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SIR ROSS McPHERSON SMITH, K.B.E., M.C., D.F.C., A.F.C.

(1892 - 1922)

SIR KEITH McPHERSON SMITH, K.B.E., F.R.G.S., F.R.Ae.S.,
M. Inst. T.

(1890 - 1955)

Anyone who wanted to find two world famous airmen probably wouldn't think to go to a South Australian property of some 780,000 ha (3,000 square miles) called Mutooroo Station, situated on the New South Wales border, 225 km north-west of Adelaide and just 50 km south-west of Broken Hill.

The station was managed by Andrew Smith and his wife Jessie (nee McPherson), who had both been born in Scotland and who were the proud parents of two sons. ¹

Keith, born in Adelaide on 20 December 1890 and Ross born on 4 December 1892 in the Adelaide suburb of Semaphore on the shore of Gulf St. Vincent, were both given, as a second Christian name, the maiden name of their mother.

Both boys were boarders at the Queen's School, Adelaide and they spent two years at Warriston School at their father's birthplace in the Scottish town of Moffat.

On his return to Australia, Ross worked as a warehouseman and joined the Australian Mounted Cadets. He was selected to tour Britain and the United States of America and, on his return, he joined the 10th Australian Regiment, the Adelaide Rifles.

In August 1914, at the outbreak of the first world war, Ross enlisted as a private in the 3rd Light Horse Regiment of the first Australian Imperial Force (A.I.F.). He was quickly promoted to sergeant, sailed for Egypt and, after training, landed at Gallipoli on 13 May 1915.

Three months later he was the regimental sergeant major and, on 5 September 1915, he was commissioned a second lieutenant.

He was wounded and invalided to England where he was promoted to lieutenant and was able to rejoin his regiment in Egypt at the end of March 1916. He then saw action during the battle of Romani in August 1916.

The following year, Ross volunteered for the Australian Flying Corps which he joined on 4 August 1917.

Keith's introduction to the new world of aviation was quite different. ²

He was rejected as a volunteer for the A.I.F. on medical grounds. He then decided to have treatment and, after paying his own passage to England, he was accepted into the Officer Cadet Wing of the Royal Flying Corps in July 1917.

He was posted to No. 58 bomber squadron stationed in France and, in February 1918, he was posted to No. 75 squadron as a gunnery instructor. He was promoted to lieutenant but did not see active service. He was placed on the retired list of the Royal Air Force on 5 November 1919.

His younger brother Ross, however, found himself in very different circumstances.

He first qualified as an observer and later as a pilot and served in the Middle East with No. 1 squadron of the Australian Flying Corps which was also designated No. 67 squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. The dual numbering amused the enemy and confused the allies.

Ross saw considerable action and was decorated twice with the Military Cross and three times with the Distinguished Flying Cross. He also received the Air Force Cross for non-operational flying. He was the most highly decorated Australian airman of the first world war. He was also the pilot for the famous Lawrence of Arabia.

For much of his active service he flew the Handley Page bomber, not only on bombing raids but also on long-range photographic flights.

At the end of the war, the far-sighted enthusiasts saw the possibilities for commercial aviation.

Ross Smith was chosen to pilot a Handley Page from Cairo to Calcutta which was the longest flight then attempted.

He left Cairo on 29 November 1919 with Walter Shiers and James Bennett as mechanics and arrived in Calcutta 11 days later. It was then decided to

survey an aerial route to Australia by sea but the attempt was abandoned at Timor. ³

Australians had always been acutely aware of their isolation from Britain and the Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes offered a prize of 10,000 pounds for the first Australian-manned flight from England to Australia within a period of 30 days. ⁴

The prize was on offer for flights that were required to commence after 8 September 1919 and arrive in Australia before midnight on 31 December 1919. ⁵

There were many former wartime pilots who commenced preparations for the flight. Among them was a young man, destined to become a Freemason, named Charles Kingsford-Smith and his companions Cyril Maddocks and Val Rendle.

Billy Hughes, however, bluntly refused them permission to compete. He said:

'These three young men are too young for such a flight. Apart from that my information is that they lack the necessary navigational qualifications to undertake such a journey. They are not, under any circumstances to be allowed to start in the event.'

Smithy was furious. He retorted:

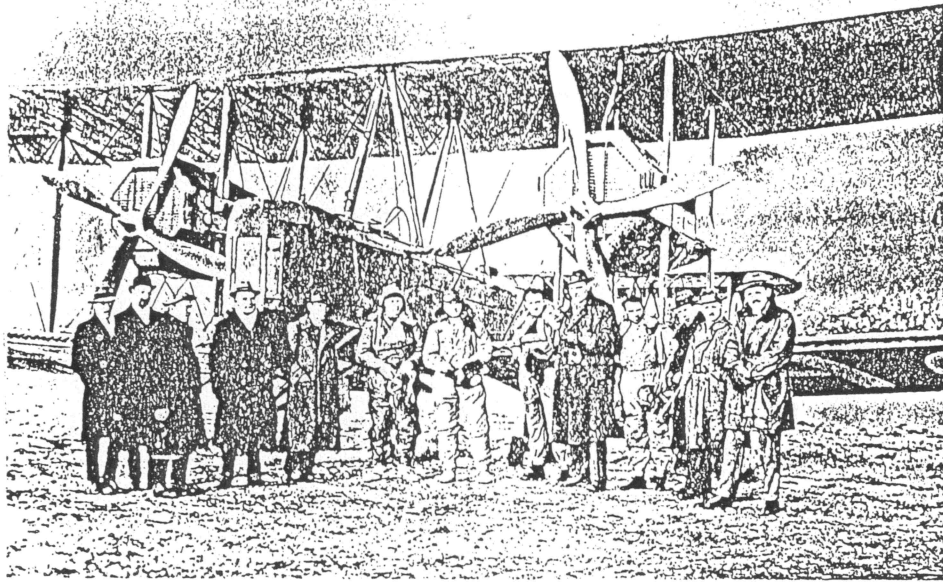
'What's the bloody man talking about? The three of us have risked our lives many times in the air fighting for freedom, and we're damn good pilots. What sort of mockery does this man's statement make of my former rank of captain-instructor in the Royal Flying Corps?' ⁶

The Prime Minister had spoken and Smithy did not attempt the flight.

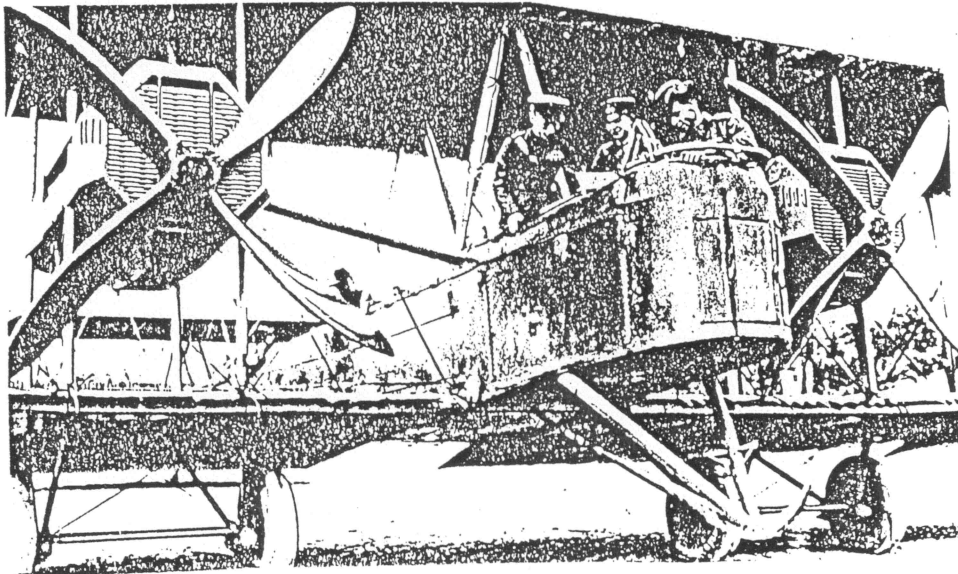
Of the six aircraft that did eventually commence the journey, two crashed without injury to their crews, one returned to base and two were never heard of again.

Ross Smith, with his brother Keith as co-pilot and navigator, and his colleagues Walter Shiers and James Bennett as mechanics, left Hounslow, in the west of Greater London, at 9.12 a.m. on 12 November, 1919.

They flew a Vickers Vimy, a type of aeroplane similar to the Handley Page, which had been supplied by the manufacturer.



NIGHTMARE FLIGHT THAT OPENED THE LONDON-SYDNEY AIR ROUTE



ROSS SMITH CLIMBS INTO THE COCKPIT OF THE VIMY BIPLANE IN WHICH HE AND HIS BROTHER PIONEERED THE LONDON-SYDNEY AIR ROUTE

Flying conditions were poor and the four men nearly froze in the open cockpit and ice continually coated their goggles.

Severe storms swept across Europe and conversation in the cockpit was impossible above the roar of the two Rolls-Royce 268 K.W. (360 hp) Eagle VIII engines. There was no radio or navigational aids and only sketchy maps of some portions of the route.

Perhaps Ross was reminded of the young A.F.C. officer stationed in Egypt and who was flying near the Great Pyramid, carrying out exercises in navigation and discovering his geographical position with a sextant.

After a series of involved and confused calculations, he turned suddenly to his pilot and said, "Take off your cap Sir".

"Why?" asked the pilot.

"Because according to my calculations we are now inside St.Paul's Cathedral".

The aircraft registration number was G-EAOU which was quickly interpreted as 'God 'Elp All Of Us'.

Perhaps the greatest help was needed by Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett who found it impossible to sleep in the aircraft and were required to work for most of each night on service and repairs.

The aeroplane carried 4,386 litres (965 gallons) of petrol which gave it a cruising range of 3,800 km (2,360 miles).

Refuelling at each stop was essential and every drop of the 90,920 litres (20,000 gallons) was hand-pumped from 18 litre (4 gallon) drums.

During a gale at Ramadi near Baghdad, the aeroplane was only saved from destruction whilst on the ground by 50 soldiers who spent the entire night physically holding it down.

At Calcutta, two hawks flew into and severely damaged one of the propellers during take-off. Ross, who was at the controls almost crashed into the trees surrounding the aerodrome.

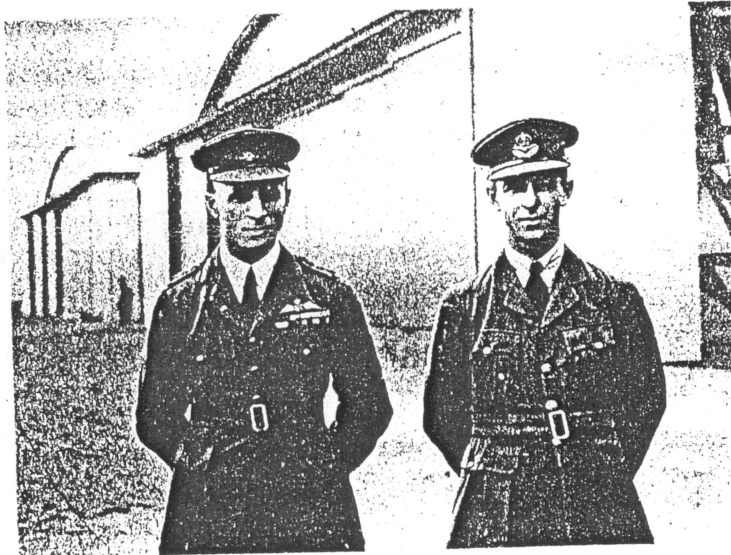
South from India, the fliers encountered monsoons but the Rolls-Royce engines kept the Vickers Vimy flying at a steady 128 km/h (80 miles per hour).

There was an accident at Surabaya in Java when the aeroplane sank through the surface of the runway which had been temporarily constructed over a rice paddy. The villagers provided bamboo matting from their huts and the fliers were able to take off for their destination.

At 3.05 p.m. on 10 December they landed at Darwin.

They had covered some 18,250 km (11,340 miles) in 27 days 20 hours with an actual flying time of 135 hours 50 minutes.

Such was the comparatively slow development of the aeroplane that the Smith brothers' time stood as a record for the next ten years until it was broken by another Australian, Bert Hinkler.



ROSS AND KEITH SMITH
National Library of Australia, Canberra

The fliers left Darwin on 13 December 1919 to be the first to fly across the continent to Sydney.

The propeller which had been damaged at Calcutta was temporarily repaired with fencing wire and angle iron at Anthony's Lagoon, 800 km (500 miles) south-east of Darwin.

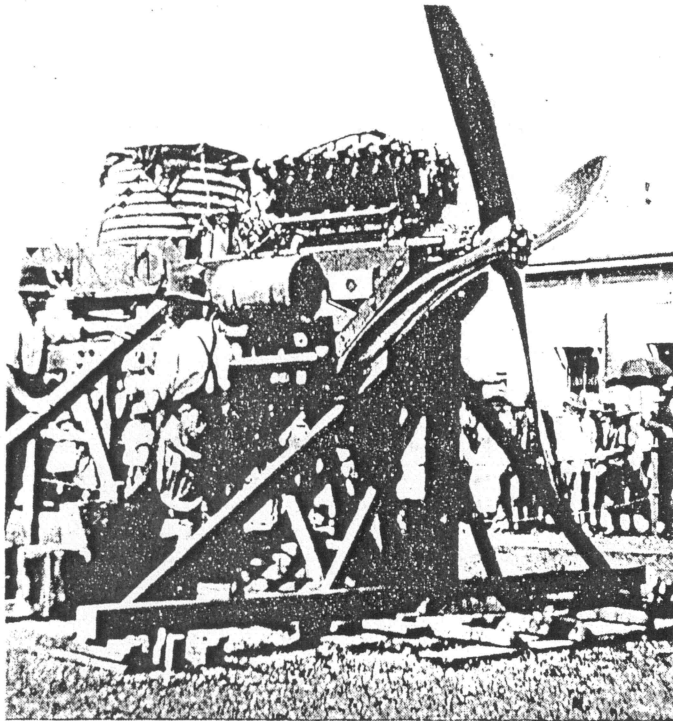
There was a delay of 11 days at Charleville in Queensland while workmen at the Queensland Railway Workshops at Ipswich 650 km (400 miles) away, repaired the engine and made a new propeller.

Ross Smith recorded his satisfaction with the work in a letter to *Land, Sea and Air* magazine.

Queensland Railways save the day

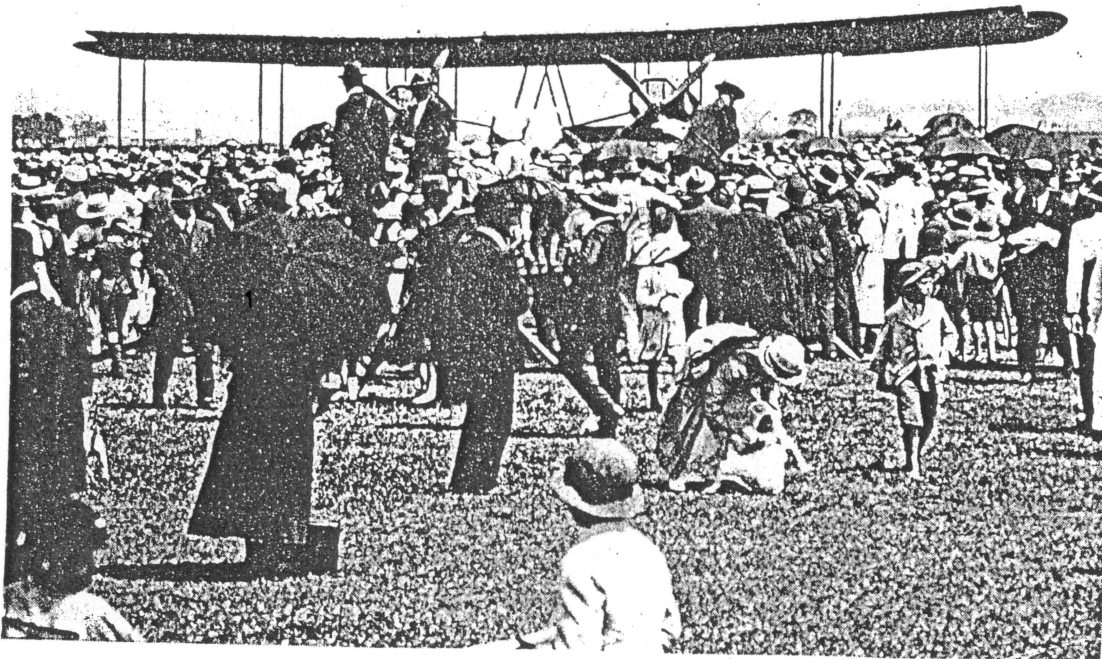
Now that our Rolls Royce engine has been tested I would like to say how pleased I am with the results of the test, and also how very much I appreciate the great assistance which we have been given by the Ipswich works. The work carried out here has been done quickly and skilfully and reflects the greatest credit on all concerned. I am now quite confident that the engine will carry us on safely to the end of our flight. The new propeller which has been made is an excellent piece of workmanship and I am sure it will carry us along successfully.

Ross Smith.



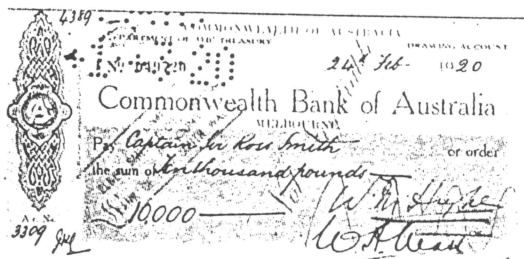
The Vimy was held up for 11 days at Charleville in Queensland while workmen at the railway workshops repaired the engine and made a new propeller. Ross Smith records his satisfaction with the work in this letter to *Land, Sea and Air* magazine

The photographer Captain Frank Hurley joined the flight at Charleville and accompanied the crew to Melbourne. This added to the discomfort of Shiers and Bennett but it was worth it just to see the huge crowd that awaited them in Sydney.



HUGE CROWDS TURNED OUT ALL OVER AUSTRALIA WHEREVER THE BATTERED BUT TRIUMPHANT VICKERS-VIMY LANDED. AT MASCOT, IN SYDNEY, SPECTATORS CLAMBERED OVER THE PLANE FOR THREE DAYS BEFORE IT LEFT ON THE FINAL LEG OF THE FLIGHT TO MELBOURNE, WHERE THE FLIERS WERE GIVEN AN OFFICIAL STATE RECEPTION.

After three days in Sydney, they flew to Melbourne where they were welcomed by the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson and the Prime Minister, Rt.Hon. William Morris Hughes who presented the cheque for 10,000 pounds which the fliers split into four equal shares.



THE CHEQUE PRESENTED TO ROSS AND KEITH SMITH AT THE END OF THEIR FLIGHT BY PRIME MINISTER W.M. HUGHES AND THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, SIR MUNRO FERGUSON.



DON'T SPEND IT ALL AT ONCE - PRIME MINISTER W.M. HUGHES OFFICIALLY WELCOMES ROSS AND KEITH SMITH TO AUSTRALIA AFTER THEIR EPIC FLIGHT FROM ENGLAND TO AUSTRALIA AND PRESENTS THEM WITH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S CHEQUE FOR THE £10,000 PRIZE

One of the first to send a congratulatory telegram was Charles Kingsford-Smith who had previously met the triumphant Smith brothers in London.

After the flight Ross and Keith toured Australia giving lectures on their experiences and showing Frank Hurley's film of the final stages of their epic journey.

The brothers were immediately knighted by King George V and Walter H. Shiers and James M. Bennett were commissioned Lieutenants and each awarded a bar to his Air Force Medal.

The brothers went to England with a plan to circumnavigate the world in a Vickers Viking amphibian. The plan ended in disaster.

IKIN BROS.

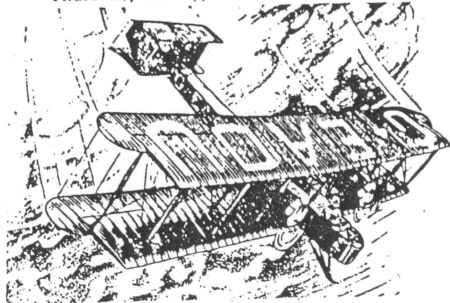
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THE SIR ROSS SMITH FLIGHT

FROM ENGLAND TO AUSTRALIA

Under the Patronage and in the Presence of His Excellency the Governor (Sir William Lamond Allardyce, K.C.M.G.), the Premier, Minister for Education, Members of Parliament, and Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Hobart.

Personally related to you in conjunction with the epoch making motion pictures, by

Sir Keith Smith himself

Starting from Hounslow (England) off snow-covered ground, on November 12th, 1919, the brothers Ross and Keith Smith, with two mechanics, Sergt. Bennett and Sergt. Shiers, flew across Europe and Asia to summer conditions in their homeland, arriving at Darwin on December 10th, 1919—covering 11,340 miles in twenty eight days—the actual flying time being 136 hours. Later they continued the journey to Adelaide—their destination.

The entire voyage will be illustrated in motion pictures secured en route by Sir Keith Smith, K.E.B., and Capt. Frank Hurley (late official photographer, A.I.F.).

A Special Musical Score for the "Ross Smith Flight" picture will be rendered by His Majesty's Orchestra.

Arnold's Biscuits

have gained a high reputation in the esteem of the Tasmanian public, and it is our constant endeavour to retain that confidence. Will you help us, when buying, to ask for, and see that you get

ARNOLD'S (Made in Tasmania) BISCUITS

AFTER THE FLIGHT THE SMITH BROTHERS TOURED AUSTRALIA GIVING LECTURES AND SHOWING FRANK HURLEY'S FILM OF THE FINAL STAGES OF THE FLIGHT.

On 13 April 1922, Ross Smith and James Bennett were test-flying the aeroplane at Weybridge near London when it spun into the ground from a height of 300 m (1,000 feet), killing both men.

Keith, who had arrived later for the test flight, saw the crash and the death of his younger brother.

The bodies of the two airmen were brought home to Australia for burial and, after a State funeral, Sir Ross Smith was buried in Adelaide on 15 June 1922.

Sir Ross and Sir Keith Smith were initiated into Freemasonry in Motherland Lodge No. 3861 at Freemasons' Hall, London, on 29 August 1921. Their proposer was Bro. Sir Harry Renwick and their seconder was Bro. William Perkins Bull. Both gave their address as 3 St. Helens Place, E.C. and their occupation as aviator. They were passed to the second degree together on 29 November 1921 and they were raised to the degree of Master Mason on Tuesday, 11 April 1922.

A visitor to the lodge was long-time friend Bro. James Bennett, ⁸ who was a member of Harmony Lodge No. 272, meeting at Boston, Lincolnshire.

Lodge of Harmony

The tragic accident and an account of the raising ceremony were reported in detail in *The Freemason* published in London on 22 April 1922.

The article was reproduced in *The South Australian Freemason* issued on 10 July 1922.

- BRO. SIR ROSS SMITH - HIS PASSING AND RAISING
(From *The Freemason*, London, April 22nd).

The news telegraphed on Thursday afternoon to all parts of the United Kingdom, and even to the utmost limits of the British Empire, "Death of Sir Ross Smith", caused many to reel because of its startling suddenness, but nowhere, next to the members of his own family and the circle of his immediate friends, could the grief have been more real and acute than among those members and guests of the Motherland Lodge, No. 3861, who, on the previous Tuesday evening - some forty hours before the sad event - had assembled at Freemasons' Hall, London, to witness the completing stage of the initiation of Bro. Sir Ross Macpherson Smith and his blood brother, Bro. Sir Keith Macpherson Smith. There were present among the visitors one whose name has figured prominently in this awful tragedy, and who was a fellow victim with Bro. Sir Ross Smith - Bro. James Mallett Bennett.

At the conclusion of the proceedings, both admitted that the ceremony as rendered by Bro. Geo. W. Jones, P.G.D., Secretary of the Lodge, had greatly impressed them, as indeed it did the onlookers, but it was at the after-proceedings that the other members of the company became intimate with the two heroes of the evening. Even the toast of their health was no mere formality. It was entrusted to an old friend, Bro. Sir Harry Renwick, who admitted that it really called for the powers of a Demosthenes, a Cicero, a Gladstone, or a Disraeli. He had known the twain, he said, ever since some years ago they came

from Australia to England to fight the common enemy. He had also known a third brother, who died in France for his country, one of the noblest and handsomest boys he had ever met. They had all read of their wonderful flight to Australia. Sir Ross had been the first to fly over Jerusalem, the first to fly to Baghdad, while Sir Keith Smith had done equally great things before the two had astonished the world in that marvellous flight. He had marvelled at the courage, endurance, and reserve force of both, and wondered what could be its force, but when he had the happy privilege of being introduced to their mother, he knew at once whence they obtained their nobility of character. They, as members of the Motherland Lodge, were proud of their association with two such noble brothers and Brethren, and proud that they could claim them as Initiates of their Lodge.

Other speakers had previously paid their tributes to the indomitable courage of the two airmen. Bro. Rear-Admiral Sir Edward Inglefield had led the way, and wished both success in the task they had undertaken. Bro. Sir Sidney Wishart, Grand Treasurer; Bro. Lord Strathspey; and Bro. Richard Gill, P.G.D., Deputy Prov. Grand Master, Master of the Lodge, had followed suit.

In their speeches, responding to the toast, Bro. Sir Ross Smith and Sir Keith Smith displayed their keen interest in the Craft of which they had that night become fully-fledged members, and their enthusiasm for the aerial task they had undertaken. But modesty was the key-note of both speeches, and Bro. Sir Ross Smith seemed as though he would wish to transfer nearly all the credit for the work already accomplished to the shoulders of Bro. J.M. Bennett, for whom he had an undisguised admiration. He was brimful of confidence. It was his firm belief that he was going to pilot the best flying machine which had ever been built. Actually it was a flying-boat fitted with wheels for alighting on the land. Built by Vickers, it was of the Viking type, and was to be driven by a 450-h.p. Napier Leon engine. He was to have the co-operation of his brother as navigator and in charge of the wireless apparatus, and the reliable assistance of Bro. Bennett as engineer. The date for the commencement of the flight had been fixed for the 25th inst., because, as an Australian, he wished to do honour to Anzac Day.

He gave particulars of the journey, which was to be one of 21,500 miles, and expected to be completed in 240 flying hours, spread over about three months. Most of it was to be along coast lines or across great stretches of sea. Starting from Croydon, he proposed to cross France and, via Lyons and Rome, go to Athens, whence, crossing the Mediterranean, he would reach Cairo. His course through Asia from there was to be by way of Baghdad, Basra, Karachi, Calcutta, Hong Kong, and Shanghai to Japan. From Tokyo a course would be followed to Petropavlovsk in the Kamchatka Peninsula, from which point the Pacific would be crossed via the Aleutian Islands. Striking south-east for Vancouver, he then proposed to make across continent for New York, by way of Winnipeg. For the transatlantic journey he was to fly via Sydney to St. John's, whence he hoped to cross the Atlantic in about eighteen hours.

Bro. Sir Henry Renwick had previously said in his speech that the two brothers had no fears, and this was demonstrated in their speeches, but the absence of fear was due not to rare-devilry or to callousness, or to neglect of any precautionary details, but to an innate courage and nobility of character, and the last glimpse that one had of these two wonderful brothers was that of two men,

disinterested, thinking only of the glory that would accrue to science and to the Empire of which they were proud to be the sons, when their task had been accomplished.

The tragedy will rest as a shadow for many years to come upon the minds of all who attended that meeting of the Motherland Lodge, and the prayers and sympathies of all will go to his brother, Sir Keith Macpherson Smith, and the other loved ones left to mourn his loss.

Bro. Sir¹Keith Smith was appointed Australian representative of Vickers Ltd. and he became Australia's leading spokesman on aviation matters.

In 1930, he signed a Petition to be a foundation member of the proposed Lodge Flying Corps in Sydney. The Grand Master declined to grant the prayer of the Petition.

He supported Bro. Sir Charles Kingsford-Smith's flight across the Pacific and gave him financial support.

During the second world war, he was appointed vice-chairman of the Royal Australian Air Force Recruiting Drive Committee. He gave strong support to the Empire Air Training scheme.

He became a director of a number of companies including Qantas and Tasman Airways and maintained his interest in Australian aviation until his death in Sydney on 19 December 1955.

He had married Anita Crawford in 1924 and she survived him. They had no children.

Bro. Sir Keith Smith was buried near his parents and brother in the North Road Anglican cemetery, Adelaide.

The famous flight has always been referred to as the triumph of Ross and Keith Smith and scant attention has been paid to the equally heroic work of the two mechanics, Bennett and Shiers.

James Mallett Bennett (1894 - 1922) was born in St.Kilda, Victoria and later trained as a motor mechanic. He joined the militia in 1912 and served with the 49th battalion. At the outbreak of the first world war, he enlisted in the A.I.F. and then transferred to the Australian Flying Corps as a mechanic. He then joined the Royal Flying Corps and trained as a fitter and turner.

He served in Egypt with No. 67 squadron and was mentioned in despatches. He was promoted to Corporal in 1916 and Sergeant in 1918. He was awarded the Meritorious Service Medal.

Bro. James Bennett was a visitor at Motherland Lodge on the occasion of the **Smith** brother's raising to the third degree.

We should perhaps remember that Keith was just 29 and Ross 27 years of age when they made the first flight from England to Australia in just under 28 days.

It was in 1919, within living memory, and a re-enactment in a specially built replica of the Vickers Vimy in 1994, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the flight created great curiosity.

Walter Henry Shiers (1889 - 1968) returned to Australia after the record-breaking flight and operated a service station at Bondi Junction in Sydney.

He went to England with the Smith brothers and James Bennett in 1922 but returned home after the fatal crash and worked for various aviation companies at Sydney's Kingsford-Smith Airport.

He then became involved in barnstorming and, after a crash, he joined New England Airways as chief engineer.

During the second world war, he was in charge of the textile branch of the Light Aircraft Co. which manufactured parachutes for the armed forces.

In 1965 he moved to Adelaide where he died on 2 June 1968.

Wally Shiers was a short, nuggetty man who had a strong will and an abrupt manner but was also very generous and he placed a high value on friendship.

Bro. Walter Henry Shiers was initiated into Freemasonry on 18 October 1922 in Lodge Composite No. 417, United Grand Lodge of New South Wales.

Anyone who doubts the technical achievements in aeronautical engineering during those 75 years should pause to inspect the original Vickers Vimy on display in a special hangar at Adelaide Airport.

The Smith brothers and their epic flight were honoured when Australia Post issued a 45 cent stamp on 29 August 1994 as one of a set of four which recalled Australia's aviation heritage.

NOTES

1. McCarthy, J., *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.11, 1891-1939, Geoffrey Searle, Gen.Ed., Melbourne University Press, 1988, p.654
2. *Ibid*, p.655
3. *The Australian Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9, The Grolier Society of Australia, Sydney, 1983, p.100
4. Luck, P., *This Fabulous Century*, Lansdowne Press, Sydney, 1980
5. *Australian Stamp Bulletin*, No. 226, August-September, 1944, p.2
- 6.* McNally, W., *Smithy*, Robert Hale Ltd., 1966
7. *Australia's Yesterdays*, Reader's Digest Services Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1974
8. *The Freemason*, London 22 April 1922
- * *Who's Who in Australia*, XI th Edition 1941, Joseph Alexander, Ed., The Herald Press, Melbourne.
- * *Concise Encyclopedia of Australia and New Zealand*, Bay Books, Sydney, 1977
- * Grainger, E., Hargrave and Son, University of Queensland Press, St.Lucia, 1978

APPENDIX

SIR ROSS SMITH.

The story of the flight from England to Australia by Captain Sir Ross Smith is told in his own words, abridged from an account published after he reached Australia. He had with him his brother, Lieutenant Keith Smith (of the Royal Air Force), and two mechanics who had served in No. 1 Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps in Palestine, Sergeants Bennett and Shiers. The machine was a Vickers-Vimy (two 360-h.p. Rolls-Royce engines), of the same type as the craft in which Captain Alcock¹⁶ and Lieutenant Brown¹⁷ flew across the Atlantic from America to England. It carried 865 gallons of petrol and had a cruising range of 2,400 miles.

Sir Ross Smith had one advantage over all other competitors in the flight to Australia, in that he had a year previously flown over the route from Cairo to India with Generals Borton and Salmond in the giant Handley-Page machine used by No. 1 Squadron in Palestine during the final offensive. Sergeants Bennett and Shiers also accompanied him in this earlier adventure. From this flight and a further reconnaissance by sea of possible landing-places on a route through the Indies to Timor, Sir Ross Smith returned to England in September, 1919, and immediately negotiated with the Vickers-Vimy firm for assistance in the enterprise of the flight to Australia. Eventually the firm's approval was obtained, preparations were made with all speed, and the party was ready to begin the flight by the end of October. For a fortnight a start was delayed by exceedingly bad weather. Sir Ross Smith finally left England during a break in the autumn storms on November 12th.

"The day of our departure from England," says Sir Ross Smith, in the account referred to above, "broke with clear, frosty weather. Two hours later a ground haze drifted up, and the Air Ministry Weather Bureau forecasted bad weather, totally unfit for flying. But we had made up our minds, and decided to start. At 8.30 a.m. we started the engines, climbed into our seats, and took off from the snow-covered aerodrome. Shortly after reaching the French coast at Boulogne we ran into a big bank of snow clouds. We could not get under-

¹⁶ Capt. Sir J. W. Alcock, K.B.E., D.S.C.; No. 2 Wing, R.N.A.S.; b. 6 Nov., 1891. Killed in aeroplane accident, in France, 18 Dec., 1919.

¹⁷ Lieut. Sir A. W. Brown, K.B.E.; No. 2 Sqn., R.F.C. (previously Manchester Regt.). Engineer, Westinghouse Coy., Manchester (Eng.) and U.S.A.; b. 23 July 1886.

neath it, for it practically reached the ground. We therefore climbed above it, to a height of 8,000 feet. The cold was bitter, 25 degrees of frost, and for three hours our breath froze on our face-masks, and our sandwiches were frozen solid. It took us five days to cross Europe to Taranto in Italy. The circumstances were most trying, for the weather was execrable. The flight was made almost all the way through dense clouds, snow, and blinding rain. Only an occasional burst of sunshine cheered us on our way. The cloud belts were too thick to fly above them, and we were obliged to keep for the most part at dangerously low altitudes.

"We intended to fly from Rome to Athens, but at Rome we received certain information which made us doubtful as to whether it would be wise to adhere to our first route. So we flew to Crete, and stayed a night at Suda Bay. We met much rain, and clouds were troublesome, as we had to clear a high mountain range in the centre of the island, and feared we might crash. However, we escaped this peril and made a non-stop flight of seven and a half hours from Crete to Cairo, arriving at the Heliopolis aerodrome on November 18th.

"On November 19th we left Cairo for Damascus. Our route lay over the old battlefields, Romani, El Arish, Gaza, and Nazareth. It revived many memories for me, for this land over which we were passing was the arena of my war service. At Damascus we were welcomed by a squadron of the Royal Air Force. Next day we got off in a break of the bad weather at about 10 o'clock, and headed for Baghdad across the Syrian desert, via Abu Kemal to Ramadie, making our landing on the old Turkish battlefield. Here we were taken care of by the 10th (Indian) Lancers, and invaluable to us was their help. For that night a simoon swept down and nearly put an end to our efforts. We lashed the machine to the ground and, assisted by a great crowd of the Indian Lancers, hung on to it through that wild night of storm. By morning the wind died down, and after six hours spent in adjustments and clearing away the sand we made another start. This was the 21st November, and our objective was Basra. We flew over Kut el Amara, the scene of General Townshend's surrender, and over the legendary site of the Garden of Eden. This was the first good flying day we had had since we left England.

"Next day (November 22nd), we were all feeling very tired, and as the machine needed a certain amount of attention we decided to spend the day overhauling at Basra. On November 23rd we left Basra for Bandar Abbas, on the Persian Gulf, and landed there after a flight of eight hours over desert and mountainous country. Next day we reached Karachi, and on the following afternoon Delhi. From Basra to Delhi we had travelled 1,600 miles, and spent twenty-five and a half hours out of fifty-four in the air. Everything had gone remarkably well, both with the machine and the engines. We spent a day in Delhi working on the machine. On November 27th we reached Allahabad, and on the 28th Calcutta. We had expected to rest a day in Calcutta, but as the machine was going so well and we were feeling so fit we decided to go on. We made Rangoon in two days, staying the first night at Akyab. Between Akyab and Rangoon we passed in the air the French Lieutenant Poulet in his small Caudron machine. He had left Europe twenty-eight days ahead of us. We had a most hospitable and popular welcome in Rangoon, which we left, on December 1st, for Bangkok, in Siam.

"We intended to fly direct from Bangkok to Singapore, but as we were informed that there was a good aerodrome at Singora, about half-way, we halted there. The Siamese notion of a good aerodrome nearly brought us all to an untimely end. A square patch had been hewn from the jungle, the trunks and upper portions of the trees had been removed, but the stumps were allowed to remain. We made a safe and miraculous landing, missing the stumps by inches. On December 3rd fell the heaviest rain I had ever experienced, and it kept us tied up at Singora. We reached Singapore on December 4th. The racecourse had been prepared for us to land on, and proved suitable, though small. Next day we left Singapore for Kalidjati, near Batavia in Java. This was a distance of nearly 700 miles and the worst stage of the journey as regards landing-grounds. We travelled 200 miles down the eastern coast of Sumatra, which was so densely wooded that it would have been impossible to make a landing. Then we turned seawards to Batavia.

placed on reclaimed land, hard apparently at the surface, but soft underneath, so that on landing our machine became deeply bogged.

"The thirty days of the competition were now closing in, and anxieties increased. We extricated the machine with the greatest difficulty, and at one time I feared it would be impossible ever to start off from that aerodrome again. I had a roadway of bamboo mats laid down, 350 yards long and 40 yards wide. The machine was hauled from the bog by a swarm of natives to this improvised pathway. We made a perilous take-off, with bamboo flying in all directions from our propellers, and late in the afternoon of December 8th we landed at Bima, in Soembawa. Next day we left Bima for Atamboea, in Timor, and flew east along the north coast of Flores and then south-east to Timor. It was only 350 (*sic*) miles from there to Darwin.

"Tired as we were, excitement kept us all from sleep that night. All going well we should land in Australia on the morrow. Before daybreak on December 10th we were down at the machine giving it the last test and overhaul before venturing on the wide stretch of sea. At 8.35 a.m. we taxied into a light breeze and took off with beautiful weather in our favour. As the hours rolled slowly by we strained our eyes towards Australia. A tiny speck upon the waters resolved itself into a warship, H.M.A.S. *Sydney*, in exactly the position we had asked her to be in case of need. The clouds and mist obscured all distant vision, and it was not until after 3 o'clock that I observed the first faint outline of land. We were then doing 83 miles an hour. The land speedily assumed more definite contour, and details became manifest. Darwin came into view. In a few minutes we were circling above the town. Then down, down, in a steep descending spiral—and we had touched Australian soil!

"The duration of the journey, with all stops, was just under twenty-eight days, but the actual flying time was 135 hours. The distance covered was 11,340 miles."

For this performance both officers were knighted, and the sergeant mechanics received the Air Force Medal and commissioned rank of lieutenants.¹⁸

¹⁸ Sir Ross Smith and Lieutenant Bennett were killed on 14 April, 1922, during a test flight in the Vickers-Viking (amphibian) in which Sir Ross Smith was preparing to essay a flight round the world.

The Australian Flying Corps

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