

TEAL Bids Farewell to Wellington

Written and edited by Stephen Berry



Fine Sight That Wellington Will Miss — 'Post' Farewell-To-The-Solents Picture

Wellingtonians have long been aware of this date, 25 June 1954, when the TEAL Solent service to Australia ceased. Contrary to some opinions, the reason has nothing to do with Wellington's weather. Rather it's the bigger reason that TEAL decided to transfer its operations to land-based aircraft, initially with ex BCPA DC-6 airliners. Wellington couldn't handle land-based aircraft until October 1959 when the new airport at Rongotai was ready for service.

Residents with a long memory will recall that although Wellington went without an international air service for five long years, the opening of Wellington International Airport welcomed an entirely new era of aviation to the capital.

Ironically the first trans-Tasman service for 5 decades was inaugurated by TEAL, using Lockheed L-188 Electras. Several years later the Electra's were replaced by DC-8s, and shortly after that TEAL was renamed Air New Zealand in 1965.

Since then, the airport has operated continuously without a major accident. Long-range operations out of Wellington to Asia and beyond won't be possible until the airport's runway is lengthened to accommodate aircraft such as the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner and Boeing 777-300ER.

Most Air New Zealand services out of Wellington are currently operated by Airbus A320s and A321Neo airliners. ATR 72-600 turboprop aircraft are used for regional domestic services, and **Bombardier Q300** smaller turboprops for short regional routes. Qantas and Jetstar also operate flights to Australia and Fiji Airlines to Fiji.

For further details about how TEAL disposed of its flying boats please read "Farewell to the TEAL Solents" elsewhere on this website.

The following news items from Wellington's Evening Post newspaper describes the days leading up to the departure of the last TEAL Solent on 25 June 1954.

Evening Post 23 June 1954

WEATHER conditions permitting Teal's Solent will circle the Hutt Valley and Wellington, both inward and outward bound, on its final flights between Wellington and Sydney on Friday.

"It will be the last curtsy to the city of a grand old lady," a Teal official said today. Provided the weather enables the flying-boat to keep to schedule, the circuit over the Hutt Valley and Wellington should be made at about 7.15am just before the Solent alights at Evans Bay, and at 10.45am just after taking off for Sydney.

Captain C. Le Couteur, one of Teal's "mileage millionaires," will fly the final flight from Sydney to Wellington, and Captain J. Shephard will take the Solent on its last trip from Wellington to Sydney.

The Mayor (Mr. Macalister) today indicated his intention of farewelling the flying-boat at the Evans Bay terminal on Friday.

Teal's second to last Solent flight across the Tasman from Wellington was made this morning. On its return trip from Wellington the Solent carried about 200lb of wool samples—two-thirds its cargo—destined for England, Switzerland, Belgium, Paris, Japan, and Australia.

The sales and booking office of Tasman Empire Airways Office is to be maintained in the capital although flying-boat services are to cease on Friday, a Teal official said today. Between six and 10 of Teal's 30-odd staff in Wellington will be retained in the capital staffing the booking and sales offices and on administrative duties.

SIR L. ISITT MAKES PREDICTION **Flying-Boats' Return Seen As Inevitable**

WITHIN 10 TO 12 YEARS flying-boats would make their reappearance in Wellington connecting the city with terminals overseas, the chairman of directors of Tasman Empire Airways (Sir Leonard Isitt) predicted today.

SPEAKING over the public-address system at the Evans Bay flying-boat base to the spectators who assembled to watch the last flying-boat take off from the city today, Sir Leonard said that as aircraft increased in size, the return of flying-boats would be inevitable.

One of the main factors in Teal's decision to change over from Solents to DC6 land-planes was the decision reached by the Australian Government to close the Sydney flying-boat terminal at Rose Bay.

This had meant the only alternative—if flying-boats were to be kept on the run—was for the Australian terminal to be moved to Brisbane. This could scarcely be regarded as

satisfactory. The company had therefore re-equipped with modern 300-mile-an-hour DC6s.

HISTORIC UNIT

Sir Leonard referred to the Solent making the final trans-Tasman trip today and said the Aotearoa II was the historic unit of Teal's Solent fleet. It had been launched by the Queen while Princess Elizabeth and during the recent Royal tour had provided her Majesty's transport to Tonga.

It was worth noting that on the Royal tour there had been only two

occasions when the Royal couple had flown in commercial aircraft. They were the flight by Solent in the Pacific, and the flight by NAC Heron from Rotorua to Gisborne.

"I see the flags are flying outside," the Mayor (Mr. Macalister) said, referring to the bunting on the aircraft, "but I feel they should be flying at half-mast." It was the death of a service which had been particularly useful to the city and the neighbouring district.

GIVEN THE LIE

Four years ago, the introduction of Teal's direct air link between Wellington and Sydney had given the lie to the stories that Wellington harbour could never be used as a flying-boat base. Since its inauguration, a highly successful and convenient service had been developed.

He said the people of Wellington would not be satisfied for the service to have terminated without an alternative. "I had hoped for an announcement today," the Mayor said, referring to the company's plans to use the R.N.Z.A.F. station at Ohakea as a terminal for Wellington.

Solents had given magnificent service to Wellington, said the Minister of Civil Aviation (Mr. Macdonald), and he regretted the service had to end. Teal had established a record which compared with any other airline in the world and tributes were due to all those who had helped to build it.

COMPENSATION

Mr. Macdonald said he regretted also that with the conversion of Teal's trans-Tasman fleet to DC6 landplanes, Wellington was no longer suitable as a landing point. However, although it appeared that air travel between Wellington and Sydney could not now be made as easily, flights would be in comfortable, speedy DC6s.

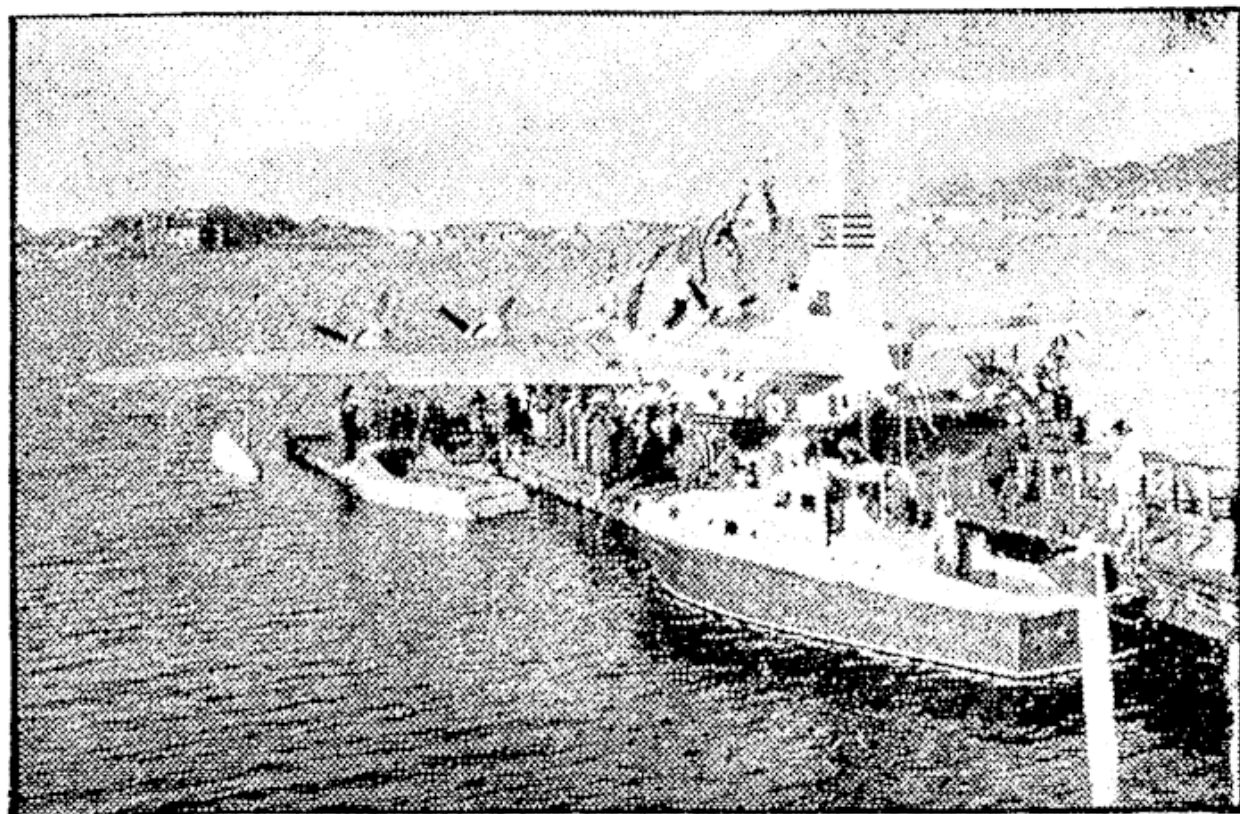
The question of using Ohakea was still under consideration, but nothing more could be said at present. Citizens of Wellington could rest assured that everything possible would be done.

The deputy-chairman of the Harbour Board (Mr. W. H. Price) said he was not pleased to be present—because it was a sad day to see the Solents end their trans-Tasman service.

"I hope with the modern inventions which are taking place today it won't be long before Wellington sees something the same again," Mr. Price said. "I have made several flights across the Tasman in these flying-boats and I couldn't wish for anything better or more comfortable."

Teal's safety record was something to be proud of, Mr. Price added. It had operated throughout the years without an accident. This record was probably unequalled throughout the world.

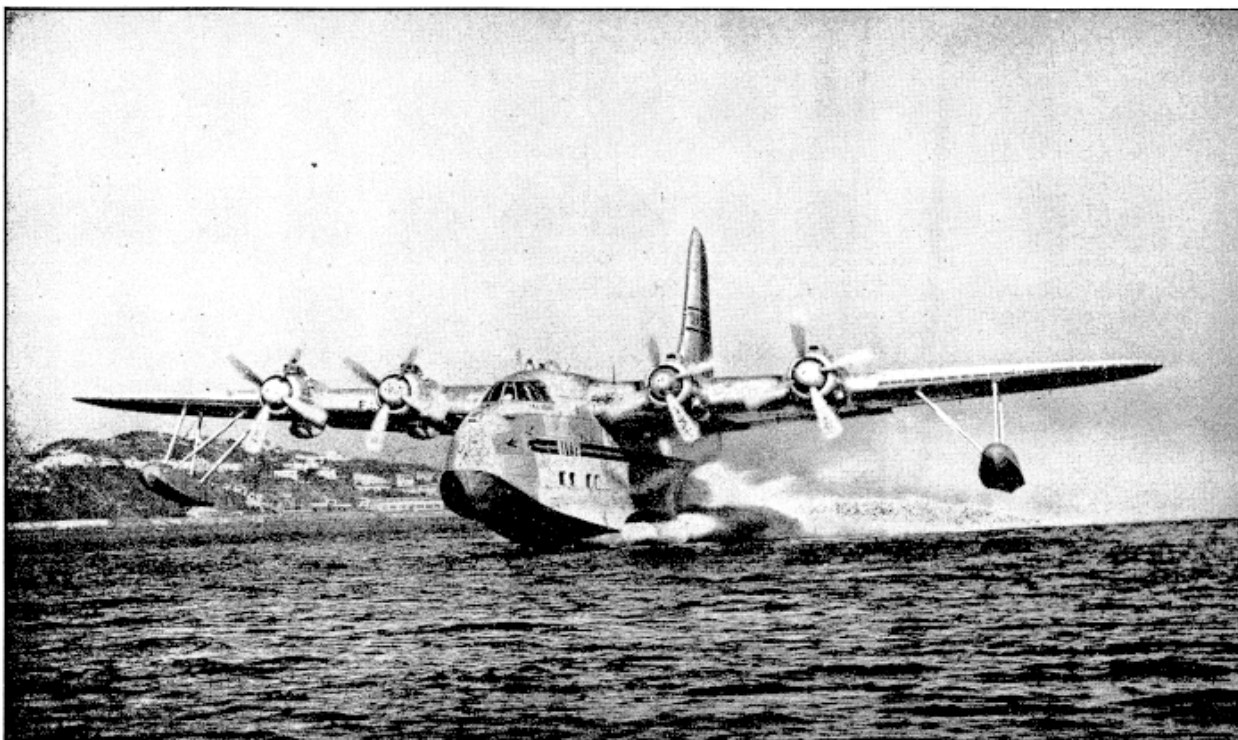
Other references to the ending of the Solent service appear on page 10.



FLAGS fly over the Solent as the service from Evans Bay folded up this morning.



MRS. PAT McNEILL, a Wellingtonian now living in Australia, and her daughter, Helen, board this morning's Solent—the last passengers to go aboard a Teal Solent from Wellington.



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Evening Post 25 June 1954

LAST OF SOLENT FLIGHTS

Nothing Official, But Big Farewell

TASMAN Empire Airways made no official arrangements to mark the departure of its last scheduled trans-Tasman flying-boat from Evans Bay this morn-

ing, but the people of Wellington did not let the Aotearoa II—a frequent visitor to the Capital in the past four years—go unfaREWELLED.

A good-sized crowd of spectators assembled at the Evans Bay terminal to watch the departure of the Solent and "off-the-cuff" speeches were made over the public address system by the Minister in Charge of Civil Aviation (Mr. Macdonald), the Mayor (Mr. Macalister), the deputy-chairman of the Harbour Board (Mr. W. H. Price), and Teal's chairman of directors (Sir Leonard Isitt).

The Mayor said straightforwardly that the people of Wellington would not "stand idly by" now that their direct air link with Sydney had been terminated, without some substitute.

Other spontaneous gestures of farewell included the dressing of the aircraft in bunting as it lay at the pontoon jetty awaiting the embarkation of passengers; the singing of "Now Is The Hour" by the crowd before the engines were started, the firing of Very lights and smoke signals from the Civil Aviation Administration launch; and farewell toots from the siren of the tanker British Gunner, moored at Miramar Wharf.

Circled City

The only arrangement made previously by Teal for commemorating the last flight was for the Aotearoa II to circle the city before departing for Sydney in a gesture of farewell.

After the aircraft's arrival from Sydney this morning, however, Teal

employees at Evans Bay hastily borrowed bunting from the Union Steam Ship Company and also used the aircraft's own visual signals to decorate the plane.

Captain J. Shephard, a senior Teal pilot with more than 1000 Tasman crossings behind him, piloted the last flight from the Capital. He is one of the two Teal captains who will not be converting to DC6s. In future he will fly Solents over the Coral Route to Tahiti from Fiji.

Before leaving, he said he would like to thank the people of Wellington for the hospitality they had shown to successive Teal crews.

He expected a slow crossing against head winds, but the weather was good and, he said, the Aotearoa should touch down in Rose Bay, Sydney, at 5pm Australian time.

Not Full List

The last flying-boat from Wellington did not carry a full complement of passengers. Aboard were 34 adults, two children, and two infants. Cargo carried by the Solent weighed 112 kilograms and included many wool samples dispatched to addresses throughout the world.

Soon after passengers boarded the aircraft the crowd sang "Now Is The Hour," and handkerchiefs fluttered as the tail mooring was slipped and the flying-boat moved out into the bay to warm-up for take-off. Teal employees crowded into the company tender and followed the aircraft out until it began to gain speed for its ascent.

Smoke signals and Very lights fired from the Civil Aviation Administration launch controlling the take-off also added to the farewells and there were toots from the British Gunner as the flying-boat took off and flew low over the Rongotai peninsula before turning and making a final circuit of the city.

Inward-bound from Sydney this morning, the Aotearoa II circled the city and Hutt Valley for almost 50 minutes. The flying-boat arrived over the bay at 7.6am but cloud obscuring the water kept the aircraft from landing. While awaiting landing instructions, her pilot, Captain C. J. Le Coureur, did three circuits of the city and one over the Hutt Valley and Eastbourne.

NEARLY 50,000 PASSENGERS

BETWEEN the inauguration of the Wellington-Sydney flying-boat service on October 2, 1950, and its termination today, 49,470 passengers were carried between the two points by air, Tasman Empire Airways announced today.

Solents carried 22,984 passengers from Wellington to Sydney and brought 26,486 from Sydney to Wellington.

The Evening Post 26 June 1954

Teal's flying-boat base buildings stood empty and desolate, overlooking a lonely Evans Bay this morning. But they won't just stand there for long if the Hataitai Municipal Electors' Association gets its way.

Executive members who toured the district with the Mayor for two hours today were brimful with ideas. One of them suggested that the buildings might make a good suite of offices. But others, with a more poetical mind, conjured up this vision:

One day, they said, the flying-boat base area might be a pleasant skating rink with provision for car parking. Some of them imagined a balmy summer night, strings of coloured lights, soft music, and gay dancers. Then they saw brightly painted round tables, wicker chairs, parasols, cool drinks, and strolling couples halting to rest and gaze out over the bay.

As a first practical step the association will try to find out just what plans Teal has for the buildings and who owns the land on which they stand.

After a two-hour trip through Hataitai this morning the Mayor said the district needed planned beautification and a district roadman.

Executive members of the association showed him dangerous corners, discussed provision of children's play areas with him, and suggested a scheme to improve Kio Bay. They believe a 60ft groyne will help build up the beach there.

RONGOTAI WANTED IN TWO YEARS

The air services committee of the Wellington Chamber of Commerce has asked for an assurance from the Minister of Civil Aviation that funds will be forthcoming to have Rongotai completed within two years.

Reporting this to the meeting of the chamber this week, Mr. C. D. A. George said that the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce had offered to support the Wellington chamber in its efforts to have the work at Rongotai expedited. He added that National Airways Corporation had also been written to asking for improvements to the Wellington-Auckland-Sydney connection.

Sir Jack Harris said that while Wellington was temporarily "out" as an international airport, people travelling from here to Australia should be assured of a day's through connection without the necessity for an overnight stay.

Commenting on the proposal that Ohakea should be developed as an international air terminal, Sir Jack said he doubted whether Wellington travellers would agree that it would prove a satisfactory alternative.

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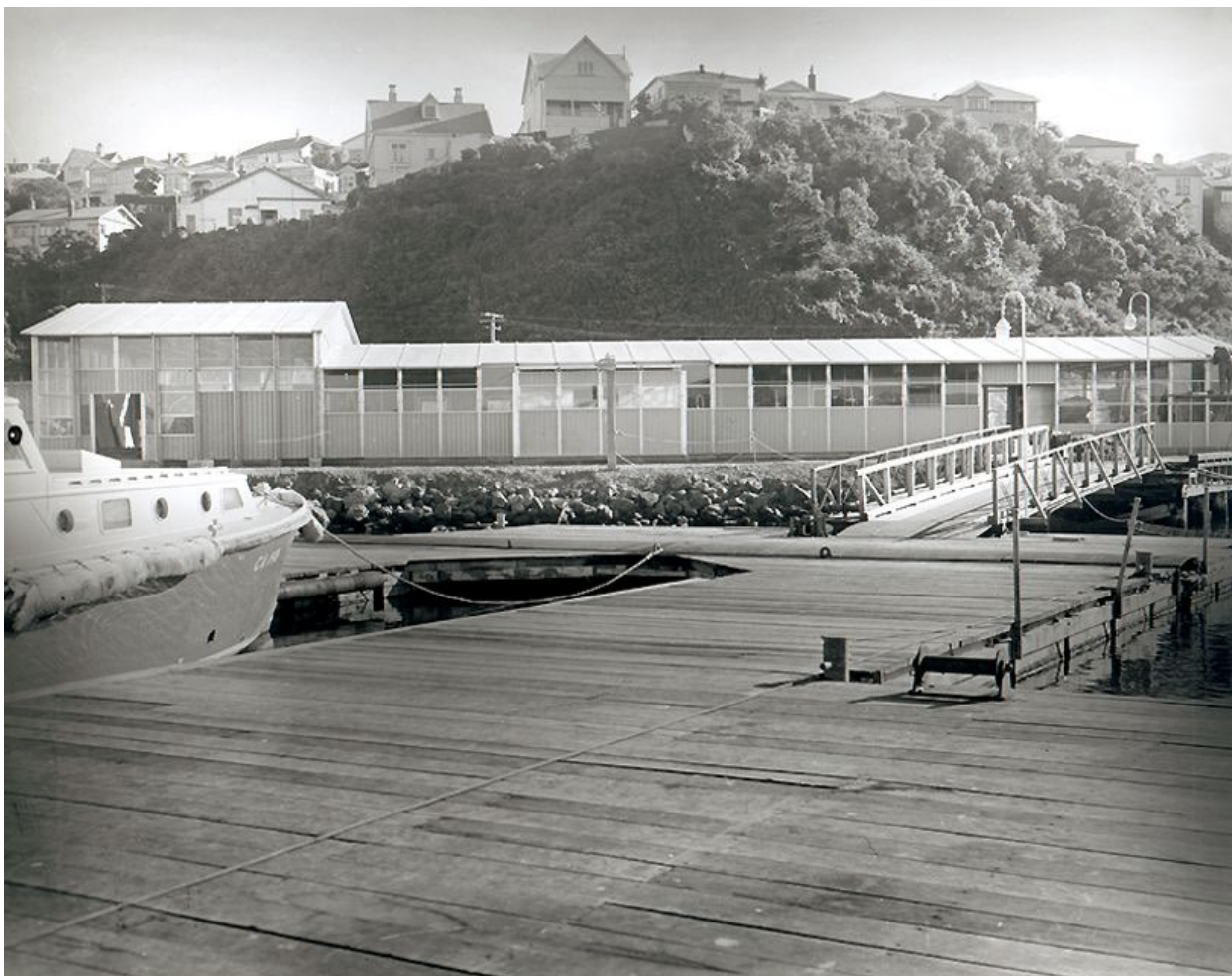
The Evening Post's 'Farewell to the Solents' photo. The aircraft is *ZK-AMO Aranui*, now on display at MOTAT in Auckland.



TEAL's flying boat base with a Solent berthed at the pontoon at Evans Bay. Used for several decades by the Air Training Corps and Sea Cadets, the old TEAL terminal building was destroyed by fire in December 2006.



The very rare occasion when three TEAL Solents were together at Evans Bay.



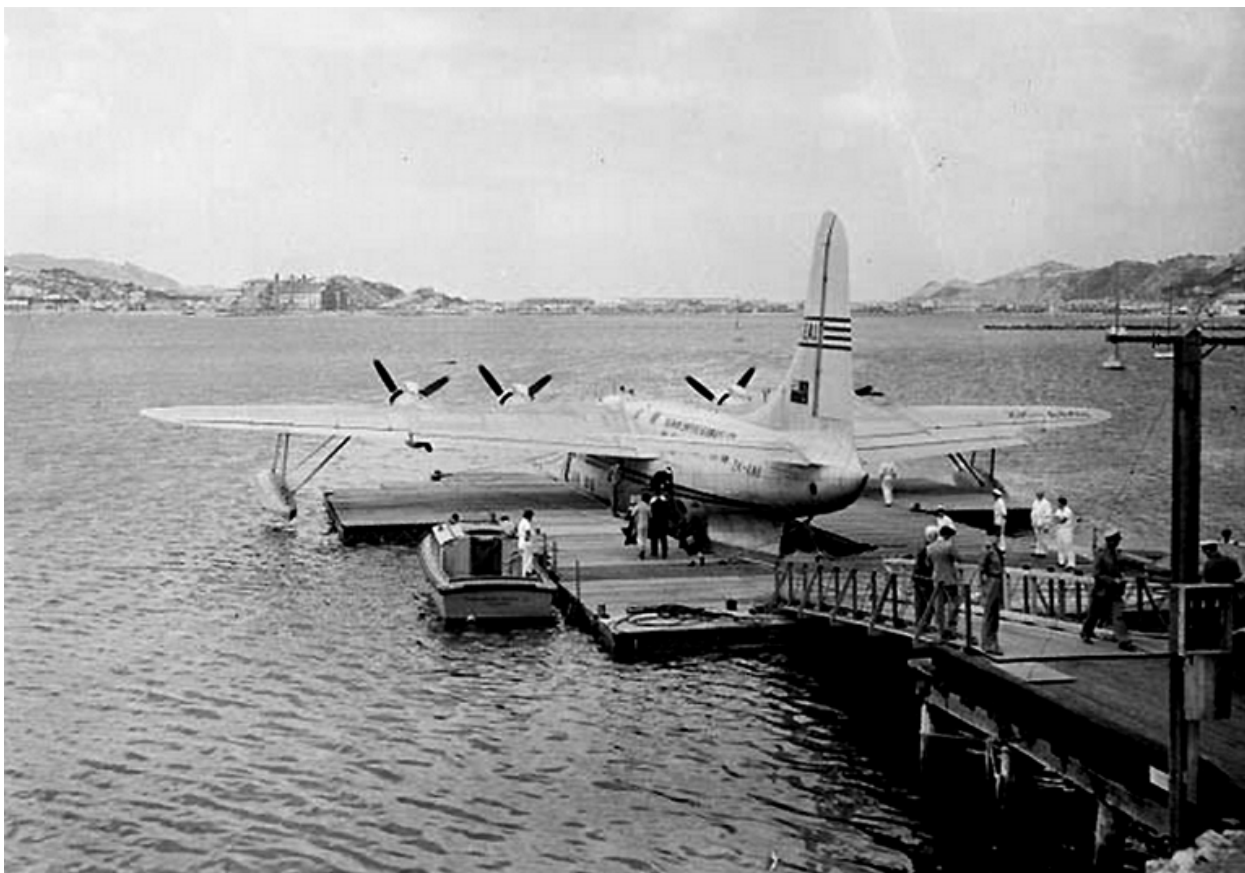
The British designed TEAL flying boat terminal taken from the pontoon. A Civil Aviation Administration launch is seen tied up where the Solents were usually moored. The terminal was demolished after being badly damaged by fire in December 2006.



A TEAL Solent being maneuvered into the pontoon after arriving from Sydney.



A TEAL Solent securely moored inside the purpose-built pontoon.



Passengers embark onto a TEAL Solent at Evans Bay, Wellington.



Passengers from Sydney enter TEAL's flying boat terminal at Evans Bay, Wellington.



TEAL's flying boat terminal with a newly arrived Solent from Sydney moored in the pontoon. This photo was taken from Hataitai Beach.



A Google street view of the old TEAL flying boat terminal at Cog Park, Hataitai. Note the pontoon used to disembark and board passengers have been removed and sent to RNZAF Hobsonville in Auckland.



Crowds of well-wishers bid a Solent farewell as it moves away from the pontoon prior to take-off.