



## Air Commodore Sir Charles **KINGSFORD SMITH** MC, AFC

[1897 – 1935]



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**Air Commodore Sir Charles Kingsford Smith was elected to Life Membership of the Club in 1933.**

Sir Charles was not a member of the Club prior to being elected a Life Member.

Sir Charles Edward Kingsford Smith (1897-1935), aviator, was born on 9 February 1897 in Hamilton, Brisbane to William Charles Smith and his wife Catherine Mary. The name Kingsford was added to the family surname when they lived in Canada. The family returned to Sydney in 1907. Charles was educated in Vancouver, Canada, at St Andrew's Cathedral Choir School, Sydney, and at Sydney Technical High School.

At 16 he was apprenticed to the Colonial Sugar Refining Co. Ltd. He married Thelma Eileen Hope (nee Corboy) on 6 June 1923 at Marble Bar, Western Australia. They divorced in May 1929, and he then married Mary Powell on 10 December 1930 at Scots Church, Melbourne.

In February 1915, after three years with the Senior Cadets, Kingsford Smith enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force. He embarked with the 4th Signal Troop, 2nd Division Signal Company, on 31 May as a sapper and served on Gallipoli and later as a dispatch rider in Egypt and France.

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In October 1916, he transferred to the Australian Flying Corps. After training in England, he was discharged from the AIF and commissioned as Second Lieutenant, Royal Flying Corps. He was appointed Flying Officer and in July 1917 joined No.23 Squadron in France.

Wounded and shot down in August, he was awarded the Military Cross 'for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty'; he had brought down four machines during his first month at the front and had done valuable work in attacking ground targets and hostile balloons. After promotion to Lieutenant in April 1918 he served as an RFC flying instructor.

Barred from participating in the 1919 England to Australia air race, Kingsford Smith and his friend Cyril Maddocks piloted joy-flights in England. 'Smithy' then went to the United States of America where he failed to attract sponsors for a trans-Pacific flight and was briefly a stunt flier in a flying circus.

Back in Australia in January 1921 he worked first in Sydney with another joy-riding organization and then as a salaried pilot for Western Australian Airways Ltd. Kingsford Smith formed a partnership in 1924 with fellow pilot Keith Anderson and operated a trucking business from Carnarvon, returning to Sydney to operate with Charles Ulm as Interstate Flying Services.

During demonstration flights in June 1927 Kingsford Smith and Ulm completed a round-Australia circuit, a notable achievement with minimal navigational aids. Kingsford Smith sought support for a trans-Pacific flight. In a three-engine Fokker plane, the *Southern Cross*, with Ulm and two American crewmen, he took off from Oakland, California, on 31 May 1928 and flew via Hawaii and Suva to Brisbane, completing the historic crossing in 83 hours, 38 minutes. Kingsford Smith was awarded the Air Force Cross and appointed Honorary Squadron Leader in the Royal Australian Air Force.

In August 1928 Kingsford Smith flew the *Southern Cross* non-stop from Point Cook, Victoria to Perth. He later co-piloted the plane from Sydney to Christchurch, New Zealand, demonstrating the feasibility of regular passenger and mail services across the Tasman Sea. He then set out to fly the *Southern Cross* to England to place orders for aircraft with which he intended to begin an inter-capital air service in Australia. However, on 1 April 1929, he was forced to land on the flats of the Glenelg River estuary. The flight to England was resumed and completed in the record time of 12 days, 18 hours.

His airline, Australian National Airways, began operations in January 1930 with Kingsford Smith piloting the *Southern Cloud*, on the Sydney-Melbourne route. Collecting his 'old bus', *Southern Cross*, in June 1930 he achieved an east-west crossing of the Atlantic, from Ireland to Newfoundland, in 31½ hours. He then returned to England to take delivery of an Avro Avian biplane, *Southern Cross Junior*, and attempt a record-breaking solo flight to Darwin in October. This was accomplished within ten days, breaking Hinkler's time by 5½ days. He was appointed an honorary Air Commodore in the RAAF in November 1930.

In 1932, when he was knighted (Knight Bachelor) for services to aviation, Kingsford Smith was almost back to where he had started, selling joy-flights while times were hard. A year later he established a flying training school in Sydney but sold it at a loss three years later. Towards the end of 1933 prospects brightened. He achieved a brilliant success in October, flying solo from London to Wyndham, Western Australia, in *Miss Southern Cross* in just over seven days.

Kingsford Smith and Taylor flew *Lady Southern Cross* from Brisbane to San Francisco in October-November 1934 to sell it and reimburse sponsors. This west-east trans-Pacific flight was another first in aviation history.

Kingsford Smith and Taylor returned to Australia to the long-awaited authorization for a trans-Tasman airmail service which they began on 15 May 1935. He was impelled to go on demonstrating that the future of world transport was in aviation. He arranged for the still unsold *Lady Southern Cross* to be shipped to England. From there, with J. T. Pethybridge, he took off on 6 November

1935, aiming to make one more record-breaking flight to Australia. The plane and both fliers were lost. It is assumed they crashed into the sea at night near Singapore.

Kingsford Smith was survived by his wife and son. Sydney's airport is named after him and there is a memorial at Anderson Park, Sydney. The *Southern Cross* is on view at Brisbane airport. Kingsford Smith was the author of *The Old Bus* (1932) and, with Ulm, *Story of 'Southern Cross' Trans-Pacific Flight* (1928). His autobiography *My Flying Life* was published posthumously in 1937 and the story of his life was filmed in 1946.



Sources included:

- Various web pages
- *United Service Club, Queensland: The First Century, 1892-1992* by Flight Lieutenant Murray Adams and Lieutenant Colonel Peter Charlton
- Club Meeting Minutes, Annual Reports and sundry documents