
Sir Ross Macpherson Smith & Sir Keith Macpherson Smith

PRG 18
Series List

Captain Sir Ross Smith K.B.E. M.C. D.F.C. A.F.C. and Lieutenant Sir Keith Smith K.B.E. were born 1892 and 1890 respectively of Andrew and Jessie (nee Macpherson) in metropolitan Adelaide. Married in 1888, Andrew and Jessie brought up their sons Ross, Keith and Colin on Mutooroo Station where they gained skills in riding and bushcraft. In 1906 the family moved to Andrew Smith's home in Moffat, Scotland where the brothers studied at Warriston School for two years. The family returned to Australia in 1908. In 1910 Ross toured Britain and the U.S.A. with a party of mounted cadets led by Colonel James Rowell.

World War One saw all three brothers enlist. Colin's initial application was rejected due to age. He commenced duty in June 1915 with the A.I.F. Promoted to lieutenant in June 1917, he died from wounds sustained at Passchendale in October 1917. Keith's applications were rejected twice due to health. After undergoing corrective surgery and a hazardous ship's journey to England, at his own expense, he was accepted by the R.F.C. where he became an instructor of pilots and navigators. By the close of the war he had flown over 443 hours. Ross enlisted in August 1914 and sailed in the first troop convoy from South Australia. With the Light Horse he was involved in heavy fighting at Gallipoli and Romani. In October 1916 he began training as an observer with the A.F.C., qualifying in January 1917. After gaining 200 hours flying time he successfully completed training gaining him his pilot's wings in March 19 . By the end of the war he had flown 400 hours as a pilot. A total of 600 hours flying time saw him gain the M.C. with a bar and the D.F.C. with two bars.

In late November 1918 a Handley Page bomber piloted by General Burton and Ross Smith with Sergeant mechanics Bennett and Shiers flew from Cairo, Egypt to Calcutta, India. Plans to fly from India to Australia were initially thwarted by the destruction of the R.I.M.S. Spinx. A replacement vessel enabled Ross to gain first hand information regarding potential landing sites in S.E. Asia and the Dutch East Indies. however, the loss of the Handley Page bomber ended the attempt. Learning of the England to Australia competition for £10,000 Ross and the sergeant mechanics returned to England, with considerable aid from General Burton. Vickers Ltd were persuaded to supply a Vimy bomber for the flight. After overcoming considerable pre-flight obstacles the Smith brothers and sergeant mechanics left Hounslow, England at 9.05 a.m. Although Ross' pre flight plans were to prove unrealistic, the flight landed at Fanny Bay Darwin at 3.00 p.m. Dec. 10, some 52 hours short of the 30 day deadline set by the competition. The drama and adventure of the flight is well illustrated through reference to the other four competitors, all of which crashed, four of the fourteen aviators not surviving the attempt.

The continuation of the flight from Darwin to the mainland cities was in itself a saga of considerable difficulties, including numerous forced landings. The Australian public received the airmen enthusiastically. Numerous congratulations were received from notables including King George V, Lloyd George and W.M. Hughes. Both Ross and Keith were awarded K.B.E's. The sergeant mechanics Bennett and Shiers were made lieutenants and a bar added to their A.F.M's.

Ross and Keith returned to Mutooroo with their parents prior to Ross touring Australia giving lectures on the flight. A similar tour of England enabled preparations to be made for a world flight. Vickers Ltd. made available a single engine Viking amphibious craft. By early April 1922 pre flight planning was almost completed and a tentative date of 20th April set for the flight to commence. On 13th April the Viking was formally handed over to Ross at Brooklands, England by Captain Cockerell a Vickers test pilot. In front of a considerable crowd of onlookers Sir Ross and Bennett were killed in an accident later attributed to "death by misadventure" by an inquest and later by a confidential report of the Accidents Committee. Numerous services and ceremonies were held in Australia and England. Sir Ross being returned to Adelaide, South Australia, and Bennett to Melbourne, Victoria where they lay in state at St Peters Anglican Cathedral and Queens Hall of Parliament House respectively. Sir Keith Smith decided not to proceed with the world flight having been persuaded that a greater contribution to aviation could be made through association with Vickers Ltd. In 1924 he married Anita, daughter of D.N. Smith of Adelaide. Sir Keith provided valuable service to Australian aviation, particularly in the period 1946-55, when he was head of the Vickers organisation in Australia, vice-chairman of the British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines, and a director of Qantas and Tasman Airways. Sir Keith died at St Vincents Private Hospital, Darlinghurst, at the age of 64 on 19/12/55.

The following were bequeathed to the record group by Lady Anita Smith (deceased 16/6/86), formerly Crawford nee Schmidt, wife of Sir Keith Smith:

Series 14/13,
15/ photograph album
18/ photograph
34/15-17
40/ assorted newspaper cuttings
43/ excluding pistol
49-58