

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

BROTHERS-IN-ARMS

ROSS AND KEITH SMITH

When one considers the many written accounts of Ross and Keith Smith and their 1919 England-Australia flight it seems superfluous to include them in this listing of South Australian brothers who served in the Flying Corps in the Great War. Nevertheless the fact that they should be included is beyond question.



A familiar photo that captures the entire crew in the London-Australia Vickers Vimy, including Ross (left) and Keith Smith in the pilots' cockpit, Wally Shiers in the front position and Jim Bennett in the rear position.

SMITH, K. M

Keith Macpherson Smith was born on 20 December 1890 at Adelaide in South Australia and educated at Queen's College in North Adelaide and Warriston School at Moffat, Scotland, before being employed by Elder Smith & Co Ltd at Adelaide. He failed the AIF medical when he tried to enlist but paid his way to England and in July 1917 joined the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). In November he was posted to No.58 RFC which at the time was a training squadron, on 24 February 1918 he went to No.75 Home Defence (HD) RFC before passing a course at No.1 Gosport School of Special Flying, and was then appointed as an observer-navigator instructor until he was placed on the Royal Air Force (RAF) unemployed list on 5 November 1919.



Keith Smith flanked by mechanics Wally Shiers (left) and Jim Bennett (right) with Vickers Vimy G-EAOU.

Between 12 November-10 December 1919 Smith flew with his brother Ross and Sgts J. M. Bennett and W. H. Shiers in the Vickers Vimy G-EAOU to win the £10,000 prize for the first flight from England to Australia, an exploit that earned him the Knight of the British Empire (KBE) on 22 December 1919, a gold medal by the Royal Aero Club (RAeC) and a silver medal by the Aero Club of France.

In 1922 Keith Smith went to England with Ross Smith and Bennett to prepare for a round-world flight in a Vickers Viking amphibian, but missed the test flight of the aircraft in which Ross Smith and Bennett crashed and

were killed on 13 April. Keith returned home for his brother's funeral in Adelaide on 15 June, then left again for England on 13 September and announced that he intended to carry out the round-world flight with a starting date announced as 3 April. In the meantime he joined the Vickers Aviation staff and postponed the flight until 1924, but although he actually completed many details in the various countries concerned the flight eventually did not take place at all.

In 1924 Sir Keith returned to Sydney while associated with Airships Guarantee Co Ltd, which had plans for an England-Australia service with Vickers-built airships, a scheme that did not go ahead. In 1925 he was granted membership of the Institute of Aeronautical Engineers (IAeE (Aust)), in 1926 was vice-president of the NSW section of the Australian Aero Club, in 1927 was elected to the Council of the Australian Aircraft Traders Association (AATA), and on 1 January 1928 became Chairman and Managing Director of Vickers (Aust) Pty Ltd.



Sir Keith Smith stands with his parents at the funeral in Adelaide of Sir Ross Smith.

On 7/2/1928 Sir Keith presented the log of the 1919 flight to the Prime Minister for retention in the National Library in Canberra, and in 1930 he was chairman of the provisional committee for the proposed Federal Chamber of Aviation (FAC).

During the Second World War Sir Keith was vice-chairman of the RAAF Recruiting Drive Committee and later became a vice-chairman of British Commonwealth Pacific Airways (BCPA), a director of Qantas Empire Airways (QEA) and also of Tasman Airways. On 19 December 1955 he died in Sydney and was buried with his brother Sir Ross at North Road Anglican Cemetery at Adelaide in SA.

On 22 March 1987 the Sir Ross & Sir Keith Smith Fund was launched in Adelaide by Sir Keith's widow Lady Anita Smith for the advancement in SA of the Science of Aeronautics and of education therein, the trustee being Elders Trustee & Executor Co Ltd. Memorabilia relating to the 1919 England-Australia flight formed the centre-piece of the aviation section of the West Torrens Railway Signal/Telegraph and Aviation Museum at Adelaide, which has since been closed.

SMITH, R. M.

Ross Macpherson Smith was born on 4 December 1892 at Semaphore, Adelaide in South Australia, and was educated at Queen's School in North Adelaide and at Warriston School at Moffat in Scotland. In 1910 he was one of three SA school cadets in a group of Australian Mounted Cadets to tour the UK and the USA, and then joined the 10th Australian Regt, the Adelaide Rifles.

Smith was a warehouseman in Adelaide when he enlisted on 19 August 1914, and embarked on 22 October 1914 for Egypt as Sgt in the 3rd Light Horse (LH). On 8 May 1915 he went to Gallipoli, where he was commissioned 2Lt on 5 September and invalided to England in October. Promoted Lt on 1 March 1916, the following month he returned to the Middle East in the 1st LH Brigade 1st Machine Gun (MG) Squadron, and on 24 October 1916 transferred to No.1 Australian Flying Corps (AFC) where he served for about six months as an observer.



Ross Smith scored his first victory in a BE12A similar to this, at the same time receiving a head wound .and crashing on returning to base.

On 19 January 1917 Ross Smith flew with pilot Lt E. G. Roberts in BE2e 7133 to make the first reconnaissance to Beit/Jibrin/Bethlehem/Jerusalem/Jericho, escorted by Lts Murray Jones and Ellis in Martinsyde machines. On 19 March 1917 Capt R. F. Baillieu and Smith landed and picked up a pilot of No.14 Royal Flying Corps (RFC) from enemy territory, an action that earned Smith the Military Cross (MC) as gazetted on 11 May 1917:- "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty when his pilot descended to the rescue of an officer who had been forced to land. On landing he held the

enemy at bay with his revolver, thus enabling his pilot to rescue the officer and to fly safely away with his machine".

Ross Smith was later posted away for pilot training, and by August 1917 was back flying with No.1 AFC. On 1 September he scored his first victory when he shared in the destruction of an Albatros DIII, although he was wounded in the head during the fight and crashed his BE12a A6311 while landing back at Weli Sheikh Nuran. On 28 November he was slightly injured when he crashed in BE12a A6338 after the engine failed on take-off.

On 29 November 1917 Ross Smith was promoted to "C" Flt Cdr, and later the Bar to his MC was gazetted on 26 March 1918:- "For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He was one of two pilots who carried out a remarkable series of photographs in one flight, covering an area of 45 sq miles. On a later occasion he successfully bombed an important bridgehead from a low altitude, and his work throughout, as well as photography, has been invaluable and characterised by the most consistent gallantry".

In 1918 No.1 AFC took over the Bristol Fighters of No.111 RFC when the latter squadron was re-equipped with the SE5a, and Ross Smith flew B1229 regularly as he began to increase his score. On 7 May 1918 he and his observer Lt E. A. Mustard in B1229 shared with Lts A. V. Tonkin and R. A. Camm in B1276 in the destruction of a Rumpler, as well as driving off two Albatros scouts, and on 22 May he and observer Lt W. A. Kirk in B1229 were on patrol with Lts E. P. Kenny and W. J. A. Weir in C4626 when they each sent an Albatros down out of control.

On 16 May Ross Smith flew Col T. E. Lawrence to his desert HQ, but reconnaissance and photography missions were still the main duties of the squadron and on 8 June he made the first British reconnaissance of Haifa. Often these patrols would be interrupted by enemy aircraft, and on 9 June he and Kirk had a long fight with a Rumpler before forcing it down. Again on 11 June they joined with their escorting crew of Lts E. C. Stooke and L. P. Kreig in B1276 to force down another Rumpler and destroy it, and on 19 June they repeated the performance at the expense of another two-seater. On 17 July Ross Smith used his front gun to destroy two Albatros scouts which tried to escape him at ground level, bringing his victories to seven. That same month saw him awarded the DFC.



Capt Ross Smith (left) and his observer Lt "Pard" Mustard prepare for patrol in front of their Bristol Fighter in 1918 in Palestine.

In the early hours of 19 September 1918 Ross Smith opened the Battle of Armageddon in the Handley Page O/400 C9681, when with Lts Mulford, Lees and McCann as observers he raided the El Afule telephone exchange, while in the evening and early next day he flew C9681 to bomb Jenin aerodrome and the railway station.

On 22 September 1918 Ross Smith and Mustard shared with Lts E. S. Headlam and W. H. Lilly in B1286 in the destruction of a DFW two-seater, and shortly afterwards Smith and

Mustard took off again to drive down three Pfalz DIII scouts, two of which they destroyed on the ground. Ross Smith's last victory, his eleventh, came on 19 October 1918 when he and Lt A. V. McCann joined with Headlam and Lilly to force down a DFW two-seater in enemy territory. As the German crew ran from their machine Smith landed nearby, and while his observer covered him he set the DFW on fire with a Vickers pistol before taking off for home. This brought his victories to 11, all but one of which were scored in B1229.

After the armistice with Turkey that took place on 31 October 1918, Major General W. G. H. Salmond and Brigadier General A. E. Borton left Cairo on 29 November with Ross Smith and mechanics Sgts J. M. Bennett and W. H. Shiers in the Handley Page O/400 C9700 to fly to Delhi. They reached there on 12 December 1918 and later flew on to Calcutta, having completed one of the world's longest survey flights up to that time, and then took steamers from Calcutta through Singapore to the Thailand region to explore an air route England-Australia. This took three months and in the meantime the O/400 was wrecked, so any plan to reach Australia was cancelled.

Awards to Ross Smith announced on 8 February 1919 were:-

Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC):-"During the month of June 1918 these officers (Captain Smith and Lt A. Kirk DFC) accounted for two enemy machines, and they have been conspicuous for gallantry and initiative in attacking ground targets, frequently at low altitudes. The keenness and fine example set by these officers cannot be over-estimated".

Bar to DFC:-"During the operations prior to October 1918 he took part in numerous engagements involving flights of 150 to 200 miles, and succeeded in doing extensive damage to the enemy's hangars, railways etc. Capt Smith displayed most consistent gallantry with marked ability in all his work, whether bombing by night or day, or in personal encounters in the air. While operating with the Sherifian forces he destroyed one enemy machine and brought down two others out of control in the desert".

2nd Bar to DFC:-"On 19th October this officer, with Lt Ashley Vernon McCann as observer, engaged and drove down an enemy two-seater. As it appeared to land intact he descended at a low altitude and with machine-gun fire forced the occupants to abandon the machine; he then landed alongside it and, whilst his observer covered the enemy officers, he set light to their machine and completely destroyed it. To have effected a landing in an unknown country, many miles in the rear of the enemy's defence troops, demanded courage and skill of a very high order".

Air Force Cross:-"This officer accompanied Maj-Gen Sir W. G. H. Salmond on an aerial journey from Cairo to Calcutta - a trip of 2,548 miles, in a machine that had previously flown from London to Cairo".

Order of El Nahda:-This special order was awarded by the King of Hejaz for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty.

Between 12 November-10 December 1919 Capt Ross Smith flew with his brother Lt Keith Smith and Sgts Bennett and Shiers in the Vickers Vimy G-EAOU ("God 'Elp All Of Us") England-Australia inside 30 days to win the £10,000 prize offered by the Australian government. They flew the 11,340 miles (18,250 km) in 27 days 20 hours with flying time 135 hours at an average 85 mph (137 kph) before landing at Darwin. Between 13 December

1919-14 February 1920 they flew Darwin-Sydney with 51 days spent at Charleville for engine and propeller repairs, then on to Melbourne on 25 February and Adelaide on 23 March 1920. Ross and Keith Smith were each knighted and presented with a gold medal from the Royal Aero Club and a silver medal from the Aero Club of France, while Bennett and Shiers were commissioned and awarded the Air force Medal (AFM) as well as receiving a bronze RAeC medal. The Vimy was presented to the Commonwealth Government and displayed at various points around the country, eventually being housed in a special building at Adelaide Airport on 27 April 1958.

In 1922 the Smith brothers began preparations for a round-world flight, but on 13 April 1922 he and Bennett were killed in the crash of Vickers Viking IV amphibian G-EBBZ at Brooklands during preparation testing for their attempt. It was intended that Sir Keith Smith would be a member of the crew, but fortunately for him he missed the fatal test flight.



Ross Smith and his parents standing in front of a Bristol Fighter of No.1 AFC at SA Motor Traders first Automotive Display in 1920, when a number of wartime British and German aircraft were shown from October 23-30 at the Exhibition Building in Adelaide.

On 15 June 1922 the funeral of Sir Ross Smith, KBE, MC&Bar, DFC&2Bars, AFC, Order of El Nahda, was conducted in Adelaide and he was buried at North Road Anglican Cemetery. Chief mourners were Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Smith, Sir Keith Smith KBE, Hon Lt W. H. Shiers AFC, Wg Cdr R. Williams, DSO, OBE, and SLdr W. H. Anderson, DFC. Pallbearers were SLdr A. Murray Jones, MC, DFC, SLdr L. J. Wackett, DFC, AFC, FLt A. T. Cole, MC, DFC, FLt W. A. Coates, MC, FLt F. H. McNamara, VC, and FLt C. J. Harman, MSM. The firing party of 45 Other Ranks (OR's) was under F. W. F. Lukis, and there was

a flypast of three DH9s flown by FLt (hon) I. N. C. Clarke, DFC, FO W. D. Bostock, DFC and FO E. D. Cummings, DFC.

On 10 December 1927 there was the unveiling of the Ross Smith Memorial statue in Adelaide, and on 22 March 1987 the Sir Ross & Sir Keith Smith Fund was launched in Adelaide by Sir Keith's widow Lady Anita Smith, for the advancement in SA of the Science of Aeronautics and of education therein, the trustee being Elders Trustee & Executor Co Ltd. Memorabilia relating to the 1919 England-Australia flight formed the centre-piece of the aviation section of the former West Torrens Railway Signal/Telegraph and Aviation Museum at Adelaide and is now held at the South Australian Aviation Museum (SAAM) at Port Adelaide.

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