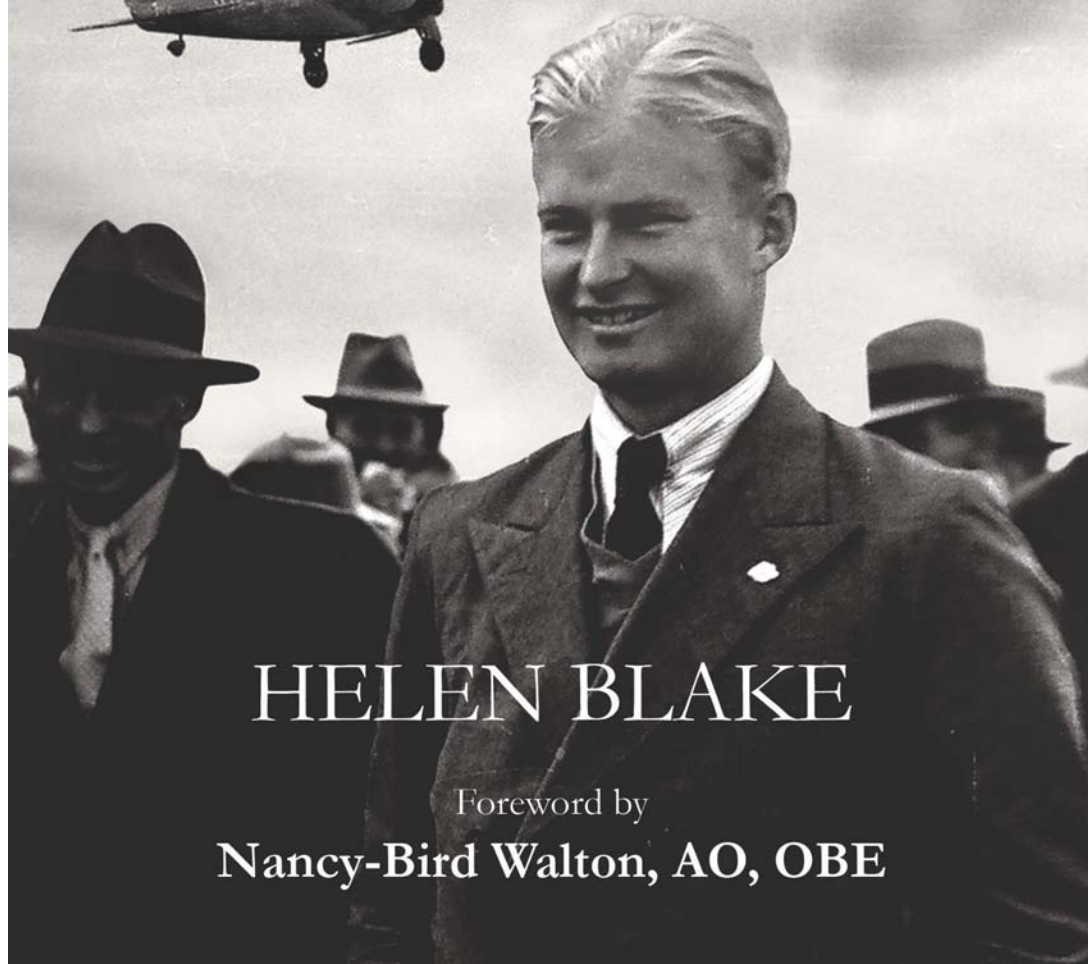


A biography of South Australia's gallant aviator

Boy Phoenix

C. JAMES MELROSE



HELEN BLAKE

Foreword by

Nancy-Bird Walton, AO, OBE

Prologue - Farewell

It was Tuesday, July 7th, 1936. A cold grey afternoon. The newspapers said 100,000 people lined the streets of Melbourne.

They had gathered to pay their respects to a 22 year old airman who had died in his plane, a high wing monoplane Heston Phoenix, crashing at nearby Melton in bad weather two days earlier.

Debonair. Modest. Handsome and chivalrous. He had touched their lives with his charm, daring achievements and sheer courage. A boy who had lived for flying all his life, and who had perished too soon doing what he loved the most.

They wept for Jimmy Melrose. A record holder several times over by the age of 21 and an accomplished aviator who was held in high regard by his peers, royalty and dignitaries, loved by the public the world over. This adoring public had watched with awe his progress over the preceding two years, ever since his round Australia record when he started making headlines, to his solo flight to England and participation in the 1934 Centenary Air Race to Melbourne. He placed third in the Handicap section in one of the smallest planes in the competition and became an overnight sensation.

Six planes circled over Melbourne's St Paul's Cathedral in a fitting tribute to their esteemed colleague. People across the whole country, indeed the globe, were stunned that he was so abruptly gone at the peak of his career.

Floral wreaths filled the cathedral. Jimmy's mother sat amongst them with her arm across the coffin in a last embrace with her beloved son. The hymns had been sung, prayers offered for the departed, and Beethoven's *Funeral March on the Death of a Hero* accompanied the pallbearers, who respectfully and somberly ushered the young airman towards his final journey.

The cortege, with a simple cross of laurel leaves upon the coffin - bearing the words '*Farewell beloved – Mother*' - made its 16 mile journey to the Crematorium at Springvale. The way was marked with silently weeping women, children standing in awe of their hero, and men with hats in hand, heads bowed.

Simultaneously in his home town, at a memorial service in St Peter's Anglican Cathedral, Adelaide, in South Australia, every seat inside was filled and outside hundreds of mourners, predominantly women, gathered. Parliament had suspended its sitting for the afternoon. Among the mourners were Melrose family members, his uncles Robert, John and Alex, his aunt Bay, cousin Ashley, and half-sister Clai Mayo. As the people left the cathedral, their eyes lifted skyward to see three DH60 Moths from the Royal Aero Club of South Australia passing overhead in tribute.

The day before, another funeral had taken place; that of Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander George Campbell, DSO, 8th Bat AIF, respected WW1 soldier and father of five young children, who was the paying passenger in Jimmy's Phoenix when it fell from the darkened clouds.

Their flight, delayed by weather conditions on the Saturday, was only 20 minutes old when the plane was heard to be in difficulty by the residents of Melton, a farming town 25 miles north west of Melbourne.

An increasingly loud drone caused the people of Melton to rush out of their warm houses and milking sheds, eyes anxiously searching for the plane which they had heard splutter and start up again.

Then, seconds later, horrified, they saw a plane shooting out of the dense cloud, followed immediately by the terrible sight of the wing cracking off the fuselage. Eyewitnesses said 'there was a deafening roar, then a terrific bang' and the machine disintegrated in the air, seats dropping out. The wet grey sky was filled with hundreds of pieces of whirling debris and the wreckage was scattered over a mile and a half. Jimmy and his passenger were killed instantly when their bodies fell either side of the deep gully.

To read more about the life of Jimmy Melrose, purchase *Boy Phoenix* [here](#)