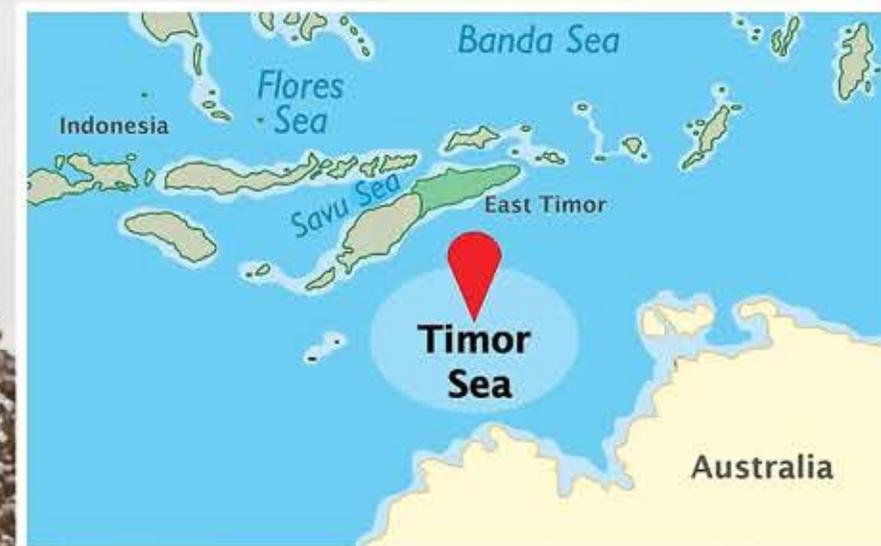


PROTOTYPES

FLIGHT OF THE CROYDON

COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN TODAY, THE MONOSPAR CROYDON WAS AN ATTEMPT TO CREATE A MODERN AIRLINER

BY ADAM STANTON



Map showing Seringapatam Reef in the Timor Sea and the final resting spot for the ST.18.



Striking image of the GAL Monospar ST.18 Croydon parked at the London Air Park in July 1935 prior to its departure for Australia. In the background is ST.24 Jubilee G-ADPM operated by Crilly Airways.

From the cockpit's left seat, Capt. Timber Wood looked out over the horizon and all he could see was a seemingly endless view of Pacific Ocean — except for one small “ring” of a coral lagoon. Looking at the fuel gauges, he knew the situation was pretty much hopeless since there was now less than one hour of fuel left in the tanks and an odd compass error had completely eliminated any hope of

finding a civilized landing field. Circling the miniscule lagoon, Wood realized that this was the only chance for a safe landing for the aircraft and his three friends accompanying him on what now seemed to be a mad flight from Australia to England. Frederick Cromcombe was in the right seat and equally as anxious as Wood.

Wood leaned the two Pratt & Whitney R-985s as far back as possible

in order to conserve fuel but there was literally nowhere to go since they were hopelessly lost. Lowering the nose of the twin-engine airliner in a rapid descent, Wood tried to calculate the chances of survival as he viewed the narrow strip of coral. He went back and forth on whether to put the aircraft into the water or attempt landing on the coral. He decided for the coral. “This is it, Fred. Give me half flaps,” instructed

Wood as he lined the aircraft up with what appeared to be the widest portion of reef located in the remote Timor Sea.

The date was 7 October 1936 and the four men were undertaking the final flight of an interesting and unique aircraft — the General Aircraft Limited Monospar ST.18 Croydon.

CREATING AN AIRLINER

By the mid-1930s, the world of

airline transport was rapidly changing and across the globe numerous companies were trying to create designs for airliners that would not only be efficient but would also earn the early airlines money. In Holland, Fokker was building a variety of two, three, and four engine designs but construction methods were extremely dated and a number of failures of the company's signature all-wood wing had cast a

shadow on the Fokker designs. In Germany, work was proceeding on advanced all-metal aircraft but most of these “airliners” were thinly-veiled military aircraft that could easily be made into bombers. In the USA, companies such as Douglas, Curtiss, and Lockheed had started construction of advanced airliners but the clear winner was the Douglas DC-2 that would lead to the world-beating DC-3.