SABRETACHE

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DECEMBER 2019

The aims of the Society are the encouragement and pursuit of study and research in military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment and kindred matters; the promotion of public interest and knowledge in these subjects, and the preservation of historical military objects with particular reference to the armed forces of Australia.

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Sabretache

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Editorial

The announcement on 3 October 2019 by the National Archives in Canberra of the digitisation of World War II service records for Army and Air Force personnel has been much anticipated. Funded by the federal government, $10 million should, hopefully, suffice in processing the 850,000 records over the next four years. For researchers, historians and family members this program will be as important as the digitisation of World War I records, making records available from any location online. We are still fortunate that these online records remain available free of charge, unlike some countries, allowing greater access and understanding of service personnel and their contribution to our history.

As these records begin to come online from early 2020, I look forward to the output of research by historians and Society members.

As this issue is the last for the year it is especially filled with book reviews to inspire the Christmas list and I am sure there will be something of interest.

Justin Chadwick

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Through a Lens Clearly
The Aerial Photography of No.1 Squadron AFC in the Middle East

Michael Nelmes[1]

Introduction

During 1916-1918 No.1 Squadron (Sqn) of the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) pioneered aerial photography in Australian service, and its work resulted in many of the first accurate maps of Sinai, Palestine, Syria and Trans-Jordan. Air Force Historian Martin James' 2017 treatise in *Sabretache* covering the squadron's operations included examples of the strategic and tactical applications of its aerial reconnaissance role.[2] Aerial photographs of the Middle East, sourced from the collection of air observer Lt Leslie Sutherland MC DCM, were featured. In the same publication, my article 'How War Shaped an Aero Club' included a summary of the service of Sutherland's fellow No.1 Sqn observer, Lt H. Bowden Fletcher DFC.[3]

This follow-on article looks further into the records of Sutherland, Fletcher and others to reveal how the squadron went about creating a photographic record of the cities and towns, settlements, enemy positions and logistical routes across the desert landscape, and how this work contributed to the outcome of the war. Along the way we will look at Sutherland's photographs (courtesy of the Office of Air Force History), his collection of squadron records for 1917-1918,[4] and his book

1 Michael Nelmes is an aviation historian and author. He also curates the Narromine Aviation Museum, NSW (which in 2018 mounted a centenary exhibition of aerial photographs by Lt H.B. Fletcher of No.1 Sqn AFC) and is the historical sub-editor for the RAAF Association's magazine, *Wings*. Previously he held curatorial positions at the Australian War Memorial in military technology and exhibitions, and was senior historical officer for the Office of Air Force History in Canberra.

2 Martin James, 'The Experience of No.1 Squadron Australian Flying Corps: A Flight into the Unknown', *Sabretache* 58, 4, (2017): 4–25.

3 Michael Nelmes, 'How War Shaped an Aero Club' (Part 1), *Sabretache* 58, 2, (2017): 35–46; 'How War Shaped an Aero Club' (Part 1), *Sabretache* 58, 3 (2017): p. 21–33.

4 L.W. Sutherland, 'Operations of the 1st Squadron AFC, 40th Wing RFC, 1917-19' incorporating Lt Col A.E. Borton's weekly intelligence summaries of 40th Wing operations and Maj S.W. Addison's review of No.1 Sqn's operations for 1918, State Library of NSW (SLNSW), ML MSS1046/4.

5 L.W. Sutherland and N. Ellison, *Aces and Kings*. John Halton: London (1929).

6 H.V. Leckie, 'The First Use of Military Photography by Australia in World War I', 1973, AWM 3DRL/4180.

Aces and Kings,[5] as well as the memoirs of squadron photographer Harry Leckie,[6] the diaries and letters of Fletcher,[7] and No.1 Sqn's war diary for 1918 including daily reconnaissance reports.[8] Squadron mechanic Joe Bull's diaries also contain references to aerial photography.[9]

When looking at the part played by aviation in the Great War, the war in the Sinai-Palestine desert is often neglected. Fought between the squadrons of the Royal Air Force's Palestine Brigade and those of the German and Ottoman air services, this campaign has been relegated in status well behind that of the Western Front. Yet the ramifications of the Middle Eastern war, in which air power was perhaps as important as in France and Belgium (though involving far fewer units and aircraft), are still with us a century later.

The air campaigns in each war theatre featured air-to-air combat, but arguably of greater military importance were the roles aircraft played in support of the ground war. Most accounts of the work of the AFC squadrons tend to focus on their combat roles: patrols which often featured desperate dog-fights and bombing or strafing of ground targets. The less glamourous, but equally dangerous, reconnaissance and photographic work is often overlooked. Providing 'eyes in the sky' for the commanders and troops on the ground was the primary responsibility of two of the four operational squadrons of the AFC – No.1 Sqn in Sinai-Palestine and No.3 Sqn in France.

While ground support came in several forms, including general reconnaissance and 'spotting' for artillery to improve its accuracy, aerial photography represented a revolution in reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. For recording enemy positions and troops, it not only augmented but often replaced the simpler, but less reliable and more arduous, method also used by pilots and air observers: pencil-marking onto maps. One can only speculate how many maps might have been whisked out of open cockpits in the slipstream. But as we will see, aerial photography had greater applications than recording enemy positions and movements. It became the very basis of, among other things, map-making and post-raid damage assessment.

Early applications

Photography using cameras taken aloft in balloons and kites dates back to 1858. Its first use from an aeroplane was in 1909, when Wilbur Wright took a motion picture camera over Rome in a Wright Flyer 'A'. Before the Great War Sgt (later Group Captain) Frederick Laws of the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) pioneered aerial

7 H.B. Fletcher diaries and letters, SLNSW, ML MSS 9667.

8 No.1 Sqn Australian Flying Corps War Diaries, 1918, (1916/17 are not held), AWM 4/8/4/1-8.

9 M. Lax, (ed), *One Airman's War: Aircraft mechanic Joe Bull's personal diaries 1916-1919*, Banner Books: Maryborough (1997).

photography from airships and aeroplanes, and in 1915 produced the Type L (for Laws) camera with a 6-inch (15 cm) focal length.[10] This became the standard British aerial camera. Meanwhile the British aviation pioneer John Moore-Brabazon, by then a lieutenant in the RFC, was working with the Thornton-Pickard company to develop an aerial camera. Moore-Brabazon later worked with Laws to produce the L/B camera. He also pioneered stereoscopic aerial photography, in which pairs of

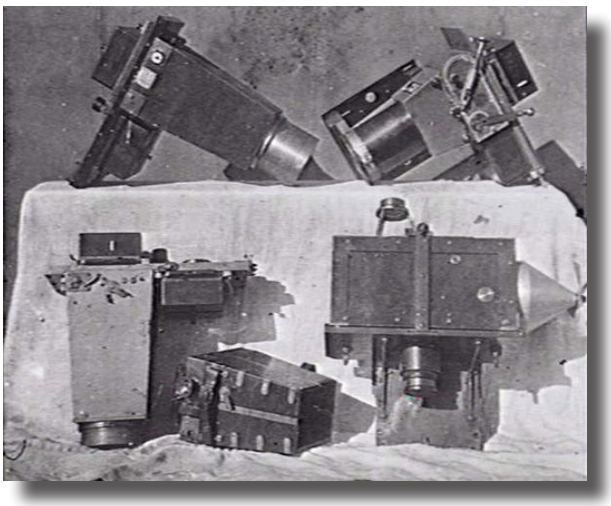

Figure 1: Aerial camera types used by No.1 Sqn.
Source: AWM P01184.002.

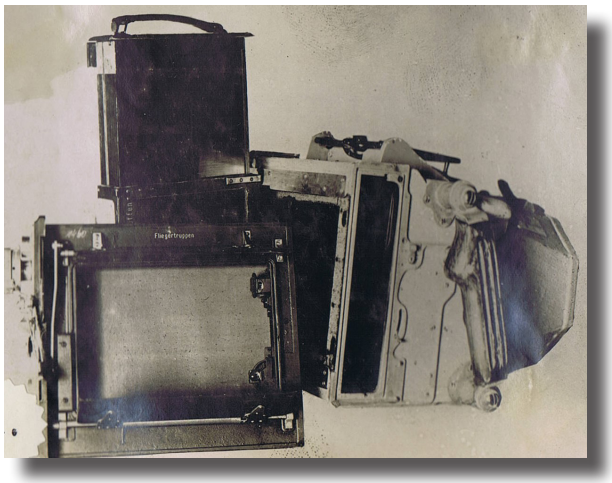

Figure 2: A German aerial camera removed from the cockpit of a downed enemy aircraft.
Source: Sutherland collection.

shortly spaced images were taken for intelligence analysis using a stereo viewer.

Like most new applications of technology, aerial photography was initially rudimentary. Nevertheless, early results were promising. The first pre-planned British offensive of the Great War, at Neuve Chapelle in France in March 1915, was planned using RFC aerial photographs. The first use of aerial photography in support of Australian troops was in the Gallipoli campaign, when a Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) pilot aimed a camera over the side of his cockpit. Some 700 glass plates were exposed over the peninsula and printed to create photomosaics from which grid maps were created and updated. Vertical images provided the basis for these, while 'aspect' (obliquely angled) images were taken for better views of installations and ground topography. These RNAS images, now in the collection of the Australian War Memorial, show remarkable clarity.

Good airmanship was required for mosaic work. The aircraft needed to be flown level while accurately maintaining height, speed and course during exposure runs. From higher altitudes, above the range of anti-aircraft fire, cameras with lenses of longer focal length were required in order to produce higher magnifications. Hand-holding and exposing a large camera while flying an aeroplane was impractical, so

10 G. Heiman, *Aerial Photography: The Story of Aerial Mapping and Reconnaissance*, Macmillan: New York (1972), p. 36-37.

cameras were mounted outside the fuselage next to the pilot (or, in two-seat aircraft, the observer).

No.1 Squadron recruits photographers

In April 1916, when No.1 Sqn AFC arrived at Suez to begin its contribution to the Sinai-Palestine campaign, its airmen had no experience in aerial photography.[11] Most, indeed, had little flying experience. No aircraft were on hand in any case. The men were temporarily posted to England for training, which did not include photography until 1917 when the pilots' flying course added a requirement to photograph six targets, using maps with alpha-numeric grid references.[12] Nevertheless, experience gained in part from the Gallipoli campaign made it clear from the start that the ability to photograph topography, terrain, enemy troop movements, and developments in infrastructure and supply lines from the air would represent a potentially war-winning advantage.

Soon after No.1 Sqn disembarked, a cable was sent back to Australia requesting three photographers to accompany the first reinforcements due to sail for Egypt on 25 July 1916. As no photographers were to be found in the Army, an advertisement was placed in the Melbourne *Argus* newspaper calling for applicants. Harry Leckie had learned his skills in professional photography at London Polytechnic, and was one of the three successful applicants of 48. The men – Leckie, Coulson and Wright – were first required to pass a test set by Kodak at Abbotsford. On 23 July, at Point Cook, they were taken up on air experience flights in the Central Flying School's Bristol Boxkite. Leckie took aloft his hand-held camera, and thus became the Army's first aerial photographer. Just two days later the three men set sail for Egypt, and on arrival at the squadron the next month, they joined a photographic specialist named Clutterbuck who was already on hand.

Two of the men spent a fortnight with the 5th Wing, Royal Flying Corps at Ismailia (sister wing to the Australian squadron's 40th Wing under the Palestine Brigade) to familiarise themselves with the British photographic equipment and methods. On their return to the squadron at Kantara, work began. Before each flight the aerial camera was prepared, and slide (or plate) holders were loaded with 5-inch x 4-inch (127mm x 102mm) plates and sealed against light. The plates were panchromatic – that is, sensitive across the visible spectrum. The photographic staff affixed the camera to a pair of upright fuselage struts on the squadron's BE.2c and

11 The squadron was soon renamed No.67 (Australian) Sqn, Royal Flying Corps, before reverting to No.1 Sqn AFC on 18 January 1918. For consistency, this article refers to it throughout as No.1 Sqn.

12 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. 431.

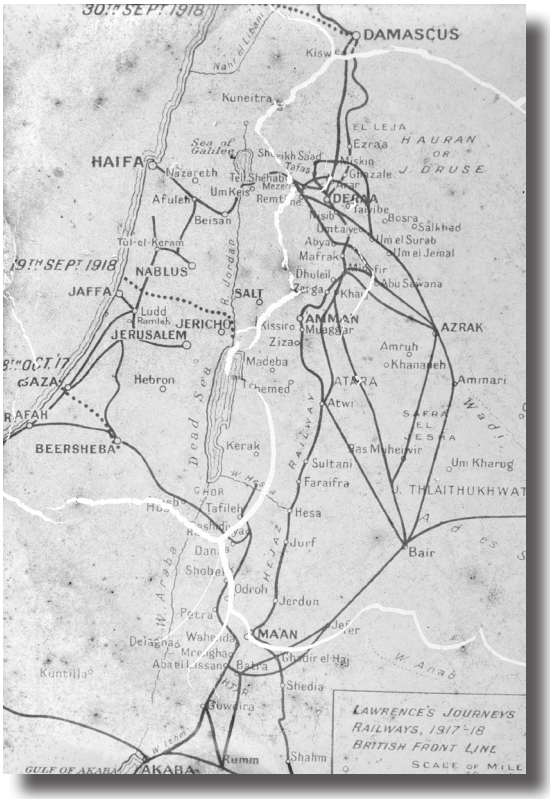

Figure 3: Map of the region, showing the advancing British front line (three dotted lines) and the railways (black lines). No.1 Sqn's base at Ramleh is marked between Jerusalem and Jaffa.
Source: Fletcher collection.

BE.2e aircraft, next to the observer, pointing vertically down. Initially the cameras, fitted with the best available British lenses of 8-inch (200mm) focal length, were fully manual. In the air the pilot (or observer in two-seat aircraft) loaded each slide into a holder on top of the camera, exposed it with a lever, removed the slide, and loaded the next. It was a cumbersome process, and many a slide was whipped away in the slipstream. Soon, however, cameras arrived which accommodated 18 slides in the top holder, the operating lever automatically loading a new slide after each exposure. From an altitude of 5,000 feet, each plate covered a square mile (2.5 sq km) of land; but as the plates had a photographic sensitivity of just 10 ASA (ISO), exposures had to be made in good light in order to keep shutter speeds short enough to eliminate movement. One limitation was that aperture and shutter speed were set before take off and fixed throughout a sortie.

Accommodation and equipment for the squadron's photographic section were basic. While the British squadron at the other side of the aerodrome enjoyed a specially-imported British photographic darkroom in which to process and print film, the Australians had to improvise such a facility made from an aircraft packing case. The case was internally divided: half for developing and the other half for the enlarger, acetylene gas providing its light source. Four prints per minute could be produced. The men worked mainly through the night, as the daytime heat in their uninsulated makeshift workspace was often extreme.

The squadron's first photography sorties

'B' Flight pioneered the squadron's use of aerial photography in September 1916, when flight commander Capt W. Oswald 'Toby' Watt took four two-seat BE.2c camera planes out on operations from Suez. Turkish outposts were photographed during ground attacks and reconnaissance or 'recce' flights, but purely photographic sorties were also flown. When machine-gun armed Martinsyde G.100s arrived the

next month, they had cameras fitted and also escorted the unarmed BE.2cs on photo flights over El Arish and Masaid. The single-seat Martinsydes and BE.12as gave pilots, whose attention was already taken up flying the aircraft, an additional job as photographer. As this was not ideal, two-seater RE.8s were also fitted with cameras, again mounted outside the right-hand side of the fuselage next to the air observer. The pilot was then free to fly the aircraft.

Photographic reconnaissance, notes Harry Leckie in his memoirs, soon became indispensable. 'No action was attempted against the Turks or against German aerodromes', he wrote, 'until the enemy territory had been photographed in detail, and every trench or position minutely examined to ascertain the layout of the country over which the attacks, down to the lightest skirmish, had to be made'.[13] After the first battle for Gaza in March 1917, Major General Salmond singled out the squadron's photographic section for congratulations for 'greatly facilitating the planning of the light horse attacks'.[14] Prior to the attack on Beersheba in October, daily photographs were taken of the defences and the information plotted on 1:20,000 maps by staff at Nuran Aerodrome. Each corrected map was then photographed. The same evening, prints of the map were sent by air or despatch rider to XX Corps and the Desert Mounted Corps.[15]

Apart from intelligence-gathering in the planning of attacks, the squadron found other related uses for aerial photography: using photographic survey prints to update the inadequate maps of the region, a task carried out by Royal Engineers survey companies, and bomb damage assessment following air raids so that the effectiveness of attacks could be gauged. From August 1917 an influx of personnel, especially transferees from the Australian Light Horse, allowed a stepped-up operational tempo in each of these applications. The squadron was soon recording the greatest number of monthly flying hours in its theatre. Official historian F.M. Cutlack records that prior to the third and final battle for Gaza in October, the squadron performed most of the photography over the front, which

> …demanded almost a daily patrol; the machines flew in pairs, and their objective was the photographing of the Turkish line for the purpose of map-making. The maps of the area from Gaza to Beersheba were drawn almost entirely from air-photographs taken by No. 1 Squadron. The airmen thus became the true precursors of the army's movements. They carried their cameras ever farther and farther afield. The maps made from their photographs enabled the artillery to shatter the enemy's defence positions at Gaza and later on in the Nablus hills, and by their maps, too, the light horse rode at last on their triumphant sweep through the Esdraelon plain.[16]

13 Leckie, 'First Use', AWM 3DRL/4180.

14 Leckie, 'First Use', AWM 3DRL/4180.

15 Sutherland, 'Operations of the 1st Squadron AFC, 40th Wing RFC, 1917-19', SLNSW ML MSS 1046/4.

16 Cutlack, *Australian Flying Corps*, p. 70.

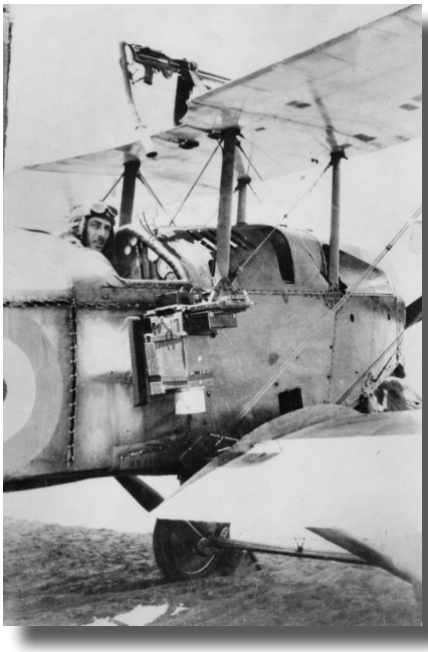

Figure 4: Capt (later AVM) Adrian Cole in a No.1 Sqn single-seat Martinsyde G.100 Elephant or 'Tinsyde'. A vertical Williamson camera is mounted on its fuselage side. Source: AWM P01034.038.

Figure 5: A BE.12a on reconnaissance approaches Beersheba. Source: Sutherland collection.

Figure 6: One of the squadron's first mosaics or 'overlaps' of four prints . Source: Sutherland collection.

Good photographic plates were highly prized, as they yielded a wealth of useful detail: enemy defensive emplacements, built infrastructure, and not only roads but narrow tracks showing supply routes. Leckie describes how the squadron's first mosaics of prints for map-making were produced. Photo runs by a single aircraft at either 5,000 or 8,000 feet, keeping to a constant altitude during each run so that the negatives had a consistent image scale. Six overlapping images were taken during each of three adjacent half-mile (800-metre) runs. The resulting 18 prints were assembled, and the mosaic then photographed to produce a single, detailed wide-view negative. The technique was honed to produce, by October 1917, a series of twenty large-scale (1:200,000) and numerous more detailed (1:20,000) maps, marking important roads, villages and emplacements previously either unrecorded or wrongly plotted. No.1 Sqn sorties for these operations totalled 163 hours, and the resulting maps were used in planning the assault on Beersheba on 31 October.

In the week following the surrender of Beersheba, maps of the region were refined from photographs and printed daily. From these photographs, accurate numbers of enemy troops could also be ascertained. Images taken on 2 November, for example, revealed a column of 750 infantry moving between Hariera and Sheria, where 1025 cavalry were concentrated. Near the Gaza to Beersheba road, 430 infantry and 160 cavalry were counted moving east and south-east.

Enter the 'Biff'

Enemy air attacks often interfered with photographic and other sorties during 1916-1917 before air supremacy was achieved. During the above week alone, 40th (Army) Wing reported 18 aerial combats, some involving No.1 Sqn's photo aircraft. Colonel Richard Williams, commanding No.1 Sqn (and later the 40th Wing), was keenly aware of the difficulty his reconnaissance crews faced in defending themselves against superior enemy aircraft, and the ineffectiveness of the lightly armed, mediocre single-seaters escorting them. He told General Branker, Officer Commanding the RAF in Palestine,

> 'Give me Bristol Fighters. I will put two men in one of those aircraft and I'll have the reconnaissance done in no time - and they can protect themselves. I don't want any escort'. I hadn't the faintest hope then that they would take the aircraft from a British squadron and give them to us. They didn't do that sort of thing for Australians. Well, to my surprise some SE[.5]s arrived in Egypt to form an additional squadron, and the first thing Branker did was give the SE's to the new squadron and give me their Bristol Fighters.[17]

The Bristol F.2B Fighter, known among airmen as the Brisfit or 'Biff', was in many ways the ultimate fighting machine of the war, a clear improvement on the earlier

17 Sir Richard Williams interview by Fred Morton, March 1976, AWM S00368.

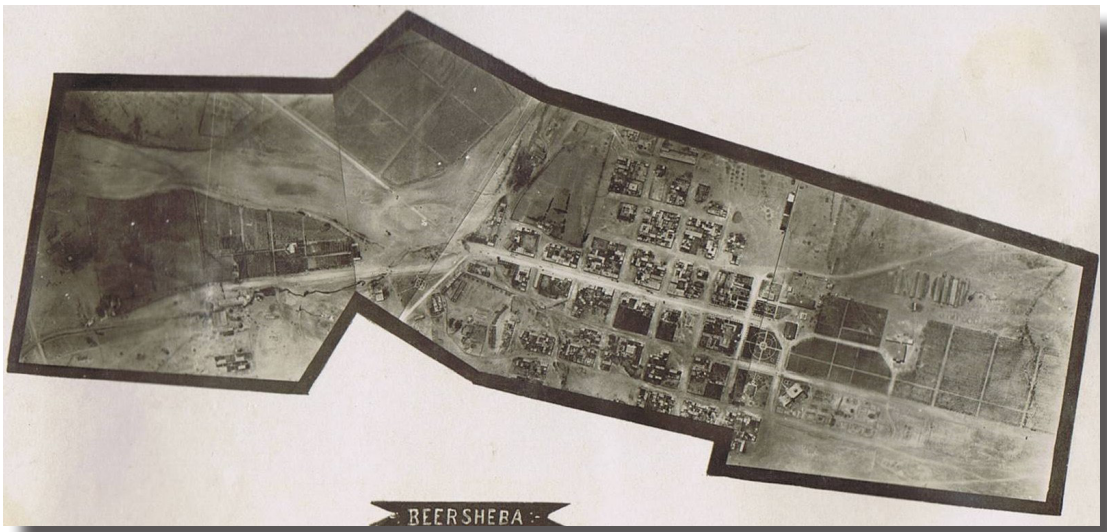

Figure 7: Reconnaissance mosaic of Beersheba. Source: Sutherland collection.

types and one which German intelligence recognised as a formidable opponent. The enemy commanders in the desert acknowledged that a squadron of Bristols represented an 'extraordinary fighting force'. No.1 Sqn got its new aircraft from its sister squadron in the wing, No.111 Sqn, RFC, which had been flying them since the previous July. Now No.1 Sqn could, in the words of air observer Lt Hudson Fysh, take a 'vigorous offensive' role. The type was especially liked for its manoeuvrability, thanks to its light yet strong construction and a powerful (190- and, later, up to 275-horsepower) Rolls Royce Falcon engine. And as Williams pointed out, its suitability for both reconnaissance and fighting roles made it especially sought-after by squadrons with a 'recce' role. From the logistical viewpoint of efficiency, it was desirable to equip a squadron with one adaptable type than with the motley collection of types Williams had inherited.

The first of the squadron's 19 'Biffs' arrived at its base at Mejdel, Palestine, at the end of December 1917. Like a number of their predecessor types they were 'presentation' aircraft from the Australian Air Squadrons Funds, provided by private, commercial and state government (New South Wales and South Australian) sponsors. A month later the new squadron commander, Major Syd Addison, included in his January 1918 report the squadron's operational aircraft inventory: nine Bristols, two RE.8s, four BE.12as and five Martinsyde G.100s. The latter two

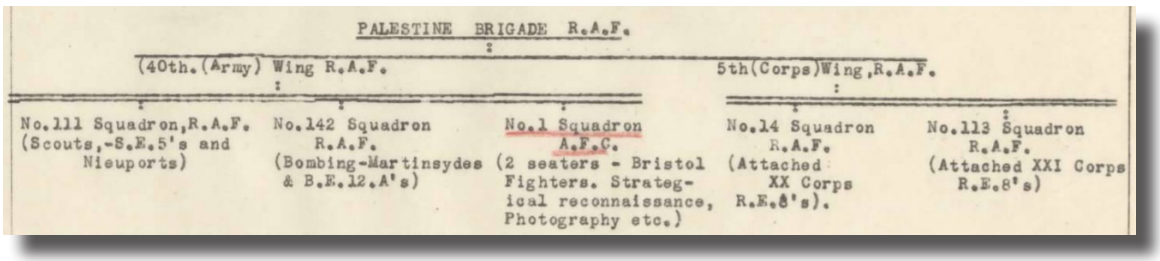

Figure 8: Organisational chart showing how No.1 Sqn was placed within the Royal Air Force's Palestine Brigade in mid-1918. Source: Sutherland collection.

types were put to use mid-month for a two-week special photo-mapping task, as Cutlack records (paraphrasing Maj Addison):

> The method was for five machines, Martinsydes and BE.12a's, to fly in line 1,000 yards [metres] apart at a height of 12,000 feet, thus ensuring an overlap of the exposures of each camera. Day after day this patrol worked devotedly, under the escort of three Bristol Fighters… One day the work had to be done in a gale, with the wind blowing at sixty-five miles an hour at 5,000 feet. At other times parts of the area would be obscured by clouds; such localities were faithfully revisited by the pilots responsible for them.[18]

The photography pilots were Lieutenants Brown, Fraser, Kenny, Taplin, and Rogers, and their three Bristol escorts were crewed by Maj Addison with Lt Hudson Fysh as observer, Capt Ross Smith with Lt Ernest Mustard as observer, and Capt Hicks with Lt Hartley as observer (the latter crew from No.111 Sqn). In *Aces and Kings*, Leslie Sutherland describes an incident during the project which illustrates the stress placed on pilots when having to double as photographers. On 17 January Lt Len Taplin in a BE.12a had just changed the cartridge of glass negatives for his fuselage-mounted camera when, as often happened, the mechanism jammed:

> … [gripping the control stick] between his knees – he dismantled the camera to adjust it. A Hun Albatros chose this very inconvenient time to attack him. Taplin turned and engaged it, but his gun being cold, jammed after the firing of one shot. "Taps", with his arms still full of camera, cleared the stoppage in his Vickers [machine gun]. Meantime, the Albatros had dived to come up under his tail. Taplin's gun responded to treatment and he turned on the Hun's tail, put a burst of thirty into him and down went the Albatros in a dive. Taps then completed the "roadside" repairs to his camera; picked up his place in the formation, and carried on.[19]

A second attacking Albatros was driven off by the escorting Bristols. Taplin earned a DFC for his remarkable feat of downing a German fighter while flying a BE.12a – the only No.1 Sqn pilot to do so – and would finish the war as the squadron's greatest ace, with 12 aerial victories. The fortnight-long photo-mosaic task was responsible for the squadron achieving, in unco-operative weather, a record for photographic coverage of Palestine, Transjordan and Syria: 1,600 square km extending 100 km behind enemy lines, including enemy aerodromes such as El Fule. This effort earned the squadron a congratulatory letter from Borton, who praised the project as 'the highest point which has yet been reached in map making photography'.[20]

By the end of March the squadron was solely equipped with Bristols. The six examples with more powerful 275 hp versions of the Rolls Royce Falcon engine were intended for patrol and escort roles in which enemy aircraft would more likely

18 Cutlack, *Australian Flying Corps*, p. 94.
19 Sutherland and Ellison, *Aces and Kings*, p. 7.
20 Maj Addison's report, SLNSW ML MSS1046/4.

be encountered, while the remaining dozen with 190 hp Falcons and fitted with fuselage-mounted cameras were intended as photographic and reconnaissance aircraft.[21] However, in practice the pace of operations was such that any available Bristol might be called upon in any role.

In an early example of multi-role capability, this one aircraft type performed all the squadron's roles including reconnaissance, photography, ground attack and patrol/air combat. For a short time even cinematography (for public relations rather than intelligence purposes) was added to the squadron's remit, using a movie camera taking 100-foot (30 m) film rolls. The AIF's official photographer, Captain Frank Hurley, arrived at the squadron on 16 February and was taken aloft for some movie runs over Jerusalem and Jericho. Hurley also conducted some reconnaissance photography.[22]

German and Turkish air opposition was now becoming infrequent and ineffective,[23] partly thanks to the Bristol's speed and manoeuvrability which enabled it to take on any attackers on equal or better terms. By April the British and Australian units had gained air supremacy. Williams mentions one Albatros scout which attacked a Bristol until it was turned upon and forced down behind the Australian lines. He recalled it well, as he then got to test fly the enemy machine!

'Fletch' joins the fray

Lieutenant H. Bowden Fletcher DFC, a Gallipoli veteran and member of the 12th Australian Light Horse in the Sinai, transferred as an air observer to the squadron in November 1917, took on the additional job of aerial photographer when posted to B Flight in the squadron.[24] His diaries and letters include descriptions of operations on which he exposed up to 50 glass plates from altitudes of up to 16,000 feet. By 1918, technical progress was such that the camera automatically changed plates after each image. In No.3 Sqn in France, the job of photography was split between pilot and observer – the former pressing the remote shutter button at set time intervals using a stopwatch, the latter changing the magazine of plates when expended – and this may sometimes have been the procedure in No.1 Sqn also.

Immediately after landing, the exposed plates were taken to the squadron's photographic section, where they were developed and printed. Sutherland notes in his book that the addition of chlorine to the water supply (a measure against

21 Keith Isaacs, *Military Aircraft 1909-1918*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra (1971), p. 72.

22 H.B. Fletcher diary entry 16 February 1918, SLNSW, ML MSS9667.

23 Enemy air opposition now consisted of no more than 80 aircraft in four German squadrons at Afule, Jenin and Amman, plus one Turkish squadron at Kutrani.

24 Fletcher wrote of his light horse experiences in *Boundary Riders of Egypt*, Australasian Authors' Agency: Melbourne (1919).

Figure 9: After bombing Deraa (south of Damascus) on 16 September 1918, this DH.9 of No.144 Sqn suffered engine failure and crash-landed in enemy territory east of the River Jordan. Source: Fletcher collection.

Figure 10: Air observer/photographer Lt Ernest Mustard DFC (left) at Ramleh after a reconnaissance flight, having handed his aerial camera over to the squadron's recording officer. Source: Sutherland collection

Figure 11: A group of No.1 Sqn observer/photographers. Back row, L to R: Lieutenants Bowden Fletcher DFC, Hudson Fysh DFC, Charles Vyner, Harold Letch MC, Ernest Mustard DFC, Leslie Sutherland DCM MM. Front row, L to R: Frederic Hawley, Walter Kirk, Richard Camm, Garfield Finlay, Edward Beaton. Source: Sutherland collection.

Figure 12: Captain Frank Hurley with camera and cinecamera in a Bristol Fighter piloted by Captain Ross Smith, February 1918. The guns have been removed and a camera platform fitted. Source: AWM P03137.010.

Figure 13: Pilot Ted Kenny and observer Leslie Sutherland (standing in rear cockpit) in a Bristol Fighter at Mejdel airfield, after returning from a reconnaissance over Jerusalem. Bristol C4626 was a replacement 'presentation' aeroplane, New South Wales No.15 'The Women's Battleplane'. Source: Sutherland collection.

Figure 14: The Mediterranean port city of Haifa, imaged from 8,000 feet on 8 June 1918. Source: AWM Fletcher collection.

Figure 15: The German aerodrome at Jenin, Syria. Source: Sutherland collection.

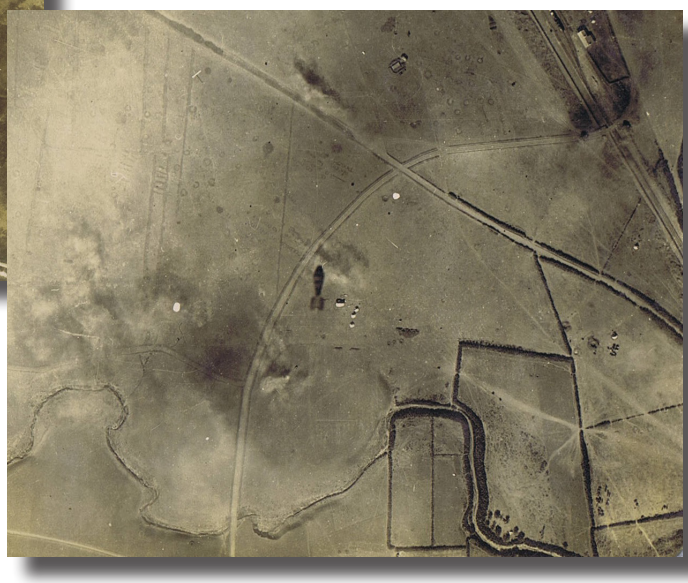

Figure 16: A squadron bombing raid on German hangars and railway (upper right) at Deraa, Syria. A falling bomb can be seen.
Source: Sutherland collection.

cholera) did not help in the developing process. The prints were then sent to the cartographic and intelligence staff, and by next morning copies of revised maps had been printed and delivered to the front line. Meanwhile, aspect (obliquely angled) images of enemy encampments, munitions dumps, railways stations and other installations had been examined in detail. Example photographs were also printed for the squadron's monthly war diary.

Fletcher took pains to point out the importance of the observers' photographic work. In his letters home he records his disapproval that observers were only awarded their flying 'wings' brevet after accumulating three times the flying hours required by pilots (100 vs 30 hours) while the observer/photographer, he declared, was the man doing 'ninety percent of the work' in the two-man crew.[25] Fletcher was understandably perturbed when, on reaching his 100 hours, the squadron commander initially declined to award him his wings. He soon relented and Fletcher proudly sewed the cloth brevet onto his tunic: an 'O' for observer, centred in a pair of wings (like the pilot's badge) instead of the later single wing. When Fletcher earned his Distinguished Flying Cross after shooting down enemy aircraft on 24 August 1918,[26] the citation also referred to his 'much valuable and dangerous work in obtaining photographs and intelligence regarding roads, etc. which was particularly required'.[28]

During March-April, enemy camps, defences, roads and rail movements were photographed in the region of Amman and Es Salt, east of the River Jordan, allowing revised maps and intelligence from over 600 plates exposed for planning the raid on Es Salt.[27] Fletcher's role in attacking the Amman aerodrome on 2 May was mentioned in his Distinguished Flying Cross citation,and is also detailed in Cutlack's official history. In May, systematic runs over the Damieh region earned more praise from 'Biffy' Borton who was now air vice-marshal commanding RAF Palestine Brigade. The West Bank region from Samaria to Nablus was likewise photographed, and in June Haifa. However, no job could be considered finished, as up-to-date photographs were taken almost daily for the revision of maps.

During their photographic sorties, the Bristols often descended to make strafing attacks on the target, or on other targets of opportunity – railway yards and trains, aerodromes, camps or other infrastructure – and these too were photographed. Cutlack records that on 9 and 11 July a pair of Bristols circled the Jenin and Balata (Nablus) aerodromes at around 2,000 feet, Ross Smith's observer photographing while the second crew shot up the hangars, aircraft and personnel. These relatively low-level airfield passes were highly dangerous, attracting anti-

25 Letter from Fletcher to parents, 26 May 1918, Narromine Aviation Museum.

26 Fletcher's pilot on this occasion was Lt Paul McGinness, usual pilot for Lt Hudson Fysh, who later co-founded Qantas with Fysh.

27 Cutlack, *Australian Flying Corps*, p. 113.

28 Recommendation for DFC, AWM 28/2/116.

aircraft fire and, occasionally, German scouts into the air.

The numbers of photographic sorties flown by No.1 Sqn during 1916-1917 have not come to light, but the squadron's diary for 1918 provides monthly figures. In January it averaged 1.2 such flights daily,[29] a figure not reached again until August as seen in the table below. From May onwards, attention was paid to the Nablus to Beisan road (leading down the Wadi Fara stream into the Jordan valley), prior to the massacre of the Turkish 7th Army there and the final Allied offensive of Megiddo (Armageddon) in September which the squadron oversaw. Another focus at the same time was Tul Keram's railway marshalling yards, which were photographed before and after being bombed.

Table: Aerial photography statistics for No.1 Sqn AFC in 1918 (from monthly summaries appended to the unit diary).

Month (1918)	Photographic reconnaissance operations flown	Enemy territory photographed (square miles)	Plates exposed	Prints produced
January	39	?	1616	7783
February	18	194	507	5112
March	23	240	518	4560
April	23	230	609	5397
May	16	180	367	4819
June	16	85	365	4647
July	24	156	524	7028
August	39	384	958	7068
September	8	64	387	6235
October	6	?	33	1250
November	?	?	28	810

Note: Square miles photographed are by vertical cameras only (excludes 'aspect' images). The fluctuations in figures reflect both demand and weather restrictions.

On 26 April 1918 the squadron moved base from Mejdel forward to a former German aerodrome at Ramleh, between Jerusalem and Jaffa. The squadron war diary for August mentions experiments with an L-type prism aspect camera, and also the successful production of stereoscopic images. Although stereoscopic photographs had long been popular with the civilian population, the operational problems of producing stereo images from the air delayed this application until

29 No.1 Sqn Australian Flying Corps War Diary, January 1918, AWM 4/8/4/1.

Figure 19: One reason why attacking rail transportation was a high priority for No.1 Sqn: this train is carrying German aircraft fuselage and wings.
Source: Fletcher collection.

late in the war. Pairs of prints or slides made from exposures taken seconds apart were loaded into a stereo viewer and examined by intelligence staff. Particularly useful information could be gleaned from these, as the three-dimensional landscape revealed topography and vertical structures not readily seen in a single image. At the time of the theatre armistice on 31 October 1918, the squadron was at Haifa but withdrew to Ramleh, and finally to Kantara for an expected move to France and the war on the Western Front. The armistice on 11 November ended that plan.

Post-war legacies in war and peace

Australian airmen were pioneers in proving the usefulness, and indeed the tactical and strategic necessity, of aerial photography on both the Western Front and the Middle Eastern theatre. The discipline continued to evolve, and in 1925 photography was again made one of the primary tasks of Nos.1 and 3 Squadrons when they were reborn in peacetime Australia as the first squadrons in the RAAF. In 1932 both began a series of photographic surveys to identify potential sites for oilfields and other natural resources in the four eastern states. A Queensland survey was conducted by a pair of No.3 Sqn Westland Wapitis, from which the Commonwealth Geologist was able to use prints to help define the geological structure of the various districts.

Figure 17: Oblique image of damage sustained by the railway station and yards at Tul Keram, Palestine (top) following a bombing raid, 24 September 1918. A lorry transport park is seen at left. Source: Fletcher collection.

Figure 18: Wrecked rolling stock among rubble, possibly the Tul Keram railway station (see Fig.17). At centre and right are an *Asien-Korps* soldier and a sailor.
Source: Fletcher collection.

This may have been a catalyst for the formation, the following year, of an inter-departmental committee to oversee a North Australian Aerial Geological and Geophysical Survey. Headed by W/Cdr Harry Cobby, its charter was to look into the feasibility of a more wide-ranging photographic survey in search of natural resources in the continent's north. The committee concluded that the

48 Baldry, Letter, 12 February 1918, NLA MS10290/37.

RAAF could accomplish the task for less than one-sixth the cost of employing civil contractors. Accordingly, a North Australia Survey Flight was formed within No.1 Sqn at Laverton and operated on behalf of the Department of the Interior. Over five months in 1935, its three Westland Wapitis operating out of Cloncurry, Alice Springs and Port Hedland surveyed the regions within range of those towns. While not as wide-ranging as the civilian Mackay surveys which had begun five years earlier, the Queensland survey alone covered some 9,000 sq km in 500 flying hours. By this time technology had progressed to the point where aerial photography was largely automatic, using internal cameras with film spools of 200 frames which were advanced electrically to take exposures at set intervals. It still, however, required sound piloting skills.

Photo-reconnaissance was to play a still greater role during the Second World War than it did in the First. The RAAF formed its own photo-reconnaissance unit, and its aircraft (primarily Mosquitoes) carried multiple large, high-precision automatic cameras producing highly magnified images of great clarity. The Mosquito PR.41 at the Australian War Memorial is displayed with examples of these, along with detailed image enlargements. Taken from altitudes of 30,000 feet or higher, they show Japanese harbours, airfields and installations more than 1,500 km distant from the aircraft's point of departure. Australian-built PR Mosquitoes continued the photography role in peace time, RAAF Survey Flight (renamed No.87 Sqn) photographing large areas of Australia for mapping purposes until 1953.

By the time of the Vietnam War, photo-reconnaissance capabilities even included night-time imaging. RAAF pilots, seconded to US Air Force tactical reconnaissance squadrons to fly RF-4C Phantom jets, used infrared detectors to photograph swathes of land in search of heat sources such as enemy camp fires or motor vehicles.[30] By this time, spy satellites were imaging places where aircraft could not easily or safely venture. Through the 1970s, the Canberra bombers of No.2 Sqn RAAF continued the earlier Mosquitoes' task of photographing large areas of Australia and the region for mapping purposes.

In the third millennium, new technologies abound. During 2003-2012, the Lockheed Orions of the RAAF's No.92 Wing Detachment in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO) flew over 2,400 intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions.[31] The capabilities of their imaging and other remote sensing equipment, and that of the surveillance drones which now operate over the Middle East, are beyond anything the desert air observers of 1918 could have imagined.

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30 Chris Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen & Unwin: Sydney (1995), pp. 285–295.

31 'RAAF Orions: Watching Over the Middle East', *Pathfinder Bulletin* No. 190, Air Power Development Centre (2012).

In the decades after the Great War, a number of the pilots, observers and mechanics of No.1 Sqn went on to make their mark on Australian aviation. The squadron's photographic flight pioneer Oswald Watt, who in 1911 had been the Australian Army's first qualified pilot, went on to command No.2 Sqn AFC in France and the Australian training wing in England. Since his death by drowning in 1921, the Oswald Watt Gold Medal had been a coveted award for feats in Australian aviation. Squadron commander Lt Col Richard Williams, later the RAAF's first chief of air staff (1922-39), is known as the 'father of the RAAF'. Paul McGinness and Hudson Fysh co-founded Qantas in November 1920. Lawrence Wackett managed the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation from the time of its formation in 1936. Bowden Fletcher founded the Queensland Aero Club in 1919, the Narromine Aero Club in 1929, and advocated for aviation in New South Wales.

Squadron photographer Harry Leckie instituted a legacy of a different kind. On 10 December 1919 his fellow squadron airman Capt Ross Smith and crew landed their Vickers Vimy bomber at Darwin, winning the Great Air Race from England to Australia. Leckie, living in Melbourne, thought that he and other former wartime airmen should welcome the crew when they reached the city to receive their prize money from Prime Minister Hughes. Leckie also saw this reunion as a first step in forming an ex-AFC association. He advertised in the newspaper, asking former members to meet him outside St Paul's Cathedral. Among his many comrades who showed up was 'Dicky' Williams. An informal dinner was held for the Smith crew when they reached Melbourne at the end of February, and it was agreed to form an Australian Flying Corps Association in Victoria. In 1921, AFC associations were established in the other states; and twenty years later, the AFC Association became the RAAF Association.

Acknowledgements: My thanks to David Pearson (MHSA), who suggested I write this follow-up article to the 2017 *Sabretache* articles by Air Force Historian Martin James (Office of Air Force History) and myself; and also to Martin for arranging access to the Sutherland collection of photographs. The Fletcher collection of photographs was donated as original glass half-plates to the Narromine Aviation Museum by Ewen Simpson (great nephew of H.B. Fletcher), and scanned by the museum. Ewen also donated Fletcher's letters to the museum, and his diaries and letters to the State Library of NSW which has now made them available online.

'Nothing to diminish their glamour' Project CHECO and the RAAF

Justin Chadwick

Introduction

In October 1962, Major Thomas Hickman and Joseph Grainger, arrived at the Tan Son Nhut Air Base in South Vietnam. Accommodated in a tent at the airfield, with a French language typewriter and a tape recorder that did not work, they were the vanguard of Project CHECO, the program to document the United States Air Force's (USAF) role in Southeast Asia. Project CHECO (Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations) was to provide analysis of USAF operations that previously had been unrecorded. The importance of Project CHECO can be seen in the 251 monographs produced covering all aspects of Allied air operations in Southeast Asia. One such report was 'The RAAF in SEA: A Special Report', prepared in 1970. This report outlined the role of Australian air power, its contribution to the conflict, and the evolution of Australian practice that resulted in a performance widely admired by the USAF in Vietnam.

From advice to participation: US air force involvement in Vietnam

US Air Force involvement in what became South Vietnam commenced with French negotiations for support in Indochina. Arguing that it was the only country with a 'hot' frontline in the Cold War, France sought economic and military assistance from its Western allies.[1] French policymakers believed Indochina would be useful as leverage to ensure retention of its colonial possession while keeping US forces in Europe.[2] To reinforce requests for foreign assistance, the French government proposed regional cooperative schemes, particularly joint military planning.[3] The US responded by authorizing aid and forming the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), Indochina, in 1950, with an air force component being added the following year. Staffing levels were initially small, which reduced the capacity of the Americans to properly oversee the distribution of military equipment. This problem

1 Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam*, University Press of Kentucky, Lexington (2007), p. 19.
2 Mark Thompson, 'Defending the Rhine in Asia: France's 1951 Reinforcement Debate and French International Ambitions', *French Historical Studies* 38 (2015), p. 498.
3 Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam*, University of California Press, Berkeley (2005), p. 200.

was not as prevalent with the MAAG Air Force and Navy teams, as they were better able to inspect equipment at fixed bases situated in secure areas.[4] However, by mid-1951 reports cited French disregard for safety and preventative maintenance, while continuing the practice of drinking whilst working.

The first US aircraft for French forces, forty F-6F Hellcats, arrived in October 1950, replacing British Mk IX Spitfires. A further delivery of F-8F Bearcat fighters arrived in early 1951, followed by five RB-26 reconnaissance planes and twenty-four B-26 bombers.[5] These deliveries, part of the Mutual Defense Assistance Program, allowed the French air force to increase its number of sorties with more modern aircraft. No longer being fought as inexpensively as possible with hand-me-downs, US military aid contributed significantly to the French victories over Viet Minh forces.[6] In January 1951, US-supplied napalm bombs and artillery were instrumental in the defeat of two Viet Minh divisions that attacked Vinh Yen, northwest of Hanoi.[7] Subsequent actions resulted in a war of equilibrium.

The Korean War armistice in July 1953 allowed further delivery of US aid to French forces. President Eisenhower, in January 1954, requested a report on increasing aid without resorting to using US personnel in combat. In expectation that MAAG would expand its role, Secretary of Defense, Charles E Wilson, increased the Air Force section from seven officers and eight airmen to 30 officers and 35 airmen.[8] However, following the Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Agreements, USAF logistics support personnel were instructed to depart and material support suspended.

The widening communist threat and the parlous state of the South Vietnamese military ensured continuing US support. By 1960 MAAG personnel numbered 685, of which about 100 were from the USAF. Permanent duty personnel arrived in Vietnam in 1961 to operate a tactical air command system, photo reconnaissance and a combat detachment.[9] Codenamed Operation Farm Gate, Vietnamese air force personnel were initially trained in counterinsurgency warfare. Later, USAF pilots and crew flew in interdiction and close support operations. US involvement had altered from providing advice to participation.[10]

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4 Ronald H. Spector, *United States Army in Vietnam: Advice and Support: The Early Years 1941-1960*, Center of Military History United States Army, Washington (1985), p. 117.

5 Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965*, Office of Air Force History, Washington (1981), p. 7.

6 Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London (2004), p. 178.

7 Richard W. Stewart, *Deepening the Involvement 1945-1965*, Center of Military History, Washington (2012), p. 11.

8 Futrell, *Advisory Years*, p. 16.

9 Futrell, *Advisory Years*, p. 73-74.

10 John Schlight, *A War Too Long: The USAF in Southeast Asia 1961-1975*, Air Force History and Museums Program, Washington (1996), p. 6.

Australia's air commitment in Vietnam

Australia's involvement in the air war in South Vietnam began with the commitment of a single C-47 Dakota transport aircraft in 1962. The decision was made following the request of the US for 'Free World Forces' to participate in their attempts to control communism in Southeast Asia. Although the Australian government was reluctant to furnish a large contingency, it did provide a group of Army advisers that were to be used in an instructional role only.[11] The single Dakota aircraft was to provide services for diplomatic staff and the army training team rather than in military operations. While a minor involvement, RAAF personnel would be able to familiarize themselves with Southeast Asia.[12]

The changing circumstances in Vietnam resulted in a request for an increased RAAF presence. In early 1963 the Australian ambassador in Saigon, Brian Hill, informed Canberra of an inquiry by the US embassy for a self-contained RAAF squadron of Dakota's, with an extra 16 pilots.[13] Following further negotiations, and President Johnson's plea for other non-Communist countries to join the US effort in Vietnam, the Australian Joint Planning Committee recommended more army trainers, specialists and six RAAF Caribou transport aircraft.[14] Integrated into the USAF airlift system, the Caribous were the first to be used by the USAF, 2½ years before the transfer of US Army C-7s.[15] Following the formation of the 1st Australian Task Force (1ATF) in 1966, No 9 Squadron, flying UH-1 Iroquois helicopters, were deployed. The final expansion of operational aircraft was the addition of B-57 Canberra bombers of No 2 Squadron in April 1967.

The development of Project CHECO

As USAF pilots and crew became involved in direct operations against Viet Cong insurgents, it was decided that the new theatre provided unique learning opportunities. Vice Commander of the Pacific Air Force (PACAF), Lieutenant General Thomas Mooreman, issued a memorandum in March 1962 that highlighted the new forces, tactics, policies, environment and techniques now available. He noted the importance of documenting and analyzing operational data that could be implemented immediately and later serve as material for official histories. In

11 Ian McNeill, *The Team: Australian Army Advisers in Vietnam 1962-1972*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra (1984), p. 5.
12 Chris Coulthard-Clark, *The RAAF in Vietnam: Australian Air Involvement in the Vietnam War 1962-1975*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards (1995), p. 21.
13 Coulthard-Clark, *RAAF in Vietnam*, p. 25-26.
14 'Australia to Increase Aid', *The Canberra Times*, 9 June 1964, p. 1.
15 James Bear, 'Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report: The RAAF in SEA', HQ PACAF, 30 September 1970, p. 3.

response, in June 1962, the Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations (CHECO) was formed.[16]

After a rocky start, CHECO personnel gained access to documents and conducted interviews with participants. Monthly reports were prepared that covered all facets of air operations, with the first major report delivered in April 1963 that compared the YC-123 and the CV-2 Caribou transport aircraft. These were followed by the use of helicopters in assault operations and particular armaments. However, it was not until mid-1964 that the CHECO team released its first official report that extensively covered the USAF involvement in Southeast Asia between October 1961 and December 1963.

An increase in the CHECO team's role paralleled that of US involvement in Vietnam. Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 and President Johnson's decision to deploy jet aircraft, USAF operations increased rapidly. Initially as retaliatory strikes for Viet Cong attacks and then in support of US ground troops. Project CHECO's first major work after the escalation was 'Punitive Air Strikes', which discussed the value of the early 1965 retaliatory air strikes. This was followed by 'Escalation of the war in SEA, Jul-Dec 1964', written by Kenneth Sams, a USAF civil servant. Sams, through an Army drinking friend, accessed an array of Top Secret documents with the resultant report recommending an increase in US airpower.

As the war progressed CHECO continued to provide timely assessments of operations. In 1966 'Contemporary' in the title was replaced with 'Current' and 'Counterinsurgency' with 'Combat', to better reflect the tasks undertaken. CHECO's staff increased to satisfy demand for information from commanders and by 1970 had doubled to a staff of 20. The reports created were varied, but fell under four main categories: tactical missions, specific operations, campaigns and technology. Subjects included the use of herbicides, 'Ranch Hand: Insecticide Operations in SEA'; 'Psychological Operations: Air Support in SEA June 1968-May 1971'; 'Interdiction of Waterways and POL Pipelines SEA'; 'Command and Control 1966-1968'; and the air war in all areas of Vietnam. CHECO reports continued to be produced after the war ended, with its final report published in January 1979.[17] Of the 251 monographs one involved Australia: 'The RAAF in SEA'.

16 Daniel S. Hoadley, *What Just Happened? A Historical Evaluation of Project CHECO*, MA thesis, Air University (2013), p. 14.

17 Hoadley, *What Just Happened?*, p. 42.

Figure 1: Front view of No 9 Squadron UH-1B helicopter gunship 'Ned Kelly', March 1968.
Source: AWM P01999.009.

RAAF and Project CHECO

Project CHECO's report on RAAF operations in South Vietnam was released in September 1970. The report provided an overview of operations, a general background of Australia's involvement in Vietnam, the helicopter, bombing and airlift missions, forward air controllers and the Army's use of tactical air. From the outset the report was full of praise, highlighting Australia as the only ally to play a significant role in the air war, with a 'level of competence widely admired by the US Air Force in Vietnam'. The RAAF learnt from USAF tactics and adopted them to their own needs, resulting in 'a fruitful association'.[18] Brigadier WT Galligan,

commander of the 35th US Tactical Flight Wing between August 1969 and June 1970, stated that 'I can't speak highly enough of their outstanding professionalism, across the board. I only wish that all USAF units could do as well'.[19] Highlighted in the report was the fact that during the six years leading to publication the RAAF suffered no operational loss or fatality. While the report is primarily narrative in nature it does highlight the importance of the development of helicopter gunships and the deployment of Canberra bombers.

Figure 2: View from No. 9 Squadron helicopter gunship fitted with dual M60 machine guns.
Source: 'The RAAF in SEA', (Figure 1).

No 9 Squadron and the development of helicopter gunships

Located at Vung Tau, No 9 Squadron was the largest Australian helicopter operation. The squadron, supporting the Army component, carried out troop movements, inserted and extracted special reconnaissance patrols, evacuated wounded, and supplied troops in the field, amongst other activities. Under direct control of the Australian Task Force Commander it was the only Australian squadron not under USAF control. Established at the same time as the task force, No 9 Squadron's eight UH-1Bs helicopters soon worked at capacity with over 2,000 sorties flown

18 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 1.
19 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 17.

per month.[20] As the Australian commitment to the conflict increased so too did the need for helicopter support, with sixteen of the new UH-1H model delivered directly to the squadron. The new models were a significant improvement, being faster, larger and with double the lift capacity.[21] While the helicopters of No 9 Squadron were highly adaptable to different operations they lacked the ability to provide fire adequate support for ground troops in the form of gunships. The provision of support gunships often came from the US Army, however this was not always available, and became more problematic with the insertion and extraction of long-range reconnaissance patrols. From late 1967, the RAAF commander at Vung Tau, Group Captain JW Hubble, argued for Australian helicopter gunships. The CHECO report posits that the decision to convert troop-carrying aircraft to gunships was made following the 1968 Tet Offensive when Vung Tau airfield was attacked by heavy mortar fire. From his bunker, the RAAF operations officer called for gunship fire that successfully halted the enemy attack.[22]

The CHECO report skips the development of Australian gunships, only commenting when provision of gunship kits was completed. The development of Australian gunships, though, began with Hubble's request. Swivel-mounted dual M60 machine guns, rather than a single gun per door, were fabricated and successfully tested by the squadron armourer. At this time the new, AH-1G, commonly known as the 'Huey Cobra', arrived in Vietnam demonstrating the improved abilities of helicopter gunships.[23] Thus the Australians could further see the advantages of the gunships while drawing on US equipment to modify their existing aircraft. Called 'Ned Kelly', the first modified No 9 Squadron helicopter was finished in January 1968. Finally, in May, the squadron was informed of the approval by the Chiefs of Staff to modify their helicopters to gunships. One of the first flights, according to the CHECO report, was to protect Australian ground troops against a strong Viet Cong attack, providing on-the-job training. Given the call sign, 'Bushranger', No 9 Squadron was 'now in the shooting business'.[24]

The Australian use of helicopter gunships varied from that of the US Army. While most of the gunship sorties were of a ground forces assistance role, they were also used in conjunction with 'people-sniffer' operations. These entailed a helicopter fitted with a device that took readings above suspicious areas. If readings were high, a Bushranger, which was usually close behind, was given clearance to fire into the area. However, despite being in free-fire zones, the Australians were more circumspect than their US counterparts and would isolate the suspected Viet Cong

20 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 8.
21 Coulthard-Clark, *RAAF in Vietnam*, p. 137.
22 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 10.
23 John Tolson, *Airmobility 1961-1971*, US Government Printing Office, Washington (1973), p. 144.
24 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 10.

until ground troops could arrive and identify them. In one example, in February 1970, a 'people-sniffer' recorded a high reading in a free-fire zone. A Bushranger sighted 15 Vietnamese, but rather than attacking the pilot held them until the arrival of ground troops who were able to identify them as civilians.[25] In an interview with the CHECO author, RAAF Staff Officer, Squadron Leader RW Bradford, stated that 'our policy is more stringent on this sort of thing than MACV directives for free-fire zones. It's a matter of general philosophy. We don't want any unnecessary killing of people and alienation of the population'.[26] While the role of the No 9 Squadron gunships was primarily to deliver fire support for ground troops, they were also used creatively in other roles.

The Canberra bomber's changing role in Vietnam

The RAAF's Canberra bombing methods and equipment differed from those of the USAF, but took time to be used to their full capacity. Initially the Canberra bombers were utilised in a night role using USAF techniques called 'Combat Skyspot'. Missions were flown along a radar course until instructed to release their payload. The advantage of this method was a higher altitude for bomb release and was not weather dependent.[27] While the RAAF pilots' abilities were quickly recognized they became frustrated with the inability to ascertain bombing effectiveness. In September 1967, though, the RAAF was given some day missions, immediately improving morale and bombing efficiency.

The Canberra bombers were better suited to a daytime role. Fitted with a bombsight connected to a Doppler navigational aid, the Canberra was capable of great accuracy on level and straight bombing runs. These capabilities were ideal for targets that were in a straight line, such as canals, tree lines, and roads. The CHECO report noted that the Canberra could 'accomplish on one pass what other strike aircraft required up to six passes to achieve'.[28] This reduced exposure to enemy fire and increased surprise. Conversely, the USAF model of the Canberra, the B-57, had been developed for photo reconnaissance and dive-bombing roles. Commencing at altitudes near 10,000 feet, the B-57 would select a target and then dive towards it. In February 1965, the B-57s were the first USAF jet aircraft to attack Viet Cong targets and later carried out bombing mission into North Vietnam and Laos.[29]

The change to daytime missions only came after persistent effort by the Australians. As Deputy Director of the USAF Direct Support Center (DASC) Alpha,

25 Report for the Month of February 1970 on the Activities of RAAF Force Vietnam, 9 March 1970, NAA A107779/15; Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 12.

26 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 12.

27 Coulthard-Clark, *RAAF in Vietnam*, p. 187.

28 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 18.

29 E.R. Johnson, 'B-57 Canberra: America's British Jet Bomber', *Aviation History*, 14 (2003), p. 51.

7th USAF, Wing Commander Tony Powell was in a good position to negotiate changes to RAAF bombing mission times. Powell had joined the RAAF as a pilot in 1957 after serving with the RAF in Korea and as an exchange officer with the RAAF afterwards. He quickly established a reputation as an outstanding officer who, according to one of his early annual appraisals, was 'extremely versatile and

Figure 3: A Canberra bomber releases its payload, April 1969.
Source: AWM VN/69/0025/06.

adaptable'.[30] By 1962 Powell had been promoted Squadron Leader and commenced training with the 435th Tactical Fighter Squadron, USAF in California where he demonstrated outstanding skill and ability, impressing senior officers.[31] On his return to Australia Powell attended the RAAF Staff College and was then appointed to command the Cadet Squadron at Point Cook. From there he was posted to South Vietnam, arriving in December 1966, and attended the Forward Air Controller (FAC) school at Binh Thuy air base, southwest of Saigon. He was briefly attached to the Tactical Air Control (TAC) Party at Vung Tau in support of the Australian Task Force, before being appointed to DASC Alpha at Nha Trang. Here Powell was senior operations staff officer, responsible for administration and also flew as senior

30 Confidential Report: Officers and Airmen Aircrew, 16 June 1957, NAA A12372/O314317.
31 Letter of Evaluation (Squadron Leader AW Powell), from Lt-Col Frank McGuiness, 435th Tactical Fighter Squadron, USAF to Office of the Air Attache, Washington, 31 May 1963, NAA A12372/O314317.

FAC, often supporting the Republic of Korea infantry division. Once again Powell impressed his superiors with his 'initiative, planning ability and leadership' and had received praise for his work by senior US Army and Air Force officers.[32]

Powell's promotion of daylight missions for the Canberra bombers began with exchange visits of USAF personnel. Members of DASC and TAC attended No 2 Squadron briefings and flew missions with them. Likewise, the RAAF personnel

Figure 4: Wing Commander Anthony Powell carrying out FAC duties in a Cessna O-1 Bird Dog, c. 1967. March 1968. Source: AWM P01953.010.

visited the DASC and TACs and flew with FACs. These exchanges, supported by the 35th Tactical Fighter Wing commander, Colonel James Wilson, increased understanding by the Americans of the characteristics of the Canberras and the role of the US air forces in tactical operations by the Australians. However, it took time to convince Wilson of an alternate role for the RAAF bombers as he felt they would not necessarily improve existing B-57 operations.[33] Powell, though, was persistent and directed the RAAF's first daylight raid against a Viet Cong assembly area. The experiment proved the point and Canberras were then used to support Australian ground troops from September 1967. Codenamed 'Booma I', two bombing sorties

32 Confidential Report: Officers and Airmen Aircrew, 14 July 1967, NAA A12372/O314317.
33 Coulthard-Clark, *RAAF in Vietnam*, p. 191.

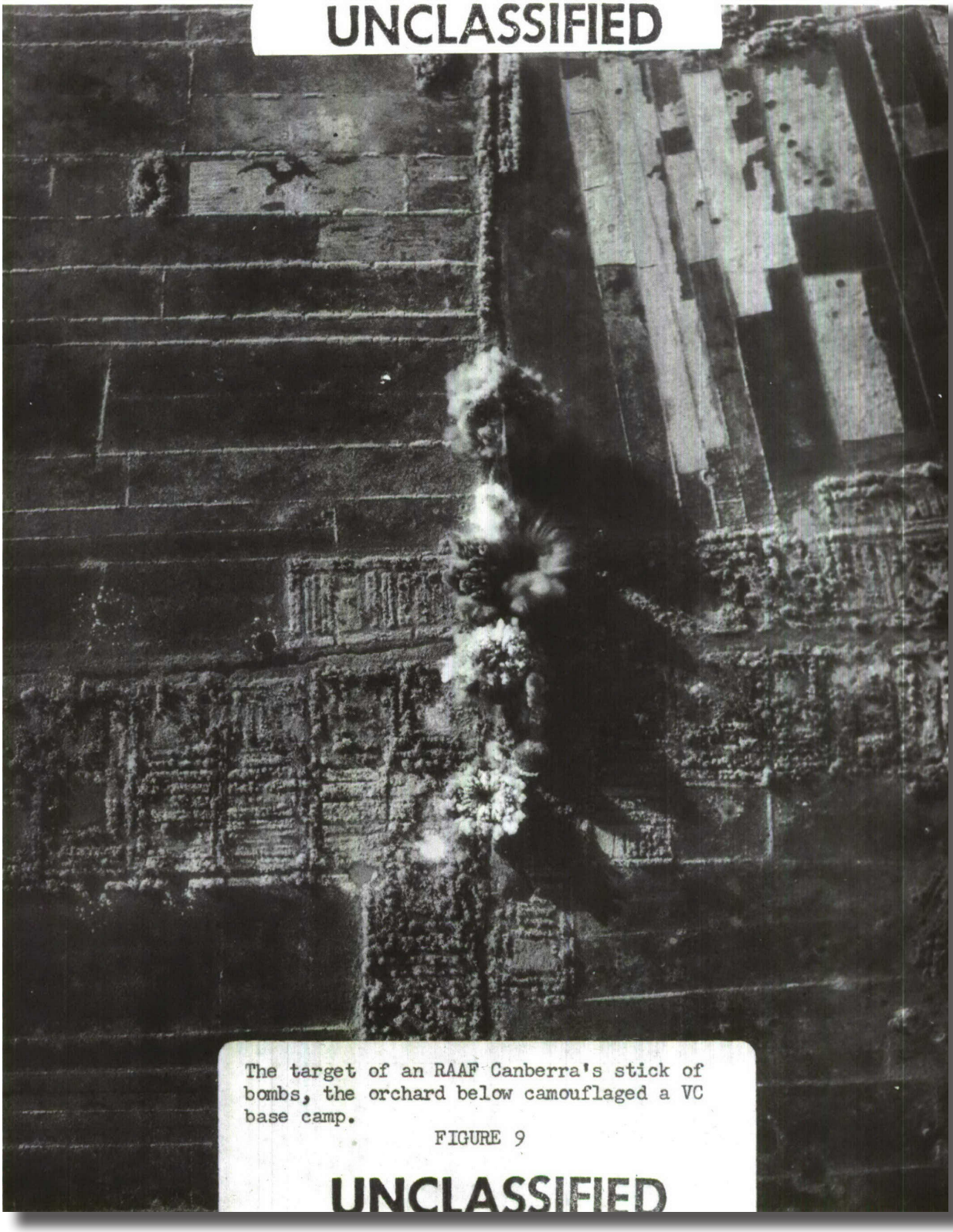

Figure 5: The target of an RAAF Canberra's stick of bombs, the orchard below camouflaged a Viet Cong base camp. Source: 'The RAAF in SEA', (Figure 9).

were flown daily for a week. By December RAAF results had improved significantly through greater bombing accuracy and morale, according to the CHECO report, 'soared even further'.[34] The realization of the Australian demand for daytime missions resulted in improved targeting and bombing efficiency. By late 1968 the Commander RAAF, Vietnam, Air Commodore GT Newstead, could report that as 'a result of our campaign 7AF and FACs on the capabilities of Canberras, much better targets are being allocated to the squadron… In five months, [bomb damage] almost doubled'.[35]

The differing use of tactical air support

While most of the CHECO report was positive in its assessment of RAAF activities, it was not entirely uncritical. Discussing the Australian Army use of tactical air support, the report criticized an 'over-caution verging on fear' of Australian army commanders when using tactical air strikes. Unlike US troops, the Australians were 'not used to having bombs and napalm dropped from the air by pilots who they felt did not always have a clear and complete picture of the friendly troops place in the tactical situation'. In their defence, Australian commanders on the ground extensively used helicopter and fixed-wing gunships. According to an interview in July 1970 with Squadron Leader Bradford, these assets were preferentially used as Australian officers were 'more familiar with their characteristics and more enthusiastic about their capabilities'.[36] To offset this aversion, from early 1970 incoming Australian company commanders and forward observers were given indoctrination flights. These allowed the new arrivals to observe actual air strikes carried out near friendly troops and the capabilities available to them.

Conclusion

The US Air Force's Project CHECO provided timely and important information to air force personnel in Vietnam and a future source of operational analysis for historians. The expanse of the project can be seen in the volume of reports published and their variety. The project's report on RAAF activities in South Vietnam, 'The RAAF in SEA', outlined the Australian assets and involvement in the conflict. What can be seen from the report is the high respect that the USAF held the Australians. Attitudes differed between the Americans and Australians in the use of force and tactics. However, these differences did not diminish the overall positive impression that the Australians made and is reflected throughout the CHECO report.

34 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 20.

35 Report for the Month of October 1968 on the Activities of RAAF Force Vietnam, 14 November 1968, NAA A107779/15.

36 Bear, 'The RAAF in SEA', p. 50-51.

William Birdwood An Australian Soldier and the First Australian Field Marshal

David Deasey[1]

William Riddell Birdwood was appointed as Australia's first Field Marshal in 1925. The circumstances surrounding that appointment are important as the idea of promoting an Australian Field Marshal, albeit posthumously, is again in the news. Birdwood's career during World War I and into the 1920s is also of interest in that there are a number of peculiarities especially for those who believe that promotions must be tied to positions held. His promotion to field marshal on the Australian Army list, albeit 'honorary' in nature, also raises some interesting questions about promotion issues. For example, how do you promote a Field Marshal in the Australian forces? He was the senior officer of the AIF during World War 1. He was honoured by Australian politicians in ways that were denied to other senior Australian commanders, especially his two most senior subordinates, Harry Chauvel and John Monash. Ultimately, he was a loyal servant of the Australian people and an honest and effective commander of the AIF. Yet in the 21st century he has almost faded from our consciousness.

At the start of World War I, Birdwood, then a temporary lieutenant general, was given the task on 12 December 1914 of forming a corps consisting of Australian and New Zealand troops. His initial instructions were explicit. The ultimate destination for all Australians, including the Australian Light Horse after training in Egypt was to be France.[2] Whilst the Australian government was anxious that Australians fill command positions it was clear that as the highest rank in the Australian Military Forces (AMF) was colonel in 1914, no Australian was suitable to be Corps commander. Major General William Throsby Bridges (himself only a colonel at the start of the war) would command the Australian 1st Division and be the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of the AIF in an administrative

1 Lt Colonel David Deasey OAM, RFD enlisted in the University of NSW Regiment in 1968 while studying at University of New South Wales and was commissioned in 1971. After numerous postings in NSW he commanded UNSWR between 1995-1998. Posted to the Inactive Reserve in 2001 he retired in 2014. A teacher of English and History in NSW schools from 1973, he retired as a deputy principal in 2009. He is currently Chairman of the NSW Committee of the National Boer War Memorial Association and has co-authored *A History of the University Of New South Wales Regiment 1952-2006*.

2 Signal from Kitchener to Birdwood, 15 November 1914, cited in W.R. Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown: An Autobiography*, Ward, Lock and Co, London (1941), p. 239.

capacity from 1914 until his death on Gallipoli in 1915. Birdwood succeeded Bridges in May 1915 as the temporary Anzac administrative GOC as well as the operational commander of the ANZAC Corps. The Australian government made that appointment permanent in September 1916 in terms of being GOC AIF. As such he was deemed to be an Australian officer with authority to deal directly with the Australian government in Melbourne. Now he was not only Corps commander, but he had also the overall administrative command of the whole AIF with full responsibilities for appointments, promotions and advice on organisation.[3] His attributes as a commander lay in his leadership and in his particular his ability to get on with diverse individuals and groups under his command. During the Boer War, Kitchener said Birdwood had 'shown, moreover, remarkable tact in dealing with and conciliating the various interests which he had to take into consideration'.[4] He also had an exceptional ability to select talented subordinates of the quality of Brundenell White and inspire total loyalty in them. It is generally accepted, however, that he lacked great ability in tactics or even in organisation. He readily identified with his Anzacs and especially his Australians. Following Ian Hamilton's dismissal Birdwood assumed command of the entire Gallipoli operation.

Ian Hamilton described him as the 'Soul of Anzac',[5] whilst his Australians gave him the nickname 'Birdie'. However, the British historian Robert Rhodes James is critical of the idea that Birdwood was extremely popular amongst his Australian soldiers stating that 'he bored the men and they bored him'.[6] So, what is the truth here? Was he respected by Australians and did he have their interests at heart? James appears to be part of that group of historians, including some Australians, who have sought to debunk what they see as the Anzac 'myth' as part of historical revisionism. He therefore questions the received version of Birdwood's popularity. James claimed that Birdwood's popularity was an invention of journalists. In Birdwood's case, James's evidence does not seem to hold up. Charles Bean said of Birdwood that 'above all, he possessed the quality, which went straight to the heart of Australians, of extreme courage', and his 'delight was to be out in the field among his men, cheering them by his talk feeling the pulse of them'.[7] In July 1917 Haig, when talking to Brudenell White, suggested that White should be commanding the

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3 Acting on advice from the War Office that all Australians would be sent to France and few if any operations would be conducted from Egypt, Birdwood advised the Australian government against sending any more Light Horse units or formations. Units such as 14th, 15th, and 16th ALH Regiments then forming in Australia were broken up and dispersed..

4 *The London Gazette*, 19 July 1902, pp. 4835-4836.

5 A.J. Hill, 'Birdwood, William Riddell, 1865-1951', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol 7, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne (1979), http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/birdwood-william-riddell-baron-birdwood-5240.

6 Robert Rhodes James, cited in Hill, 'Birdwood'.

7 C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War 1914-1918: The Story of ANZAC*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney (1941), p. 121.

Australian Corps. White is said to have responded: 'God forbid! General Birdwood has a position among Australians which is far too valuable to lose'.[8]

It is also notable that Birdwood's official visit as outgoing AIF commander to Australia in 1920 became more like a royal progress. Likewise, his angling for the Governor General's position in 1930 cannot just be regarded as office seeking but rather an indication of a genuine interest in Australia. He, after all, had a daughter and grandchildren living in Western Australia. In 1935, continuing his interest in Australia, he wrote an article for the Western Australian Education Department's distance education magazine, *Our Rural Magazine*.[9]

Figure 1: Portrait of Field Marshal William Riddell Birdwood GCB, GCMG, GCVO, KCB, wearing a slouch hat. Source: AWM P03717.009.

8 Peter Pederson, *Monash as Military Commander*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne (1985), p. 216.

9 *The West Australian*, 18 October 1934, p. 14.

Birdwood went on to command I Anzac Corps in France and when in 1917 the Australian government pressured to have all Australian units under the one command he commanded the Australian Corps from November 1917 consisting of all five divisions. Birdwood, now that both operational and administrative aspects were under his command, from 1915 onwards had agitated for the formation of an Australian Army with of course himself as commander. The failure to get the sixth Australian division operational, the refusal of the British Army to bring the Australian Light Horse brigades to France[10] and finally Haig's refusal to allow the creation of an Australian Army all contributed to the Australian Army not being

Figure 2: General Sir William Riddell Birdwood with his wife Jeanette and daughter Nancy driving through London before an Anzac Day march. Source: AWM H16667.

formed. Haig's reasoning was perfectly legitimate, he pointed out that in the two Anzac Corps in France there was a significant British presence in both corps in terms of support units, especially artillery and logistics. That would increase significantly at Army level and would lead to British soldiers outnumbering the Australians. In fact, the whole concept was never viable. In any case, by 1916-1917 there was usually many more than two Corps in an Army. Haig only allowed the formation of the Australian Corps[11] as a single body on the assumption that one division was still

10 They were deemed essential for the defence of Egypt and the canal zone.

11 It should be noted that this did not include all Australian troops in France, for example the Australians of the 22 ANZAC Mounted Regiment remained under operational command of Lt General Sir Alexander Godley then commanding XXII British Corps. They were, however, under Birdwood's administrative command.

badly damaged from the 1917 operations and not yet battle worthy, whilst another would become the Corps training division.

It is at this point that the first interesting promotion took place for Birdwood. On 23 October 1917, prior to the creation of the Australian Corps, Birdwood was promoted permanently to full general,[12] yet he was still only a Corps commander and would remain so for the next six months. This raises the question why this would occur. The appointment he had was as a lieutenant general appointment. The official reason given for the promotion is that there had been a number of retirements from the active list of the Indian Army and Birdwood was the senior active officer on the list and was thus entitled to the promotion. This would seem to go against the received argument that rank is tied to a position held and not a reward for service. John Monash, on taking over the Corps in late May, was only promoted to temporary lieutenant general. The promotion was personal for Birdwood, based on seniority and on merit not on service need.

In addition to his command of the Australian Corps Birdwood was later double hatted from December 1917 as commander of the Second British Army after General Plumer, its commander was sent to Italy.[13] While this ended in March 1918 he did not seem to have personally moved to Second Army headquarters leaving his II Army staff to run the organisation in what was then a quiet time for operations.

At the time of his promotion to command the Fifth Army, Birdwood found himself embroiled in the controversy over his replacement commanding the Australian Corps. Journalists Keith Murdoch and Charles Bean, having pushed for an Australian to take over the Corps command, wanted Brudenell White as Birdwood's replacement, in short anyone other than Monash. When it became clear that Monash would get promoted, they then tried to manoeuvre him into Birdwood's job as GOC AIF. For Birdwood, trying to adjust to his new role as Army commander, it must have been a difficult and unpleasant time. In the process of trying to move Monash from the Corps command, the plotters managed to convince Prime Minister Billy Hughes that Birdwood could not do justice to both jobs, Commander Fifth Army and GOC AIF. Birdwood had of course taken with him to Fifth Army Headquarters, senior Australian staff officers not only to assist him run Fifth Army, such as Brudenell White, but also to assist him in his role as GOC AIF, such as Colonel TH Dodds. In this role Dodds clashed verbally with Hughes when directed to promulgate an order (probably relating to ANZAC leave) without reference to Birdwood, which he refused. Birdwood felt the necessity to brief the Governor General on the matter saying that he had 'complete confidence in his work and loyalty'.[14]

12 *The London Gazette*, 12 November 1917, p. 11661. This is prior to command of the Australian Corps and well before the need was apparent for Plumer to go to Italy.

13 T.A. Heathcote, *British Field Marshals 1736-1997: A Biographical Dictionary*, Pen and Sword, Barnsley (1999), p. 44.

With Monash clearly indicating that he wished to stay in command of the Australian Corps and White refusing to move from Fifth Army the situation degenerated into a farce. Birdwood, having been told that it was intended to replace him, and Hughes having been convinced by the plotters that Birdwood could not do both jobs, the only other option would have been to bring Sir Harry Chauvel from Palestine. Neither Chauvel, the next most senior Australian officer after Birdwood, nor Sir Edmund Allenby, with the Megiddo campaign about to start wanted this. Hughes had effectively painted himself into a corner. The job was reoffered to Birdwood with the proviso that he resigned the Fifth Army command. To the surprise of all, Birdwood accepted, but negotiated a stay at Fifth Army until 30 November 1918. The war of course ended on 11 November 1918, so perhaps Birdwood had a better feel for where the war was going than others. In any event the plotters and Hughes had the potential to compromise not only Australian operations but British operations on several fronts.

So how Australian was Birdwood?

At the end of the demobilisation phase in late 1919 Birdwood and his family came to Australia. Most sources deal with this by stating that he was visiting Australia in 1920 as if somehow it was detached from his World War I command. His personal file in Canberra,[15] however, recorded it as the successful return of the AIF commander, noting that he 'returned to Australia per SS *Ormonde*'. So it was as an Australian commander returning home like any other Australian. It is noteworthy that when, in 1973, the Australian government issued a commemorative Gallipoli Medallion to those Anzacs still alive or to their next of kin, Birdwood's daughter, then a resident in Western Australia, asked the local ex-service organisation whether or not she, as the daughter of a British general commanding the Australians, was eligible. '[W] e have no doubt as to his eligibility', was the response.[16] That is, he was considered 'Australian' for the purposes of eligibility for the medallion.

The *Ormonde* was the same ship as Sir John Monash and his family returned to Australia on. The Monash's arrived in Melbourne on Boxing Day 1919, however Birdwood had already left the boat in Perth to begin his triumphant Australian tour. Clearly the government saw great value in the AIF commander touring Australia

14 A. J. Hill, 'Dodds, Thomas Henry (1873–1943)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/dodds-thomas-henry-5990/text10225, published first in hardcopy 1981. Accessed 17 February 2019.

15 War service records, NAA B2455. Like all British officers attached to the AIF, he was an honorary Australian for the duration and held rank in the AIF as well as the British Army.

16 Letter, 8 November 1973, NAA B2455.

to allow people to see him, they were less enthused about giving the same heroic welcome to senior Australian officers.

Writing about his reception in Perth during his 1919-1920 tour Birdwood said that

> …on landing at Fremantle, was a poster depicting a huge hand — the hand of one of my diggers — held out to welcome a small figure representing myself with the words, "put it there, Birdie!" and that if I may say so illustrated the spirit in which I had been received by these splendid men from the beginning of the association. In return, it had been an unfailing source of pleasure to me to all I could for their welfare and comfort.[17]

So, Birdwood's Australian tour was not as a British officer but as Australian commander of the AIF. He was still being posted and paid as an Australian officer. He was not struck off the AIF list until his return to England in September 1920.[18] During his tour Hughes wrote to Birdwood,

> It is the earnest desire of the Commonwealth government that you should continue in some fitting form your relationship with the military forces of Australia with whom you were so long and so honourably associated during the course of the great war now happily ended. I have accordingly very much pleasure in inviting you to accept the rank of 'honorary' general of the Australian Military Forces.[19]

There is no evidence that there was any discussion about this with the Australian military or for that matter the Australian Cabinet – it seems to have been a 'captain's call'. In contrast, when Monash returned to Melbourne he offered to remain on the AIF active list for a short time to clear up any repatriation issues. His offer was declined and he was discharged, though the minister indicated that the Army would like to consult him if required.[20]

It is interesting to note the Canadian government's response in the same situation. The Canadian Corps commander, Lieutenant General Sir Arthur Currie, was commonly regarded with Monash as one of the most capable of Corps commanders, sharing the honours of 8 August 1918 (Battle of Amiens). In recognition of his services, Currie was promoted to general on the active regular list of the Canadian military in 1919 and given a regular posting. General Sir Julian Byng, a British officer and Currie's predecessor as Corps commander, was promoted

17 Birdwood, *Khaki and Gown*, p. 323.

18 War service records, NAA B2455.

19 Field Marshal Birdwood - Appointment to Honorary Rank in the Australian Military forces. In this case 'Honorary' meant at no cost to the Australian taxpayer, NAA MP367/1/578/1/1444.

20 Retention of Sir John Monash's services, NAA MP367/1/535/4/778.

to 'honorary' general on the Canadian militia list in 1920 in honour of his services with the Canadians.[21] The Canadian action is in stark contrast to the approach taken by the Australian government in relation to both Sir Harry Chauvel and Sir John Monash. Both were confirmed in their rank later in 1919. Despite pressure from ex-servicemen, the Conservative governments of Hughes and his successor Stanley Melbourne Bruce denied both any other rewards until finally the election of the Scullin Labour government in 1929 led to both being promoted to full general. Again, in this particular case, neither Chauvel as Chief of the General Staff and Inspector General or Monash on the active Unattached List of the militia, occupied a position which carried this rank. It was a reward for services rendered during the war. The promotion was belated recognition for their distinguished service during the war.

The Australian government was sensitive to the promotions of the Australian senior officers. In his final wartime 'Peace' dispatch in 1919, General Sir Edmund Allenby mentioned Chauvel's successful command of the Desert Mounted Corps during the campaign in the Sinai, Palestine and Syria.[22] When Allenby recommended promotion of Chauvel to substantive lieutenant general in the Commonwealth Military Forces the Australian government was appalled, causing a flurry of correspondence. On 17 April the official secretary to the Australian High Commissioner, Andrew Fisher, wrote to Birdwood briefing him on the recommendation and asking for his opinion.[23] Birdwood responded on 7 May 1919 indicating Chauvel's qualifications and his seniority to Monash,[24] thus seeming to imply his support for the move. On 5 June 1919, the official secretary wrote again advising that as Chauvel had received the honour of the Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George (GCMG) the same as Monash, the matter was considered closed. The issue was that as far as the Australian government was concerned Chauvel was a temporary lieutenant general in the AIF, but in the AMF was only substantive colonel and temporary major general. As no decisions had yet been made about postwar organisation for the AMF and in fact there was some pressure to return all AIF officers to their prewar ranks, Allenby's recommendation

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21 *Canada Gazette*, 21 December 1920, cited in J. Williams, *Byng of Vimy, General and Governor General*, Pen and Sword, Barnsley (2014), p. 265. Byng would be promoted to Field Marshal in the British Army in 1932, aged 70, after 13 years on the retired list.

22 Peace Gazette Despatch, Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 1 February 1919, NAA MP367/1/578/1/1211; Question of Rank of General Chauvel in the Citizen's Military Forces and of a Decoration as Alternative. Note the error in file name 'Citizens' instead of 'Commonwealth', NAA MP367/1/578/1/1211.

23 Hogben (on behalf of the official secretary to the Australian High Commission) to Birdwood, 17 April 1919, NAA MP367/1/578/1/1211.

24 Birdwood to High Commissioner, 7 May 1919, in MP367/1, 578/1/1211. Part of Birdwood's letter stated: 'He is indeed the next senior officer to myself serving under the Commonwealth Government'…Birdwood was always sensitive that Chauvel's achievements were not forgotten.

was not received with any enthusiasm. In fact, at the conclusion of his letter in June the official secretary to the High Commissioner wrote that the 'War Office was advised that the proposed promotion of General Chauvel to Lieutenant-General in the Commonwealth Military Forces was not concurred with by the government'.[25]

It is not clear from the files that the award of the GCMG was in fact meant to be a genuine substitution for promotion. It appears that Birdwood may have already recommended both Monash and Chauvel for that honour prior to the rank controversy in recognition of their overall wartime achievements. Monash received his in the New Year's Honours list whilst Chauvel received his in the June Birthday

Figure 3: General William Riddell Birdwood outside his dugout at Anzac, 1915. Source: AWM H16667.

Honours. It would seem unlikely, based on this timing, that Monash's GCMG was intended to recognise his work in the repatriation of Australian soldiers. In any event the government took Chauvel's award as the end of the matter. So, Allenby's recommendation, which was also about recognizing Chauvel's professionalism, was potentially ignored. Whatever the circumstances, the whole situation is an interesting example of rank being notionally traded for a decoration. Copies of the recommendations for the GCMGs are not held by the Australian War Memorial, so cannot be checked in Australia.

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25 Letter, official secretary Australian High Commission, London to Birdwood, 5 June 1919, NAA MP367/1/ 578/1/1211.

A file note in September 1919 reinforced the view that the Government was less enthusiastic about promoting its own. 'Pending decision by the Government on the subject of the future strength, organisation and training of Australian forces', the file comments, 'it is not deemed advisable to make permanent changes in the allocations of the senior members of staff'. Presumably this also refers to officers' rank as the same file records Harry Chauvel as Colonel AMF and temporary Lieutenant General in the AIF.[26]

Birdwood and Australia kept close contact with each other. In the New Year's Honours List of 1923, he was awarded the Grand Cross of the Bath (GCB) and Australia sent official congratulations. In April of that year he wrote to the new Defence Minister EK Bowden to congratulate him. Bowden replied on 20 April 1923 thanking him for his best wishes as well as for his continuing interest in Australian defence issues. He went on to outline current defence policy, including pointing out that the government had reduced the army to a cadre of 25% of its posted strength and that Australia's 'attitude on naval defence will of course be largely guided by the results of the Imperial conference to take place in London in October'.[27] What Birdwood thought of this is not known.

Birdwood went on to take command of the Northern Army in India which was shortly after redesignated Northern Command, India. He was nominated as Commander-in-Chief, India from August 1925 to succeed General Lord Rawlinson.[28] On 20 March 1925, prior to his appointment, he was promoted to field marshal. Birdwood was the first Commander-in-Chief, India to serve with the rank of field marshal in the post-mutiny era and the first officer of the Indian Army to be field marshal whilst on the active list.[29] All previous Indian field marshals had been promoted either on or in retirement which of course returned them to the active list on half pay.

Prior to his promotion to field marshal in India, the Australian government was alerted to the pending move. In discussions that ensued on the basis that since an 'honorary' general in the AMF had been now made a field marshal in the British Army should he not now be so elevated in the Australian army in view of his wartime services? Without any discussion with the Australian Army it was announced in the press to coincide with the announcement of his promotion that

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26 Lt General Chauvel and Major General Sir C B B White KCMG etc Pay of, NAA MP367/1/404/8/4.

27 Letter, E.K. Bowden to General Sir William Birdwood, 23 April 1923; Letter, Birdwood to Bowden, on latter's appointment as Minister for Defence, NAA MP367/1/534/1/591.

28 Rawlinson, who had been selected to become the next Chief of the Imperial General Staff at the War Office, would likely have received his field marshal's baton in that posting.

29 Note here that the Commander-in-Chief, India had not until then held the rank of general. Following Birdwood until its abolition in 1947 it varied between general and lieutenant general.

he would also be raised to 'honorary' field marshal in the AMF. It was subsequent to this announcement that the Chief of the General Staff Lieutenant General Sir Harry Chauvel, now in uncharted waters, held a promotion board in October 1925, many months after the original announcement, to make a formal recommendation for Birdwood's promotion to field marshal. Signed off by the then Defence Minister, Major General Sir Neville Howse, it was then gazetted in January 1926, nearly a year after the decision had been taken.[30] It is quite clear that the army had not been consulted about the move and no one was quite sure how it should be done legally. Equally, no one was quite sure what a field marshal was, nor what the process was for appointing one.

In consequence of Australia's move to promote its first field marshal, an interesting debate ensured as to whether Australia should present its own field marshal's baton. That is, should Birdwood have two batons, one for the Indian promotion and one for the Australian. Eventually the War Office suggested that this was not a good idea. The interchange between the War Office and Australia's military representative to the Imperial General Staff, Colonel TH Dodds raises some interesting issues. Dodds, in writing to the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Thomas Trumble, on 5 January 1927, passed on the following from the British Adjutant General:

> ..although Australia undoubtedly had every right to make as many field marshals as they pleased, perhaps it might have been as well before making an officer on the active list of another army to be an Australian Field Marshal if the government controlling the other army had been asked to give their assent.[31]

These comments were after the Imperial Conference decisions of 1926 but before the Statute of Westminster in 1931 or its Australian ratification in 1942. The Imperial Conference made the following comment on Imperial relations:

> It is the right of the Government of each Dominion to advise the Crown on all matters relating to its own affairs. Consequently, it would not be in accordance with constitutional practice for advice to be tendered to His Majesty by His Majesty's Government ... [on a Dominion matter] against the views of the Government of that Dominion.[32]

So, the British were clearly under the impression that Australia had the right to

30 *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, 14 January 1926. The process followed by Chauvel's committee is contained in NAA MP367/1/578/1/1444.

31 Letter, Dodds to Trumble, 6 January 1927, NAA MP367/1/578/1/1459.

32 Report of the Inter-Imperial Relations Committee of the Imperial Conference 1926, NAA A4640/32. Also, Statue of Westminster Adoption Act 1942, NAA A1559, 1942/56.

promote Birdwood to field marshal and others if they wanted to, the War Office was querying why it had not been consulted about one of its own officers on the active list before the promotion took place. The letter also noted the need to consult the Palace on issues relating to field marshals.

Despite the 'honorary' nature of Birdwood's appointment it appears that he was still noted on the Australian Army active list in 1950 shortly before his death. As part of the long discussion on how to legitimise General Blamey's promotion to field marshal in 1950, none of which was shared until very late in the process with the Australian Army, Sir Frederick Shedden, Secretary to the Department of Defence, wrote a minute on 30 August 1950, well after the promotion was announced. The Army, led by the Chief of the General Staff Lieutenant General Sir Sydney Rowell, had been prepared to post Blamey on promotion to the Reserve of Officers, not to the active list on the basis of his age and health. With regard to Birdwood, Shedden noted that the 'reference to age and health has not been applied in the case of Field Marshal Birdwood, nor would appear to obtain in the case of field marshals of the British army'.[33] This would imply that Shedden was referring to the status of Birdwood as an Australian field marshal as he makes a distinction between Birdwood and the rest of the British field marshals.

Birdwood hoped to become Governor General of Australia in 1930 and was disappointed when the Scullin Labour government appointed Sir Isaac Isaacs as the first Australian-born Governor General. One further indication of Birdwood's sentiment towards Australia can be seen when he was raised to the peerage as Field Marshal Baron Birdwood of Anzac and Totnes in January of 1938. Birdwood died on 17 May 1951.

The Australian government still pays for the upkeep of his grave in Twickenham cemetery in England.[34]

Birdwood has become almost a forgotten figure in Australian military history, which is unfortunate as he exercised such a pivotal role in the development of the AIF. He created the instrument that Monash used to such effect in 1918. His promotions to general in 1917 and to Australian field marshal in 1925 give the lie to the arguments that promotion is always tied to position held and not used for reward. His promotion to general in the Australian Army in 1920, particularly when contrasted with honours handed to senior British commanders and also the Canadians, shows the meagre approach to awards to Australia's senior officers by the Australian government.

33 Shedden minute, 30 August 1950, NAA A663/0156/1/180.

34 'Brit Still Revered by Diggers', *Courier Mail*, 11 April 2015, p. 54.

The Light Blue & White
The 52nd Battalion AIF at Dernancourt and Villers-Bretonneux, April 1918

Dale Chatwin[1]

With the 100th anniversary of the re-taking of Villers-Bretonneux recently passed it is perhaps timely, even necessary, to review the part played and the impact upon the, until recently, little remembered or honoured 52nd Australian Infantry Battalion. But this is not a history of the battle, which has been told so often before, but rather a series of findings about what happened to the soldiers of the 52nd. And perhaps this is now even more necessary, since what the 52nd achieved at Villers-Bretonneux has recently been cast into shadow as French historian, Romain Fathi, has argued that towards the end of the 52nd's second 24 hours in the line at Villers-Bretonneux that the battalion was 'saved' from a catastrophic outcome by the intervention of the French Moroccan Division.[2]

Forming the 52nd Battalion AIF

The 52nd was born out of the 12th Battalion in early March 1916 when the AIF was doubled in Egypt. At the time it was made up of experienced Gallipoli veterans (two parts Tasmanian and one part each Western Australians and South Australians). Further officers and men were sourced from newly arrived recruits who had not made it to Gallipoli with the majority appearing to come from Tasmania.

After travelling to the Western Front as part of the 13th Brigade, 4th Division, on 3 September 1916 the 52nd attacked Mouquet Farm and suffered substantial casualties.[3] In that battle, in one of the great Australian tragedies of the war, three of four Potter brothers who were fighting with the 52nd, were killed within 24 hours.[4]

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1 Dale Chatwin is the grandson of Burnie, Tasmania born Alton Chatwin (1822) who was with the 52nd Battalion for its entire life. He fought at Gallipoli with the 12th landing in late May 1915. Two other Chatwin lads from the same area also served with the 52nd.

2 Romain Fathi, 'They Attack Villers-Bretonneux and block the road to Amiens': A French perspective on Second Villers-Bretonneux', in *New Directions in War and History*, Big Sky Publishing, Newport (2017), p. 64.

3 C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1948: The AIF in France, 1916*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney (1941), p. 858.

4 'When we hear of Anzac sacrifice, think of Eliza Potter and her lost sons', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April 2019, https://www.smh.com.au/national/when-we-hear-of-anzac-sacrifice-think-of-eliza-potter-and-her-lost-sons-20190422-p51g4t.html.

Reinforcing the 52nd Battalion AIF

At Mouquet Farm a number of Queenslanders fought with the 52nd – part of the 2nd Reinforcements for the battalion. Between mid-1916 and late 1917 a further nine sets of reinforcements from Queensland, as well as a draft of 50 men from' A' Squadron of the original 14th Light Horse, joined the 52nd. By April 1918 Queenslanders were the major state grouping in the 52nd, though few histories record this.

Figure 1: Reinforcements to the 52nd Battalion of the 13th Infantry Brigade, being allotted to their companies.
Source: AWM E02396.

Creating a Case to commemorate the 52nd Battalion AIF – the Queensland presence

This is why a Facebook community, comprising relatives and friends of the 52nd Battalion which now comprises over 500 members[5] in conjunction with the Redlands RSL Sub Branch of the Queensland RSL, recently lobbied and were successful in having a dedicated memorial plaque added to the WW1 Crypt under the Shrine of Remembrance in Anzac Square, Brisbane.

The unveiling took place 100 years to the day (and 88 years after first proposed) that the 52nd participated in, as the Australian War Memorial Unit History on its website now records, 'legendary' attack, at Villers-Bretonneux on 24 April 1918.[6]

5 https://www.facebook.com/52BnAIF/
6 https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51492

As part of the process of making the case for the Memorial Plaque I examined hundreds of Service Records from the National Archives and as a consequence spent considerable time considering the battle readiness of the 52nd in April 1918. In support of the proposal for the memorial I quickly concluded that over 450 of the men who fought at Villers-Bretonneux on 24 April 1918 were Queenslanders. But what was more astonishing was how recently so many of these men had just been 'marched in' to the unit.

In the few short weeks between Dernancourt on 5 April 1918 and Villers-Bretonneux over 100 men (nearly all Queenslanders) joined or re-joined the 52nd. The battalion had also been similarly reinforced just prior to Dernancourt. Many of these men from the 9th and 10th Reinforcements had never fought in a battle – they were trained – but not battle experienced.

The lives of the late March reinforcements were probably spared at Dernancourt because the Brigade commander, William Glasgow, retained the equivalent of a company from the 52nd in reserve, rather than committing the whole battalion to the battle. At Dernancourt, according to the Official History, the 52nd suffered 154 casualties.[7]

The 52nd Battalion AIF at Villers-Bretonneux

At Villers-Bretonneux the 52nd suffered 245 casualties[8] of which 168 were Queenslanders. The city of Redlands, east of Brisbane and home of the sponsoring RSL for our memorial proposal, had three men who fought with the 52nd at Villers-Bretonneux. All mid-1917 recruits, the three men arrived in the two weeks before Villers-Bretonneux and, never having been in action, were killed early in the attack. Fifty-seven of the Queensland casualties at Villers-Bretonneux were from the 9th or 10th reinforcements – nearly all men who had never fought in battle.

I would like now to turn to the recent argument made by Romain Fathi that French intervention avoided a catastrophic outcome at Villers-Bretonneux for the 13th Brigade and consequently the 52nd Battalion. Essentially, Fathi argues, based on French sources, that the Australians and British had little hold over the ground they occupied late on 25 and early on 26 April. He also maintains, again based on French sources, that when the French moved forward they found the ground abandoned and/or had difficulty locating the British-Australian line. One French officer maintained that the line 'only existed by islets'.[9]

I would argue instead that, given the fluidity of battle in progress, that the

7 C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1948: The AIF in France, December 1917-May 1918*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney (1941), p. 412.

8 Bean, *The AIF in France, December 1917-May 1918*, p. 637.

9 Fathi, 'A French Perspective', p. 61.

Australians and British were defending in depth – not defending straight trench lines and demonstrates a difference in battle tactics. This is confirmed by the 52nd Battalion's commander, Lieutenant Colonel John Whitham, in a later account of the battle, where he records that when the French came to take over they demanded, 'Ou est votre premiere ligne?; Ou est votre second [sic] ligne'.[10] This is backed up by one of the most important eyewitness accounts, that of Australian Military

Figure 2: The wooden cross memorial of the 52nd Battalion erected to those members who died on 24-25 April 1918 during the loss and recapture of Villers-Bretonneux.
Source: AWM E04855.

Historian, Charles Bean, a source Fathi did not consult.[11] On the afternoon of 26 April Bean recorded in his diary, 'The French don't relieve as we do. They simply formulate a barrage line & form up behind it & go forward. Our line was in front of the barrage but we had to clear of it by a stated hour'.[12]

Villers-Bretonneux is one of the few instances on the Western Front where the Australian and French operated together. At Villers-Bretonneux there were clearly

10 This is partly noted by Bean in the account of 2nd Villers-Bretonneux in the Official History (see vol. 5, p. 630) when he admits to inadequacies in the support provided by Australian guides to the French in moving up at Villers-Bretonneux on the afternoon of the 25th April.

11 I have communicated with Fathi about this and provided the relevant diary entries from Bean's

12 Bean Diaries April/May 1918, p. 38, AWM 38/3DRL/606/108/1.

issues in communication, practice, coordination and understanding of how each army operated. Bean returned again to this issue just a few days later, noting that when a straightening of the line to the south of Villers-Bretonneux was proposed, the commander of the Australian Forces, Lieutenant General Birdwood, went to see the French south of Villers-Bretonneux to ensure there was no re-occurrence of the issues of 26 April.[13]

Disbanding of the 52nd Battalion AIF

The attack at Villers-Bretonneux on 24/25 April 1918 weakened the 52nd - less than four weeks later the battalion was disbanded to reinforce the other battalions in the 13th Brigade.[14] On 16 May 1918 the 52nd ceased to exist except as a training battalion.

The Brigade Order (see excerpt below) demonstrates the overwhelmingly Queensland nature of the battalion in April 1918 when one takes into account the losses at Dernancourt and Villers-Bretonneux. It also shows how few of the original South Australians and Western Australians were left.

> The Order (Appendix 24 from the 13th Brigade War Diary for May 1918) re-organising the 13th Brigade by reassigning the men from the disbanded 52nd Battalion to the 49th, 50th and 51st battalions. The 49th to receive 174 Queenslanders; the 50th to receive 31 men from South Australia and 100 from Queensland; the 51st to receive 21 from NSW, 8 from Victoria; 34 from Western Australia and 120 from Tasmania. The band of the 52nd [nearly all Queenslanders and a Pipe Band] to be transferred in total to the 49th complete.[15]

On that same day the battalion placed

> A memorial of those of the 52nd who fell in action on 24th/25th April 1918 between Cachy and Villers-Bretonneux … at U.3.a.4.8 (Sheet 62d) … at 11-30AM ... On the tablet was painted the Battalion colours "Light Blue & White", followed by the names ... of all who actually were killed or died of wounds in the vicinity - 58 names in all ... The spot selected was just about 100 yards forward of the jumping off tape from where the counter-attack started at 10 p.m. on 24th April, and is situated at a beautiful part of the BOIS D'AQUENNE, near its S.W. corner. The cross stands at the edge of the wood and, with its background of trees ... is easily seen when approaching from the west.[16]

13 Bean Diaries April/May 1918, p. 111, AWM 38/3DRL/606/108/1.
14 52nd Australian Infantry Battalion War Diary, Appendix P1 and P2, AWM 4/23/69/26/2.
15 52nd Australian Infantry Battalion War Diary, May 1918, Appendix 24, AWM 4/23/69/26.
16 52nd Australian Infantry Battalion War Diary, Appendix P3, AWM 4/23/69/26/2.

We now know, thanks to Finlay Skinner, a 52nd soldier who fought at Villers-Bretonneux, that the majority of the 52nds dead were buried about 500 yards further west of where the cross was placed.[17] We also now know, thanks to a photograph in the possession of the descendants of one of the Redlands men lost at Villers-Bretonneux, that the wooden cross was later transferred to the Adelaide Cemetery when the majority of 52nd killed at Villers-Bretonneux were reinterred there.

Lessons learned in researching the story of the 52nd Battalion AIF

There are a number of things I have found or learnt in the process of seeking to better understand the story of the 52nd and I include them here hoping that they may assist others researching unit histories. The story of a battalion is as much in the service records of its men and the personal documents left behind as it is in official histories and brigade and unit diaries. Despite a history of the brigade (Peter Edgar's excellent To Villers-Bretonneux) and a history of the battalion (Neville Browning's The 52nd Battalion AIF 1916-1919) the composition of the 52nd Battalion in April 1918 in terms of where the men came from and its readiness to fight in the crucial battle of Villers-Bretonneux proved to be really unknown.[18]

The process of researching the history of an Australian WW1 unit disbanded prior to the Armistice in November 1918 is fraught with obstacles. For instance, if you research the 52nd using the AIF Database you receive a completely distorted view of the composition of the 52nd in 1918.[19] This occurs because any soldier who was part of the original 52nd when the unit was disbanded (around 200 men) has no mention of their 26 months of service in the 52nd in their AIF Database record. Similarly, the service of the 50 odd men who were transferred from the original 'A' Squadron of the 14th Light Horse (Queenslanders) in December 1916 is completely unacknowledged unless they were killed prior to the disbanding of the 52nd. This has implications for understanding the service of men who served in the other disbanded battalions.

One cannot also necessarily trust the accuracy of the research underpinning the unit histories on the Australian War Memorial (AWM)website. Until early 1917 the role of the various battalions of the 13th Brigade which fought at Villers-Bretonneux were completely mixed up. The role of Queenslanders in the 52nd was completely unacknowledged – whilst a Queensland battalion which was in reserve (the 49th) was recorded in its AWM unit history as having participated in

17 Finlay Skinner, *Memories of a World War 1 Digger*, Sunstrip Printers, Nambour (1980).

18 A conscious effort has been made to upload, copy or link as much material as possible to the 52nd Battalion AIF Facebook site - https://www.facebook.com/52BnAIF/.

19 The AIF Project, https//aif.adfa.edu.au/aif/.

the attack![20] Even now the revised unit history for the 52nd on the AWM site still does not credit the presence and role of Queenslanders (given there were over 450 of them at Villers-Bretonneux) in the 52nd sufficiently.[21]

Figure 3: The wooden cross memorial of the 52nd Battalion erected to those members who died on 24 - 25 April 1918 during the loss and recapture of Villers-Bretonneux.
Source: AWM E02396.

Just how close the 52nd came to ceasing to be an effective fighting unit in April 1918 - a consequence of accumulated casualties and issues with being able to integrate new reinforcements - has also been missed in previous histories. In Peter Edgar's To Villers-Bretonneux, based on the performance of the 13th Brigade, that is, the capability to mount an attack at night over un-reconnoitred ground without a barrage, concluded that by April 1918 the 13th Brigade was a well-trained and well-led Unit. Not knowing that over 160 of the men in the 52nd had only just recently joined the unit and most had never fought in a battle. Well trained and well led, but not battle-hardened. Perhaps a re-appraisal of just how close some other AIF battalions were to collapse in March/April 1918 is warranted.

As for Romain Fathi's recent interpretation of the events of Second Villers-

20 https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20160402004938/https://www.awm.gov.au/unit/U51489/, archive snapshot taken 2 April 2016. Accessed 4 April 2019 versus current website at https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51489 (accessed 4 April 2019) which records correctly that the 49th was held in reserve during the assault on the evening of 24 April 1918.

21 '52nd Australian Infantry Battalion', https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U51492. Accessed 29 July 2019.

Bretonneux from a French perspective. It is great to see new material introduced into the discussion and the efforts of the Moroccan Division deserve to be better appreciated and understood in Australia. However, it is important when challenging history to go back to the original sources to ensure your inferences can stand unchallenged by other eyewitness testimony recorded at the time. Fathi really should have looked at Bean's diaries. The Moroccan Division simply relieved the 52nd and the British at Villers-Bretonneux – it did not save them. When the 52nd retired from the battlefield they did so because the French were going to shell them – not the Germans!

In the process of examining the story of the 52nd Battalion so many other stories have also come to light thanks to the families of the men who fought, starting with the terrible family tragedy of the Potter brothers. We also now know that at least 12 men of indigenous descent fought with the 52nd Battalion and recently I was privileged to read a personal letter (held by the family) from Birdwood to William Alexander Craies, father of the most senior Queenslander to be killed at Villers-Bretonneux. Other letters in the possession of the family prove that Charles Bean attended the funeral of Craies on the afternoon of 26 April (the event is not in Bean's diary) and that Bean took the famous photo of the funeral party which is used on the DVA Anzac Portal site with such great effect.[22] Other information in the letters reveal that a pipe major played at the funeral (the 52nd had a pipe band). Craies's name was later placed at the top of the wooden cross at the Bois D'Aquenne.

Conclusion

What I have tried to do in the previous few pages and certainly in the last section is point out some of the issues faced even today when researching an Australian infantry battalion of WW1. Most history about Second Villers-Bretonneux has been what I would term macro-history, only occasionally dipping into the micro. I hope I have shown that the men of the 52nd deserve better. That is why on the bottom of the 52nd's memorial plaque in Anzac Square it does not say 'Lest We Forget' but rather 'They deserve that we remember them'.

Finally, my thanks to the over 500 relatives and friends of the 52nd Battalion AIF on our Facebook site [https://www.facebook.com/52BnAIF/] who have shared so much and especially to my colleague John Wadsley of Tasmania who is currently engaged in preparing a more personal and detailed story of the 52nd Battalion AIF because they deserve that we remember them.

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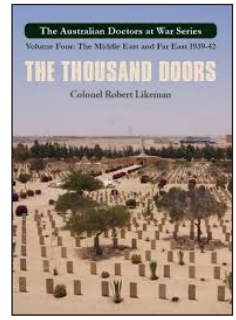
22 https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/history/conflicts/australians-western-front/australian-remembrance-trail/australian-national-0

Reviews

The Thousand Doors
The Australian Doctors at War Series, Volume Four: The Middle East and Far East 1939-42
Robert Likeman
A$65.00
Halstead Press, Canberra, 2019
Hardback, 463 pp
ISBN 9781928043426



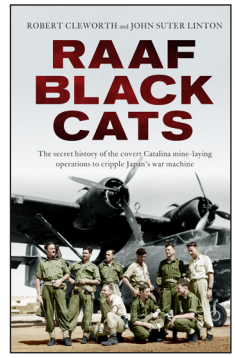
Robert Likeman's latest addition to his published works, *The Thousand Doors: The Australian Doctors at War Series, Volume Four: The Middle East and Far East 1939-42*, is another well-researched and valuable addition to Australian military medical history. Having completed his three-volumes on Australia's medical services during the First World War Likeman has turned his research to the subsequent global conflict.

The importance of medical services in wartime tends to be overlooked, particularly in the general market for military history. While Allan Walker's official history, published in the 1950's, will remain the magnum opus of Australia's wartime medical services, it misses, due to its overarching nature, many of the hundreds of people who constituted the various medical units. What Likeman does in *The Thousand Doors* is provide a window into those individuals who made a contribution, no matter how large or small. Each entry draws from service records of the individual providing biographical information as well as their movements during service. Rather than being simply alphabetical, the entries are by unit and include a list of commanding officers and other senior officers and surgeons. Added to this is the inclusion of brief historical backgrounds on the units and where they campaigned. This creates a greater sense of coherence and relevance while reducing the possibility of isolation of the individual. This is important in order to ensure a broader understanding of the role of each person within a larger organisation.

The value of this work cannot be understated, particularly as service records of this period have yet to be made available online. For researchers and historians, this is of immense value. If I have one comment it is the index system that is used. Rather than a name and page number the index provides a name and unit and can make finding a particular person a little more difficult. However, this is a minor quibble that is eclipsed by the breadth of the research undertaken.

Like previous volumes, *The Thousand Doors*, is meticulously researched and provides information for historians that would otherwise consume a great deal of time and makes a major contribution to Australian military history.

Justin Chadwick



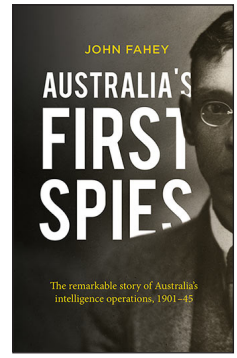
RAAF Black Cats: The secret history of the covert Catalina mine-laying operations to cripple Japan's war machine
Robert Cleworth and John Suter Linton
A$ 32.99
Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2019
Paperback, 362 pp
ISBN 97817603066

Knowing very little about the RAAF covert mine laying operations in World War Two, I was drawn to Robert Cleworth and John Suter Linton's *RAAF Black Cats*. From the introduction I found it hard to put down. I must admit I was first taken in by the cover photographs which showed a sleek black Catalina. Who were these intrepid men who served with this elite unit? The authors have described in detail the story of the men who served in this unit. They have also produced a well-researched story into the lives of the men and their planes. What they accomplished in their sometimes frail craft only demonstrates the extraordinary lengths the pilots and ground crew went to in order to keep their planes flying, usually under extremely trying conditions. After the war the men were sworn to silence and not to mention their war service which is why so little has been written about the covert mine laying operations by the RAAF during the World War Two.

The unit played a crucial in the war against Japan in the Pacific area but due to the need to keep their activities secret it seemed that these men did not get the credit that they were due. That aside, I found that in my mind's eye I could visualize what the men had to endure operating twelve hours at a time over enemy territory never knowing when they would be attacked by Japanese fighters. To the authors' credit they have produced a readable and informative story which I feel would appeal to anyone who has an interest in the RAAF during World War Two.

The book has a personal touch to it, which I found interesting, and a little sad that some of these men paid a high price for their service. The process that the authors undertook to research the story is worthy of a book in itself and judging by the detailed bibliography they must have researched far and wide to gather so much information. The book has a chapter titled 'Correcting History' where the authors have corrected any inaccuracies that may have occurred in the postwar period, interviewing Japanese personnel who were at the receiving end of the Black Cat activities. It was found that the mine laying operations far exceeded the effort by the RAAF. For anyone who is interested in a great story I would recommend this book. It's a great read.

Mike English



Australia's First Spies: The Remarkable Story of Australia's Intelligence Operations, 1901-45
John Fahey
A$34.99
Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2019
Paperback, 456 pp
ISBN 9781760631208

John Fahey is a former Australian intelligence officer who, though not a historian, has managed to write an approachable and vastly interesting book on the early days of Australia's intelligence operations.

Fahey writes in the preface of *Australia's First Spies: The Remarkable Story of Australia's Intelligence Operations, 1901-45* that his purpose is to inform the general reader and the specialist that 'the secret history of a country is a far more dependable indicator of what actually happened than all the public pronouncements and posturing of politicians and appointed officials' (p. xvi). Rather than focus on words, Fahey looks at actions.

The book is chronological in approach, commencing with the first post-Federation intelligence gathering operation by Wilson Le Couteur in 1901 and concluding at the end of the Second World War. Le Couteur, a businessman with knowledge and experience of the Pacific, offered the prime minister, Edmund Barton, his services 'to undertake an enquiry into the state of affairs in the New Hebrides' (p. 2). The subsequent report provided the Australian government with intelligence on local issues and internal conflicts. The nascent intelligence operations were placed on a firmer footing following the appointment of senior public servant Attlee Hunt as coordinator. His time there, concluding in 1923, saw the creation of federal, state and overseas intelligence reporting. This work was the harbinger of future intelligence and counter-intelligence operations.

While *Australia's First Spies* explores the development of military intelligence during the First World War and after, it is the period from 1939 to 1945 that receives greater focus, specifically SIGINT (signals intelligence). This is where Fahey's experience comes to the fore. He describes the work of the Allied Intelligence Bureau and its many displays of amateurism. One such example, what Fahey states as 'perhaps the most egregious breach' of security (p. 255) in Asia during the war, was a transmission sent in a low-level code, using normal communications to a unit behind enemy lines and without due clearance. The transmission told the Japanese that the Allies could read their codes, and quickly. And this occurred in 1944! While this demonstrates problems, Fahey also shows the remarkable success of Allied intelligence operations against the Japanese. However, at no time does his work drift into hagiography.

Of particular interest is the role of the Japanese Kempeitai's successful role

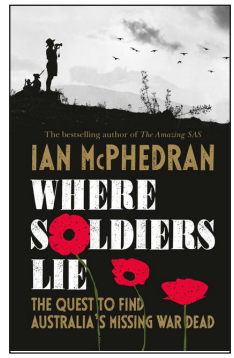
in counter-intelligence. By early 1943 every Australian Service Reconnaissance Department (SRD) operation against the Japanese had failed, with a death rate of 94 per cent for 'no intelligence return' (p. 325). Rather than reconsidering the plans in light of these failures, the operations continued. Fahey points out that if there was any form of oversight or proper reporting all SRD operations would have been ceased.

Fahey was fortunate to receive aid from eminent Australian military historian David Horner, whose work recently has included the first volume of the official history of ASIO. This influence has ensured that the book draws on archival sources and secondary scholarship while allowing Fahey's intimate knowledge of intelligence operations to show.

Australia's First Spies: The Remarkable Story of Australia's Intelligence Operations, 1901-45 is a valuable contribution to the scholarship of intelligence in Australia. Fahey's work is thoroughly researched and, while scholarly, is quite readable and highly recommended for those with a desire to understand the development of Australia's intelligence community.

Justin Chadwick

Where Soldiers Lie: The Quest to Find Australia's Missing War Dead
Ian McPhedran
A$39.99
Harper Collins, Sydney, 2019
Hardback, 308pp
ISBN 9781460755655



Very few people would not have seen an image of a ramp ceremony for fallen service personnel. The repatriation of the bodies of soldiers that have lost their lives during active service has become an important part of the grieving process, not just for families and loved ones, but also those that they served with. However, this process is a relatively recent phenomena. Former defence writer for News Limited and Walkley Award winner, Ian McPhedran, has written, in *Where Soldiers Lie: The Quest to Find Australia's Missing War Dead*, a moving and insightful account of the handful of people, many ex-service personnel, who have made it their goal to bring home or find those that were left behind.

McPhedran works chronologically backwards, starting with the recovery of Australian soldiers lost in Vietnam before moving onto Borneo, Korea and the Second and First World Wars. This decision is appropriate as it demonstrates the differences over the years of attitudes toward repatriation of bodies and also the considerably larger numbers involved. But his story is not just of those who fell and the few that have been recovered. McPhedran also investigates the role of the volunteers and professionals, what he terms 'bone hunters', associated with the task.

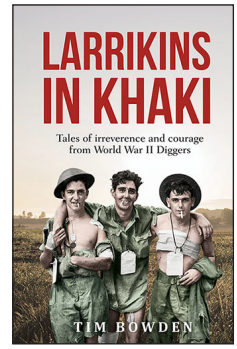
His discussion of the Unrecovered War Casualties – Army office is interesting and shows the process involved in researching and deciding on recovery operations. Further is the role of science, particularly DNA, in identifying soldiers buried overseas. What the book also shows is the tenacity of people who face government blocks, obfuscation and delays in Australia in comparison with the well-funded approach in the US.

Written in a journalistic manner, McPhedran's work is easy to read and covers a topic that is not common amongst military historians. His descriptions of operations are appropriate to form adequate context without dominating the core purpose of the book. There is plenty of personal stories that show the impact of loss and the importance to families to know where their lost ones lie.

Where Soldiers Lie is a fascinating, engaging discussion of the people involved in the process of recovering those who have fallen overseas. It involves military personnel, anthropologists, archaeologists, forensics experts, researchers and family members and friends all working together for the common goal of finding another lost Australian soldier.

Justin Chadwick

Larrikins in Khaki: Tales of irreverence and courage from World War II Diggers
Tim Bowden
A$32.99
Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2019
Paperback, 448 pp
ISBN 9781760528546



Tim Bowden is well remembered for his time as an ABC broadcaster and documentary maker, but for military enthusiasts he is best known as the author of books such as *One Crowded Hour: Neil Davis, Combat Cameraman*, *The Changi Camera: A Unique Record of Changi* and the *Thai-Burma Railway and Stubborn Buggers: The Survivors of the Infamous Gaol that Made Changi Look Like Heaven*. Bowden's latest work, *Larrikins in Khaki: Tales of irreverence and courage from World War II Diggers*, continues his exploration of Australia's military history.

In *Larrikins in Khaki* Bowden has collected a range of stories from soldiers that represent all sides of military service during the Second World War. Arranged chronologically, from enlistment to the Middle East and back to the jungles of New Guinea, Bowden weaves soldiers' recollections into his narrative with ease. Stories range from combat to camp life, capture and incarceration, life at home and convalescence. The use of personal accounts alongside a narrative of events, particularly in the action sections are powerful. At Gona, Joe Dawson of the 39th Battalion, recollects the 'smell of death, the stench of decaying bodies, the smell of

the mixture of mud, blood, cordite, and oppressive heat was all around us' (p. 310).

Alcohol played a prominent role in many a soldier's life, with Diggers drinking anything they could get their hands on. Ivan Blazely, of the 2/8th Field Regiment, recalled the time, while in the Middle East, when his mate drank yellow paint, thinking it was a liqueur, and the concoction they created by mixing cocoa and arrack. But the drinking was not limited to the other ranks, Blazely went on to say that 'if you wanted to hear a mob of screaming drunks, do a guard near the sergeants' or officers' mess on grog night' (179). On Bougainville ingenious troops scrounged materials and ingredients to make a brew with a 'smell that resembled that of the public urinal in the Great Southern Hotel at 6 o'clock on a Saturday' (p. 366).

But not all of Bowden's accounts are limited to overseas service. He also delves into the development of Australian paratroopers and those that served in Australia. But, importantly, is the loved ones left behind. On Dawson's return to Melbourne in September 1944, he 'experienced a magical moment – the reunion with my sweet Elaine and my first meeting with our darling daughter' (p. 322).

Bowden admits in his introduction that his book 'is not in any sense a military history', rather it is the Digger's themselves that 'control the narrative' (x). While Bowden says this his narrative provides enough background information to contextualise the soldiers' voices. The focus is always on the personal accounts of the Diggers themselves. The strength of *Larrikins in Khaki* is that it shows a very personal side of military service that makes the reader laugh, grimace and empathise with those who experienced war. Bowden concludes by stating that he hopes that he has 'illustrated the sterling qualities of the Australian fighting soldier – hard to discipline, generous to their comrades, irreverent and, above all, telling it as they saw it, warts and all' (p. 412). This he has achieved.

Justin Chadwick

Three Score Years and Twenty
Walter C. Balmford
A$29.95
Arcadia, 2019
Paperback, 162 pp
ISBN 9781925801774

This book is the personal memoir of Walter C. Balmford which has been published forty years after his death with his family editing the original text.

A quarter of the book, which may be of interest to the military history enthusiast, covers Walter's memories from his time as a pilot in the Royal Flying

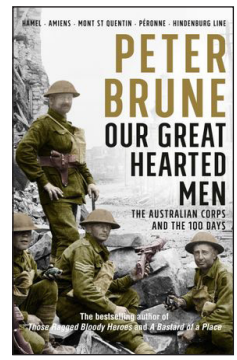
Corps from 1917-18. He flew RE 8's with No 6 Squadron in France. For those familiar with World War One aircraft the RE 8 was the recce workhorse of the RFC.

The greater bulk of the book deals with the various non-military phases of Walter's life which are not immediately of interest from a military history perspective. With the recent conclusion of the 100th anniversary of the First World War there have been an enormous number of personal diaries of those involved being published which serves to add a social history element to the wider picture of that conflict. *Three Score Years and Twenty* fits well within that category and would be appealing to those who are interested in personal narratives of the air campaign on the Western Front.

As with most books on military history it could have been greatly enriched with some maps of the locations where Walter served on the Western Front.

Rohan Goyne

Our Great Hearted Men: The Australian Corps and the 100 Days
Peter Brune
A$49.99
Harper Collins, Sydney, 2019
Hardback, 464 pp
ISBN 9781460756515



When the review copy of this book arrived I must admit that I queried the value of another book that explores Australia's involvement in the closing chapter of the First World War. Much has been published over the last five years in recognition of the centenary of the conflict, some good, some not so. Peter Brune's *Our Great Hearted Men: The Australian Corps and the 100 Days* definitely falls in the former category.

Brune follows the diary entries of seven Australian combatants to illustrate, on a personal level, the anguish, fear and loss of soldiers and officers. By doing so, along with Charles Bean's official history and unit records, Brune presents a balanced, if uncontroversial, narrative. Of importance is the discussion, in the first chapters, of strategy and doctrine. This discussion provides valuable context for the following detailed exploration of the Australian Corps' role in the hundred days. Of equal importance, to this reviewer at least, is Brune's statement on assessments of military figures, writing that '[h]indsight is the luxury of the historian – and the reader' (p. 66). An apt statement that is often forgotten.

If *Our Great Hearted Men* draws criticism it is with the occasional lapse into speculative description, such as Brune's narration of Monash 'slowly pacing back and forth' as viewed by Walter Coxen from a window of Bertangles (p. 119).

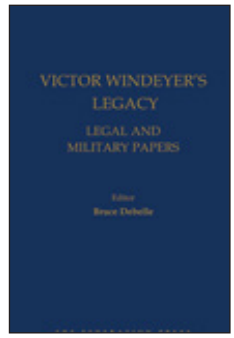
Unreferenced, this does a disservice to the book.

While much of the narrative is well-known and there is little new light shed on the actions of the Australian Corps in the hundred days, it is Brune's assessment of Monash in the penultimate chapter that is this book's strength. He sets out to provide a balanced analysis of Monash's achievements by drawing on a wide range of sources including Liddell Hart and Lloyd George. Brune disputes Tim Fischer's argument that Monash was a superior general to Canadian Arthur Currie and deserves to be posthumously promoted to field marshal. Brune's final, if brief, assessment is appropriate.

Overall, *Our Great Hearted Men* is a fine piece of research and is well-written. Brune's book is for anyone looking for a one-stop book on the Australian Corps' role in the hundred days.

Justin Chadwick

Victor Windeyer's Legacy: Legal and Military Papers
Bruce Debelle (ed.)
A$120.00
Federation Press, Sydney, 2019
Hardback, 304pp
ISBN 9781760022112



Victor Windeyer was one of the many Australian Army officers that combined a successful civilian career with a military one. His service began while studying, joining the Sydney University Regiment, and while he missed serving in the First World War, spent the interwar period honing his command skills. Appointed to battalion command at the outbreak of war in 1939, Windeyer displayed leadership skill in North Africa, particularly at Tobruk, and in New Guinea.

Bruce Debelle is Australia's leading scholar on Windeyer and has drawn together a fascinating range of articles penned by Windeyer throughout his legal and military career. While much of *Victor Windeyer's Legacy: Legal and Military Papers* focuses on his legal writings, there is still some gems of military information. His address following the battle of El Alamein, where rather than dwelling on the achievement, Windeyer talks of sacrifice and why they are fighting, is moving. His memorial service address for Field Marshal Montgomery encapsulates the leader and his impact on the Allied troops in North Africa. Wndeyer's reviews of General Slim's book, *Defeat into Victory*, and Gavin Long's *To Benghazi* are insightful and forthright.

Victor Windeyer's Legacy is primarily about Windeyer's legal writing, including biographies of fellow justices, addresses and legal histories. Although very limited, the military writing is of great interest and an insight into one of Australia's great legal minds and militia officers.

Justin Chadwick

Technology

'The Conger': One of Hobart's Unsuccessful Funnies

Rohan Goyne

The funnies of the 79th Armoured Division championed by Major General Hobart are rightly credited with providing invaluable assistance to the British and Canadian infantry during D-Day on 6 June 1944. However, not all of the developed specialist armoured vehicles were successful, the Conger mine clearance vehicle was a spectacular failure in the field.

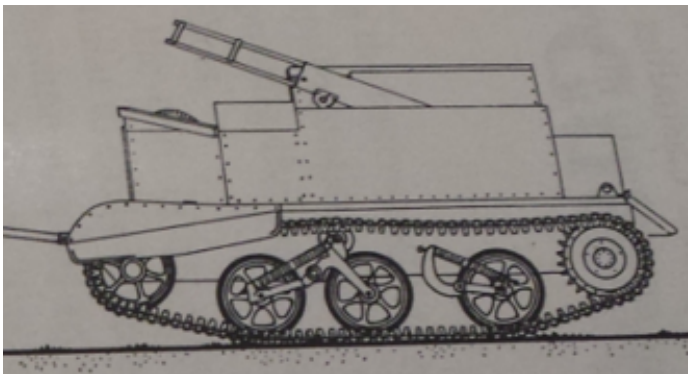


Figure 1: The Conger.
Source: Geoffery W Futter, *Funnies*, 1974.

Towed into battle behind a Churchill AVRE tank, the Conger used surplus Universal Carriers which were stripped of an engine and other internal fittings to be converted to a mine clearance role. It appeared at the same time as the Flail tank and Snake system which were considered more easily deployed on the battlefield and also less risky to troops deploying them.

The concept of the Conger involved the projection of 150 metres of flexible hose by a 5-inch rocket across an enemy minefield. Liquid nitro-glycerine was then forced through the hose using compressed air before being disconnected from the Conger's armoured trailer, towed away by the Churchill AVRE and then detonated supposedly neutralising the minefield.

In practice, when the Conger was deployed in France, the inherently unstable nature of nitro-glycerine demonstrated its unviability. At one time, the firing mechanism detonated prematurely and forty men were killed, four Churchill tanks were destroyed along with the two 6-tonne lorries which transported the fuel.

As a result, the Conger was withdrawn from front line service. The lesson from the Conger is that not all of Hobart's funnies were a successful adaption of old mechanised technology to new re-purposed specialist armoured vehicles.

Society Matters

The MHSA website has a 'MHSA In the News' page. The Society encourages members to forward to the Webmaster any stories that relate to what the Society or members have been doing with a relevant military theme, or on military matters in general, that might be of interest to the Society and the broader readership for posting on the site.

The page can be found at: http://www.mhsa.org.au/mhsa-in-the-news/

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