

OPAL AIR (OPAL AIR PTY LTD TRADING AS) (AIRLINE CODE OB)

The story of Opal Air is the story of Warwick Goldsworthy and his persistence in starting the first approved regional airline in Australia in 1967.¹ In 1954 Warwick commenced an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner with Freighter Trailer Industries. During that time (contrary to his father's wishes who wanted him in the family business) he learnt to fly at the Royal Queensland Aero Club in DH-82 Tiger Moths on weekends, and meanwhile completed two years of a diploma in engineering. In 1960 on completion of the apprenticeship, he obtained a position installing diesel generators in power houses at Madang and Wewak in Papua New Guinea.

Warwick gained his commercial pilot's licence in 1961 and wrote to numerous charter operators seeking a pilot's job. He gained a position with Silver City Air Taxis, which operated out of Broken Hill and Port Augusta. The company also held the Flying Doctor contract at Port Augusta.

On Thursdays a freight contract was flown from Port Augusta to Coober Pedy and return, which took 1.45 hours. The return flight passengers were opal miners who would speak of their "fabulous" finds while proudly displaying their glittering gems. In Warwick's words "I quickly became hooked and decided to start an air service to cater for their needs and get some opal action for myself". Consequently, Warwick designed the first "round" tunnelling machine for mining and with the assistance of his older brother Ross made it in their father's workshop. A by-product of this was the creation of the family dugout at Coober Pedy, where both the front and back doors had views to the far horizons.

In 1963 Warwick left Silver City Air Taxis and formed his own air charter company Opal Air with the assistance of several backers including Bepi Coro of the Miners Store in Coober Pedy, Greg Sherman and Laurie Lehman. The company operated passenger and freight charter flights between Adelaide, Andamooka and Coober Pedy and during this time he also continued his active interest in opal mining. The first aircraft purchased, Cessna 210/5 VH-BUD (1), was used to carry passengers and freight. After three years a larger aircraft, Cessna 310K VH-RXY, was leased followed by Cessna 310K VH-BUD (2), to cater for the increased traffic.

In 1967 Opal Air received the first Commuter Airline Licence issued in Australia and the first scheduled service from Adelaide to Andamooka and Cobber Pedy was flown on 3 July using Cessna 402 VH-BUD (3).

The first timetable was for Monday/Wednesday/Friday:

Adelaide	Andamooka	Coober Pedy
Depart 0800	Arr 0945 - dep 1000	Arr 1100
Coober Pedy	Andamooka	Adelaide
Depart 1300	Arr 1400 - Dep 1415	Arrive 1600

This was later expanded to daily flights.

Fares:

Adelaide to Andamooka \$30; Adelaide to Coober Pedy \$44; Andamooka to Coober Pedy \$20.

Return fares were double the single fares. Children: between ages of three and fifteen inclusive half fare; children under three free.

In 1967 Tony Schwerdt won the tender for six Mustang fighters that were used in the Emu Atomic Bomb test and he was flown by Warwick Goldsworthy in Cessna 402 VH-BUD (2) from Coober Pedy to Emu Junction. This was along with Graham Treloar and several others together with a supply of fuel, batteries and various tools. After several months they were successful as the Mustang A68-1 was flown to Parafield and the other fighters were disassembled and trucked out.

¹ An aviator profile on Warwick Goldsworthy can be found under the History Group section of the South Australian Aviation Museum website.