

WRIGLEY'S "SPEARMINT" CHEWING GUM TO THE RESCUE ON THE FAMOUS SMITH BROS. FLIGHT OF 1919.
Condensed account of the late SGT. WALLY SHIERS unique experience in Cairo, Egypt, 19/11/1919.

This truthful and unusual enroute repair of an aeroplane engine's manifold induction pipe, occurred when crew-member mechanic Sgt. Wally Shiers (AFM), initiated emergency repairs to a split aluminium casting which was an essential component for reducing and maintaining critical engine temperatures on the Vickers Vimy's Eagle Rolls-Royce (Eight) 360 H.P. engines. Before commencing the famous FIRST ENGLAND to AUSTRALIA FLIGHT, various manufacturing supporters donated substantial supplies of their products with WRIGLEY'S "Spearmint Chewing Gum" makers being amongst the generous sponsors from where this story of its later unusual use proved to be the real saviour of the entire EPIC FLIGHT.

This now famous episode began after the Vickers Vimy Bomber's journey across the Mediterranean Sea, a non-stop flight of 650 miles over the open waters, where only one solitary ship was sighted during the entire crossing which caused many anxious moments when the PORT side EAGLE engine was over-heating alarmingly.

Ross Smith had taken the Vimy off from Suda Bay, Crete, at 8.12 a.m. on Tuesday November 18th, 1919 for Cairo, Egypt, and it was a vastly relieved crew when the North African Coast was sighted at Sallum, the flight continuing eastwards down to Heliopolis Aerodrome where the Vimy landed after a 7 hour 40 minutes flight.

After closing down the engines, Ross Smith jumped down from the cockpit and called out, "Hey Shiers, your engine is sick!", Wally replied, "Yes Sir, I am aware of it and will attend to it immediately".

When the cowling was unbolted, Wally quickly discovered a hairline crack in the aluminium induction pipe which is a sometimes porous quality casting, and he then began the harduous task attempting to locate a replacement at Heliopolis, Cairo, Alexandria and associated aerodromes without success, they had no similar spares at all.

Urgent wires were sent to Vickers Ltd. and Rolls-Royce, Vickers could get a spare to them in 3 weeks, Rolls would send a new engine in one month, which caused both Ross and Keith Smith much despair and terrible mental trauma, who in their frustration paced like wild tigers in a cage, backwards and forwards considering ways out of their miserable dilemma.

However Wally Shiers recovering composure from his own un-necessary self condemnation for the unhappy day's happenings, suddenly remembered the WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT CHEWING GUM supplies on board the plane, brilliantly conceived an idea to repair the cracked induction manifold pipe. Hastily unpacking the chewing gum he handed out pieces to all and sundry, asking them to chew vigorously on the substance until it reached a gluey compound, then by eventually compressing the whole mass into a ball, he flattened this out into tape like strips.

This Wally used as a sealing pug which he forced into the offending split along the manifold. With infinite care he replaced the induction pipe back on to the engine, completing the seal with overlayers of ignition tape, followed by ample coatings of quick drying shellac, adding further layers to create a poultice like repair.

Then Wally bolted the cowls back on, and when completed sought out his still despondent commander Captain Ross Smith, and said, "I THINK SHE OUGHT TO BE ALL RIGHT NOW ROSS".

Ross sprang to his feet and said, "GOOD GOD", amazed, "WHAT DID YOU DO SHIERS?", he asked, then after being told said, "RIGHT, WE'LL TAKE HER UP FOR A TEST FLIGHT", and within an hour or so, the huge Vimy was merrily trundling around in the sky again...

Ross was so happy and elated with the make-shift repairs of humble chewing gum, which was holding up to the engine runs so well, that when he landed in near darkness, he said excitedly, "THAT'S VERY WONDERFUL", in tribute to Wally's repairs and the effectiveness of the WRIGLEY'S product which eventually remained on the PORT side engine from Cairo to Australia, as no other spares existed enroute.

A magnificent recommendation and endorsement for a unique EPIC PIONEER AVIATION JOURNEY which may surely have failed in 1919 had WRIGLEY'S SPEARMINT CHEWING GUM or equivalent not been so readily available then, an historical achievement in AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE AND IT'S HEROES.

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References "THE SKIES REMEMBER", Sir A. Grenfell Price.

The late LIEUTENANT WALTER HENRY SHIERS (AFM) own reminiscences to his late brother ARTHUR SHIERS and other family members, also personal speeches and addresses given at venues around Australia and Over-Seas during WALLY'S life-time after this momentous Epic Flight when the whole WORLD stood still in silent salute to their brave aerial deeds against incredible odds, achieved only 16 years after ORVILLE WRIGHT first flew in 1903 from Kill Devil Sands, Kitty-Hawk, North Carolina.