

WORLD'S GREATEST AIR RACE – the 1934 MacRobertson (cont).

Story No. 2. Granville Bros. R6H

This story has been based mainly on Jacqueline Cochran's first autobiography published in 1954. However, since finishing the story, we have uncovered a second autobiography, written before she died in 1980 and published in 1987 with Maryann Bucknum Brinley as co-author, as well as other publications containing stories contradictory to what she wrote in her autobiography. Due to the time factor involved with additional research, which would be too lengthy to detail in this story, we have decided to print our story based on Cochran's first book, and recommend further reading of the other references, details of which will be listed in the acknowledgements to be published at the end of next month's Story No. 3.

Continuing with this second in the series of three stories about the 1934 MacRobertson Air Race, you may recall that, of the 64 entries received by the Melbourne Race Committee for the Mildenhall, England to Melbourne, Australia Air Race, 18 came from the U.S.A. However, only 3 of these started in the race. This month's story is about one of the three - racing entry number 46, originally nominated by Clyde Pangborn, who withdrew his entry, which was taken up subsequently by Jacqueline Cochran (see below).

In the first story of this England to Australia commemorative trilogy, we looked at an innovative aircraft specifically designed for the race but which never left the ground. For this second story, we will look at an aircraft and crew which started the race but failed to finish. The aircraft was the Granville Brothers R6H Q.E.D. (Quod Erat Demonstrandum – remember your school maths? – So It Is Proven! or, as described by its designers, "Quite Easily Done") and the crew was Jacqueline Cochran and her co-pilot, Wesley Smith, whom she described as "the best instrument pilot around".

Unlike "Sunny New South Wales" (last month's Story no.1), the Q.E.D. was not specifically designed for the race. In fact, the Granville Brothers (Gee Bee), of Springfield, Mass. U.S.A., designed the R6H as a commercial development of their Gee Bee racing designs that would be capable of long range and high speed – it had a Pratt and Whitney "Hornet" 675 h.p. engine. Designed to meet commercial rather than racing standards, it was, in fact, only a partial breakaway from their earlier racers.

Q.E.D. was first entered in the race by Clyde Pangborn, but he had a dilemma. Although the building of Q.E.D. was almost complete, problems in the Gee Bee factory due to the death of Zantford Granville, the eldest brother, meant there was a possibility that the aircraft may not be ready to transport to England in time for the race start on 20th October, 1934. Also, and particularly because of his experience in flying over oceans, he had an offer to be co-pilot in a Boeing 247D passenger aircraft (race number 5) flown by Roscoe Turner, who did not have over water experience. Pangborn's dilemma - does he wait for Q.E.D. hoping it will be ready in time or does he fly with Turner? He withdrew Q.E.D. from the event and joined Turner.

Meanwhile, Cochran had nominated a Northrop 2 P.L.C.M. Gamma monoplane (race number 30), to be flown with two co-pilots, Wesley Smith and Royal Leonard, each flying half of the way. She had it built to her specifications, which included a specially designed supercharger, additional fuel tanks and a liquid-cooled Curtis-Wright Conqueror engine. However, only days before the aircraft was due to be shipped to England, the supercharger failed, causing a crash landing, which severely damaged the aircraft. It was out of the race.

Fortunately for Cochran, she had heard that Q.E.D. was available again. She contacted Gee Bee, to whom she was known as she had approached them earlier before deciding on the

Gamma. Sight unseen, she agreed to buy Q.E.D. if it were flown to New York, which it was, but it lacked some specific instrumentation. Cochran arranged for Smith and Leonard to take some of the sophisticated equipment such as landing lights, flares, radio equipment from her Northrop to be installed in Q.E.D. during its shipment to Southampton, England. Granville Brothers even sent mechanics on the ship hoping to complete the aircraft whilst at sea.

Q.E.D. arrived in England just days before the start of the race, leaving its crew little time to become familiar with it. Cochran claims she never saw Q.E.D. "until I arrived at the airport near Southampton to fly it to the field where the race would commence".

With such a hurried timetable, things were bound to go wrong, and they did. An aircraft quickly assembled and a crew with very little experience with its handling were prime ingredients for trouble. -

Cochran and Smith flew Q.E.D. for the first time from Southampton to Mildenhall, a distance of approx 130 miles, and made a particularly bad landing, so much so that she thought the aircraft had been damaged. On close inspection, the aircraft did not suffer any breakage. The problem was the flap system. The ailerons became ineffective with the flaps lowered causing the wing to stall near the ground on landing so as to just simply drop onto the ground. This was not going to be an easy aircraft to fly.

On race day, they took off behind the Dutch KLM team flying the DC-2 "Uiver". Spectators claimed the sounds of Q.E.D.'s engine and propeller were like horrible screeching noises as it accelerated on its take-off run. It was an alarming sight.

From Mildenhall, Cochran flew direct to Bucharest, Romania, some 1350 miles away. Flying mostly out of sight of the ground due to thick cloud, and estimating they were near Bucharest, Cochran descended on instruments through the cloud to confirm their position.

Soon after, problems occurred when switching fuel tanks and the aircraft lost power. Both pilots prepared to bail out, but Cochran's canopy would not open, "so Smith did not leave the plane." She continued playing with the fuel selectors, found they had been reverse labelled and the engine worked again.

They had selected a field for landing, but, as the flaps were wound down, the aircraft was thrown off balance. The flaps on one side had jammed in the up position; a flapless landing would have to be made. The landing took up every inch of the selected field, and badly damaged the aircraft's undercarriage.

For the second time, her aircraft was out of the air race. One report suggested it was probably a relief for the two pilots. Cochran immediately left Bucharest for Paris, and Smith stayed to have the aircraft repaired and returned to the U.S.A. She never flew Q.E.D. again. Quoting from her autobiography, "The Australian race was a tragedy of errors." Excluding the cost of the plane, it cost her about \$US20000 (£A5000 at the exchange rate of the day).

A year later, the aircraft was sold to the Mexican Government. Captain Sarabia – the Mexican Lindberg – used it to make a record flight from Mexico City to Washington D.C. U.S.A. A few days later, on his take-off from Washington for a record attempt back, the plane dived into the Potomac just beyond the end of the field, killing Sarabia. As Cochran wrote in her autobiography, "I was one of the few owners of a 'Gee Bee' who didn't lose his life in it. They were squatty, fast and unstable."

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Next month's newsletter will feature: racing entry number 35, Ray Parer's Fairey Fox Mk 1.