

Farewell to the TEAL Solents.

by Stephen Berry

Following the dissolution of British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines (BCPA) in 1954, the airline's three Douglas DC-6 airliners were transferred to the New Zealand regional airline TEAL. This somewhat unexpected event had huge consequences as it allowed TEAL to transfer to landplanes instead of flying boats which they had operated successfully on the trans Tasman route since 1940.

A New Zealand Government promise, that the Solent would be the last water-based aircraft the airline would operate, ended any thought of future flying boat development in New Zealand. The Solents were delivered during 1949 with one setting a new trans-Tasman crossing record of 5 hours 37 minutes.

The four Solent IV flying boats were: *ZK-AML Aotearoa II* (the TEAL flagship); *ZK-AMN Awatere*; *ZK-AMM Ararangi*; and *ZK-AMO Aranui*. After the transTasman flying boat service ended in May 1954, *ZK-AMM Ararangi* was broken up at Mechanics Bay later that year after her main spar was badly weakened by an engine fire. *ZK-AML Aotearoa II* and *ZK-AMN Awatere* were sold to Hamble-based Aquila Airways and *ZK-AMO Aranui* was moved to RNZAF Hobsonville where it remained until being moved to MOTAT in July 1979. *Aranui* has since been restored and is on display in MOTAT's new Aviation Hall.

In 1951, TEAL purchased an extra Solent flying boat from [BOAC](#) to ease pressure on growing passenger numbers and help with the new Wellington based Tasman Service operating from [Evans Bay](#). The Solent 3 *ZK-AMQ Aparima* carried on in TEAL service until 1957, and on the Coral Route as the backup to *ZK-AMO Aranui* based at Suva, Fiji. *Aparima* was scrapped at Mechanics Bay in 1957.

With one exception, the Solents were withdrawn from service with the introduction of the ex BCPA DC-6 landplanes in May 1954. The exception, *ZK-AMO Aranui*, continued flying the Coral Route from its base at Suva, Fiji, until 1960 when TEAL introduced the landplane based Hibiscus Service to Nadi, Fiji.

Initially TEAL had ordered the Solents for their trans Tasman service between Auckland and Sydney, the first entering service in mid-1949. A year later, in November 1950, a service from Wellington to Sydney was inaugurated. Many so-called experts had predicted that Wellington Harbour was far too rough for flying boat operations, but those fears were unfounded and the Solents all operated successfully from New Zealand's capital until their sudden withdrawal from service in May 1954.

The people and local government officials of Wellington were shocked by this decision, as a considerable amount of money had just been spent building a modern airline terminal for the Solent's trans Tasman and Chatham Islands services. In fact, the terminal was only

opened in November 1952 and had proved to be a boon, with Wellington able to advertise itself as a true international airliner. The new terminal building, which cost more than 24 pounds per square foot, was a pleasant change from the TEAL workshops in which passengers had been processed for the previous 12 months.

The arrival in 1954 of the BCPA DC-6 landplanes finally allowed TEAL to expand operations to Nadi, Fiji and from there directly to Tahiti. It also opened up landplanes to Melbourne, helping move passengers during the 1956 Olympic Games, and to Brisbane. It also ended the leasing of a TAA DC-4 operating out of Christchurch on behalf of the airline.

Wellington's rebuilt Rongotai Airport handled its first DC6 service just after it opened in October 1959. Originally to be replaced by the Lockheed L-188 Electra in 1960, the DC-6 remained in service until 1961 due to engineering issues with the Electra, when they were handed over to the RNZAF to be used as troop transports.

The two Solent IVs that were sold to Aquila Airways entered service on their Southampton to Madeira and the Canaries route soon after arriving in Britain in January 1955. Happily, Aquila retained ZK-AMN's original name *Awatere*, which means "swift flowing river" in the Maori language. Both Solents remained in service with Aquila until mid-1958 at which time they were sold on to Aerovias Aquila of Portugal.

Both Solents were subsequently sold to ARTOP of Portugal in October 1961 but never entered service due to the company ceasing operations. Sadly, that was the end for the two former TEAL stalwarts because they were left to rot on the banks of the River Tagus for almost a decade and subsequently broken up for scrap.



A TEAL DC-6 being loaded at the brand new Wellington Airport at Rongotai in 1960.



The scene at Wellington Airport in late 1961 after the DC-6s were replaced by the Electras.



A TEAL DC-6 at Whenuapai Airport, Auckland ca 1958.



A TEAL DC-6 being refuelled at Whenuapai Airport, Auckland.

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The Solent Fleet And Their Disposal.

ZK-AMO Aranui



***ZK-AMO Aranui* at rest in the lagoon at Aitutaki in 1955. Note second to last TEAL livery.**



The sole surviving TEAL Solent IV *Aranui* at Auckland during the last month of operations on the Coral Route in 1960. Illustrated is the Solent's final TEAL livery.



ZK-AMO Aranui at RNZAF Hobsonville shortly after her retirement in 1960



Short Solent IV ZK-AMO Aranui as she is today, on display in the aviation hall at MOTAT, Auckland.

ZK-AMN Awatere



The TEAL Solent IV ZK-AMN Awatere taxiing into the pontoon at Laucala Bay, Fiji, circa 1954.



G-ANYI ex TEAL Solent ZK-AMN Awatere shortly before her sale to Portuguese operator ARTOP. The sale came to nothing as the airline ceased business soon after. The aircraft was finally broken up in 1971. This photo from the Gordon Reid collection, shows Awatere in her Aquila Airways livery.

ZK-AML Aotearoa II

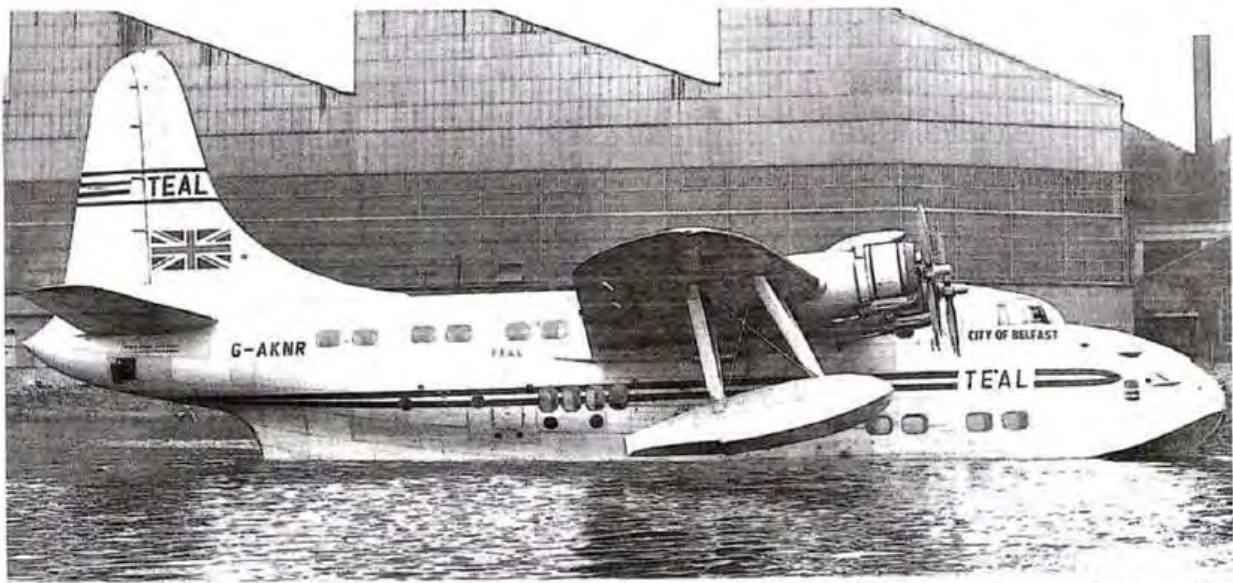


The TEAL Solent IV flagship ZK-AML Aotearoa II on the hard at Mechanics Bay, Auckland in the early 1950s.



A rare photo of former TEAL Solent Aotearoa II in Aquila Airways livery at Madeira in 1957. Following its subsequent sale to ARTOP the aircraft languished on the banks of the River Tagus for almost a decade before being scrapped. Photo courtesy of Peter Marson.

ZK-AMQ Aparima



Former BOAC Short Solent III G-AKNR was sold to TEAL in September 1951, and is pictured here sporting TEAL livery together with her BOAC name "City of Belfast" at Short's Queen's Island facility on August 22 1951. (Short Brothers & Harland)

Ex BOAC Solent III G-AKNR *City of Belfast* at the Short Bros & Harland Belfast factory shortly before departing for New Zealand in 1951. On arrival she was renamed *Aparima*. She remained in TEAL service until 1957 when she was scrapped at Mechanics Bay.



TEAL Solent III City of Belfast photographed at Wake Island during her delivery flight to New Zealand in 1951. This aircraft was purchased from BOAC earlier that year.



ZK-AMQ Aparima, TEAL's ex BOAC Solent III, being broken up at Mechanics Bay in 1957.

ZK-AMM Ararangi



TEAL Solent IV *ZK-AMM Ararangi* alighting on the calm waters of the Waitemata Harbour in November 1949.



Solent *ZK-AMM Ararangi* being broken up at Mechanics Bay, Auckland in July 1954.



Solent ZK-AMM Ararangi being broken up at Mechanics Bay, Auckland in July 1964.



ZK-AMM Ararangi being broken up at Mechanics Bay in July 1954.



The tail and rear fuselage of *ZK-AMM Ararangi* lying on the ground while being scrapped.

All photos from Whites Aviation, MOTAT, Peter Marson, and the Gordon Reid and Stephen Berry collections.