

# 23 Days

## Across Australia with Parer and McIntosh

9-31 August 1920

Quick notes edited by Tom Lockley

This material mainly comes from *Trove*.

*Direct quotes from Trove newspapers are in Italics.*

*References to newspaper titles are given only  
when this is relevant.*



*Parer's aircraft, restored to pristine condition, is now in the collection of the Australian War Museum.*

Draft as at Sunday, 25 December 2022

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## Introduction

This booklet concentrates on the journey of Parer and McIntosh from Darwin to Melbourne, 8-31 August 1920, which like the Smith crew's flight across Australia 13 December 1919-22 March 1920 and the Wrigley and Murphy journey from Point Cook to Darwin 16 November-13 December 1919, does not get the recognition it deserves. The more spectacular flight from England to Darwin created more attention at the time, but the flights across Australia were seen by Australians in many places and added to the remarkable air-mindedness of the 1920s. Within a year QANTAS was formed; shortly afterwards the RAAF was created; and within a short eight years the world's first flying doctor service changed outback life forever.

There is a great Facebook page on Parer and McIntosh, easily accessible by googling *flight and adventures of Parer and McIntosh*. It covers the England to Australia section of the flight in good detail.

For the newcomers to the story, I have 'bookended' the story of the flight by extracts from the Australian Dictionary of Biography.



*Crash landing at Moulmein, Burma*

## The background: from the Australian Dictionary of Biography

*Raymond John Paul Parer (1894-1967), airman and adventurer, was born on 18 February 1894 at South Melbourne, second of nine children of Spanish-born Michael Parer, caterer, and his Victorian wife Myria, née Carolin. Ray was educated at St Stanislaus College, Bathurst, New South Wales, and Xavier College, Melbourne. As a teenager he developed a keen interest in mechanics and aviation and attempted unsuccessfully to fly a home-made glider. He served an apprenticeship with Broadribb Bros, Melbourne, and became a motor mechanic.*

*On 2 November 1916 Parer enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force, having previously been rejected as being under standard height. His objective was to join the Australian Flying Corps and in February-May 1917 Acting Sergeant Parer completed No.7 Aviation Course at the Central Flying School, Point Cook, Victoria, flying Grahame-White Box-kites.*

*Parer was commissioned on 1 June as second lieutenant and three weeks later embarked for Britain. He attended various A.F.C. and Royal Flying Corps instructional units and qualified as a pilot on 15 February 1918 with the rank of lieutenant. Subsequently posted to the Central Despatch Pool, Royal Air Force, he tested and ferried many types of aircraft to units in Britain and France. For his professionalism at C.D.P. he was recommended twice for an Air Force Cross.*

*On 24 June 1919 Lieutenant Parer declared his intention to enter the Australian government's £10,000 air race from England to Australia. Finance was not forthcoming, however, until late in the year when Lieutenant John Cowe McIntosh—with whom Parer had joined forces (although McIntosh could not fly an aircraft)—approached the Scottish whisky magnate Peter Dawson, who agreed to back the venture. Parer purchased a single-engine de Havilland DH.9 biplane,*

*G-EAQM, and painted P.D. on the fuselage in deference to his sponsor. By this time the air race had been won by Ross and Keith Smith who reached Darwin in December. Undaunted, Parer and McIntosh continued with their preparations.*

*The fliers left Hounslow on 8 January 1920, and 208 days later arrived in Darwin on 2 August. Their adventures were amazing. As they struggled from one disaster to another they left a trail of broken propellers, smashed undercarriages, damaged tail-skids, ruined radiators, crumpled wings, and bent fuselages. Their engine had twice caught fire, a vicious down-draught had almost forced the aircraft into the smouldering crater of Mount Vesuvius in Italy, and they had had to fight off Arabs in the Syrian desert. Finance was such a problem that Parer and McIntosh undertook advertising flights in Calcutta, and embellished their aircraft with slogans ranging from tea to whisky.*

## **Journey across the continent**

**Monday August 2, 1920: Arrival at Darwin**, supposedly with only fuel for another two miles or two minutes or with only two pints, depending on the account being read. They said that air currents had carried them considerably out of their course, and the haze from a number of bush fires had made it difficult for them to see. Flying across the open water of the Timor Sea in such an unreliable aircraft, with no rescue ship available, was an incredibly brave – or foolhardy venture.

Acting Administrator Mr Staniforth Smith, the Mayor (Mr. Robert Toupein) and a crowd of hundreds welcomed them: remember that the total population of Darwin was less than 2,000.

‘Detailed official maps’ of the route across Australia were made available. And some fuel was available. However as the range of the DH-9 was considerably less than the Vimy’s, Parer’s father organised additional fuel supplies.

Messages of congratulation flowed in, including from the Prime Minister, 'Billy' Hughes, for which they thanked him, adding 'we experienced several crashes, many difficulties, and immense discouragements, but we battled through, and are more than compensated by the spontaneity and warmth of our reception. We trust that we may have added another strand to the crimson thread that binds our glorious Empire'.

**Monday 9 August: Darwin to Katherine** 0705 to 0830.

Over Government House, the aviators dropped *a letter tied with string around a cake of scented soap and was as follows: 'Cheerio to people of Darwin who jolly nearly killed us with kindness. Hope to see you all' some day soon'*. It was signed by Lieutenant McIntosh.

The times for this seem to be accurate and no other information is available.

**Tuesday 10 August: Katherine to Anthony Lagoon**

There are inconsistencies in accounts of 10 and 11 August: apologies accordingly. For example, the *Adelaide Express*:

*A telegram was received in Adelaide on Tuesday from Powell Creek, midway between Oodnadatta and Darwin, stating that the aviators, Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh, flew over the Katherine at 12.15 on Monday. They passed Daly Waters at 2.10 pm, and Newcastle Waters at 3.15 pm at a high altitude. Lieutenant Parer then headed direct for Anthony's Lagoon. The sight of the aeroplane astonished the natives. At 3:15 pm. the machine- appeared over Powell Creek, flying low, and proceeded in a due easterly course.*

According to the *Sydney Sun*, they visited Borrooloola, Brunette Downs and Avon Downs – *they were well received and got every assistance from the station people. While landing at Brunette, one of the wings struck a tree and cut it in two. The wing was damaged and the aviators had it fixed by a carpenter.* A later report said that the aircraft was flying at 75 mph when it hit the tree.

## Wednesday 11 August: Landing at Avon Downs

This is confirmed from several sources with few details being available.

### General comments on flying over inland Australia

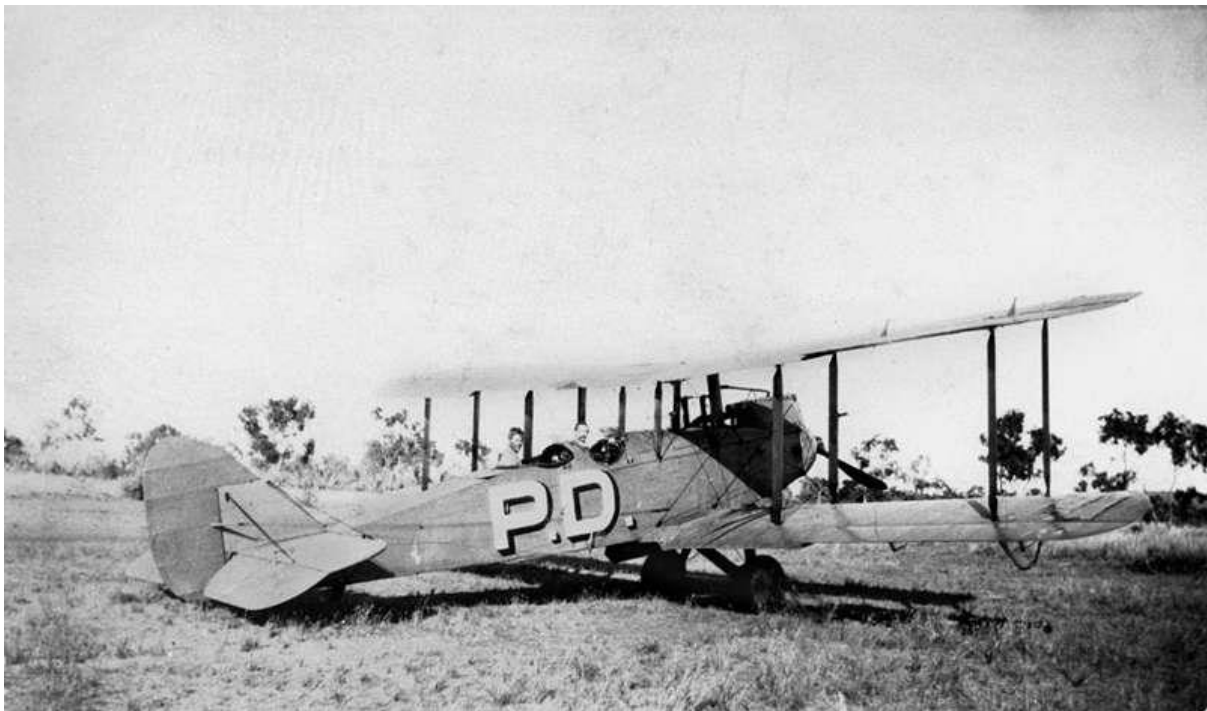
Over inland Australia they followed the telegraph lines where possible, and often the nearby area was very suitable for forced landings. There were stretches of absolutely flat, hard sand, and there were level grass plains, through these were sometimes deceptive, as small bushes could not be seen until a low altitude. *But the colour was an excellent indication of their character. The higher coloured land made good landing places.*

*'Northern Territory and Queensland are wonderfully suited for flying. This part of Australia is flat, full of good landing grounds, and practically free from bad weather, fog, low clouds, and wind and rainstorms, with splendid visibility. The blocks of cumulus clouds, which I take to be the usual atmospheric conditions, create shadows that cause bumpy conditions in the air, but it should be all right as long as you are up from 8000 to 10,000 feet.*

*'But for flying in Australia the heat is probably too much for the ordinary engine radiator; and it would probably be necessary to have a radiator specially designed, with larger cooling surfaces. We made two radiators that suited us but now that we are getting into cooler conditions we shall have to mask our tropical radiators on the way, to Melbourne.'*

## Thursday 12 August: Avon Downs to Cloncurry.

*They left Avon Downs at 10 am, passed Camooweal at 10 40 and when about 60 miles further on they had to make a forced landing, They fixed up the trouble ('a rusty part in the carburettor') in three hours and got under way again. (Sydney Sun).* They arrived at 1730 after a delay of five hours: Cloncurry people were about to send out search parties when West Leichhardt Station advised by telegraph that the 'plane was just passing, flying very high. Everyone then rushed to the landing ground to meet them.



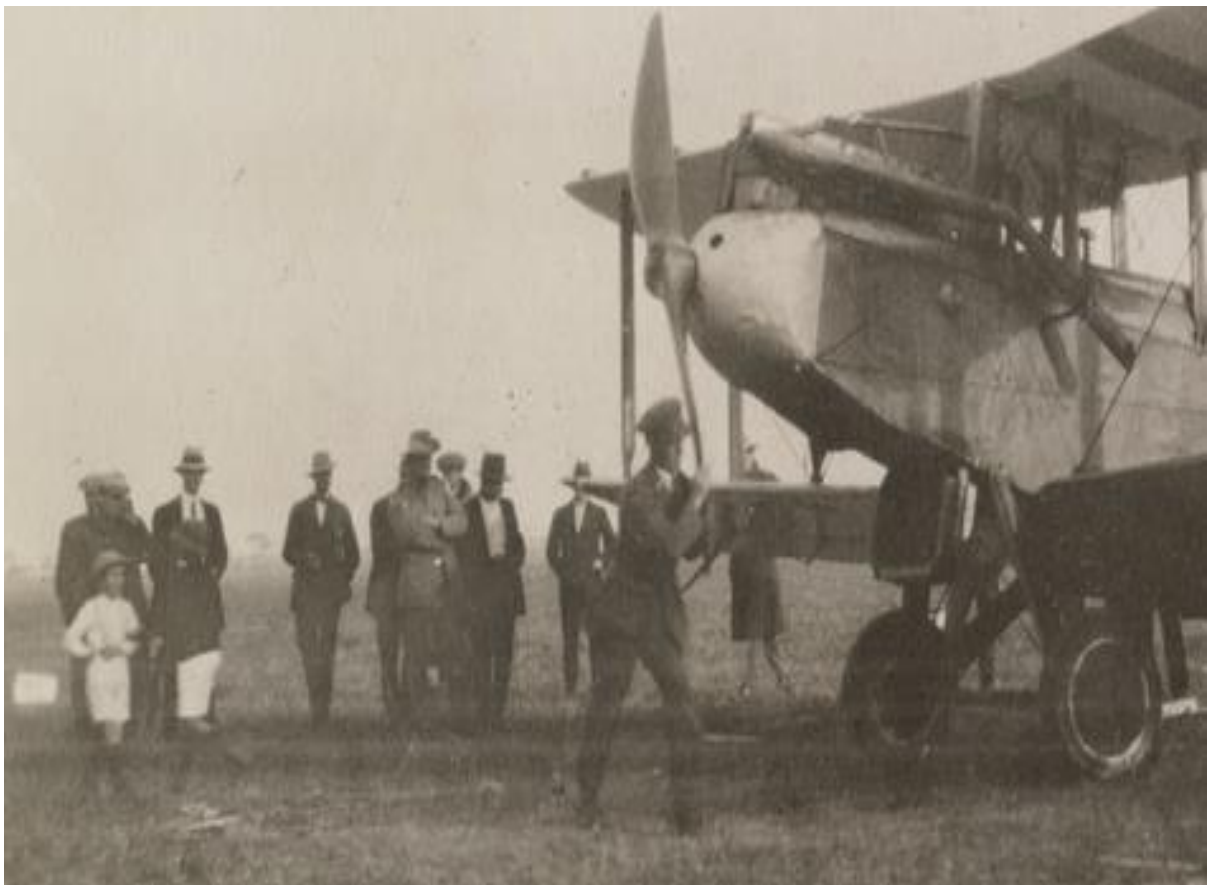
*Cloncurry*

12 August: It was announced that Parer and McIntosh, *are linking up with Francis Birtles Enterprises, Ltd, ... which company has been successfully registered with a capital of £100,000 to exploit Francis Birtles' various overlanding films, also those now being taken of Parer's wonderful flight, and, incidentally, to manufacture films in Australia for the world.*

Prospective investors were encouraged to contact the company.

**Friday 13 August: Cloncurry to Longreach.** Landed at Longreach at 1600, 'a graceful landing near the racecourse'. Parer's mother was there to be reunited with her son since she had not seen him since he had left for the war. As she embraced him, 'there were many wet eyes among those present'. The Deputy Chairman of the Shire Council welcomed the aviators on behalf of the town. Three cheers were given for them, and they were driven to the town. They stayed the following day and were officially welcomed at a dinner that evening. A collection of £40 was made for them.

*Longreach*



**Monday 16 August: Longreach to Rockhampton.**

The aviators left for Rockhampton at 0800, and the people of Rockhampton were delighted that they had decided to land there. They had a forced landing at Pine Hill, near Emerald, owing to magneto problems (#3).

Parer said later: *When approaching [the landing site at Pine Hill] we saw a big white patch, and on landing the patch proved to be a heap of bleached cattle bones. Before we left we arranged those bones to form a letter 'T,' to show any other aviators that the place was good for a landing. We hope the owner didn't mind.'*

They flew over Emerald at 1330 and landed at Callaghan Park Racecourse, where smoke signals were sent up. The Rockhampton *Morning Record* covered the event in great detail.

When the aviators' machine was sighted the firebell was tolled and whistles in the city were sounded. A large crowd had already gathered at the Callaghan Park racecourse, the landing place, the middle of which was indicated by a large white T. *The crowd was in a state of intense excitement when the aeroplane was seen at the back of Rockhampton, coming in a south-westerly direction and straight for Callaghan Park. Police had kept the centre of the track clear for landing. After circling the field five times, a perfect landing was made, right in the middle of the T, running to within twenty yards of the fence. The crowd surged around the aircraft and speeches were made by the Mayor and other dignitaries, including the RSL leaders. Three cheers were called for, and the airmen were driven to the Criterion Hotel. The Mayor announced that the airmen would be the guests of the community, and that the expenses of fuel and oil to reach Brisbane would also be paid.*

Mcintosh was the main spokesperson:

*'In traversing the country from Longreach to Rockhampton, we've seen some of the most interesting country since we left Port Darwin,' said Lieutenant McIntosh. 'It was quite in contrast to the Northern Territory.*

*'We travelled from Longreach at a height of from 1000 ft. to 4000 ft. and sometimes 5000 ft., averaging a speed of seventy miles an hour. We sighted Rockhampton at twenty minutes to three this afternoon at a height of 3000 feet. We were over the city just after three*

*o'clock, and we made the landing on the racecourse on the north side of the Fitzroy River at twenty-five minutes to four o'clock. The conditions were very humpy at 4000 ft., and it was cold-nearly freezing. My teeth were chattering.*

*'The machine is now in rather 'dicky' order. Her internal bracings are loose, very loose. In fact, she is in a really bad state. The engine seems to be running quite well. It is a marvellous engine.*

*'We were rather struck with the size of Rockhampton when we first spotted it. It seems to be a very fine place from the air.*

*Lieutenant McIntosh. said that they were very pleased to be nearing the end of their journey, which had been undertaken on their own account, assisted by Mr. Peter Dawson, the Scottish distiller. At the same time, he wished to contradict a statement which he believed had been published in some of the Australian papers—that they had been bound by Mr. Dawson to terms. They had not been bound to any terms at all.*

*'I am sorry we cannot stay any longer than eight o'clock to-morrow morning, when we leave for Brisbane,' added Lieutenant McIntosh. 'We have had a very strenuous time, and we want to push through now as quickly as possible and finish up at Melbourne. We may land at Nambour to meet a very old friend, but do not propose to land at any other places except the capital cities.'*

*It is said that Lieutenant Parer intends to devote two years in Melbourne to experimental work on what he believes to be a valuable idea. Lieutenant McIntosh, when questioned, stated that they had received three offers from machine companies for round-the-world flights, but had not yet decided upon what course they would take.*

On this day it was announced that the airmen would be awarded the Air Force Cross.

Parer was impressed with possibilities of making emergency landings as he flew down the coast: *The beaches are better for landing than anywhere I saw on the flight from England. I have the greatest feeling of confidence in the coastal route for flying machines.*

**Tuesday 17 August: Rockhampton to Brisbane.** They left for Brisbane at 0855.

They dropped a message over Bundaberg, which even at that time was an aviation centre: one Captain Snell had his aircraft there, and had recently made the news by carrying an air mail from Brisbane to Maryborough to celebrate the visit of the Prince of Wales. A message came through that if he took to the air and escorted Parer and McIntosh they would land there, but this did not happen.

They flew over Maryborough at 1205.

They first landed at Nambour. According to the *Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, they called there to meet a long-time supporter, Mr G H Thornton, who had introduced them to their sponsor, whisky distiller Peter Dawson. He was not, however, present and the aviators soon flew on.

**Condition of the aircraft:** The newspaper gave a good description of the aircraft. *The end of the lower right wing was heavily bandaged, and both wings had patches in practically every square yard of their surfaces*. Two large areas of fabric were missing from the top of the upper wing. Many names and addresses were written over the aircraft, and when the locals wished to add their detail, the only instruction was 'don't write on the propeller'. Some holes had actually been made in the Irish linen fabric of the rudder by this practice. A piece of galvanised iron had been hammered into a patch

on top of the fuselage, about a foot square, bolted on with tank bolts. *We do not want to condemn a useful job, but the finish was such that had a Nambour Rural School boy turned it out from the metalwork classroom, it would not have been an exhibit in one of the school's displays.* The original radiator, smashed in an earlier crash, had been replaced by two Overland car radiators fitted below the engine. *The propeller was held on by another piece of metalwork, obviously not machined, and so on: a book could be written on them all, which should be found in every aviation fitting shop, and when that machine gets to Melbourne, thus ending the journey they undertook, it should be acquired by the Federal Flying School and kept unchanged as a lesson to all future budding bird-men.*

They had lunch and decided to fly on at about 5 pm. Some panels were removed from a fence to enable an adequate take-off run.

**Starting the engine:** The air intakes were plugged with petrol-soaked rags, and the propeller turned over several times till 'contact' was called and the engine was run for about 15 minutes at slow speed. People were holding down the tail of the aircraft, and when they let it go it moved forward, slowly gathering speed and was only about a foot above the ground when it passed the fence line. It flew off after dropping a number of leaflets advertising Mr Thornton's next auction.

They reached Brisbane about an hour later.

People had gathered at Windsor Park (Albion Flat) and at Bulimba, (the home of the Aeroflight Aviation Company), and dignitaries such as the Under-Chief Secretary, representing the Government; the District Commandant, the secretary of the Queensland Aero Club and others prepared to welcome them. The aviators flew over Bulimba, but flew on to land at Lytton, near the mouth of the Brisbane River



possibly at the instigation of Lieutenant Butler, flying a BE2e aircraft used for advertising the Peace Loan and also Perdriau tyres. Despite the landing mix-up, they were received with enthusiasm by the entire

community, and taken to Lennons Hotel for a reception in Brisbane. Many dignitaries spoke Parer said that Central Queensland and similar places would benefit greatly from aviation services.

**Saturday 21 August: Brisbane to Walsh Island, Newcastle.** En route from Brisbane their first problem was a forced landing at Brunswick Heads, near the state border, (#4) because of a problem with ‘one of the planes’ – probably a wing rigging problem. They passed over Coffs Harbour at 1.15 pm. They faced strong headwinds, and after nearly eight hours in the air, short of fuel, they made an unexpected landing at Walsh Island Dockyard, Stockton, Newcastle. The aircraft appeared at about 1630 and circled low over the island and landed on the sandy shore of the reclaimed dockyard site (#5).

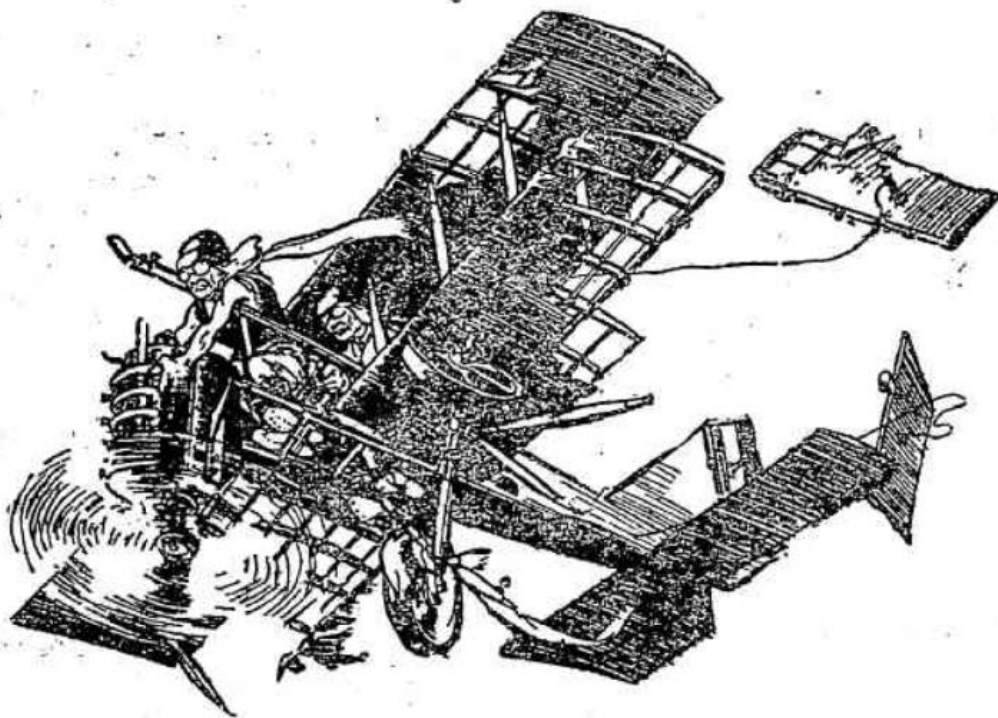
Mr and Mrs Cutler, chief of the dockyard, lived in the official residence, and with his son Captain Norman Clark and some workmen rushed to assist the airman, whose aircraft was bogged in the sand.

They had looked at the racecourse, from which Guillaux had flown in 1914, but it seemed too small and rough. They were exhausted and were happy to have a nice quiet night with the Culters, and most of Newcastle had no idea that they were there. McIntosh said they had chosen this landing to meet up with old friends from Gallipoli: Lieutenant-Colonel Becston, now a local doctor, and Warrant-officer Bader.

The airmen had been expected at Mascot at 1500, and over three thousand people were waiting at the airfield, despite having to walk

over a mile from the nearest tram stop. Parer's parents, two brothers and two uncles were among the welcoming group.

*Mrs. Parer said she could not help feeling anxious, although she was becoming more accustomed to these patient vigils, now her boy has reached Australia. And of course she is proud— unutterably proud— of the airman, and the way he is battling along on his old 'bus. 'You know,' Mrs. Parer said, 'it is wonderfully patched, but he tells us that the engine is going fairly well.' Just then one of the many false alarms raised the hope that the de Havilland was appearing in the distant sky. 'You won't be able to mistake it,' remarked one of her sons laughingly. 'You will see the piece of galvanised iron flashing.' 'Yes,' added Mrs. Parer, with a proud, but slightly tremulous smile, 'do you know, they have patched up its nose with an old piece of galvanised iron!' A piece of galvanised iron— isn't it beautifully Australian! But the longed-for flash never came. During the afternoon the spectators were entertained by several flights which were made by an Avro machine and a Government's Curtis 'plane.*



OVER THE LAST STAGES.

“Mac” to Parer: Thank God we've still got the rudder left!

—(Reproduced from “The Bulletin.”)

## Sunday 23 August: Newcastle to Sydney

They took off from Newcastle 1400 and landed at Mascot in front of a crowd of between 10,000 and 12,000 people. They were welcomed by the Mayor of Mascot, Captain Allison, who represented the State Governor. *Cheer upon cheer went up as the gallant men stepped from the machine.* The meeting of Mrs Parer and her son was most touching. *The mass of people rushed the airmen, and only for the assistance of the police they would have been overwhelmed. The aeroplane was in a dilapidated condition, and one wonders how the trip across the world was made in it. The fabric on the wings is rotten, due to the heat and rain. The stays are bent, and parts of the mechanism are severely strained. It is the intention of the aviators, if the machine can stand the trip, to leave Sydney on Wednesday for Melbourne.*



## Monday 24 August: Official welcome by the Lord Mayor, 1100.

Sir Ross Smith, who had travelled specially from Adelaide to welcome the airmen, said that the flight was one of the most marvellous in the history of aviation. They had overcome many difficulties, and only airmen of great experience and skill could have made the flight in a single engined aircraft that was practically obsolete. 'They deserve every possible commendation for their great achievement.

*The aircraft was in a 'disreputable-looking' state. The engine was still running well – the only engine trouble experienced since the aviators left London on January 8 was due either to faulty lubrication or an*

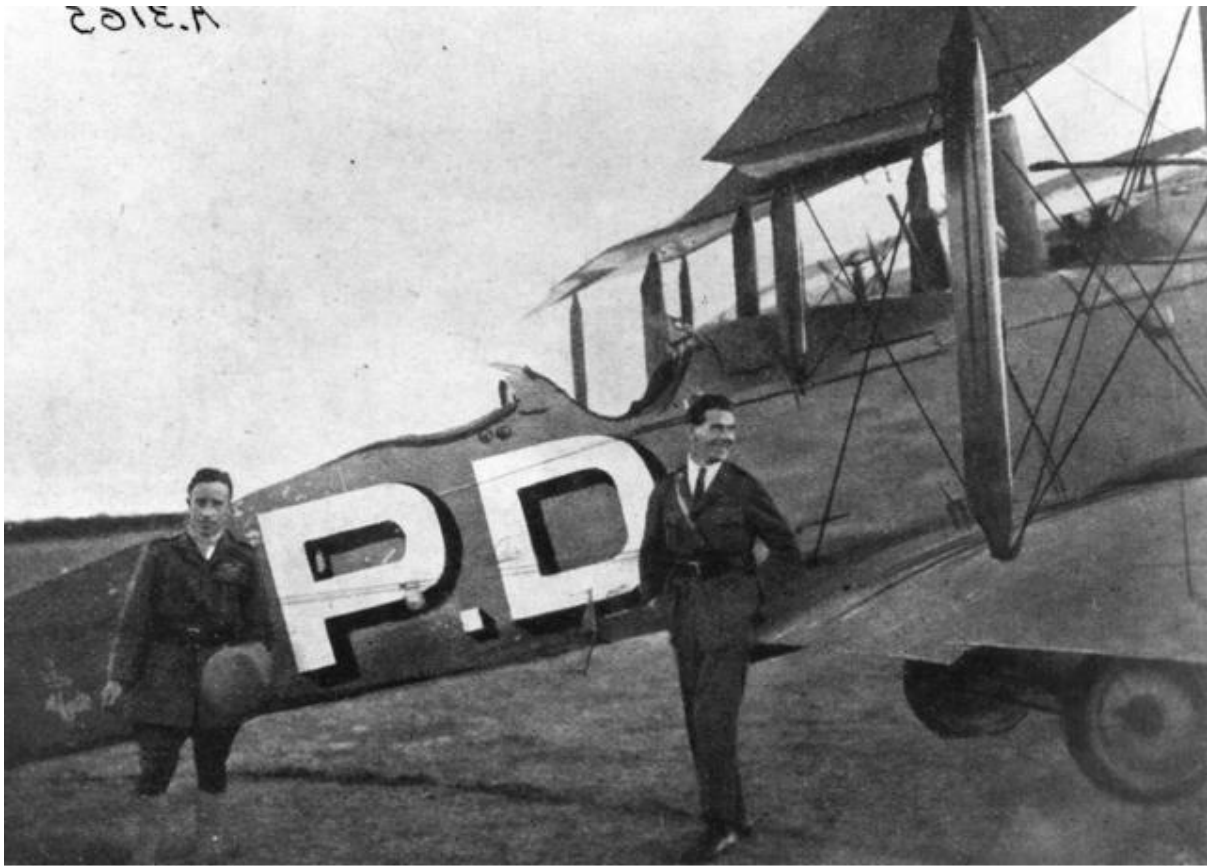
*inferior petrol mixture. The only repairs needed to the engine was the replacing of a broken exhaust spring. The nose was blown out of the machine at Port Darwin, and that was patched up with a piece of sheet-iron, and though, it does not look attractive it was an effective piece of work, and has carried them right across Australia without any trouble. Owing to exposure to all sorts of weather for over eight months, the fabric is rotten throughout, and is only kept together by the repeated coats of 'dope' it has received. 'On Saturday,' said Lieutenant Mcintosh, 'a piece about 2ft wide was blown out of one wing. That forced us to land at Brunswick Heads. When I repaired this I found that the wings were all holes. When I had repaired over a dozen I gave up, and we decided to make the best of the matter, and so we got on here without any further trouble. It was only shortage of petrol that forced us to land at Newcastle.*

*But whilst saying that the outer covering is rotten and dropping to pieces, you must not say that the machine is done. When she is taken to pieces and controls and other wires tuned up and any broken framework replaced, and new covering put on. the machine will be again quite serviceable. That would take at least six weeks, so we will take her on to Melbourne as she is. We do not expect to have any trouble on the journey.*

In the evening Parer and Mcintosh joined the Old Boys of St Stanislaus' college, Bathurst, for dinner.

### **Tuesday 25 August: Millons Club luncheon**

*A well-attended meeting was held for the purpose of recognising the marvellous feat of Lieutenants Parer and Mcintosh in successfully flying from England to' Australia. A committee was formed for the purpose of collecting funds for presentation to Lieutenants Parer' and Mcintosh. It was decided to issue circulars for contributions.*



#### Thursday 26 August 2020: repairing the aircraft

After lunch at Government house, the airmen worked on the aircraft: *naturally in a machine that has stood such a long strain there is much work to be done. The oil and petrol filters must be cleaned; and so must the make-and-break of the magneto. The control wires need tightening, and the sorely-damaged top wing must be once more patched and doped.*

#### Friday 27 August 1920: Sydney to Bathurst

*The aviators were due to leave at 9 am, but owing to minor repairs having to be effected, the start was not made until 1045. There was an accompanying- escort, consisting of an Avro and a de Havilland. - Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh arrived in Bathurst at 4 pm and made a successful landing just outside the town. After they descended before a big gathering, the aviators were escorted to the Town Hall and a received by the Mayor. During the reception the Avro 'stunted' over the hall. The airmen were then taken to the Saint*

*Stanislaus' College for dinner. They described the trip across the mountains as delightful.*

*Prior to the aviators leaving, the Mayor of Mascot, Alderman Hicks, read an address of congratulation and presented them with an illuminated address. A considerable number of people witnessed the departure, and the Intrepid airmen went off to ringing cheers.*

*The machine in which the famous aviators have made their journey had some difficulty in getting off the ground this morning- the first run was too short, and Lieutenant Parer was compelled to return and take the whole length of the 'drome before the machine would rise. He did not waste any time in gaining height, but buzzed straight off in the direction of Parramatta.*

Bathurst was in a state of high excitement:

*Lieutenants Ray Parer and McIntosh who, as a result of their flight from England to Australia, under almost incredible conditions, are looking large in the public eye of Australia, will arrive at Bathurst this morning on their way to Melbourne, where their historic flight will terminate.*

*It is out of respect to the Vincentian Fathers, his Alma Mater, and his warm love of Bathurst, that Lieutenant Parer and his heroic companion have decided to come out of their way, in order to call at the City of the Plains, and the welcome extended the pair should be worthy of the occasion.*

*A message received at St. Stanislaus' College last night stated that the aviators would leave for Bathurst at 9 o'clock. They might therefore be expected to arrive here shortly after 10 o'clock. The landing place chosen is Messrs. Clements and McCarthy's paddock, near the Corporation Sale Yards, it being regarded, by experts as preferable to the racecourse. The police will be in charge and the public are absolutely forbidden to go into the paddock or even to mount the fences prior to the landing. The paddock is not very large,*

*and the authorities want the aviators to have all the room possible to secure a good landing. A look-out, as suggested by 'Agricola' in yesterday's 'Advocate,' will be made from the central tower of St. Stanislaus' College, and immediately the man with the glasses sees the aeroplane coming the flag (half mast in consequence of the death of Mr. John Meagher) will be run to the top of the post. Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh will have an escort of at least one aeroplane from Sydney, whilst the Aviation Service Company's Sopwith Dove, with Flight-Lieutenant Moody and Mr. P. J. Moodie aboard, will fly out from Bathurst to meet the visitors as soon as the signal is received.*

*This will be the first time Bathurst will have seen such a 'flotilla' of planes, and the scene should create much interest. Immediately after landing the aviators will be taken to the Town Hall, where they will be accorded a civic reception. Then they will be taken to St. Stanislaus' College and received by the body of boys at the main entrance. For the rest of the day and evening they will be the guests of the College. Arrangements have been made for cinematograph photos of the landing and subsequent events at Bathurst.*

The Catholic Weekly described the reception of their now distinguished 'old boy'.

*Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh were entertained at dinner at St. Stanislaus' College, Bathurst, on Monday last week. A large group of priests and brothers were led by Very Rev. Father Lowe, CM (president), who proposed the only toast of the evening, namely: 'Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh.' He referred humorously to the fact that he had known Ray Parer since the latter was a child, and had often spanked him for converting the study hall into an aerodrome. Little did he dream in those days that the youthful aviation enthusiast was going to figure in the most daring and spectacular flying feat the world has yet known. (Applause) On the one side of him he had an Australian, and on the other a Scotchman: he himself was an American, so it was not a bad blend of nationalities that they had at*

*the top of the table. Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh were a credit to the lands of their birth, and they at St. Stanislaus' were proud to have some claim on at least one of them.*

*The Mayor (Alderman Havenhand), and Rev Mr Pendleton Stewart (representing the Bathurst branch of the Returned Soldiers' League), supported the toast.*

*Lieutenant Parer, who received an ovation, said that he was very pleased to see once again the old school and the old familiar streets of Bathurst, but he was particularly pleased to renew his associations with Fathers Lowe, John, and Mark Hall, and other masters of the college, to whom he felt he owed so much. He had always said, that he looked back to his days at 'Stannie' as the brightest and best days of his life. It was a great temptation to end the flight here; but they had to go to Melbourne, and he thought they would get there all right. He thanked them all for the good time given himself and Lieutenant McIntosh. (Applause.)*



*'Stannies' – St Stanislaus' college Bathurst*

*Lieutenant McIntosh, after telling a couple of very humorous incidents in connection with the trip, was asked for something about himself. He said: The first time I came to Australia I worked my passage, as I've worked it ever since, and landed here with five bob in my pocket. (Laughter and applause.) In 1914, when I left Australia, I had less and if I depend upon the generosity of the Federal Government, when we have finished this stunt I'll have less still. (Renewed laughter.)*

*After dinner a musical programme was enjoyed in the college play-hall, when the opportunity was afforded the boys of meeting the guests. Lieutenant Parer, in response to a demand for a speech, called on Father Lowe to grant a holiday to the boys, and declared, amid applause, that he would not sit down until he got what he asked. Lieutenant McIntosh told the gathering that when they were flying towards Bathurst, his companion pointed out a spot far in the distance, saying, 'There is "Stannies," my old school,' and he (Lieutenant McIntosh) felt as though it were his old school also, as he had heard so much about it. On behalf of the college authorities.*

Smith's Weekly (Sydney, NSW : 1919 - 1950), Saturday 28 August 1920, page 3

*Good Lads, You have done Australia proud. For grit, good humour, bad luck I and a glorious achievement, you hold a record. Men who can fly over Vesuvius, and treat it merely as a joke, are the real Amiens stuff. When Hawker flew across the Atlantic the American 'Literary Digest' had a long account of it under a big double column heading, 'The Britisher with the Spirit of a Yank.' That is not easy to take, but it proves bow other nations are glad to bask in even the reflected I glory of deeds such as yours. Anyway, we're proud to claim race kinship with you. Your reckless courage stirs a man. Even the humblest drudge goes to his task with a lighter heart and better purpose in the knowledge that in him is some of the blood and spirit that brought you through.*

*Father Lowe presented Lieutenant Parer with the college badge, inscribed, and beautifully worked in gold and enamel. The senior prefect, W. Cantwell, on behalf of the boys, presented Lieutenant McIntosh with a handsome cigarette case.*

(Later, another reunion occurred at Melbourne with fellow-pupils from St Xavier's College, where he completed his secondary education, but the 'Stannies' reunion was a far bigger affair.)

### Saturday 28 August 1920: Bathurst to disaster at Culcairn

They left Bathurst at 1530, heading for an overnight stop at Albury. the plan was follow the railway to Albury overnight, then a detour to Bendigo before flying on to Flemington racecourse at 3 o'clock on Tuesday afternoon.

There was considerable debate about how much the Government should give the airmen. £500 each had been promised, but many people thought this was too little and should be increased to £1,000 each, including parliamentarians who raised this matter on 26 August. Many donations were privately made. A few, however, were critical of the Government payment.

Considerable disappointment was felt in Lithgow that Parer and McIntosh did not fly over. the town, although it was recognised that to do so would take them several miles out of their direction. *Both machines were plainly visible at South Bowenfels as they passed over tile little hamlet of Lowther at 3.30. Many Lithgowites asserted that the renowned aviators skirted the town, but investigation proved that what they saw was a very large eagle hawk, which was recently seen in the neighbourhood, and is still making periodical flights.*

They landed at Richmond because of magneto trouble (#6), and flew on. But the magneto caused its final problem at Culcairn. The *Sun* newspaper reported: *'It was about five minutes to 6, and night was Just beginning; to fall,' said Lieutenant Parer. 'We were not flying high, and had flown over Culcairn until we were about four miles*

beyond it. The magneto began to give trouble, so we turned back to search for a suitable place on which to land. We picked out what appeared to be an ideal one, near the railway line, and not far from a farmhouse. It looked as flat and as inviting as a bowling green. We headed for it, but as we neared the earth we were surprised to find that it was a paddock under cultivation. As we flew nearer and nearer it seemed to be growing softer and softer, but there was nothing for it but to land. The machine nose-dived in a manner which we hadn't expected when we were just a few feet above the paddock. The engine dug its nose deep into the soft soil and then somersaulted. We were, luckily, thrown clear. You can contradict all the reports that have left here about us being injured, though it is a fact that Lieutenant McIntosh and myself were badly shaken. This time, however, the old machine is damaged beyond repair. One wing is broken, and so is the strap of the other. The rudder, the propeller, and the front of the engine are smashed up, too. Help came to us speedily, for the occupants of two motor cars had evidently watched us from the start, and they drove to the paddock. The occupants of the farm house also saw us, and they did all they could for us. and later motored us in to Culcairn.' Lieutenant Parer indicated that Lieutenant McIntosh and himself would travel to Melbourne by train on Monday or Tuesday. Meanwhile they will stay at the Culcairn Hotel.

Captain Jones, who recently took the Prince's mail to Sydney, passed over Culcairn, and landed about ten miles further on. As Lieutenant Parer did not catch him up, he turned back to see if anything was wrong. On his arrival at Culcairn he did all he could to assist the unfortunate airmen, who quickly recognised the hopelessness of resuming the journey.

A telephone message was sent to Cootamundra for another aeroplane, and this machine arrived to-day. It was also caught in the heavy ground, however, in landing, and broke its propeller. Captain Jones has placed his machine at the disposal of Lieutenants

*Parer and McIntosh, who hope to reach Flemington in in time to keep their engagements with the public. Both birdmen seemed cheerful. Thankfulness at their own fortunate escape t appeared to outweigh regret at their inability to complete -their wonderful journey in the machine that had carried them so far.*

*The excitement caused by the accident to Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh continued all day Sunday and late into the night. All day crowds visited the railway yards and inspected the much-travelled and much damaged aeroplane as she lay useless and impotent. Arrangements were made with Haycroft Bros. of Henty, for their motor lorry to convey the ma chine into Albury where Parer's brother would take charge of her and see that arrangements were made to send her on to Melbourne as bath aviators were naturally very anxious that the machine should share in the public reception arranged for them at the Flemington racecourse on Tuesday afternoon. At 1 p.m. the motor lorry got away and shortly afterwards was followed by, a lorry conveying the wings, etc. Both aviators were cheerful but naturally disappointed at not being able to do the last stage of their long and momentous journey by the "old bus" as they affectionately termed it. Parer remarked that a Sydney paper had once said after another of their mishaps 'Thank Heaven they still have the rudder left.' now,' he said, 'We have not even that.' The rudder was smashed in the Culcairn accident. 'But,' he went on, 'we have saved the bottle of whisky for Billy Hughes'. This bottle was given by Peter Dawson's whisky people and they were asked to convey it to Mr. Hughes in Australia. The bottle was intact and went through the Culcairn smash without being broken.*

*A public meeting was held in the Shire Hall on Sunday evening for the purpose -of making arrangements and raising funds to pay the Culcairn expenses of the aviators. Owing the hurried notice there was not a large attendance but the meeting was a representative one. All spoken to about it this morning were willing to give their mite to help- the intrepid aviators along. Mr W S Keast, the well known agent*

*from Melbourne, was present at the meeting and donated £10 Cr J H Balfour gave £5/5J and W G Balfour £3/3/, and to the time of writing about £50 was donated.*



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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### *The crash at Culcairn*

*The aviators received word from the Defence Department that they could use the military machine of Captain Jones to continue their journey to Melbourne so that they would have the satisfaction of entering, the city by air. They were to get away from Culcairn this morning for Gerogery where the machine is lying. Captain Jones and his mechanic will go on to Melbourne by train. Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh wish to thank all who made their enforced stay in Culcairn so pleasant and also those who assisted so willingly and enthusiastically in helping to get the aeroplane away: also to 'Jie people' of Culcairn for their kind and thoughtful act in' arranging for the expenses while In Culcairn.*

***Culcairn 'bête noir' of aviators.*** *Ross Smith had to land near Henty - which is in the Shire and in the past few months three military machines have been compelled to land here through some mishap or another. Then we have Parer's machine and also that of Major*

*Anderson's which smashed up coming to' his assistance. No doubt in the near future there will have to be aerodromes at most of the towns along the Southern line and this will tend to minimise accidents and the risk of life to the aviators.*

*About twenty motor cars went Gerogery to see Parer and Mcintosh get away in the military aeroplane. The day was beautifully clear - and cloudless. The machine got away a few minutes before one o'clock, and rose; beautifully, gradually soaring higher and higher, gaining great speed and getting every second further and further out of range of vision. The aviators expected to make Point Cook, Melbourne, all going well, about three o'clock.*

### **Sunday 29 August: to Point Cook**

*Contrary to expectations, Lieutenants Parer and Mcintosh arrived at the Central Flying School, Point Cook, this afternoon, in a biplane belonging to the Defence Department, thus completing their long ' flight from England. When the aviators left Sydney on the last stage of their world flight, they were accompanied by Captain. Jones and Sergeant Chester. They had intended visiting Bendigo to-day on the way to Melbourne, but the unfortunate accident at Culcairn, made it necessary to alter their plans. It is understood that Lieutenants Parer and Mcintosh desired to personally supervise the loading and unloading of their damaged machine, which is being conveyed to Melbourne to be placed on view in connection with the official landing: and they were reluctantly obliged to' abandon the proposed visit to Bendigo, and fly direct to Melbourne. Captain Jones's machine was placed at Lieutenant Parer's disposal. Having supervised the loading of their smashed machine; the aviators left for Melbourne about 1 o'clock, and two hours later they flew over the city towards Point Cook, where they made a graceful landing. Lieutenant Parer later motored to the home of his parents in Irvine street, Malvern, for dinner, and spent the evening quietly with his relatives.- Both the aviators are in splendid health, hut they are keenly disappointed that disaster should have overtaken them when they had practically*

*reached the end of their historic journey. They were very tired, and welcomed the quiet rest prior to the official landing, which takes place tomorrow Flemington Racecourse.*

### **Tuesday 31 August: Landing at Flemington**

Before landing. Lieutenant Parer circled round the course. Cheers and the waving of Flags greeted the airmen. When they alighted the Director of Air Service, Lieutenant Colonel Williams welcomed the intrepid airmen. Entering the committee reserve they were welcomed by an official party including the Prime Minister, (Mr Hughes), cabinet ministers and military leaders.



National Archives of Australia

NAA: A1200, L53897

*On behalf of the people and the Government of Australia the Prime Minister said that they had completed an Odyssey which would long live in the annals of Australia, an adventure possibly without equal in the history of man. When those present had looked at the machine in which the journey had been accomplished, and which was inspiring in its senility and decay, they could no doubt realise something of the*

*rude buffets the aviators had experienced on every side and in every land. They left amid the derisive laughter of thousands of people in England, and possibly in other parts of the world, because of the apparent faultiness of the aeroplane in which they proposed to accomplish the journey. But these young men have shown the world that for Australians nothing was impossible.*

*Addressing the airmen, Mr. Hughes said-‘You have reflected upon this country a new lustre, and from the bottom of my heart I want to thank you. You have done great things for Australia, and in addition you have shown that aviation over long distances is not impossible even in an ordinary machine.’*

*In reply, Lieutenant Parer said:-‘Well, I have seen the old ‘bus, and after our last experience I can hardly believe it has arrived in Melbourne. It did us both good to see it again, because when last we saw it it was on its back with its feet up in the air.’ (Laughter.) Anyhow, we are here. When Mac and I set out, we had only one thought, and that was to get to Australia. What we did was all-for sport to gratify ourselves, and for the honour of Australia.’ Lieutenant*



*Posing with the damaged aircraft at Melbourne*

Mcintosh said that when the machine crashed near Culcairn he thought their journey had come to a sudden end; 'but although it turned turtle, it did not turn dog, and let us both off lightly,' he added. Enthusiastic cheers were given for Lieutenants Parer and Mcintosh and the 'old 'bus.

During an inspection of the damaged machine the Prime Minister received his. souvenir of tile event. Opening a small lid underneath tie machine, Lieutenant Mcintosh took out a bottle of Dawson's whisky, which he said Mr Peter Dawson had given him to present to Mr Hughes.

#### Thursday 2 September: a warning of weakness

Lieutenants Parer and Mcintosh to-day supported a contention of Sir Ross Smith that the possibility of an aerial Invasion of Australia was very real.

Lieutenant Parer said that the development of aviation throughout the world left Australia weak when compared to the other countries. For an aeroplane to reach Australia from the north should soon be an easy matter, and there was no difficulty in getting supplies of petrol. Lieutenant Mcintosh said it was possible that the danger could be overcome if the matter was taken in hand at once.

Lieutenants Parer and Mcintosh have each received a pair of sleeve-links from Mr and Mrs J L Watson, parents of the late Basil Watson, who met his death near Point Cook.

#### Wednesday 1 September: Presentation of cheques

The Government of Australia was still based in Melbourne, and at Federal House, Parer and Mcintosh were guests of the politicians to receive their Commonwealth cheques for £500 each.

In proposing the health of the guests the Prime Minister said that hit had been one of the most amazing journeys in history. He mentioned the many adventures of the journey, especially the time when, after flying over Mount Vesuvius, the aircraft caught fire and the fire was

extinguished by sideslipping the aircraft. Mr Tudor, leader of the Opposition, also spoke.

Lieutenant McIntosh made a humorous response. 'I have often stood outside Parliament House with holes in my pants,' he said, 'and wondered if I would ever get inside. I think it is a great honour to have got in, and to have dined with the leading statesmen of the country'. He went on to say that had had often heard Mr. Hughes speak. One occasion was in London, when he enjoyed the opportunity of throwing out a conscientious objector on his head. A few minutes later he had the contour of his face badly damaged for sticking up for Australians. 'I see a five and two noughts on this document,' he said jocularly. 'it might have been more.' But he hastened to remark that, 'We didn't do the flight for cheques, and for myself I am thoroughly satisfied. It will pay for the petrol. But, all the same, I don't think I would cross the Timor Sea again for on or two of these. As a matter of fact, the greatest cheque we could have received was the sight of Darwin.'

### Monday 11 September: another cheque

A citizens' presentation was made to Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh at the Town Hall on Monday evening', in the presence of over 2000 people. Each received a cheque for £550, the presentation being made by the Lieutenant-Governor (Sir William Irvine), who paid a tribute to the airmen for their great daring and skill. The presentation was preceded by a concert programme. Relatives and intimate friends gave a dinner to Lieutenants Parer and McIntosh at the Grand Hotel on Tuesday night. The Spanish Consul, Senor Montero, presided.

### The later story: From *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*

McIntosh and Parer soon parted; McIntosh was killed in an aircraft accident in Perth in March 1921. Meanwhile, Ray formed Parer's Commercial Aviation Service, Melbourne. On 27 December 1920 he

won the first Victorian Aerial Derby in a DH4 at an average speed of 142 miles (228.5 km) per hour, a record which stood for a decade. He next attempted the first flight around Australia to raise funds to enter a \$50,000 trans-Pacific flight competition. The event was cancelled. Nevertheless, Parer set out from Melbourne on 7 October 1921 to encircle the continent in the Royal Aircraft Factory FE2b, G-AUCX. He got as far as Boulder, Western Australia, where he finished up in Kalgoorlie hospital with his cousin Mark Parer, after crashing on take off on 7 February 1922.

Disillusioned with postwar prospects in aviation Parer bought a garage on King Island, Bass Strait, where he had been the first to land an aircraft on 25 January 1921.



*Bristol Tourer in New Guinea, about 1927*

Some four years passed before he returned to aviation—this time to New Guinea during a gold rush. In November 1926 Parer formed The Bulolo Goldfields Aeroplane Service Ltd and subsequently purchased the DH.4, G-AUCM, intending to operate the first air service in New Guinea. However, he was beaten into New Guinea by E A Mustar who flew from Rabaul to Lae on 30 March 1927; Parer followed on 23 June. For the next fifteen years Parer staggered from one crisis to another. His determination to fight back, however, was not lost on many Territorians who called him 'Battling Parer'.

During his years in New Guinea Parer flew aircraft types including the DH.4, DH.9/9c, DH.60G Moth, DH.83 Fox Moth, Bristol Fighter, Junkers W.33, Fokker FIII and FVII, Fokker Universal, Fairey Fox and Fairey IIF, and Boeing 40H-4. He was also associated with Morlae Airways and Pacific Aerial Transport. He made several first flights including the first over the Owen Stanley Range, set records and established new landing grounds, particularly in the Sepik River district. From 1936 his flying activities diminished as he devoted increasing time to searching for gold.



### *Parer in the 1930s*

A typical 'Battling Parer' interlude was his participation in the 1934 MacRobertson England-Australia Air Race. It was almost a repeat of 1920. Backed by The New Guinea Centenary Flight Syndicate, Parer purchased an ex-RAF Fairey Fox biplane, G-ACXO, and accompanied by G E Hemsworth left Mildenhall on 20 October 1934. The

aircraft was less than half way across the English Channel when the engine began misfiring and Parer was forced to land in a French field. He had flown for less than an hour and was already out of the race.



Being Parer, however, he decided to complete the flight to Australia and arrived in Melbourne on 13 February 1935. The flight had taken 117 days; C W A Scott and T Campbell Black had won the race in 70 hours, 59 minutes flying time.

With New Guinea under threat of invasion in 1942, Parer joined the Royal Australian Air Force. However, because of his health he was transferred to the reserve in October. As so often happened to Parer, this opened a new chapter in his life. With his flying days behind him he turned to the sea to regain access to his beloved New Guinea.

He signed up as an engineer aboard the *Melanesia*, one of the fleet of small boats used by the United States forces for supply and reconnaissance along the northern coast of New Guinea. When the war ended he purchased an ex-Royal Australian Navy ketch in Darwin and proceeded to Torres Strait to search for pearls; in 1949-51 he skippered a barge around the Papua-New Guinea coast for the Department of Works. He was then employed as an engineer aboard tourist vessels on the Great Barrier Reef, Queensland, but returned to Papua New Guinea in 1956-58, to operate small boats searching

for oil. He spent the last years of his life managing two small farms at Mount Nebo, Queensland.

Parer's private life partially paralleled the misfortunes of his professional career. His first marriage to Ethel Blanche Jones, née Williams, a divorcee, on 30 December 1941 at Townsville, Queensland, was dissolved on 8 May 1950. His second, to Mary Patricia Ross in Sydney also ended in divorce. Survived by a son, Parer died at the Repatriation General Hospital, Greenslopes, Brisbane, on 5 July 1967 and was buried after a requiem Mass in Pinaroo lawn cemetery, Aspley.

Parer was a small, wiry man who never gave up in the face of adversity. He was a colourful contributor to the history of Australian aviation and left a rich legacy of memories. The writer Norman Ellison recalled: 'In cold aeronautical assessment, I don't suppose you could say that Ray Parer made a great contribution to Australian aviation, but with the wider lens the colour and spirit which he contributed made it certain he won't be forgotten'. Damien Parer, the World War II combat photographer, was a cousin.