

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

BROTHERS-IN-ARMS



Although Herbert Joseph "Jimmy" Larkin's birthplace of Brisbane in Queensland precluded him from joining his brother Reginald in the list of SA-born airmen who served in the Great War, they both distinguished themselves in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and Jimmy went on to make a name for himself in the pioneering days of Australian aviation.

LARKIN, H. J.

H.J.Larkin as a pilot with No.5 RFC in France.

Herbert Joseph "Jimmy" Larkin was born on 8 October 1894 at Brisbane in Queensland and educated at St Thomas's Grammar School, Melbourne, after which he joined the Union Steam Ship Co in 1912. For the next two years he was in the Military Cadet Corps (Militia) and the 21st Signal Troop, Australian Engineers, and when war broke out he enlisted on 19 August 1914 as Cpl 1st Signal Troop Australian Engineers AIF. He embarked on 20 October for Egypt where he was a signals clerk to Generals Monash and Chauvel, and from 9 May 1915 served on Gallipoli until he was wounded on 18 September and invalided to England.

On 21 April 1916 Larkin transferred to the RFC and trained at No.20 Reserve Squadron RFC, graduating as a pilot before receiving a posting on 7 July 1916 to fly RE8s with No.5 RFC in France, and he was still with the squadron on 22 April 1917 when he was appointed "C" Flt Commander. A circus atmosphere was maintained when he was nicknamed "Captain Barnum" while his deputy Lt C. D. Smart was "Mr. Bailey". On 14 July 1917 Larkin's award of the Croix de Guerre & Palm was gazetted "*for conspicuously valuable photo and reconnaissance work in connection with German retreat from Bapaume*", an award that in later years he modestly claimed to have won in a card game.

Larkin returned to Home Establishment and instructed with No.65 Training Squadron (TS) RFC until 1918, when he was made a Flight Commander in No.87 RFC which took its Sopwith Dolphins to France on 26 April 1918. He opened his scoring on 3 June while flying Dolphin C4173, an Albatros DV and a Fokker Dr1 Triplane going down out of control in quick succession. He then changed his aircraft to C8163 to gain another six successes in August, all Fokker DVIIIs including a triple on the 21st, a single on the 25th and a double on the 30th.

He added two more DVIIIs out of control on 3 September and destroyed another one on the 16th to bring his final score to 11, a fine record that earned him the DFC.

Larkin's later postings included No.4 Training Depot Station, No.51 TS, No.13 TS RAF until he left the Service. On 11 June 1919 in London he and his brother R. S. Larkin with others formed the Larkin-Sopwith Aviation Co of Australasia Ltd, and engaged as pilots A. W. Vigers, T. T. Shipman, E. R. King, G. C. Wilson and G. C. Matthews. The latter attempted to fly out to Australia in the Sopwith Wallaby G-EAKS as a competitor in the 1919 Great Race, but he only reached Bali before the aircraft was damaged and had to be shipped the rest of the way. The other pilots returned by sea.

On 15 October 1919 Larkin received his first aircraft from England, and ten days later he made the first night flight in Australia in the illuminated Sopwith Dove K-168 G-EAHP at the Melbourne Henley Regatta. As well as importing a small number of Dove and Gnu aircraft he also began the manufacture of petrol storage systems at Glenhuntly in Victoria, and on 26 December organised an air pageant at Epsom Racecourse, Mordialloc, with parachute descents, aerobatics and a 37 mile air race.

In September 1920 Larkin temporarily operated as the Larkin-Sopwith Aircraft Supply Co Pty Ltd after the Sopwith Aviation Co in England went into liquidation, and on 27 December he organised the Victorian Aerial Derby at Epsom Racecourse over an 80 mile course. He later registered his company as Larkin Aircraft Supply Co Ltd (Lasco) on 1 July 1921.

During 1921-22 Larkin, as managing director of Australian Aerial Mail Services which operated as Australian Aerial Services Ltd, won contracts for a Sydney-Adelaide and a Sydney-Brisbane service. The latter failed to eventuate but on 2 June 1924 the first AAS service from Adelaide-Sydney began, flown by F. L. Roberts and F. S. Briggs with Sopwith Wallaby G-AUDU *Bower Bird* (formerly G-EAKS).

Larkin was having re-equipment problems, so from August-December 1924 used DH9 A6-4 and A6-5 (temporary registrations G-AUEH and G-AUEG) on loan from the RAAF, and on 15 November 1924 imported his first DH50 aircraft. On 21 July 1925 he stopped his Sydney-Cootamundra service and began Melbourne-Hay and Mildura-Broken Hill services, then in 1926 he was approached by

C. J. Levien to provide a New Guinea service. He quoted £10,300 to provide an aircraft, pilot and engineer but neither this nor a revised later estimate was accepted by Levien.

In 1927 Larkin established a factory at Coode Island in Victoria and also established aerodromes at Adelaide and in the Riverina in SA, and in 1928 was awarded a Camooweal-



Australian ace "Jerry" Pentland flew with Larkin in No.87 RAF in 1918.

Daly Waters service although he declined an amended contract to continue 50 miles to Birdum to connect with the Darwin railway. From 6-8 February 1929 the Shepherd Enquiry was held into Larkin's allegations of bribery and corruption against M. L. Shepherd, Secretary to the Department of Defence, the result being that Shepherd was cleared of all charges advanced by Larkin on issues relating to tenders with WAA and the attitudes of Controller of Civil Aviation Brinsmead and Qantas.

In 1928 Larkin employed designer W. S. Shackleton as Chief Engineer and in 1929 Lasco produced the single-engined Lascoter VH-UKT to Shackleton's design, followed in 1931 by his Lark glider and in 1933 by the three-engined Lasconder VH-UMY. This made its first mail flight Daly Waters-Camooweal in June 1933 to become the first Australian-designed three-engined aircraft to be used on regular service, albeit without CofA because of a dispute between the Civil Aviation Branch and the Larkin company.

On 4 August 1929 F. S. Briggs flew the Lascoter with Larkin, Shackleton and Canadian National Railways agent T. G. Butler from Melbourne for the opening next day by the South Australian Governor, Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, of Larkin's AAS Adelaide Aerodrome. On 4 February 1930 he formed the unsubsidised Murray Valley Aerial Services Ltd, on 14 March 1930 began a Melbourne-Adelaide service, in 1931 opened the Larkin Flying School at Coode Island and between 1932 and 1933 built 32 DH Moth airframes for the RAAF. At this time he was employing over 110 people and even produced his own publicity magazine *Wings*, but then the Depression cut most of his activities.

In 1932 Larkin formed the Australian Air Convention to formulate aviation policy, comprising a committee of J. V. Fairbairn (chairman), R. Graham Carey, L. M. McPherson, W. R. Garrett, J. Taggart, E. J. C. Rennie, B. Murray, E. G. Roberts, H. J. Larkin and Major H. Shaw. In 1933 he offered to the PMG an unsubsidised mail service Darwin-Koepang to link with KNILM, using an Australian-built three-engined aircraft (presumably the Lasconder), but the offer was refused. In 1934 he secured a tender for meteorological flights from Hobart for 30 days, and these were carried out by Larkin pilot A. Ashley in a Blackburn Bluebird (105 Genet Major).

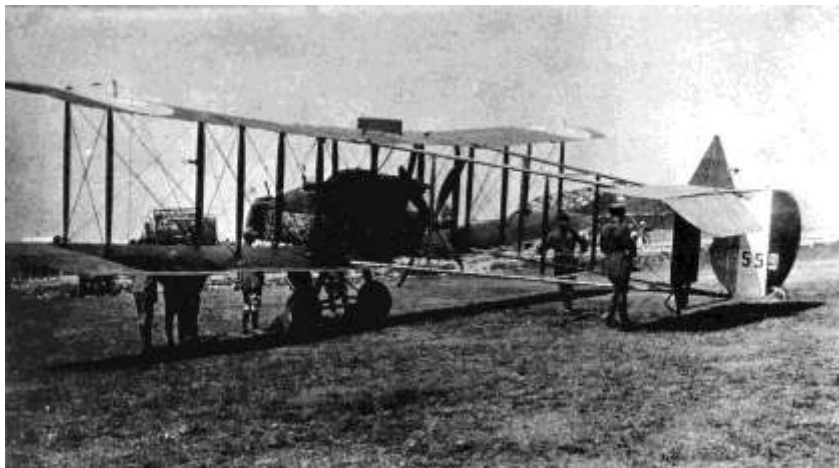
On 26 February 1934 the Australian Air Convention was sued by Western Mining Corporation over allegations regarding Government subsidies, and a judgement of £50 + costs was awarded against the AAC defendants with the exception of Garrett and Murray. After Larkin lost the case he went into liquidation in 1935, his assets went to New England Airways (later Airlines of Australia) and later he became traffic manager for AOA.

In 1937 Larkin left Australia for Europe and had a succession of jobs before rejoining the RAF at the beginning of the Second World War, and between 1939 and 1943 he advanced from FLt to SLdr. On 10 April 1943 he relinquished his RAF commission and until 1946 served with the American forces as a purchasing officer, after the war engaging in the disposal of surplus US Army and Air Force equipment. In 1945 he settled in France, and early in 1947 was back in Australia on a business trip as representative for the Peugeot car firm before returning to Paris in February.

Larkin retired to the Channel Islands and in 1968 published a book *Bonsai Culture for Beginners*. On 20 June 1972 he died at St Martin's, Guernsey.

LARKIN, R. S.

Reginald Stanley Larkin, the brother of H. J. "Jimmy" Larkin, was born on 10 June 1898 at Norwood, Adelaide in SA, and later moved to Victoria where he was educated at Essendon



An FE2b of the type that would have been flown by Reg Larkin on night bombing raids.

State School and Sth Melbourne College before becoming a journalist on the *Argus*. He joined the RFC and graduated as 2Lt pilot before receiving a posting to fly FE2b night bombers with No.101 RFC, with which he took part in numerous raids. On 17 December 1917 Larkin displayed great courage under fire, and this coupled with his conduct

on other occasions earned him the MC, which he received at an investiture by King George V on 4 February 1918.

During his service at the Front Larkin was shot down three times, once in flames, but he survived to finish the war with the rank of Capt. In 1919 he organised the London end of the Larkin-Sopwith Aviation Co of Australasia Ltd and was London manager until 1925, when he joined Mackinnon Mackenzie Calcutta in India and became an executive. After being employed at Bombay, Colombo, Hong Kong and Shanghai he retired on 1 April 1953, and after living on Cyprus and Vancouver Island he returned to England c.1957 and on 12 February 1983 died at Ferndown.

Chas Schaedel.

History Group

South Australian Aviation Museum Inc

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