

Henry Edgar (Harry) Ding

by Hans Mincham

Henry Edgar (Harry) Ding (1907-1976), trucker, was born on 23 April 1907 at Petersburg, South Australia, eldest of four children of Edgar Ellis Ding, railway pumper, and his wife Edith Louise, née Richards. Educated at Olary, where his mother ran a post-office store, and for two years at Peterborough High School, in 1921 Harry began carrying supplies to sheep stations by horse and cart. He also took Sir Douglas Mawson and his students to geological sites.

In 1922 Edgar Ding bought a roofless Model-T Ford buckboard with which Harry continued transporting supplies and passengers. Having opened a motor works at Olary as a Ford dealer, in 1926 the tall, rangy, softly-spoken lad started a trucking business with an old 2-ton Chevrolet.

An accident wrecked it and he bought a Dodge. With the purchase in 1932 of a 4½-ton Leyland, Ding's business flourished. Two years later he bought a garage-store at Yunta for his base. By 1935 his trucks at Cockburn, Olary and Yunta on the Port Pirie-Broken Hill railway line, and at Hawker and Lyndhurst siding on the Central Australian line, ran mail and supplies to pastoral properties, and transported wool from them.

He secured the fortnightly Marree-Birdsville mail contract and Tom Kruse inaugurated this service in 1936, thereby ending the era of camel transport. Passengers were welcome on the 330-mile (531 km) route along the notorious Birdsville Track.

After an engine failure had alerted Ding to the need for radio communication, in the mid-1930s Alfred Traeger installed a wireless-base for him at Yunta and his drivers were provided with transceivers. His station VHU9 used three wavelengths, working at long or short distances by day and night. Many pastoral properties, including four in Queensland owned by Sir Sidney Kidman's company, joined the busy Yunta network which also assisted Rev. John Flynn's Australian Aerial Medical Service.

With Flynn officiating, on 5 October 1938 at the Presbyterian Church, Gladesville, Sydney, Harry married a nurse Catherine Alice Anderson; they were to be divorced in 1954. Cecil Madigan engaged Ding in 1939 to transport equipment to Andado station, Northern Territory, the starting point for Madigan's camel trek across the Simpson Desert. At Yunta, Ding received and transmitted Madigan's messages and national broadcasts.

Ding's fleet pioneered the road transport of livestock by carting fat lambs to railway sidings and by carrying South Australian stud rams and bulls to Central Queensland. Three men kept a truck constantly travelling. A Mammoth Major, too

wide to be legally driven through most towns, was used on long hauls, with Harry's brother George as senior driver. Business peaked in the early 1940s, with twenty trucks, nine mail runs and depots at Marree, Lyndhurst, Hawker, Olary and Yunta. World War II made maintenance difficult.

In 1944 Harry moved to Wilcannia, New South Wales, and gradually sold the depots. From 1950 he operated a garage at Walcha.

At Norman Park, Brisbane, on 15 April 1954 Ding married with Presbyterian forms 23-year-old Phyllis Mary Bonser of Wilcannia. In 1960 he revisited the outback; in 1973 he flew to the United States of America; he frequently travelled to Fiji and he wrote an autobiography, *Thirty Years With Men* (Walcha, 1988). Survived by his wife, their daughter and two sons, and by the daughter of his first marriage, Ding died of cancer on 13 April 1976 at Tamworth, New South Wales, and was buried in Beam cemetery, Walcha.

Select Bibliography

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