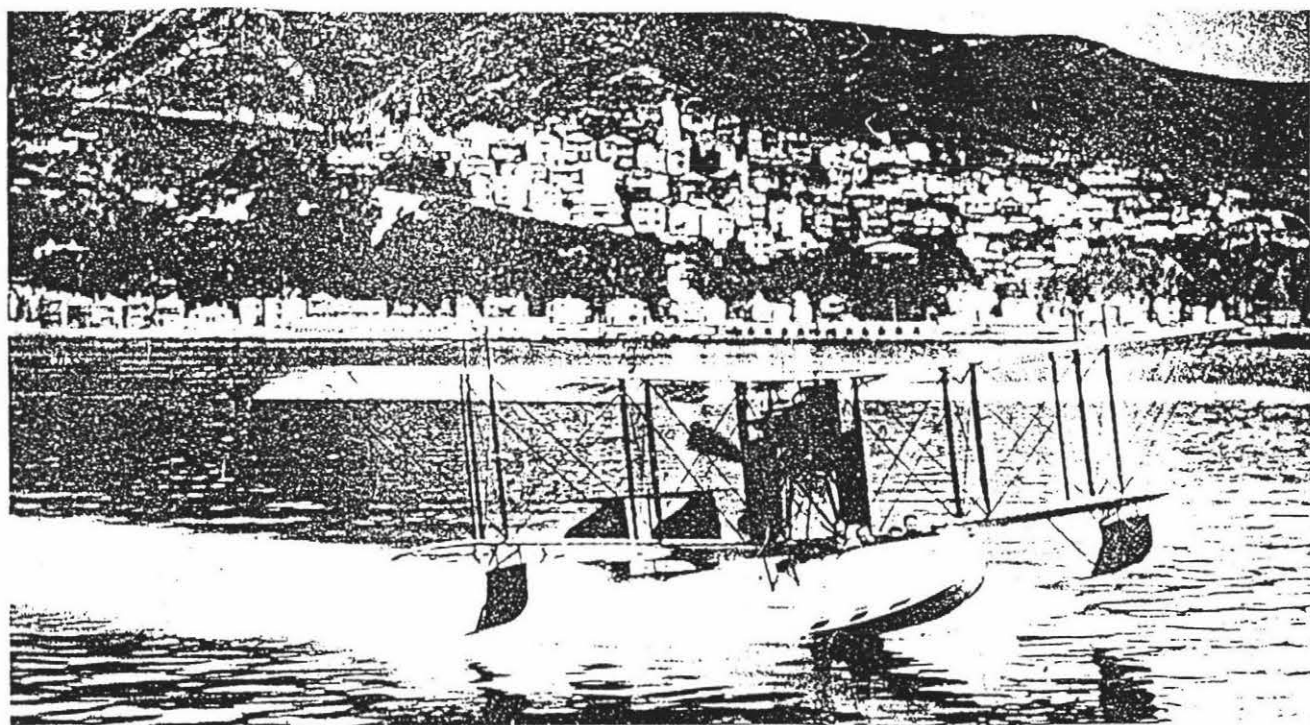
engineer who built a plane for himself. In June 1913, he and another Wellingtonian, Richard White flew it and on one of their flights attained a height of 300 feet. They obviously had doubts about the suitability of Wellington because they made their flight in the Wairarapa.⁶



Arthur Shaef's 'New Zealand Vogel' at Lyall Bay
note the hills in the background

From 1913, commercial flying from Wellington seems to have been limited to recreational flights provided by barnstorming pilots operating from Newtown park and the Hutt Park Raceway. J. W. H. Scotland imported a French Caudron plane which he used for demonstration flights. His demonstration at Wellington was delayed several times because of the weather but on 25 March, 1914 he took off from the Adelaide Road football ground rather than disappoint the '...eager crowds...' again. On returning, he hit some trees at Newtown park and crashed. He was unhurt.⁷

During the First World War, big advances were made in plane design and interest in flying was greatly increased. Over three hundred New Zealanders served as pilots in the British air forces and this was a factor in heightening the interest in flying, which was seen as a glamorous and adventurous occupation. After the war, this interest was reflected in an increase in civil flying, including business enterprises, several of which failed.⁸ The improvement in aircraft performance over only eight years was impressive. While Fisher had attained a height of 300 feet in 1913, Leonard Isitt took his DH6 to 20,000 feet in 1920, and later the same year he flew that plane over Mount Cook. In 1921, a DH9 flew from Timaru to Auckland, a distance of more than 695 kilometres, in one day. Notwithstanding this improvement, planes were greatly affected by the weather. The Timaru - Auckland flight had been planned as a one day flight from Invercargill to Auckland but a report of bad weather in the Wellington region had necessitated a stopover at Timaru until the weather improved. Also in 1921, a



Supermarine Channel G-NZAI on Wellington Harbour after the flight from
Auckland

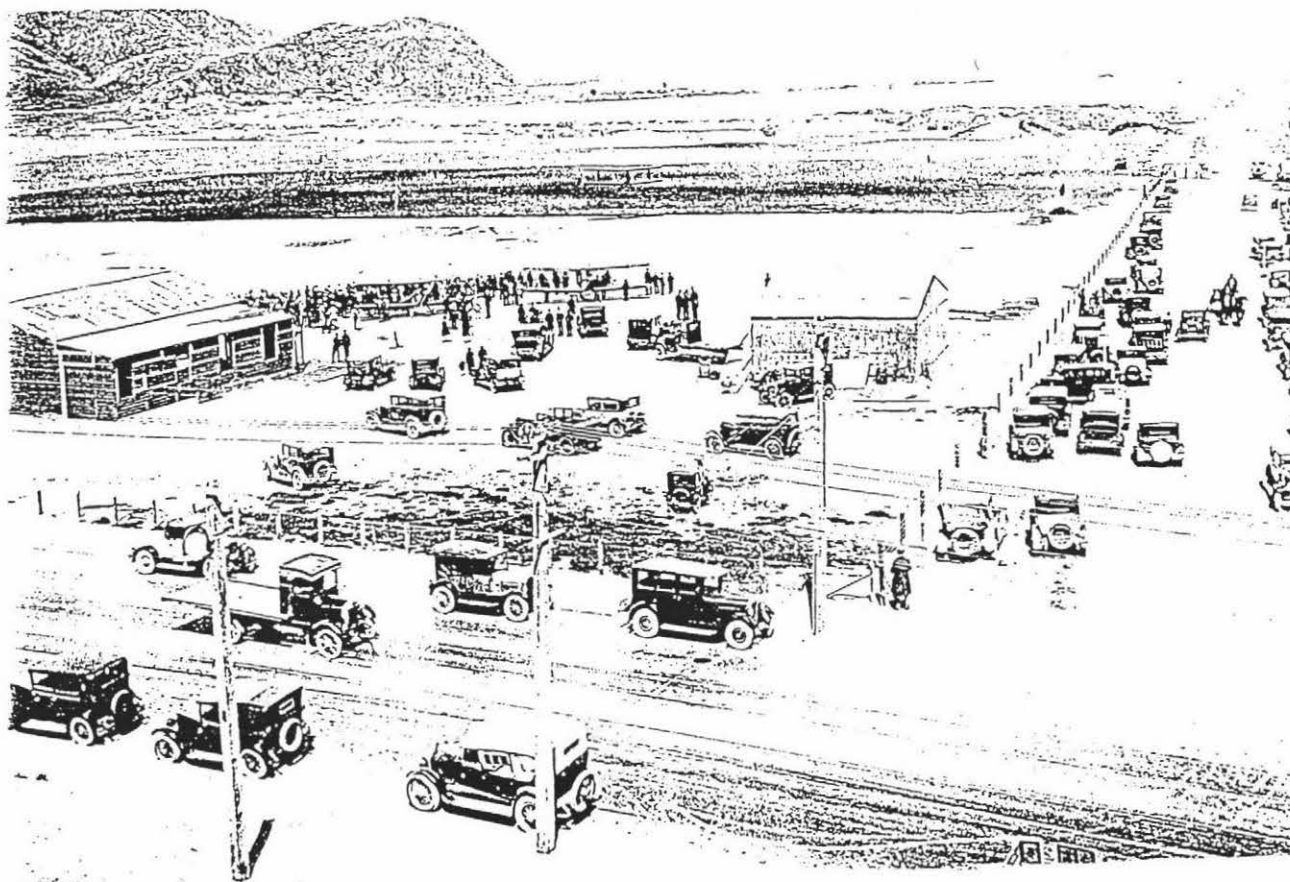
flying boat flew from Auckland to Wellington in five hours with intermediate stops at Kawhia and Wanganui. The aircraft made several demonstration flights over Wellington but the weather again intervened. A gale sprang up, the aircraft was overturned at the dock and was returned to Auckland by rail.⁹

After Shae's early misadventures, the Lyall Bay/Rongotai area does not seem to have been used again for flying until 1921 when the first Air Board granted it a licence and classified it as what now would be called an airstrip. The short lived New Zealand Aero Transport Company, founded by Rudolph Wigley, began operating then in competition with the already well established Canterbury Aviation Company¹⁰. This latter company operated throughout the South Island barnstorming and joyriding¹¹ and was concerned about the likely competition, but was even more disturbed when it heard rumours that its North Island counterpart was planning to expand into the South Island. To forestall this threat, it instructed its pilot to fly across Cook Strait to establish itself as a cross strait operator. The flight took place on 25 August, 1920 but did not use the Rongotai field; it landed at the Trentham racecourse.¹²

The reason no aircraft operated at Rongotai¹³ between 1913 and 1921, and few after that date, was because the area had been designated as both an airfield and a manoeuvre reserve. Even after 1921, when Rongotai became a licensed aerodrome, the army continued to use the area as a training ground for digging trenches, a strong deterrent to aircraft operators.

The Wellington City Council (W.C.C.) decided an aerodrome was needed to service the city and in 1928 it announced its intention to form an airfield of forty-six acres at Rongotai which would provide two runways, one of twelve hundred feet running north east-south west, and a longer one of two thousand feet running north west-south east.¹⁴ This was in response to a perceived need for the capital to have an airport. 1928 and 1929 saw a great surge in interest in aviation throughout New Zealand. Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith flew across the Tasman Sea from Sydney on 11 September, 1928. His route took him over Wellington but he was unable to land at Rongotai, so he continued on to

Christchurch. The *New Zealand Observer*'s view was that the flight showed it would not be long before business people could travel to London in less than a week and to Australia in a few hours.¹⁵ (In fact it was to be another decade before commercial trans-Tasman flights were to begin.)



Rongotai Airport at Rongotai in the late 1920's

While Kingsford-Smith's exploit caught the public imagination, the earthquake at Murchison in 1929 dramatically demonstrated the value of air transport and the need for airfields. H. E. Holland, M.P. for Buller and leader of the Labour Party, said that Westport and the surrounding district had been completely isolated by the earthquake, road and rail communications having been cut.¹⁶ The only landing place for aircraft was on the beach and this was not available when the tide was in. To establish a communication link it was necessary

for the only plane available, a two seater from Christchurch, to make two trips, the first to deliver the primitive, rather bulky radio equipment, and the second to take the radio operator. Responding to Holland's statement, the Minister of Defence, T. Wilford, said he had plans for forty-four landing places throughout the country, four of them being on the West Coast, one at Westport.¹⁷

That the Minister in charge of civil aviation was the Minister of Defence was logical. There undoubtedly was an element of defence interest as the physical nature of the country would have made defence difficult in time of war, and the limited range of aircraft would have made a multiplicity of airfields necessary. Also there was an air force in being which would have to be expanded if war broke out. Civil flying was very limited and it seems appropriate that the Government would give responsibility for civil aviation to the Minister of Defence, hence the Department which had most expertise in the activity and the greatest experience of aircraft operational requirements.

At that time it was considered to be the responsibility of local authorities to provide aircraft landing grounds for civil use, but it had been difficult for them to become involved in providing airfields to any substantial degree. They could only engage in activities permitted by their governing legislation and according to Wilford they had no power to spend money on aviation purposes other than the very minor amount they could spend on items not specifically authorised by their governing legislation (commonly known as Unauthorised Expenditure) which was as little as £50 for some councils.¹⁸ He said the Government was considering this matter and would be announcing its proposals to overcome this difficulty later in the parliamentary session.¹⁹

The Government's decision to authorise the construction and development of airfields by local authorities was an astute one as it capitalised on the local desires for airfields. The Government thus had airfields available for defence purposes if it ever became necessary to assume control of them, and a large part of the cost would have been met by the local population. No official suggestion was made that this network would be useful for defence; this could have

raised questions on the financing of them and probably would have resulted in an argument that greater financial support from the Government was warranted. The defence advantages of these airfields were disregarded publicly, the development of the network being emphasised as an undertaking of great commercial value.²⁰

The proposals referred to by Wilford were incorporated in the Local Authorities Empowering (Aviation Encouragement) Bill 1929. In discussing the bill, the Minister said '...Every town of any importance will sooner or later find it just as essential to possess well sited aerodromes as it does today to possess railway stations, roads and garages....'²¹ He reiterated his plans to have forty-four landing places in the country. He felt it was absolutely useless to consider the development of commercial aviation if suitable landing places were not available regardless of the type of machine used.

...Though you get a machine to travel from London to Karachi in a non-stop flight you must have somewhere to come down when necessary. In New Zealand we are in the extraordinary position that - apart from Hungary - we are the only country in the world without any commercial aviation whatever...²²

J. G. Coates, leader of the Reform Party and a former Prime Minister, also felt it important that aircraft landing places were provided but thought it could be a burden on the ratepayers as some local authorities might be carried away '...with the lure and glamour of aviation....' He agreed, however, that a local authority should be allowed to spend money on them within reason, and also believed that with the unemployment level then obtaining the Government could assist with subsidies.²³

The 1929 legislation allowed local bodies to spend money developing airfields up to the level of their 'Unauthorised Expenditure'. It also permitted Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin to borrow up to £5,000 for aerodrome development without having the poll of ratepayers usually required before local authorities could borrow under the provisions of the Local Bodies Loans Act, 1926.²⁴ Also in 1929, legislation was passed changing the

designation of land which had been vested in the W.C.C. as a recreation and manoeuvre reserve to a reserve for aviation purposes.²⁵ The effect of this Act was to increase the area of 46 acres earmarked by the W.C.C. to almost 63½ acres, which became a reserve '...held in trust for an aerodrome and general aviation purposes....'²⁶ The Act reserved power to the Minister of Defence to use the aerodrome for planes of the New Zealand Air Force free of charge and to permit the Government to erect a hangar of not more than two thousand square feet to house its planes. From this it may be deduced that the defence needs of the country were being recognised but it should be borne in mind that the Public Works Department also had a plane for civilian purposes..

A major earthquake in Hawke's Bay on 3 February, 1931 showed the value of air services. The earthquake occurred just before 11 a.m. and once the Prime Minister received confirmation that it was a serious one, he gave instructions for an aircraft to be sent as soon as possible to assess the situation. A little after 2 p.m. a plane took off from Rongotai with a Public Works engineer as a passenger.²⁷ Two days later, the *Evening Post* reported the earthquake had given striking evidence of the value of aircraft, pilots and landing grounds in a time of crisis. With fissures and landslides on roads, bridges broken and railway lines twisted, land communications were dislocated, and air services were second only to radio for sending and receiving messages to and from the area. Air services were also invaluable for carrying emergency supplies.²⁸ In twelve days, from 4 to 15 February, twenty-eight planes flew 45,000 miles to and from Hawke's Bay. Two planes flew twice daily from both Wellington and Auckland to Hastings carrying 200 mailbags and bundles of telegrams, quantities of medical stores and passengers. Included in the stores was a complete water chlorination plant flown from Auckland to Hastings.²⁹ However, weather conditions were still a problem for planes. When the aircraft returned to Rongotai from Hawke's Bay, on 5 February, the northerly wind had dropped and suddenly changed to a fierce southerly and planes at the aerodrome had to be put under cover to avoid damage to them.³⁰

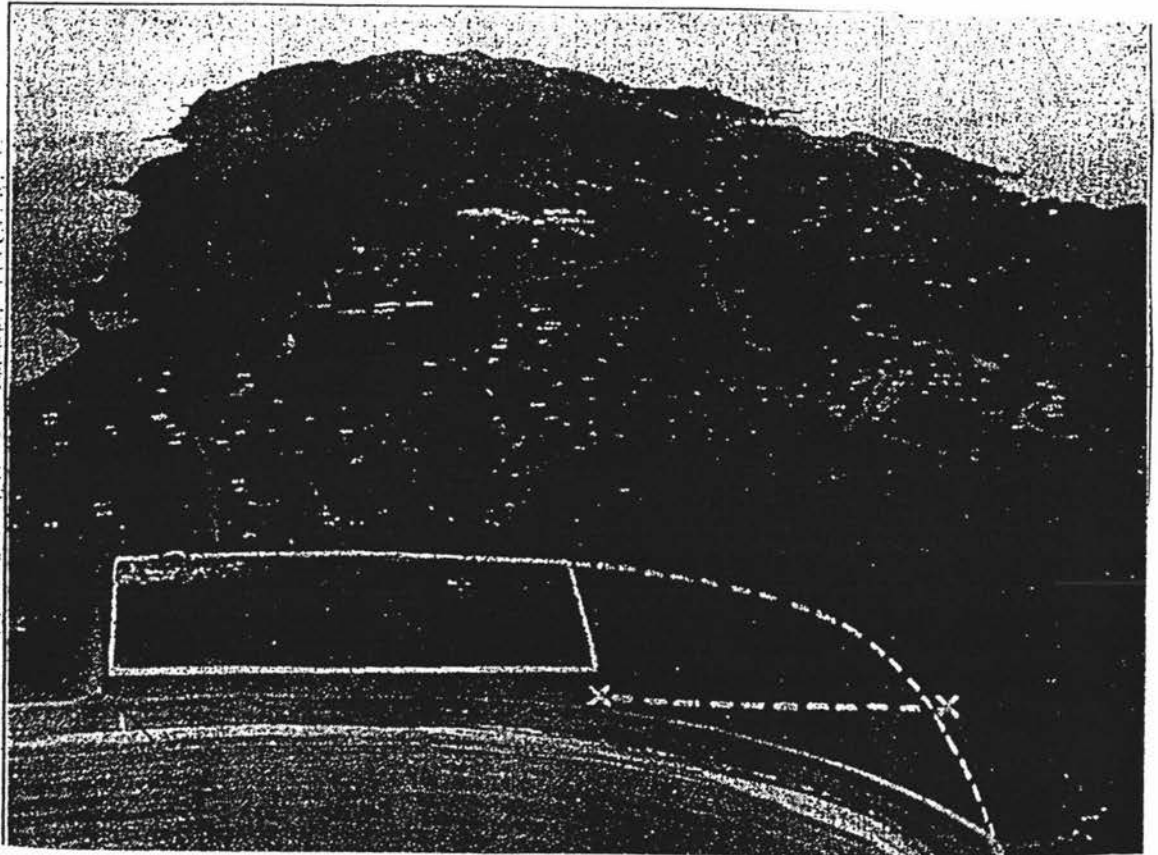
Practically no development in civil aviation had occurred in the year ending 31 May, 1931. A company, National Airways (N.Z.) Ltd., had

been formed in 1929, but had not committed itself to any active operations and another company, Dominion Airlines, had gone into liquidation.³¹ This company was originally set up to operate a regular daily service between Blenheim and Wellington, but did not get the service started.³² Nationally, eight minor companies were engaged in intermittent air taxi work using small 2-3 seater planes.³³ The report stated that at 31 May, 1931, only 17 aerodromes and 59 planes were licenced for civil aviation purposes. 30 of the planes were operated by 9 aero clubs.³⁴ Rongotai was one of the licenced aerodromes and Wellington was one of the aero clubs.

While Rongotai might have been large enough for the small flying club planes, it was too small for the larger planes coming into service. In January, 1933 Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith flew from Australia to New Zealand in his Fokker Aircraft, the Southern Cross, returning to Australia in March 1933.³⁵ Prior to this, Wilfred Kingsford-Smith, Sir Charles' brother, had travelled around New Zealand looking at aerodromes and assessing their suitability for use by the Southern Cross. He decided that before the plane could use Rongotai, the runway would need to be twice as long, a fence would have to be removed and the additional area levelled.³⁶

A W.C.C. councillor, Frank Meadowcroft, who was also a member of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce said the City Council wanted the plane to visit Wellington. He said that while the matter had not been considered officially, he was sure the Council would agree to the necessary work being done if unemployment funds could be used to pay for it. Later that day, the Council resolved to spend £300 of unemployment money on Rongotai '...if it would guarantee...' a visit by the Southern Cross. The secretary of the Wellington Aero Club welcomed the proposal as it would almost double the length of the north-south runway. He thought the work should have been done earlier because when licensing the airfield, the former Director of Air Services had '...stressed the point that the most dangerous feature was the shortage of run in the line of the prevailing winds....' The Aero Club had a list of 20 towns which had invited Kingsford-Smith to demonstrate his plane, all of which had, or were developing, aerodromes

capable of catering for the Southern Cross. '...It would be a reflection on the capital city of the Dominion if Sir Charles had to pass it by when a comparatively small expenditure at Rongotai would give its people an opportunity of seeing the most famous aeroplane in the world....'³⁷ The necessary extensions were made. That the Rongotai operations were very small scale at this time is evidenced by a report that a new Gypsy Moth plane was delivered to the Wellington Aero Club in December 1932, increasing the number of their planes to four.³⁸

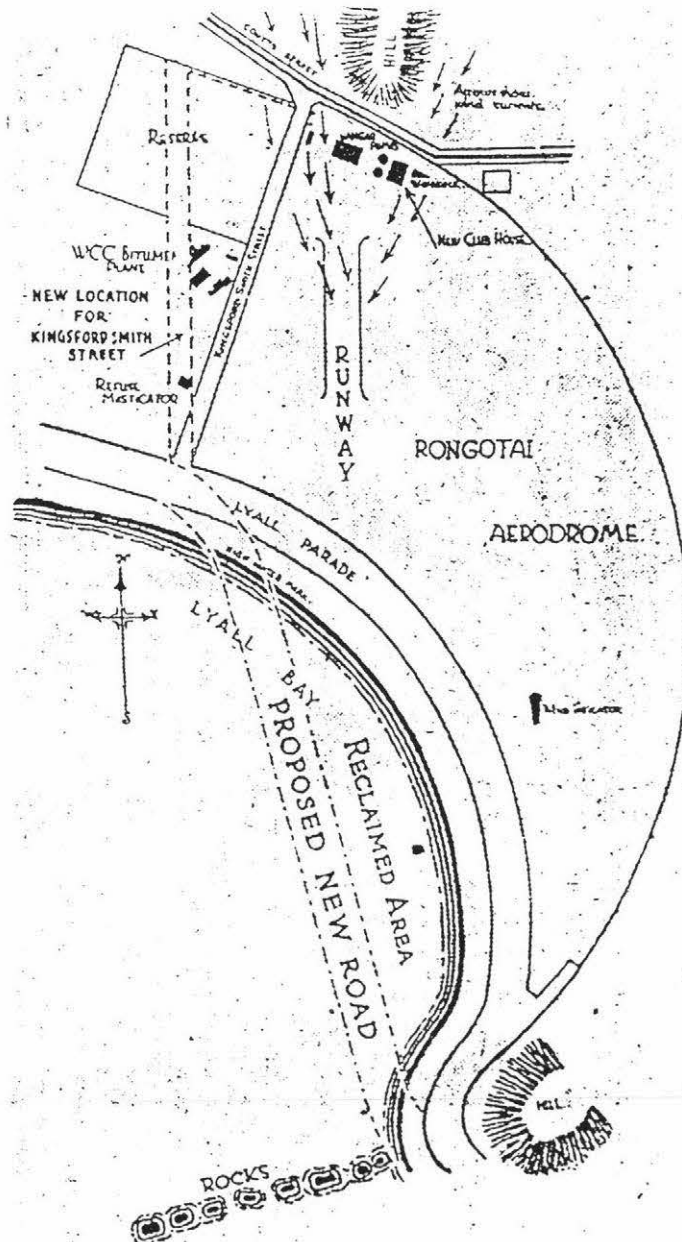


Rongotai Aerodrome from the air. The rectangular area shows the elanding area at that time . The dotted line shows the extensions required by W. Kingsford-Ssmith.

The line marked with crosses depicts the fence line to be removed.

The Wellington Chamber of Commerce naturally was interested in any factor which would facilitate business activity in the city. In 1934 it set up a committee to investigate sites near Wellington city which would be suitable as an aircraft landing ground for the current and future needs of

commercial aviation. The sites examined were Scabey Island, Gear Island, Rongotai, Wainuiomata, Porirua, Titahi Bay, Waikanae and the top of Tinakori Hill. It also considered land in the Wairarapa but, while the land was suitable, it had been eliminated because it was too far away over the Rimutaka Hills. Paekakariki had also been rejected because the land was too bumpy and an undue amount of levelling would be required. An aerial survey of the remaining sites was



The proposal of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce to develop Rongotai. The area in Lyall bay would be reclaimed using spoil from the hill at the bottom of the plan

planned when the government plane arrived from Christchurch.³⁹ The committee recommended developing the Rongotai airfield by reclaiming part of Lyall Bay with spoil obtained by demolishing some of the Moa Point hill, closing Kingsford Smith Street and realigning it, removing some buildings and incorporating that land and some recreation reserve into the airport. This development would permit the construction of a north south runway aligned with the Rongotai Terrace hill.⁴⁰

Wellington Aero Club activities were reported in a regular weekly column of the *Evening Post*, even though they were only very small scale. It was considered worth reporting in December 1934 that a Moth plane had made two return Cook Strait crossings to Rongotai,⁴¹ and later the same month that five aircraft movements had occurred at that aerodrome during the day. This quoted the names of the pilots and passengers and details of the flights undertaken.⁴² Probably even less flights took place in winter.

In December 1934, aviation matters were front page news because of international flights and this increased public interest in aviation generally. The major news was the attempt by Sir Charles Ulm to fly from the United States to Australia. His disappearance and the subsequent search for his plane ensured aviation was kept before the public.⁴³ Ulm was well known in New Zealand. In 1928 he had been Kingsford-Smith's co-pilot on the delivery flight of the Southern Cross from California to Australia,⁴⁴ and in 1933/34, before being lost in the Pacific Ocean, he had made three double crossings of the Tasman Sea. On the first of these he carried 36,000 letters from New Zealand for overseas destinations. As the major financial and administrative centre, Wellington was an important air mail destination. While in New Zealand he had made a non-stop flight from Auckland to Invercargill carrying Christmas mail.⁴⁵ Aviation was big news in 1934; this all helped to create interest in air services.

Transport services were subject to licensing, and legislation enacted in 1934 made it unlawful to conduct commercial air services within New Zealand without a licence other than for flights starting and ending at the same

point without intermediate stops. Both aircraft and airfields had to be licenced. In December 1934, trans-Tasman fliers Whitehead and Nicholson, who had flown from Sydney to Auckland, flew on to Wellington and were informed they would be prosecuted for flying an uncertified aircraft,⁴⁶ but no penalty was imposed.⁴⁷ Before awarding a licence the licensing authority, the Transport Co-ordination Board,⁴⁸ was required to take several matters into account including '...the type and suitability of the aerodromes proposed to be used and the facilities thereat... available for aircraft, passengers and freight....'⁴⁹ and in March 1935, the Board considered applications for air transport licences throughout the Dominion.

Union Airways applied for a licence to operate a main trunk system using Palmerston North as the main aerodrome for the southern part of the North Island. It alleged Rongotai was unsuitable and supported that assertion with a statement from a pilot who said he would not fly into Wellington. The Wellington Town Clerk presented a statement that Wellington had to be a port of call on the main trunk line because good access was important for people with business to conduct in the city.⁵⁰ This view had already been advanced by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce and several local authorities from other areas. The general tenor of most submissions was that the four main centres, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin should be served directly, and not have to rely on a feeder service from a smaller centre.⁵¹

One applicant for a licence, the Great Pacific Airways, claimed the Union Airways objection to Rongotai was not valid because Union Airways planes were already using Rongotai for flights across Cook Strait and the aerodrome could be made suitable for larger planes. One reason suggested for Union Airways, a subsidiary of the Union Steamship Company, wanting to exclude Wellington from the main trunk air services was the wish to protect its parent company's sea ferry service.⁵²

In its report, the licensing authority said it was '...fully aware of the importance of Wellington as the capital city and the focal point of business interests in the Dominion but...[it would not]...take the responsibility of allowing

Wellington to be a regular port of call...' under the conditions then obtaining. The Board thought pilots might be tempted to use Rongotai when conditions were unsuitable and because of its responsibility to consider the safety of passengers, could not approve of its use. However, it said Rongotai could be acceptable if a suitable alternative airfield was available close enough. Until then Wellington could not be used for main trunk commercial flights.⁵³

The Board noted that the company proposing to operate from Wellington, Great Pacific Airways (N.Z.), had not been formed at that time but approval had been given to its proposal to operate a service Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin with intermediate stops. When the company was established the Board would be prepared to consider the conditions under which it might be prepared to permit the use of Rongotai.⁵⁴ It noted that on 23 September 1935, the overseas principals of the company had established a subsidiary to advance its activities.⁵⁵ The Board also reported that on 11 April, 1935 it had granted a licence to Cook Strait Airways Ltd. for a service between Wellington, Blenheim and Nelson but had declined the application of N.Z. Airways Ltd., to operate a service to Auckland, Rotorua, Napier, Masterton, and Wellington.

The Board's objection to Rongotai was '...the dangerous climatic conditions which prevailed at Wellington...' and it mentioned Paekakariki as the site of a possible suitable alternative airfield. While Rongotai would not be licensed for main trunk flights, the Board agreed to its use for flights across Cook Strait because the weather at Wellington was more likely to be known when starting out on these short flights.⁵⁶ In the early days of the Wellington Aero Club's flying training it had been said that anyone learning to fly at Rongotai would be capable of flying anywhere in the world. This was because of the capricious winds and obstructions around the airfield, but it is interesting to note that it had handled more traffic than any other New Zealand aerodrome, and in safety.⁵⁷

The refusal of the Board to approve the use of Rongotai caused considerable concern in the capital. The *Evening Post* considered

Wellington organisations had a duty to prepare plans so that the city could be brought into the main trunk air service. It said the Chamber of Commerce had done a lot but the time was opportune for the formation of a body to advance the interests of Wellington and that the W.C.C. had to take the lead in setting up a body which should be empowered to take any necessary action.⁵⁸

The Wellington Chamber of Commerce also stressed action was needed to ensure Wellington was part of the main trunk route and decided to approach the W.C.C. to see what should be done. The City Council discussed the matter at length and asked the City Engineer to report on what was necessary to make Rongotai a satisfactory aerodrome.⁵⁹ A Citizens' Association candidate for the W.C.C. said if elected he would do all he could to ensure Wellington was not omitted from air services. '...He was afraid vested interests had been at work to cut Wellington out....'⁶⁰ No doubt he was referring to the Union Airways Company Ltd.

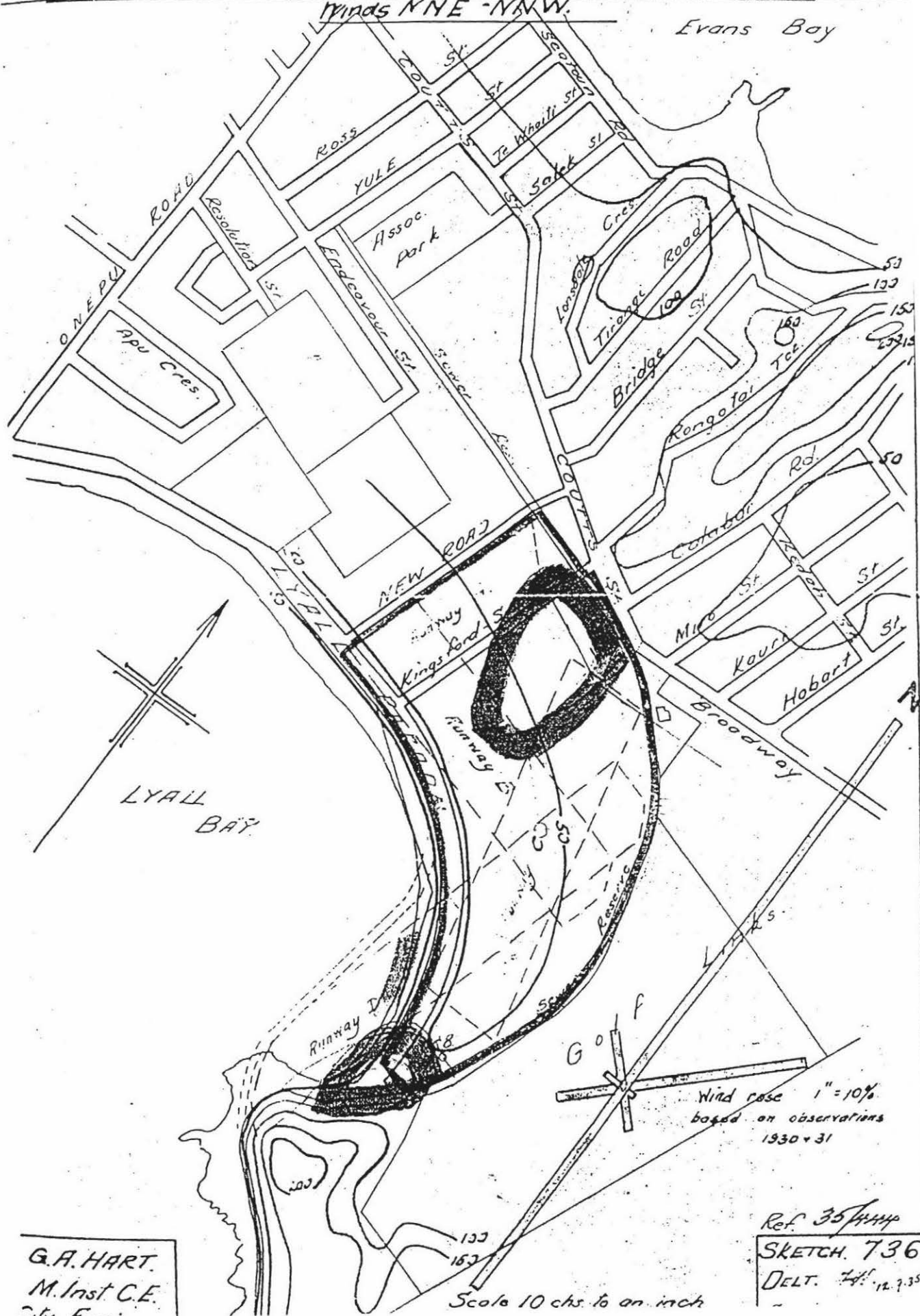
A deputation from the Wellington Chamber of Commerce met the W.C.C. Airport Committee and it was resolved that the City Council should protest to the Transport Co-ordination Committee on the exclusion of Wellington from the main trunk air service.⁶¹ The City Engineer investigated the problems and in June 1935, following wind tunnel tests on a relief model of the area, produced a plan of the locality showing the probable areas of turbulence with the most common wind pattern. It was decided to recommend to the Council that the airport be upgraded in four stages as finance became available.⁶² This recommendation was referred back by the full Council, which suggested relocating Lyall Parade, closing Kingsford-Smith Street and relocating it, removing a bitumen plant, taking in the recreation ground to the north and incorporating the whole area into the aerodrome. This would add an additional 30 acres to the airfield at a cost of £12,000. The Council considered the Transport Co-ordination Board should be advised of these proposed improvements.⁶³

On 30 December 1935 Cook Strait Airways opened a Wellington-Blenheim-Nelson service operating from Rongotai. In 1937 this was

— LOCALITY PLAN — RONGOTAI AIRPORT —

Probable Turbulent Area Near Ground.

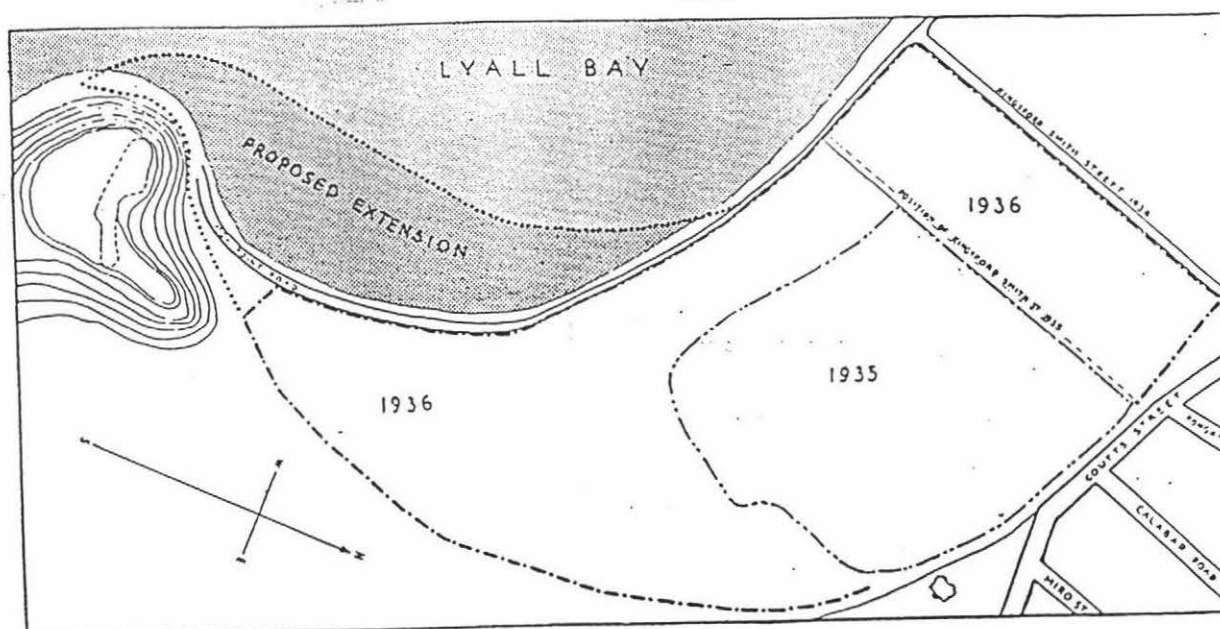
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extended to Greymouth and Hokitika. The planes used were DH 89s, (de Havilland Rapides, also known as Dominies). Driscoll wrote that the Rapides of Cook Strait Airways made a blind approach around Moa Point, a large hill, '...to the tiny Rongotai airfield.' In the same year, Union Airways opened a service Auckland-New Plymouth-Palmerston North-Wellington using Lockheed Electra 10a aircraft.⁶⁴ This service was extended progressively to Christchurch, Dunedin and Invercargill.⁶⁵ With the start of scheduled air services operating from Rongotai, it was time to ensure the safety of passengers, crews and planes, and improvements to the airfield were planned to provide this. The W.C.C. decided to develop the airfield along the lines of the 1934 Chamber of Commerce recommendations, but must have thought them too ambitious or costly because their plan involved a much smaller reclamation in Lyall Bay.



Rongotai Airport boundaries in 1935 and 1936 and a proposed extension into Lyall Bay, December 1936.

The decision of the Board to deny Rongotai a licence certainly inspired a quick response. An application was made to the

Unemployment Board for a subsidy to meet the cost of this work and the Board agreed. It suggested 150 men be employed on subsidy, but the W.C.C. was only prepared to agree to the employment of 100 men.⁶⁶ The City Council wished to keep its expenditure to a minimum and the question of the Government meeting more of the cost was discussed with the Prime Minister. He replied that it was Government policy for aerodromes to be provided by local authorities, the Government only being prepared to provide a chain of emergency landing grounds throughout the country.⁶⁷ Cost, and who should meet it was a recurring question, and the possibility that the W.C.C. could raise a loan to meet the cost of development without a poll of ratepayers caused some alarm amongst them. In response to these concerns, the mayor said the clause in the Empowering Bill authorising this would be deleted. He assured ratepayers that no airport loan would be raised without a poll being held.



Moth ZK-ADE approaching Rongotai airport, circa 1936

Rongotai was not only used for civil aviation purposes. It was also the home of the first fully operational territorial air force squadron in New Zealand. The first commanding officer of that squadron was E. A. 'Gibby' Gibson, who was to play an ever increasing and influential part in New Zealand aviation.⁶⁸ In civilian life Gibson was an engineer with the Public Works Department engaged in aerodrome development. As a flyer using Rongotai and as the officer responsible for the flyers and planes under his command operating from that airfield, he naturally favoured either improving it or developing some other airfield convenient to Wellington. He had been a member of the Committee set up by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce in 1934 to advise on the most suitable site for a commercial airport for the city.

The development of aircraft from 1911 to 1937 and the desire of various interest groups to take advantage of the new form of transport created a demand for facilities to cater for the better aircraft becoming available. Influential Wellington people insisted that Wellington should not be by-passed by commercial aviation despite the weather conditions, physical surroundings and short runways which were limiting factors. The interest groups in favour of developing Rongotai were the W.C.C., Wellington Chamber of Commerce, Wellington Aero Club and aircraft operators with support from other local bodies which wanted improved access to central government administrative authorities and Wellington district commercial organisations. The influence of the interested people cannot be overestimated; Gibson was an aerodromes engineer and commanding officer of the territorial air force squadron based at Rongotai, the Mayor of Wellington, T. C. A. Hislop, was also the president of the Wellington Aero Club, and several members of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce were also Wellington City Councillors. Flying was expensive, so those engaged in it as a hobby must have been comparatively wealthy and were likely to have been regarded as some of the leaders of society although they were few in number. Flights were considered to be newsworthy and the *Evening Post* reported them in a regular aviation item.⁶⁹

Interest in aviation was stimulated by the return of pilots with wartime experience and several famous flights, in particular those of Charles Kingsford Smith in the Southern Cross. The defence forces wanted Rongotai as a training facility for pilots and its value in civil emergencies was demonstrated by the Napier earthquake. It is close to town, and one woman aero club member was able to leave home at 6a.m., have 1½ hours flying, return home, eat, change and get to work on time.⁷⁰ The growth of a national civil aviation service and the threat to exclude the capital were factors that influenced the development of Rongotai.

There were factors operating against Rongotai. The hills obstructed the flightpath and the wind caused considerable turbulence. Because the army used the airfield for training, development was restricted, and even when it became available for aircraft use, the local authority was reluctant to spend much money on it. Indeed, the runway extension to cater for Kingsford-Smith's flights only went ahead because unemployment funds were available. Opposition was also expressed by the shipping company operating the inter-island ferries. Nevertheless, continued pressure did result in extensions to Rongotai aerodrome..

CHAPTER 3. THE 1937 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

Nationally, 1934 had been an important year for civil aviation in New Zealand because legislation was enacted that year requiring the licensing of airfields before they could be used for commercial flying. Wellington City Council (W.C.C.) and the Wellington Chamber of Commerce wanted an airport within easy reach of the city. While there was little air traffic at that time, it was likely to grow and the Chamber of Commerce wanted to ensure the city was prepared for that growth which would enhance business opportunities. Also, as Wellington was the seat of Government and a place to contact members of parliament, anyone wishing to lobby them or conduct business with senior government officials would usually find it necessary to visit the city which was the main financial, commercial and industrial centre, a major port and the northern terminal of Cook Strait traffic and the Christchurch ferry. It was also the site of the head offices of many of New Zealand's major companies and the chief branches in New Zealand of overseas companies, and being situated centrally in the country could be thought of as the hub of the transport system.

Civil air travel was expensive and used by few people but most of them would usually have political, commercial or industrial power. The Government also had an interest in the development of airfields and the central location of Wellington made it a desirable base for air defence.

Investigations were carried out by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce to determine the needs of the city for an aircraft landing ground and its location. Rongotai was decided on as the most suitable and by 1937, plans had been prepared for its extension. Initially, a relatively minor extension was proposed but this was replaced by a much larger scheme. Problems were

encountered in funding the smaller development and even greater problems were involved in the larger scheme which necessitated the removal of many houses and a secondary school when there was an acute shortage of housing, building materials and skilled labour. Prolonged discussions ensued to see if some improvement could be made to the airport without removing houses, but before anything other than minor improvements had been made, World War II started and other matters were given priority.

In February 1937, the W.C.C. proposed raising a loan of £70,000 to be matched by a Government subsidy of £70,000 to develop Rongotai as a commercial airfield. This proposed development coincided with the wishes of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce which had initiated the investigation into the commercial air service needs of the Wellington region in 1934. The Chamber issued a leaflet in support of the proposal to raise the loan of £70,000 to '...complete Rongotai Aerodrome...' giving the names of the committee it had assembled to examine the question.¹ It is difficult to imagine a better qualified group to comment on the technical aspects of the proposed development. Clearly the Chamber members wanted an aerodrome to be developed and the only question in their minds was 'Where?' After several months of studying the various sites, its technical committee had recommended Rongotai as the site for the main aerodrome but had also recommended that a reservation be placed over a suitable site north of Paekakariki for development later as an auxiliary aerodrome.

The committee had looked at nine proposed sites before deciding upon Rongotai and had concluded that '...when all considerations ...[had been]...weighed up, Rongotai ...[stood]... far ahead of all the other areas reported on....'² In a memorandum to the Engineer in Chief of the Public Works Department, Gibson stated that the committee had not considered Rongotai suitable as a trans-Tasman terminal, even though some proponents were using this as a reason for its development. The committee had deemed Rongotai to be unsuitable for trans-Tasman traffic because it was believed that weather patterns prevalent at Wellington were such as would preclude scheduled operations. Also, it would not be suitable for night flying, partly because of the weather conditions, but mainly

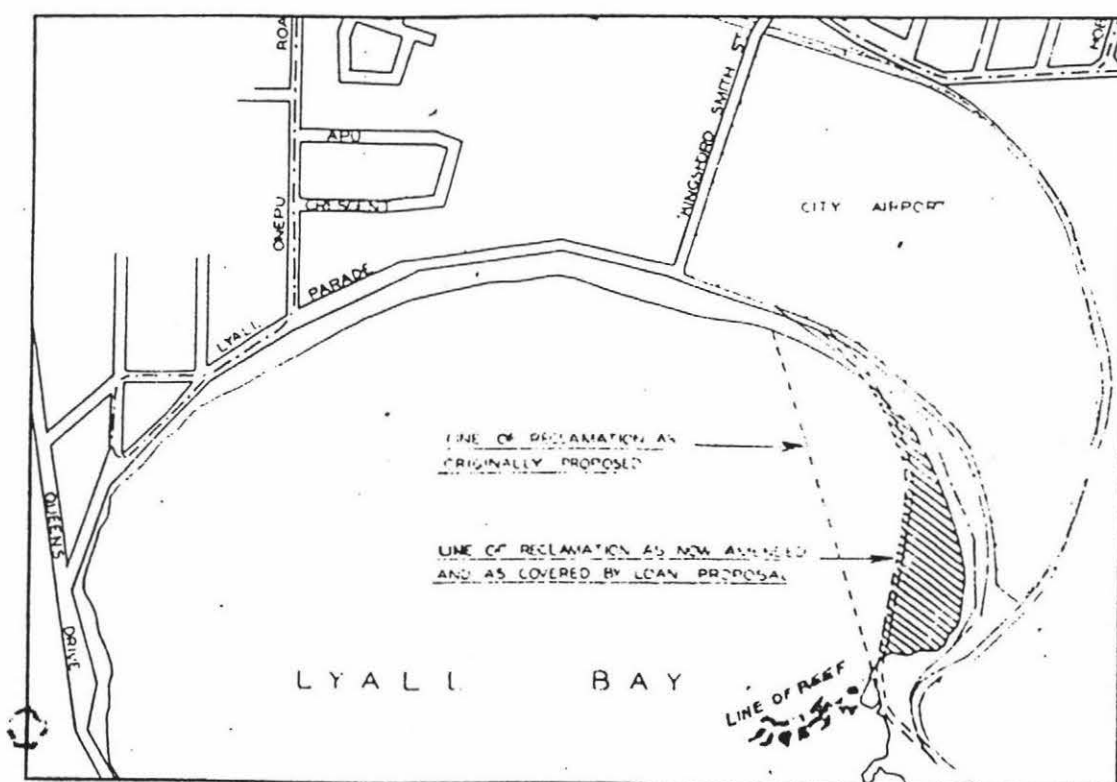
because of obstructions.³ While Gibson did not identify the obstructions, other reports indicate these to be the surrounding hills, buildings such as the Evans Bay Power Station with its high chimneys, and ships in the harbour.⁴ Moreover, while not specifically referred to in the report, it had been generally accepted for a long period that because the flight path was over the sea, it would be unsuitable for night flying as it was impossible to provide a lighting system marking the approach to the airport.

The Chamber claimed that the Government had been so impressed with the proposal that it was prepared to pay half the cost of £140,000, with the W.C.C. paying the other half. The Chamber considered this a good bargain, but noted that other transport facilities had been funded by Government. It mentioned that £1,300,000 had been spent on railway terminal facilities, £810,000 of that in the previous three years. It also reported that investment in harbour facilities totalled £3,295,885. As at the date of their report, Rongotai had only cost £81,440 and with the now proposed £140,000 would have cost £221,440, of which the Government would have paid only £70,000.

The Chamber reported that if the aerodrome was developed it was expected that the annual revenue of the airfield would be increased by £1,400. It had calculated that assuming an interest rate of 4%, interest on the loan would be £2,800 per annum, but went on to state that the rate could well be lower than 4 %. If its assessment of improved revenue proved to be correct, the ratepayers would only have to meet charges of £1,400 per annum plus the Sinking Fund contribution needed to repay the principal of the loan when it fell due. The Chamber also anticipated that with increased traffic a profit would soon be achieved. Even if this expectation was not realised, they felt the cost was small in relation to the benefits which would accrue from having an improved aerodrome. It considered air transport would become important and that

...If Rongotai ...[was]... fully developed in accordance with the loan proposals, it ...[was]... destined to become the focal point of all air traffic to, and in, the Dominion as well as ...[providing]... the best possible accessibility and service for ... commercial and residential interests...⁵

With the benefit of hindsight, their view was optimistic. It clearly did not envisage the requirements of the much larger, heavier and faster aeroplanes which were to be operational in the not-too-distant future. It certainly did become the focal point of internal traffic, but certainly did not become the focus of air traffic '...to the Dominion...', that is international traffic, and this should have been clear at the time. The pamphlet ended by urging the ratepayers to accept the Government's offer and to '...vote for the loan and make Wellington the chief airport of the Dominion....'⁶



Proposed extension to Rongotai Airport to be financed from loan with the Chamber of Commerce recommended reclamation shown.

The Mayor of Wellington, T. C. A. Hislop, issued a statement giving his reasons for supporting the proposed loan to finance the development of Rongotai which he believed to be the best site for an aerodrome to

serve the city. Air travel and air mail were growing rapidly overseas, and it was likely this would occur in New Zealand; it was important that facilities were provided to cater for them. Wellington could either be part of a main trunk system serviced by feeders from other centres, or it could be a feeder to some other centre. He said Rongotai was suitable for planes then in service but needed to be extended for future aircraft. The existing airfield was suitable for training purposes but not satisfactory as a defence facility, so Hislop considered the Government was very generous to offer half the cost of the upgrading. He felt there were two options; either do the work then and have half of the cost met by the Government, or leave the development until later when the City would have to meet the full cost. He considered Wellington had to prepare for the development of aviation and the Government's offer should be accepted. Rongotai was already the base of the largest airline in New Zealand and 12,000 passengers were flying across Cook Strait annually.⁷

As has been shown above, the Wellington Chamber of Commerce recommended the approval of the loan proposals for developing Rongotai as the focal point of air traffic 'to the Dominion'. This conflicted with Gibson's statement of the expert committee's opinion that Rongotai was unsuitable as an international airport. It was not only Wellington people who hoped the trans-Tasman terminal would be in Wellington. A report in the *Timaru Post* said that there was support in Christchurch for a Wellington terminal because it would aid tourism and improve the mail service to the South Island.⁸ The exhortations of the Chamber did not achieve their objective; the loan proposal was rejected by the ratepayers, *New Zealand Truth* publishing a long article headlined '...Why Throw £140,000 Down The Drain To Bolster Civic Pride?...'⁹ The aerodrome loan proposal was only one of a number of loan proposals put forward at that time which were rejected. The W.C.C. loans voted on totalled £341,000. Of the six City Council proposals, five were rejected by ratepayers, the only one approved being the loan for improvements to the sewer system. Among the loans rejected was one for the extension of the cemetery. One comment made was that not only had the ratepayers decided not to fly, they had decided not to die either. The Chamber of Commerce was disappointed but agreed that those who would have to

pay for the proposal had a right to reject it. It claimed that many of the statements made against it had been incorrect, that only about ¼ of those entitled to vote had done so and that the great bulk of the money to be spent would have been met by the Government by way of subsidy under the No.5 scheme of finding work for the unemployed.¹⁰

There seems to have been a general feeling amongst Wellington ratepayers that rates should be kept to a minimum and all unnecessary expenditure deferred.¹¹ This attitude is understandable. The country had experienced a severe depression and many people would have been unsure of their financial future. Both the *Dominion* and *Evening Post* supported the development of Rongotai in editorials claiming that once the ratepayers were fully informed of the importance of the scheme, they would approve it. The *Evening Post* said the reason for the rejection of the loan was that ratepayers had been '...influenced by other considerations involved in a large loan schedule presented at an inauspicious time of the year....'¹² This view corresponded with that expressed in the *Dominion* editorial which with delightful rhetoric said the rejection was not of the scheme itself, but '...more an exasperated protest against an unconscionable aggregation of varied schemes, heavy commitments and the chafing effects of State and municipal taxation....'¹³

Hislop was disappointed but believed the work should proceed even though the ratepayers had rejected the loan proposal. A report of the Council meeting of 11 March, 1937 quoted him as saying he would be approaching the Government for a grant of £50,000 to enable the Council to extend the runway running North East-South West by 220 yards.¹⁴ To carry out this work a small reclamation would be needed in Lyall Bay.

Clarification was sought by R. McKeen, City Councillor and Government M.P. for Wellington South, who wanted to know if the intention was for the cost to be shared between the Council and the Government. Hislop said he was suggesting the Government paid the full cost. In his opinion, the Council was already straining its resources in providing a hangar which would be used for the

Auckland-Wellington-South Island service. Hislop believed it would be good business for the Government to provide the money because the aerodrome would be improved.¹⁵

The following day, the *Dominion* commended the Mayor on his initiative. The aerodrome needed to be upgraded and '...no matter how much money is spent there it will never be a perfect aerodrome; but it is already a good one, and would be made a very good one....'¹⁶ It went on to say the Government had undertaken to spend £70,000 on Rongotai. The Mayor's suggestion was that the Government provide five-sevenths of its intended contribution immediately, and that at some future time, perhaps at local body election time, the W.C.C. could put the loan proposal to the ratepayers again. On its being sanctioned, the Government could provide the balance of £20,000.¹⁷

E. A. Gibson, the Public Works Department Assistant Aerodromes Engineer, had already had an informal meeting with E. R. McKillop, the Assistant City Engineer during which they discussed the proposals likely to be made by the Mayor and his advisers as a deputation to the Minister. These were that the Government make a straight out grant of £50,000 to get the improvements put in hand, provide a subsidy on the hangar construction, and subsidise the levelling of a portion of the recreation reserve (which was intended as the site of the Centennial Exhibition).¹⁸

Gibson did not support the making of a grant. He believed this would create a precedent and that other major cities, for example Auckland, would press for the Government to meet the full cost of their aerodrome development. He also suggested that if the Government met the full cost of stage one of the extension, Wellington ratepayers could defeat the loan proposal on the assumption that the Government would meet the full cost in any case.

As an alternative, he suggested the Government offer a £1 for £1 subsidy on work proposed in the original scheme which involved the removal of part of the hill at Moa Point and filling in part of Lyall Bay, provided

the work was done efficiently in consultation with the Public Works Department which would provide the necessary plant at normal charge out rates. The work should be done in a manner that would provide protection from storm damage. The City Council was to provide at least £10,000 per annum to the cost and if space was available, free housing was to be provided for the Public Works Department aircraft in the Council's hangar.

Gibson was strongly opposed to subsidising the hangar because requests for such subsidies had been rejected in the past, but he did support subsidising developments that would improve aircraft operational safety. He also recommended subsidising the levelling of the recreation ground / exhibition site, but only to a standard suitable for aerodrome purposes. If a £1 for £1 subsidy was approved, he considered the land should be designated as 'aerodrome reserve.' He also believed conditions similar to those he had recommended for the Moa Point excavation should be imposed if a subsidy on levelling the ground was agreed to. The Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department, advised the Minister he was broadly in agreement with Gibson's recommendations.¹⁹

Next day, 15 April 1937, the deputation led by Hislop met Bob Semple, the Minister of Works. It was mentioned that the hangar was almost finished²⁰ at a cost of about £10,000 and that the total spent on the aerodrome had reached some £80,000.²¹ No suggestion was made for a subsidy on the hangar expenditure, but a request was made for a subsidy on levelling the Centennial Exhibition site, which would then be classed as aerodrome land. Clearly, the informal comments made by Gibson to the city engineering staff had been noted. Hislop then requested £50,000 from the Government to permit an extension of 220 yards to the runway. The City would regard the subsidy on the levelling work as part of the Government's contribution.²²

Semple was unhappy. He said he had fought the Minister of Finance, Walter Nash, and the Treasury for a considerable time to get agreement to the £70,000 subsidy, but the W.C.C. representatives had been unable to get agreement to meet their share. He believed the development of Rongotai was

important to the country and the modified scheme did not appeal to him. While it might cater for planes of that time, he thought plans had to be made for aircraft which would be in service five to ten years later. Developments in aircraft design were very fast. He was not inclined to agree to a '...half way idea...', but the Council wanted £50,000 for a part-job.' Semple said he would have been prepared to go to Cabinet and ask for £100,000 if that was what was needed to get the job done, but he still had doubts and so was not inclined to do anything. He said Wellington should be the centre of air traffic but the Wellington ratepayers had '...done something indescribably stupid...' ²³ Semple seems to have been indulging in rhetoric with his talk of £100,000. He had already said Treasury and Nash had been reluctant to find £70,000. ²⁴

Hislop took up the comment that the Government might provide £100,000 and said that the City would certainly find the balance of £40,000 needed to complete the job with its share spread over a period of three years. Some method would be found to meet that cost, even if it had to come from normal revenue sources.

Semple thereupon retreated somewhat and said that he meant he would find £100,000 only if absolutely necessary rather than do an unsatisfactory part-job. He believed the council proposals were a patchwork and that part of the work proposed would have to be '...thrown away...' when the full scheme was adopted. '...He wanted to say that the ratepayers of the town were mad to turn that loan down - they threw away a modern aerodrome....' ²⁵

Despite his protestations regarding a '...half way idea...' some work went ahead. In his annual report to parliament, Semple wrote

...Rongotai Aerodrome, Wellington has been maintained in good order, and is in constant use by commercial and club aircraft. Extensions in the south-east corner were undertaken by the Wellington City Council and a new hangar has been erected. Investigations concerning the future of this aerodrome are being undertaken.... ²⁶

The report did not give details of the extensions to the airfield, but according to Roberts its area of 63½ acres in November 1929 had been extended to a total of 85 acres in 1939.²⁷ The 'new hangar' which had been erected apparently refers to the City Council hangar, built at its expense. The Government was building a hangar, but this was not completed until later. The Public Works Department Annual Report for the following year, stated the hangar had been completed, an experimental-direction finding station installed and proposals framed both for temporary improvements and the permanent enlargement of the Rongotai airfield. The annual accounts of the Public Works Department make no reference to any expenditure on Rongotai, but at that time there were subsidies available for local authorities giving work to unemployed people. Among the activities which could attract a subsidy was the construction of aerodromes.²⁸

While the ratepayers had rejected the loan proposals the W.C.C. still hoped to extend and improve the airfield. They were supported in this by Gibson,²⁹ himself a flyer as well as an aerodrome engineer, who had been on the committee set up by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce that had recommended the development of Rongotai in February 1937.

Gibson recommended the course of action commonly taken in the political sphere when it seems a particular measure is unpopular but the proponents wish it to proceed. He suggested the setting up of a committee of experts to examine the proposals. In his memorandum, he set out comprehensive terms of reference for the proposed committee and also suggested its membership.³⁰

The Engineer in Chief / Undersecretary for Public Works incorporated Gibson's memorandum verbatim in a submission forwarded to his Minister. Semple agreed to the recommendations on 7 July, 1937,³¹ and the committee recommended by Gibson was set up with the members he had proposed, and with his suggested terms of reference.³²

In his announcement of the setting up of the committee the Minister of Defence, Jones, said it was important to provide for the needs of both internal and overseas air traffic for the following 20 years. 1½ years of operations by Cook Strait Airways flying into Rongotai had shown it to be suitable as an airport for Wellington. Jones had a point. Until the Rapides of Cook Strait Airways were taken over by the Government in November 1939, they had completed 96% of the 19,821 scheduled flights across Cook Strait using Rongotai.³³ The Investigating Committee was to determine whether Rongotai could be made suitable for night flying and whether it could be made suitable for overseas land planes. If either or both of these were considered possible, the anticipated schedule of use of Rongotai should be given without recourse to an alternative aerodrome at Paraparaumu. Several other matters of detail were to be considered including the demarcation of responsibility for development between Government and local authorities.³⁴

Once again, Gibson had shown his political judgment. It would have been difficult to argue against his selection of the membership of the Committee, but the personnel would undoubtedly support his wish to go ahead with the development. Wilkes, a pilot himself, was responsible for the safety of civil aircraft using the field and he would undoubtedly find any improvements to safety levels desirable; Cochrane, as chief of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, would obviously be in favour of improvements to an airfield used by the air force, particularly as the cost would not be a charge against funds allocated for defence; Gibson, also a pilot using the airport regularly, had been a member of the committee which had recommended its development initially, and would probably be given the responsibility for developing it. Blythe and Bolt were both using the airfield regularly as commercial pilots and would obviously like it to be improved. It is less obvious that Wood and McKillop would support the development. However, the scheme had been prepared by the W.C.C. and while it is not certain McKillop was involved in the design process, it is likely that he had been. There is no suggestion that these men would not make an honest appraisal of the matter, but there can be no doubt that they would have had a predisposition towards improving the aerodrome.

The proposal to set up the Committee was well received by the press which had supported the improvement of the airport. The appointment of the Committee seems to have stimulated local action on the matter as a petition signed by 154 residents of Rongotai was forwarded to T. A. Barrow, the Air Secretary, protesting at the '...grave danger to lives and property which now exists at Rongotai caused by low flying aeroplanes since the inauguration of the passenger air services....'³⁵ Wood, Chairman of the Investigating Committee, sent this letter and accompanying petition to Gibson with the handwritten comment that '... This petition seems very opportune...'³⁶ which could be interpreted as indicating Wood's support for the development. The scheme would provide more runway length in the east-west direction, hence improving the safety margin. However, the Committee noted very early in its deliberations '...that a fundamental requirement for Rongotai was a long unobstructed North-South runway....'³⁷, permitting take off and landing operations to be diverted over the sea.

The Committee advertised in the *Dominion* and the *Evening Post* on the 5 and 6 November 1937 to obtain views on the aerodrome and its development from anyone who wished to make submissions, but it stated these should be received by 10 November, a mere four or five days after the advertisement.³⁸ Probably the Committee believed that the question of Rongotai had been given wide publicity and that it was likely any relevant strong views would have been expressed and considered previously. It is likely they thought the level of safety of the airport made the project urgent and they felt it was necessary to make progress before the approaching holiday period. However, a cynic might interpret the short period as betraying the arrogance of 'experts' who believed they 'knew what was best', but felt that to cover themselves in the event of future criticism they had to go through the motions of consultation while they had no real interest in receiving carefully researched submissions which might conflict with their opinions.

One person who managed to lodge his submission suggested the area around Lyall Bay beach which was proposed for the north west-south east

runway extension would be better used for recreation purposes. He considered that the isthmus had been formed by the sea depositing sand and that by reclaiming land there, sand-bearing currents could be deflected and perhaps the harbour entrance could become silted up. Of more interest in the light of subsequent events was his assertion that when a site was being sought for a dry dock, it had been discovered that good foundations could not be found, so it had been necessary to acquire a floating dock. In his view, more investigation was necessary before a site was finally chosen.³⁹

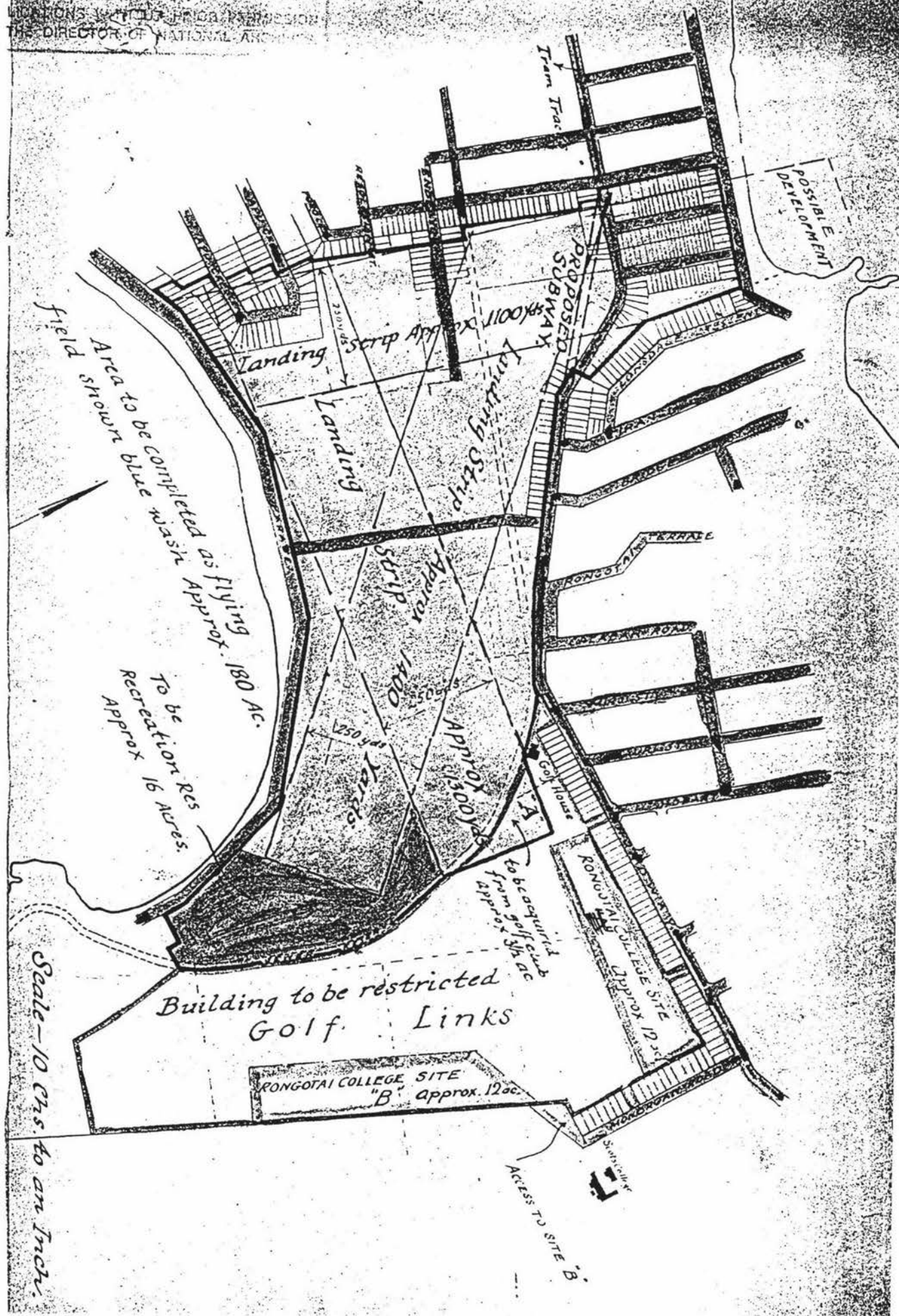
The Committee reported quickly to the Minister of Defence, the Minister responsible for air services. It sent its report to him on 14 February, 1938, and included in its findings was the opinion that complete sea level access should be provided for aircraft approaching the airfield from both Evans Bay and Lyall Bay. It considered the airfield should incorporate a strip of land from sea to sea across the isthmus, a proposal envisaging the removal and resiting of some 190 houses, relocating sports facilities, shifting Rongotai College and acquiring the Miramar golf course. The Committee obviously anticipated some opposition to this from the Government, so they went on to '...emphasise that traffic can only follow the provision of facilities and that if the benefits of air travel are to be realised, it is ... necessary to pass through the period of initial capital expenditure on aerodromes....'⁴⁰

The 3½ acres of land sought for the east-west runway was roughly triangular in shape and was close to the clubhouse of the Miramar Golf Club. The proposed north-south runway was centred on Salek Street to the north, and also involved the removal of houses in Stewart Street, Apu Street and Endeavour Street. It incorporated the land occupied by Rongotai College, hence the provision on the plan of two alternative sites on land which at that time was part of the golf course. The proposed newly expanded aerodrome also included the land intended as the site of the Centennial Exhibition.⁴¹

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Any doubts the Committee had about the acceptability of their recommendations, were well founded. The Minister would have been horrified. The prospect of removing a college, taking a golf course, relocating sports facilities, but above all, uplifting almost 200 houses and moving them to another site, causing disruption to some 200 families, was alarming. Not only was the disruption a worry, but the cost of acquiring all those properties, moving them and the associated facilities such as roading, sewerage, gas and electrical services, and stormwater drains, seems to have been unthinkable politically so far as the Government was concerned.

The housing situation had been causing the Government considerable concern. In September 1937, the Minister of Finance, Walter Nash, presented his budget, and one of the first items raised was the shortage of housing. He reminded parliament that a national housing survey was currently being undertaken, and while the results would not be available for several months, it was obvious there was an acute shortage of suitable housing due to the reduced building activity during the previous twenty years. Improving economic conditions and the increased marriage rate had raised the demand for houses to such an extent that normal private enterprise activities were inadequate to meet the need and Government felt it necessary to become involved in the construction of accommodation. He had provided £3,000,000 for this, of which £1,500,000 would be spent by 31 March, 1938.⁴² Contracts had been let by the Housing Construction Department for 1118 houses, of which 385 were in the Wellington district, an indication that housing was particularly short in Wellington. Expansion of housing construction was however limited by a shortage of skilled labour.⁴³

The Housing Construction Department was under the immediate control of the Parliamentary Undersecretary to the Minister of Finance, J. A. Lee, a very vigorous politician. In his diary for 11 August, 1937, Lee noted that the allocation of houses continued to be a source of dissatisfaction. This was bound to be the case as a few hundred houses could not satisfy the need of thousands.⁴⁴ Three weeks later, he was disappointed at the slow progress in construction.⁴⁵

The report of the Investigating Committee seems to have been placed in the 'too hard' basket and consideration was deferred. It was not until six months later, on 31 August, 1938, that a meeting was arranged at which members of the Committee met Semple and other ministers to discuss their recommendations. Following this meeting, the Committee revised its proposal and on 21 September, 1938 an amended suggestion was forwarded to the Minister of Defence. It is likely that Government's attitude was affected by the election due in a few weeks as housing was an important political issue. Moreover, the Labour leadership had a genuine concern at the housing needs of people. Financial considerations could also have had a strong influence on their decision; money was short and the plan envisaged substantial government expenditure for several years.

The revised plan did not vary much from the original design, but suggested upgrading the airfield in stages with the objective of improving its operational characteristics and postponing as far as possible the necessity for the bulk of the rehousing and reclamation.⁴⁶ The proposed modifications retained the desirability of having the two east-west runways lengthened to 1300 and 1400 yards respectively, but reduced the suggested north-south runway to about 750 yards. This would still involve the use of the Centennial Exhibition site, the removal of Rongotai College and a few houses.⁴⁷

The Investigating Committee recognised this modified scheme would not provide an aerodrome up to the standard they believed appropriate, but they had to accept the Government's decision. They had not abandoned the idea of a north-south runway across the isthmus, but accepted they would have to be satisfied with a shorter one in that direction and the lengthening of the existing runways, which would improve the airfield to some extent. To implement this lesser scheme they reiterated their recommendation that the small triangular area of the golf course be acquired to permit the extension of one east-west runway.⁴⁸

The Committee stressed the urgency of the matter, and asked the Air Secretary to raise it again with the Minister or the W.C.C., impressing them with the need to acquire the land for the runway extension quickly so that the work of levelling and grassing could begin. It wrote that the runway extension was needed because the growth in traffic at peak periods '...such as at last Christmas makes this first stage more than ever necessary....'⁴⁹ Moreover, a great increase in flights was expected for the Centennial Exhibition.

The Committee made no reference to the advantages of an improved airfield for defence purposes. Nevertheless this must have been in the mind of the Minister of Defence, F. Jones, who was responsible for both civil and military aviation. At the opening of the Nelson airport in 1937, Semple had said that while he had no authority for defence, '...Each addition to civil air strength adds to our air defence.... The development of landing fields ... strengthens the plan of air defence....'⁵⁰ In May 1938, Hitler moved troops to the Czechoslovakian border and Czechoslovakian troops had moved to defensive positions at the border to counter the threat to their country's sovereignty.

The delay in making a decision on Rongotai is, however, understandable. Developing it seems to have been politically unpalatable, undoubtedly because of the housing shortage, despite the dangerous international situation. Paraparaumu, the emergency airfield for Wellington, was being developed and this could no doubt be considered as providing some measure of air defence for Wellington. While this landing ground was ostensibly for civilian purposes, it is likely expenditure on airfields was one of the factors which persuaded Lee to write that '...Cabinet [is] engaging in a debauch of military expenditure....'⁵¹ In November, 1938 Jones announced the purchase of 250 second - hand planes from Britain at 'junk' prices.⁵²

In his report for the year ended 31 March 1939, the Controller of Civil Aviation, T. M. Wilkes, stated that the deliberations of the Investigating Committee were under consideration by the Government.⁵³ There are indications that the Chairman, Wood, as Engineer in Chief of the Public Works

Department, had been discussing it with Semple, because on 1 May, 1939 he wrote asking him to '...please instruct me regarding the calling of a meeting...' with the ministers concerned on upgrading the aerodrome.⁵⁴ In his memorandum, the Chairman wrote that the Minister

...would remember that Pilot Members of the Rongotai Airport Committee had stressed very strongly that there...[was]...no adequate margin of safety at Rongotai ... and that, in the event of an engine failure, a disaster involving loss of life...[was]...almost certain.⁵⁵

On 31 May notice of a meeting between the Committee and members of Cabinet was sent out, fixing the date of the meeting as 15 June, 1939.⁵⁶

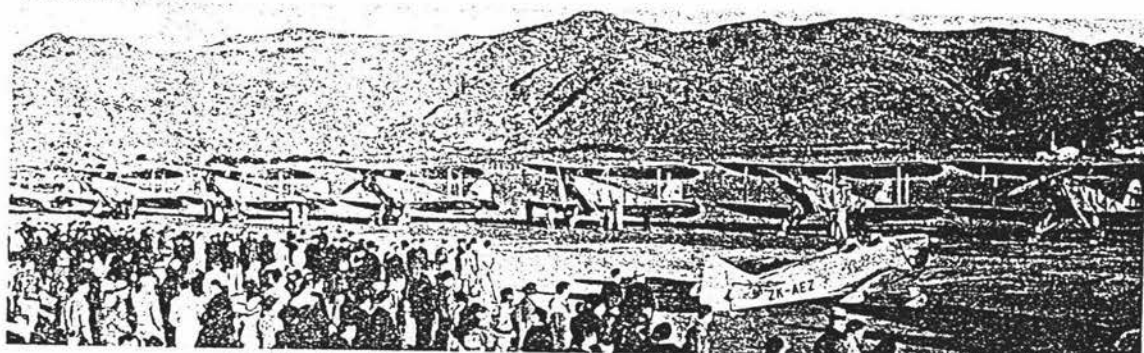
This might seem a lengthy period if the dangers were as great as indicated, but even if they were as stated action to remove them would take a considerable time. The acquisition of land, levelling and grassing would be time-consuming. In particular, the grass for the runways could not be sown satisfactorily until the spring and then would need time to become established; planes landing on grass could easily ruin it, particularly if the ground was wet and muddy and the grass not well grown with a strong root system.

As mentioned above, the Committee had been asking that urgency be afforded the acquisition of a small piece of the golf course. However, as late as 20 June, 1939 no action had been taken to acquire it as on that date the Miramar Golf Club asked about the intentions of Government regarding their land. Rumours had been circulating that their land was under threat and they wanted some information on the matter.⁵⁷ The Club committee could well be concerned. The international situation was causing worry; only twelve weeks later the Governor-General issued the War Regulations and proclaimed a state of emergency. Anyone with land contiguous with an airfield had every right to feel concerned.

Rongotai was causing Wood some concern, and as Engineer in Chief of the Public Works Department he suggested to his Minister that in view

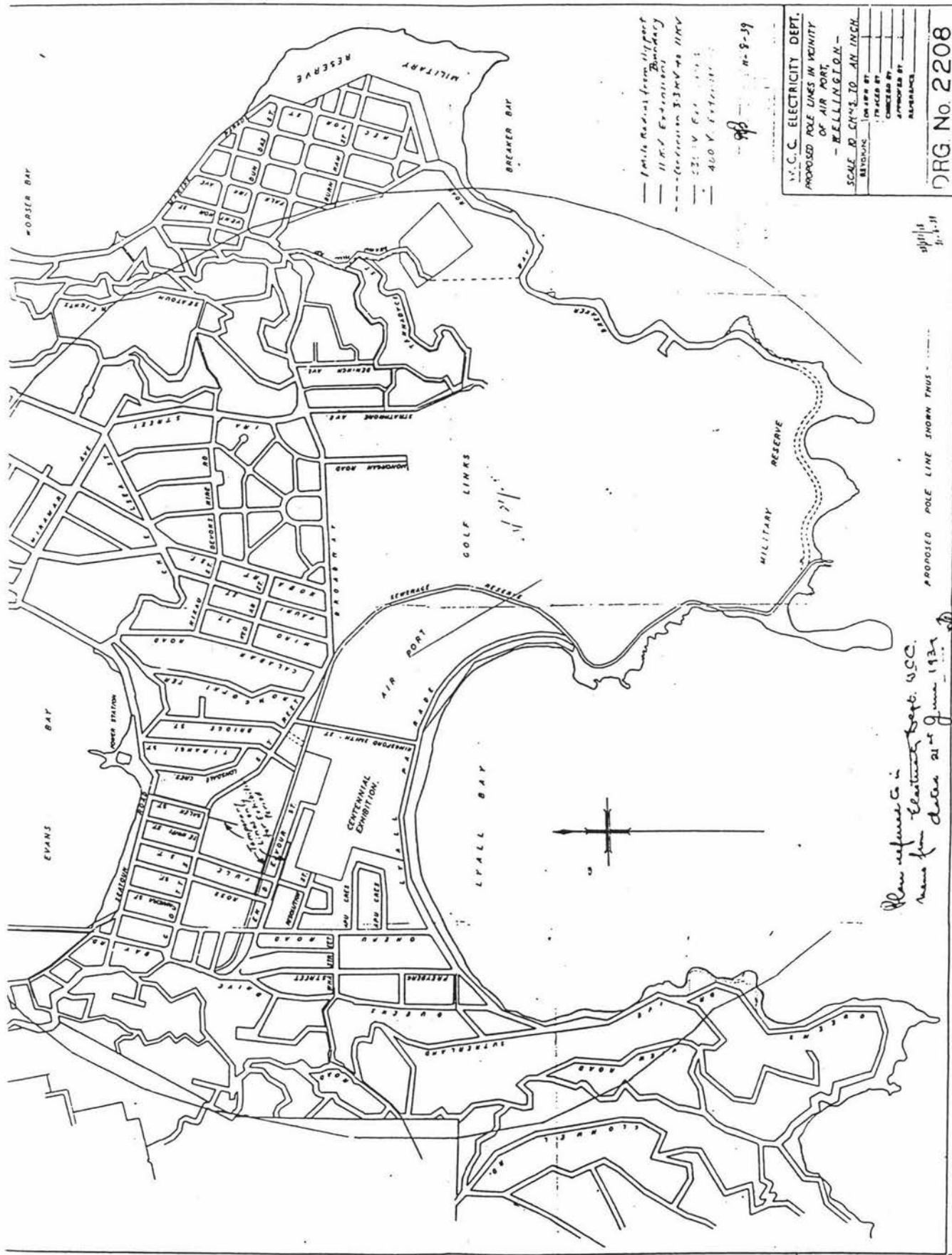
of the considerable time involved and the complexity of the issues that the Minister confer with the Minister of Defence to see if a Standing Committee of Cabinet should be set up to consider the whole question of Rongotai as an airport.⁵⁸

While he did not expressly refer to defence requirements and the likely use of the airfield for air force operations, this must have been in his mind. Rongotai was the base of a fully operational territorial air force squadron and the international situation at that time was causing concern. New Zealand was at war only two months later.



Wellington Territorial Squadron, R.N.Z.A.F. 1938.

Parallel with the recommendation of the Furkert committee on Rongotai had been the recommendation that an auxiliary emergency aerodrome be constructed north of Paekakariki.⁵⁹ No specific site seems to have been recommended for the emergency landing ground, but Paraparaumu was selected. This had been agreed to by the Government and progress had been much better than on the Rongotai proposal. The site was 'bare land', with no houses or schools to be acquired or moved. Construction work at Paraparaumu began in July, 1939, using machinery transferred from Whenuapai, Auckland⁶⁰ and in his annual report of the year ended 31 March, 1940 Flt. Lt. J. M. Buckeridge, the Acting Controller of Civil Aviation, reported that '...the preparation of an emergency landing ground for Wellington has been completed at Paraparaumu....'⁶¹ He also recorded that the construction and maintenance of civil aerodromes had been continued until war was declared, following which airfields and aircraft had been taken over by the New Zealand Air Force.⁶² The Minister of Works, however, was more reticent in his 1940 Annual Report to Parliament which merely stated that since the outbreak of hostilities, the prime objective of his department in aerodrome



construction was to accelerate their completion.⁶³

The period 1934 to 1939 clearly indicates the political nature of the project. Those who initiated the investigation, the Wellington Chamber of Commerce, wanted an airport which they believed would give them commercial advantages, so they selected a committee which would undoubtedly support their objectives. The W.C.C. was also in favour of the development, but was unable to persuade its ratepayers to support the scheme initially because of a general unwillingness to spend on new projects. Many could not see any benefit accruing to them, unemployment was still high and some people had not recovered from the depression. The Government too wanted an improved airfield and defence must have been an important factor, but it was concerned because of the housing problems and the need to demolish a reasonably new college. Housing was an important issue for the Government and the area was a predominantly working class one which supported it, in contrast to those proposing the development who were the wealthier citizens. The Government adopted the well-tried political manoeuvre to justify blocking, or delaying action on controversial issues; at the suggestion of Gibson, one of the original proponents, it set up an investigating committee of experts to examine the proposals. Gibson selected a committee which comprised people who would undoubtedly support the proposal. This placed the decision back with the Government, which deferred making a decision on Rongotai, but did start construction on the auxiliary field at Paraparaumu in 1939, thus avoiding the political problems associated with developing Rongotai. The start of World War II in September halted consideration of civilian aerodromes; military needs became paramount and consideration of the development of Rongotai as a civil airfield was no longer appropriate.

CHAPTER 4 WARTIME AND POST WAR DEVELOPMENTS TO LATE 1948

With the advent of war and the consequent taking over of the aerodrome by the Government, civilian operations were severely reduced but military use increased. Details of the extensions to the airfield are unclear, but extensions required by the Royal New Zealand Air Force (R.N.Z.A.F.) were made. The Wellington City Council (W.C.C.) did some of the work needed and towards the end of hostilities started planning for peace time requirements.

After the war ended, it took some months for normal civilian activities to be restored, but when they were the argument on whether or not to develop Rongotai was resumed. The aerodrome was closed in September, 1947 because it was considered too dangerous to use; the runways were too short, they were breaking up with constant use and the grass was worn. The Wellington Chamber of Commerce and the Wellington City Council (W.C.C.) were still in favour of developing Rongotai and the Miramar Golf Club said it had to support its development if that was in the national interest. The Wellington Harbour Board (W.H.B.) was prepared to support it but wanted the Government to establish a flying-boat base in conjunction with the Rongotai development and residents in the vicinity had varied opinions but many objected to the noise and dangers, as did the Rongotai College authorities who wanted new facilities before construction of the new airport was begun. Support was also given by air lines which complained about the increased cost of operating from Paraparaumu and travellers who objected to the extra cost of travelling to Paraparaumu and the time taken to get to and from that airport.

Despite the problems the Government identified, particularly with housing, a decision was taken to go ahead with the development of Rongotai and negotiations between Government agencies and all interested groups were initiated. After believing they were proceeding satisfactorily, Government broke off negotiations in August, 1948 because it considered the W.C.C. requests to be excessive.

In its report of 14 February, 1938,¹ the Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee had recommended the construction of a runway across the isthmus with complete sea level access at both ends. It seems they were keeping their options open. They were of course, dealing with the provision of runways for land-based aircraft, but there was some public support for long-range flying-boats which could use Wellington Harbour for landing, and the development of amphibian aircraft was also progressing. The latter could land on the harbour and then taxi to a land based terminal.

Wellington Harbour had been used for landing a Centaurus flying boat in 1937² and as far back as 1934 Imperial Airways had been negotiating to extend its Mediterranean flying-boat service through to Australia and then on to New Zealand.³ However, there was little enthusiasm for developing Wellington Harbour as a flying-boat base. The Controller of Civil Aviation, T. M. Wilkes, advised the Minister of Defence that an expert committee had come to the conclusion it would be unwise to attempt the regular operation of flying-boats from Wellington Harbour because of the weather conditions prevailing there.. Nevertheless it had expressed the view that with the rapid development of flying-boats, the time might not be far distant when such aircraft could be operated from Wellington.⁴ Eventually, flying-boats were to operate from Wellington Harbour, but only for a limited period from 1950 to 1954, after which they gave way to land based aircraft.⁵

During the war, civil flying had been almost entirely suspended. There had been some severely reduced commercial air services between the main centres and Rongotai was one of the airfields used.⁶ Demand

for the very restricted services into Rongotai was very high and planes linking Wellington with other centres were usually booked out many months in advance.⁷ At the outbreak of war, all civil aerodromes and aircraft had been taken over by the Government, which had assumed responsibility for their operation and maintenance. The wartime requirements of the air force had necessitated the extension and upgrading of many airfields. On their return to local authority control, these improved facilities were of great value to civil aviation because in almost every case the extensions incorporated in the aerodromes were retained. Rongotai was one of the aerodromes which had been extended, and its importance as the hub the civil aviation network ensured it did not lose its additional area.⁸ When the Government had taken over Rongotai it comprised some eighty-five acres, but by August 1945, it had expanded to one hundred and six acres.⁹ This was the aerodrome handed back to the W.C.C.



No. 42 Squadron, R.N.Z.A.F. circa 1942

Although the aerodrome had been taken over by the Government at the outbreak of war, the W.C.C. was still involved in its maintenance and improvement. During the twelve months ending 31 March, 1940 the W.C.C. had an account named 'Airport Extension Account' which showed that

£6,100 had been transferred from the City's General Account and £6,680 had been received from the Government. £7,516 had been spent during the 1939-1940 year.¹⁰ Aerodrome drainage was important and when a problem arose in mid 1940, it was agreed that improvements to the system should be made at a cost of £18,000 to be paid for by W.C.C. £6,500, Public Works Department £6,500 and Labour Department Subsidy £5,000.¹¹ The proposal to realign Kingsford Smith Street and take in some of the exhibition grounds and private property, a proposal which had been rejected by the ratepayers in 1937, was considered again in 1940. This would lengthen the runways East/West to 1000 yards, Northeast/Southwest to 800 yards and Southsoutheast/Northnorthwest to 850 yards.¹² The street was to be realigned at Government expense.¹³ Further work planned involved some reclamation in Lyall Bay with spoil from Moa Point hill,¹⁴ (thus reducing the hazard it presented), incorporating land taken from the Miramar Golf Course and some sand dunes near Moa Point thereby doubling the length of the existing North/South runway to 1000 yards. This extended the flying field by 10 acres.¹⁵ In June 1940 it was decided to go ahead with this extension, but as the closure of Kingsford Smith Street would cause problems of access for some people and as roads were under the control of the local authority, it was suggested that the closure be arranged in the normal way by the controlling authority, the W.C.C. The Mayor, T. C. A. Hislop, did not agree with this; no doubt he could see it would affect him politically as some residents would be inconvenienced. His attitude was that if the Government wanted to close the street, they should do it, not expect the City Council to do it.¹⁶ In March 1941, the Minister of Defence agreed to close Kingsford Smith Street and advised the W.C.C. and Public Works Department that Air Department was taking the land under Sec.6(1)(c) of the Defence Emergency Regulations 1939.¹⁷ In June, property fronting the street which was also required was '...to be purchased...' according to the W.C.C. Airport Committee.¹⁸

Although it must have been obvious to Wellington businessmen that Rongotai was being developed, some members of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce did not believe sufficient was being done to ensure a satisfactory airport would be available after the war. The Chamber discussed the desirability of having a proclamation over land deemed necessary to extend the

airport for full commercial use after the war. Hislop did not want to embarrass the Government or the Air Department during the war, but felt that safeguarding the area around Rongotai for later development was important. C. J. S. Harcourt, a land agent, was less enthusiastic.¹⁹ The President of the Chamber, R H. Nimmo, said the question of a proclamation over the area had been raised with the Prime Minister '...who was reluctant to exercise a proclamation because of the necessity of sweeping away a number of houses when the airport extension scheme was carried out and thus making the housing situation even more acute....'²⁰

The Chamber of Commerce persisted in its attempts to have the land secured for future development at Rongotai and urged the Government to take the area bounded by Salek Street, Yule Street, the aerodrome and Evans Bay. Harcourt estimated the cost of the land at £300,000 based on Government valuation plus 25%. The Chamber considered this a small amount and noted that much of the money would be recovered by fronting the land until it was needed. Captain S. Holm, of the Holm Shipping Company, commented that shipping companies would expect to pay £1,000,000 for a passenger ship that would last only 28 years. The recommendation was not unanimous, M. M. F. Luckie feeling the city could not afford to lose 200-300 houses.²¹

The same names keep appearing in different positions. Councillor Nimmo, President of the Chamber of Commerce, raised the issue at a W.C.C. meeting saying the Government should be urged to ensure the adequate development and extension of Rongotai to meet future needs. His stance was supported by Hislop, member of the Chamber of Commerce and a one time president of the Wellington Aero Club, Councillor F. W. Furkert, member of the Chamber of Commerce, Councillor C. M. Bowden, subsequently Associate Minister of Finance, Councillor W Appleton, later mayor and member of the W.H.B., and Councillor E. M. Gilmer, daughter of the former prime minister, R. J. Seddon.²²

Some members of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce were unhappy at what they believed to be the apparent lack of urgency shown by

the W.C.C. in improving Rongotai. They suggested removing control from the City and vesting it in a separate Airport Board. With so many members of the Chamber of Commerce executive committee also City Councillors, the motion was unlikely to succeed and an amendment to the proposal was passed that before any change in control be considered, a careful appraisal of the financial implications of a separate board be examined.²³ No further action to promote the establishment of a separate board has been noted, and no change in control eventuated.

The W.C.C. Airport Committee kept the question of peace time requirements in mind and held a combined meeting with representatives of the W.H.B., Air Department and airlines. The meeting unanimously agreed that Rongotai could not be used by 20 seater passenger planes without considerable improvement and that such planes were the smallest needed to provide for post-war traffic. These would require a runway across the isthmus from Lyall Bay to Evans Bay. It was resolved that a deputation should wait on the Minister of Defence to ask for a subsidy for the work and for '...the release of the Commission report....'²⁴ The report referred to seems to have been that made to the Minister in February 1938 which recommended the construction of a runway across the isthmus.²⁵

The City Engineer was asked to prepare a scheme for the progressive development of Rongotai and when this was available, a combined deputation from the W.C.C., the W.H.B. and the Wellington Chamber of Commerce would wait on the minister.²⁶ It would obviously be very expensive to implement the plan produced and this could have been why Sir Charles Norwood said Rongotai was to a great extent a New Zealand airport and that the Government should be called upon to assist in its development. The W.H.B. representatives at the meeting urged that a seaplane base be provided at Evans Bay in addition to Rongotai.²⁷

The W.C.C. Airport Committee continued to seek progress and reported that the Prime Minister had been asked to consult with the 1937 Commission to see if any subsequent aircraft developments had occurred to alter their recommendations.²⁸ After investigation it was decided that to provide a

satisfactory airport at Rongotai, there was no alternative but to encroach on the residential area to the north of Coutts Street. However, considerable improvement could be made without encroaching on the residential area. Development could be made in stages, the first of which would be the demolition of Rongotai College and the buildings on the Centennial Exhibition site. Eventually, it would be necessary to demolish houses on Coutts, Salek and Te Whiti Streets and Seatoun Road..²⁹

A significant development at Rongotai during the war was the establishment of the de Havilland aircraft factory. Until 1940, there was no organised attempt to manufacture aircraft in New Zealand, but in that year, de Havillands set up a production line for Tiger Moths at Rongotai. These planes were fairly simple to make and suitable craftsmen were available to manufacture them. They were used as training aircraft and four hundred had been produced by the end of the war. There were many other types of de Havilland planes in service in New Zealand and the factory situated on Rongotai aerodrome was used to maintain and modify them until 1958.³⁰ This had resulted in a great number of planes using the airfield and undoubtedly had significantly increased wear on the runways. With the closure of Rongotai in 1947, planes had to land at Paraparaumu and be transported by road for servicing but this was costly and time consuming, factors that caused air lines to want the development of Rongotai to proceed.

At the end of the war, most commercial services were operated by the R.N.Z.A.F., using Dakota transports.³¹ The transfer to civilian airlines was completed on 1 April, 1947 when the N. Z. National Airways Corporation (NAC) commenced operations by taking over the routes operated by the previous airlines and the R.N.Z.A.F.³² Demand for civil air services increased and Rongotai became a busy aerodrome. However, the grass runways were small, worn, and patched with turf, and only a limited number of pilots and planes could use them.³³ Despite the Government providing an annual allocation of grass seed and fertiliser, the aerodrome was closed to all but light and medium sized aircraft operations on 27 September, 1947 after only two years of peace time use. '...Except for sporadic air taxi work, it ceased to be a commercial airfield....'³⁴



New Zealand National Airways Corporation passenger and freight handling facilities on the resumption of civil aviation circa 1947

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This is the plan of the Wellington city engineer, Mr. K. E. Luke, for the development of Rongotai airport from its present area of 106 acres to 180 acres. The city council, subject to the Government's consent, has given notice of intention to take the Miramar golf links of 84 acres, and the areas marked E, G and H on the plan. Part of the golf links will be used for the relocation of houses affected. There is room for a maximum of 300 houses, plus a limited number of football grounds at the south end. There are 48 houses and one gymnasium affected in the blocks marked E and G, and 126 houses, two shops and five factory buildings in block H. Notice of intention to take in respect of blocks C (15 houses) and D (45 houses and one pavilion) has not yet been decided by the council. It is proposed, in the city engineer's report, to provide a site for Rongotai College by acquiring 41 acres of undeveloped land, owned by the Miramar Golf Club, and marked "proposed site" on the plan. The site proposed in the 1938 Commission's report is marked "originally proposed site." As stated by Cr. B. J. Todd, airport committee chairman, decision on a new site for the college rests with the Wellington Colleges Board of Governors and the

This was not an unexpected decision. Concern about the state of the aerodrome had been evident for several months and worries about the failure to make progress with the development had inspired a newspaper headline that a '...Dead Hand Is Still On Rongotai....'³⁵ Not all people were worried about the lack of progress, however, as there was a strong lobby against its development. Only two weeks after the *Evening Post* 'Dead Hand' article was published, the *Dominion* carried a news item that the '...Rongotai Residents Seek Abandonment Of Aerodrome Plan....' Of 54 speakers at a residents' meeting, only 2 spoke in favour of the airport development. It was noted that a poll was to be held to see if the Wellington Zoo should be upgraded but no poll was planned for the airport proposal; the W.C.C. seemed to have more concern for animals than people. Mrs. C.A. Birchfield, President of the Rongotai-Kilbirnie-Lyall Bay Residents' Association, said both the senior and junior Chambers of Commerce and the W.C.C. approved of the airport development, but these groups '...represented wealthy monopoly interests which were more concerned with their own welfare than the peoples....'³⁶ The plan the Rongotai residents wanted abandoned was the resurrected 1937 Salek Street plan which would have removed about two hundred houses, demolished Rongotai College, taken over the Miramar golf course and reclaimed land in Evans Bay.



Airport lounge at Paraparaumu, 1951. Passengers were usually wealthy, hence the quality of the furniture.

No action had been taken to demolish Rongotai College during the war, but once the war had ended, the Rongotai College Parents' Association believed its school to be at risk and decided to inspect the proposed sites for the new college. The College Board then sent a deputation to the Minister of Public Works, R. Semple. They viewed the existing site of the college as unsuitable. There was a danger from aeroplanes and their noise was too great. Also, the site was too exposed to wind and the property was used by many people as a rubbish dump. Furthermore, the golf course which had been proposed as a site was also unsuitable in that it was too close to the aerodrome and might still be wanted for aerodrome development in the future. A much better site in their opinion was at Moa Point, which was sheltered and only half a mile from a tram route. While this was further from the population centre it was preferable to take the children to the school rather than take the school to the children because the site was so much better, including land available to provide playing fields.³⁷

Semple agreed and said he would take the matter up with the Prime Minister and H. G. R. Mason, the Minister of Education.³⁸ Next day, the College Principal, H. A. Herron, wrote to his College Board setting out his assessment of the alternative sites. He was in no doubt that the Moa Point location was the better.³⁹ As promised, Semple conveyed the concerns of the College Board to P. Fraser, the Prime Minister, who wrote to the Acting Minister of Education, A. H. Nordmeyer. Fraser thought the matter was urgent. He felt the school would need a gymnasium, assembly hall and cafeteria and the Government could at least lay the foundations of a school that would be '...a model for post-primary education....'⁴⁰ If a quick decision was taken, a start could be made before the election later in the year. While the Board favoured the Moa Point site, C. E. Beeby of the Education Department was not convinced.⁴¹ Subsequently, the Parents' Association Chairman said his members were prepared to accept the golf links site so they could '...work in harmony with the department's policy....'⁴²

The Prime Minister thought there would be no difficulty in issuing a proclamation over the Golf Club land and the Chairman of the Rongotai College Parents' Association said that while only forty days notice was required for

a proclamation to take effect, that would hardly be reasonable. Fraser said the '...first step would be to approach the golf club. The matter would be pushed ahead as soon as possible....'⁴³

The W.C.C. Airport Committee was quite aware of the airfield's shortcomings, and despite the controversy on whether or not development should proceed, in July 1947 it decided to consider the state of the airport at its September meeting.⁴⁴ This decision was taken only two months before the Government ordered the airport's closure. A newspaper report of the intention to raise the issue indicates that the outcome of the Airport Committee's deliberations had already been determined because it stated that following the meeting the Committee would discuss the question with the W.H.B. and the Wellington Chamber of Commerce. It indicated that the purpose of these discussions was to see if a joint course of action was appropriate. It was thought a likely decision would be to form a deputation to wait on the Government to see if progress could be made on the development of the aerodrome.⁴⁵ From the amount of information available to the public before the meeting, it seems its only purpose would be to decide on the detail of the negotiating strategy and those who would represent the City Council.

The Wellington Chamber of Commerce had not altered its opinion on the need for development.⁴⁶ No official decision had been made to go ahead with the scheme, but in the Public Works Department, engineers were already making preliminary preparations for the project. As early as June, the Department was preparing drawings of a wave maker to simulate the scouring effects of various types of wave formation on a model of the foreshore.⁴⁷

The Government had been under pressure to make a decision on Rongotai, not only from the W.C.C., but also from the National Opposition, which raised the matter persistently. C. G. E. Harker, M.P. for Hawkes Bay, asked what was being done to develop civil aerodromes to cater for the heavier types of aircraft being brought into service, and in particular, what was being done in regard to the Rongotai aerodrome.⁴⁸ The Minister, F Jones, replied

that many suggestions had been received for improving Rongotai, but some of these involved the removal of houses. Nevertheless, consideration was being given to improving the landing facilities at the aerodrome.⁴⁹

Later that day, T. P. Shand, M.P. for Marlborough referred to Harker's question and the Minister's reply. He said the airfield was much the same as it had been ten years earlier and the pilots using it wanted to know what was going to be done, first as a temporary measure to alleviate the problem caused by Moa Point and second for permanent improvement.⁵⁰ Jones agreed that if there was any danger at Rongotai, steps should be taken to remove it. The difficulty with Paraparaumu was that it took an hour to get from Wellington and the nearness of Rongotai was an asset to the city. Under the 1937 scheme it had been intended to have the road and tramway pass under the airstrip through a tunnel. It was now thought the road could use a tunnel and the trams be diverted, but the moving of houses and Rongotai College would entail a lot of work.⁵¹ Housing was still a problem. Nationally, there were more than fifty three thousand applicants for state housing outstanding at that time.⁵²

Lobbying of the Government was intensifying and the *Dominion* had a very forthright editorial headed '...Delaying An Important Decision....' It referred to the Minister as very reticent on the matter and claimed the saving in time involved by people travelling to and from Australia was largely wasted because of the time taken travelling between Wellington and Auckland. The Minister had not made a decision despite the vast amount of data available to him. He was guilty of '...unwarrantable procrastination...' and had said he was setting up a technical committee to advise him. Surely his Department could keep him informed; he ought to have all the information at his fingertips of such basic matters as the location needed for airports. It suggested that perhaps further consideration should be given to the installation of a flying-boat service.⁵³

The facilities used by the airlines were also deteriorating. The NAC wrote asking the Public Works Department Engineer-in-Chief enquiring about the renovation of the buildings it occupied on the airfield. No action was

taken on the request and a note on the letter dated only some six weeks before the closure notice was issued read '...Hold pending major decision....'⁵⁴ The staff of the Public Works Department clearly believed something was about to be determined regarding the airport.

The Government was under severe pressure from the Opposition to do something about Rongotai. Shand, supported mainly by Wellington members, was the main protagonist. He quoted expert opinion that the airfield was dangerous to both the travelling public and people living or working nearby. Jones again expressed concern that development could result in the eviction of 250 families and implied the allegations of danger were exaggerated because in 10 years, 376,177 passengers had been carried without death or injury and that de Havillands had used the airfield for several years without accident. Shand pressed for a policy statement from the Government setting out its intentions.⁵⁵

The Chairman of the W.C.C. Aerodrome Committee at that time was Sir Leonard Isitt, a director of NAC who had become Chairman of Tasman Empire Air Lines (TEAL) in 1946.⁵⁶ He was not happy with the lack of progress and wrote to the Wellington City Engineer asking him the costs that would be incurred in developing Rongotai.⁵⁷ A copy of this letter was made available to the Engineer in Chief of the Public Works Department to keep him informed of the City Council's activities.

Rongotai was in a parlous state and the very day Sir Leonard Isitt asked for costs to be prepared a closing order issued by the Minister took effect and Wellington traffic was diverted to Paraparaumu. This intensified the argument that had been simmering for years on whether Rongotai should be developed or abandoned and Paraparaumu developed as the airport to serve Wellington. The closure was none too soon. Just before it was effected a Lodestar with a full complement of passengers had an engine failure just after taking off. Luckily, the pilot managed to avoid the hills and return to land safely.⁵⁸

The closing order stimulated action. Whatever was done would involve considerable expenditure and the Commissioner of Works advised the Treasury that an investigation into the costs of developing Rongotai and Paraparaumu was necessary. Treasury wanted to know how long development would take, the types of planes that would be able to use Rongotai, the costs of altering city services and construction and operating costs of Paraparaumu and Rongotai (to Class "C"), singly or in combination, with each other.⁵⁹

The costs of building a new college had already been sought from the Government Architect.⁶⁰ A rough overall estimate had been prepared based on a projection of a 1950 secondary school population of seven to eight hundred pupils and an intermediate population of six hundred pupils. These estimates totalled £550,000. The amount quoted excluded the cost of ground levelling, roading and services such as water, sewerage, gas and electricity supplies, which would vary dependent upon the site chosen.⁶¹

Later, the Government Architect prepared estimates for the building requirements of the Air Department for traffic control, meteorological and communication services, and the requirements of NAC and the W.C.C. The engineers estimated the amount of earthworks necessary to provide a runway four thousand seven hundred and seventy feet long and three hundred feet wide, would cost approximately £248,175.⁶² A decision on the aerodrome seemed imminent; at least the engineers of the Public Works Department thought so. It is not clear if they had been advised to look into the matter by the Minister, or whether they were acting on their own initiative. It could well be the latter, as the fact that the Department was controlled by engineers leads to a suspicion that it was dominated by the thinking of engineers whose solutions to problems would likely be engineering ones. This does not imply their views were incorrect, merely that their views could have a particular emphasis. Estimates were well in hand⁶³ but no model of the proposed airport was available. A model had been prepared some years earlier but it had been chopped up and used for kindling⁶⁴ presumably in the belief that it was no longer relevant.

From October 1947 there seems to have been little public demand for information until the end of January 1948 when the press protested at the delays and said it was time the authorities made up their minds.⁶⁵ The newspapers went on to say that the W.C.C. was being hindered by the failure of the Government to give it a firm decision. The Mayor, W. Appleton, said '...It was difficult ...to recall a matter of such great national importance on which there had been so much Government procrastination....'⁶⁶ It was not only the airport that was being delayed; people wishing to develop property in the area were also disadvantaged, although it was agreed in February that the flour mill at Miramar could be erected up to a height of one hundred and twenty feet because this would comply with the flightpath restrictions even if the airport did go ahead.

The lack of definite information was very worrying to the residents of the area. The Kilbirnie-Lyall Bay Residents' Association wrote to the Prime Minister asking for information on the likelihood of their having to move, and details of the property which would be involved.⁶⁷ This letter was followed up by a deputation to the Prime Minister, delivering a letter setting out their understanding of the situation which was that the Government would acquire the whole of the Miramar Golf Club land. That land would be used for the new Rongotai College, the building of a number of state houses and the re-erection of houses moved for airport extension.⁶⁸ E. R. McKillop, the Commissioner of Works, replied some six weeks later that the matter had been discussed with the Prime Minister, that the engineering proposals of the W.C.C. had been considered and preliminary negotiations on their implementation had commenced. However, the matters raised by the Residents' Association involved policy which would have to be considered by the Government.⁶⁹ The Prime Minister replied to the Residents' Association in similar terms a week later.⁷⁰

In the meantime, the Rongotai College Parents' Association had written to Semple asking for the college move to be effected before the existing college buildings were demolished.⁷¹ The parents do not seem to have had much confidence in the Government; they presumably felt the decision on new buildings for the college might be delayed and the pupils dispersed to other colleges. Two

days after the Parents' Association letter was sent, oral approval was given for the acquisition of the Golf Club land at a meeting of Prime Minister P. Fraser, Minister of Finance W. Nash, Minister of Education T. H. McCombs, and representatives of all Departments concerned. Of that land, fifty-eight acres were for educational purposes and sketch plans of the proposed buildings had been prepared. These had received general approbation and further plans were to be prepared. At the meeting, Fraser had reiterated he wanted the matter dealt with urgently and Education Department understood the Commissioner of Works had been directed accordingly.⁷²

Following the meeting with the deputation from the Kilbirnie-Lyall Bay Residents' Association representatives, the Prime Minister held a meeting in his office to discuss Rongotai with the Ministers of Finance and Defence and representatives of W.C.C. and Education and Public Works Departments. It was decided that the Government would operate the aerodrome on its completion and find the major part of the cost of construction. The golf links would be used for a new Rongotai College, intermediate school and cultural centre. The Commissioner of Works was instructed to enter into negotiations with the Golf Club on the purchase of its land, and with the W.C.C. for the aerodrome property, streets and sites for removed houses. He was also required to find out what services the City would provide and shift at its expense, and to negotiate with the W.H.B. for rights to reclaim land in Evans Bay and remove property to provide for the reclamation.⁷³

A press release was now made to the effect that negotiations had begun with all interested parties following the Government's decision to endorse Rongotai as the airport for Wellington. These negotiations would be complicated because the existing airport was owned and operated by the W.C.C. The Council would also be involved in providing roads, sewers, power, water and other services, which would require substantial alteration. Also the airport needed much reclamation in Evans Bay, which was controlled by the W.H.B. which also owned land needed to provide spoil. There were many householders who would be affected by the scheme and Government intended approaching all of them

individually. It would also be necessary to move Rongotai College. The press release emphasised that the scheme was only in the preliminary stages and further investigations were being arranged. These were of a technical nature and involved taking samples of spoil, test bores etc.⁷⁴

A meeting then occurred between the Chief Land Purchase Officer of the Public Works Department, H. J. Voice and W.C.C. representatives. While the meeting was informal, it comprised persons with great influence, including the Commissioner of Works, the Engineer in Chief and the Chief Land Purchase Officer of the Department and the Mayor, Councillor Furkert, the Acting City Engineer and the Town Clerk.

The Department proposed that the existing aerodrome and facilities, the streets to be incorporated into the aerodrome, land for housing relocation and spoil be provided by the City at no charge and the City meet the costs of relocating water, sewers etc. The Crown would accept responsibility for land purchase matters and shifting houses. It was also suggested a Technical Committee be set up to collaborate on technical matters. The proposals were received sympathetically by the City Council representatives who were left to take them for consideration by the full Council. It is not surprising the Council members were sympathetic to the proposals. The Technical Committee was to comprise the District Engineer, Public Works Department as Chairman, the Wellington City Engineer, the W.H.B. Engineer and the Public Works Department Aerodromes Engineer.⁷⁵

While the proposals had not yet been considered by the W.C.C., McKillop wrote to his senior officers advising them that if the Council and Harbour Board were generally in favour, Cabinet should be approached to approve formal proposals to the local authorities. He had telephoned the president of the Miramar Golf Club telling him of the Government's intention to acquire the golf links and that the Undersecretary of the Department had been instructed to take preliminary action to implement that decision. He also wrote that Education Department officers would be consulted on the design of Rongotai College.⁷⁶

The acquisition of houses was to proceed and they would be graded, the better quality to be moved to sites near the main gate of the exhibition grounds and the lesser quality to Moa Point or some other convenient site. Not all houses would have to be moved immediately.

Compensation would need to be paid to those whose property was being taken and when the basis for paying compensation had been established, the land purchase officers would have authority to act. However, the method of assessing compensation required the approval of Cabinet before an offer was made to any householder.⁷⁷ A few weeks later, Voice wrote that the terms were too generous. He assessed the estimated cost of developing the airport to be £1,053,000, but the costs to be met by the W.C.C. amounted to only £50,000, less than five percent. He apparently discounted the value of the existing airport because it would still be there; the only difference was the matter of control. He accepted that the airport would be of national importance but believed it to be of much greater importance to Wellington.⁷⁸

The Golf Club responded very quickly and a meeting was held on 1 June, 1948 between the Undersecretary and Voice from the Department and Messrs Bowden, (an M. P. as well as a member of the Golf Club), J. B. Hatrick and McLean of the Golf Club. At the meeting the Club representatives were reminded of the Government's intention to purchase its land. The Club members said their main concern was to reinstate the golf course on another suitable site, but that they had been unable to find one. They asked if the Government would consider providing Crown land between Paekakariki and Raumati South for their new course. The Departmental Officers undertook to put this to the Government if the Club wished to pursue it. They also said that the Department would prefer to pay for the land and leave the Club to reinstate itself, but assured them that the Department would '...assist in any way possible in regard to making machinery available or supporting applications for building permits, transport licences, etc....'⁷⁹ The Club decided it did wish to be provided with land and on 2 August, Cabinet approved that negotiations be entered into with representatives of the

Miramar Golf Club to acquire its land, and to consider the provision of land at Paekakariki for Club purposes.⁸⁰

The Technical Standing Committee suggested by the Department was set up with the proposed membership but the W.C.C. stipulated that the City Engineer was only permitted to consider technical matters.⁸¹ At its first meeting, the Committee decided on its terms of reference which were to examine the proposals in detail and make recommendations on their implementation. They were also to prepare costings of the various components of the project and co-ordinate construction and planning. F. Langbein, the Acting Commissioner of Works, approved the terms of reference,⁸² but it soon became obvious they were inadequate to properly control such a major undertaking. The Chairman, C. Langbein, District Engineer of the Public Works Department, asked that the role of the Committee be extended to having responsibility for pushing the whole job through to completion. His reason was that while the job itself was one major project, it comprised several major projects, each of which would require independent investigation, design reorganisation and estimating work. However, the Committee expected to be able to give a reasonably accurate overall estimate of cost so that an application to Cabinet for funds could be prepared. Detailed costs would be calculated for the various sections of the work so a check would be possible on the overall cost, and when necessary, financial adjustments made.⁸³

The rights and property of the W.H.B. would be affected by the extension to the airfield and the Commissioner of Works asked the Board if it would be prepared to relinquish its rights of reclamation in Evans Bay south of the proposed causeway road. The Board agreed to give up eighty-five acres south of the causeway without compensation, provided its rights to the north of the causeway were not affected. It also agreed to a request to make spoil for reclamation purposes to be taken from the Board's Aberdeen Quay property but this was conditional on the Crown taking over all the land owned by the Board between Seatoun Road, Watford Street and the sea and paid for at the then ruling market value. The Board also wanted to retain ownership of the Aberdeen Quay

land for subdivision purposes after the Crown had levelled it, formed roads and installed drains.

The W.H.B. did not want to have any financial responsibility for the airport and required an assurance that it would not be expected to contribute to the cost of the aerodrome.⁸⁴ It also had reservations about the effect air traffic would have on their operations. Rongotai had been closed, but over the years there had been suggestions of Evans Bay being used as a flying-boat base. It seemed Evans Bay would become, initially, a diversion landing place and subsequently a full scheduled landing place for the larger flying-boats on the Sydney-Auckland route. People were keen to have a trans-Tasman service direct to a Wellington terminal and the Board wanted an assurance that if one were established, it would be provided by the Government.

The Board also made one other condition which clearly was unacceptable. It wanted an assurance that its rights on the movement and control of shipping would not be interfered with and wanted an assurance that shipping would have priority over aircraft.⁸⁵ It was pointed out that with a sea level take off to the north or an approach from the north, aeroplanes would be flying over Evans Bay and ships' masts could well provide a hazard. Also, once a plane is airborne it must come down somewhere; it could not be left in the air for lengthy periods, particularly at Wellington where there were obstructions on both sides of the flightpath and the weather conditions often created great turbulence. The Harbourmaster accepted this and agreed that shipping would yield to the needs of aircraft.

The W.H.B. gave formal approval for the removal of spoil from Aberdeen Quay for reclamation purposes and formally requested the Government to accept responsibility for providing streets, stormwater and sewer drains.⁸⁶ The Acting Commissioner of Works could not agree to the Board's request. The land at that time was hilly and of little value; when the rock had been removed and the land levelled it would be much more valuable. It was too much for the Board to expect to have the land developed further. The Board had also

asked that Evans Bay be set up as a flying-boat base concurrently with the development of Rongotai for land planes and that Government provide the necessary facilities.⁸⁷

As noted above, the Chief Land Purchasing Officer claimed that the W.C.C. share of the cost was too low. After the Council had examined the proposals taken to it by its sub-committee, it wanted an even better deal. The Chief Investigating Officer of the Public Works Department wrote that the representatives of the Council had '...made certain requests for additional work above that envisaged by the committee in its report. These additional works represent[ed] a substantial addition to the total cost of the Rongotai proposal....'⁸⁸

The estimated additional cost totalled more than £500,000. Included was an item requesting compensation for the loss of rates on property being incorporated in the airport estimated at £1,100 per annum. The W.C.C. had calculated that to compensate it for the rates foregone it should receive £33,700 which was the amount which would have to be invested at 3.25% per annum to make up the £1,100 annual shortfall.⁸⁹

F. Langbein was unable to agree to these terms and discussed them with the Prime Minister, following which a telegram was sent to the Commissioner of Works who was overseas. It stated that the Prime Minister had directed negotiations be broken off pending the return of the Commissioner later in the year.⁹⁰ The telegram as sent was less vehement than the draft which had been submitted to the Prime Minister for his approval. The original text was similar to that of the draft letter to be sent to the City. This draft was also amended by the Prime Minister, who clearly had an important influence on and interest in the negotiations while keeping in the background himself. Although he was obviously making some major decisions personally, he gave responsibility for the promulgation of those decisions to the Minister of Works, Semple. This had the double effect of purporting to show Semple as the decision-maker but reserving the Prime Minister as appeal authority who could modify any decision without apparently backing down.

The letter drafted by F. Langbein and forwarded to the Prime Minister for comment read

I was so astounded at the extent of the requests of the City Council that I immediately discussed the matter with the Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister, who expressed the view that the requests were preposterous.

In view of the exorbitant requests of the City Council, the Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister has directed me to advise the City Council that, as views are so divergent, and the requests of the City Council so exorbitant the only thing to do is for the Government to rescind its decision to take over the airport and solely to build a new Rongotai College, and thus leave the field clear for the City Council to proceed with the development of the airport.

It is not proposed to reopen discussions until the Commissioner of Works returns to the Dominion towards the end of the year.⁹¹

Strong words indeed, particularly as they came from Semple, a representative of a Wellington constituency. Semple referred the letter to the Prime Minister. The covering note from Fraser enclosing the amended version of the draft stated that it was '...adequate for your [Semple's] signature...' and that it was '...somewhat modified from what I first suggested when discussing the matter with yourself and Mr. Langbein. P. F....'

In the first paragraph, the Minister was not 'astounded' but only 'surprised' and the requests were not 'preposterous' but only 'far in excess of anything practicable or even possible.' In the second paragraph, the reference to 'exorbitant' requests in the first line became 'excessive'. Also, all words following 'divergent' in that paragraph were deleted.⁹² The threat of leaving the City to do the whole airport development was thus removed, but this was clearly always an idle threat in view of the final paragraph, which indicated that negotiations would be reopened on the return of the Commissioner. If the Government had decided to withdraw and give responsibility to the City to do the work, there would have been no need to reopen negotiations.

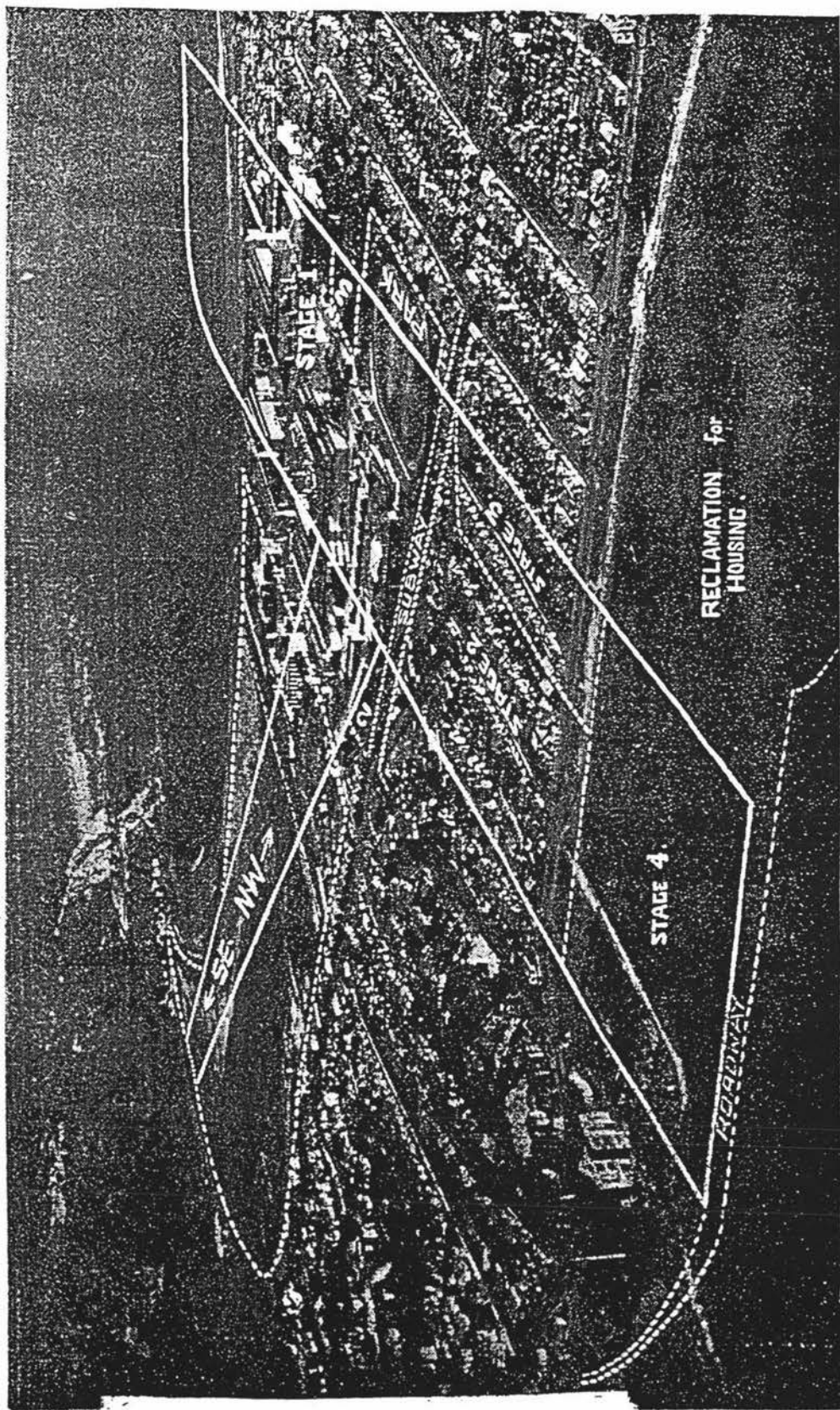
On 16 August 1948 negotiations with the W.C.C. ceased and F. Langbein advised the W.H.B. that discussions with the City Council had been postponed until the end of the year. As it was desirable that parallel discussions were held with the Harbour Board, it was appropriate that these too be postponed.⁹³

The Controller of Civil Aviation, E. A. Gibson, was concerned as he had been involved in the campaign to upgrade Rongotai for at least fourteen years. He wrote to the Commissioner of Works saying he understood that negotiations with the City Council '...may yet be protracted...' and that the work of the Technical Sub-committee had been suspended some five or six weeks earlier. He was sure satisfactory agreement would be reached in due course and then there would be considerable pressure to have the construction work put in hand. However, engineering surveys and subsequent detailed design would take many months and he suggested it would be advisable to reconvene the Technical Committee.⁹⁴ F. Langbein would not agree. He felt it would not be prudent to undertake survey work until McKillop had returned when negotiations could be pursued with the W.C.C.⁹⁵

Both views had some merit. Gibson's approach would avoid any delay in completion of the project; he was sure the work would go ahead and wanted progress. Langbein's approach was politically sound. He too was probably sure the work would go ahead but he was not prepared to weaken his bargaining position with the City Council by proceeding with the work prior to an agreement on the parties respective responsibilities.

Rongotai had been the busiest airport in the country and its closure in September 1947 had resulted in additional costs being incurred by the airlines and travellers being inconvenienced by having to use Paraparaumu. The Government, the W.C.C., the Chamber of Commerce, the W.H.B., the Miramar Golf Club, Residents' Associations and Education Authorities would all be affected by the development.

FUTURE OF RONGOTAI AS AIRPORT



Attempting to reconcile the interests of all parties was difficult, but it seemed they all agreed that the airport should be constructed and a Technical Advisory Committee was set up to coordinate the construction work. All that needed to be done was to decide the detailed obligations of each party. The Government had agreed, reluctantly, to remove houses and meet the major cost, the W.H.B. had agreed to give up some of its rights, the Miramar Golf Club had indicated it was prepared to cooperate, the Education Authorities were prepared to move Rongotai College. Agreement was not reached, however, with the W.C.C. and negotiations were suspended pending the return of the Commissioner of Works from overseas. Why the Government did not authorise the Acting Commissioner to deal with the situation is not clear. Perhaps it was glad to defer action for several months.

It should be noted that although the Golf Club had expressed a wish to co-operate, this agreement was only in principle. No detailed agreement had been reached. Similarly, the agreement to have a new school to replace Rongotai College was conditional on a new school being built before the existing college was demolished. This condition would cause delay because of the time needed to construct the new school. Government had accepted that some disruption to housing would be incurred, but the unacceptable demands of the W.C.C. gave the Government a reason to justify further delay. Nevertheless, considerable progress had been made. The Government had approved the development in principle.

CHAPTER 5 DEVELOPMENTS FROM LATE 1948 TO SEPTEMBER 1950

Although negotiations between the Government and the local authorities had ceased, arrangements had been made for a mission to come from the United Kingdom to advise on the overall civil aviation requirements of New Zealand. This body presented a comprehensive report which included recommendations to develop Rongotai, improve Paraparaumu and establish a sea plane base at Evans Bay.

The Rongotai development was expected to require the Miramar golf links and the removal of houses and Rongotai College and negotiations to resolve these matters were resumed, as were negotiations with the local bodies. 1949 was a Parliamentary election year and this seems to have stimulated action because transport, housing and education were important political issues. The development of the aerodrome was approved but this did not save the Government from electoral defeat. The new Government was also committed to developing Rongotai, but engineering difficulties caused by the high water table made the Salek Street site unsuitable and a new site was proposed.

The cessation of negotiations with the Wellington City Council (W.C.C.) and the Wellington Harbour Board (W.H.B.) in 1947 did not mean action was not taken to further the progress towards an improved airport. Discussions with the Miramar Golf Club continued and consultation with the Education Department on the provision of a new college for Rongotai pupils was also pursued. The Government had been frustrated in its attempts to obtain the services of a United Kingdom 'expert' who had been in Australia,¹ but was able to get the agreement of the United Kingdom Government to allow a mission to come

to New Zealand to report on the overall civil aviation activities in the country.² As part of its investigation, the Mission examined the air services available to the Wellington region.

The Tymms Mission arrived in Wellington on 26 August, 1948³ and their report was submitted on 4 November. Among its terms of reference it was required to report to the Minister on '...the standards required for aerodromes in New Zealand for the operation of internal and international civil air services....'⁴ The Mission noted that the Government had set up an Aerodromes Committee with responsibility to report on the aerodromes necessary to provide a service and what needed to be done to bring them up to internationally recognised standards. It felt the Committee was being asked to deal with problems of aerodromes without being aware of the intentions of N. Z. National Airways Corporation (NAC). This was planning in reverse; the Committee was being asked to do the planning to provide aerodrome requirements before the Government had exercised its responsibility by determining the air services to be catered for.⁵

The Mission came to the conclusion that Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch should have international services. They discounted claims of other local interests for such a service.⁶ They examined the problem of providing an overseas service to Wellington and thought '...Wellington as the capital city, a large industrial and commercial centre and the largest operating centre...should be served direct by international services....' They believed the topography of Wellington made it impossible to provide an aerodrome of the necessary standard for land planes but thought that it should be possible to use Wellington Harbour as a landing place for flying-boats, the only aircraft suitable for providing a service to other countries at that time, but it would be restricted to trans-Tasman routes.⁷ It was satisfied that the Short Solent flying-boats which had been ordered by Tasman Empire Airline Ltd., (TEAL) would be suitable.⁸ However a flying-boat base would only be a temporary measure as the Solents were expected to have an economic life of only seven years and it was thought

unlikely they would be replaced by water-borne planes because aircraft development was being concentrated on land planes.⁹

It believed Rongotai could not be developed up to international standards because of the surrounding hills, Paraparaumu could not be developed up to international standards either because of the hills on one side. It did not believe an international airport for Wellington should be built further away¹⁰ but Wellington Harbour could, and should, be developed as a flying-boat base even though this could only operate for a few years.¹¹ It recognised the limitations of Rongotai and assessed the practical limit of development as being to Class E. They disagreed with the proposed width of the airstrip of three hundred feet and recommended five hundred feet, with clearances over houses of eight hundred feet. They believed the whole isthmus should be cleared and that the need for further development at Paraparaumu would disappear when Rongotai was constructed.¹² However, even when Rongotai had been constructed it would be difficult, even impossible, to provide approach lighting three thousand feet either end of the runway.¹³

Palmerston North had been the headquarters of Union Airways and when NAC took over the former in 1947, it retained Palmerston North as headquarters of the new organisation. The Tymms Mission referred to this and recommended the Corporation transfer its head office and servicing facilities to Rongotai. If Rongotai were selected it would '...reinforce the need for speedy construction to the full plan...' to develop the aerodrome.¹⁴ The Mission's report does not indicate the scope of its investigations into possible alternative sites; it refers only to Rongotai and Paraparaumu. It

...appreciated that there is no alternative site for the construction of an aerodrome in the vicinity of Wellington, and it is necessary that Wellington should have an aerodrome of convenient access from the city. It is only on this basis that the construction of an aerodrome at Rongotai can be justified...

but it questioned the siting of the proposed runway which, while the best available, was too far to the west because of the hills to the south and the Patent Slip and hills

to the north. In its view, a better runway would pass through the Evans Bay power station, but it recognised that would be needed for some time. Two constructive suggestions made by the Mission were first, the construction of a taxiway parallel to the runway which would increase the handling capacity of the airfield considerably by permitting greater use of the runway, and second the relocation of the hangars and service buildings from the north-west corner of the airfield to the south-east corner, thereby reducing aircraft congestion. The south-east corner was part of the recently closed runways alongside the golf links.¹⁵

Even while the Tymms Mission was deliberating, negotiations with the Miramar Golf Club continued. Cabinet had approved that negotiations be entered into with the Club management to acquire the Club land.¹⁶ A deputation of five club members, two of whom were M.P.s, C. M. Bowden and W. E. Parry, the Minister of Internal Affairs and Social Security, waited on the Minister of Works, R. Semple, . The main spokesman was Bowden. He said the Club would prefer to stay on its existing site, but the members were prepared to move if it was in the national interest and would assist progress.

Semple said he believed Paekakariki to be the best alternative site for the new links and the question of land tenure would have to be determined. There were two possibilities, leasehold and freehold, of which a long term lease was the option preferred by the Government which was not keen on freeholding the land.

The Club President, J. B. Hatrick, was quite prepared to agree to a long term lease provided a right of renewal was incorporated in the deed. Parry however was not so happy. When the land at Paekakariki was taken by the Government, it had been acquired for recreational purposes for the people of Wellington; there had been no expectation that it would be cut up into separate holdings. However Semple announced that Cabinet had agreed Paekakariki seemed to be the only suitable site for the Golf Club in lieu of Miramar.

Parry raised the issue of the amount of land necessary and Bowden advanced the Club's initial position that two eighteen hole courses were desirable and that these could be accommodated on about two hundred acres. The reason for wanting two courses was that one would be reserved for good players, while not so good players could use the second course. He also referred to the need to hold tournaments and championships on the links and while these were occupying one course, players not involved could use the other one. F. Langbein, Acting Commissioner of Works, was not impressed and asked how much land would be needed for one course. He did not receive a response, but Bowden informed him that the Club had six hundred members and in addition catered for three thousand visitors.

Semple seems to have been more receptive to the Club's views than the Departmental Officers as he said it was important to cater for recreational needs and to provide for the future development in the area. Titahi Bay was already being developed and the planned new highway through Johnsonville would bring Porirua to only a few minutes journey from Wellington. He wanted more detailed information about the area suggested for the new links and was told they would be situated to the north end of the land, the total area of which was some two thousand three hundred and thirty acres.

Bowden wanted to be convinced of the suitability of the site. In his opinion it had to be as close to Paekakariki station as possible because not all of the Club members had cars so they would be using the train to get to Paekakariki. He also said the Club would provide a bus service to transport members to and from the station. He assured Semple that the Club would make the links available for public use, but of course would reserve the right to close them for tournaments and Club championship matches. It was asked that a site be agreed on quickly so the work of levelling it and sowing grass could be started. Nothing could be put in train however until a specific proposition was available to put before Club members.

Cabinet too had to agree to the transfer of land and it was suggested that Langbein and N. Hutchings examine the site. They said they could

only inspect the proposed site if Cabinet gave its prior approval. Their response to that suggestion could be interpreted as reluctance on their part to make progress. To suggest that the Acting Commissioner of Works and the Chief Administration Officer of the M.O.W. needed Cabinet approval to look at Crown land only twenty-five miles from their office seems specious, particularly when the Minister apparently agreed because he undertook to put the issues to Cabinet.

Bowden raised the matter of compensation for the Club's land and the method the Crown would use to acquire it. The land could be taken under the Public Works Act, or the Crown could purchase it as if it were a voluntary sale which was the preferred option of both Semple and the Club. The form of tenure of the new links, freehold or leasehold, was also raised and, if leasehold, the assessment of the rental payable by the Club. As the Club did not have any earth moving equipment, it was agreed M.O.W. machinery would be made available to set out the new golf course.

Both parties seem to have been reasonably satisfied with the outcome of the meeting, which ended with Semple saying that before Club members were approached a written statement from Cabinet should be given to them. Once this was available, negotiations between the Departmental Officers and Club representatives could be undertaken and firm proposals submitted to Cabinet. He felt it should only take a few weeks to reach a satisfactory conclusion.¹⁷ Negotiations with the Wellington City Council, (W.C.C.), and the Wellington Harbour Board, (W.H.B.) had been broken off two months earlier and did not resume for several months and no further action seems to have been taken with the Club for almost a year..

The W.C.C. was unhappy at the apparent stalemate and some seven months after the Government had broken off negotiations, the Town Clerk wrote to Semple asking if talks could be resumed in the hope of a settlement of the questions involved.¹⁸ Semple was not yet ready to agree. He wrote that following Government's agreement in principle to develop Rongotai, the Tymms Mission had recommended changes to the Rongotai designs which, if agreed to,

would mean many more houses would be involved. The cost would be increased substantially and in his opinion it would be premature to enter into further negotiations until the technical aspects raised by the Mission had been considered.¹⁹

The City Council was not pleased. It agreed consideration had to be given to the matters raised but felt these did not affect the need to relocate Rongotai College, irrespective of the development decided upon. It reminded Semple that the Deputy Mayor had interviewed the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, who had intimated that further discussions would be held when the Commissioner of Works, E. R. McKillop, returned from overseas, but that

...no opportunity ...[had]...been given by the Government for resumption of discussions notwithstanding the Council's repeated representations regarding the urgent necessity in the interests of the travelling public of New Zealand that this most essential project be embarked upon at the earliest possible date....

The Prime Minister was leaving for England the following week and the Council wanted the Government's decision '...at an early date....'²⁰

Semple was not in Wellington when that letter was delivered and his secretary, recognising its urgency and importance, sent copies to the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence.²¹ Fraser was unable to arrange a meeting with the City Council and wrote to that effect on the day he was leaving for England. But he did suggest discussions be resumed between the City representatives and McKillop about proceeding with the work and conditions under which agreement could be reached in respect of particular sections of it.²²

Meanwhile the W.C.C. and the Wellington Chamber of Commerce had been inviting support from other districts. Within two weeks of the W.C.C. request for the reopening of negotiations, a deputation of eighteen people representing thirteen organisations of Otago businesses waited on the Mayor of Dunedin. They believed the commercial community had the '...right to expect the most up to date facilities so that the maximum saving of time...[could]...be

achieved....' With Rongotai out of action, and Paraparaumu in use they said it was necessary to develop Rongotai.

...Distance...[from]...Wellington is not the sole factor - the tortuous nature of the route to Paraparaumu and the time taken to travel by road is perhaps the most important....time wasted on the road journey to and from Paraparaumu is objected to very strongly, and in the case of the Nelson and Blenheim services, air travel is negated to that part of the South Island.....

The deputation said there had been many wild statements on the housing problems which they believed were relatively small compared with the national importance of Rongotai airport.²³ They denied interfering in matters which did not concern them; it was a matter of national interest. They believed it should be possible for business people to leave Dunedin at seven or eight o' clock in the morning, conduct several hours work in Wellington and return to Dunedin on the same day.

The deputation complained that despite urging from the W.C.C. and the Wellington Chamber of Commerce, '...the Government continued to procrastinate first, with regard to housing, second city water, gas, drainage etc., third, who is to bear the cost?...' They asked the Mayor of Dunedin to convey their concerns to the Prime Minister, which he did.²⁴

Less than a month later, the Mayor of Auckland wrote to the Prime Minister that it was of '...vital importance...' that people visiting the capital should be able to use a conveniently situated airport and that Rongotai was the only desirable location. Auckland businessmen had appointed a deputation which had approached him to obtain support for developing Rongotai. The Auckland business community was seeking an assurance from Government that the Rongotai project would be put in hand without undue delay.²⁵ Fraser replied that the matter was under consideration for action as soon as the full effects of the Tymms Mission report had been assessed and negotiations with the W.C.C. had been completed. He added a note, '...I can assure you the importance of Rongotai Airport is fully appreciated by my Government.....'²⁶

McKillop was instructed to get in touch with the Mayor of Wellington, Chairman of the W.C.C. Airport Committee and Town Clerk to discuss the matter.²⁷ A little over a month later, McKillop wrote to the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation expressing the opinion that the time seemed opportune for making a statement on the Rongotai airport situation.²⁸ A press release was made the following day, which said one reason for the delay in making progress on Rongotai was the varying opinions advanced by aviation authorities. It referred to differing views on the width of runway needed but stated that these had been reconciled and design work had reached a stage that allowed consideration to be given to some aspects of the work such as reclamation, site clearance and roading.

It had been decided that a runway three hundred feet wide would be sufficient. This conflicted with the Tymms' recommendation but was explained by changed operating conditions. The Mission had prepared its report on the expectation that pilots would not be under full operational control but would have a large measure of discretion on landings and take-offs. At almost the same time the Mission was reporting, a change had been introduced in Britain whereby pilots were under the full control of the civil aviation authorities which took responsibility for operational control. This agreed with the view of the New Zealand Technical Committee and also complied with international standards, consequently it had been confirmed that a runway three hundred feet wide was satisfactory. The statement noted there were still many factors that had to be resolved before an aerodrome could be constructed in a highly developed built up area like Rongotai, but it was hoped the responsibility for carrying out the various phases of the work could be arranged quickly with the City Council, Harbour Board and Ministry.²⁹

The Engineer in Chief of the M.O.W. forwarded a set of drawings to the Director of Civil Aviation showing the various stages for the development of Rongotai, including the reclamation work needed and proposals for a causeway at the Evans Bay end of the runway.³⁰ McKillop wrote to the Air Secretary and the Secretary to the Treasury advising that negotiations were under way with the W.C.C. and the W.H.B. He reminded them that the existing airfield

had been partly financed by the City Council which controlled it and he wanted Government policy on cost sharing to be established. Problems could arise in other centres if unwelcome precedents were established and he believed Departmental Officers should consult one another prior to the matter being placed before the Government.³¹

The Commissioner of Works deemed it prudent to see if firm decisions on the financial matters could be reached. Government Departments would need to know if construction was to be on a subsidy basis or whether the local authorities should contribute fixed sums, so the M.O.W. staff prepared comprehensive notes on the question of cost sharing.

McKillop considered that in the interests of safety, control of aircraft operations should be on a national basis for all aerodromes from which scheduled services operated. This did not mean Government should accept financial responsibility for constructing aerodromes throughout the country. If the Government paid for everything '...there could be no end to demands for high class aerodromes from one end of the country to the other....' He referred to the United States where Congress had met half of the cost of aerodromes, the other half coming from local sources which also assumed responsibility for items of purely local interest such as commercial facilities at the airport. It was thought the Government would meet two - thirds or even three - quarters of the cost of Rongotai but that a different formula might be appropriate for international airports.

It was suggested the W.C.C. could be expected to pay at least a quarter of the cost, but since the City Engineer's estimate had been prepared several years earlier, it might hesitate to agree to a subsidy basis as costs were likely to be thirty percent or even fifty percent higher than the original estimate. The Council would probably prefer to donate all the Council land involved and carry out the alterations to the City services at their expense.

The question of the contributions to be made by each party was important if construction was not to be retarded, or even jeopardised altogether. Probably a factor which would encourage the W.C.C. to make an early decision was McKillop's comment that the Government's decision to lengthen and strengthen the runways at Paraparaumu '...at very great cost...' could be construed as tending to make Rongotai less important. McKillop concluded the briefing notes with a suggestion that the Council be urged to make a firm offer. He would emphasise to the W.C.C. that nothing would create as favourable an impression as a quick and reasonable offer by the City to share costs.³² McKillop did not attend the meeting with the W.C.C. and W.H.B., the Department being represented by the Deputy Commissioner of Works, F. M. H. Hanson. The W.C.C. representatives eventually agreed to provide land, service alterations and cash up to a total value of £500,000 if the airport cost in total was £ 1,500,000.³³

At the meeting in the Mayor's office, the Chairman of the W.H.B. agreed to ask his Board to sell the foreshore land at valuation and to agree to meet half the cost of roading the levelled land at Aberdeen Quay, an amount of £5,000, if the Government agreed to meet the other half. He also agreed to ask his Board to forego its right of reclamation in Evans Bay and to give spoil from the hill at Aberdeen Quay.³⁴

McKillop seems to have had some reservations on this. He wrote to the Board referring to the 1948 Board proposals³⁵ and said the aerodrome was going to be very costly, perhaps in excess of £2,000,000³⁶. In the earlier proposals which had been revived by the Chairman of the W.H.B. it had been anticipated the sea bed would be provided free, as would the spoil from Aberdeen Quay. It was also anticipated the roading cost would be shared equally, but McKillop hoped the Board would meet the full cost of the roading in view of the expense of the project. He was aware that the Board represented a much wider area than just Wellington city but if it was prepared to meet this extra expense, it would assist him in making recommendations to the Government. Having asked for an additional contribution, McKillop then continued that he was

sure he could find a solution to the question of the provision of a sea-plane/flying-boat base which would be satisfactory to the Board.

In his letter McKillop referred to a meeting at which the Board, Hanson of M.O.W. and the Civil Aviation Division had been present and said Hanson believed the Board had agreed that when a flying-boat base was established, five or six flights per day would be acceptable as this would cause the Board little trouble. He reminded the Board that there could be a problem with land planes if ships' masts were too high and with the proposal to develop Rongotai to a Class D aerodrome, larger aircraft could operate from it and the conflict with shipping movements could be exacerbated..³⁷

Problems of jurisdiction would have to be resolved. Not only was the control of shipping in the flightpath important, but the control of aircraft could create problems for shipping. It was agreed that consultation on lighting systems was essential as a safety measure for both shipping and aircraft operators.³⁸

Gibson insisted that whenever a plane was landing or taking off from land or water, a competent air authority must have complete control, including control of the surface space required. This could have been a major difficulty, but Gibson overcame it by saying that a competent air authority '...could be the Harbour Board if it was prepared to employ staff suitably trained and qualified under the Civil Aviation Regulations....'³⁹ The W.H.B. General Manager suggested certain areas of the harbour should be specified for aircraft use under various weather and wind conditions, or on particular days. Such areas could be legally designated as being under the jurisdiction of the controlling air authority.⁴⁰

McKillop's assessment of twelve to fifteen aircraft movements per hour at peak times was lower than Gibson thought likely. He had recorded three half hour periods per day at Paraparaumu with eight movements which would tend to confirm McKillop's assessment, but Gibson believed that once

Rongotai was operational, the number of movements would double.⁴¹ He did not envisage any conflict between the harbour and air authorities over the use of air space in the early years because traffic levels would be relatively low, but he did anticipate problems ten or fifteen years after Rongotai was operational. Moreover, the pressure for increased traffic would force further development at Rongotai, involving further encroachment into Evans Bay.

...One thing has to be realised in the development of Rongotai. Without this airport air transport in this Dominion can never be a proper public utility. It would remain an expensive and wasteful luxury used by the few at the expense of the many.⁴²

1949 was a parliamentary election year and as is usual in an election year, contentious issues are debated very vigorously. Walter Nash, Minister of Finance, said the debate on the type of plane suitable for the trans-Tasman route had been going on for years. He did not express any personal opinion, but he did not seem to very supportive of Rongotai, believing Paraparaumu was close enough to Wellington.⁴³ S. G. Holland, Leader of the Opposition, wanted Rongotai started urgently,⁴⁴ but Nash again raised the matter of destroying houses.⁴⁵ For National, J. Fortune referred to the Minister's statement that NAC lost £170,000⁴⁶ through operating from Paraparaumu.⁴⁷ Shand went further and said in addition to that loss, there was a loss to the passengers who had to pay an additional ten shillings each journey for the extra distance to Wellington. Moreover, the personal loss to Nelson and Marlborough passengers was much greater because the airline could not operate a schedule which enabled passengers to make the return trip and conduct business in one day. He said Paraparaumu was unsafe in poor flying conditions but that a properly developed airfield at Rongotai would be much safer. The Government had expert advice that Paraparaumu could never be satisfactory but Rongotai could be. Despite this, it had waited until it was forced to close Rongotai and move airways transport to Paraparaumu. The Government had still not made a decision to develop Rongotai; it had considered a reduced scheme which had involved the removal of only eighty houses but the Tymms Mission had said that was unsatisfactory and the complete plan would have to be implemented. The loss of

£170,000 was an annually recurring one equivalent to the interest and sinking fund needed to service a loan of £5,000,000. A capital investment of £2,000,000 would be good value. Only five houses would have to be demolished and people would be out of their homes for only two days if their houses were moved. '...Was the flying public to be submitted to perpetual risk of death merely because the Government would not face the political problem in moving houses?...' The first step, the removal of Rongotai College should be started immediately.⁴⁸

Responding, the Minister reiterated the problem of shifting many houses, some of which would have to be demolished, as would Rongotai College. With heavy demand for homes, the Government had not been prepared to devote so much labour and materials when the Rongotai scheme was first mooted. All parties were anxious to solve the problems to create an airfield at Rongotai which, while it would never be safe for international flights, could be suitable for internal flights. The NAC believed

...the effect of the surcharge detracts from the popularity of air travel as also does the disproportionate time involved in surface transport. The loss of traffic due to these factors is considered to be of consequence, though very difficult to assess in amount.....⁴⁹

The *Dominion* announced that planning of a sea-plane base in addition to Rongotai had been urged, and that the Harbour Board would discuss this with the Government.⁵⁰ In fact, such discussions had been proceeding for some time and were already nearing completion. The flying-boat base was agreed to. The Commissioner of Works advised the W.H.B. that Evans Bay had been declared an alternative to the Auckland facility at Mechanics Bay, consequently it would be necessary to provide pontoons, a landing jetty, a small terminal building and some other minor facilities. It was intended that the Government meet the cost of these installations and the Board was asked to approve the proposal.⁵¹

The W.H.B. was very co-operative. It agreed to meet the full costs of roading and drainage of the levelled land at Aberdeen Quay. It also agreed to the construction of a Class E⁵² aerodrome at Rongotai which it felt

would only affect shipping using the Patent Slip. However, the Board had long term plans for constructing a graving dock in the harbour and wanted assurances that a suitable site would be made available in due course. It resolved that if at any time Rongotai was to be upgraded to a Class D aerodrome, it would consider the options available and if Evans Bay was declared an alternate aerodrome to Auckland, the Board would make the necessary area available.⁵³

The Commissioner of Works, McKillop expressed his thanks to the Board. He wrote that '...Mr. Hanson advised that had the Board exercised its full rights in regard to the operation of shipping in Evans Bay, it would have meant that no aerodrome would have been possible at Rongotai...'⁵⁴

As progress was being made with the W.C.C. and the W.H.B., the Commissioner of Works felt it was time to advise the Miramar Golf Club of the state of negotiations. He referred to the discussions held with the Club some twelve months earlier and said that during his absence overseas the matter had been held up, but that negotiations had been resumed with the local authorities concerned. They were engaged in considering preliminary plans. As the Golf Club was aware, Rongotai College would have to be demolished and rebuilt on a new site somewhere in the eastern suburbs. His Officers had made every effort to avoid interfering with Club land, but other land suitable for the college had not been found so they must reluctantly use the golf links. When the land needed for the college had been allocated, the remaining land would be used for housing purposes. He hoped the Club would be resited elsewhere; recreational land at Paekakariki was nearing completion and he suggested the Club contact Hanson to discuss the matter. McKillop ended his letter with the caution that this decision had not yet received the approval of the Government.⁵⁵

By mid September 1949, plans were far enough advanced for an estimate of the total cost to be prepared. Hanson advised the City Council of this but qualified it by referring to the difficulty being experienced in finding a source of suitable rock for the sea wall toes. This rock had to be broken before it could be put in position, but also had to be very durable to withstand the action of

thwater which in some places was fifty to sixty feet deep. If satisfactory rock could not be found, it would be necessary to use concrete blocks. Moreover, it would take several months to prepare detailed stormwater and drainage plans, so detailed costings could not be produced.⁵⁶

Hanson's early estimate was £2,486,500, later amended to £2,626,500, but it was noted that this did not include any charge for supervision or for contingencies. Indeed, the Commissioner of Works wrote to the City Council justifying an estimated total cost of £2,800,925, of which the City Council share was £958,200. This was the minimum for the existing needs and did not provide for distant future needs.

The Commissioner indicated the increased cost was occasioned by the need to cater for heavier planes which required stronger landing pads and runways. It had also been necessary to provide extra filling to give greater safety if planes overshot the runway. Because of increased forecasts of freight traffic, a larger terminal area was necessary to obtain optimum use of the airfield, but this extra space necessitated additional reclamation work. To increase the capacity of the runway, taxiways had to be provided and the plan provided for playing fields to replace those incorporated into the aerodrome. Additional houses had to be moved because the runway had been reoriented to give a better flight path and there had been a general increase in costs.

McKillop added that the whole matter of financial control was under consideration by the Government and it was likely that compensation would not be paid for aerodromes taken over; the cost of development would be all that was taken into account. It was noted that when roads and state highways had been taken over, compensation was not paid for them either. The airport was an expensive project and having to meet half the development cost could overtax the W.C.C. resources so a ratio of one-third City, two-thirds Government was suggested. McKillop mentioned that the proposal that the Government and local authorities each meet half had not yet been adopted as Government policy and Wellington would be advantaged as it would have an agreement to meet a lesser

share before the policy was determined. Moreover, an exception would be made for Wellington in respect of compensation for the existing aerodrome as they had been told this would be done before the Aerodrome Committee had formed its policy on this matter.

While the Government had not yet considered the basis of cost sharing, McKillop was sure an offer to meet one-third of the cost would result in agreement and an earlier start to construction. He also noted that there were two methods of assessing the one-third share. These were for the Council to agree to meet one-third of the total cost, or to agree to accept responsibility for sectors of the work estimated to cost one-third of the total cost. He believed the latter would be better for the W.C.C. as any savings made by them would accrue to them. Moreover, their experience and knowledge of some aspects could result in their doing the work cheaper.⁵⁷

The Civil Aviation Authority would be responsible for the expensive radio control systems, communications, air traffic control, ground aids, meteorological services and their maintenance, but no agreement had yet been reached on the maintenance of the aerodrome itself. McKillop believed this should be shared between the Government and the W.C.C. in the same proportion as the capital costs. As maintenance costs were largely dependent upon usage and the Council was on the spot, he favoured it being responsible for maintenance of the roads and drainage, but any damage to the causeway would be an airport responsibility.

In an attempt to reinforce the view that the W.C.C. was getting a good deal, he continued that in the unlikely event of the airport being abandoned, the Government would probably be entitled to seventy-five percent of the proceeds because of the amount of money it had put into the project, but he proposed the Government meet half the cost, W.C.C. one third and the W.H.B. one sixth.⁵⁸

The City Council agreed to the development of the Rongotai Aerodrome to Class E standard with a single runway at a cost of £2,800,000 of which one-third would be provided by the W.C.C.⁵⁹

The Prime Minister and Minister in charge of Civil Aviation expressed pleasure that the Council would meet one-third of the cost. However,

...As a result of decisions of the International Organisation recently established to lay down standards for various classes of aerodrome, the work at Rongotai ...[would]... need to be more extensive and standards ...[would]... have to be much higher than those proposed in an earlier report by the City Engineer.⁶⁰

Matters were progressing rapidly and McKillop asked Hanson to prepare a submission to Cabinet to obtain formal ratification of the proposals already agreed with the W.C.C. He directed it should indicate the aspects on which agreement had not been reached and the basis on which Hanson would be negotiating these outstanding matters. He suggested that title to the airport land be vested in the Government.⁶¹ An election was to be held only a few days later and no doubt McKillop wished to get formal acceptance by the Government of matters already agreed upon and the basis for future negotiations.

As Rongotai was an election issue, it was advantageous to the Government to be able to report a successful project. The Minister of Defence issued a press statement referring to the negotiations with the City Council on the Rongotai airport saying the major items had been agreed. Negotiations had been protracted since their start in 1946 because of the standards laid down for airfields. The high cost of about £2,750,000 was caused by the need for longer, stronger runways for the larger, heavier planes in use.

The Minister said that the plan involved the reclamation of a large area of Evans Bay for recreational purposes and as some of the houses were not suitable for moving they would be demolished and replaced. The several hundred yards of causeway should improve traffic flow by removing congestion.

He noted that the City engineering staff had made proposals regarding the Lyall Bay area which were very helpful and had been accepted by the Government. The W.C.C. was also helping with the cost of the new airport. While there had been major difficulties these seemed to have been overcome.⁶²

However, problems arose over the management and maintenance of the airport. The Town Clerk indicated to Hanson that the City Council Airport Committee did not want to be responsible for maintenance of any part of the airport proper, nor did it want to run any of the subsidiary activities other than the recreational facilities on the airport land and some place to pick up and set down passengers, sightseers and workers.⁶³ Hanson was surprised. He considered Rongotai as 'Wellington's Airport'; the City would gain prestige in the eyes of citizens who would not want their airport operated by the Government. Apart from operational control of aircraft, which was a Government responsibility, he felt the City should manage and maintain the airport on a one-third cost basis. It was intended to levy charges for the use of the facilities and in the initial stages these should recover costs but when the airport was fully operational they should show a considerable profit.⁶⁴

The Prime Minister seems to have wanted some visible sign that action was being taken. With only two weeks to go before the election, he instructed Hanson to discuss the clearing of Rongotai College grounds with the Principal. Hanson wrote to S. Roberts, the Chief Administration Officer of the M.O.W., asking him to confirm funds were available to do the work. When confirmation had been received, Hanson would visit the site with the District Engineer to explain what needed to be done, and get him to '...push ahead...' with the work.⁶⁵ It seems Roberts was unable to give that confirmation because McKillop wrote to the Director of Civil Aviation asking him to obtain urgent Cabinet approval for the expenditure of £4,400 for clearing the ground. McKillop emphasised that the clearing of the grounds was urgent and that the Prime Minister had '...directed that the work be carried out at an early date.'⁶⁶ Nothing seems to have happened.

If the apparent surge of activity during the latter part of 1949 was intended to assist in the re-election of the Government, it failed. A new Government under the leadership of S. G. Holland was formed. Those responsible for Rongotai activities were W. S. Goosman, Minister of Works, with W. A. Sheat as his Undersecretary, and T. L. Macdonald, Minister of Defence, whose portfolio included Civil Aviation.⁶⁷

The change of Government did not stop the negotiating process. As noted above, Hanson had written to the W.C.C. about the administration of the airport when it became operational. The Council replied accepting the Government would be responsible for the airways control facilities and that the City Council would control the public buildings and concession areas and maintain the runways, taxiways, causeway, hangars and internal roads. It required an assurance that fare structures and freight charges would include the fees, charges and surcharges '...so as to produce the maximum reasonable revenue for maintenance and other outgoings....' The Council could agree to meet one-third of any shortfall in the early stages and retain one-third of any surplus. The City Council thus had agreed in principle to manage and maintain the airport. As regards the suggestion the land be vested in the Government, the Council was not so sure; it would prefer it to be vested in the Council.⁶⁸

The question of the development of Wellington aircraft landing facilities was soon raised with the new Government. Goosman was asked by a residents' association when construction would be started on Rongotai and a flying-boat base at Evans Bay.⁶⁹ Goosman was unable to give any information but promised to do so as soon as possible.⁷⁰ McKillop provided him with briefing papers on 9 March giving a summary of the issues and recommending £100,000 be allocated for work likely to be performed in the 1950-1951 financial year and asking for approval to enter into formal agreements with the W.H.B. and the W.C.C.⁷¹ On 14 March 1950 Cabinet approved the construction of an airport at Rongotai and provided £100,000 for anticipated expenditure for the 1950/1951 year. It said formal agreements should be entered into with the W.C.C. and the W.H.B. on the basis of the tentative agreements reached. Cabinet also noted that

the construction of the airport would involve the acquisition of the Miramar golf links and considered every effort should be made to conclude an agreement with the Club on the basis of negotiation.⁷²

The Miramar Golf Club was told that the Government had now approved the project. A reassessment of the amount of land needed had disclosed it would be possible to leave the Club with enough for a nine hole course. It was asked if it preferred to relinquish only part of the land or if it preferred to sell the whole area so that more funds would be available to develop a new course. It was also asked if it was still interested in land at Paekakariki.⁷³ However, the Club now thought another site should be sought for the new college. It gained some support for its objections to losing its links from the New Zealand Golf Association Inc. The course was of championship standard, it was in a very convenient position and the New Zealand championships had been held there on several occasions. The Association listed eight golf courses that the Wellington area had lost since 1939 and added that there was no other suitable area within a reasonable distance of the city.⁷⁴

The Rongotai College Parents' Association was pleased with Goosman's statement that the provision of a college on the golf course was to proceed forthwith. The indecision of the previous ten years had adversely affected the college and they asked to be consulted on deliberations about the new school.⁷⁵ The Commissioner of Works was anxious to settle the negotiations and sought a clear statement from the Director of Education on the site for the new college. He understood it was intended to rebuild the college on the golf links. Hanson questioned the need for forty acres of flat land in Wellington and thought twenty-five would be sufficient. McKillop decided that thirty acres should be allocated.

McKillop sought an early decision. He believed funds would be short for the ensuing three years and while preliminary plans had been drawn up, the Education Department might wish to modify these so that only essentials were provided thus making more money available for other schools. The City Valuer had assessed the value of the existing College as £100,000 less

depreciation and obsolescence; Hanson was prepared to provide a sum of £125,000 as a charge against the airport.⁷⁶

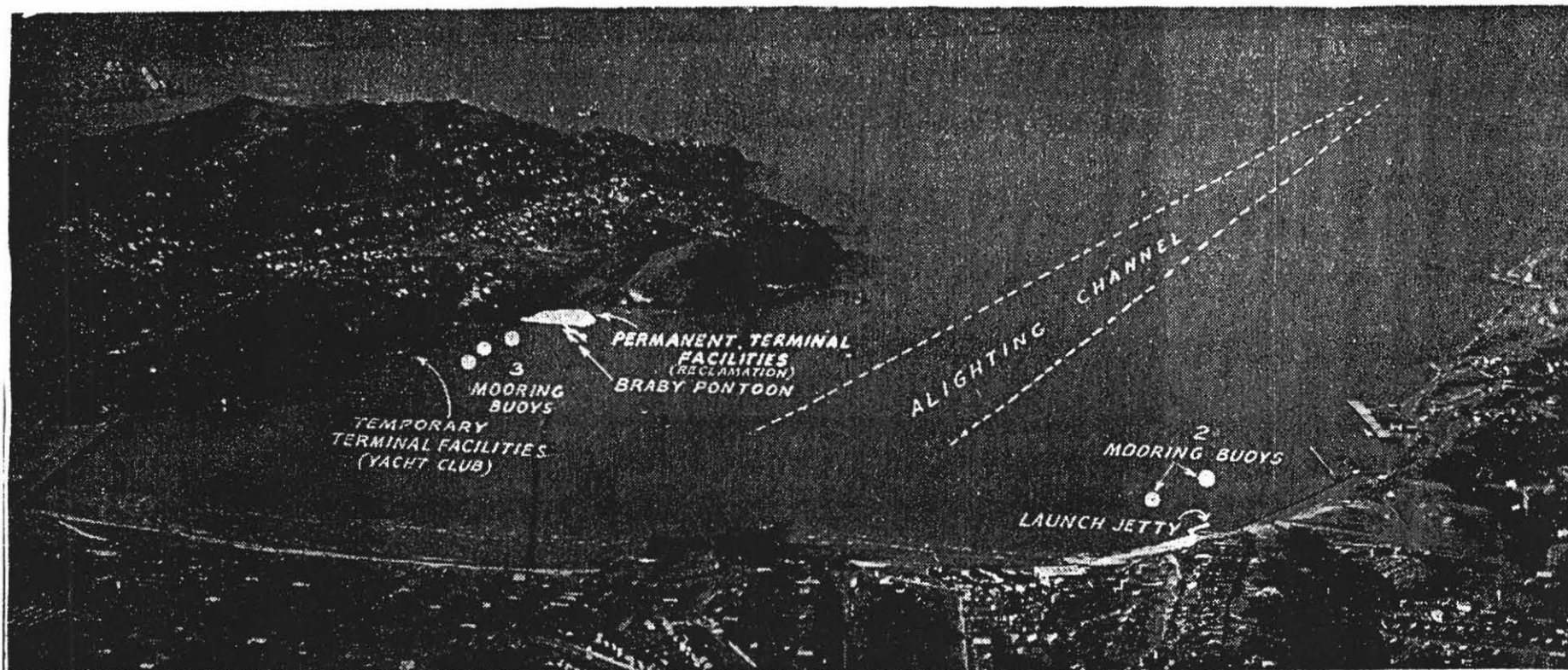
The Education Department did not agree with the site or the amount of land proposed. They wanted it located at the northern end of the links, not the southern end because it was important to be near the residential area it was to serve and close to transport for night class students. The anticipated roll of the College had been reduced to five hundred and forty pupils and while twenty-five acres would be sufficient for post primary purposes, it was intended to build an intermediate school in the future which would require the additional fifteen acres. Pending its construction the extra land should be used as playing fields for the college.⁷⁷

The Minister of Education had been approached by several eastern suburbs organisations wanting post-primary education to remain in their area. '...even if the golf links were not available...';⁷⁸ so he invited several interested people to a meeting in Parliament to consider the educational needs of the area, the site the college should occupy and if the noise factor from aircraft operations would be disturbing.⁷⁹

There were several progressive associations in the eastern suburbs, each working separately for their own localities, but the fear that Rongotai College might be relocated outside the area persuaded them to form an Eastern Suburbs Joint Action Committee to resist this. 1950 was a local authority election year and the Joint Committee felt it should have a representative from the eastern suburbs on the City Council, so arrangements were made for its nominee to be accepted as a Citizens' and Ratepayers' Association candidate. They nominated H. A. Herron, the Principal of Rongotai College who, though reluctant to be associated with any political group, felt he could act independently. However, he withdrew his candidature when he found his views differed from those of the Association.⁸⁰

THE DOMINION, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 1950

Familiarisation Flights For Solents Begin Today At Evans Bay



The Evans Bay flying-boat base will be used for the first time today by a Tasman Empire Airways Solent aircraft in tests before the Wellington-Sydney service starts next Tuesday. This aerial photograph shows the base and its present and planned installations. The permanent terminal and pontoon on the western side and the launch jetty on the eastern side will be built after the start of the service. Meanwhile here will be temporary passenger facilities at the Evans Bay Yacht and Motor Boat Club, and the flying-boats will use the mooring buoys until the pontoon is ready. The alighting channel indicated is an approximation, subject to variation according to the weather.

At a meeting called by the Minister of Education, O. Conibear of the Wellington Colleges Board of Governors said the golf links was the best site for the new school. Fraser, now Leader of the Opposition considered the links the only suitable site and said that the previous Government had given a pledge to the community that post primary education would remain in the eastern suburbs. Semple agreed and said that he had always been opposed to the development of Rongotai airport because of the number of houses that would be lost, but that he had to surrender to engineers' opinions. Algje conceded an undertaking had been given to rebuild the college on the links but queried the effects of aircraft noise. Six Harvard planes had been used to test noise levels but Hanson thought the noise would be no greater than that already experienced unless air force jet planes used the airfield. Gibson concurred but said when fully operational, plane movements could occur every three minutes.⁸¹

Cabinet having resolved that the project was to go ahead, the Commissioner of Works confirmed that the sharing of responsibility would be as set out in his letter of 27 September, 1949, and the W.C.C. agreement of 14 October, 1949. In the meantime, the question of maintenance and management of the airport could be left in abeyance. The Government accepted the terms outlined in the W.C.C. letter of 21 December and Hanson's letter of 30 November and asked for the Council's formal approval, but even though legal documentation had not been drawn up, surveys and designs would be put in hand.⁸² The Council gave the approval requested, but reserved the right to re-negotiate the sharing of costs of additional capital work and developments. It also wanted a review of the decision not to give it the right to provide transport to and from the airport.

In general, the Treasury concurred with the Ministry of Works views on Rongotai, but had two reservations. These were that the estimated cost of the new college was too low, as was the estimated cost of facilities for the Civil Aviation Division and it recommended an additional £425,000 be allowed for these items. It also doubted the Commissioner's estimate of four and a half years to complete the project and proposed that the funds be provided over a period of six years. It thought at some future date it would be necessary to transfer

some flights to Paraparaumu and that Rongotai would have to be extended, perhaps by adding a runway parallel with the one to be constructed.⁸³

Despite having pressed for the Salek Street site from 1934 to 1950, and finally succeeding in getting approval to go ahead, the test bores proved the site unsatisfactory. No tests had apparently been taken despite the information given to the Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee in November 1937 on the lack of solid foundations there.⁸⁴ The Salek Street plan envisaged a sea level approach at both Evans Bay and Lyall Bay but the tunnel under the runway would have been below the normal water table, in permanent danger of flooding and the sand would not have given enough strength for the foundations needed for the heavy planes which would use the runway. The scheme was abandoned. On being questioned on this, the Mayor, W. Appleton said '...an alternative was discussed between the late Mr. Furkert and myself some years ago and it is interesting to note it looks as if his ideas will be put into effect....' Algie said a new scheme was under consideration which would avoid Rongotai College grounds and that the golf course would probably not be required.⁸⁵

Late 1948 to late 1950 was a period of intense political activity. Local residents' associations combined to form a joint action group to press for the construction of a new college before the demolition of the existing school located on the proposed runway. The Miramar Golf Club questioned the sites for the new college and asked for much more replacement land than could be reasonably expected. It is not clear if these caused any delay, but several months were lost at the beginning of the period when negotiations with the W.C.C. were suspended. Moreover, the estimated cost rose substantially.

The Tymms' Mission gave international support to Rongotai development. Less land was needed than the Mission recommended because of new traffic control procedures. The W.C.C. would have been concerned that the development of Paraparaumu would make Rongotai less important and a delay in reaching agreement on cost sharing could result in the City Council having to meet a larger share. Travellers and airlines were complaining about the time wasted and

extra cost in using Paraparaumu. Rongotai was an election issue and the Labour Government wanted to show progress before the election. It was not re-elected. The new National Government, which had been urging the development of Rongotai for years, provided funds for the project, but the site proved to be unsuitable. This seems to have been anticipated because alternative plans had already been prepared. It may well have been a deliberate decision to withhold information on the probable need to relocate to a more expensive site until a firm commitment to Rongotai had been obtained.

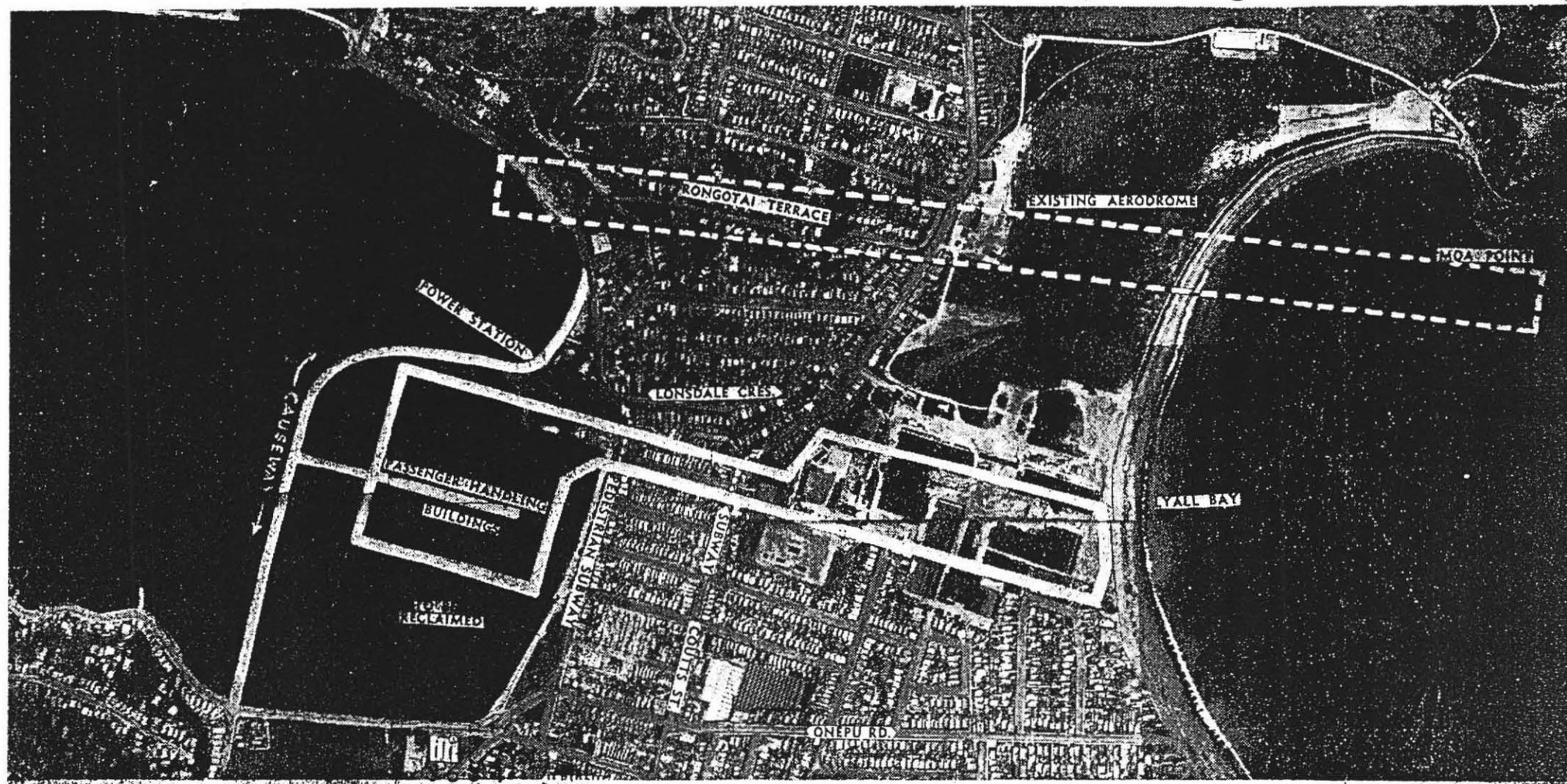
CHAPTER 6 1950 TO THE OPENING OF THE WELLINGTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT 1959

In September 1950, the press reported that a new scheme was under consideration for Rongotai.¹ Because the cost of £1,000,000 estimated in 1948/1949 had risen to £ 2,800,000 in June 1950, it was felt appropriate to look at alternative sites with reasonably quick access to Wellington.² Ministry of Works (M.O.W) engineers had obviously been working on this as a photograph with the outline of the new proposal was published in the *newspapers*.³

The new scheme agreed to by the Wellington City Council, (W.C.C.), involved the construction of a runway centred on Rongotai Terrace, incorporating the whole of the existing airport and the land previously used for the Centennial Exhibition. The costs of the survey and plans were to be shared in the same proportion as that agreed for the main development, namely the W.C.C. meeting one -third and the Government two - thirds.⁴ General approval to the Rongotai Terrace scheme was recommended by the W.C.C. Airport Committee to the City Council.⁵

F. M. H. Hanson, Deputy Commissioner of Works, was now in charge of the project and wished to get as much progress as possible. Since negotiations were virtually complete, he asked the office solicitor to prepare agreements with the W.C.C. and Wellington Harbour Board (W.H.B.). It was particularly urgent to get a formal agreement with the latter as the first stages of construction involved the reclamation in Evans Bay and the removal of spoil from W.H.B. land.⁶ It would have been reasonable to expect that future difficulties would be engineering ones and relatively minor matters such as arguments about

New Eastward Site For Rongotai Extension Being Investigated



The new site for the extension of Rongotai Aerodrome at present being investigated is shown above by dotted lines running from Moa Point. The strip for the runways is about 500 yards wide and runs over Rongotai Terrace to Evans Bay. The present scheme, providing for a runway farther west through the Rongotai College grounds is also shown. The discovery of unsuitable substrata where the tram and traffic subway is proposed has made it almost certain that this scheme will be abandoned.

the level of compensation to be paid to individual property owners and complaints about noise and dust caused by the construction works. However, some major design changes proved to be necessary.

It was suggested to E. R. McKillop, the Commissioner of Works, that altering the alignment of the runway by moving it one hundred feet to the east at the Evans Bay end and one hundred and fifty feet to the west at the Lyall Bay end would give a better approach and he instructed that test bores and soundings be taken of the proposed new alignment.⁷ This improved alignment was confirmed as satisfactory by the Aerodrome Engineer.⁸

The Government faced requests that work be so arranged that the old runways were available for Cook Strait traffic as long as possible.⁹ The Minister of Works, W. S. Goosman, did not hold out much hope for the interim use of Rongotai by Herons¹⁰ but conceded that if Herons proved to be satisfactory, the extra costs and time incurred by using Paraparaumu made their use at Rongotai attractive. No doubt the concern of the Marlborough businessmen was intensified by the national waterfront strike of 1951, as the increased demand for air services put considerable pressure on N. Z. National Airways Corporation (NAC). The airline had expected its first two Bristol freighters to arrive in May 1951 but the dock strike occurred prior to their arrival. To provide a freight service, the corporation chartered four planes from Formosa.¹¹ The Herons arrived in 1952, three months before the reconditioned east-west runways were reopened¹² and were in service until the major runway construction work began in 1957.¹³

Drawings for the new proposal needed detailed surveys and engineering investigation, but some aspects could be implemented without much delay. Whatever scheme was adopted, much reclamation work in both Evans Bay and Lyall Bay would be needed. Being within the harbour and sheltered from the open sea, Evans Bay was unlikely to be subject to violent wave action, but Lyall Bay could be seriously affected with scouring by waves and currents. It was important to be sure the expensive construction of the airport was protected, so a

design engineer experienced in constructing hydraulic models for hydro - electric power schemes was instructed to prepare a model to use data to be compiled of wave actions, particularly in storm conditions.¹⁴

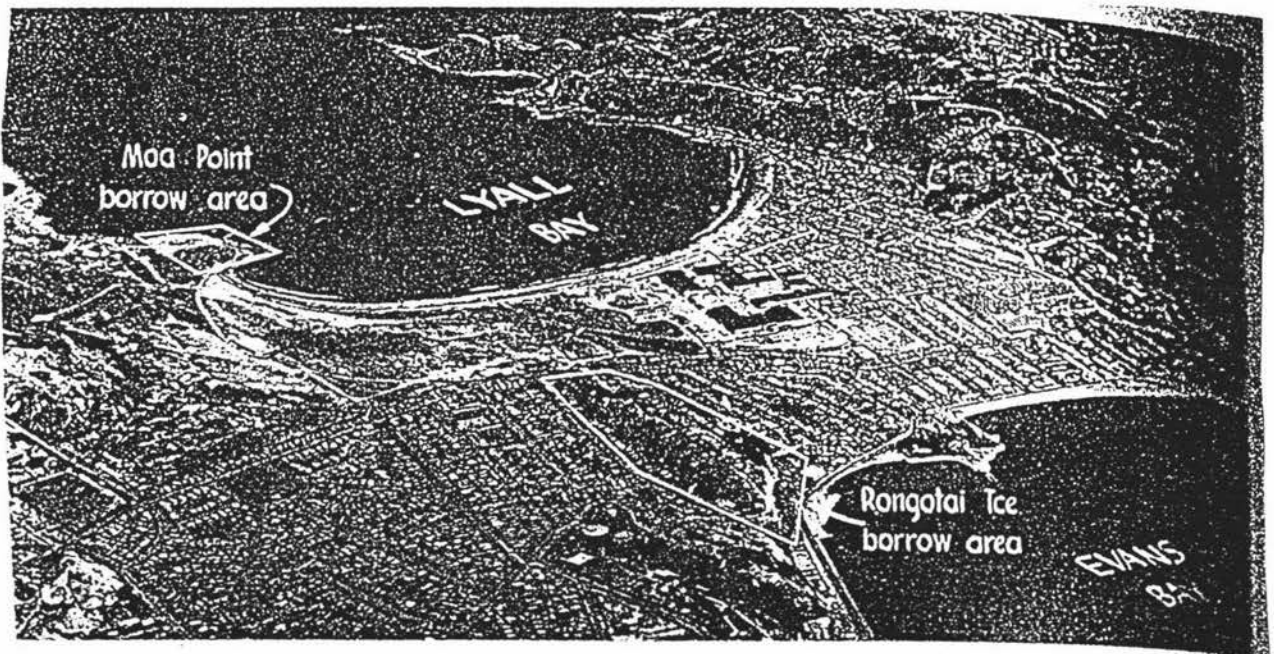
Reclamation work in Evans Bay was to proceed using spoil from Aberdeen Quay¹⁵ and the Government policy on the procedures for buying houses on the site and their disposal was notified to the aerodrome engineering staff.¹⁶ While the main construction work to be charged against the Government was being performed by the M.O.W., the costs were the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Administration (C.A.A.), a division of the Air Department. This caused some administrative problems as the M.O.W. was buying properties before financial approval had been given, or even sought, by the C.A.A., which became liable for the local authority rates payable once the property had been purchased. The properties were let by the M.O.W. until they had to be demolished or relocated. The administrative work of keeping track of these transactions, technically a C.A.A. responsibility, was time consuming and difficult because two Departments were involved, consequently E. A. Gibson, the Director of Civil Aviation, suggested that the M.O.W. assume complete control of such transactions until the airport was completed when it could be handed over to C.A.A.¹⁷ This was acceptable to the Treasury and M.O.W.¹⁸

The policy of letting houses pending their removal or demolition provided a significant amount of money to the Government because the houses would not be needed for a lengthy period but the District Commissioner of Works was later to worry about removing tenants who refused to vacate houses and asked that a general approval be sought from the Minister to have such tenants evicted. If necessary, he wanted the assistance of the Crown Solicitor to be made available.¹⁹ Blanket approval for the ejection of occupants was not granted, the policy being for individual cases to be dealt with on their merits.²⁰

The Director of Civil Aviation, Gibson, was concerned that the best advice available had not been sought on the airport design. He was afraid large sums of money could be wasted on construction and that the country could be

saddled with unnecessarily high operational costs if improvements could be made to the layout²¹ but McKillop did not reply to this request '...as the proposal ...[was]... at present under discussion at ministerial level.'²²

When the Salek Street project had been considered, the length of the proposed runway would only permit its use by internal traffic, consequently a runway strength of Class 5²³ had been proposed. With the additional length of runway proposed for the Rongotai Terrace scheme, the airport might be suitable for trans-Tasman flights which would require a runway strength of Class 4. However, the Commissioner of Works felt that because the characteristics of future planes were not predictable, the subway should be built to a Class 3 strength, so as to withstand double the weight capability of a Class 5 runway and to cater for planes with higher tyre pressure.²⁴



Aerial view of the airport site before construction

This was not the only consideration given to improvements. The Aerodrome Engineer of the Ministry, Smart, believed that the Rongotai Terrace scheme, while costing a little more than the Salek Street scheme, would give an aerodrome slightly better than Class D length and that with additional

reclamation at Evans Bay could be upgraded to Class C. The removal of another fifty seven houses could improve the airport to a full instrument controlled one and, if necessary, a parallel (twin) runway could be constructed with the removal of a further fifty-five houses.²⁵

Cabinet deferred approval of tenders for the reclamation work and breakwater construction in Lyall Bay until it had obtained more information from its Finance Committee,²⁶ but four weeks later accepted the tender of Wilkins and Davies Construction Ltd., of £517,432 5s 0d with the expectation that approximately 22% would come to charge in the 1953-1954 financial year.²⁷ Cabinet departed from its usual practice of only naming the successful tenderer by also divulging the amount involved. This was a special exception made because there were no other similar cases and other tenderers were unlikely to gain any financial advantage from the disclosure.²⁸

The work proceeded much faster than expected and the Air Secretary was asked to have a further £20,000 placed on the Supplementary Estimates for that year.²⁹ The speed of work on this contract was inconsistent because only a few months later, Gibson was complaining about the slow progress and wanted an assurance that there would be no substantial underexpenditure. He noted there had been consistent underexpenditure on Rongotai for the '...past few years....' and he was having difficulty in justifying the amounts he thought necessary for capital development. He was concerned that if the amount provided in the Estimates of Expenditure was cut back, it would affect the allocation for Rongotai.³⁰

It was expected that there would be an underexpenditure of £24,113 for the 1953-1954 year. Some items would be overspent and others underspent, but a note indicated that the anticipated 10% supervision charge on contract prices had been waived by the Treasury.³¹ This was wrong. The Assistant Finance Officer of Treasury had not waived the charge, only deferred £48,000 of the supervision charges until the matter had been given further consideration. It was agreed construction was slow, but this was because

restrictions had been placed on the contractors by the C.A.A. so the cost of the work performed had been reduced by about £2,000 per day.³²

The restrictions referred to involved limiting the use of a crane needed for piling at Lyall Bay and the placing of concrete blocks at Moa Point to the hours of darkness, or during daylight at times specifically approved by the air traffic officer. At all other times the crane had to be parked in a specified area with its jib lowered³³ because the crane was on the flight path of Herons using the east - west runways at the Lyall Bay end of the airport. These restrictions cost the contractors a lot of money and legal advice confirmed they were entitled to compensation. Moreover, having to operate the crane at night involved extra pay and additional costs for lighting.

The Evans Bay reclamation had been going ahead for some time and eastern suburbs residents were complaining about the problems of access to their area. Some roads had been closed and others were being crossed by many trucks depositing spoil in the reclamation area. They felt greater urgency should be given to the causeway road and filling should be behind it rather than leave the causeway until the reclamation had been completed. Notwithstanding the causeway and access road being the Council responsibility, the Mayor wrote that he hoped the M.O.W. would be able to get on with the reclamation quickly so that access to Miramar would be improved as soon as possible.³⁴

Construction work does have side effects. The Evans Bay power station was reported to be between one and two percent less efficient since the reclamation work had been undertaken. It had been necessary to clean the cooling condensers and recirculate water more often. Fuel usage had also increased. At that late stage, the State Hydro-electricity Department wanted information on the proposed work because the power station needed a flow of sea water at normal temperature at least ten feet deep at the water intake.³⁵ Not all side effects were bad. Blasting was necessary to obtain spoil from Moa Point and to remove part of Rongotai Terrace. The Geophysical Division of the Department

of Scientific and Industrial Research obtained details of times and places of blasting in order to carry out seismological surveys.³⁶

Work was proceeding and the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation, T. P. Shand, appointed a Committee to co-ordinate the operations of the three main interest groups, C.A.A., M.O.W. and W.C.C. The Chairman was Sir A. de T. Nevill, the Deputy Director of Civil Aviation. While the Committee had no executive functions, it could make recommendations to the Minister and the Departments concerned.³⁷ The first meeting of the committee on 2 April 1955 received a time plan of the development prepared by the District Commissioner of Works. This showed it was expected to complete the airport by April or May 1958, but by 28 April it was already clear that date could not be met. The time plan had two key dates, the closure of Coutts Street, which bisected the airport, by August 1957 and the demolition of the Electrolux factory and provision of a new one on reclaimed land by August 1956. Both of these were W.C.C. projects. Coutts Street was a tram route and its closure to public transport was dependent upon the City Council being able to acquire buses to replace them. The Electrolux factory could not be replaced by the scheduled date as the Council had given the company until the end of March 1957 to vacate the premises.³⁸ This clearly demonstrated the need for the Coordinating Committee.

The time plan was reproduced in the '...Functional Plan of Rongotai Aerodrome...', the Borgeson Report.³⁹ Even though it was obvious the May 1958 completion date was not attainable, Shand issued a press statement in September 1955 quoting '...the middle of 1958...' as the date on which work was expected to be complete.⁴⁰

In May 1955, the Government accepted an offer from the United States Civil Aviation Administration to advise on the functional planning of the airport.⁴¹ Gibson had been asking in vain for an overseas expert to comment on the airport design for a number of years. The M.O.W. apparently had not believed overseas advice was necessary, but it seems Gibson's urgings had been heeded by Shand and recommended to Cabinet.⁴² It is interesting to speculate on

what inspired the 'offer' to assist from the United States administration. As Director of Civil Aviation in New Zealand, Gibson would undoubtedly have had some association with his counterparts in other countries. Moreover, he had worked closely with the U. S. Air Force during the war and had been awarded the U. S. Legion of Merit for his services. He would have known many people in aviation circles and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he suggested to his American friends that they make the offer. The United States advisor, M. B. Borgeson, made two visits to New Zealand. He had differences of opinion with M.O.W. staff and he

'...came close to resigning on a number of occasions, is known to have literally thrown two Ministry of Works officials out of his office...[and was]...prevented from ...[flying]...back to the United States because the only ...[internal aircraft available]...was unserviceable.....he was obliged to spend the night at a Blenheim hotel where ...Shand...also happened to be staying. By next morning, Mr. Borgeson had agreed to remain until his job was done.⁴³

The terms of reference prepared by Nevill and C. W. O. Turner,⁴⁴ Chief Engineer of the M.O.W., were apparently not provided to Borgeson by the New Zealand Embassy in Washington which had asked him only to comment on engineering work already under way.⁴⁵ Borgeson had prepared his preliminary report but wanted to give it to the Ministers verbally '...without any public servant present....' This worried Turner, who felt Ministers should be accompanied by officials,⁴⁶ and he could also have been worried about the content of the report; Borgeson had already outlined shortcomings in the design, particularly in respect of the terminal area. Turner thought the Minister should be advised of Borgeson's '...extraordinary attitude to the Department which was without foundation....'⁴⁷

The M.O.W. Aerodrome Engineer was unable to tell Borgeson of the anticipated use of the airport and Hanson clarified the position; international flights were not proposed at that time, but it might be used for them in future and Borgeson's views on this would be appreciated.⁴⁸

Borgeson had produced only sketch plans which would form the basis of a master plan for submission to the Government and the W.C.C., but Nevill was aware that shortcomings in the design had been identified. Nevill expressed his regrets at the situation because it could cause embarrassment for the Government. He 'wore two hats.' Although he was Deputy Director of Civil Aviation, this information had come to him in his capacity as Chairman of the Coordinating Committee which required him to advise the Ministers and Turner who was on his Committee. As it was deemed confidential to those people, he had not discussed the matter with Gibson, his Director, or the Air Secretary who was Head of his Department.⁴⁹

Nevill advised the Ministers that Borgeson had prepared preliminary sketch plans of two alternative designs; one with a terminal to the west of the runway and the other with it to the east. The M.O.W. plan had proposed a terminal area to the west, on the exhibition grounds, but Borgeson proved that area barely adequate for the existing demand and certainly incapable of expansion. To make that area satisfactory he believed a further two hundred houses would have to be removed. To provide a suitable area to the east of the runway, Borgeson believed the golf course would be necessary. Nevill felt it was imperative that Borgeson be asked to prepare a functional plan and include it in his report, which was due in early 1956. It was essential the basis for the findings be studied and if more space was required the M.O.W. should be consulted.⁵⁰

Turner agreed with Nevill and in his brief for Shand wrote that '...While the choice at present is full of difficulties which can only be removed by proper economic appraisal, there is no doubt at all that no consideration should stand in the way of a proper solution....'⁵¹ Even before Borgeson had explained the reasons he considered the exhibition site unsatisfactory, Hanson was doubtful of the finding. He told his Minister, the Prime Minister, Minister in charge of Civil Aviation and Minister of Finance that the exhibition site could provide a workable terminal and that no commitment should be made without careful checking because the use of the golf course would cost an extra £1,000,000.⁵²

Although the ultimate configuration of the airport was still uncertain, work continued on the excavation and reclamation work and the provision of some ancillary services. It is not clear if this uncertainty caused any significant delays.

To pay for its share of the work, the W.C.C. needed to raise loans which required authorization by the Local Government Loans Board, a division of the Treasury. Authority had been given for the raising of £100,000 in December 1952 and a further £100,000 in November 1955. Little of that money had been spent, when only one month later, the Council applied for authority to borrow an additional £150,000. The Board was reluctant to approve this and advised the Council to first use most of the £200,000 already approved before applying for an additional authority.⁵³ The Loans Board also raised the matter with the Commissioner of Works, saying it preferred to authorise one loan for the whole amount and that it wanted to be informed of the full financial implications of the Rongotai development. The W.C.C. had said it was unable to provide that information because of possible changes to the scheme when the Borgeson report had been studied.⁵⁴ Hanson supplied details of the airport work and payments to be met by the Council and estimated these at £1,000,000. In addition, it would have to carry out a lot of expensive work on roads and services aside from the aerodrome expenditure. He reminded the Loans Board that the work had been declared one of both national and local importance in terms of section 31 Finance Act (No.3) 1944 quoting Cabinet decision CM(51)39.⁵⁵

The W.C.C. wished to raise loans even though it had large sums unspent because loan money had been difficult to obtain. From 1951, local authorities had experienced difficulty in raising loans and '... in the early part of 1952, a virtual stalemate was reached...' in the loan market,⁵⁶ and '...despite an increase in the amounts approved by the Local Government Loans Board, the total of loan moneys actually raised declined in 1954-55...' ⁵⁷ and '...local bodies ...[had]... not obtained as much as they would have wished from some of the institutions to which they ...[had]... traditionally looked for funds....' ⁵⁸

Although the original application for the Number 3 Loan had been for £150,000 the amount finally authorised by the Local Government Loans Board was £200,000 and Number 4 Loan in July 1957 was for a further £500,000.

Borgeson submitted his report in June 1956.⁵⁹ In it he advocated the development of the airport in three stages, namely pre-stage one, stage one and final development. He rejected the exhibition site for the terminal area because it was exposed to salt spray and high winds which would lead to undue deterioration of aircraft. Also, the noise factor would be disruptive to residents and staff and students of Rongotai College, and the cost of future expansion would be prohibitive.

The pre-first stage had the terminal area to the east of the runway with the proposed conversion of the de Havilland factory as a temporary terminal, thus permitting the golf course to continue in use with some minor modifications. The land to the west not required for the terminal would be available as industrial sites and also provide land for sports fields for the College.⁶⁰ Borgeson did not support the M.O.W. proposed length of paved runway which he felt was longer than necessary and recommended a shorter one.⁶¹ He also suggested the W.C.C. obtain '...competent advice (sic) and guidance ...' on the operation of an airport.⁶²

The M.O.W. started to prepare plans for a terminal area on the eastern site and these were well advanced by August 1956, but Hanson understood that the City Engineer had not proceeded with the design of the works which were his responsibility, presumably because no firm decision had been taken on the final design. Turner wrote it was not intended to alter the gradient of the runway as suggested by Borgeson because this would preclude the possibility of extension to the south and would involve higher cost. Nor was it intended to reduce the length of runway. M.O.W. had planned for a 5650 feet runway and the C.A.A. had asked for 5600 feet for Viscount use, but Borgeson had suggested 5320 feet and said this was sufficient for limited use by Viscounts.

From his memorandum, it seems Turner was claiming many of the technical matters raised by Borgeson required only minor modifications of M.O.W. plans already available.⁶³ However Borgeson did propose a major change by suggesting the transfer of the terminal area from the west to the east of the runway. Turner wanted a final decision by the Government on whether the eastern or western terminal area was to be adopted. A decision could not '...be long deferred without major delay in construction occurring. Some delay to the programme ...[seemed]... inevitable but when a firm decision ...[had]...been taken the construction programme ...[would]... be reviewed on the most practicable basis....'⁶⁴

Shand discussed Borgeson's proposals with the City Council in early December 1956 and wrote to the new Mayor, F. Kitts. He asked for assurances that the W.C.C. accepted that an agreement on cost sharing had been reached in principle and advised him that Shand was prepared to accept any form of arbitration which could be mutually agreed upon for matters still unresolved. Until firm agreement had been reached he could '...not authorise the letting of any further contracts, and each day's delay ... on in reaching agreement ...[would]... be a day's delay on the completion of the airfield....' Shand said the question of arbitration on contentious clauses in the agreement had been discussed with R. Macalister.⁶⁵ The W.C.C. confirmed it was prepared to adopt the Borgeson plan up to pre - stage one, but that it did have some reservations on the cost of the additional capital work. Subject to more definite information, it might be prepared to share the additional capital cost equally with the Government provided it received half any operating surplus instead of only one - third. The W.C.C. acknowledged an agreement existed on the basis of the exchange of letters some years earlier and suggested the Government submit a draft agreement for perusal. It also expressed the hope that the Government would be in a position to make an early announcement on the adoption of Borgeson's report.⁶⁶

An early decision was not taken. W. A. Fox, M.P. for Miramar, said '...we have been dithering and dallying for years, but we still do not

have a final plan. They are still arguing about who is to pay and how much is to be paid....⁶⁷ Indeed, Borgeson's report seems to have been treated as confidential because the District Commissioner of Works who was in charge of work on the site wrote asking for copies.⁶⁸ In April 1956, Shand had said he had '...the report of perhaps the world's leading expert on airport planning, which ...[he hoped]... in due course to table in ...[the]... House....' This must have been the preliminary report as the final one was not presented to the Minister until June of that year. Despite his 'hopes' to table it, no action was apparently taken to do this,⁶⁹ although Nash, the Leader of the Opposition did obtain a copy.⁷⁰ The delays foreseen by Turner did eventuate. The Labour paper, the *Standard* attributed the delay to the failure of the Government to make a decision on the plan to be adopted, that of Borgeson or that of the M.O.W. It claimed that the Government was not in favour of the Borgeson plan even though it had cost almost £30,000. Men on the site were said to believe the delay had political significance because the hold up was unnecessary.⁷¹ In fact, much progress had been made. The Air Secretary was able to confirm that work could proceed up to pre-stage one and that agreements with the W.C.C. would be based on the draft originally prepared by the M.O.W. The changed nature of the project would involve a number of alterations and the Air Department had been given the services of a Crown Solicitor to assist it.⁷²

Responsibility for the construction work was that of the District Commissioner of Works but he had not received clear instructions and asked for policy decisions on the airport.

...The chequered past history of this project emphasise the advisability of some definition of policy as soon as possible.

Basing our opinions largely on hearsay and what we read in the papers we are laying our construction plans to a definite course and within our ...[District]... authority have taken steps to implement those plans.

Basically we require an executive instruction telling us the extent to which the Borgeson proposals are now accepted....⁷³

He went on to detail the information necessary to prepare construction schedules for an estimated completion date of mid-1959 which he felt would depend on the closing of the airfield to all planes by a firm date in August 1958.⁷⁴ In fact, the Coordinating Committee decided that Rongotai would cease to be a licensed aerodrome as from 1 April 1958 and that there would be no prospect of it being used after that date.⁷⁵ Herons had already ceased to use the airport the preceding July.⁷⁶

Borgeson had recommended the de Havilland factory be moved to a new site and that it be modified to serve as a temporary terminal building. Hanson asked for guidance on the arrangements to be followed in negotiations with de Havillands. He had been asked to open negotiations with the company by the Air Secretary and on checking the lease held by them, he had discovered a clause which required only three months notice to the company to vacate the premises. Despite this, the lessors, the W.C.C., had given the company reason to believe that it could have indefinite, undisturbed possession. Moreover, the company was of great importance to the Government because of the service it gave to the Royal New Zealand Air Force. The land on which the factory was situated was owned by the W.C.C., and there was considerable cost involved if the factory and the land was required for aerodrome purposes.

Shand was interested in progress on the airport and asked that he be provided with reports with particular reference to delays and the reasons for them,⁷⁷ but the M.O.W. representative on the Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee did not wish to provide this information. He felt any such requests should be made to the Commissioner of Works⁷⁸ despite the fact that the Committee was set up by the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation on the authority of Cabinet to advise him. The Chairman, Nevill, took the opposite view, advising the Minister of some matters regarding the Borgeson recommendations and specifically noting that he had not discussed the matter with his immediate superior, Gibson, or his Head of Department.⁷⁹

While Air Department had been given responsibility for concluding agreements with the W.C.C., Hanson was not prepared to accept that. He advised his Minister that as a result of that recent change his Department and the Minister lacked

...full knowledge of the state that negotiations ...[had]...reached in regard to many vital matters relative to the responsibilities of the Government and the Council. This ...[was]... embarrassing to the Department and ...[put]... difficulties in the way of prosecuting the aerodrome works....

He went on to assert the M.O.W. would be handicapped as long as the Minister of another Department carried out negotiations and entered into agreements as planning work without full details of agreements and other arrangements was difficult. Consequently, he suggested the authority to negotiate and conclude agreements be transferred back to the M.O.W.⁸⁰ Goosman sent Shand a copy of this memorandum the following day.⁸¹

No firm financial agreements had been settled between the Government and the W.C.C. setting out their respective responsibilities so no announcement could be made of the acceptance of the Borgeson plan, but as both parties had indicated their approval in principle, planning could proceed on the basis of that plan. The City Engineer advised that work was in hand to provide a road to the north of the runway and contracts had been let for a pedestrian subway beneath the airport at Coutts Street.⁸² The subway had been changed from a full traffic one to a pedestrian one, because it would have to be strong enough to withstand the pressure of much larger aircraft than had been intended originally and there were problems in providing a wide subway which would be strong enough. It was also deemed unnecessary to have a full traffic subway because of improved roading to the north and south of the runway and the ability to reroute public transport using buses and trolley buses instead of trams. In fact, when the airport was finally operational, the factor which limited the weight of planes using the airport was the strength of the subway, the runway itself being capable of carrying much heavier aircraft.⁸³

Adoption of the Borgeson report would necessitate additional filling in the terminal area which was to encroach on Golf Club land, but at that time no approval had been sought to survey the golf links. The City Council was engaged in substantial ancillary work but this could not proceed fully until the terminal area had been levelled by the M.O.W. It was hoped the work would be under way in August or September and the Herons would then be unable to use the east - west runways. It was thought important that the new airport be operational for NAC Viscounts by early 1959 to avoid serious financial problems for the airline, but the engineers involved were doubtful if that could be achieved. It was agreed a new timetable for construction should be prepared, but the City Engineer indicated it was unlikely it would be of much value unless a firm policy decision on the basic design of the airport was taken. The lack of such a decision was causing him some embarrassment.⁸⁴

Shand had instructed C.A.A. to postpone the acquisition of the Miramar Golf Club land and to reduce as far as possible encroachment on it. He felt only a small area would be required and thought the Club could redesign its course to give it a satisfactory facility for some years.⁸⁵ This matter was raised by the Commissioner of Works with his Minister and he set out three possible courses of action. These were, first, to acquire only five and a half acres which would be sufficient for at least seven years, second to acquire the whole of the property and re-establish the Club at Paekakariki, and third to commit the Crown to purchasing the whole property in stages at valuation at the date each portion was taken. Hanson preferred the first option as it was much cheaper and did not commit the Government to any future development.⁸⁶ Cabinet agreed to this with the proviso that if agreement could not be reached with the Club, the second option be negotiated. The M.O.W. wanted to obtain at least five and a half acres before March 1958 to ensure construction was not held up, and the Golf Club wanted a definite proposal by early December 1957 so it could be resolved by the end of its financial year.⁸⁷

The W.C.C. was leaning towards full scale positive management of the airport and was proposing to engage Leigh Fisher, an American

expert on airport management, to visit New Zealand to advise the Council. This was the person who had been consulted by Borgeson. The National Government was defeated in the 1957 election and Shand, the outgoing Minister in charge of Civil Aviation recommended to his successor that he approve the appointment of Leigh Fisher to advise the City Council.⁸⁸

In response to a request for information on progress on its construction work, the W.C.C. advised that it could not give a firm estimate of the cost or the completion date of work it had in progress. It indicated the terminal and surrounding area might be varied considerably when the Fisher report had been studied and that the City Engineer was not aware of any undertaking that the terminal building would be available for use about the time the airport would be opened. The terminal was only intended to be a short term temporary one and the W.C.C. believed active steps should be taken to investigate and prepare plans for the permanent terminal within twelve months of the airport opening. The Council also understood an undertaking had been given to the Miramar Golf Club that no further land would be required for at least seven years, but the Council was not a party to that undertaking. Leigh Fisher had confirmed the proposed conversion of the de Havilland factory could only be a short term measure and that it was important and urgent to take the whole of the golf links to allow proper planning and development of the aerodrome.⁸⁹

Hanson did not agree; he considered the temporary terminal would have to serve for some years until traffic requirements had been determined. It was also clearly intended that the terminal would be available when the airport was opened; previous Councils had always understood this. Moreover, there was no need for the Government to go back on its undertaking to the Golf Club. Its land would only be needed if a start was to be made on the permanent terminal and that was out of the question, not only on the grounds of the finance needed, but because negotiations with the Golf Club could take years and that time could be used to assess the needs for the permanent facility.⁹⁰ Hanson had already raised the question of the terminal cost with the City Council. The previous October it had been agreed the permanent terminal would not be provided and the cost of the

aerodrome had been reduced as a result by £110,000, of which the City Council saving was about £36,000.⁹¹

Fisher's report was not released because it contained '...estimates of income from various channels and concessions, which if made public could affect airport revenues...',⁹² but the Minister and the Chairman of the City Council Airport Committee did release the report's recommendations. These were to concentrate as much traffic as possible at Rongotai, and to lease concessions to raise revenue from banks, fuel services, shops and later perhaps a hotel. Fisher had also recommended the acquisition of the golf links within two to three years of the airport opening and the construction of a tunnel across the harbour to the Wairarapa, or the building of a bridge across it. The joint Government and W.C.C. statement included the words '...All the views expressed by Mr. Fisher were not necessarily supported either by the Government or the City Council....'⁹³

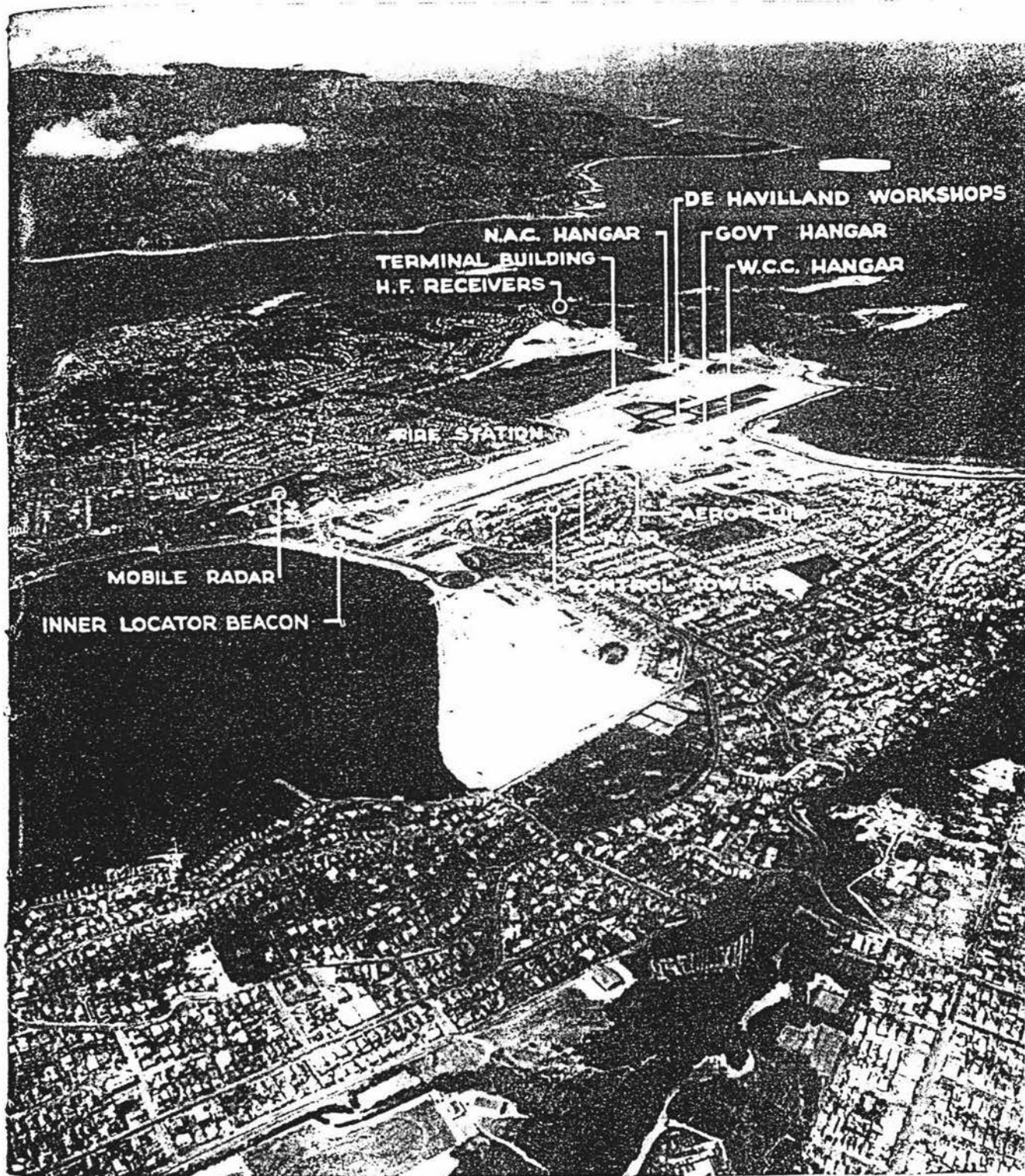
The major recommendations of the Fisher report were not adopted, but the views expressed were noted and must have assisted in the management of the airport. The Leigh Fisher report was not supplied to the M.O.W., the report being commissioned and paid for by the W.C.C., which was responsible for the management of the airport.

The plans drawn up by the City Engineer for the terminal building were thought too elaborate for a temporary facility and Hanson suggested the de Havilland building could be modified to stage one of a permanent terminal



Tiger Moth factory later converted into the Airport Terminal

which could be extended to stage two later. In view of this, he had not supported the application to the Local Authorities Loans Board for approval to raise a loan for the work.⁹⁴ The item was deleted from the loan application.

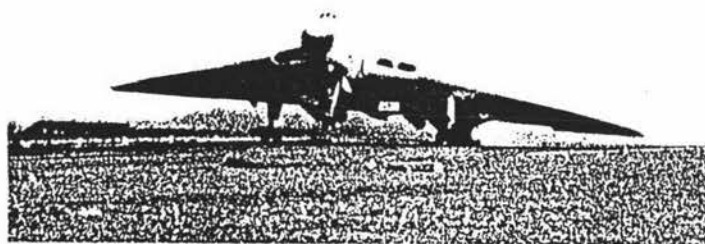


Wellington Airport from a northerly angle, showing the position of its main features. Photo by W. H. Love, Pet

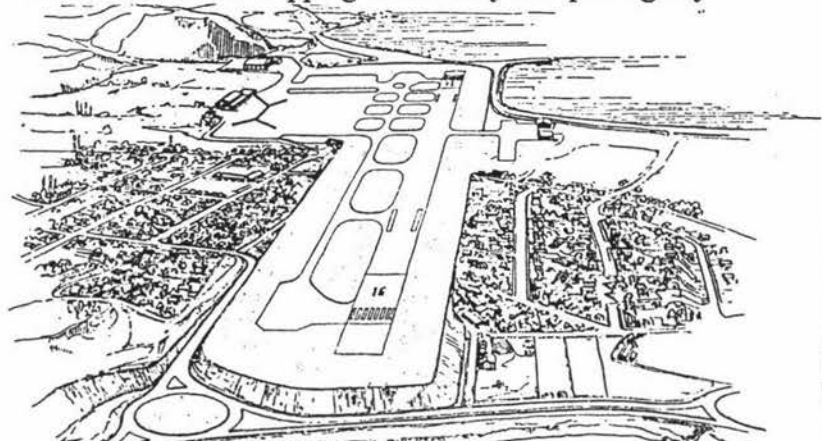
Hanson advised the C.A.A. that he expected the airport to be available for limited use on 15 July 1959,⁹⁵ and NAC was told that barring unforeseen circumstances it could start operations on that date with a limit of ten Viscount movements and ten DC 3 movements per day during the hours of daylight.⁹⁶ The Viscount airliner 'City of Wellington' arrived at Rongotai on 6 July 1959 for three days of tests and familiarisation flights, and NAC daylight operations began on 20 July.⁹⁷ A Douglas DC 4 of the United States Marine Corps landed in a strong northerly wind on 17 September and the captain praised the airport, remarking that he had only needed half the runway.⁹⁸

To mark the opening of the new airport, an air display was arranged to take place on Saturday 24 October 1959 but

'...the weather was unkind ...[and]... after a 24 - hour delay the assembled dignitaries could enjoy celebrations which included ... a Sunderland flying boat that almost landed on the tarmac and a Vulcan bomber that crunched the threshold of the runway, sprayed the crowd with kerosene and limped off to Ohakea to nurse its bruised underbelly...'⁹⁹



Air Force Vulcan clipping the runway on opening day



Rongotai Airport - View looking south from Evans Bay

Wellington had its airport. There had been many problems and negotiations had been protracted during the final decade. The Salek Street scheme had initially been modified by moving the runway slightly. Then the abandonment of that scheme and the adoption of the Rongotai Terrace scheme meant that it was unnecessary to demolish Rongotai College or take much of the golf course. Instead of a runway at sea level, it was much higher, longer and stronger; a much better airport than had originally been planned. It also reduced the disturbance to shipping as, although the take off and landing trajectory was lower, it started from a higher base. There had been a vast amount of discussion, planning and negotiation, much of which had proved nugatory, but the final outcome was an airport satisfactory to most people.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

The saga of Rongotai Airport to 1960 reflects the economic, social and political forces operating during that period, as well as the possibilities and problems posed by technical developments, topography and climate. There were many factors militating against Rongotai, not least of which were its serious natural disadvantages. It was subject to severe turbulence because of the high winds and hilly surroundings. Until 1929, local authorities were expected to meet the cost of providing civil aerodromes, but had almost no authority to spend money on them until legislation was passed in that year which allowed them, including the Wellington City Council (W.C.C.), to do this. Moreover, aviation was not regarded as important by most people and in 1937, the ratepayers voted against raising a loan to develop the airfield. Inhibiting development was the proposal to remove many houses, demolish Rongotai College and acquire the Miramar Golf Course. Following the depression, housing and building materials were short, and there was a great expansion of secondary education resulting in pressure on those schools. The decision to proceed with Paraparaumu airport reduced the immediate need for Rongotai and residents of the area asked that the development be abandoned. If it was to proceed, they wanted a new college built before the demolition of the existing one. The residents of the area tended to be working people who were Government supporters but who weren't interested in flying. Their member of parliament was R. Semple, the Minister of Public Works.

The outbreak of war in 1939 delayed the development of civilian air services, but Rongotai was taken over as a military airfield and some extensions were made. After the war, negotiations for the use of Rongotai as a

civilian facility were resumed, but these were complicated and lengthy. The scheme envisaged rehousing a lot of people when building costs were high. It was also suggested the best site for the runway would be through the Evans Bay Power Station when electricity was short and vast sums of money were being spent to develop electricity generating capacity. The Government, the W.C.C., Miramar Golf Club, Wellington Harbour Board (W.H.B.), education authorities, residents, travellers, Wellington Aero Club and the Wellington Chamber of Commerce all had interests to be accommodated. Indeed, the W.C.C. attitude on the issue of cost sharing with the Government resulted in the suspension of activity for several months.

The Labour Government finally approved development in 1949, but was defeated before progress could be made. This resulted in only a short delay while the new Minister was briefed and Government funds were made available. Work was started but the site had to be abandoned because the water table was too high and satisfactory foundations could not be installed. This must have been expected because plans had already been prepared for the alternative site at Rongotai Terrace, but these too had to be amended considerably after an overseas expert, Borgeson, showed the area set aside for ground services was too small even for existing use and that many more houses would have to be demolished to cater for increased traffic. Moreover, aircraft in the area set aside for parking would be subject to wind damage and corrosion from salt spray. Delays also occurred as a result of differences between the Government and the W.C.C. on the terminal building, the W.C.C. wanting a much more elaborate facility than the Government was prepared to subsidise. A considerable amount of time and effort had been expended in negotiating with the Miramar Golf Club and Rongotai College authorities. The airport opened in 1959 left the college untouched and only had a minimal effect on the Golf Club.

However there were many strong forces pushing in favour of Rongotai, not least the existence of a small airfield with undeveloped land contiguous to it which could be developed relatively cheaply. Earthquakes in 1929 and 1931 demonstrated the value of aviation in civil emergencies and public interest was aroused by several famous flights, particularly those of Sir Charles Kingsford-

Smith, and Rongotai was extended to permit his plane to land. While the depression inhibited a lot of development, it was to some extent positive as money to pay for the work was available from the Unemployment Board's Funds, the City Council still being reluctant to spend much ratepayers' money on the airport.

The growth of air mail was important to Wellington, because it was the seat of Government, and the major financial, commercial and industrial centre of the country. Head offices of Government Departments and most of New Zealand's major companies, and the chief offices of overseas companies were located there. Business interests pushed for a local airport, especially as safe, long distance passenger aircraft made national and even international travel possible for the better off, many of whom became involved with aero clubs. The local Chamber of Commerce urged the development of Rongotai in 1934, but no action was taken until the Transport Co-ordination Board refused to license Rongotai for commercial flights because of its unsafe condition. The W.C.C. then prepared plans to improve the airfield which was extended in 1936.

Successive governments in the 1930's encouraged development of airfields, largely because of defence or civil emergency needs, and they subsidised improvements to Rongotai which was considered dangerous to both flyers and local residents. In the late 1930's, air defence was considered important and the Government was prepared to spend considerable sums on aircraft, aircrew and airfields. With the declaration of war, Rongotai assumed greater importance as a defence communications centre and an aircraft construction and aircrew training area. Extensions were necessary to provide for these. The airfield was returned to civilian use on the cessation of hostilities, but its small size and excessive wear to the grass runways made it unsafe so it was closed and Wellington traffic was transferred to Paraparaumu. This resulted in increased clamour for improvement to Rongotai. A series of 'expert' committees had recommended this, the parliamentary Opposition had been strongly in support of its development, as were airlines, the aero club, prominent citizens and people from other parts of the country. Passenger traffic, internal and international, and freight were increasing rapidly but the additional cost, discomfort and delays caused by travelling through Paraparaumu resulted in a lot of pressure to develop Rongotai. Reluctantly, the

Government agreed and plans were prepared based on the Salek Street site. When that site had to be abandoned, work began on the Rongotai Terrace site.

Mention must be made of some of the people who had a strong influence on decisions. E. A. Gibson, who advocated development in 1934, was a Public Works aerodromes engineer, a pilot, and Air Force Wing Commander ended his career as Director of Civil Aviation. Sir A De T. Nevill who was associated with the development of Rongotai for 25 years, became Chief of Air Staff and later Director of Civil Aviation, was chairman of the Investigating Committee which confirmed Rongotai as the best site. E. R. McKillop, W.C.C. assistant engineer when plans were drawn up by the City Engineer in 1937 was Commissioner of Works during the period Rongotai was being considered by the Government. T. C. A. Hislop, mayor of Wellington most of the time negotiations were in progress, was also President of the Wellington Aero Club. There were many others such as Sir Leonard Isitt, Chairman of Tasman Empire Air Line (TEAL), New Zealand National Airways Corporation (NAC), and the W.C.C. Airport Committee, and at a later stage in development, F. M. H. Hanson, a Public Works engineer who was Commissioner of Works at the time the airport was opened.. These men had the skills, technical knowledge, ambition, energy and political acumen needed to get to the top in their respective spheres.¹ It is little wonder that Bob Semple felt he had to defer to the opinions of his advisers. It is also clear that the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, had an important influence on the negotiations.

When the airport was opened in 1959, air travel was limited to a few people. Wellingtonians were proud of their airport,² but doubts were expressed about its ability to provide for anticipated use. In hindsight, the wind has been an advantage because it usually blows along the length of the runway, hence reducing the distance needed for landing and take off, and also keeps the airport relatively free of fog. Despite, or perhaps because of, carrying the International Airline Pilots 'black star' as a warning of seriously deficient safety margins and the need for great care,³ the airport has a remarkably low accident record. Over the years there have been several investigations⁴ on how to improve

it and some improvements have been made.⁵ In 1992, a proposal to expand Rongotai by acquiring over 180 homes and the Miramar Golf Course resulted '... in a huge public outcry and the airlines said it was unnecessary....' A modified plan to make the airport safer, improve parking and terminal facilities was announced in June 1993. It required the displacement of 19 homes, 3 hectares of the golf course, 2 commercial properties and a W.C.C. apartment block.⁶

The outcome of any proposal which has political implications depends on the balance of political influences of those supporting and those opposing the proposal. That the airport was developed in stages reflects the relative political influence of those groups at each stage of development. The objection to and abandonment of the proposed extensions in 1992 is evidence that the balance of political influences remains delicate in the case of Rongotai.

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- 2 Examples of articles quoting engineering problems are
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 Various contributors, Discussion on Gibson's paper cited above. *New Zealand Engineering*, Volume 7, Wellington 1952., pp.195-199.
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- 3 Notable examples include
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White, Leo, *Wingspread*, Auckland 1941.

Notes Chapter 2. Early Days Of Aviation.

- 1 Roberts, J. S., 'Wellington Airport, the City Council Responsibilities', Proceedings of a symposium, Wellington Branch, Institution of Engineers, *New Zealand Engineering*, Volume.16, Wellington 1961, p. 325.
- 2 Beck, A. J., and others, 'New Zealand Airports -Their Economics and Management', unpublished paper, School of Public Administration, Wellington 1961, p.5.
- 3 Campbell, Duncan, 'The Airport', in *Wellington Prospect*, Editors N. L. McLeod and B. H. Farland, Wellington 1970, p. 203.
- 4 Alexander, R. T., 'Aviation - The Early Days' in *New Zealand Heritage*, Volume 5, Part 75, Wellington 1973, p.2080.
- 5 Rendel, David, *Civil Aviation in New Zealand, An Illustrated History*, Wellington 1975, pp. 5-6.
- 6 Alexander, p.2081.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Rendel, p.17.
- 9 Ibid., pp17 -18.
- 10 Campbell, p. 204.
- 11 Rendel, p. 15.
- 12 Noble, L. M., *Sir Henry Wigram, Pioneer of New Zealand Aviation*, Christchurch 1952, pp.81-82.
- 13 Rongotai is the Maori name for the area encompassing Lyall Bay,

- 14 Roberts, p.325.
- 15 Quoted in Keith, Hamish, *New Zealand Yesterdays, A look at our recent past*, Sydney 1984, p.252.
- 16 NZPD, Volume 221, Holland, 27 June, 1929, p.9. Holland did not comment on the possibility of using sea transport, a slow method of communication, but referred only to the use of land and air transport. To use aircraft it was necessary to have a place where they could come in to land.
- 17 NZPD, Volume 221, Wilford, 27 June, 1929, p.9.
- 18 Examples of 'Unauthorised Expenditure' are the purchase of wreaths for deceased local dignitaries, entertainment of board members after meetings, gatherings to honour sports people on their selection for national teams. Such expenditure, not being specifically authorised by statute was chargeable to a statutory item misnamed 'Unauthorised Expenditure'.
- 19 NZPD, Volume 221, Wilford, 27 June, 1929, p.9.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 NZPD, Volume 222, Wilford, 9 August, 1929, p.101.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 NZPD, Volume 222, Coates, 9 August, 1929, p. 105.
- 24 *New Zealand Statutes, 1929*. Local Authorities Empowering (Aviation Encouragement) Act 1929. As noted above, the W.C.C. had announced its intention to develop Rongotai the previous year.
- 25 Campbell, p. 204.
- 26 *New Zealand Statutes, 1929*, Wellington City Empowering and Amendment Act, 1929, Sec., 9(1) and Third Schedule to the Act.
- 27 *Evening Post*, 3 February, 1931, p.10.
- 28 *Evening Post*, 5 February, 1931, p.12.
- 29 *AJHR*, Volume II, 1931, Annual Report of the Defence Forces of New Zealand, H.19, paragraph 3(c), p.3.
- 30 *Evening Post*, 5 February, 1931, p.12.
- 31 *AJHR*, Volume II, 1931, Annual Report of the Defence Forces of New Zealand, H.19, paragraph 3(f)(1), p.4.
- 32 Rendel, p. 29.
- 33 *AJHR*, Volume II, 1931, Annual Report of the Defence Forces of New Zealand, H.19, paragraph 3(f)(1), p.4.
- 34 Ibid., paragraph 3(f)(2), p.4.
- 35 Rendel, p.32.

- 36 *Evening Post*, 22 December, 1932, p.9.
- 37 *Evening Post*, 22 December, 1932, p.12.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 *Evening Post*, 6 June, 1934, p.10.
- 40 *Dominion*, 26 September, 1934, P.7.
- 41 *Evening Post*, 1 December, 1934, p.11.
- 42 *Evening Post*, 13 December, 1934, p.11.
- 43 *Evening Post* throughout December, 1934.
- 44 Rendel, p.23.
- 45 Rendel, pp.32 - 33.
- 46 *Evening Post*, 7 December, 1934, p.10.
- 47 *Evening Post*, 8 December, 1934, p.10.
- 48 The Transport Licensing Board was short lived. It was abolished in 1936 and the Minister of Transport was appointed the licensing authority. *New Zealand Statutes, 1936*, Transport Licensing Amendment Act 1936, Section 22. . Section 25 of that act removed the right of appeal against licensing decisions except for those questioning the jurisdiction of the minister. This would thus prevent appeals on the substance of decisions hence avoiding lengthy litigation.
- 49 *New Zealand Statutes, 1934*, The Transport Licensing (Commercial Aircraft Services) Act 1934, Sections 3, 2(1), and 8(2)(j).
- 50 *Evening Post*, 23 March, 1935, p.9.
- 51 *Evening Post*, 22 March, 1935, p.4.
- 52 *Evening Post*, 23 March, 1935, p.9.
- 53 *Evening Post*, 11 April, 1935, p10, quoting the report of the Transport Co-ordination Board.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 *AJHR.*, Volume III, 1936, Annual Report of the Transport Co-ordination Board, H40A, pp.6-7.
- 56 *Evening Post*, 11 April, 1935, p.10.
- 57 White, Leo, *Wingspread*, Auckland 1941, p.77.
- 58 *Evening Post*, 12 April, 1935, p.8.
- 59 *Evening Post*, 17 April, 1935, p.14.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 10 July, 1935.
- 62 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 13 August, 1935.

- 63 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 20 August, 1935.
- 64 It is interesting to note that both Cook Strait Airways and Union Airways had close associations with shipping companies which were very much to the fore in early aviation enterprises. The Anchor line, a coastal shipping company associated with the Peninsular and Orient Line (P. and O. Line), stood behind Cook Strait Airways, and the Union Steamship Company was associated with Union Airways. Perhaps this close association between shipping companies and early airways services was an influence leading to the generous attitude shown by the Wellington Harbour Board to the restrictions placed on it consequent on the development of the Evans Bay Flying-Boat base and the Rongotai airport.
- 65 Driscoll, Ian H., *Flightpath South Pacific - The Flyers, The Airlines and The Aircraft*, Christchurch 1972, pp.58-60.
- 66 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 30 October, 1935.
- 67 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 2 December, 1935.
- 68 Ewing, Ross and Macpherson, Ross, *The History of New Zealand Aviation*, Auckland 1986, p.215.
- 69 For example see *Evening Post*, Aviation News 13, 18 and 30 January, 1932 and 6, 8 and 14 December, 1932.
- 70 Lainé, Shirley, *Silver Wings: New Zealand Women Aviators*, Wellington 1989, p.62.

Footnotes Chapter 3

- 1 The committee comprised
Mr. F. W. Furkert (Former Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department), Sqd. Ldr. T. M. Wilkes (Director of Air Services), Dr. E Kidson (Director, Meteorological Services), Mr. E. A. Gibson (Assistant Engineer Aerodromes, Public Works Department), Mr. G. A. Hart (Engineer, Wellington City Council), Mr. F. N. Thompson (Assistant Engineer, Wellington City Council), Mr. E. D. Cachemaille (Engineer, Wellington Harbour Board), Mr. C. L. Jackson (Engineer, Petone Borough Council), Mr. R. F. Mainland (Engineer, Lower Hutt Borough Council). However page 12 of the Official Programme for the opening of the airport in 1959 quoted the members of the committee as including Flt. Lt. A. De T. Nevill (R.N.Z.A.F.) and F. T. Widdop, (Railways) as members and omitted Wilkes, Cachemaille and Mainland. Since the deliberations had taken some three years, changes in membership over that period could be expected.

- 2 Leaflet issued by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce dated 18 February, 1937, Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Part 2, Extension of Rongotai Aerodrome, 1937-1939.
- 3 Memorandum dated 28 June, 1937 from E. A. Gibson, Aerodromes Engineer Public Works Department to J. Wood, Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1937-1939.
- 4 It is interesting to note that as late as April, 1994, two America's Cup class yachts in Wellington Harbour for a race were required to move from the area by air traffic controllers because they were too close to the aerodrome. Their masts were 32 metres tall and all pilots using the airport were warned if ships with masts higher than 24 metres came within 1.5 kilometres of the airfield. *Dominion*, 26 April, 1994 p.8.
- 5 Leaflet issued by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce dated 18 February, 1937, Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Part 2, Extension of Rongotai Aerodrome, 1937-1939.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 *Evening Post*, 4 February, 1937, p.14.
- 8 *Timaru Post*, 13 March, 1937.
- 9 *New Zealand Truth*, 25 November, 1936, p.13.
- 10 *Dominion*, 26 March, 1937, p.12.
- 11 Replying to a letter to the editor asking what benefits would accrue to ordinary ratepayers from the airport development, Hislop said the development was necessary for Wellington '...to have her rightful place upon New Zealand air lines....' *Evening Post*, 6 February 1937 p.10. Another ratepayer wrote complaining of the ever increasing burden of rates, suggesting ratepayers of a city of 100,000 were asked to provide facilities to match those of a city of 1 million. *Evening Post*, 9 February 1937, p.10.
- 12 *Evening Post*, 12 July, 1937.
- 13 *Dominion*, 12 July, 1937.
- 14 *Dominion and Evening Post*, 12 March, 1937. Reports in both newspapers were broadly similar, the only material difference being that the *Evening Post* quoted a proposed runway extension of 200 yards, not 220.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Dominion*, 13 March, 1937, p.10.
- 17 *Ibid.*

- 18 Memorandum dated 14 April, 1937 from E. A. Gibson, Assistant Aerodromes Engineer to the Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1937 - 1939.
- 19 Gibson's memorandum was incorporated in the memorandum forwarded to the minister by the engineer in chief on 14 April, 1937. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1937 - 1939.
- 20 Roberts, J. S., Wellington Airport, The City Council's Responsibilities, in *New Zealand Engineering*, Volume 16, p.325, Wellington 1961, wrote that the hanger was built in 1935. p. 325. This presumably refers to the date construction started as in the proceedings of the same symposium, Burton wrote that it was erected in 1937. p. 341.
- 21 There is an unsigned note on the file dated 14 April, 1937 which quoted the cost of the aerodrome, including the cost of the land as £58,400 as at 30 March, 1936. Of that sum, the Government had contributed £23,000. The note did however record that the Wellington City Council could not guarantee their figures. Public Works Department file. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1937-1939.
- 22 It is surprising that Hislop did not suggest a subsidy on the hangar; it is not unusual for an item to be requested even when a refusal is expected. It might, possibly, be agreed to, but even if refused, acceptance of the rejection with good grace could be interpreted as showing moderation. While both parties are undoubtedly aware of the tactic, it does give them both the opportunity to claim a compromise was reached which could be important politically.
- 23 Notes of a meeting between the Minister of Public Works and a deputation from the Wellington City Council on 15 April, 1937. Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1937 - 1939.
- 24 It is possible Semple would have been successful. In his diary, Lee implied that Semple usually got his way by '...resigning every twenty four hours...' but Lee was somewhat biased, believing he had been unfairly treated by not being appointed to Cabinet. There is little doubt however, that Semple did act as Lee recorded. Lee, John A., *The John A. Lee Diaries 1936 - 1940*, 5 July, 1939, p. 164, Christchurch 1981. See also p. 23, 23 June, 1937 and p. 161, 20 July, 1939.
- 25 Notes of a meeting between the Minister of Public Works and a deputation from the Wellington City Council on 15 April, 1937 Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1937 - 1939.
- 26 Annual Report of the Public Works Department, *AJHR*, 1937-1938, Volume III, D.1, p.62.
- 27 Roberts, p. 325.
- 28 Annual Report of the Department of Labour, Employment Division, *AJHR*, 1938, Volume II, H.11A, Item 24(p), p.17. (The report of the Department of Labour

which administered the Employment Promotion Fund does not give details of the projects subsidised; it merely quotes £4,004,456 as the total expended for the year on all projects, (Table VI p.20) but the Annual Report of the Public Works Department for 1938 showed it had spent £276,300 on aerodromes, of which £228,000 had come from the Consolidated Fund, £5,000 from Civil Aviation, £30,000 from the Employment Promotion Fund, and the balance from sundry other accounts. *AJHR*, Volume II, 1939, D.1, p. 64

- 29 Noonan credits Gibson with persuading the Government in the early thirties that it would be advantageous to have airfields near every town of any size but this had been accepted by Government in the late twenties. While in opposition, Coates had suggested subsidising aerodrome development to reduce unemployment, (See page 11 above) While supervising unemployed workers on relief work at Wigram, Gibson came to believe aerodrome construction to be suitable projects for relief work and is reported to have organised a deputation from aero clubs to put forward the idea. This was received favourably and Gibson was transferred to Head Office, Public Works Department to implement it. Gibson was later to transfer to the Civil Aviation Division of the Air Department where he became Director of Civil Aviation. Noonan, Rosslyn J., *By Design, A Brief History Of The Public Works Department/Ministry of Works 1870 - 1970*, Wellington, 1975, p. 149.
- 30 Memorandum dated 28 June, 1937 from E. A. Gibson, Aerodromes Engineer Public Works Department to J. Wood, Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 2, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1937-1939.
- 31 Memorandum dated 5 July, 1937 from the Undersecretary for Public Works/Engineer in Chief, Wood, to the Minister of Public Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission, 1937-1939.
- 32 The Committee was Mr. J. Wood M.I.C.E., (Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department) Wing Cdr. T. M. Wilkes M.C., C.B.E., (Controller of Civil Aviation) Wing Cdr. The Hon. R. A. Cochrane, A.F.C., (Chief of the Air Staff,) Mr. E. A. Gibson A.M.I.C.E., A.M.Ae.E., (Engineer of Aerodrome Services, Public Works Department) Cdr. B. A. Blythe (Chief Pilot, Union Airways) Cdr. G. Bolt (Chief Pilot, Cook Strait Airways) Mr. E. R. McKillop A.M.I.C.E., (Acting City Engineer, Wellington City Council). The memorandum prepared by Gibson is an interesting example of a submission to a minister. It sets out the problem, the reasons action should be taken, details of the proposed action and who should carry it out. If the minister was unsure or wanted further information on the matter he could ask for it, if not, and he felt it seemed reasonable, all he had to do was write 'agreed' and sign it.
- 33 White, Leo, *Wingspread*, Auckland 1941, pp.153-154.
- 34 *Dominion*, 10 July, 1937 p.12.

- 35 Letter dated 30 July, 1937 from the Air Secretary to the Chairman, Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission, 1937-1939.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Minutes of a meeting on 11 August, 1937 of the Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission 1937-1939.
- 38 *Dominion and Evening Post*, 5 November 1937 and 6 November 1937.
- 39 Letter dated 8 November, 1937 from Mr. Bardsley to the Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission 1937-1939.
- 40 Report of Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee to the Minister of Defence dated 14 February, 1938 WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission, 1937-1939.
- 41 Plan of the proposed Rongotai Aerodrome prepared by the Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission 1937-1939.
- 42 Financial Statement, *AJHR*, 1937, B.6, pp. 4-5.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Lee, 31 August, 1937, p.29.
- 45 Ibid., 8 September, 1937, p.31.
- 46 Report of the Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee to the Minister of Defence dated 21 September, 1938. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2, Rongotai Aerodrome Commission, 1937-1939.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Memorandum dated 20 January, 1939 from the Secretary, Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee to the Secretary, Air Department. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission, 1937-1939.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 *Evening Post*, 6 February 1937, p.10.
- 51 Lee, 7 June, 1938, p. 71.
- 52 Lee claimed to have recommended this two and a half years earlier, and that it was in Britain's interest to do this as New Zealand could then train pilots for Britain. Ibid., 17 November, 1938, p.107.
- 53 Annual Report of the Controller of Civil Aviation, *AJHR*, 1939, H.37, p.8.

- 54 Memorandum dated 1 May, 1939 from J. Wood, Chairman Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee to the Minister of Public Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission, 1937-1939.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Memoranda dated 31 May, 1939 from J. Wood, Chairman Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission 1937-1939.
- 57 Undated letter received on 20 June, 1939 from the Secretary of the Miramar Golf Club to the chairman, Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission 1937 - 1939.
- 58 Note on file, July 1939. WArc., 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission, 1937-1939.
- 59 Leaflet issued by the Wellington Chamber of Commerce dated 18 February, 1937, Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Part 2, Extension of Rongotai Aerodrome 1937-1939.
- 60 Ewing, Ross and Macpherson, Ross, *The History Of New Zealand Aviation*, Auckland, 1986, p.103.
- 61 Annual Report of the Acting Controller of Civil Aviation, *AJHR*, 1940, H.37, p.14.
- 62 Ibid., pp.13-14. It is surprising that information was published in wartime that a landing field had been completed and its location. It was perhaps believed that any enemy would have been aware of the development.
- 63 Annual Report of the Minister of Public Works, *AJHR*, 1940, D.1, p. xx.

Notes Chapter 4,

- 1 See pp.36-37.
- 2 Air New Zealand, 'Background to an Airline', in *Air New Zealand's First Thirty Years*, Auckland, 1970, pages not numbered.
- 3 NZPD, Volume 254, McLeod, Legislative Council, 20 July, 1939, p. 580.
- 4 Annual Report of the Controller of Civil Aviation, *AJHR*, Volume III, 1939, H.37, p. 8.
- 5 Air New Zealand, 'Reaching Outward' in *Air New Zealand's First Thirty Years*.
- 6 Annual Report of the Ministry of Defence, *AJHR*, Volume V, 1946, H.37, p. 287.
- 7 Wood, F. L. W., *This New Zealand*, Hamilton 1952, p. 44.

- 8 Ibid., p. 29.
- 9 Roberts, p. 325.
- 10 Wellington City Council Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March, 1940, Account 34, p.19. Further transactions of a much smaller nature are recorded in this account (under different account numbers) until the year ended 31 March 1945 when the balance of £4110 was returned to the Public Works Department and the account was closed.
- 11 Note dated 13 June, 1940 on Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 3, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1939-1941.
- 12 *Evening Post*, 15 November, 1940, p.9.
- 13 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 12 March, 1941.
- 14 *Evening Post*, 14 June, 1940, p.7.
- 15 *Dominion*, 4 October, 1940, p.4.
- 16 *Evening Post*, 12 December, 1940, p.8.
- 17 Letter dated March 1941 from the Air Secretary to the Public Commissioner of Works and the Wellington City Council WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 3, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1939-1941. (A perusal of the regulations suggests a better reference would have been Regulation 6(1)(e) S.R. 1939/123). Receipt of this information was noted in the minutes of the W.C.C.. Airport Committee meeting 12 March, 1941.
- 18 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 6 June, 1941.
- 19 *Dominion*. 5 February, 1941, p12.
- 20 *Evening Post*, 5 February, 1941, p13.
- 21 *Dominion*, 2 April, 1941, p.10.
- 22 *Evening Post*, 12 June, 1941, p.9.
- 23 *Evening Post*, 20 August, 1941, p.8.
- 24 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 30 September, 1943.
- 25 See page 47.
- 26 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 3 March 1944.
- 27 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 4 August, 1944.
- 28 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 9 March, 1945.
- 29 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 30 April, 1946.
- 30 Rendel, David, *Civil Aviation in New Zealand: An Illustrated History*, Wellington 1975, p.124.
- 31 Ewing, Ross and Macpherson, Ross, *The History of New Zealand Aviation*, pp.172-173, Auckland 1986.

- 32 Ibid.
- 33 *Evening Post*, 21 July, 1947, p.12.
- 34 Campbell, Duncan, 'The Airport', in *Wellington Prospect*, Editors N. L. McLeod and B. H. Farland, Wellington 1970, p.205.
- 35 *Evening Post*, 15 May, 1947, p.13.
- 36 *Dominion*, 29 May, 1947 p.6. The Mrs C. A. Birchfield seems to be Connie Birchfield, well known in the Communist Party whose husband was an official of the Party and who lived in the district.
- 37 Notes of a meeting held on 26 June, 1946 between the Rongotai College Board and the Minister of Public Works. WArc., WE, E2, E 15/6/175, Rongotai College New Site Etc.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Letter dated 27 June, 1946 from the principal of Rongotai College to the Rongotai College Board. WArc., WE, E2, E 15/6/175 Rongotai College New Site Etc.
- 40 Notes of a meeting 5 August 1946, sent by the Prime Minister to the Acting Minister of Education, WArc., WE, E2, 15/6/175 Rongotai College New Site Etc. p.6.
- 41 Ibid., p.3.
- 42 Notes of a meeting 2 September 1946, between the Rongotai Parents' Association and the Director of Education, WArc., WE, E2, 15/6/175 Rongotai College New Site Etc. p. 1.
- 43 Notes of a meeting 4 October, 1946 between the Prime Minister, Minister of Public Works and the Rongotai Parents' Association. WArc., WE, E2, 15/6/175 Rongotai College New Site Etc.
- 44 *Evening Post*, 21 July, 1947, p.12.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 *Evening Post*, 22 July, 1947, p.6.
- 47 Note 23 June, 1947 on Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1946-1949.
- 48 *NZPD*, Volume 276, Harker, 9 July, 1947, p.331.
- 49 Ibid., Jones, 9 July, 1947, p.331.
- 50 Ibid., Shand, 9 July, 1947, p.347. Moa Point was a large hill at the eastern end of the runways then in use. It was too steep for planes to fly over either on take off or landing and necessitated planes making a sharp turn. It also meant planes making a blind approach if landing in a westerly direction.
- 51 Ibid., Jones, 9 July, 1947, pp.348-349.
- 52 Ibid., Nash, 9 July, 1947, p.328. See also Hackett, p.350.

- 53 *Dominion*, 25 July, 1947 p.6.
- 54 Letter dated 12 August, 1947 from N. Z. National Airways Corporation to the Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 55 NZPD, Volume 276, 9 July, 1947, Volume 277, 20 August, 1947, Volume 278, 10 September, 1947
- 56 Air New Zealand, 'Men At The Top' in *Air New Zealand's First Thirty Years*.
- 57 Letter dated 23 September, 1947 from the chairman, W.C.C. Aerodrome Committee to the City Engineer. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946 - 1949. Costs requested were for the taking of the Miramar Golf Course, removing Rongotai College, Building a subway at Coutts Street, reclamation at Evans Bay, removing 60 houses and providing a sealed runway 4750 feet long and 150 feet wide.
- 58 Ewing and Macpherson, p.174.
- 59 Memorandum dated 10 October, 1947 from the Commissioner of Works to the Secretary to the Treasury, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1946-1949. The classification of an airfield refers to its international rating and depends upon the length and strength of runways, navigational aids available, and the height of obstructions on the approach and circuit. In effect it determines the type of plane which can use the airport. In *AJHR*, 1948, Volume 5, H37A, Appendix H., pp.126-128 the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Mission (The Tymms' Mission) gave data on aircraft then in service, weight, take off and landing distances, wheel loadings and the classification of aerodromes needed to cater for them.
- 60 Memorandum dated 1 October, 1947 from the Commissioner of Works to the Government Architect, WArc., W1,23/381/18 part 5 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946 -1949.
- 61 Note from the Government Architect dated 15 October, 1947. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1945-1949. The costs were £350,000 for the college, and £150,000 for an intermediate school constructed in timber with a further £50,000 if constructed in concrete.
- 62 Note on Public Works Department file dated 21 October, 1947, WArc., 23/381/18 part 5 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension. What is always surprising is that estimates are commonly quoted at such precise figures giving quotations of a price down to a £ figure; it is impossible to quote so exactly, and as it was only an estimate one would expect it to have been rounded off to say £250,000.
- 63 *Evening Post*, 29 October, 1947.
- 64 *Ibid*.
- 65 See *Truth*, 28 January, 1948 and *Evening Post*, 3 February, 1948, p.6.

- 66 *Dominion*, 6 February, 1948, p.9.
- 67 Letter dated 5 April, 1948 from the Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay Residents' Association to the Prime Minister, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 68 Letter dated 14 April, 1947 from the Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay Residents' Association to the Prime Minister, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 69 Letter dated 21 May, 1948 from the Commissioner of Works to the Secretary, Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay Residents' Association, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 70 Letter dated 27 May, 1948 to the Secretary, Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay Residents' Association, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 71 Letter dated 14 April, 1948 from the Rongotai College Parents' Association to the Minister of Public Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Part 5 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 72 Letter dated 16 June 1948 from the Assistant Director of Education (Admin) to the Commissioner of Works. WArc., WE, E2, E 15/6/175 (originally E 15/6/158) Rongotai College New Site Etc.
- 73 Notes of a meeting held in the Prime Minister's office 16 April, 1948, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 74 *Southern Cross*, 12 May, 1948.
- 75 Notes of a meeting 15 May, 1948, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 76 Memoranda dated 20 May, 1948. WArc., 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Note dated 1 July, 1948 on file. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 79 Notes of meeting held 1 June, 1948 between the Public Works Department and the Miramar Golf Club. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1946-1949.
- 80 Note dated 2 August, 1948, Public Works Department file, WArc., 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 81 Letter dated 9 June, 1948 from Town Clerk, Wellington City Council to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.

- 82 Notes of a meeting of the Technical Standing Committee, 24 June, 1948. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949. It is interesting that the W.C.C. limited its representative's power to non policy matters; from the terms of reference it will be seen that many technical matters had an element of policy in them.
- 83 Letter dated 7 July, 1948 from the District Engineer to the Acting Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1946-1949.
- 84 Report of Wellington Harbour Board approved 28 July, 1948, Public Works Department file, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1946-1949.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Letter dated 16 August, 1948 from the Secretary to the Harbour Board to the Acting Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Report dated 9 July, 1948 by Chief Investigating Officer, Public Works Department to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946 -1949.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Telegram dated 16 August, 1948 from Acting Commissioner of Works to the Commissioner of Works in London. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949
- 91 Draft of a memorandum, Semple to the Town Clerk, Wellington City Council dated 16 August, 1948. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 92 Ibid.
- 93 Letter dated 16 August, 1948 from Acting Commissioner of Works to Secretary, Wellington Harbour Board. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 94 Letter dated 26 August, 1948 from Director of Civil Aviation to Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 95 Letter dated 31 August, 1948 from Acting Commissioner of Works to Director of Civil Aviation, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.

Notes Chapter 5. Developments from Late 1948 to September 1950.

- 1 The 'expert' declined to advise the Government because he disclaimed expertise in aerodrome or flying boat base construction or requirements. *NZPD*, Volume 277, F. Jones, 20 August, 1947, p.474. The potential dangers of obtaining 'expert' advice from an individual without expertise in such a serious matter raises doubts about the competence of those seeking the advice.
- 2 The members of the mission were
 Sir F. Tymms K.C.I.E., M.C., F.R.Ae.S., United Kingdom representative to the International Civil Aviation Organisation, (I.C.A.O.), Montreal
 K. T. Spenser M.C., A.M.I.C.E., F.R.Ae.S., B.Sc., A.C.G.I., Deputy Director for Aircraft Research and Development, Ministry of Supply, London
 G. J. Warcup, Deputy Director, Aerodromes Division, Ministry of Civil Aviation, London
 and the official secretary provided by the government was Sqd. Ldr. M. B. Furlong, Royal New Zealand Air Force. .
- 3 Report of the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Mission, *AJHR*, 1948 H.37A, p.4.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p.3.
- 5 *Ibid.*, paragraph 72, p.30.
- 6 *Ibid.*, paragraph 82, p.33.
- 7 *Ibid.*, paragraph 84, p.33.
- 8 *Ibid.*, paragraph 86. p.35.
- 9 *Ibid.*, paragraph 90, p.36. The mission was right. Flying boats were only a temporary expedient and the Short Solents did give good service after a design fault had been rectified. The decision to purchase the Solents had been contentious. They were British built planes, the land based planes then available being American built. At that time the New Zealand Government was strongly in favour of 'buying British', (See Ewing, Ross and Macpherson, Ross, *The History of New Zealand Aviation*, Auckland 1986, pp.169-171), probably influenced by patriotic motives and because of the desire to promote trade in primary produce.
- 10 Report of the United Kingdom Civil Aviation Mission, paragraphs 267-268, pp. 85 - 86, see also paragraph S 74, p.142.
- 11 *Ibid.*, paragraph 279, pp.88-89. See also S 76 p.142.
- 12 *Ibid.*, paragraphs 284 - 286, pp.89-91. See also S 77, p.142
- 13 *Ibid.*, paragraph 250, p.81.
- 14 *Ibid.*, paragraph 95, p.37.

- 15 Ibid., paragraph 285, pp.90-91.
- 16 Memorandum dated 20 May, 1948 of the Commissioner of Works on file. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1946-1949.
- 17 Notes of a meeting held on 21 October, 1948 of a deputation from the Miramar Golf Club to the Minister of Public Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 5, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1946-1949.
- 18 Letter dated 3 March, 1949 from the Wellington City Council to the Minister of Public Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6. Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 19 Letter dated 1 April, 1949 from the Minister of Public Works to the Wellington City Council. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6. Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 20 Letter dated 7 April, 1949 from the Wellington City Council to the Minister of Public Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Letter dated 13 April, 1949 from the Prime Minister to Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 23 Notes dated 14 March, 1949 of a deputation of Otago businessmen to the Mayor of Dunedin. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 24 Letter dated 14 March, 1949 from the Mayor of Dunedin to the Prime Minister, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 25 Letter dated 11 April, 1949 from the Mayor of Auckland to the Prime Minister. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 26 Letter dated 13 April, 1949 from the Prime Minister to the Mayor of Auckland City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 27 Letter dated 2 May 1949 from the Minister of Public Works to Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 28 Letter dated 9 June, 1949 from Commissioner of Works to the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 29 Press statement dated 16 April, 1949. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.

- 30 Letter dated 24 June, 1949 from the Engineer in Chief, Public Works Department to The Director of Civil Aviation. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949 - 1951.
- 31 Letter dated 26 July, 1944 from the Commissioner of Works to the Air Secretary, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 32 Briefing papers for Public Works Department officers attending a meeting in the office of the Mayor of Wellington on 11 August, 1949. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 33 Notes of a meeting on 11 August, 1949. WArc., W1. 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 See pages 66-67.
- 36 In the original draft of the letter he quoted the cost as probably from £1,500,000 to £2,000,000.
- 37 Letter dated 18/23 August 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington Harbour Board. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6, Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951. A Class D aerodrome had a lower approach and take-off trajectory, namely one in fifty instead of one in thirty. There could be twelve or fifteen land plane movements per hour at peak periods, say three times a day, and this could create a problem for ships, particularly those on a turning course for the Patent Slip or Miramar Wharf. To comply with aircraft needs, the maximum height of ships in these areas would be ninety or one hundred feet, and if ships were taller than this, aircraft would have to remain in the air or be diverted
- 38 A red flashing light had been installed at Tirangi Road as an aid to aircraft, but flashing lights were used by the Harbour Board as an aid to navigation for shipping. The Board had not been given prior notice of the installation of the aircraft light and as it was visible from the sea, it had caused some confusion to ships' navigators.
- 39 Report dated 22 August, 1949 of a meeting between the Director of Civil Aviation and the Wellington Harbour Board, WArc., 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Letter dated 22 August 1949 from the Director of Civil Aviation to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 NZPD, Volume 287, Nash, 13 September, 1949, p.2072.
- 44 Ibid., Holland.

45 Ibid., Nash.
46 It is not clear how the loss of £170,000 caused by operating through Paraparaumu was calculated. For the year ended 31 March 1949, NAC stated the known costs of transferring to Paraparaumu as

	£
Extra costs of maintenance	14,316
Extra flying distance of Cook strait flights	
less savings on New Plymouth and Gisborne flights	5,206
Extra fuel delivery costs	3,138
Extra transport costs, city to Paraparaumu	<u>45,000</u>
Total extra costs	67,660
Less surcharge of ten shillings per head	<u>44,876</u>
	22,876
Plus the estimated loss of Cook Strait fares	<u>26,318</u>
Total	<u>49,102</u>

The total extra costs were quoted in *NZPD*, Volume 288, Jones, 5 October, 1949, p.2563. The amount of surcharge is calculated from a handwritten note quoting passenger movements from Paraparaumu attributed to N. Z. National Airways Corporation. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.

47 *NZPD*, Volume 288, Fortune, 5 October, 1949, p.2561.
48 *Ibid.*, Shand, pp.2561-2563.
49 N. Z. National Airways Corporation letter dated 6 February, 1950 to Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
50 *Dominion*, 25 August, 1949, p.8.
51 Letter dated 30 August, 1949 from Commissioner of Works to Wellington Harbour Board. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951. As this is what the Harbour Board had requested, the request for approval was only a formality. It is interesting to speculate on the effect a refusal would have had; the Harbour Board had statutory responsibilities over the area which had apparently already been declared a 'water aerodrome'.

- 52 See page 83. The Board had not noted the project had already been changed to upgrade the airport to Class D.
- 53 Report of a sub-committee adopted by the Wellington Harbour Board on 21 September, 1949. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 54 Letter dated 6 October, 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington Harbour Board. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 55 Letter dated 19 September, 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Miramar Golf Club, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 56 Letter dated 13 September 1949 from the Commissioner of Works (signed by F. M. H. Hanson) to the Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 57 McKillop's calculations of the W.C.C. share was

	£
Work suited to the City Engineer's Department	480,200
plus ten percent supervision charge	48,000
Credit for existing land and assets	280,000
Cash contribution towards cost	<u>150,000</u>
	<u>958,200</u>

Letter dated 27 September, 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.

- 58 The M.O.W. views on several other minor matters were explained and it was suggested that if more detailed information was required, it could be obtained from Hanson. What McKillop omitted from his letter was that if enough Golf Club land remained for a nine hole course after the aerodrome, college and housing needs had been met, then the Golf Club should be permitted to retain it. It would not be reasonable to take that land for other recreational purposes; if additional sports fields were needed, more reclamation work should be undertaken. Letters dated 27 September and 3 October, 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 59 Letter dated 14 October, 1949 from the Wellington City Council to the Commissioner of Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.

- 60 Letter dated 10 November, 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 61 Note dated 16 November 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Assistant Commissioner of Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 62 Press release dated 21 October, 1949 by the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 63 Handwritten note dated 17 November, 1949 from the Town Clerk to the Assistant Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 64 Letter dated 30 November, 1949 from the Assistant Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council, WArc. W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951. At the proposed level of charges, based on the level of traffic using Paraparaumu the revenue for the first year of operation would be £18,800 rising to £71,000 in a few years. Government reserved the right to raise taxes on air travel and traffic but would be responsible and fix these in consultation with the City Council which would of course have the right to decide on the level of '...fees and concession rates...' for services it provided.
- 65 Memorandum dated 17 November, 1949 from the Assistant Commissioner of Works to the Chief Administration Officer, Ministry of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 66 Letter dated 24 November 1949 from the Commissioner of Works to the Director of Civil Aviation, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 67 *N. Z. Gazette*, No. 75. 13 December 1949, p. 2803-2804.
- 68 Letter dated 21 December, 1949 from the Wellington City Council to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 69 Letter dated 8 February, 1949 from the Wellington and District Advancement League to the Minister of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 70 Letter dated 14 February, 1950 from the Minister of Works to the Wellington and District Advancement League, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 71 Briefing papers dated 9 March, 1950 for the Minister of Works, WArc., W1, 23.381.18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.

- 72 Memorandum dated 15 March, 1950 from the Secretary to the Cabinet to the Commissioner of Works and other departmental heads, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 73 Letter dated 17 March, 1950 from the Commissioner of Works to the Miramar Golf Club, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 74 Letter dated 8 September, 1950 from the New Zealand Golf Association Inc., to the Director of Education. WArc., WE, E2, E 15/6/175 New Rongotai College Site Etc.
- 75 Notes dated 20 March 1950 of a meeting of the Rongotai College Parents' Association, WArc., WE, E2, E 15/6/175 New Rongotai College Site Etc.
- 76 Letter dated 27 March 1950 from the Commissioner of Works to the Director of Education, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1950.
- 77 Letter dated 15 June, 1950 from the Director of Education to the Commissioner of Works, WArc. W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1950.
- 78 Letter dated 14 July, 1950 from the Miramar North Progress League to the Minister of Education WArc., WE, E2, 15/6/175 New Rongotai College Site Etc.
- 79 Letter dated 31 July, 1950 from the Minister of Education. WArc., WE, E2, 15/6/175 New Rongotai College Site Etc.
- 80 Betts, G. M., *Betts on Wellington - A City and its Politics*, Ed. R. H. Brookes, Wellington 1970, pp.100-101.
- 81 Report of meeting on 16 August 1950 called by the Minister of Education, WArc., WE, E2, 15/6/175 New Rongotai College Site Etc.
- 82 Letter dated 27 March, 1950 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council. WArc., 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 83 Report dated 10 March, 1950 from the Secretary to the Treasury to the Minister of Finance. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1949-1951.
- 84 Letter dated 8 November, 1937 from Mr Bardsley to the Rongotai Aerodrome Investigating Committee, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/2 Rongotai Aerodrome Commission 1937-1939.
- 85 *Evening Post*, 26 September, 1950, p.14.

Notes Chapter 6, 1950 to the Opening of the Wellington International Airport
1959

- 1 See page 97.
- 2 Letter dated 29 June, 1950 from the Commissioner of Works to the Director of Civil Aviation. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 6 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1949-1951.
- 3 *Evening Post*, 26 September, 1950, p.14. Roberts' article on Wellington Airport attributes the new scheme to Hanson and that it was produced in December 1950 and agreed to by the Wellington City Council in February, 1951.
- 4 Letter dated 3 April, 1951 from the City Engineer, Wellington City Council to the District Engineer, Ministry of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951 - 1952.
- 5 Minutes of the W.C.C. Airport Committee meeting dated 2 February, 1951.
- 6 Memorandum dated 8 August, 1951 from the Deputy Commissioner of Works to the Office Solicitor, Ministry of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 1951-1952.
- 7 Memorandum dated 26 September, 1951 from the Commissioner of Works to the District Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1951.
- 8 Memorandum dated 26 November, 1951 from the Aerodrome Engineer to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 9 Letter dated 28 September, 1951 from the Blenheim Chamber of Commerce to the Minister of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 10 The Herons ordered for the Cook Strait flights were small planes with seventeen seats, including three for the flight crew, and with four engines which made them suitable for operating over the top of Moa Point and landing on the east - west runways. They were fitted with an aluminium alloy main wing spar but this proved to be too weak for the steep, turbulent conditions so it had to be replaced by a steel one which reduced the payload to twelve passengers. Ewing, Ross and Macpherson, Ross, *The History of New Zealand Aviation*, Auckland 1986, p.174.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p.176.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.174 but see also Alexander, R. T., *High Adventure - From balloons to Boeings in New Zealand*, Wellington 1968, p.58 which quotes the date of acquisition as June, 1953.

- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Memorandum dated 28 August, 1951 from the Commissioner of Works to the District Commissioner. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 15 Memorandum dated 4 September, 1951 from the Commissioner of Works to the District Commissioner, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 16 Memorandum dated 10 September 1951 from the Deputy Commissioner of Works to the Aerodrome Engineer. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 17 Letter dated 17 October 1951 from the Director of Civil Aviation to the Secretary to the Treasury, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension part 7 1951-1952.
- 18 Memorandum dated 27 June 1952 from the Chief Accountant Ministry of Works to the District Commissioner, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 19 Memorandum dated 22 May 1953 from the District Commissioner to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 20 Memorandum dated June 1953 from the Commissioner of Works to the District Commissioner. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 21 Letter dated 25 February 1952 from the Director of Civil Aviation to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Class 5 relates to the strength of the runway. Class 5 is suitable for light planes only.
- 24 Letter dated 7 March 1952 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Engineer, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 25 Memorandum, undated probably March 1952, from the Aerodrome Engineer to the Chief Engineer, Ministry of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 7 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1951-1952.
- 26 Memorandum dated 4 June 1953 from the Secretary to the Cabinet to the Prime Minister, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension, 1953-1954.
- 27 Cabinet Minute CM(53)30 WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.

- 28 Cabinet Minute CM(53)31 dated 30 June 1953, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 29 Letter dated 12 October 1953 from the Commissioner of Works to the Air Secretary, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 30 Letter dated 8 February, 1954 from the Director of Civil Aviation to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 31 Note from the Chief Accountant on a letter dated 2 February 1954 from the District Commissioner to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 32 Note dated 9 February 1954 from the Assistant Chief Engineer, Ministry of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 33 Letter dated 23 December 1953 from the Director of Civil Aviation to Wilkins and Davies Construction Ltd. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 34 Letter dated 28 September 1953 from the Chief Engineer, Ministry of Works to the Wellington City Council, and Letter dated 8 October 1953 from the Mayor, Wellington City Council to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 35 Letter dated 21 June 1954 from the State Hydro - electricity Department to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 36 Letter dated 24 June 1954 from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 9 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1953-1954.
- 37 Letter dated 30 March 1955 from the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation to the Mayor of Wellington. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 38 Memorandum dated 28 April 1955 from the District Commissioner of Works to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 39 Borgeson, Melvin B., *A Functional Plan Of Rongotai Aerodrome, Wellington, New Zealand*, Englewood, New Jersey 1956, p.29, WArc., Nash papers, W1195, 0663-1735 file 6/1/2 Rongotai Airport
- 40 Press release, Annex E to the Minutes of a meeting dated 2 September 1955. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.

- 41 Minutes dated 6 May 1955 of a meeting. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 42 Campbell, Duncan, 'The Airport' in *Wellington Prospect*, Editors N. L. Mcleod and B. H. Farland, Wellington 1970, p.206.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Appendix 1 attached to the minutes dated 6 May 1955. WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 45 Notes of an informal meeting December 1955 between M. B. Borgeson and the Minister of Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 46 Notes prepared by the Chief Engineer for the Commissioner of Works. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Letter dated 1 December 1955 from the Deputy Commissioner of Works to M. B. Borgeson. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 49 Report dated 10 December 1955 from the Chairman, Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee to the Prime Minister, Minister of Works, Minister in charge of Civil Aviation and Chief Engineer M.O.W. WArc., W1 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., Appendix 1.
- 52 Letter from the Commissioner of Works to the Minister of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 53 Letter dated 15 February 1956 from the Local Government Loans Board to the Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 54 Letter dated 16 March 1956 from the Local Government Loans Board to the Commissioner of Works WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 55 Letter dated 13 April 1956 from the Commissioner of Works to the Local Government Loans Board 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 56 Report of the Royal Commission on Monetary, Banking and Credit Systems, *AJHR*, 1956, B.3., Appendix C paragraph 207, pp.292-293.
- 57 Ibid., Appendix C, paragraph 208, p.293
- 58 Ibid., Appendix C, paragraph 210, p.293.

- 59 Roberts, p.327.
- 60 Borgeson, p.21.
- 61 Ibid., p.29.
- 62 Ibid., p.41.
- 63 Letter drafted 6 August 1956 by the Chief Engineer to the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation and Minister of Works, but not sent. The draft was noted that the information was included in a letter dated 8 August 1956. WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 11 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1955-1956.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Letter dated 6 December 1956 from the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation to the Mayor of Wellington, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 12 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957.
- 66 Letter dated 15 February 1957 from Wellington City Council to the Minister in charge of Civil Aviation WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 12 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957.
- 67 NZPD, Volume 308, Fox, 31 August, 1956, p.1600.
- 68 Letter dated 1 February 1957 from the District Commissioner of Works to the Commissioner of Works WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 12 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957.
- 69 NZPD, Volume 308, Shand, 19 April, 1956, p.383.
- 70 Borgeson, WArc., Nash papers, W1195,0663-1735 file 5/1/2 Rongotai Airport.
- 71 *Standard*, 20 February 1957.
- 72 Letter dated 6 March 1957 from the Air Secretary to the Commissioner of Works WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 12 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957.
- 73 Memorandum dated 8 March 1957 from the District Commissioner of Works to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 12 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Report of Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee meeting dated 6 December 1957, WArc., W1, 23/381/23 part 13 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957-1958.
- 76 Roberts, J. S., 'Wellington Airport, the City Council Responsibilities', in *New Zealand Engineering*, Volume 16, Wellington 1968, p.327.

- 77 Minute dated 15 May 1957 of meeting, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/1998 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 78 Memorandum dated 4 June 1957 from the District Commissioner to the Commissioner of Works 23/381/18 part 12 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957.
- 79 See page 108.
- 80 Memorandum from the Commissioner of Works to the Minister of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 12 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957.
- 81 The comments seem to have been accepted by the C.A.A. as subsequent correspondence with that Department concentrated on design features and operational facilities needed to make the airport satisfactorily functional. This is evidence that Hanson's objections to the C.A.A. negotiating had been adopted and is reinforced by a note on file that the Chief Purchasing Officer of the M.O.W. was engaged in negotiations with the Golf Club. Note on file dated 18 November 1957 WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 13 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957-1958.
- 82 Minutes dated 24 June 1957 of a meeting, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 83 Note on file, September, 1959, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 15 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1959.
- 84 Minutes dated 24 June 1957 of a meeting, WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 85 Letter dated 11 October 1957 from the Director of Civil Aviation to the Commissioner of Works WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 13 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957-1958.
- 86 Memorandum dated 13 November 1957 from the Commissioner of Works to the Minister of Works WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 13 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957-1958.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Minute dated 9 December 1957 WArc., W1, 23/381/18/199 Rongotai Airport Coordinating Committee.
- 89 Letter dated 24 April 1958 from the Wellington City Council to the Commissioner of Works, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 13 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957-1958.
- 90 Letter dated 29 May 1958 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/281/18 part 13 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957-1958.

- 91 Letter dated 4 March 1958 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council, 23/381/18 part 13 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1957-1958.
- 92 *Evening Post*, 27 November 1958.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Letter dated 15 September 1958 from the Commissioner of Works to the Wellington City Council, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 14 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1959.
- 95 Letter dated 1 April 1959 from the Commissioner of Works to the Director of Civil Aviation, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 14 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1959
- 96 Letter dated 7 April 1959 from the Director of Civil Aviation to the N. Z. National Airways Corporation, WArc., W1, 23/381/18 part 14 Rongotai Aerodrome Extension 1959.
- 97 Wellington City Council, *Brochure and Programme to Commemorate the Opening of Wellington Airport*, Wellington 1959, p.29.
- 98 Dominion, 18 September 1959.
- 99 Keith, Hamish, *New Zealand Yesterdays - a look at our recent past*, Sydney 1984, p.63.

Notes, Chapter 7. Conclusion.

- 1 Their standing is evidenced by their achievements, professional qualifications and awards.
 Wing Commander E. A. Gibson, O.B.E., L.M.(U.S.), A.M.I.C.E., A.M.Ae.E.
 Brigadier General F M. H. Hanson, M.M., D.S.O., O.B.E., M.I.C.E., M.N.Z.I.E., M.N.Z.I.S.
 Air Vice Marshal Sir L. Isitt, K.B.E., L.M.(U.S.).
 E. R. McKillop, O.B.E.(Military), C.M.G., M.I.C.E.
 Air Vice Marshal Sir A. DE T. Nevill, K.B.E., C.B., L.M.(U.S.), M.Sc.C.Eng., F.R.Ae.S.,
- 2 'Stilipes' alluded to the Auckland Harbour Bridge when he wrote '...We all have our stories about the Sunderland that almost landed and the Vulcan that did momentarily - and we are very Proud of Our Airport. After all, bridges aren't the

only achievements of the modern age....' Wellington's Airport' in *Comment*, Summer 1960, p.22.

3 *Dominion*, 25 June, 1993. pp.1 and 3.

4 Examples are

Air League of New Zealand (Inc.), *Civil Aviation Blueprint*, Wellington 1964

Gillion, C., *Wellington's Airport - The Costs and Benefits of Alternative Developments*, Wellington 1970

Scott, W. D., *Wellington Airport Study - Final Report*, Wellington 1979

5 For example, the runway was extended to the south by 600 feet in 1972 to permit the use of CD8 aircraft. Stroud, John, *Airports of the World*, London 1980, pp.259-260. (Also referred to by Noonan. Rosslyn J., *By Design, A Brief History of the Public Works Department/Ministry of Works*, Wellington 1973, p.254.

6 *Dominion*, 25 June, 1993, pp.1 and 3.

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1956

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Zealand Aviation*, Auckland, 1986.

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