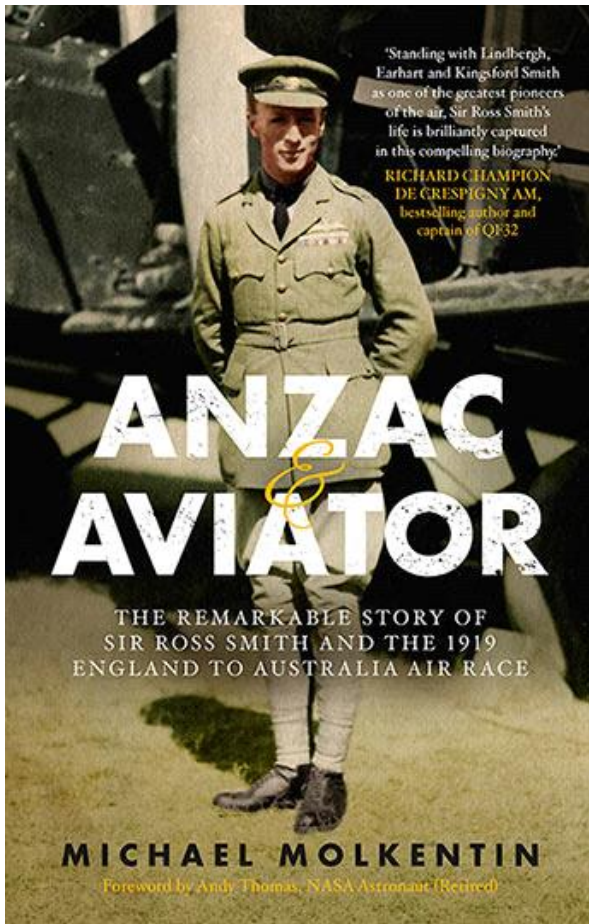


Book Review for *Progenitor*, Journal of the Genealogical Society of the Northern Territory

Michael Molquentin, *Anzac & Aviator: The remarkable story of Sir Ross Smith and the 1919 England to Australia Air Race*. Allen & Unwin, Crow's Nest, NSW 2065, xviii + 406 pages; ISBN 978 1 74237 919 7



Anzac & Aviator is the story of an extraordinary Australian, Ross Smith. *Anzac and Aviator* encompasses all facets of Smith's life, from his carefree days as a child on a remote South Australian sheep station to his untimely death in a disaster that shook the world. There was nothing in Smith's childhood that indicated a future as one of Australia's and indeed the World's greatest pioneering aviators.

Michael Molquentin has used a wide range of sources from which he crafts an absorbing story of a young lad very much the product of the times. Smith rides off to war, only to leave his horse behind in Egypt and man a machine gun at Quinn's Post – possibly the most dangerous spot on Gallipoli.

Surviving Gallipoli, Smith expects to be sent to the Western Front, but fate determines otherwise and he and his horse find themselves on the sands of Sinai, but Smith's resourcefulness and initiative drive him to

volunteer for the fledgling Australian Flying Corps. Smith reasons that he could do more damage to the enemy from the air, than he could from the back of a horse. He survives two gruelling years of aerial combat over Palestine, to emerge as one of the most skilled and decorated Australian pilots of the war.

Ever seeking new challenges, Smith volunteers as pilot on the first mission to survey an air route from Cairo to the East Indies. It was during this survey, that the concept of a flight right home to Australia dawned on him. On his return to Britain, Smith learnt that Australia's Prime Minister Billy Hughes was offering a £10,000 prize for the first airman to fly from England to Australia. This was his chance to achieve his dream of flying home.

The trials and tribulations of the 1919 Great Air Race are well documented, as is the later test flight for a round-the-world attempt that claimed Smith's life.

Anzac & Aviator is a well-constructed book, divided into five parts, all of which are in chronological order and cover special periods in Smith's life. Each part is sub-divided into chapters which make for easy reading of the narrative. Readers will appreciate the nice little touch of using a silhouette of the Vickers Vimy to indicate breaks in chapters.

There is a good selection of images – 41 in total – printed on gloss paper in the centre of the book. There are also four maps; one of SA (with an insert of Adelaide and environs) showing the position of Mutooroo Station c. 1910; one of Egypt, Sinai and Palestine 1916-1918; one of the Gallipoli battlefield May 1915, showing the proximity of Quinn's Post to Turkish Trenches, a mere three yards away and one showing the route of the first flight to Australia, 1919. All of which contribute significantly to the reader's understanding of the story.

Overall, Smith is portrayed as 'a determined boy – a leader born', who had an easy confidence when dealing with people whether they be fellow military personnel or women. Smith maintained a strong emotional attachment to his mother, writing to her every week of the five years he was away from Australia. These letters provide an insight into Smith's character. He tells his mother that he 'found flying exhilarating' and gained 'a savage satisfaction of seeing them [Turks] drop'.

All things considered, Molkentin has given us a well-crafted biography, which will totally absorb the reader, despite a couple of mis-spellings (Nagambe; axels) and the incorrect name of Brunette Downs (Burnett, Burnette). The Vickers Vimy actually landed on a flat piece of country at Cobb's Creek bore (Bore No 13) in the Barkly Tableland, where they were found by Percy Peacock, a Bore Driller working in the area with his father Syd. The Peacocks provided the aviators with food and water, then set off in their truck to get help. Sadly, the Peacocks are only referred to as 'a Bore Driller'. It would be a shame if their names was lost to history,

Apart from these few irritations, it was a great read.

Judy Boland