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BRO. AIR COMMODORE SIR CHARLES KINGSFORD SMITH. M.C., A.F.C., Kt.

1897 - 1935

On a night in June, 1928, flashes of lightning bathed in an uncanny light, a new-fangled intruder in the skies above the storm-tossed Pacific Ocean - a lone monoplane - a "suicide crate" by today's standards, was battling for its life high over the boiling waves, its three engines roaring defiance.

The pilots, Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm fought to control the bucking "Southern Cross" as they headed for Brisbane on man's first attempt to fly the mighty Pacific Ocean from America to Australia.

Almost five hours out of Suva, on the last leg of their epic flight, they plunged headlong into a wall of water and electrical fire some 500 miles wide. Today, huge jet airliners fly high and above such storms along this path pioneered by Smithy. But, the "Southern Cross", with a ceiling of only nine thousand feet had to fly straight into the heart of the storm and fight its way through at a speed of only 85 knots. There could be no thought of turning back - they had to make it to Australia or go down into the mountainous seas with no chance of rescue. As they crashed through the storm, water forced its way into the cabin, soaking the Australian pilots and their American comrades, Harry Lyon the navigator and James Warner, the radio operator. Drenched and numbed with cold, they battled on as their battered plane climbed and dropped, climbed and dropped again, like a giant yo-yo, between 9,000 and 500 feet.

After nearly seven hours struggle the "Southern Cross" flew out of the storm as suddenly as it flew into it. The flight was now routine and at 10.13 a.m. on 9th June, 1928, they touched down at Eagle Farm Airport, Brisbane - history had been made!

The man who was to become Bro. Air Commodore Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, M.C., A.F.C., was born at Hamilton, Brisbane, on 9th February, 1897, fourth son of a devout christian Bank Manager who held family service in his home every Sunday. Young Charles was three years old when the family moved to Canada where his father had accepted a position with Canadian Pacific Railways. Six years later they returned to Australia where they resided at McMahons Point in Sydney. Charles was educated at Girrawheen School, Hunters Hill and St. Andrews Cathedral Choir School in Sydney. He was a member of the choir until his voice broke and it was about this time that he had his first brush with death. Surfing with a cousin and two friends at Bondi in 1907, he and the others were swept out to sea by a rip. One boy was drowned and Charles was brought from the water unconscious and revived by a nurse who was holidaying at the beach. It took more than thirty minutes to revive the unconscious youth. The sea had reluctantly given up the victim it was to claim a generation later.

After his school years, Charles attended Sydney Technical College. He was intelligent, but reluctant to concentrate on his studies for any length of time, preferring sport, parties and action. Finally he managed to complete his technical course and was accepted by the Colonial Sugar Refining Company as an electrical apprentice.

Smithy was seventeen years old when World War 1 burst over Europe and on his eighteenth birthday he enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces where he was trained as a despatch rider. He subsequently saw service in Egypt, Gallipoli and France. He was recommended for a commission and transferred to the Royal Flying Corps as a lieutenant - his destiny as a flyer had begun. Posted to France in 1917, he found fighter flying exhilarating, and aerial combat even more headier stuff, especially when attacking the red triplanes of the "Richthofen Circus".

It was at this time he decided to take up flying when he returned to Australia after the War, and saw it as an "interesting and honourable" career. He had a tremendous vision for the future of aeroplanes. He saw them as shrinking great distances, much faster than the swiftest ocean liners - the Pacific could be flown in 80 hours as against three weeks by ship.

Three months service with the Royal Flying Corps saw the end of his active service. Returning from a flight over enemy territory at Somme, on 14th August, 1917, he spotted two German planes below him and dived to attack the nearest. Unfortunately he failed to

notice a third German plane which attacked him from above at point blank range, spraying him with machine gun fire. Smithy was hit in the foot, but despite his pain, and the fact that he passed out briefly several times, he managed to return to his base where it was found that his plane had been riddled with over 180 bullets - many near the cockpit area. Smithy had escaped death once again. Three of his toes had to be amputated and this was the end of his combat days. For his successful war exploits he was awarded the Military Cross and, extremely nervous and on crutches, he presented himself at Buckingham Palace to receive his award, which was pinned to his tunic by King George V. As Smithy backed away he tripped over his crutches and crashed to the ground, only to be assisted to his feet again by the King who told him to waive ceremony, turn his back on his monarch, and walk away frontwards. After the War Smithy remained in England and with a couple of friends bought two war surplus planes, taking people on joy-flights to earn a little "bread and butter". In 1919 the Australian Government offered a £10,000 prize for the first England to Australia flight. Smithy and his two friends decided to enter but were banned when it was found that none of them had any navigational experience. He then went to California for about a year where he joined a "flying circus" before graduating to Hollywood where he worked as a stunt man crashing planes for the cameras. At the beginning of 1921 he returned to Australia. To make a living he joined up with the Diggers Aviation Company, again taking people on joy-flights and ferrying a few passengers around the country. When Western Australian Airlines was established in 1922 he joined them, flying the first airmail services between Geraldton and Derby, but all this time his heart was set on flying the Pacific. On the move almost all the time, Smithy made many lasting friends in the towns where he stayed. He became a popular guest at parties where his infectious good spirits and melodious banjo extended the gaiety into the small hours. Smithy is reputed to have married a beautiful Irish girl at this time. The girl, Thelma McKenna, from Meetheena Station, Port Hedland, is said to have had a fiery temperament and to have left the happy-go-lucky pilot after a few months. He had become friendly with an equally high-spirited pilot named Keith Anderson, both obsessed with the idea of flying the Pacific. To raise money for a Pacific flight they formed the Gascoyne Motor Transport Company at Carnarvon, W.A. It prospered and they sold it at a considerable profit in 1926. They

then bought two small Bristol aircraft and returned to Sydney where Smithy renewed his friendship with Charles Ulm, and all three continued their quest for financial backing for an attempt to fly the Pacific.

In June, 1927 Smithy and Ulm made an attempt on the round Australia record of 22 days 11 hours. They did it in just 10 days 5 hours. Their fame prompted the N.S.W. State Government to offer them £9,000 towards their Pacific flight so they went to San Francisco, arriving there on 5th August, 1927. This was a few days before the start of the California - Hawaii Dole Air Race, so Smithy, Ulm and Anderson set about studying the competing aircraft, assessing their airworthiness and safety margins. They decided for their Pacific flight they needed a multi-engined aircraft, large enough to take a full crew, including a navigator and radio operator, and fitted with the best equipment available. Another Australian, Sir Hubert Wilkins, offered them his Fokker, a composite plane built from two aircraft damaged during his Arctic explorations. It had no instruments or engines but was exactly the "carcass" they wanted. They paid £1,500 for it and set about the task of preparing it for the Pacific flight. New Wright engines, instruments, radio equipment and additional fuel tanks were fitted - the trio found themselves increasingly in debt! To make matters worse, the Dole Race to Hawaii proved a tragedy, with the loss of two planes and four lives, so the N.S.W. Government dropped their financial backing, and instructed Smithy, Ulm and Anderson to cancel their attempt and return home. With a "Nelson touch", Smithy turned a blind eye to this ban, but the shortage of money looked like bringing about what the N.S.W. Government failed to do. The situation was desperate and there was some talk of quitting. Anxious to be re-united with his fiancée, Anderson shook hands with Smithy and Ulm and sailed for Australia. It was then, purely by chance, that the Australians were to meet a Capt. Alan Hancock, a wealthy shipping and oil magnate, who offered to pay off their debts and finance their venture. The "Southern Cross" took off from Oakland, California, on 31st May, 1928 on the first stage of its epic flight. Despite minor engine problems it landed at Honolulu 27½ hours later. The plane took off again on 3rd June from a beach airstrip on the longest leg of the flight - 3,138 miles. Smithy landed it successfully at Fiji 34½ hours later after flying through tropical storms and experiencing further mechanical problems.

A proud Australian Prime Minister, Brother the Right Honourable Stanley Bruce, interrupted a parliamentary debate to announce: "the Airmen have landed in Fiji".

On 8th June, and again from an improvised airstrip, the "Southern Cross" took off on the final leg, where it had to hammer its way through the worst storm of the whole trip.

At last Ballina, N.S.W. and then Brisbane was below. A National Hero was born!

When Smithy and the crew of the "Southern Cross" flew on to Sydney they were greeted by the Governor-General of Australia, Brother His Excellency Lord Stonehaven and a crowd of 300,000 people.

Smithy was made Hon. Squadron Leader of the R.A.A.F. and Ulm a Flight Lieutenant. Both received the Air Force Cross. The Federal Government gave them £5,000 and public subscriptions totalled £15,000.

Smithy and his "Southern Cross" became a continuing legend!

Three months later he made the first non-stop trans-Australian flight with Ulm, Brother Harold Litchfield and T. McWilliams.

The following month the same crew made the first trans-Tasman crossing, returning a month later making the first east-west crossing.

Fame and popularity brought financial backing and at the end of 1928

Smith and Ulm formed Australia National Airlines, an inter-state passenger, freight and mail service. It prospered and they decided to fly the "Southern Cross" to England and order four new planes for their company. They took off from Richmond for Wyndham, 2,000 miles

away on their first leg, on 31st March, 1929, but disaster struck them. With the loss of their radio antenna during a storm, they failed to receive further storm warnings and flew blindly through the night, missing Wyndham and becoming hopelessly lost. Almost out of fuel, Smithy managed to land the plane on a Glenelg River mud flat about 300 miles from their destination.

During the subsequent air search, one of the search planes, the "Kookaburra" piloted by Smithy's friends, Keith Anderson and R. Hitchcock, was reported overdue at Wyndham. It was later found, forced down near Wave Hill and both pilots had died of thirst. It

was tragically ironic that Anderson had bought the "Kookaburra" with £1,000 given to him by Smithy and Ulm after their Pacific flight.

Another plane, the "Canberra", found the "Southern Cross" on 13th April. Food was dropped and, five days later, two light aircraft were able to land carrying fuel. Two weeks later the "Southern Cross" landed back at Richmond.

Newspapers and the public began to ask if the "Southern Cross" had, in fact, been forced down or was it an elaborate publicity stunt. The Prime Minister ordered a Public Inquiry. This Inquiry issued its findings on 24th June, exonerating Smithy and his crew. But public suspicion and doubt, heightened by the loss of Anderson and Hitchcock hurt Smithy deeply. Despite the ordeal which, including the Inquiry, lasted for 2½ months, Smithy was determined to fly to greater glory. Three days after the report, he and Ulm flew the "Southern Cross" to England in a record time of 12 days 18 hours, arriving there on 8th July, 1929. After a short break in London, three of the crew returned home whilst Smithy flew the "Southern Cross" to Holland where Anthony Fokker had the plane completely rebuilt free of charge. After all, it had been a superb advertisement for him and his company.

In London, Smithy was re-united with John Stannage, the radio operator who found the "Southern Cross" near Wyndham. With two others they then flew the plane to New York - the first ever east-west London to New York flight.

With a navigator only, Smithy flew the "Southern Cross" to San Francisco in July, 1930, thus becoming the first man to circumnavigate the globe in the same plane.

On 9th October, 1930, he flew an Avro Avian from London to Darwin in 9 days 21½ hours, - another record!

In this year he married again, his first marriage ending in divorce after nine years. This time he married a charming young woman from Melbourne, Mary Powell, whom he had met on one of his sea voyages. They had one child, a son, Charles Arthur, born in 1933.

Women had played a large part in Smithy's life but his first love was flying. He was a hail-fellow, well-met type, always on the move, living out of suitcases in hotel rooms, restless and spiritually homeless. He loved stag parties, men and beer, loud raucous song and drinking competitions.

In 1930, Smithy was appointed Hon. Air Commodore of the R.A.A.F.

In 1931 he carried the first official airmail from Australia to England. In June, 1932, the King, who had helped him to his feet 15 years before, knighted him.

Flying a Percival Gull, Smithy established a new record from England to Australia of 7 days 4½ hours in October, 1933.

On 20th October, with P.G. Taylor, later Sir Gordon Taylor, G.C., M.C. Smithy achieved another first, this time in his newly acquired Lockheed Altair, "Lady Southern Cross". This flight was the west-east crossing of the Pacific from Australia to America, considered by many to be his greatest achievement.

Just after his arrival in Perth in 1934, he said: "Will you please convey Fraternal greetings to Wor.Bro. Angelo and to the Brethren of my Mother Lodge, Gascoyne No. 62, and the many Brethren in the North I knew when it was my pleasure to be amongst them, 'way back in the 1920's'.

On learning that the M.W. Grand Master had decided to make use of the air service to visit Lodges in the North West, Sir Charles remarked: "Really, I am not surprised, for air travel is being used more and more by all sections of the community to minimise time lost in travel, and with the many parts of the State that are visited by the Grand Master, a great saving of his valuable time can be made by air travel to the more distant Lodges to be visited. I believe he is the first Grand Master in Australia to fly to visit Lodges under the jurisdiction of a Grand Lodge." Smithy added: "I would like to take this opportunity of extending to the M.W. Grand Master my sincere wishes that his first aerial flight to the North West in connection with the duties of his high office may be the forerunner of many pleasant air journeys to visit Lodges in the more distant parts of Western Australia."

Seven months later he began his last trans-Tasman flight - the last long distance flight in the "Southern Cross", now growing old and wearing out. Carrying King George V Jubilee Air Mail for New Zealand, he was accompanied on the flight by Taylor and Stannage. Half way across trouble developed when part of the main engine exhaust manifold broke away and sliced into the starboard propeller. Smithy cut the engine and had to turn back, fuel, luggage and mail had to be dropped. Then the overloaded port motor began to fail due to the lack of oil pressure. There was plenty of oil in the starboard engine, but how to get it? Taylor, removing his boots and bracing himself against the slipstream, climbed out on the wing struts, removed the drain plug and collected the oil in a thermos flask and began filling a leather suitcase held out by Stannage. Taylor then edged out under the other wing and began filling the port engine. This process had to be repeated a number of times until they were about 10 miles from the coast and had enough power for a safe landing.

Shortly afterwards the "Southern Cross" was sold to the Commonwealth Government for £3,000 to be preserved as a National Relic.

But for Smithy, time had almost run out. On 6th November, 1935, he left England for Australia with a friend, J.T. Pethybridge, on a new record bid in his Lockheed Altair, "Lady Southern Cross", in which he had flown the west-east Pacific "first". After eighteen years of charmed and brilliant flying, his stamina was starting to wear thin. He was in the middle of his worst financial crisis and had not had time to train and toughen himself as he had done on previous long distance flights. To make matters worse, it was their second start, having had to turn back after the plane suffered damage during a severe hailstorm over the Adriatic. Repairs were effected in London and now, seventeen days later, they were off again. At Allahabad, India, some 29 hours later, they were three hours behind the time set by Scott and Campbell-Black in October, 1934. They decided to make it up by attempting a long hop across the Indian Ocean to Singapore. They were seen over Calcutta and again off the coast of Burma. Then they disappeared forever - Smithy was gone. He was 38.

Bro. Charles Kingsford Smith was Initiated in Gascoyne Lodge No. 62, Grand Lodge of Western Australia, at Carnarvon on 9th April, 1925. He was Passed to the Second Degree on 1st July and Raised to the Third Degree on 3rd September of that year. In 1926 he held the office of Steward and he was still a member of the Lodge at the time of his death in 1935.

His master mason's apron was presented to the A.I.F. Memorial Lodge No. 289 United Grand Lodge of Queensland on 16th August, 1945, by his brother, Wor. Bro. W. Kingsford Smith and has been used in the tribute to "our fallen brethren" in the Anzac Day ceremony ever since.

After the first crossing to New Zealand in 1928, Smithy together with Brother Harold Litchfield and T. McWilliams, attended the festive board at the Installation of Lodge United Forces No.245 Grand Lodge of New Zealand in Christchurch.

On 8th June, 1985, the Freemasons of Ballina, N.S.W. marched in procession in regalia and with a special masonic float to mark Smithy's historic flight from the United States of America to Australia.

BRO. SIR CHARLES KINGSFORD SMITH REMEMBERED -

Bro. Sir Charles Kingsford Smith and his exploits have been featured on several issues of Australian stamps.

The first occasion was on 19th March, 1931, when a series of three stamps, depicting two globes and the "Southern Cross", were issued - 2d. Red, 3d. Blue and a 6d. Purple with the words "AIR MAIL" printed in the margin.

On 27th August, 1958, an issue commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the first crossing of the Tasman by air was issued. It featured Kingsford Smith and the "Southern Cross" and was of 8d. value - the Air Mail rate at that time. New Zealand simultaneously issued the same blue "twin stamp" but of 6d. denomination.

An issue featuring Australian Aviators was released on 19th April, 1978. Four stamps of 18 cents value were issued, the first depicting Harry Hawker, the second, Bert Hinkler and the third and fourth, Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm respectively, the last two also featuring the "Southern Cross" in which they made so many record-breaking flights together. A miniature sheet was also issued commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the first trans-Tasman flight and also featuring the "Southern Cross".

Bro. Sir Charles Kingford Smith is depicted on the \$20 Australian Banknote, issued since 14th February, 1966, when Australia changed to decimal currency. This could be called a "Masonic Banknote" as Bro. Lawrence Hargrave, another pioneer in the history of flight is shown on the reverse side of the note.

Smithy's plane, the "Southern Cross" has been fully restored and is on display at Brisbane Airport and his name has been immortalised by having numerous parks, streets and venues throughout the country named in his honour, but none more significant than the Southern Cross Drive and Sydney's Kingsford Smith Airport at Mascot.

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