

## Harry Jenkins –biography before Churchill Island

### David Maunders

Edward Harry Jenkins was born in 1883 in Abbotsford<sup>1</sup> a “natural born British subject”. At the age of 18, in 1901, he enlisted in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, Scottish Horse as a trooper to fight in the Anglo-Boer War. The Scottish Horse was sanctioned by Lord Kitchener and organised by Major, the Lord Tullibardine, who recruited Scotsmen or men of Scottish descent, chiefly in Natal but recruiting took place in Great Britain and other colonies. The Highland Society of London sent 386 officers and men in February and March 1901 and from the Society in Melbourne “about 300 men joined me on 8<sup>th</sup> March<sup>2</sup>. These were a splendid draft, very fine riders and all Victorians”. It seems likely that Harry was of Scottish descent and an expert rider, in order to be recruited to this regiment. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse, under Colonel Benson, “speedily became one of the best corps in the country”. In July they captured wagons and horses from Viljoen’s Commando and captured a large number of armed Boers and were praised by Kitchener. In September at a farm called Brakenlaagte, they came into a conflict with a force under General Louis Botha and were involved in the unsuccessful defence of an artillery battery. Two companies lost 73 officers and men including Colonel Benson.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Horse continued operations in the Eastern Transvaal in October but without Harry who was discharged on 2 October having completed his service. He was awarded the Queen’s South Africa Medal (QSM) which was awarded to all who fought in the conflict.

*War service was perhaps something of a gap year for Harry and it seems likely that on his return, he enrolled in Dentistry studies, either at the Melbourne Dental Hospital or the Melbourne University Faculty established in 1904.*

Perhaps Harry transferred his horse riding skills to motor cycles. We know that he competed in a motor cycle carnival in Sydney in 1910. The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported:

“A fine programme was decided, which owing to the presence of a couple of Victorian champion motorcyclists, had an interstate flavour....The championship was won by Jenkins of Victoria, who defeated Yee of Sydney, by almost half a lap.”<sup>3</sup>

Churchill Island displays the silver cigar case which Harry won, riding his 3½ HP Triumph.

*In this period we may assume that Harry established his dental practice in Collins Street. He married Alice May Gahan in 1911 She was born in Collingwood Gahan in*

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives of Australia, War Record of Harry Jenkins.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Tullibardine, quoted in David Biggins, The Scottish Horse. <http://www.angloboerwar.com> Viewed 5/08/2012

<sup>3</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday 17 February 1910, p.10

*1883 of a Scottish father so this may have been the network which brought them together. Their son Ted, (Edward Harry) was born in 1916.*<sup>4</sup>

In late 1916 Harry enlisted in the Australian Flying Corps, No.4 Squadron. He signed up at the Town Hall and we may assume that he had hopes of becoming a pilot. However, it is clear that he had no previous flying experience as he was given the rank of private and promoted to temporary sergeant just before embarkation on the *RMS Omrah* on 17 January 1917. He arrived with his squadron at Castle Bromwich near Birmingham designated as an MT Driver. He was promoted to sergeant on 1 July and posted to the AIF HQ in London for promotion to lieutenant in the Dental Corps. After this he served in a number of dental units in Britain and France and was promoted to captain in August 1918. That year he seems to have been seconded to the British Regular Army as temporary lieutenant. In March 1919 he had leave to travel to Italy and on his return was admitted to hospital with mumps. He was notified of his return to Australia in August 1919 and discharged from service in October. He was awarded the British War Medal 1914-1919 and the Victory Medal, 1914-1919.<sup>5</sup>

We may assume that he returned to his dental practice as he requested his medals to be sent to 151 Collins Street. We have no further signs of Harry until the 1929 Australian Motor Racing Grand Prix in 1929. He came 4<sup>th</sup> overall and first in class D in a Bugatti Type 30. The race was won by Arthur Terpich in a Bugatti Type 37A s/c. The medal awarded to Harry is on display at Churchill Island. It should be noted that in 1929 he was 46 years old. Perhaps it was this competition at Phillip Island that later made him look to that area and buy Churchill Island.<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, now 48, he was in London with Harold Jeffrey. They had sailed from Melbourne to England with the intention of purchasing a DH.60 Moth to make a holiday flight to Australia for resale. Instead they purchased the Desoutter, which gave them enclosed cabin comfort. Jeffery was aged 41 years, a director of Dimmeys Department Store in Richmond, Melbourne and was a commercial pilot who had flown in the Australian Flying Corps over the Western Front in the First World War.

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<sup>4</sup> Gahan and Spalding family trees: [www.members.optusnet.com/spalding1/JG106.htm](http://www.members.optusnet.com/spalding1/JG106.htm);  
[www.angelfire.com/biz6/gahanfamily](http://www.angelfire.com/biz6/gahanfamily)

<sup>5</sup> This information is drawn from Harry's War Service Records, 37 pages in the National Archives. Online [www.naa.gov.au](http://www.naa.gov.au) Viewed 6 /08/2012

<sup>6</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1929\\_Australian\\_Grand\\_Prix](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1929_Australian_Grand_Prix) viewed 6/08/2012.



G-ABOM with Messrs Jeffery & Jenkins being farewelled from England by a representative of the Vacuum Oil Co (on left in coat), December 1931. Geoff Goodall collection

Jenkins had only recently learned to fly. The Desoutter II that they purchased was the 30<sup>th</sup> made by the company and had been in service with an Irish air taxi company, Iona National Air Taxis and Flying School, Dublin.<sup>7</sup> They left Heston Aerodrome on 29 December 1931 for Australia.<sup>8</sup> The plane was fitted with dual controls so that both could take a turn at the controls. It had an air speed of 105 miles per hour and a range of 800 miles. They flew in stages to points where the Vacuum Oil Company had laid down supplies: through (among other places) Le Bourget, Marseilles, Nice, Tunis, Gaza, Baghdad, Karachi, Jodhpur, Delhi, Calcutta (where they stopped for nine days to join a rajah in a tiger hunt), Rangoon, Singapore, Batavia, Darwin, Cloncurry, Charleville, Sydney, Cootamundra, Benalla and Melbourne<sup>9</sup>. The plane was then sold to Lawrence McKenzie Johnson and named *Miss Flinders* with the code VH-UEE. It flew a service from Launceston to Whitemark on Flinders Island. It became part of Holyman's Airways, forerunners of Australian National Airlines and Ansett. It was later sold and resold a number of times before being displayed at Launceston Airport from 1966 to 1997. It is now preserved by the Queen Victoria Museum in Launceston.

It was only a few years after this adventure, that Harry Jenkins bought Churchill Island.

<sup>7</sup> Information from research by Kevin O'Reilly

<sup>8</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Desoutter-Mk.II> sighted 6/08/2012.

<sup>9</sup> *Northern Standard*, Darwin, Tuesday 19 January 1932, p.5



*Miss Flinders* inside the Launceston Airport terminal 1969

Photo by D.I.Anderson via The Collection

### Route Taken by Jenkins and Jeffrey, 1932

