

THE FIRST MAN TO FLY AN AEROPLANE IN AUSTRALIA.

In 1909, *The Age* newspaper in Australia announced that they would pay £20,000 to the first man or woman to fly an aeroplane in Australia.

This was a lot of money and it attracted the famous *Erich Weiss* to set sail for Melbourne.

Erich was accompanied by his wife and he had a *Voisin* bi-plane packed in crates on board his ship. This *Voisin* was powered by a 60 hp motor.

Erich had seen *Bleriot* fly his aeroplane across the English Channel earlier in 1909 and decided that he would like to accept *The Age's* challenge and collect the cash. In Melbourne, Erich enlisted a group of mechanics and selected a large paddock on the outskirts of the City, where they assembled the *Voisin* and announced that they would fly on the next Sunday.

Thousands of the Melbourne citizens crowded around the paddock and cheered madly as Erich flew his *Voisin* into the air. He circled the paddock several times and made many landings and take-offs.

The crowd went wild and they swarmed onto the field and carried Erich shoulder –high from his little *Voisin*.

So it was that the first man to fly an aeroplane in Australia on 18 March 1909 was Erich Weiss and he claimed the prize of £20,000.

In the next few weeks, Erich would give 14 exhibition flights before thousands of people. He then took his *Voisin* to Sydney and on 18 April 1909 he flew from Rosehill Racecourse before a crowd of thousands who each paid one shilling to watch this amazing event.

Men cheered, women cried and children were in awe.

Erich was one again carried shoulder-high around the Rosehill Racecourse. *Erich Weiss* was a household name.

Erich knew that all this would be good publicity for his Stage Shows that he would be performing in Sydney and Melbourne in the coming months.

His Stage-name—of course—was *Harry Houdini* who had been thrilling audiences all around the World with his daring exploits.

So it was that Erich Weiss, or as he was known- Harry Houdini, who would become the first man to fly a powered aeroplane, in Australia, in 1909.

(John Imrie-1/8/2020)