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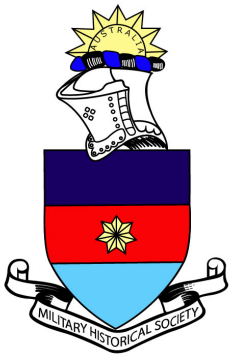

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EDITORIAL

The closing of 2017 has been marked by two achievements for which the Society should feel justifiably proud. First, the net result of the series of studies commissioned from renowned and specialist historians of the First World War – which have been published in *Sabretache* over the last two years – has been the production of a book, *Fighting on All Fronts: The MHSA Battle Series vol.1 1916-1917*. It contains eleven articles (168 pages of c.90,000 words) to commemorate the centenary of that central period of the war – and by extension the 60th anniversary of the Society – with its first print-run of 200 copies being fully funded by an Army History Grant obtained by the Federal President, Rohan Goyne. The articles – nine of the special commissions topped up by two others of relevance to the theme – are substantially as they feature in *Sabretache*, but printed on high quality colour-sensitive paper and with a Preface very kindly supplied by Prof Peter Stanley. The book appeared in time for sale at the combined MHSA/Narratives of War Conference held in Adelaide on 17-19 November; an advertisement for it can be found in the Society Notices column in this issue of the journal. My thanks go to Series Coordinator David Pearson for overseeing the project and assisting in its completion; I also wish to express my gratitude to Rainbow Press for the speed and professionalism with which they produced the book, in addition to their ongoing excellence in printing and dispatching the regular journal issues.

The second achievement is the above-mentioned combined conference involving the Society and the University of South Australia's Narratives of War Research Group. As a former academic at the University and a member of the Society, I acted as a liaison person between the two institutions, but the credit goes to the administrative people at Uni SA led by Prof Kerry Green and Julie White, and to the SA Branch committee under state president Michael English. The conference itself was successful and valuable not only as an event in itself, but in establishing a precedent for future such collaborative efforts involving the Society and like-minded organisations. You can read a more detailed conference report by Mike English in this issue.

It remains for me to thank Rohan Goyne and Federal Council for their continued support. I look forward to a productive 2018, and to receiving and publishing your submissions, large and small, to the journal.

Paul Skrebels

THE EXPERIENCE OF No.1 SQUADRON AUSTRALIAN FLYING CORPS: A FLIGHT INTO THE UNKNOWN

Martin James

Introduction

The Royal Australian Air Force's No.1 Squadron (No.1 Sqn) was the first permanent operational aviation unit to be formed in Australia. Established on 6 January 1916, the squadron has, with only brief periods of deactivation, served Australia's interests for over 100 years – initially as part of the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) and later as part of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). Prior to the formation of No.1 Sqn, the AFC had only previously formed two small flights for overseas service. The commitment to establishing a fully manned squadron was a major milestone in the maturation of the AFC during World War I. From this modest start, a further three operational squadrons were formed followed by the establishment of a training Wing in the United Kingdom. The experience of No.1 Sqn during World War I in many ways reflected the AFC as a whole – that of a Corps of highly motivated and determined airmen, embedded within the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and later Royal Air Force (RAF).

Throughout its service in World War I, No.1 Sqn served with unique distinction. It was Australia's only flying unit to serve in the Palestine campaign and the AFC's only truly multi-role squadron, performing reconnaissance, photo-survey, special operations, airlift and air-to-air combat, all with equal alacrity. It counted in its ranks the recipient of Australia's first Victoria Cross awarded for valour in the air domain, and a commanding officer who was later to become known as the Father of the RAAF. The humble origins of the AFC and the squadron itself did not however presage these future achievements.

Australia's entry into the era of military aviation was a long drawn out affair. During 1908 the value of aircraft in military affairs was being discussed within the Australian Senate. In December, these discussions led to the Minister for Defence, Senator George Pearce, to assure the Senate he would be seeking the latest essays on the development of aircraft and its potential for military use.[1] Despite this interest, it would not be until May 1910 that Pearce approved the conditions for the trial of an Australian designed and built aircraft suitable for use by the Military. While the trial came to nothing, the interest of Pearce in the potential for aviation was still evident in 1911 when he returned from an Imperial Defence Conference in the UK, declaring an intent to establish a military aviation arm within Australia's defence forces. Regardless of this initial enthusiasm, it would not be until after the UK had moved to create the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in 1912, vide Army Order 132/1912, that Australian Military Order 570 of 1912 was issued in September 1912 authorising the establishment of the Australian Flying Corps (AFC).[2] Nearly eighteen months later, when a Bristol Boxkite took off the first time on 1 March 1914 from Point Cook, Victoria, military aviation in Australia became a reality.

Amid the fanfare the first flight generated, it almost went without notice that the AFC of March 1914 was heavily influenced by the RFC and had been dependent on Britain for nearly every key piece of its capability. The establishment, manning and structure of the AFC was

[1] 'Federal Parliament.' *The Telegraph (Brisbane, Qld: 1872-1947)*. 5 December 1908: 8. Web. 10 Apr 2017 <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article174884545>.

[2] Australian Army Military Oder 570 of 1912 *Flying School and Corps,* dated September 1912 (Army History Unit Archive Collection).

based exclusively on its UK cousin.[3] The two newly recruited, and only, airmen instructors, Henry Petre and Eric Harrison (originally from Castlemaine, Victoria) were both recruited from the Britain and had received their flying education in that country. It was a similar case with the four aircraft mechanics also recruited from the UK.[4] In the years ahead, right up until its eventual disbandment in 1919, the AFC would remain dependent on Britain for guidance, materiel and a large measure of training. During the war years of 1914-18, the Imperial relationship between Britain and Australia, as well that between the RFC and AFC, was to not only influence the nature of Australia's contribution to the air war overall, but determined the formation and employment of the eight AFC squadrons raised during World War I. The operational experience of the first complete squadron to be raised by the AFC, No.1 Sqn, mirrored that of the AFC as a whole. Unique to No.1 Sqn, however, was its tactical experience, as the only AFC squadron to serve in Egypt and Palestine.

Early AFC Operations

The AFC's initial operational deployments during World War I were not entirely successful affairs. The first deployment of two pilots, four mechanics and two aircraft to New Guinea as part of the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN&MEF) in November 1914, proved to be abortive. The reports of a German naval base some sixty miles (100kms) upstream of the month of the Sepik River were found to be incorrect, resulting in the AFC personnel and aircraft returning to Australia in January 1915 without the aircraft even being assembled.[5]

The second AFC deployment, to Mesopotamia, proved to be far more consequential in terms of its contribution to the ground campaign, but was ultimately to have tragic consequences for many of the AFC members involved. In response to a request from the Government of India dated 8 February 1915 for 'trained airmen, flying machines and motor-transport', the Australian Government decided to offer an initial force consisting of four pilots, 18 air-mechanics and 23 additional support staff. Due to the force disposition failing to meet with any approved establishment within the RFC, or indeed the Australian Army, the deployment was simply known as the 'Half Flight'.

Of the 45 initial members of Half Flight, only the four pilots and a small number of the NCO air-mechanics were qualified within the AFC. This small pool of experienced personnel available for overseas service was hardly surprising. The Central Flying School at Point Cook had only just begun to run courses for pilots and aircraft mechanics, the first of which consisted of four and six students respectively. With only two pilots and four mechanics having been initially engaged from overseas and a small number of qualified personnel subsequently becoming available, the pool of suitable talent for Half Flight was slim indeed. While nothing could be done to address the lack of qualified aircrew, the ability to address the shortfall in tradesmen was at hand. The solution was to draw on enlisted personnel with allied trades found within the ranks of the Broadmeadows training camp of the newly formed AIF.[6] These personnel then went on a crash course on aircraft maintenance and unit operation. This solution to a manning problem proved to be as equally effective in solving the same shortfall in skilled manpower in January 1916 when No.1 Sqn was established.

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Air Power Development Centre, *The Australian Experience of Air Power,* Canberra, 2013, p.6.
[5] Ibid p.10
[6] F.M. Cutlack, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918. Vol. VIII The Australian Flying Corps*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1933, p.2.

After commencing flying operations with the British forces advancing on Baghdad on 31 May 1915, Half Flight was to remain in theatre as part of the RFC's No.30 Sqn until the remanent of the force was withdrawn in 1916. However, by this point, Half Flight had largely disappeared as a discrete force, being subsumed by No.30 Sqn. Its operations consisted of reconnaissance, rudimentary strike missions and disruption of Turkish communications. Later, as the British campaign began to unravel, airlift missions were also conducted to sustain the British forces surrounded by Turkish forces at the siege of Kut on the Tigris River.

In all, Half Flight and the RFC performed well despite the limitations imposed on it by a lack of suitable aircraft, poor logistics support and trying operating conditions.[7] By the time the last of the AFC members withdraw, Australia had lost three pilots: one killed and two captured. Added to those losses must be added as nine mechanics who also became prisoners of war when Kut finally fell to the Turks in April 1916.[8] The experience of raising and deploying Half Flight was instructive when it came to the formation No.1 Sqn, as the initial establishment and recruiting of personnel, both qualified and unqualified for the new flying squadron followed an almost identical approach to that of Half Flight. In a case of history repeating itself, the rationale for raising No.1 Sqn was also initiated by a request from overseas, this time from the UK when in September 1915 the Secretary of State for the Colonies suggested that 'Dominions might wish to raise complete aviation units. Such units would take their place in the general organisation of the RFC…'.[9]

Formation and Deployment

It says much for the Government's faith in the future of aviation in this country that it was willing to raise an additional aviation unit in response to the Secretary of State's request given the AFC's experience to that point. The initial deployment to New Guinea and the difficulties faced by Half Flight in Mesopotamia could hardly have provided confidence regarding the viability of additional commitments to what was a still untried and unproven warfighting capability. However, despite the recent history of the AFC and regardless of the still very limited number of qualified aircrew (both pilots and observers) available in Australia, on 6 January 1916 No.1 Sqn was formed.[10]

Established with 28 Officers and 181 other ranks at Point Cook, the manning of No.1 Sqn on formation in 1916 reflected the diversity of the wartime army as a whole. Since Federation the Australian Army had been a mix of full-time regular soldiers, part-time cadet and militia forces on compulsory service and volunteer formations.[11] This diverse composition was the result of the Defence Act of 1903-1912 and the Australian Universal Compulsory Military Training Scheme. Introduced in January in 1911, the scheme intended that all eligible Australian young men should receive a portion of military training from 12 to 26 years of age.[12] As Lord Kitchener noted in his 1910 *Memorandum into the Defence of Australia*, a mature system of cadet and recruit training should provide a standing force of some 80 000

[7] NAA: A2023, A38/8/202, *First Half Flight (AFC [Australian Flying Corps]) in Mesopotamia - Reports by Commanding Officer Captain Petre, H A, AFC*
[8] Air Power Development Centre, p.12.
[9] Cutlack, p.423.
[10] RAAF Historical Section, *Units of the Royal Australian Air Force,* vol.3, AGPS, Canberra, 1995, p.1.
[11] https://www.awm.gov.au/learn/understanding-military-structure/army accessed 1 April 2017.
[12] Peter Dennis et al (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.155.

members sustained by a training pipeline of young cadets and recruits. Kitchener's scheme, however, was not intended to produce a steady flow until 1918 and only achieve peak maturity in 1925.[13]

Consequently, No.1 Sqn, like the rest of Australia's forces raised for service in World War I, was manned by a spectrum ranging novice soldiers to trained professionals of the permanent Army. As was the case with Half Flight, an additional element of diversity within the newly raised squadron was the technical mastery of many of its new members. There were pilots with no military experience and observers with solid military credentials earned within the various pre-war artillery formations, but with no previous aviation background. A similar disparity existed between the tradesmen and artisans.

In his autobiography, founding member of the unit, pilot Eric Roberts, described the mixed nature of the squadron and the challenges of inducting 'awkward and ill at ease officers who owed their commissions due to the pilot qualifications rather than military skills'. The lack of the pilot's understanding of the battlespace while in the air was in some ways to be mitigated through the observers in the aircraft having been drawn from the Royal Australian Artillery.[14] For the new pilots, so recently civilian, it was to be some time before they could truly assimilate to their new occupation as military aircrew.

As diverse as the new squadron was, it clearly bonded as a unit very quickly. When an Inspector General report drafted by Maj Gen J.W. McCay in February 1916 suggested that the observers already within the unit be withdrawn to receive further training in reconnaissance and possible duties in Garrison Artillery units,[15] the response from the newly appointed Commanding Officer of No.1 Sqn, Lt Col E.H. Reynolds was both immediate and to the point. Reynolds, with perhaps more pragmatism than tact, pointed out several shortcomings in the IG's report and was particularly pointed when highlighting those elements of the report which demonstrated the IG's lack of knowledge of military aviation. Before any decisions around the fate of the observers could be taken, No.1 Sqn set sail for Egypt.[16]

Egypt – On the Defensive

No.1 Sqn left Melbourne for the Middle East aboard HMAT A67 *Orsova* , on 16 March 1916. The nominal roll raised for the voyage indicated that the squadron consisted of 23 officers, one warrant officer and 207 enlisted members. The voyage to Egypt was a happy one for most members of the unit, many of whom were leaving Australian shores for the first time. Lt Eric Roberts, of B Flight, was very pleased to find himself allocated a first-class cabin. The affinity with the ship was to prove an enduring relationship. On the eve of the *Orsova*'s last voyage from Australia in August 1936, No.1 Sqn held a reunion on board to farewell their old cruising companion. It was a reunion that almost didn't happen. In March 1917, while cruising through the English Channel, the *Orsova* was torpedoed by a German submarine. The captain managed to save the ship through the simple expedient of running her aground in Cawsand Bay just outside of Plymouth. The *Orsova* was to be repaired in time to begin repatriating Australian servicemen home from the European theatre in January 1919.[17]

[13] NAA: MP84/1, 1901/6/3, *Lord Kitchener's Report.*
[14] E.G. Roberts, *Box Kites and Beyond,* Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1976, p.7.
[15] NAA: A2023, A38/8/540, *Appointment of Officers to No 1 Squadron AFC [Australian Flying Corps]*
[16] Ibid.
[17] RAAF Museum Collection, *The History of the Orient Liner 'Orsova', England – Australia 1909-1936,* S.S. Orsova Voyage 70, 1936.

The thrill of the voyage across the Indian Ocean and arrival in Egypt on 14 April was short-lived. Within a week of arrival, the reality of the limited training available to the squadron in Australia resulted in several of the lesser experienced pilots and all the observers being sent on to Britain for further training. It would appear the IG in Australia had some appreciation for aviation after all. The pilots, including Roberts and Frank McNamara, were to return to the squadron by August. However, all the observers who survived training were posted to other units. It was a sadly depleted unit which presented itself for duty with the RFC's No.5 Wing in April 1916. Not only were they without several essential aircrew but, as the RFC Headquarters in Egypt were not expecting the squadron to arrive as promptly as it did, there were no aircraft or airfield space allocated to the Australia unit.[18]

The arrival of No.1 Sqn in Egypt occurred during a transitional period in the British defence of Egypt, or more specifically, the Suez Canal. In January 1916, Lt Gen Sir Archibald Murray was appointed to command the Mediterranean Expeditionary forces concurrent with the withdrawal of troops from Gallipoli back to Egypt. Murray's new command was specifically tasked with establishing defence-in-depth of the eastern approaches to the Suez Canal. By March, his responsibility extended to include command of the British forces in west Egypt as well.[19] Murray's expanded command responsibilities reflected a strategic reality in Egypt. From the outbreak of World War I, the British faced several threats to their control of the region. The first such threats were a series of large-scale raids mounted by a Turkish-German alliance from the east, intended to disrupt traffic along the Suez Canal. The second threat came from the Senussi, a religious movement originating out of Libya. The Senussi, encouraged by Turkey and Germany, attacked into western Egypt and managed to secure a coastal strip around Sollum and several inland oases. The Senussi advanced as far as Matruh, some 260km west of Alexandria, before British forces counterattacked and drove the main Senussi force out of Egypt, retaking Sollum in mid-March 1916.[20]

With the western Egypt now largely secure, the British refocused their efforts in securing the Suez Canal, which was still threatened by Turkish forces. To establish a defence in depth, the main British forces advanced east of the Suez to occupy the region approximately 15kms from the canal, centred on Romani.[21] It was during this realignment that No.1 Sqn arrived in theatre on 14 April 1916.[22] Having been dispatched without aircraft, technical equipment and with only rudimentary training, the Australian unit may have been a welcome addition to the RFC forces already operating in Egypt, but it did present an immediate problem in terms of how to employ what was in reality a very limited capability. Once the inexperienced pilots and observers had been sent to Britain for further training it was clear that No.1 Sqn was in no fit state to operate as a formed unit. The solution to providing worthwhile employment for the remaining aircrew and the mechanics was to divide the unit up into small flights and embed these elements into already existing RFC squadrons of No.5 Wing (Nos.14 and 17 Sqn s), for the Australians to gain experience within already formed operational units. This experience was somewhat limited for the aircrew due to the lack of available aircraft, but invaluable for the ground support staff.

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[18] Sir Richard Williams, *These Are Facts,* AWM, Canberra, 1977, p.42.
[19] H.A. Jones, *The War in the Air: The Part Played in the Great War by the RAF,* Oxford University Press, 1935, pp.177-78.
[20] https://ia601404.us.archive.org/13/items/desertcampaignsb00mass/desertcampaignsb00mass.pdf.
[21] Jones, pp.178-79
[22] *Units of the Royal Australian Air Force,* vol.3, p.1.

The inability to operate as a formed unit may have been a blessing in disguise. The limited training the squadron had in Australia and the lack of experience in military flying and aircraft maintenance was in reality a serious deficiency. The repercussions of yet another failed AFC enterprise would not have boded well back in Australia. The decision by the RFC to temporarily split the squadron in to smaller flights and send these small detachments temporarily to operational RFC squadrons was extremely sound. The training received by all the members of No.1 Sqn proved to be valuable and had an especially enduring influence on the ground staff of the unit. The additional experience gained by the Australian tradesmen, who already possessed mature technical skills, provided the necessary induction into military aviation and provided a solid foundation for sustaining operations in the years ahead.

The enduring nature of the proficiency of No.1 Sqn was remarked on by Lt F.C. (Clive) Conrick, who joined the unit at Ramleh in April 1918. He noted in his dairy 'Today I spent a lot of time wandering around the workshops learning more about the Bristol Fighter. The mechanics and the riggers were all very helpful and all seemed to be very competent at their jobs and my presence did not seem to interfere with their work.'[23] As noted by Conrick in 1918, the AFC approach appeared to provide enduring benefits in taking tradesmen with an already established aptitude, his observation being that

> In the short time I have been with the squadron, I have come to realise that it is the model of efficiency in maintenance and administration. So much so that General Headquarters, which is camped a short distance away, is continually sending visitors over to No.1 Squadron so that they can see for themselves how a squadron should be run.[24]

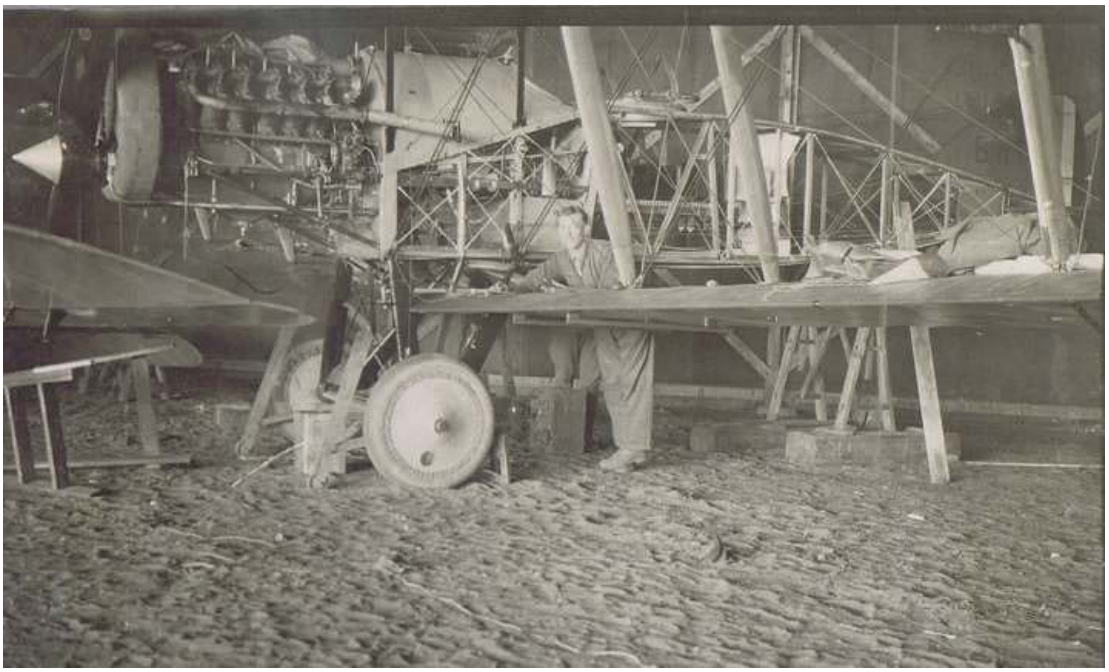

Fig.1: A Bristol Fighter in the riggers hands during maintenance.[25]

Richard Williams was certainly in no doubt as to the reason why there was a generally higher performance in the workshops compared to sister RFC units. Writing in the RAAF Journal *The Bomber* in 1931, Williams remarked that the RFC of 1916 was suffering from a shortage of skilled mechanics due to no restrictions on allowing such tradesmen to enlist into the

[23] Pat Conrick, *The Flying Carpet Men,* self published, 1993, Lucindale, SA, p.16.
[24] Ibid.
[25] This and all subsequent images provided courtesy of the RAAF Museum's Sutherland Collection.

fighting arms of the British Army. The solution adopted by the RFC, of training otherwise unskilled personnel at manufactures factories, was not as efficient as the practice of the AFC of transferring already qualified personnel out of the infantry units of the AIF.[26] Williams felt that such was the quality of the Australian tradesmen that, within a month of arrival in Egypt, the ground staff were sufficiently competent to take over their own aircraft.

By June 1916, No.1 Sqn was clearly seen as a viable proposition, with the senior RFC commander in theatre, Maj Gen W. Salmond commenting favourably on the rapid progress the squadron had made in the short time it had been in Egypt.[27] In addition, a new commanding officer was posted to the unit, Maj T.F. 'Foster' Rutledge, who arrived with a new flight commander as well, Capt Oswald Watt. Rutledge had been Melbourne-based prior to travelling to Britain where he qualified as a pilot and flew with the RFC. [28] Watt had extensive pre-war flying experience, having operated an aircraft in Egypt prior to the war and had then seen extensive action over France, when he joined the French Foreign Legion in the Aviation Service.[29] Rutledge and Watt brought considerable knowledge of aircraft and unit operations to No.1 Sqn.

Rutledge and Watt's arrival at the unit was timely, as No.17 Sqn RFC was despatched from No.5 Wing and relocated to Salonika. As part of the move, the aircraft of No.17 Sqn were handed over to the Australians. This consisted of a mix of B.E.2c – two-seaters as well as Bristol Scout and Martinsyde single-seaters.[30] By July the squadron was at least partially equipped. However, it was not operating as a single entity, but was dispersed to the east and west of the Suez Canal based at various times at Heliopolis, Kantara, Sherika and Port Said. Operating across such a wide expanse, the squadron was engaged in largely reconnaissance flights over the Turkish forces to the east and the remnant Senussi still active around several inland oases in the west.

The Battle of Romani 3-6 August 1916, was No.1 Sqn's first major action. The Turkish attack on the British positions around Romani was intended to place the Suez Canal within range of their heavy artillery. For No.1 Sqn, the air operations which influenced the battle began well before the battle started at ground level. Flying with No.14 Sqn RFC, the Australian crews assisted with the tracking of the advancing Turkish forces some 16 000 strong. From 19 July, the Turks were under near constant air observation as they slowly advanced on Romani. Several fortified lines were reported as being constructed and three separate troop columns were tracked. But it was not until 1 August that offensive operations began when Lts Wackett and Ellis joined five aircraft from No.14 Sqn on a bombing attack on Turkish troop concentrations, and Williams assisted in a naval gunfire support mission. In fact, the flyers had been ordered not to conduct any attacks prior to this date. British General Staff had been well prepared for the enemy offensive and had readied strong positions around Romani and had prepositioned reinforcements, including the Australian Light Horse, in anticipation of drawing the Turks into close action against a strong defensive line. Once the forces were fully committed, the British plan was to launch mounted infantry and cavalry around the Turkish left flank in an envelopment attack. In short, the British ground

[26] Air Cdre Richard Williams, 'The Story of No 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps'*, The Bomber: Journal of the RAAF*, Aug. 1931, Melbourne, p.4.
[27] Cutlack, p.42.
[28] Chris Clark, *The High Life of Oswald Watt – Australia's first military pilot,* Big Sky Publishing, Newport NSW, 2016, p.148.
[29] NAA: B2455, *Watt Walter Oswald*.
[30] Williams, 'The Story of No 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps'*,* p.5.

commander wanted the Turks to move into a well-prepared battlespace unimpeded by air attacks.[31]

After several days of fierce fighting, the British counter-offensive against the Turkish left was successful and the Turks were forced to retreat. Throughout the initial period of heavy fighting over 3-5 August, aircraft maintained surveillance over the enemy communication lines seeking signs of any reinforcements moving towards the front lines. From 5- 8 August, the AFC and RFC aircrew maintained observation over the retreating enemy as they progressively fell back on the fortified lines constructed during the initial advance on Romani. The British counter-offensive was able to continue to force the Turks back as far as El Arish, some 90 miles east of the Suez.[32] Again, No.1 Sqn aircrew operating with No.14 Sqn RFC, maintained contact with the retreating enemy forces, providing reconnaissance reports and conducting bombing attacks.

The Battle of Romani ended any immediate threat to the Suez Canal from the east.[33] Additionally, by October 1916, the remaining Senussi forces in the inland oases were driven out of their positions, finally bring the threat to western Egypt to an end. As a result, the demand for reconnaissance and surveillance flights in western Egypt declined, thereby enabling A Flight of No.1 Sqn detachment, which had been operating out of El Kharga, to be repositioned to the east. This shift in the strategic environment in Egypt enabled Murray to restructure his forces and to prepare for an advance on Gaza via El Arish.

For No.1 Sqn, the period after the Battle of Ramani was also one of consolidation. From August, aircrew who had been sent to Britain for further training began to return, with pilots such as Eric Roberts and Frank McNamara returning through August 1916.[34] The pilots from Britain, combined with the return of A Flight from the west, meant that for the first time since arriving in Egypt in April No.1 Sqn was complete in terms of aircrew. In his autobiography, Sir Richard Williams makes an interesting note regarding the observers held on strength at the time. As all the Australian observers who arrived with the squadron in April had been sent to the UK for training, the RFC had agreed to provide observers from within their ranks. Richards noted, however, that these aircrew were 'mostly very junior with no air experience and extraordinary little other experience'. Williams further noted that these observers had no understanding of the country they were operating over and could not recognise light horse formations.[35]

For Williams, the solution to the problem was to recruit into the AFC experienced Light Horse officers, of which there was no shortage of volunteers. After some understandable reluctance was expressed by the Light Horse hierarchy, William's scheme was put into practice. As an added inducement, the Light Horse volunteers were also offered pilot training once they had completed a period of satisfactory service as observers. As sincere as the offer of flying training was, by 1918 the shortage of pilots experienced in 1916 had largely been overcome, whereas good observers were a scarce commodity. It was with some regret that Williams, by then in command of the RAF No.40 Wing (No.1 Sqn AFC and No.14 Sqn RFC), had to rescind the offer in the interests of maintaining capability.[36]

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[31] NAA: A1194, 33.68/15152, *The Australian Light Horse in the Great War*.
[32] Jones, pp.191-94.
[33] Ibid.
[34] NAA: B2455, McNamara F H, accessed 14 Apr 17.
[35] Williams, *These Are Facts,* p.53.
[36] Ibid, p.92.

Two of the very early transfers from the Light Horse were Lts Viv Turner and Ross Smith[37]. Williams was later to record that Ross Smith got his first flying experience using the dual control BE2e machine while flying as an observer. Smith was later to qualify as a pilot and was selected to fly the huge (by the standards of the day) Handley Page O/400 aircraft allotted to No.1 Sqn in August 1918. Both Smith and the Handley Page were to conduct several missions in support of Col T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia). Smith of course went on to complete the first England to Australia flight in 1919 with three other crewmates including his brother, Keith.

On 8 November, A Flight moved its base of operations from Upper Egypt to Kantara and then to Mahemdia, joining the rest of the squadron. For the first time since April, No.1 Sqn was once again operating at full strength and from the one airbase. With No.1 Sqn now settled in terms of manning, equipment and a common base of operations, it was truly ready to fully engage in the final stage of the Sinai Campaign. From its arrival in April the unit had needed to address a range of capability requirements before it was able to take its place in the RFC order of battle. For example, a unit-wide deficiency in training necessitated the temporary redeployment of the unit to Britain and to other squadrons in Egypt.

The capability deficiencies of No.1 Sqn did not stop at training. The unit had left Australia with personal equipment and motor transport only. In fact, several of the vehicles had been the private property of squadron members who donated them to the cause. Once in theatre, it was the British Army, the RFC in particular, who had to provide every tool, tent and tent peg needed by the unit. Cameras, radios, engines, weapons and spares, everything needed to sustain a flying unit in a deployed theatre, was provided by the British. From April to November 1916, No.1 Sqn was effectively still in development. The fine work done by the AFC in the weeks prior to, during and after the Battle of Romani was in effect part of a working up program of an embryonic military unit still very much 'learning the ropes'.

The immature state of No.1 Sqn at its departure from Australia reflected in many ways the state of the AFC during WWI. The AFC had few trained aircrew and a very small instructional staff at its sole airbase at Point Cook. It required the supply of aircraft from overseas to sustain operations and was only just beginning to establish a contractor base in Australia to sustain its domestic raise, train and sustain operations. That the RFC was to eventually establish an AFC training wing in the UK and provide initial training to both air and ground crew from within their own establishments is highly indicative of the fact that the development of military aviation in Australia was being rushed. It was more efficient to sustain the AFC squadrons by recruiting replacements from the AIF already in theatre than to rely on the supply of sufficient numbers of operationally ready crews from Australia. If there is an enduring lesson to be learnt from the AFC experience in New Guinea, Mesopotamia and in Egypt, it is the necessity of investing time and resources into capability development up front before endeavouring to project deployable forces into the conflict space. By November 1916, however, No.1 Sqn was the complete and ready unit it should have been before it left Australia.

The development work done in readying No.1 Sqn for the final phase on the Sinai and subsequent Palestine campaign mirrored other preparation work completed by the British through 1916. The Sinai region did not have the transport, water and harbour infrastructure

[37] NAA: B2455, TURNER V G; NAA: B2455, SMITH R P.

needed to support a major ground offensive, and this shortfall necessitated the development of a water pipeline as well as road and railway development from the east bank of the Suez, north east along the coastal strip towards the Turkish outposts at Bir el Mazar and El Arish on to the Egypt-Palestinian border.

El Arish to Aleppo – On the Offensive

The British offensive operations which began through September-October 1916 involved a two-year campaign which ultimately took the British forces from the Sinai Peninsula to Aleppo, a distance of some 1000kms. The long march north started with a progressive rolling up of Turkish positions in the Sinai beginning with the occupation of Bir El Mazar and El Arish. On 20 December, El Arish was reported by No.1 Sqn as having been evacuated and was promptly occupied by the Australian Light Horse. The long-term surveillance flights conducted by No.1 Sqn over towns such as El Arish had established a clear understanding of the ground environment in terms of geography, force dispositions and pattern of life. It was through this appreciation of the battlespace that the intelligence gathered from surveillance and photo reconnaissance flights was effective.

Concurrent with the indication of El Arish's evacuation was the discovery of a corresponding increase in enemy forces concentrated opposite the British right flank at Magdhaba.[38] Based on the aerial reconnaissance reports, British mounted forces including the Light Horse moved out from El Arish on 22 December and surrounded Magdhaba the next morning before launching a determined assault on the town. Prior to the ground attack, diversionary air attacks were conducted around Irgeig, 90kms northeast of the Magdhaba. The attack had the effect of drawing in the German aircraft based at Beersheba away from the intended approach of the Light Horse. No.1 Sqn then followed up with direct attacks on Turkish positions in Magdhaba itself. Once the Light Horse commenced their assault, No.1 Sqn aircrews provided close air support with bombs and machine guns. The attack was strongly resisted by the Turks and the outcome hung in the balance until the Australian forces secured several of the more stubbornly defended strong points late in the day after sunset. [39] The victory at Magdhaba precipitated a general withdraw of Turkish force from the El Arish Wada region. Aerial reconnaissance found that the Turks had fallen back on a strong defensive line stretching from Gaza to Beersheba with a fortified position at Rafa, 30kms southwest of Gaza on the Sinai-Palestine frontier. As no advance could be made on Gaza without first dislodging the force at Rafa, a near carbon-copy of the attack on Magdhaba was launched against the enemy force estimated to be some 2000-3000 strong.

Despite several attacks on El Arish by German aircraft, No.1 Sqn remained committed to the Rafa action and its aircraft were used to screen the advance of the mounted forces on 8 January 1917 and to conduct reconnaissance patrols. The intelligence gathered by these patrols revealed that there were several strong enemy garrisons within a day's march of Rafa. During the ground assault on 9 January, No.1 Sqn flew surveillance patrols, conducted bombing attacks on the German airfield at Beersheba and provided regular updates on the progress of the assault. At sunset, a Turkish relief force consisting of some 1200 troops with artillery was seen approaching. However, the British attack was completed and the mounted column withdrawn before any serious contact was made with this force. A notable success of the Rafa attack was the use of airborne radio, used to communicate with the Royal Artillery

[38] Cutlack, p.48.
[39] http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/154693716, Accessed 14 April 2017.

batteries and with the RFC HQ.[40]

Fig.2: No.1 Sqn at Rafa. A BE2 returns from a reconnaissance mission.

The period after the fall of Rafa to the first of the Gaza Battles was occupied by the continued construction of road and rail links with the Suez Canal. Murray had determined that these vital logistics links were required at least as far north as Rafa before any attempt could be made on the Gaza-Beersheba lines. For No.1 Sqn and the RFC, flying operations continued unabated and the results being achieved were to have enduring effects through 1917.

A regular target for No.1 Sqn during January 1917 was German airfield at Beersheba. In a small irony, at the time the squadron was using the old German airbase near El Arish as a staging base in order to extend the range of the heavily laden aircraft. The routine raids at Beersheba eventually persuaded the German airmen that the airfield was no longer viable as a forward operating base. After a particularly successful attack in 19 January, when Capt Alan Murray-Jones placed twelve 20lb (pound) bombs in the main hangar, the base was evacuated. The impact on the German-Turkish air operations by the evacuation of the Beersheba base can only be guessed at. The presence of an operating airbase at Beersheba during the Light Horse envelopment of the town in October 1917 may have provided the means for both surveillance of the outflanking movement of the Light Horse as well as the launch of direct attacks on the column before it could threaten the town.

A repeated comment through both the AFC and RFC official histories of the campaign was the superiority of the German machines operated by the German airmen in support of their Turkish allies. Williams noted that the aircraft operated by No.1 Sqn through 1916-17, the Bristol Scout, the BE2c, 2e and 12a were underpowered and ill-armed to deal with enemy aircraft in the air.[41] Additionally both histories indicate that German aircrew were active in attacking AFC and RFC airfields, stores depots and the railway works and camps and that performance of their aircraft meant there was little chance of intercepting these raids even when there was ample warning given. However, despite holding the technological superiority the German airmen did not press home their advantage. No.1 Sqn could conduct regular surveillance patrols, reconnaissance and photographic missions and repeated raids on Turkish military infrastructure as well as the German airfields with little in the way of aggressive and

[40] Jones, p.194.
[41] Williams, *These Are Facts,* pp.48-50.

effective counterair from the German airmen. When contact was made in the air the odds were stacked against the Allied airmen, however, in the absence of an organised air defence and effective tactics, the attrition caused by the German airmen never threatened to establish German air control over the British or Turkish areas.[42]

In a marked contrast, the AFC and RFC tactics were very aggressive. After the German airbase at Beersheba was evacuated, British airmen began to extend their reconnaissance and surveillance patrols ever further north. As had become a routine practice, these patrols, as well as many bombing attacks, could be staged through advanced landing fields, which held the minimum needed by way of guards, fuel, spares and munitions, but were otherwise unoccupied by maintenance or aircraft facilities. The impact was that the main operating bases were far removed from easy attack while enabling extended missions to be conducted behind Turkish lines. The extended patrols were not just general reconnaissance, but targeted intelligence collection activities. In January 1917, the airmen were specifically searching for the location of the new German airfield while also photographing hitherto unseen Turkish military infrastructure and bases.[43]

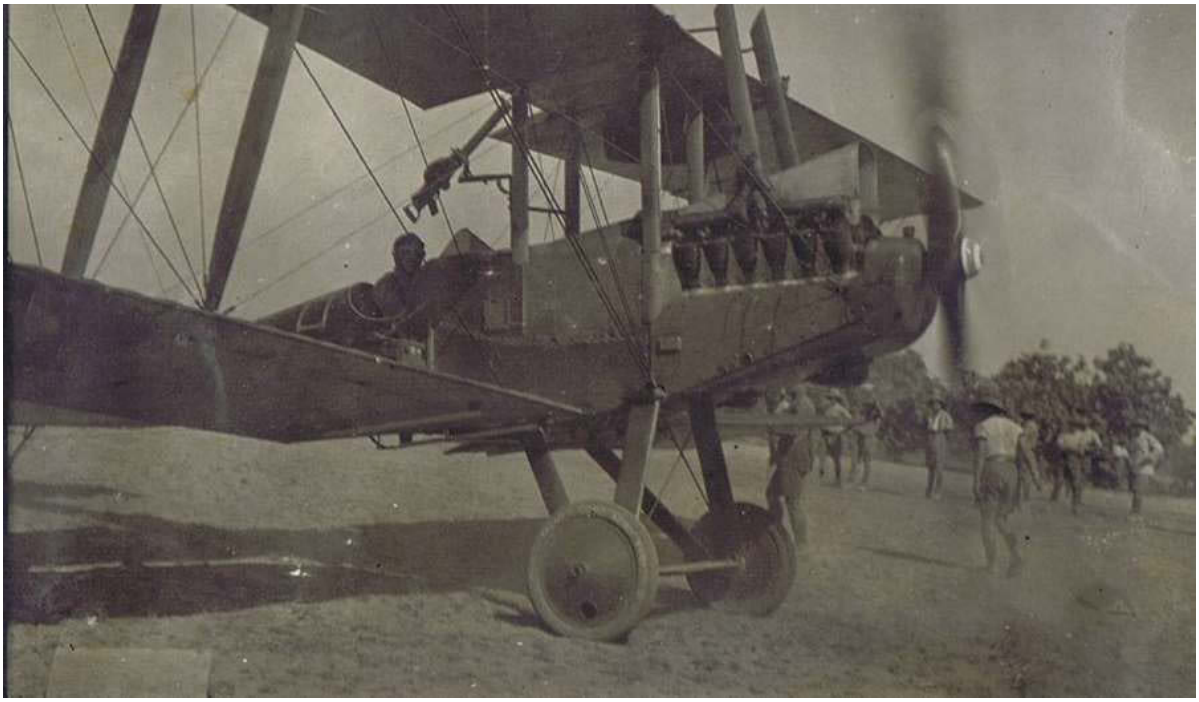

Fig.3: Deir el Belah. Capt Murray-Jones 'runs up' a BE12a.

After two failed attempts at locating the German airbase, Eric Roberts of No.1 Sqn again set out in company with Ross Smith as his observer in a BE2e on 29 January. On this mission Roberts was escorted by two Martinsyde single-seaters. Roberts' last reconnaissance mission had nearly ended in tragedy when his aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire over Weli Sheikh Nuran (a redoubt between Gaza and Beersheba). In the encounter, Roberts' aircraft was badly damaged, while his observer, Lt George Mills, was severely injured when he was struck by a piece of shrapnel. Despite the damage to his aircraft, Roberts managed to return to base before Mills bled to death.[44]

The 29 January flight was to be far more successful than the previous attempts. After seeing

[42] Cutlack, p.46.
[43] Ibid, p.49.
[44] NAA: B2455, MILLS GEORGE NEWNHAM accessed 31 July 2017.

suspicious wheel marks on the ground near Ramleh, approximately 30kms northeast of Jerusalem, Roberts and Smith came under heavy anti-aircraft fire. There below them, concealed under trees were a series of hangers and aircraft. The elusive German airfield was found.[45] In keeping with the aggressive tactics then employed by the squadron, on 1 February, a raid consisting of four BE2e aircraft escorted by four Martinsyde fighters was launched against this new airfield. Roberts, as one of the few pilots who could identify the location of the target led the attack, recording several direct hits with 120lb bombs.

Roberts records in his memoirs some additional information concerning combat flying in World War I. As was found by many aircrew through the conflict and those in World War II, the cost of flying under constant stress could have a debilitating effect on aircrew health. After the near loss of his observer, George Mills, and that of his aircraft, Roberts began to have trouble sleeping and suffered loss of concentration while flying. After the Ramleh raid, Roberts reported to the squadron medical officer and was promptly removed from flying due to stress. Roberts was not unique in this experience. Sir Richard Williams was also hospitalised for a short period in 1916 suffering from 'shell shock'. For Williams, it was a minor issue, but for Roberts the condition was far worse and he never flew on operations again.

Fig.4: No.1 Sqn CO, Maj Williams (centre) looks over his unit one morning at Mejdel.

The attacks on the German airfield at Ramleh were no simple act of aggression, but one of the few means whereby the British could assert control of the air over the far superior German aircraft. If the allied airmen were to maintain their wide area surveillance and ground support to the ground units, the prevention of German air control was critical. In February and March this contest in the air became increasingly hard fought. Not only did the German flyers become more active in attacking airfields and aircraft, but were targeting the railway and depots established as part of Murray's impending attack on the Gaza-Beersheba line. The situation in the air was increasingly perilous for the British flyers due to a marked increase in the number and proficiency of Turkish anti-aircraft batteries in the Gaza region.[46]

For their part, the British squadrons focused on clearing out the last of the Turkish forces in

[45] Roberts, p.31.
[46] Cutlack, pp.52-57 & 61.

the Sinai Peninsula and attacks on railway and supply depots behind the Gaza-Beersheba line, while also keeping pressure on the German flyers through continual attacks on enemy airfields. Less glamorous but extremely critical was the photographing of the enemy positions around Gaza. The tempo of operations had the effect of expending all of the available bombs, with the ground assault on Gaza imminent there was an imperative to maintain the bombing offensive. The solution to the logistics problem was to modify 6-inch howitzer shells for use from aircraft, and while seemingly to work well, were never really trusted by Williams.[47]

Williams' distrust of the bombs proved to be well founded. On 20 March while No.1 Sqn was attacking the railway between Junction Station and Tel el Sheria, a shell released by Frank McNamara exploded prematurely, wounding him in the right thigh. Despite this wound, when McNamara saw another No.1 Sqn aircraft land near the railway after being hit by anti-aircraft fire, he did not hesitate to land beside the stricken aircraft to rescue the downed pilot, Capt Douglas Rutherford. With Rutherford standing on the wing, McNamara attempted to take off before a column of Turkish cavalry seen in the distance arrived. However, because of his wound McNamara was unable to control his aircraft and crashed. This left Rutherford's BE2c aircraft as the only option. The two airmen managed to restart this aircraft and return to base with some difficulty, as McNamara was nearly unconscious due to blood loss.[48] For his gallant act, McNamara was awarded the Victoria Cross, one of only four to be awarded to Australian airmen and the only one awarded to an AFC member.

Unfortunately for Rutherford, his recue only delayed the inevitable. Within two weeks he was wounded in the right leg during the first Battle of Gaza and was unfit to fly (his observer, Lt Hyam, died of his wounds). After two months in hospital he was sent back to Australia for three months, retuning to duty in in 1918.[49] On 1 May 1918 he was piloting a Bristol Fighter, with Lt McElligott as his observer and a second aircraft flown by Lts Haig (pilot) and Challinor (observer). The airmen were screening a force of mounted infantry who were operating near Amman and dropping leaflets to the local Arabs when Rutherford's fuel tanks were ruptured by a burst of accurate machine gun fire from a Turkish ground position. Rutherford once again made a forced landing and experienced watching a fellow pilot land beside him in a rescue attempt. This time things did not go as planned. While attempting to take off with four people on board an aircraft designed for two, one of the wheels collapsed, leaving all four airmen stranded behind enemy lines. With no other options, they surrendered to a troop of Circassian cavalry and were handed over to the German Flying Corps. Rutherford and his colleagues then spent the remainder of the war in a POW camp.[50]

On 26 March 1917, just over a month after McNamara's heroic flight, the first Battle of Gaza began. Prior to the battle starting, No.1 Sqn photographed the entire stretch of defences around Gaza, conducted repeated strikes intended to limit logistics support to the forward area and disrupted enemy air operations to the full extent possible. During the battle, No.1 Sqn's role was to provide accurate intelligence on Turkish troop movements and to report the progress of the attack. However, the ground assault did not meet with the success expected and the imminent arrival of Turkish reinforcements resulted in the British forces having to withdraw from the very outskirts of Gaza itself.[51]

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[47] Williams, *These Are Facts,* p.61.
[48] NAA: B2455*, McNamara F H*.
[49] NAA: B2455, *Rutherford, Douglas Wallace*.
[50] Ibid.
[51] LTGEN Sir H. G. Chauvel, NAA: A1194, 33.68/15152, *The Australian Light Horse in the Great War*.

Without sufficient forces to re-attack Gaza immediately, the British entrenched in front of the Turkish positions and entered a period of trench warfare. For No.1 Sqn the following month was spent in the same duties as those preceding the first Battle of Gaza. The air opposition increased significantly, with Williams noting that there appeared to be more German aircraft and they were more aggressive in the air. On 19 April, the second Battle for Gaza started, a frontal assault supported by tanks. However, the Turkish forces were well entrenched and were particularly well served by their artillery, rapidly putting the tanks out of action and forcing the attacking troops to retreat to their own lines. Without doubt the Second Battle of Gaza was even less successful than the first a month prior.[52]

Fig.5: A No.1 Sqn reconnaissance photo of Turkish redoubts just prior the Third battle for Gaza.

For No.1 Sqn, their attacks on Turkish cavalry on 20 April were to bring some success to the British efforts that month. Acting on intelligence and radio intercepts, No.1 Sqn was ordered to patrol with four aircraft the right flank of the Light Horse encampment then at Shellal. As anticipated, a large force of Turkish cavalry was caught in the open while watering their horses at a small dam. Williams records that the attack was particularly effective in breaking up formation and completely disrupting the planned attack on the Light Horse encampment.[53]

Williams' attack was a remarkable achievement. With only four aircraft he was able to disrupt and prevent a major ground attack. This event, and other similar air attacks during World War I, marked a major paradigm shift in military thinking. The aerial surveillance and photographic work of units such as No.1 Sqn meant that army commanders were no longer able to manoeuvre at will, free from enemy observation. Similarly, unless control of the air was maintained through active or passive air defence, ground forces were increasingly vulnerable from air attack. The action at Shellal was but a foretaste of a far more significant attack at Wadi Farah in September 1918.

The period after the Second Battle of Gaza was one of restructure and re-equipping of the British forces in the Middle East. Lt Gen Murray was replaced by Gen Sir Edmund Allenby in June and additional units sent to the region to reinforce British forces then in the region. The increase in strength was not limited to the ground forces only. No.1 Sqn found itself part of a much larger air component with the formation of additional RFC squadrons and with a new commanding officer, Maj Richard Williams. By October 1917 the RFC had formed the

[52] Ibid.
[53] Williams, *These Are Facts,* p.65.

Palestine Brigade consisting of two wings under the command of Brig Gen W. Salmond, with No.1 Sqn forming part of No.40 Wing with No.111 Sqn RFC.[54] The AFC squadron also had a turnover of personnel as the RFC officers serving in the unit were replaced by Australian aircrew, as well as enjoying the welcome arrival of new RE8 two-seaters and re-engined Martinsyde fighters. As much as the RE8 was an improvement over the older BE2 and 12as, as well as the Martinsydes, the Australian aircrew looked on with some envy on the new Bristol Fighters operated by their sister squadron, No.111 Sqn. Williams considered the Bristols the finest aircraft to serve in World War I and was so impressed by these aircraft that he specifically requested the type when Australia was offered 100 'gift' aircraft from Britain in 1920, and was disappointed when different aircraft types were selected.[55]

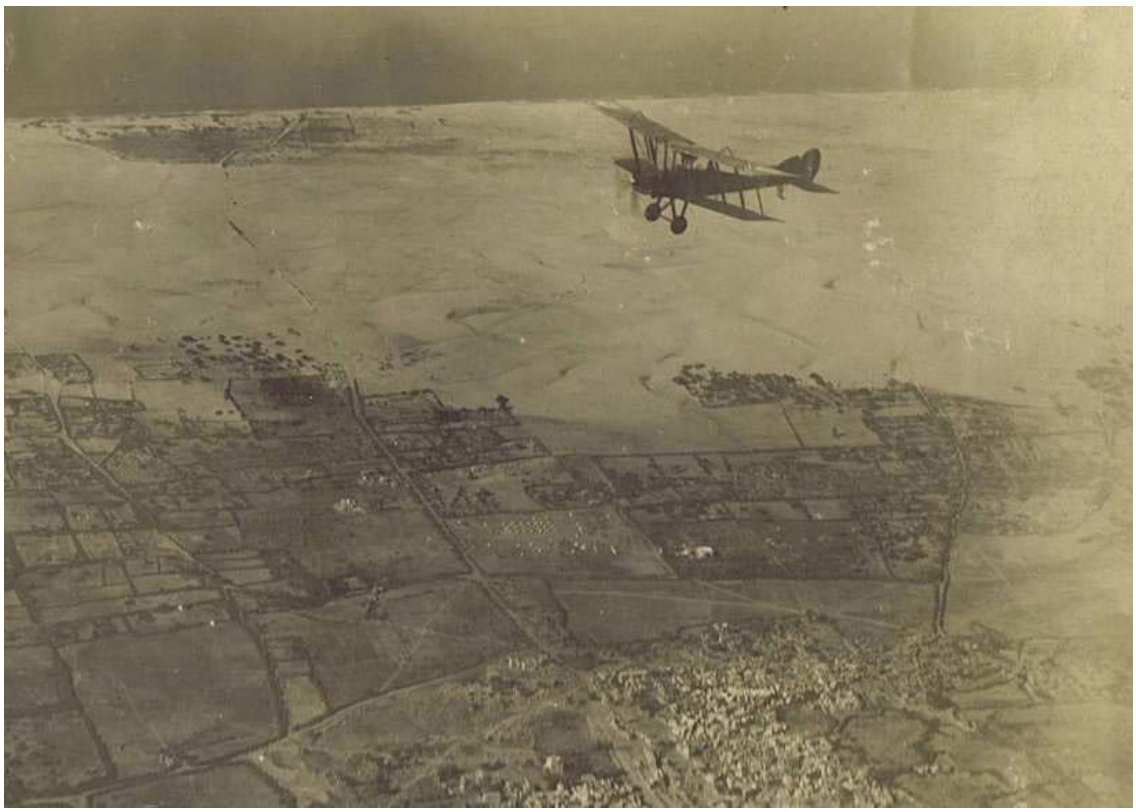

Fig.6: 'Dicky' (Maj Williams) – flying his old favourite, BE2a 4312 – has a look at Gaza.

As part of the structure of the RFC Brigade was the division of responsibilities between the two Wings. No.5 Wing was designated a 'Corps' Wing, meaning its squadrons were responsible for providing air support directly for tactical ground formations, whereas No.40 Wing, of which No.1 Sqn was part, was an 'Army' Wing, meaning its duties were centred on strategic reconnaissance and photography.[56] This division of roles was to have a major impact on the rest of No.1 Sqn's operations in Palestine; its focus became centred on long-range operations and as events would show, not limited to the strategic roles first envisioned by the term 'strategic reconnaissance'.

The Third Battle of Gaza began on 31 October 1917, and as had become the usual practice, No.1 Sqn was heavily committed to reconnaissance and photographic work over the Turkish

[54] Jones, p.227.
[55] Chris Coultard-Clark, *The Third Brother: The Royal Australian Air Force 1921-39*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p.160.
[56] Major S.W. Addison – Commanding, *1st Squadron, AFC. Review of Operations.* Dated March 1919. RAAF Museum Collection.

lines between Gaza and Beersheba in the weeks before the fighting started on the ground. These flights were greatly facilitated by having escorts provided by the improved Martinsyde aircraft from within their own squadron and the Bristol fighters of No.111 Sqn. In the many encounters with German aircraft, due in part to additional units moving to the front from Germany, several No.1 Sqn aircraft and crews were lost – some killed in action, while others became prisoners of war. What remained the same was that once the tactical situation in most air-to-air engagements began to favour the Australians, the German aircraft preferred to use the superior performance of their aircraft to break off contact rather than continue the fight.

Once the ground assault started along the Gaza-Beersheba line, No.1 Sqn aircrew attacked specific ground targets, beginning with Williams conducting an attack on Gaza on 1 November. Once the breakthrough came at Beersheba, when the Australian Light Horse charged into the heart of the town, there soon followed success by the infantry opposite Tel el Sheria and then ultimately at Gaza itself. By 6 November, No.1 Sqn reconnaissance detected large numbers of Turkish troops retreating north towards Mejdel. In an influential series of bombing raids over the 6-8 November the AFC and RFC aircrews were able to encourage further retreat from Mejdel and forced the early evacuation of three German airfields before all their equipment was ready for transport. Further bombing attacks were made whenever troop concentrations or new airfields became apparent through reconnaissance and intelligence reports.[57] The constantly evolving operational picture on the ground meant that the services of No.1 Sqn in the photo-reconnaissance and bomber role remained in demand until the lines stabilised again in mid-December.

The dislocation of the Turkish and German forces from their positions on the Gaza-Beersheba line began a general collapse of effective resistance until the Turkish front stabilised on a line extending from the northern end of the Dead Sea to a point some 100kms northwest to the Mediterranean coast. While some resistance was met on the ground as the British forced advanced on Jerusalem, it was largely piecemeal and delayed the British advance rather than stopping it outright. Jerusalem fell on 9 December with Allenby entering the city on the 11th.[58] After months of static warfare in the south of Palestine, in a mere 42 days the strategic situation in Palestine had been dramatically altered. No.1 Sqn had been a highly effective part of the entire campaign.

Throughout its service in the Sinai and Palestine during 1916-17, the most recurring issue expressed within No.1 Sqn was the deficiency in their aircraft performance compared to that of their German opposition. With the renewal of offensive operations in 1918, came the welcome addition to the squadron's aircraft in the form of Bristol Fighters. In a major rejuvenation of No 40 Wing's aircraft, No.111 Sqn was re-equipped with SE5a fighters and their now surplus Bristol Fighters transferred to No.1 Sqn. For the first time in the war, No.1 Sqn could compete in the air on equal footing against the German Aviation Corps.

The great advance north in the closing days of 1917 meant that No.1 Sqn, now positioned at Mejdel, was now able to reconnoitre into hitherto inaccessible areas of Palestine and to gather additional photographic and visual intelligence of the Turkish and German forces in the region north of Jerusalem. Success came early when in January when Ross Smith located a large German airfield near El Afule. On 3 January 1918, eight aircraft from No.1 Sqn with an additional eight RFC aircraft attacked the airfield, achieving excellent results with several

[57] NSW State Library, *Resume of 40th Wing Operations, Royal Flying Corps.* https://transcripts.sl.nsw.gov.au/page/353105/view, accessed 25 August 2017.
[58] Fld Mshl Viscount Wavell, *Allenby: Soldier and Statesman,* George Harrap, London, 1946, pp.185-93.

hangars destroyed along with at least one aircraft that had been parked out in the open. Not only was the raid a success, but No.1 Sqn scored its first confirmed air-to-air kill when Lts Austin (p) and Sutherland (o) shot down an Albatross scout which was attempting to attack the raiding the Australian formation as it came off target. Later that day, the squadron added maritime strike to its repertoire when aircrew attacked boats and wharfs on the Dead Sea near El Kelat. Aircrew were surprised to note that this action took place at 1200 feet below sea level.[59]

Fig.7: No.1 Sqn's first glimpse of Jerusalem.

While the destruction of the enemy aviation and logistics assets was useful, the photographic work done by No.1 Sqn in January 1918 was of far greater importance to the campaign as a whole. When it was appreciated that the British maps of the region north of Jerusalem were inaccurate and lacked detail, No.1 Sqn was tasked with completing an extensive photo-survey to enable more accurate maps to be made. In all an area of 624 square miles was photographed over a period of just 14 days, exposing 1616 plates and producing 7783 prints. In the following month, an additional 194 square miles was photographed requiring the exposure of an additional 507 plates, yielding a further 5112 prints. The information the prints provided to the intelligence corps and the cartographers of Allenby's HQs resulted in redrawn maps which in turn was provided to all levels of command in the theatre, generating a whole-of-theatre effect of enduring value. So, while the photographic work was at times mundane and exacting, its importance to the conduct of operations was a great value.[60]

January 1918 marked another milestone for No.1 Sqn. From its arrival in Egypt in April 1916 it was known officially within the RFC as 'No.67 Sqn RFC', despite repeated requests from the squadron and from Australia to cease the practice. A similar RFC squadron designation was applied to the other seven AFC units then flying with the RFC in France and Britain. In January, the RFC policy changed. From that month forward, all AFC squadrons were to be referred to by their Australian squadron numbers only.

The work being conducted by No.1 Sqn in the months leading up to the great offensive of September 1918 was consistent with its previous employment to date. What changed was the

[59] Addison op. cit. March 1919.
[60] Ibid.

increasing complexity of the terrain over which the British ground forces were to operate. The effect was to place an increased demand on No.1 Sqn for reconnaissance and surveillance as well as an increase in tactical support to the troops moving through the deeply ravined and broken country in the Jordan River Valley and in approaches to the Amman northeast of Jerusalem.

Fig.8: Weli Sheikh Nuran airfield. Lts Kenny, Sutherland and mascot aboard a Bristol Fighter. Sutherland claimed to have carried the mascot on numerous operations.

As had also become common practice, No.1 Sqn was also tasked with conducting raids on targets either in direct support of ground operations or to mislead Turkish and German forces as to the real target of ground attacks, In February, when Allenby's ground forces were driving towards Jericho and north along the Jordan Valley, No.1 Sqn provided close contact support for the British forces moving through the broken terrain to provide advance warning of enemy ambush and troop concentrations. Where viable, these troops were attacked from the air. On 21 February, a particularly large body of Turkish reinforcements was located near Shumet Nimrin and was immediately attacked. When the area was patrolled the following day, it was clear that this force had retreated and the way was clear for the ground forces to continue their advance along the Jordan Valley.

In March, the British intended to advance northeast of Jericho towards Amman and to Es Salt. While preparations were being made for this offensive, No.1 Sqn patrols found increasing signs of enemy reinforcements moving into the area; clearly the British advance was anticipated. Es Salt was occupied on 25 March, but the advance on Amman stalled in the face of fierce opposition to the extent that the whole British line had to retreat to the Jordan River, including the occupation force at Es Salt.[61] No.1 Sqn flew almost continually over the retreating troops, providing both intelligence on Turkish troop movements and close air support.

[61] Wavell, pp.207-08.

Fig.9: No.1 Sqn's base at Mejdel.

Another attempt to take Amman and Es Salt was attempted 30 April-4 May, but again the Turkish forces in the region mounted a skilful defence. Additionally, in a rare failure, No.1 Sqn patrols failed to identify a strong Turkish force near Mafid Jozele. These troops were able to mount a successful counterattack on the Light Horse Brigade. The combined pressure of the increasingly effective counter-attacks forced another British retreat to the Jordan River.

In the months April to August 1918, No.1 Sqn became more active in the air defence role than had previously been the case, with three enemy aircraft shot down in April, six destroyed and a further four damaged/driven down. In May and in June the squadron conducted 133 'hostile air patrols' and 24 bomber escort missions, accounting for four destroyed and eight damaged/driven down. During July the unit accounted for four aircraft destroyed and a further nine driven down/damaged. In August the unit accounted for 10 aircraft destroyed and a further nine driven down/damaged.[62]

There was in May and again in August something of a diversion for the unit. On 16 May, Ross Smith was assigned to transport Lawrence of Arabia to Kerak and to Kutrani to meet with Arab forces belonging to the Sherif of Mecca. In August in a surprising development, No.1 Sqn was allotted a Handley Page O/400 bomber. This aircraft, the only one of its type in theatre, was allotted to No.1 Sqn for long-range bombing attacks. Ross Smith was chosen to pilot the aircraft, and this choice was to place him and No.1 Sqn once again in Lawrence's company the following month.

September 1918 was something of the apogee of No.1 Sqn's wartime experience. In September Allenby launched his final offensive of the Palestine campaign and this advance would see his forces reach Aleppo before the Turks agreed to peace terms. During the month, No.1 Sqn flew a total of 866 hours, the highest total yet flown by the unit; 116 684 rounds were expended and 41 618lbs of bombs were dropped. A total of 156 separate ground attacks were conducted across the extreme ends of the front lines from Amman in the east to the Mediterranean coast in the west. While the statistics for the offensive operations are impressive for a unit flying 18 small biplanes and a single O/400, the core function of the squadron as a strategic reconnaissance unit was not ignored, with 387 plates exposed and 6235 prints produced.[63]

[62] Addison, March 1919.
[63] Ibid.

Fig.10: The No.1 Sqn Armourers: Sgts Harman and Moore and their trusty men.

Allenby's great offensive, known as the 'Battle of Megiddo', began on 19 September when No.1 Sqn's O/400 bombed the railway station at Afule. At 0415h troops on the British extreme left launched a series of coordinated attacks on the Turkish lines. In a rare event during World War I, the infantry opened a gap in the front lines and the cavalry was able to penetrate into the enemy's rear areas. In an action described a 'swinging door', British forces rapidly advanced along the coast before swinging inland in an enveloping movement around Megiddo.[64] As air attacks by the RAF had knocked out the main Turkish HQs and communications centre, most commands were unaware of the developing situation until it was too late to withdraw. As the attack in the west gained momentum, Lawrence and his Arab forces attacked towards Deraa in the east. Now threatened by a general advance to the right and an immediate threat to the east, the Turkish forces in the Es Salt and Amman regions began a retreat on 21 September. With so many Turkish and German formations now on the roads, they became targets for the aircraft which were free to roam across the region at will.

The most graphic example of the effectiveness of aircraft against troops caught in the open occurred on 21 September when the Turkish Seventh Army was retreating along the Ferweh road through the Wadi Farah. A force estimated to be between 5000 and 7000 strong was located by a No.1 Sqn aircraft at approximately 0700h and a sighting report was immediately sent back the Williams' Wing HQ. From 0800h until 1200h the Turkish column came under near constant air attack. Caught in a region of rugged narrow gullies, the troops were unable to avoid the unremitting air attacks. In Williams' words, 'the Seventh Army ceased to exist'.[65] As had been demonstrated repeatedly in World War I, the rise of air power had fundamentally changed the nature of conflict.

Not everything was going the way of the Allies, however. During the advance of Lawrence's Arab irregular forces on Deraa they came into range of the German aircraft operating in the area. With no form of air cover, this force was suffering under the dual problem of constant losses from air attacks and a rise in desertions owing to the impact the attacks were having on

[64] Wavell, pp.230-31.
[65] Williams, *These Are Facts,* p.96.

morale. The response was to dispatch two Bristol Fighters to Lawrence's location near Deraa to provide air cover to his forces.

The deployment of the aircraft worked well. While having breakfast with Lawrence on their first morning, the Australian crews scrambled to meet four incoming German aircraft. In five minutes one of the enemy aircraft had been destroyed and the others had been driven off. The action was quick and decisive, and breakfast was resumed in short order; in Lawrence's words, 'Our sausages were still hot; we ate them, and drank our tea.'[66] To sustain the Bristol Fighter deployment with Lawrence, Ross Smith and the Handley Page was employed in an airlift role to supply fuel, spares and food and munitions. The sight of the giant O/400 arriving at Lawrence's camp inspired those whose confidence had been waning and had more of an effect on morale than did the efforts of the Bristol Fighters.[67]

The Battle of Megiddo completely disrupted the Turkish forces in the region. On 1 October, the Australian Light Horse occupied Damascus and by 8 October Beirut was also captured. On 25 October Aleppo too was occupied; after a brief clash on the outskirts of Aleppo on 26 October the fighting ended. On 31 October an armistice with Turkey was agreed. No.1 Sqn's war was over. In fact, October was still an extremely busy time for No.1 Sqn. Until the armistice was agreed it was unknown what threats may be posed by a resurgent Turkish Army, so a regimen of constant patrol and surveillance was maintained. The final aerial victory of the squadron occurred on 23 October over the last known active German airbase just north of north of Aleppo. Two enemy machines were forced down and the airfield was strafed. When the Australian airmen return to the airfield the next day, it was found deserted.

With offensive operations at an end, the need to keep the large British forces in the region had well passed. By December 1918, No.1 Sqn had returned to its former base at Ramleh and from there made it way ack to Kantara in Egypt. After a period of reorganisation and returning of equipment to the RAF, on 5 March No.1 Sqn sailed home to Australia on board the HMAT *Port Sydney*.

It seems appropriate in allowing Sir Richard Williams to conclude this narrative No.1 Sqn's experience of the desert campaign. Williams was with the unit on its arrival in April 1916 and was still close to the unit as its Wing Commander when operations ceased in October 1918. When he was promoted to command No.40 Wing, Williams noted the following:

> Month after month No.1 Squadron was at the top of the list in all operational statistics, such as hours flown, aerial combats, bombs dropped, ammunition expended, photographs taken and so on. The squadron also headed the daily list of serviceable aircraft. It had been my great privilege and pride to be the captain of that team.[68]

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[66] T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks01/0100111h.html#landing, CXIV.
[67] Addison, March 1919.
[68] Williams, *These Are Facts,* p.86.

DR LAURA ELIZABETH FORSTER

Rob Leicester Wagner

As Dr Laura Elizabeth Forster stood on the platform at London's Victoria Station, she must have pondered with some amusement the fuss from bystanders over the departure of her medical unit's doctors and nurses for the war front. It was 4 September 1914 and Great Britain had only been at war with Germany a month when the British Committee of the French Red Cross, the umbrella group supervising Forster's unit, was established. The train was taking the team to Folkestone for the boat trip across the channel to a Red Cross hospital near the front in Antwerp, Belgium. It would not be Forster's first time in a combat zone. Although she was a seasoned physician in London, she had volunteered as a nurse – female doctors were not permitted near the front lines – to travel to Epirus in the autumn of 1912 to treat the wounded during the First Balkan War. Then, few Britons seem to notice that a war was raging. The commotion she was witnessing two years later at Victoria Station was an entirely new experience.[1]

Nine nurses dressed in pristine violet cloaks and sky blue dresses, four male doctors in khakis and four female physicians were on the platform for a send-off by family members and colleagues. Accompanying them were drivers, orderlies and an unexpected quartet of women farmers dressed in crisp officer's khaki tunics, breeches and sun helmets. At Folkestone the attention was even greater as a film camera operator convinced the group, about 20 members in all, to march down the quay as he cranked his camera to record their departure. They may have been heroes in their mismatched uniforms, but they were not military. Unlike the Royal Army Medical Corps, where only male physicians were sent to the front, women medical officers had no such military support. They volunteered to private organisations to treat the wounded and the rampant diseases among refugees in war zones. While the British Expeditionary Force documented the services of its personnel, many private organisations' record-keeping was haphazard or lost.

As a result, most independent women doctors were rarely recognised for their sacrifices during the Great War. Forster's contributions to the war effort are officially documented through the British Committee of the French Red Cross as serving a single month in a combat zone – 14 September to 14 October 1914 – although she worked as a surgeon and epidemic specialist for 29 consecutive months at the fronts in Belgium, France, Russia, the Caucasus and Turkey.[2] Even documentation from members of the British Committee gives female physicians short shrift. In his book, *A Surgeon in Belgium* (1915), Sir Henry Sessions Souttar gave a detailed first-hand account of the committee's Antwerp operations while under attack by the German Army in September and October 1914. Souttar praised the unit's medical director, Dr J. Hartnell Beavis, for supervising the delivery of aid under fire, but he mentioned no other staff member by name. Beavis's four female doctors – Forster, Alice

[1] Jennifer Baker, 'Australian Women Doctors who served in WW1', https://sites.google.com/site/archoevidence/home/ww1womendoctors?tmpl=%2Fsystem%2Fapp%2Ftemplates%2Fprint%2F&showPrintDialog=1.

[2] British Committee French Red Cross, *Roll of Individuals entitled to the Victory Medal and British War Medal Granted Under Army Orders*, London, 24 February 1921 (Forster, Sept.-Oct. 1914), pp.B19, B20, B21; Dr J. Hartnell Beavis, late director, British Field Hospital for Belgium and H.S. Souttar, FRCS, assistant surgeon, West London Hospital, 'A Field Hospital in Belgium', *The British Medical Journal*, Vol.1, No.2819 (Jan. 9, 1915), pp.64-66; Dr Henry Sessions Souttar, *A Surgeon in Belgium*, Edward Arnold, 1915, pp.1-42; Katherine Storr, *Excluded from the Record: Women, Refugees, and Relief, 1914-1929*, Peter Lange AG, 2009; 'Casualties in the Medical Services – Dr. Laura E. Forster', *British Medical Journal* 10 March 1917, p.345.

Benham, Dorothea Clara Maude and Ethel Baker – were never identified, nor was their performance in the operating theatre acknowledged. None of the original four women doctors returned to Beavis's medical unit after the Antwerp operation when the group was later dispatched to Furnes, France.[3]

Such is the lot of an independent physician. Forster would join the Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units operated by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in early 1916 in Russia. *The Common Cause*, a magazine published by the NUWSS, and *The British Journal for Nursing* reported on some of Forster's work. As an itinerant surgeon, she travelled after about a year in Northern France to Petrograd in the autumn of 1915 to treat the ill and wounded. Later she joined the Russian Red Cross to serve in the Caucasus and then in Erzurum, Turkey. Although she sacrificed her life saving thousands of war refugees and soldiers, her work remains largely unknown.[4]

A Medical and Military Family

Fig.1: Laura E. Forster at 21 years old while a student at the University of Karlsruhe in Germany. (Courtesy The Women's College Archives, University of Sydney)

Not that it mattered to Forster. Unassuming and private by nature, she inherited a fierce independent streak from her father, William Forster, a mercurial Australian grazier, politician and poet. Her mother was the former Elizabeth Jane Wall. Few details can be found of Laura's early life in Ryde, New South Wales, where she was born. Her grandfather was Dr Thomas Forster, a surgeon in the 14th Light Dragoons in the British Army. Her childhood was spent on the sprawling 25-acre grounds of the Brush Farm Estate near Ryde that had been in the family since 1807. Her upbringing by all indications was idyllic and comfortable.

Laura was the youngest daughter. Her mother died when she was four. She was left in the care of her sister, Mary Elizabeth, who was 12 years older. In 1873, the 55-year-old William married Maud Julia Edwards, a 26-year-old beauty from Devon, England. With William, Maud gave Laura a half-sister, Enid, and three half-brothers. The boys – John, Herbert and Lionel – would have distinguished military careers and all would die in the Great War.[5]

[3] Beavis and Souttar, 'A Field Hospital in Belgium', pp.64-66; Anonymous War Nurse, *A War Nurse's Diary: Sketches from a Belgian Field Hospital*, MacMillan, New York, 1918; Souttar, *A Surgeon in Belgium*, pp.1-42.
[4] *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 8 December 1916, p.464; 15 December 1916, p.478; 5 January 1917, p.516; 19 January 1917, p.535; 23 February 1917, p.610; and 2 March 1917, p.625.
[5] Dr Laura Elizabeth Forster family tree, Ancestry.com, https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/65253452/person/160052625067/facts; Bede Nairn, 'Forster, William (1818-1882)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol.4, Melbourne UP, 1972.

It was Maud who would have a profound influence on Laura, but it wasn't until her father died in 1882 and Maud re-married that her impact on Laura would become apparent. John, Herbert and Lionel's interest in the military, and Laura's as well, was due to Maud's new husband. In 1884, Maud took the children to Devon. There, she married in 1889 Capt John Burn-Murdoch, the son of a physician and member of the Royal Engineers. He served in the 1879-80 Afghan War, where he was severely wounded, the 1882 Egyptian Expedition and the Boer War in South Africa in 1900. Listening to her stepfather's adventures in exotic countries, and watching from a distance her brothers enjoy important military careers, surely had shaped young Laura's appetite for adventure and government service.[6]

Laura, who was educated at Sydney schools, was already thinking ahead to adventure and how she could achieve her dreams of travel and service. One piece of tantalising evidence of her passion for travel is a photograph of her taken when she was 21 years old and inscribed with 'Karlsruhe 1879-1882', indicating that she spent some time in the German city and perhaps at Karlsruhe University, although there is no known documentation that she was a student there. It is likely she also mastered German since her dissertation at the University of Berne, 'Zur Kenntniss Muskelspindlen', *Virchow's Archive* (1894), on muscle spindle fibres, was written and published in German. [7]

In June 1887, Laura sat for her preliminary examinations for admission to medical school. After passing her exam, she registered at Berne University on 19 July. On 1 November she began her first day of classes. She studied at the Pathological Institute for twelve semesters researching muscle spindle fibres. After graduating with a medical degree in 1894, she returned to England. The following year she passed her British Qualifications exams to become a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, and the Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Surgeons, both in Edinburgh. She was among 39 medical graduates to pass the qualifications out of a total of 95 sitting for the exams.[8]

Despite her impressive credentials and becoming a member of the British Medical Association and the Association of Registered Medical Women, Forster faced the same obstacles virtually all female physicians in 1895 encountered: There were no jobs available to women in British general hospitals, and certainly no surgical positions. Female physicians were relegated to employment at hospitals and clinics founded by women and specifically to treat women, children and orphans. Forster found work as a medical officer at the Cutler Boulter Provident Dispensary in Oxford and established a separate private practice.[9]

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[6] Statement of Services of John Burn-Murdoch of the Royal Engineers, p.361, https://www.fold3.com/image/524723525?rec=613982727.

[7] Laura Forster, Zur Kenntnis der Muskelspindeln, Inaugural Dissertation, Erlangung der Doktorwürde einer hohen medizinischen Fakultät der Universität Bern, vorgelegt von Laura Forster, (Aus Sydney), Berlin, 1894.

[8] *The British Medical Journal, Universities and Colleges*, p.253; The Medical Directory for 1905 (Sixty-first annual issue); Mary R.S. Creese and Thomas M. Creese, *Ladies in the Laboratory III: South African, Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian Women in Science: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Scarecrow Press, 2010, pp.37, 64, 75, 230; *Registered During the Year 1894: The General Council of Medical Education and Registration of the United Kingdom*, London, 1895, p.34; *Council of Medical Education and Registration of the United Kingdom*, London, 1895, p.34.

[9] *The Medical Directory for 1905* (Sixty-first annual issue); Creese and Creese, *Ladies in the Laboratory III*, pp.37, 64, 75, 230; *British Medical Journal*, 'Casualties in the Medical Services – Dr. Laura E. Forster', p.345; and Dr Laura Forster, LRCP & S Edin, MD, Berne, 'Histological Examination of the Ovaries in Mental Disease', communicated by F W Mott, Major RAM (T), MD, FRS, 13 March 1917. pp.1, 3, 67, 70, 83.

While the Cutler Boulter position was perhaps unchallenging, working in Oxford gave Forster access to the top medical practitioners at Oxford University. Her first interest was determining the causes and effects of ovarian diseases in severely mentally ill women. Using the pathology laboratory at the Claybury Asylum, she performed autopsies on about 100 deceased women received from London and Charing Cross hospitals. An important mentor on the project was Dr Frederick Mott, who published Forster's findings posthumously one month after her death in 1917. In 1907, she published a research paper on the histology of tubercular human lymphatic glands under the supervision of Dr Gustav Mann. In her paper on diseased ovaries, Forster credited a dozen male physicians for assisting her in the research, an extraordinary number of doctors in a profession that in Victorian England was generally hostile to women physicians.[10]

Onward to Belgium

At 56, Forster was older than the rest of the medical staff leaving for Antwerp. Very small, with elfin features, and somewhat frail-looking even when she was in the best of health, Forster was someone who didn't necessarily telegraph her presence. But she was the only member of the medical team with experience in a combat zone.

Fig.2: Dr Alice Benham at a young age in England. She was Dr Forster's best friend during the war. (Courtesy Anne Gretton)

Following two nights in Folkestone, the party on 8 September took an old paddle steamer, the *Marie Henriette*, with a destroyer escort and crossed the English Channel in rough waters to Ostend. The unit spent a night in a train station waiting room. Part of the group then took the night train to Antwerp while the rest followed in six automobiles through Bruges and Ghent to their destination.[11] Their hospital on Boulevard Leopold was a former Duke's palace converted to a grammar school. The staff unpacked their equipment and belongings but otherwise remained idle for three days until a flood of wounded Belgian and British soldiers, about 170 in all, arrived and overwhelmed the wards. There were not enough beds, and nurses were turned out of their quarters to give the wounded accommodation.

Forster, Benham, Maude, Baker and nine nurses spent long shifts in the operating theatre assisting Beavis and Souttar. The theatre had three long windows facing a courtyard that

[10] Ibid.

[11] British Committee French Red Cross, *Roll of Individuals entitled to the Victory Medal and British War Medal Granted Under Army Orders*, pp.B19, B20, B21; Beavis and Souttar, 'A Field Hospital in Belgium', pp.64-66; Anonymous War Nurse, *A War Nurse's Diary: Sketches from a Belgian Field Hospital*.

provided good lighting during the day. From the ceiling hung an abundance of electric lights while in the corner water boiled throughout the day and evening. Souttar observed the operating theatre rivalled any London surgical room in equipment and cleanliness. Most of the wounds treated were minor, but surgeons soon discovered that injuries resulting from gunshots and explosives were nothing like the traffic- and work-related injuries they treated in England. Even puncture wounds seemingly minor could kill a man. Soldiers arrived soaked to the bone with their uniforms caked with dirt. Most patients were septic with shrapnel wounds filled with mud. [12]

The operating team worked quickly and efficiently, and celebrated the fact that they performed no amputations with the first wave of wounded. By dawn the next day, most of the patients had been treated and dressed and were resting. The hospital was divided into 14 wards with the largest accommodating 70 patients. The remaining wards had up to 12 beds each. By this time the medical staff had grown to about 40 doctors, nurses, drivers and orderlies.[13] In the weeks that followed, small contingents of doctors and nurses travelled by automobile to the front to treat Belgian and British soldiers in the trenches for minor injuries and ailments. Forster and Benham stopped at every village along the route to the front to treat civilians and soldiers alike.

Fig.3: The operating theatre at Antwerp, Belgium, in 1914, shortly before it was abandoned as German troops advanced on the city. (Courtesy University of California Libraries/Internet Archive)

Over the next three weeks, the hospital fell into a rhythm as the staff adjusted to the constant influx of men. However, the front lines were inching closer to Antwerp as defences around the city began to fall to German bombardments. At a reservoir near one defensive position at Walaem, six miles south of the city, dead British and Belgian soldiers were stacked up against the walls to form a barricade against invading Germans. With the threat of

[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

contamination, Belgian citizens filled a dry-dock with salt in an attempt to purify the water. Water was shut off for 23-and-a-half hours a day, leaving nurses to scramble with pails to secure as much water as possible in a single half-hour. With a hospital containing more than 200 staff and wounded, and an operating theatre that required copious amounts of water, the task stretched the limits of endurance among the nurses and doctors.[14]

By 30 September the waterworks at Walaem had been destroyed and nurses scattered to gather water from the wells of nearby residences. Electricity and gas became unreliable and 42-centimetre German artillery shells were falling closer to the hospital. A massive explosion at the fortress at Wavre St Catherine on the perimeter of the city brought dozens of men suffering second- and third-degree burns. The burns were a new type of injury and the most challenging to treat. Every square inch of the men's bodies had to be treated slowly and carefully, with the dressing for each man taking one hour to complete.[15]

During the first week of October it was clear the German Army was poised to seize the city. On a Friday, British Counsel-General Sir Cecil Herstlet informed the hospital that his office was evacuating Ostend. The following morning the Belgian Army Medical Service ordered the hospital to evacuate the wounded to the railway station for transport to England. The same day the Germans sent word they would shell the city in 24 hours and urged civilians to escape to safety. On 6 October civilians on foot and in automobiles and lorries evacuated the city in en masse, clogging the streets leading to the countryside.[16]

Precisely at midnight the shelling began with a mighty roar. One British nurse recalled being frozen with fear. 'My friend reached out her hand and said, "Remember we are British women, not emotional continentals. We've got to keep our heads".'[17] Shells were falling in two-minute intervals as nurses and doctors, Forster, Benham, Maude and Baker among them, methodically moved patients in pitch-black darkness from ward to ward on stretchers to an underground passageway deep in the bowels of the hospital. Two hours after the bombardment began, all patients were safely underground. A headcount showed the staff was responsible for 73 Belgians and 40 British wounded soldiers and marines.[18]

Evacuation

As dawn broke the Germans pounded Antwerp block by block, although shells dropped short of the hospital. Gas and electricity were no longer working. By noon, many of civilians had been cleared of the city and homes disappeared in the heavy shelling as the bombing crept closer to the hospital. Beavis rounded up the six automobiles available to the unit since first arriving in Belgium and commandeered five London buses from a nearby omnibus garage.[19] By 3pm the wounded were loaded on the buses and jammed in automobiles. One young doctor had forgotten his kitbag and dashed upstairs to retrieve it when suddenly a wall collapsed, exposing the destroyed home next door. He quickly turned around and boarded a bus without his equipment. More wounded soldiers showed up expecting treatment, only to find the staff and patients were ready to leave. Those soldiers were quickly treated and joined the group. It was a horrific 14-hour drive to Ghent, the first leg of the retreat. The convoy slowly moved through severely damaged streets. In one neighbourhood the group had no

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Anonymous War Nurse, *A War Nurse's Diary: Sketches from a Belgian Field Hospital*.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Beavis and Souttar, 'A Field Hospital in Belgium', pp.64-66

choice but drive through a wall of flames. There was no turning back. When Germans were spotted, the convoy slipped down back streets and alleys, slowly winding their way out of Antwerp.[20]

Fig.4: Dr J Hartnell Beavis, medical director of the Antwerp medical unit, supervised the female medical and nursing staffs. (Courtesy Univ of California Libraries / Internet Archive)

The trip was agony. Some patients had compound fractures, severe head wounds, gunshot wounds to the lungs and others had broken backs. Even on London streets taking the bus can be a rough ride on all-rubber tires and primitive suspension. Dodging potholes and driving over debris on cobbled streets aggravated wounds and forced Dr Maude to administer morphine to the men. The only exit from the city was to cross the Scheldt River on a pontoon bridge. Hundreds of refugees jammed the city square on foot and in vehicles waiting to cross. The bridge could only accommodate one vehicle at a time, requiring nearly a two-hour anxious wait for the convoy's turn to cross. After the last bus of the 10-vehicle caravan crossed the bridge, a German artillery shell scored a direct hit on the bridge, splitting it in two and stranding civilians in the square.

Outside the city the main road to Ghent was clogged with fleeing residents. As darkness fell the buses picked their way through the crowds. The vehicles were often mired in sandy ruts, which required the medical staff to use ropes and pulleys to upright the buses onto all wheels. Whenever someone spotted Germans in the distance the order went out from vehicle to vehicle, 'Lights out and silence!' Often the medical team encountered columns of British marines marching to Antwerp. They ignored warnings the enemy now occupied the city. Through it all Forster said little and displayed no emotion other than to offer soothing words to the men. Benham, in typical restrained British fashion, observed Forster's work ethnic during the entire Antwerp operation:

> Dr Forster was a very keen and enthusiastic member of the staff, and was ready to take part in Red Cross expeditions to villages just outside Antwerp, where the fighting was taking place. When the bombardment of the city was followed by the evacuation, Dr Forster took her part in moving the patients, and showed great pluck and endurance during the retreat to the coast.[21]

[20] Anonymous War Nurse, *A War Nurse's Diary: Sketches from a Belgian Field Hospital*; Conscientious Objector, 'An Heroic Woman Doctor', (New Zealand) Press, Volume LIII, Issue 1590, 11 July 1917.
[21] Ibid.

The convoy arrived in Ghent shortly before dawn, and remained for 24 hours before continuing its journey to Ostend via Bruges. At Bruges it became clear the Germans were prepared to march on the city, and the team fled at two in the morning. At Ostend a 500-bed Red Cross hospital was partially filled with wounded and the team was permitted to take empty beds to get some sleep. On a Tuesday, three Harwich-to-Antwerp steamers were secured for the evacuation. Each vessel could accommodate 500 wounded. The staff moved the soldiers and marines onto the vessels, but refugees began to panic on the quay, demanding that they be permitted to board. As the steamers left their moorings several men and women leaped to the boats, hanging on to the railings. Nurses and doctors pulled many aboard, but others fell into the water and drowned. Ambulance trains and members of the Royal Army Medical Corps were waiting for the steamers at Dover. After removing the wounded from the boats, the Antwerp staff boarded a train for London.

Beavis had taken the names and addresses of his staff members and began contacting them in London for the next operation in Furnes. Forster, Benham, Maude and Baker declined the invitation. Benham joined the NUWSS and eventually left for Russia. Maude left for a Royal Army Medical Corps hospital in Calais and later went to Serbia. Baker, a fellow Aussie, remained in England. Forster decided on northern France near the Belgian border to continue treating Belgian soldiers and perhaps be closer to her brothers.[22]

The Family's First Casualties

It would seem reasonable that Forster would join Beavis's unit when it arrived in Furnes toward the end of October 1914. Furnes was 15 miles east of Dunkirk and only 30 miles from the France-Belgium border. But she chose to go it alone. Although she was able to work in the operating theatre in Antwerp, Dr Benham once remarked that Forster's passion was surgery. Perhaps she did not have the freedom with the British Committee of the French Red Cross that she wanted.[23] Although the French Red Cross had liberal views of female surgeons and welcomed them into their hospitals with enthusiasm, her medical unit in Antwerp was under British supervision with an apparent less than open mind on the role of female doctors. Rather than continue with the Antwerp staff, she established herself as an itinerant surgeon moving from one field hospital to the next. She remained at one hospital until the call was made for volunteers to assist at another, given the ebb and flow of wounded in one particular area of the combat zone.[24]

Forster's family in Australia and England was aware that she was in northern France, but could never pinpoint her location. Forster's half-brother, Capt Lionel Archibald Forster, a seasoned officer and veteran of the Boer War and Orange Free State campaign, was not far away when he joined the British Army's First Battalion from the Reserve of Officers list at Le Mesnil, France, on 24 September 1914. He was wounded in action at Voilaines on 22 October and taken prisoner by the Germans who seized Douai, a commune in the Nord Department, and held onto it until 17 October 1918. Capt Forster died at the Lycée Hospital, Douai, on 4 November.

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[22] Ibid.

[23] *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 'Martha's Family Connections', Issue 13, 2014, p.7; *Perth News*, 3 March 1917; Stella Bingham, *Ministering Angels: A History of Nursing from The Crimea to The Blitz*, Dean Street Press, 2015; *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 2 March 1917, p.625.

[24] Australian Dictionary of Biography, 'Martha's Family Connections', p.7; *Perth News*, 3 March 1917; Stella Bingham, *Ministering Angels*.

In the spring of 1915, the month-long second Battle of Ypres raged just 11 miles from the France-Belgium border. Forster's other half-brother, Capt Herbert Cyril Forster, was fighting with the 4th Bn Royal Fusiliers at Bellewaarde Ridge just a short distance away during the last two days of battle to seize control of Ypres. On the last day of fighting on 25 May, Capt Forster was killed in action.[25]

Petrograd

While Forster chose to work alone near the front in Northern France, her friend Dr Alice Benham travelled to Russia with the NUWSS, which had established a string of hospitals in Zaleschiki, Kazan, Stara Chelnoe and Petrograd (these pre-revolution names no longer exist). The facilities were named the Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units after the NUWSS president Millicent Fawcett, a moderate suffragist who eschewed the movement's more militant factions that engaged in violence against the British government. The NUWSS was one of five charitable units in Russia, joining the Great Britain to Poland Fund, the Anglo-Russian Hospital, Quaker Refugee Units and Scottish Women's Hospitals.[26]

Russia was doing poorly in the war with catastrophic food shortages in Moscow and Petrograd (now St Petersburg). Food distribution was poor and often food was left to rot on lorries and at train stations. Diseases ran unchecked. Typhoid, smallpox, measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria and dysentery plagued families, who suffered through the 1915-1916 winter with little firewood as temperatures inside their homes dropped to 8C.[27]

Benham would rotate through the hospitals as the chief medical officer, spending much of her time in Petrograd and later at Stara Chelnoe in southwestern Russia. Born Alice Marian Benham in 1873, she was single and had lived comfortably in Chelsea with three servants. She graduated in 1904 with a Bachelor's of Medicine degree and earned her advanced medical degree in 1910 from London University.[28]

In the autumn of 1915, Forster learned, probably from Benham, that Petrograd was in desperate need of doctors to treat the local population and refugees streaming into the city. With so much work in France, it is a mystery why Forster chose Russia to offer her services. W.H. Moberly, the administrator for NUWSS, recalled after Forster's death that her 'love of adventure' took her north. Moberly also implied the Australian was not getting enough time in the operating theatre in France and wanted to 'find scope for her beloved surgery' in Petrograd. Forster also could have felt no desire to remain in France since Lionel and Herbert were dead and her third brother, John, had yet to arrive at the front.[29]

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[25] Christleton Village History Group, 'Lionel Archibald Forster', http://www.christleton.org.uk/christleton2/heroes/forster/index.html; *The London Gazette*, 6 October 1908, p.7228; *Eagle House Book of Remembrance, the Great War, 1914-1918*, http://www.oehs.org.uk/greatwar1418.html; and *Forces War Records*, https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/records/1951174/captain-herbert-cyril-forster-british-army-london-regiment/

[26] *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units for Refugees in Russia', 13 October 1916, p.340; 10 November 1916, p.396; 1 December 1916, p.432; 8 December 1916, p.464; Helen Fraser, *Women and War Work*, HardPress Publishing, 2013.

[27] Public Health Reports, 'Public Health Administration in Russia in 1917', 28 December 1917, Vol.32, No.52, p.2206; Peter Grant, *Philanthropy and Voluntary Action in the First World War: Mobilizing Charity*, Routledge Studies in Modern British History, 2014.

[28] *Medical Directory of 1927* (Alice Marian Benham).

[29] Leah Leneman, 'Medical Women at War, 1914-1918,' *Medical History*, 1994, 38, pp.160-177; Katherine Storr, *Excluded from the Record: Women, Refugees, and Relief, 1914-1929*, Peter Lange AG, 2009; *The*

Forster journeyed 1,600 miles from France to Petrograd, arriving about three months before the NUWSS was able to firmly establish itself in the city. Upon arrival, Forster immediately found a position as the first Australian or British female physician at a 2,000-bed hospital to perform surgery in the Men's Surgical Department. Already fluent in German, she quickly mastered Russian, allowing her to easily transition into the new environment.[30]

The NUWSS, meanwhile, sent Moberly and nursing organiser Violetta Thurston in December 1915 to investigate the medical needs at Petrograd. In January 1916, Dr Mabel Eliza May and Dr Beatrice Coxon arrived with a 12-member female staff to open a maternity hospital.[31] In the spring and summer, five more female physicians and about 20 nurses followed. This was Forster's first contact with the NUWSS. It also reunited her with Benham. Forster moved from the men's department surgical unit to the NUWSS 116-bed maternity hospital when it opened on 13 March 1916.[32]

A Journey Takes its Toll

As was her custom, Forster usually responded quickly to calls for doctors at other hospitals. In May the Russian Red Cross sought physicians to work in the Caucasus where more than 220,000 refugees were streaming into the region. The number eventually climbed to 367,000 registered civilians by the end of October.[33] Forster immediately volunteered. It was a long and gruelling journey. As summer approached temperatures peaked at 35 C, often accompanied by intense thunderstorms, and sometimes dipped to freezing at night. The convoy often stopped at the roadside for the night exposed to the elements, and then continued the next morning. Benham observed that her friend 'had to put up with a good deal of discomfort, and had found the summer heat and dust very trying. The way she ignored her own comfort and undertook strenuous work was very much admired.' Moberly recalled that Forster 'was no longer young. She was without friends or connections there.'[34]

The long hours in surgery and catching only a few hours sleep nonstop began to take its toll on the doctor. She remained in the Caucasus briefly before moving to Erzurum, Turkey, to take charge of one of the field hospitals. In January 1916, the Russian Caucasus Army began their assault on Erzurum against the Ottoman Third Army with 165,000 infantry and cavalry and 180 guns. The Turks had 126,000 men, but only 50,000 were combat-ready. By 18 February, the Russians seized the city, but 2,300 men were killed and 13,000 wounded. The

Common Cause, 'Our Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units in Russia', 20 October 1916, p.352; 27 October 1916, p.365; 1 September 1916, p.176; and Sybil Oldfield (ed.), *International Woman Suffrage, 1913-1920*, Routledge, London, 2003.

[30] *Perth News*, 3 March 1917; *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 2 March 1917, p.625.

[31] *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units for Refugees in Russia', 13 October 1916, p.340; 10 November 1916, p.396; 1 December 1916, p.432; and 8 December 1916, p.464.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Asya Darbinyan, 'Russia's Humanitarian Response to the Armenian Genocide', *The Armenian Weekly Magazine*, April 2016; Arnold Joseph Toynbee and James Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916: Uncensored Edition: Documents Presented to Viscount Grey of Fallen by Viscount Bryce*, Taderon Press, 2000; Halit Dundar Akarca, *The Russian Administration of the Occupied Ottoman Territories During the First World War: 1915-1917*, The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences of Bilking University, September 2002, pp.66-70, 76; Helen Rappaport, *Four Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Romanov Grand Duchesses* Pan, 2015.

[34] *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 2 March 1917, p.625.

Turks suffered 40,000 casualties and 13,000 were taken prisoner.[35]

Arriving at Erzurum, Forster found conditions better than anticipated. The Caucasian Committee of the All-Russian Union of Towns operated 11 medical-related facilities. The makeshift institutions included two 400-bed general field hospitals. Forster took charge of a 150-bed infectious diseases hospital. Typhus was the biggest killer, taking by the end of the summer an estimated 70 percent of the 40,000 infected refugees, soldiers and residents of the city.[36]

Joining the Suffragists

In September 1916, the NUWSS asked Forster to replace Benham to take charge of a 15-bed hospital at Stara Chelnoe in southwestern Russia. Like her trip to the Caucasus and Erzurum, the journey to Stara Chelnoe provided little shelter and hundreds of miles under a blistering sun. Benham, who was returning to England for a break, noted that her friend arrived 'looking tired and thin.'[37] Stara Chelnoe was a sad little place; primitive and sitting just outside the village. Forster took the train and then travelled 20 miles by automobile from the station over rough roads to the village. The hospital, which was taken over by the NUWSS in May, took in Polish refugees, Russians and Chubasch, a Volga tribe. Russian soldiers and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war often arrived in batches from the front. Many of the injuries Forster dealt with involved peasants who hurt themselves with harvest machinery. Although the number of patients far exceeded the beds available, Forster had only one nurse, Sister Josephine Percival, and a handful of orderlies to assist.[38]

In January 1917, Percival reported to the *Gloucester Journal* that, 'I am running this hospital with Dr Laura Forster. We have kept well-occupied and I hope we shall not have to close, as it is a home of refuge for those poor people. The chief ailments seem to be skin diseases, tubercular troubles, abscess and pneumonia. We have just sent home, convalescent from pneumonia, a boy of eighteen who is shortly to be called to serve his country.'[39]

In December, the NUWSS transferred Forster to its 80-bed Fifty-Second Epidemic Hospital, in Zaleschiki (also spelled Zalishchyky), Galicia, which now straddles the Poland-Ukraine border and had been established in June 1916. She joined Dr Helena Hall to replace Dr Kate King May-Atkinson, who was returning to England to raise more funds for the operation. Initially attached to the Russian Ninth Army, the hospital was transferred to the Seventh Army under the famed General Aleksei Brusilov, who was beloved by his soldiers for his successes in battles against the Austro-Hungarian Army. Brusilov would inspect the Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units' facilities and occasionally dine with the doctors.[40]

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[35] Darbinyan, 'Russia's Humanitarian Response to the Armenian Genocide'; Toynbee and Bryce, *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916*; *Seizure of Erzurum by Russian Troops*, Presidential Library website, https://www.prlib.ru/en/history/619031.
[36] Ibid.
[37] *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 2 March 1917, p.625.
[38] *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 2 February 1917, p.569; 9 February 1917, p.579; 16 February 1917, p.591; and 23 February 1917, p.610.
[39] *Gloucester Journal*, 20 January 1917, p.5.
[40] *The Common Cause*, 'Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units in Russia', 1 December 1916, p.432; 8 December 1916, p.464; 15 December 1916, p.478; and 19 January 1917, p.535.

Death in the Winter

Zaleschiki was about 30 miles from the southwest front and a steady stream of Russian soldiers passed through the hospital – the only infectious diseases facility within 200 miles – with typhus and diphtheria. Joining the Russians were Austro-Hungarian POWs who were among the 400,000 soldiers captured by Brusilov's forces, which was covering 15 miles a day along the 250-mile front. At one point the hospital had vaccinated 20,000 soldiers from both armies. Thrust into the maelstrom of wounded and infected soldiers, were the local population and refugees. Forster never managed to catch her breath. Once arriving in Zaleschiki, she alternated every other day with other doctors by travelling in an open car exposed to freezing January temperatures to the front to treat soldiers in the trenches and at field headquarters and aid stations.[41]

Fig.5: The medical team at Zaleschiki, Galicia, Russia, in 1916. Laura Forster is believed to be seated in the centre. (Australian War Memorial photo H18592)

Early in the first week of February 1917, she came down with influenza and was bed-ridden. About ten days later, on 11 February, she suffered a fatal heart attack. Her two closest friends, Alice Benham and W.H. Moberly, were in England and not with her. 'I am sure she would have chosen to die in harness as she has done, preferring wear out rather than to rust out,' Benham said of Forster. Moberly, who described Forster as an 'intimate friend', said the Australian was a 'tiny, fair woman with indomitable courage'.[42]

[41] Muriel H. Kerr, 'Six Months' Medical Work with the Millicent Fawcett Units in Russia', *The Common Cause*, 26 January 1917, p.553; *The Common Cause*, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 2 February 1917, p.569; 9 February 1917, p.579; 16 February 1917, p.591; *The British Journal for Nursing*, 5 February 1916, p.127.

[42] *Perth News*, 3 March 1917; *National Probate Calendar*, 1917, p.288; Conscientious Objector, 'An Heroic

For the rest of the staff there was little time to mourn her death, but hospital nurses gathered the next day to sew not the Australian Red Ensign flag but the British Union Jack to drape over her coffin. They recruited a Russian Orthodox priest from a nearby village, who brought some of his altar boys to lead a procession from the hospital to a nearby cemetery. As was the custom of Russian Orthodox rites, Forster was carried in an open casket with the Union Jack tucked up to her chin. Religious icons were placed in the casket with her body. Nurses in their formal Red Cross uniforms followed the priest to the cemetery. Dozens of villagers, who had received treatment from Forster, also turned out.[43]

Nearly 20 months later, Capt John Gregory Forster, Laura's only surviving half-brother, was fighting in France near Epehy with the 7th Battalion, London Regiment, when he was fatally wounded. He died on 2 October 1918 at Boisleux-Saint Marc.[44]

Dr Forster did not die destitute. Her nephew, Norman William Kater, was named executor of her estate valued at £816, adjusted for inflation, about £64,954, in 2017 pounds sterling.[45] In November 1926, Mary Forster Kater, a benefactor of the Women's College at the University of Sydney, established the annual £500 'Dr Laura Forster Memorial Fund' to be administered in her sister's name. The college awarded the scholarship to any student from any of the university's colleges until 1985.[46]

Military scholars have not given the same attention to Russia's participation in the war on the Eastern Front as they had to events in Western Europe. Large gaps in the telling of the war in Western and Central Russia, particularly from the diaries of enlisted men and low-ranking officers in the Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman armies, remain unfilled. Not unexpectedly, many stories from the open fields in southwestern Russia and the mountains of the Caucasus have largely been told by British aid workers reporting conditions to newspapers, journals or in their own memoirs. Curiously, many such reports focused on Russian culture and customs and kept the news light. In many reports there was little on the specifics of what occurred in operating theatres and on the battlefield. It was as if the medical staff wanted to paint the brightest picture possible for readers. The consequences one hundred years since is that non-military – and often all-female – volunteer medical units, which did not have the resources of an army, received little attention in the media or from the British Expeditionary Force. The lack of focus deprived doctors and nurses acknowledgement of their contributions to the war effort.

Dr Laura Forster appears to have chosen a very private path to using her skills as a surgeon at the front. But that is also true of thousands of other medical officers whose work today on the Eastern Front is largely unknown.

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Woman Doctor'; The Common Cause, 'The Millicent Fawcett Hospital Units', 2 March 1917, p.625; and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Lady Doctor's Death', 16 May 1917.

[43] *The British Journal for Nursing*, 20 October 1917, p.253; *The British Journal for Nursing*, 'Care of the Wounded', 27 October 1917, p.269.

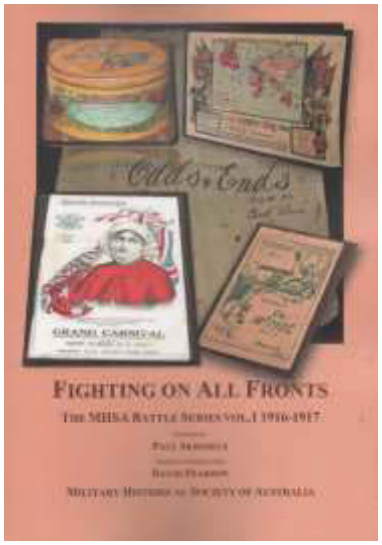
[44] Winchester College at War, 'Forster, John Gregory', http://www.winchestercollegeatwar.com/archive/john-gregory-forster/.

[45] *National Probate Calendar*, 1917, p.288.

[46] University (of Sydney) Colleges, *Scholarships*, p.521; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Sydney University, Women's College, 14 July 1928, p.14.

SOCIETY NOTICES

Society Book Publication: *Fighting on All Fronts*



November saw the publication of the MHSA's 60th Anniversary book commemorating the centenary of the First World War, *Fighting on All Fronts: The MHSA Battle Series vol.1 1916-1917*. It's a collection of 11 articles by specialist military historians which have appeared in recent issues of *Sabretache*, but here presented in one volume and reprinted as a deluxe edition in a limited print-run of 200 copies.

- 168 pages
- profusely illustrated in colour and B&W
- $30.00 AUD plus postage

South Australian orders may be directed to the Editor at editor@mhsa.org.au. All others please contact the Series Coordinator, David Pearson, at David.A.Pearson@aph.gov.au.

Order your copy now before it becomes a collector's item!

A formal launch of the book is scheduled for 6pm Tuesday 6 February 2018 at the National Library of Australia, Canberra as part of the Library's bookshop launch program. Professor Peter Leahy will be launching the book together with a panel from among the contributing authors. David Pearson and Rohan Goyne have organised for the book to be stocked at the National Library and Australian War Memorial bookshops, which represents another first for any Society publication. Please contact Federal Council for more about the launch.

Paul Skrebels and Rohan Goyne

New MHSA Patron: Professor Peter Leahy

Prof Peter Leahy, Lt Gen (retired) AO will commence as the Patron of the MHSA from 1 January 2018. Peter brings a wealth of experience in military history as a former Chief of Army and a great supporter of the Chief of Army History Conferences. Federal President Rohan Goyne and Vice President Nigel Webster met with Peter in November to welcome him to the Society, and they provided him with an advance copy of the Society's new publication, *Fighting on All Fronts*.

Rohan Goyne

Queensland Boer War and Commonwealth Horse Project

Allan Woodward is one of the volunteers at the Maryborough Military & Colonial Museum and for many years he has been compiling biographies and photos of every soldier who served with a Queensland or Australian Commonwealth Horse unit during the Boer War. There are about 2600 in total and he has photographs of all but 162 soldiers. Most of the photos have been derived from the *Queenslander Newspaper* and thumbnail ones for the 1st Contingent, which are of poor quality. He has acquired about 200 from other sources including descendants of the soldiers who served. If anyone can assist Allan with additional information or photos, please contact him at woodyone@bigpond.net.au or on 07 41212097. Postal address is 106 Wharf Street Maryborough QLD 4650. He is also quite willing to supply information or photos to any member who has an enquiry.

John Meyers

Horseferry Road Commemorative?

Although I had been to London on six previous occasions, only on this recent visit did I make the pilgrimage to Horseferry Road. I had the address from a letter which was published in a book I had read. There is a new building being built on the site, so I feel that there should be a plaque or some such on the building or on the footpath – or why not a statue of an Australian soldier? This part of London is very much part of Australia's history. It is not for me to suggest it to the Government or to the Australian War Memorial, but a letter requesting it from the MHSA would carry more power that one from me.

Capt A.J. (Tony) Walker (retd)

[*Editor's comment:* Horseferry Road was the location during WW1 of AIF Administrative Headquarters, the Australian War Records Section, and the War Chest Club. Back then it looked like this *(AWM photo D00077)*:

There is even contemporary WW1 movie footage of a walk down the road here: https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/F00065/. Today it looks like this *(photo courtesy of Tony Walker)*:

Tony's idea is certainly timely and thought-provoking. Should the Society act?]

Western Australian WW1 Participants Project

I have received correspondence from a Sandra Playle who is undertaking a research project to produce a list of AIF participants from WA; she has a list of 64,000 names from a variety of sources and she is seeking volunteers to help her enter the data into a database to produce a final more accurate listing. Her details are as follows: Sandra Playle, fedalmar@hotmail.com, 0422 922 132. Any members or readers willing to assist should contact Sandra directly. She has offered to present on her project and she lives in the Pilbara, WA.

Rohan Goyne

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REVIEW OF BEGA EXHIBITION

Rohan Goyne

I recently viewed the exhibition *The Great War, Tales from the Far South Coast: Local Experiences of World War One* at the Bega Pioneers Museum in Bega, NSW. It is one of many exhibitions which have been funded through the ANZAC Grants Program and which have revealed the experiences of the home front during World War One. It details the rich tapestry of local history from the period and reinforces the impact of this global conflict.

The exhibition is located in two rooms of the Bega Pioneers Museum which is a block from the main street (search the Sapphire Coast Tourism website for museum opening times). One of the most interesting items in the exhibition are the extracts from the local Objections Courts proceedings. The exhibition further highlights the value of the ANZAC Grants Program for revealing the extensive history of the home front at a local level, and contradicts the 'Anzacery' criticisms which have focused mainly on the national-based commemorations. The photograph below shows local volunteers boarding a steam ship at Tathra wharf to travel to a recruitment centre.

The exhibition runs until 11 November 2018, and I would recommend it to anyone travelling in the region.

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401666 FLIGHT LIEUTENANT DANIEL JOSEPH REID DFC

George Ward

Some years ago while chatting to a friend, my wife mentioned that I had recently visited Sagen in Poland, the site of the Great Escape, made famous by the 1963 film of the same name. This led to him telling her that his uncle was a pilot in the RAAF in WW2 and he was the family custodian of many of his uncle's artifacts. This included two plastic tubs of photos and documents, plus his flying jacket and a number of other items including a diary from 20 March 1941 up to 22 January 1942. The medals and log books are with another member of the family. Upon my wife telling me, I suggested that as the material was available, this pilot's story should be recorded. This is his story.

Born at Yarraville Victoria in April 1920, Daniel Reid had a passion for aviation that was to stay with him all his life. The earliest item in the collection is his Member's Ticket for the Elsternwick District Model Aero Club. It is for the 1935 Season and the annual subscription is five shillings. He attended Christian Brother's College East St Kilda and a reference from the school in 1936 describes his being a diligent student, cheerful and gentlemanly. The Intermediate exam for 1935 shows that he passed in English, French, Algebra, Physics, Chemistry, Geometry and Trigonometry.

With the outbreak of WW2, Daniel Reid enrolled in the RAAF Reserve, Air Crew, on 2 August 1940, and on 12 January 1941 was selected to participate in a trip to RAAF Base at Laverton. He was issued with a RAAF Reserve badge which he was required to hand back when accepted for full-time service. His wait was not very long; on 17 March 1941 he received orders to report to RAAF No.1 Recruiting Centre in Queen Street, Melbourne ten days later.

He participated in a march through the city before travelling to Spencer Street Station where they boarded the 5 o'clock train to Albury. Changing trains in Albury, they had a rather noisy trip to Sydney. After another change at Strathfield they caught the local train out to Lindfield on the north side of Sydney and arrived at their destination, No.2 Initial Training School, Bradfield Park NSW. Daniel's rank was Aircraftsman Class 2 Group V – in his words, lower than a private in the army. He was to spend two months there, attending lectures on engine, airframes and the theory of flight. On 22 May those on the course were granted five days' leave, so Daniel travelled down to Melbourne to see his family.

He was then posted to the new RAAF Base, No.10 Elementary Flying Training School, Temora, and the records in May and June show him learning to fly a Tiger Moth under the eyes Pilot Officer (P/O) Smith in C Flight, No.1 Class . His diary records that he was not sure what reaction he would have to flying but after 40 minutes as a passenger he notes that he enjoyed it greatly. His landings were the only thing that took a little longer to master. Their day started with reveille at 4.45am and flying commenced one hour later. Then breakfast at 8.45am followed by lectures from 9.30 until lunch at 12.30pm. The afternoon was usually spent attending more lectures. Their training was completed by the end of July and the airmen were granted eight days' home leave.

Then on 8 August 1941 they packed up their kit and after breakfast boarded double-decker buses for their trip to the Sydney wharf. Here at 10am they boarded the *Awatea* for their sea voyage to Canada via New Zealand and Fiji. In Canada they would undergo advanced flight

training under the Empire Air Training Scheme. Daniel penned a couple of poems which express his feelings about some of the staff at Temora:

> Goodbye Mr Tracy, Mr Hodges too
> Hodges is a B…..d, and the same applies to you
> We hope your trainees fail you, and leave you in the stew
> And so today we bid you, a very fond adieu.
>
> Goodbye Mr Simpson, goodbye Huxley too
> Since we left old Bradfield, we've been mucked around by you
> Your training is a failure, your Tigers are a farce
> And so as far as we're concerned, you can stick them up your a..e

Fig.1: Daniel Reid at No.10 EFTS, Temora, training on Tiger Moths. The photo is originally captioned 'Disguised as an aviator'. (Reid collection, used with permission)

Escorted by the HMAS *Sydney*, they arrived in NZ two days later. Here they enjoyed four days' leave, most of which was spent sightseeing. He records that he dropped his movie camera but fortunately didn't do much damage. Members of the RNZAF joined the ship for the rest of the voyage. Training continued onboard ship by the way of lectures and most nights were filled with singalongs around the piano or films. On 17 August they stopped at Fiji for 24 hours. Shore leave was granted but being Sunday the pubs were closed. He was impressed by the camouflaged gun emplacement and barbed-wire defences manned by the NZ Army. Their escort HMAS *Sydney* left them on the 18th and a new escort vessel took over.

On Friday the 29th they sighted the Canadian coastline and were soon docked at Victoria. The RCAF Band was there to welcome them on the wharf. They later set sail for Vancouver where they disembarked, and after forming up on the wharf marched through town, which Daniel describes as great fun. Here they were posted, with his mates Doug Power, Frank Richards and Laurie Pyke going to McLeod for bomber training while Dan and his mate Charlie Richardson were sent to Camp Borden for fighter training. This pleased him greatly.

They now boarded a Canadian National Railways train for a trip across the Rockies, stopping at Jaser for two hours, then onto Edmonton where they were billeted overnight at No.3 Manning Depot. Continuing the journey, they had a brief stopover at Winnipeg where the men stocked up on grog, which turned the trip into a party train. There were a few hangovers the next day. Saturday 13 September saw them arrive at Toronto where the train diverted to Barrie and then continued on a further 16 miles to Camp Borden. Upon arrival they were divided into two squadrons and given a medical. Daniel went into No.2 Sqn, E Flight. The planes used for training were Harvards and Yales and the aerodrome had asphalt runways, a

long tarmac and about three-quarters of a mile of hangars. On Monday 15th he reported to E Flight and spent some time sitting in a Yale memorising the instruments before going to the equipment store, where he was issued with both summer and winter flying kits.

The following day more time was spent sitting in both planes and Daniel wasn't impressed at the amount of time being wasted just sitting around with nothing to do. Finally a series of lectures commenced covering armaments, engines and navigation. On the seventh day Daniel got to fly in a Harvard and was duly impressed. After two weeks they flew to Leeches Field were the instructor showed him the procedure for forced landings. He was then sent up alone to practice, just as the weather turned bad. Things didn't go well when after some time in the air he lost sight of Leeches Field, and was forced to do a belly landing in a paddock. Having landed safely, he was picked up by the farmer and rang the base, which instructed him to stay with the plane. Later a station wagon and driver picked him up and an airman was left to guard the plane. Once back in Borden he wrote a report on the incident and there was no recrimination other than some more practice forced landings in the days that followed. On 27 September they had a 48 hour leave so visited Toronto and Niagara Falls. A few weeks later his diary records that on 18 October Ernest Brooks from E Flight was killed in a flying accident. He was aged 22 and was buried at Barrie Cemetery.

On 19 October, No.2 Sqn having finished all their ground subjects, moved to Edenvale Airfield, Ontario, in with No.1 Service Flying Training School. Daniel had mixed feelings about their new home: 'There is no hot water, we fly from tents, our planes are left out in the open, but the meals are better than Borden and there are no parades and the atmosphere is free and easy.' Here they commenced training in night flying. One night while landing in a thick fog he crashed into another plane that had landed and stopped on the runway with engine trouble. The four pilots were uninjured but the planes suffered $10,000 damage. Another incident about this time was when a civilian contractor wandered onto the runway and an Australian pilot decapitated him with his plane's wing. Then on 15 November No.1 Sqn was flying back from Hagersville when they struck bad weather. P/O McDonald got separated and is thought to have gone down in the lakes.

On 19 November Daniel qualified as a Safety Pilot, having done trips of 300 miles, and could land on ice or snow in both day and night time. The photos show them flying with a lot of ice and snow on the ground and the surrounding buildings. At times there was frost on the inside of the plane, which he states made it mighty uncomfortable;somewhat different to flying conditions in Australia! 'Saturday 20th November. Toronto: Wings parade last night and goodbye to Borden.' The wings were presented by Sqn Ldr McCullock. On that day, 11 Australians and eight Canadians and Americans were commissioned. The Australian were Fred Thornley, Ken Slayter, Norm Amos, Ernie Esau, Bernie Hearny, Colin Whittle, Bert Hogarty, Joe Hamlet, Harold Watkins and Norman Clark.

Having completed the course, Daniel requested leave and was granted a 10-day pass. With his mate Glyn Sage he travelled down to New York. For the trip he needed a passport which was issued by the Canadian Government. In it he is described as being 6 feet 1 inch tall with hazel eyes and light brown hair. In New York they stayed at the Hotel Piccadilly and included in the collection is a program from The Music Box Theatre dated 23 December 1941, containing signatures from both performers and RAAF personal. On 2 January 1942 they embarked at Halifax and set sail for Liverpool in England. His first impression of their transport ship SS *Bayano*, described in his diary as 'a Small dingy looking tub', had changed by the time they reached England: 'It has a Bofors Gun on the stern under the charge of a

Corporal in the Royal Marines. Anything that came within range was a target for him. On the voyage the corporal instructed them in the use of Hotchkiss and Lewis Guns.' A number of events on the voyage prolonged their time at sea.

> Sunday 11th. Two ships in the convoy collided last night and both went down.
>
> Snow and sleet, and the Captain said he didn't receive the order to alter course which resulted in the Bayano getting separated from the convoy. We found a Yank destroyer and set our course straight for the Orkneys.

The ship's cargo consisted of Hurricanes packed in cases on the deck, and bacon and aluminium ingots in the hold.

On 21 January they arrived in Liverpool, then sailed onto Bournemouth the next day where they disembarked. From there they travelled by train to the RAF School of Army Co-Operation at Old Sarum, Salisbury to be part of Course No.41 (War). Then it was onto the No.5 (Pilot) Advance Flying Unit RAF, Tern Hill in Shropshire. His first posting to an operational unit was with 453 Sqn. This squadron had been disbanded after service in the Far East and the fall of Singapore. It was reformed at Drem in England on 18 June 1942, and Daniel Reid joined it four days later. In September the squadron was moved to Hornchurch. Equipped with Spitfires, they saw their first action at the end of October, which resulted in one Spitfire being shot down and three German fighters and one bomber damaged. Towards the end of the year the squadron was based at Martlesham Heath and in the new year moved to Rochford. Most of their operations were bomber escorts, fighter sweeps and attack missions.

Fig.2: Course No.41 of the RAF School of Army Cooperation, Old Sarum, 1942. Daniel Reid is standing in the back row, second from the right. (Reid collection, used with permission)

On 18 November Daniel was recalled from leave and told he was being posted to the Middle East. He left 453 Squadron four days later and prepared for the forthcoming trip. While with 453 Sqn he had 85 hours of flying, which included fighter sweeps and convoy and coastal

patrols. On the 25th he sailed from Glasgow and a week later on 3 December arrived at Gibraltar, which he records in his diary as 'An interesting place'. Here they were allocated Spitfires, which they were to deliver to his new squadron. Arriving at Maison Blanche, Algiers on 11 December, Daniel described it as 'a modern aerodrome with extensive buildings'. Four days later he was taken on the strength of 152 Sqn. He records that he 'flew a Spitfire over from the Rock (Gibraltar) with 5 other pilots'. A further note against their names lists that three were later killed and one badly injured.

While based at Djemila he records doing a lot of sightseeing around early Christian sites and Roman ruins:

> 17th December. We flew up to Souk El Arbo today. They got badly bombed in the town last night. We have now joined 152 Squadron.

Two days later he records that he done his first patrol from this airfield:

> 20th December. Twelve of us went off on a rather unusual sweep this morning. We flew to Megey El Bab where we split into pairs and scouted around at deck level. We were looking for some Gerry bombers that had attempted to bomb the Grenadier Guards.
>
> 31 Jan 1943. At the drome cleaning my kite. Polished it all over and got scratches out of perspex. Repaired gun mounting with Bostik.

From February the squadron was based at Souk-el-Kemis, where most of their operations were escort duties as part of the Desert Air Force. This later changed to a fighter-bomber role.

> 2nd Feb. Army having a blitz on saluting and put 10 airmen on a charge. We retaliated and I had 2 men at the Signals HQ charged for not saluting me and Alec. I would rather have bombs than bullshit.
>
> 4th Feb. What a shambles this morning. Up at 5.45am No breakfast ready. Down to the drome. Machines covered in frost. No ground crew. Machine wouldn't start. Nine of us eventually got off and 8 others turned up later.
>
> 5th Feb. Food bloody awful and bloody scarce. Living in tents in a farmyard.
>
> 15th Feb. In bed all day. Doc tells me I have fluid on the left lung and should really be in hospital.

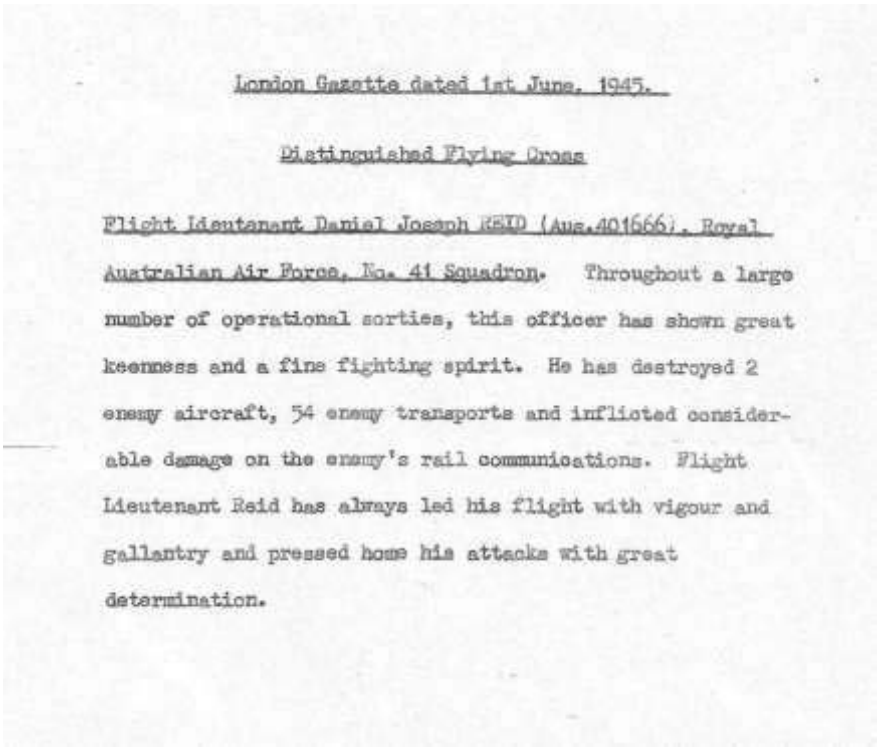
On the morning of 20 February he went to the 19th Casualty Clearing Station by ambulance, about eight miles out of Souk El Arba, and had a chest X-ray. As a result he was diagnosed with Pleural Effusion, Owing to the sickness he was forced to leave the squadron and return to England.

In his short time with them he flew twelve fighter sweeps and eight fighter patrols on full operations for a total of 50 hours' flying time. On 23 February he was shocked to hear that 152 and 3 Sqns had moved to Tebessa. Not recovering, he was placed on an ambulance train that contained many wounded soldiers coming from the front. He is happier on 28 February when he records, 'in hospital in Algiers at last'. Now at the 96th General Hospital, he received treatment which resulted in a large amount of fluid being drained from his lungs. On 12 March he boarded the H.S. *Oxfordshire* bound for England and ten days later was disembarked at Avonmouth. Then on 23 March he was admitted to the RAF Hospital at Glanmorgan. From there he was taken by train to RAF Hospital Ronkswood, Worcestershire

While there he spent the time improving his drawing skills, his main subjects being Spitfires. After a stay of three months, he is moved to the RAF Hospital at Church Village, Pontypridd. This included one month convalescing followed by three months' light duties. On Saturday

11 September Daniel attended a cricket match at the Lord's Ground between the RAF and the RAAF. The program records Sgt K. Miller from Victoria among the RAAF team.

Upon his discharge from hospital Daniel was posted to 41 Sqn, which in 1943 was stationed at Hornchurch, and most of its operations had been providing fighter escorts for bombers. By June 1944 the squadron was en-gaged in providing air support for the Normandy invasion. Once air bases were secured in northern Europe the squadron moved to the Continent. Joining 41 Sqn on 3 August 1944, he notes taking part in his first sortie with them two days later on an 'anti-Diver' (i.e. shooting down V-1 bombs) patrol. A Christmas dinner menu for 125 Wing, Officer's Mess at Diest, Belgium confirms his presence. His last sortie was in March 1945 when he was wounded while attacking a camou-flaged oil tank. Mention is made of him receiving a flak or gunshot wound to the lumber area.



London Gazette dated 1st June, 1945.

Distinguished Flying Cross

Flight Lieutenant Daniel Joseph REID (Aus.401666), Royal Australian Air Force, No. 41 Squadron. Throughout a large number of operational sorties, this officer has shown great keenness and a fine fighting spirit. He has destroyed 2 enemy aircraft, 54 enemy transports and inflicted consider-able damage on the enemy's rail communications. Flight Lieutenant Reid has always led his flight with vigour and gallantry and pressed home his attacks with great determination.

Fig.3: Flt Lt Reid's citation for the DFC. (Reid collection, used with permission)

While with 41 Sqn he notes that he carried out ten fighter sweeps, 14 armed reconnaissance patrols, 18 bomber escorts, five fighter patrols and 27 anti-Diver patrols. In total he flew 160 hours with the squadron. Between 19 June and 28 August 1944 the squadron was deployed in destroying V1 Flying Bombs and is recorded as having destroyed 53 of them. Daniel is credited as having destroyed at least one. Then in September the squadron was tasked with the job of destroying V2 sites. In addition they were providing air support for Operation Market Garden, better known as the Battle of Arnhem. Following the allied advance, the squadron moved to Diest in Belgium in December 1944 and with the end imminent, in April 1945 they were at a base near Celle in Germany. On 1 June 1945 Daniel was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. He was discharged on 27 August 1945 with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

Returning to Australia, Daniel decided to continue his studies and matriculated from the University of Melbourne in March 1947. He then went on to study law, which he passed with honours. In 1949 he joined the church and became a Franciscan friar, and then in 1957 he went on to become priest. Two years later he went to New Guinea and helped establish Franciscan Airlines and in this role provided a lifeline to many outposts. He served as a priest at Aitape, Sissano and Kafle. He also trained future pilots for Fran Air, as it was later called. Father Daniel Reid died on Anzac Day 1993 and is buried at Box Hill.

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MHSA CONFERENCE REPORT

2017 University of South Australia Narratives of War Symposium/Military Historical Society of Australian Conference, 17-19 November 2017

Friday 17 November

The conference began with a meet and greet at University of South Australia, Hawke Building, City West Campus, North Terrace, Adelaide. The Hon Tom Kenyon gave an enthusiastic welcome speech which set the tone for the conference. Approximately 70 attendees had registered for the conference and 30 of the registrations included the dinner at the Naval, Military and Air Force Club of South Australia.

Rohan Goyne, MHSA Federal President, replied on behalf of the Society and gave a speech supporting the symposium/conference and thanking the University for co-hosting the conference, which provided the society with the means of conducting the national conference in South Australia. The University had organised catering for the welcome reception, as well as for the two days of the conference. The catering was well organised and went off without a hitch.

Saturday 18 November

The conference theme, *Generations of War*, gave members of the general public and society members the ideal opportunity to exchange ideas and research material they had been working on. The keynote speaker for Saturday was Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, who gave a presentation titled 'War Stories: From Global to Local'. She used her own family as examples of how families experienced war from both sides of the Great War. She illustrated her talk by looking at the other side of the conflict from the German aspect. Some of her relations had served with the Germans and she also gave us an insight into the Australian perspective. It was a thought-provoking speech. This set the scene for the day's conference.

With so many sessions to select from, it was very hard to pick which ones to attend. Two sessions at a time were run in parallel in adjoining rooms, which gave us the opportunity to see and hear the topic we wanted to attend. The topics included:

- Negotiating Censorship: Comparing World War 2 with Vietnam
- Dunkirk: Film, Memorialising and the Telling of War
- 'Here I Am in Anzac Cove': The Anzac Centenary – Remembering or Commemorating?
- Letters from Home: Primary Sources of the SA Home Front

The conference also included a discussion panel on how to support Army Reservists. The panel included Maj Gen Neil Wilson, Brig Rob Atkinson, Brig Michael Burgess, Major Dr Kate Ames, and Captain Dr Sharon Mascall-Dare. The panel was chaired by Dr Pamela Schulz. A lively discussion ensued on the implications of Reservists in this day and age.

After lunch the sessions began with topics such as:

- Experience of War and the Human Spirit: Then and Now
- Mustard Gas: the Experience of the 25th Battalion, AIF, October to November 1917
- Mixed Blessings: The Postwar Lives of Australian WW1 Nurses

The afternoon sessions included topics on PTSD in the Australian Defence Force, the

rehabilitation of military personnel, and mental health in the Australian military.

The Naval, Military and Air Force Club hosted the dinner which was the ideal venue; the three-course meal was well received, with members discussing the events of the day.

Sunday 19 November

The keynote speaker, Professor Alexander McFarlane, the Head of the University of Adelaide Centre for Traumatic Stress Studies, gave an insight into the effects of trauma brought about by various conflicts across the world.

The presentations on Sunday included 'Violets, Wattle and White Feathers: South Australian Women's Activism on the World War 1 Home Front'. Damien Wright launched a book titled *Churchill's Secret War with Lenin: British and Commonwealth Military Intervention in the Russian Civil War 1918-20*. It is a thoroughly well-researched book, and at a cost of $40 is value for money.

Christeen Schoepf provided a session on the Cheer-up Society Roll of Honour, commemorating the role of women in WW1 and WW2 who supported the South Australian men who enlisted. She plans to produce a book on that topic. The launch of the society's book *Fighting on All Fronts* was discussed, and the master of ceremonies, Kerry Green, indicated to the attendees that this book would be a worthwhile investment.

That afternoon those members of the Society present had a meeting to discuss aspects of Society business; this was chaired by Rohan Goyne and proved to be extremely fruitful. A key concern was the declining membership base and what to do about it. We canvassed the following topics:

- What do we need to do to recruit more members?
- Do we merge with like-minded groups to boost our membership base?
- Can we be more involved in history week? With the anniversary of the Armistice 1918, do we get involved with groups such as local genealogy societies?
- Do we create a Facebook page to improve our exposure to the public?
- From a local perspective, should we have our meetings at historical venues such as local museums and historical societies?

These and many other points of discussion formed the basis of the meeting. Members agreed that such meetings, chaired by the Federal President, should be encouraged at the national conferences, as input from the other states was most welcome.

In conclusion the 2017 conference was an unqualified success, due to the input of Paul Skrebels, Elizabeth Hobbs and Peter Harvey from the South Australian Branch of the Society and the staff of UniSA who went out of their way to accommodate us in what we required. Perhaps this is the way to go – merging with a like-minded group to help facilitate our conferences.

Mike English
President
Military Historical Society (SA Branch)

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relating to an assault on the Heights, the author's narrative method is to deliver the outcome early, and then proceed to build an analysis of what went wrong. This approach of reverse engineering a battle is a novel concept in military history, but has been handled well.

While Mouquet Farm has passed into Australian military folklore, Hampton demonstrates that the German-held farm did not become an objective until too late in the offensive. The extensive underground dugout and tunnel system was largely avoided by Birdwood. This enabled the Germans to quickly regroup after artillery bombardments, often disconnected with infantry assaults, and get their machine guns readied for execution. In contrast to 1 Div, 2 Div based its attacks on manpower rather than firepower. 4 Div, or rather the well trained and prepared 4 Brigade, relied on large-scale raid tactics. The less prepared 13 Bde suffered horrendous casualties when flanking 4 Bde's 13 Battalion, whose tactics they were unfamiliar with. Inevitably battalions ceased to have enough manpower to function, let alone hold captured German lines – real or imagined on maps.

The book simultaneously examines the coordinated objectives, or lack of, for the flanking British divisions, and operations of Gough's Reserve Army and the neighbouring Rawlinson's Fourth Army against Thiepval. The narrative would have benefitted from the inclusion of accompanying maps relating to these objectives, to offer a better understanding of the British Expeditionary Force's wider picture. Minor faults in the publication lie with the editing of typesetting. In several places gremlins have inserted symbols or removed endings of sentences. Wrong units have been designated a couple of times, interrupting the logical flow of events. My main disappointment was 12 Bde's involvement on 6-7 August not being included in the discussion, the author deciding not to examine their defensive role against the German counter-attacks. Ultimately, Pozieres represented a failure to learn lessons, manifesting itself in the planning for the First Battle of Bullecourt. This book is thoroughly recommended for armchair generals to scholars of Pozieres. I would welcome similar treatises of Australia's other WW1 battles.

Brenton Brooks

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MESSAGE STICK PATROL

Justin Chadwick

The patrol left Boka 3 on the northern coast of New Guinea on 28 March 1945. Led by Lt James Norrie, it consisted of 15 ORs, two signallers, the Intelligence Officer, Lt Jack Smiles, and two native guides. After making their way along the beach and road to Dagua Creek, they turned inland toward Kauremerak Hill. The aims of the patrol were to see if Japanese troops were using the area as a supply route to the nearby village of Banak and the Wonginara Mission; if there was any traffic; enemy defensive positions and direct artillery fire onto them if necessary; submit a track report; and 'leave ample evidence' that they had been in the area.[1] What they left as 'evidence' was unique in the history of intelligence warfare in New Guinea during World War Two.

Australian involvement in the Aitape-Wewak campaign on the northern coast of New Guinea began in November 1944. US troops, the 163rd Regimental Combat Team, landed at Aitape on 22 April 1944 and quickly overwhelmed the depleted Japanese forces there.[2] With the

[1] AWM 52/8/3/2/46. 2/2nd Infantry Battalion Patrol Report dated 28-30 March 1945.
[2] Dexter, David. *Australia in the War of 1939-1945: The New Guinea Offensives*. Australian War Memorial, Canberra (1961): 804.

intention of mounting operations into the Philippines, the area was used as a support base. Prime Minister Curtin, had written to Supreme Commander SWPA, Gen MacArthur, in November 1943 with a request to employ Australian troops in the clearance of the Japanese from Australian territories.[3] Gen Blamey, on the other hand, expected that Australian troops would do this and thus free up US troops for operations in the Philippines. MacArthur demanded that four Australian divisions would need to be employed and thus meant the 6th Division AIF, the only one near full strength, would be used.[4] On 24 October the 6th Div received instructions on its future use and its movement in early November.[5] Even before command had been handed to the Australians, the divisional commander, Maj Gen J.E.S. Stevens, discussed proposed operations against the Japanese, rather than merely defending the area.[6]

Following patrols by the 2/6th Cavalry (Commando) Regiment, elements of the division began its eastward advance along two axes: one inland through the Toricelli Mountains and the other along the coast. On 2 December the 2/4th Infantry Battalion made its first contact, killing one enemy.[7] Patrols became the dominant operational method and varied from small investigatory patrols to larger fighting patrols that attacked villages and defensive positions held by the Japanese. Casualties at the end of December, since the division arrived in the Aitape area, were 42 Australians killed or wounded to approximately 500 Japanese killed and 200-300 wounded.[8] It was slow and hard work, especially due to supply problems, exacerbated by rain that led to flooding, malaria and stiff Japanese resistance.[9] By March 1945, after relieving the 19th Brigade in January, the 16th Bde had led the advance along the coast. It was at this time that the 2/2nd Bn changed its operational role from reserve to leading battalion of the brigade and, through a continuous patrolling and rapid thrusts, captured But and the Dagua airstrip.[10]

On 22 March patrols were sent out along the coast and inland with one tasked to clear the Wonginara Track. This patrol, under the command of Capt Keith Lovett, faced stiff opposition on the road leading to the Jikkoku Mountain Pass and had to withdraw. The next day another patrol encountered strong resistance on the 1410 feature, but was successful in ejecting the occupiers. At the same time Lovett's patrol resumed its advance and again faced more resistance. The Commanding Officer of 2/2nd Bn, Lt Col Allan Cameron, realized that the pass was held in strength and decided to send a company through the 1410 feature and attack Japanese positions along the ridge and then meet up with Lovett's patrol. This attack went in on 25 March, capturing one feature, but failed to hold a second despite an airstrike by Beauforts followed by a thousand rounds of artillery.[11]

While the companies were slowly pushing forward, Cameron despatched Lt Norrie and 15 Platoon on its two-day reconnaissance patrol. Leaving Boka 3 at 1pm, the patrol turned south at Dagua Creek and soon encountered some natives who had fled their villages the previous night due to Japanese movement further south along the Mabam River. At a clearing a little

[3] Long, Gavin. *Australia in the War of 1939-1945: The Final Campaigns.* Australian War Memorial, Canberra (1963): 20.
[4] Ibid, 23.
[5] AWM 52/1/5/12/54. 6th Australian Division War Diary entry 24 October 1943.
[6] AWM 52/1/5/12/55. 6th Australian Division War Diary entry 19 November 1943.
[7] AWM 52/8/2/19/31. 19th Australian Infantry Brigade War Diary entry 2 December 1944.
[8] AWM 52/1/5/12/56. 6th Australian Division War Diary entry 31 December 1944.
[9] AWM 52/1/5/12/59. 6th Australian Division War Diary entry 31 January 1945.
[10] AWM 52/8/3/2/46. 2/2nd Infantry Battalion War Diary Synopsis of Operations 1-31 March 1945.
[11] AWM 52/8/3/2/46. 2/2nd Infantry Battalion War Diary entry 27 March 1945.

west the patrol came across a 'very old destroyed Jap camp. Some water bottles no skeletons'.[12] Moving up a spur, the native guides pointed out markings on trees that could have been made by animals or footwear and near the top of the spur they came across a clearing that give a good view of the battalion positions. The two guides told Norrie that this position had been used as an OP by one or two Japanese that same morning. The patrol followed the track to a junction where they bivouacked for the evening.

The next morning the patrol moved to the top of Kauremerak Hill and established a patrol base, as the Japanese track did not did not cross the high ground. Norrie sent patrols to the southeast and southwest of the hill, but due to poor visibility from dense jungle they found nothing. The platoon then followed a Kanaka track northwest to a Japanese position that had been used the day before, which Norrie and Smiles presumed by the same Japanese who manned the OP. Following a razor back spur, the patrol came across a well-concealed weapon pit that dominated the track and was built in such a way that any occupant would not be 'skylined', due to scrub behind it and only visible when within three feet of it. From here a Japanese sentry was spotted a little more than 20 yards away but, according to orders, Norrie did not engage the enemy. What Norrie and Smiles did next was the last requirement of their patrol orders: to leave ample evidence that they had been in the area.

On a stick Smiles whittled a message in Romaji (literally meaning 'Roman letters' in Japanese, so the message was not written in Kanji script): 'Goshu Jin Wa Koko Ni Desu' and 'Gashi Shina Ka – Goshu Jin Ni Koson Yo Ka', and placed it in the pit. After waiting ten minutes the patrol moved off and soon after heard a rifle being cocked, and moved back toward their bivouac area from the night before. After a ten-minute rest the patrol heard sounds on the track behind them and as they left the high feature a single shot was fired overhead, which Norrie presumed was intended to draw their fire. The patrol evaded pursuit, returned and reported.

Toward the end of the war it was common practice for the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS) to broadcast messages over loudspeakers, airdrop leaflets and sometimes get close enough to deliver notes to encourage the surrender of Japanese troops. The message stick left by Norrie's patrol was similar to the tactics used by ATIS. In this instance the messages carved on the stick, 'Goshu Jin Wa Koko Ni Desu', translates as 'The master is here', and 'Gashi Shina Ka – Goshu Jin Ni Koson Yo Ka' translates approximately as 'The day of starvation – The master calls, your good days are over'. Whether the message sticks were effective could not be assessed, though it was rare that Japanese surrendered.[13] The real gain was that Norrie's patrol found a way to outflank the Japanese using a track that they thought would not be used, and the location of a number of weapon pits.

For the rest of the month the battalion conducted more reconnaissance patrols and sniping activities. Following heavy artillery fire and air strikes, the Japanese positions finally fell on 6 April, their lines of communication severed. This enabled an attack on the Japanese 20th Division headquarters, killing its commander, Maj Gen Nakai, and the eventual capture of Wewak on 10 May.

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[12] AWM 52/8/3/2/46. 2/2nd Infantry Battalion War Diary Patrol Report dated 30 March 1945.
[13] Long, 182.