



Harry Hawker MBE AFC

Harry Hawker

Pioneer Aviator

1889—1921



Aviation Engineer, Test Pilot, Aircraft Designer

www.harryhawker.com.au

Email harry@harryhawker.com.au

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In 1914, prior to the commencement of WWI, the London *Daily Mail* offered a prize of £1000 for the first successful non-stop crossing of the Atlantic. However, the outbreak of the war left no opportunity for anyone to make an attempt. At the end of WWI considerable improvements had been made in aviation and the *Daily Mail* renewed its offer.

A number of British aviation companies were keen to take on the challenge. Sopwith wanted to be first in the race to and his obvious choice to lead the attempt was Harry Hawker. Harry was not only one of the best pilots in the world at that time, he was also a very capable aircraft designer and mechanic. As navigator for such a daunting challenge, Harry chose LTCDR Mackenzie Grieve.



Harry chose the Sopwith B1 as his aircraft. The fuselage depth was increased to allow for larger fuel tanks and the wings modified to support the additional load. They aptly christened this aircraft the Atlantic. Harry also thought it would be an advantage if the undercarriage could be jettisoned after take-off, as it created considerable drag. When it was released after take off they increased their air speed by 7 mph.

After five hours they had covered 725km. Harry was concerned with the radiator temperature which had crept up to 85.6°C. At this temperature he knew they would boil dry before reaching land. In total darkness he cut off the engine and descended through the clouds towards the sea. The temperature fell and Harry restarted the engine and climbed back to their cruising altitude. An hour later the temperature rose again. They were now 1600km out and past the point of no return. They made several more power-off dives in an attempt to keep the radiator cool, but it was always only going to be a temporary reprieve, as each time they attempted to climb, so did the radiator temperature. On one occasion when Harry attempted to restart the engine it was non responsive—in less than a minute they would be in the ocean, then at 100 meters above the water, as Harry frantically worked to get the engine started, it coughed back into life!

As the sun rose the winds increased to what seemed to be gale force, but peering through the rain, they miraculously spotted a small steamer. Harry headed for the ship and circled it three times, Grieves let off three red flares to indicate their distress and when Harry was sure they were sighted, he turned off the engine one final time and landed in the rough seas ahead of the *Marry*.

