Culture, class & experience in the Australian Flying Corps

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Abstract

The Australian Flying Corps (AFC) was one of the world’s earliest military air arms yet within Australian military history it has commanded only limited attention. The experience of the infantry in combat and the subsequent development of the digger myth and the Anzac legend (which was informed and shaped by the digger myth) have taken centre stage. But does the digger reflect the experiences of other units within the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF)? This thesis examines the Australian Flying Corps to answer that question in part.

This thesis is a social-military history of the AFC’s combat aviators and mechanics, and sits within an Australian tradition of writing about war from below. It is a tradition that bases itself upon a lively discourse between the historian and the letters, memories and diaries of Australian soldiers. This thesis examines the social and cultural backgrounds of these men, the nature of, and how they responded to, a new type of warfare, one that was fought in the air. It argues that the history of the AFC challenges the notion of an AIF that was a socially and culturally homogenous force and that future studies of the smaller units within the AIF may well produce a richer historiography of the experience of Australian men in combat during the First World War.
I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work except where I have given full documented references to the work of others and that the material contained in this thesis has not been submitted for formal assessment in any formal course.

Signed

Michael Molkentin
October 2004
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For Melissa.

(a cord of three strands is not quickly broken)
Abbreviations

AAMC- Australian Army Medical Corps
AFC- Australian Flying Corps
AIF- Australian Imperial Force
AM- Aircraft Mechanic
AM/2- Aircraft Mechanic Second Class
AWM- Australian War Memorial
BEF- British Expeditionary Force
Capt.- Captain, the standard rank of a Flight Commander
HQ- Headquarters
Lieut- Lieutenant, the standard rank of a Flying Officer
2/Lieut- 2nd Lieutenant (starting rank for flying officers)
Maj.- Major, the standard rank of a Squadron Commander
Pte- Private
RAF- Royal Air Force, the amalgamation of the RFC & RNAS in April 1918
RFC- Royal (British) Flying Corps
RNAS- Royal Naval
Introduction

There is a small but growing field in Australian social military history. It builds upon the tradition established by C. E. W. Bean who made the ordinary soldier, and his experience of war, a central part of his approach to writing Official History.¹ It was a form of history from below- a 'democratic history' wherein 'the real actors were the individual Australian soldiers in the front line'.² For each of the men mentioned in his text, Bean assiduously noted their social background as well as their eventual fate. Robson made a statistical study of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) by sampling 0.5 per cent of its volunteers.³ Gammage, in a ground breaking work, examined 1000 individual soldiers, allowing them to describe their experience of war through their letters and diaries.⁴

Other historians have extended this approach by adopting a regional perspective. Welborn, for example, examined the infantry and Light Horse Battalions from Western Australia with the social and cultural identity of the state playing an important part in the analysis.⁵ McQuilton⁶ and Mongan and Reid⁷ placed their men within their broader regional social and cultural backgrounds paying particular attention to patterns of enlistment and class. Blair⁸ concentrated on a single battalion to offer a different view of war and wartime experience. More recently, Wise⁹ studied upper-middle class soldiers from Sydney's private schools demonstrating how preconceptions held by these men were profoundly altered by active service. These historians have demonstrated the value of focussing on particular cohorts of soldiers and examining their experiences within the context of their cultural, social and

² McKernan, M, Brown, M, Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1988.
geographical backgrounds. This thesis, then, sits within this tradition by examining a specific cohort of men, their social backgrounds and their experience of war.

Australian military historians have often dealt with the AIF as though it was a holistic force and an infantry force, a clear indication of the influence of Bean who saw the AIF as a democratic force, freed from the constraints of class with war as the great leveller. The infantry was certainly the largest single element in the AIF making up 64 per cent of the force\textsuperscript{10}. And moreover, the infantry did play a dominant role in the development of both the Anzac and digger traditions. Under represented in this scholarship however, are social-military studies of individual military units outside the infantry divisions. Groups of First AIF soldiers from the Artillery, Signal Corps, Engineers, Medical Corps, and the Flying Corps have not yet been singled out by social-military history for examination. The servicemen and women of these units came from different places within Australian society and engaged in contrasting styles of warfare. Did these units, then, differ from the general picture in terms of class, cultural and geographical background from the AIF as a whole? This thesis takes the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) as its cohort to provide a partial answer to that question.

The AFC was among the world's first military air arms. At the declaration of war in 1914, Australia was the only dominion within the empire to accept an invitation from Britain to form a military air arm. With just a single aerodrome staffed by two instructors and four cadets, the AFC had humble beginnings as a corps within the AIF. By 1916 however, aircraft were superseding cavalry as the army's reconnoitring 'eyes', and were becoming increasingly prevalent in both the European and Middle Eastern theatres. In March 1916, Australia committed her first full AFC unit- No. 1 Squadron to action in Palestine. By the beginning of 1918, three more Australian squadrons (Nos. 2, 3 & 4) had been posted to the Western Front. Fighting under the command of the British Royal

Flying Corps (RFC) these units distinguished themselves on both fronts in some of the fiercest aerial fighting of the war.

Yet there is little secondary literature devoted to the AFC. F.M Cutlack's *Official History of the Australian Flying Corps*\(^\text{11}\) constructed an empirical picture of the AFC's overall campaign history. Although his narrative lacks the epic prose of Bean's volumes, and he is less innovative in his use of oral and unofficial sources, Cutlack's work remains a very readable history which is remarkably well researched, and has provided the necessary context for social and cultural inquiries such as this one.

Unit histories for the AFC have thus far, only been written for No. 3\(^\text{12}\) and No.4\(^\text{13}\) Squadron. Like most histories of their type, they were penned by officers who were centrally involved in the events that they were writing about. Apart from advancing Cutlack's empirically based narrative by exploring individual units in greater detail, they also provide essays by various squadron members on field organisation and the experiences of combat, training and formation flying. These examples of 'official experience' have provided a valuable point of comparison with the private writings of the airmen. Finally, the two unit histories contain quantitative evidence regarding operations and personnel pertinent to statistical analysis.

The small number of other works concerned with the AFC includes published memoirs by pilots Cobby\(^\text{14}\) and Sutherland\(^\text{15}\), and the transcribed diaries of Conrick\(^\text{16}\) and Bull\(^\text{17}\). These works are quite useful in exploring the experiential side of the AFC. In the case of the memoirs, both were written during the inter-war years and often reflect the mystical air warrior rhetoric that characterised aviation literature during this era. Indeed, the titles *High

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*Adventure* and *Aces and Kings* betray their authors' adherence to elitist fighter pilot mythology. This said though, they are valuable when read alongside the private records of their comrades and the official historians.

Finally, Goodland and Vaughan's *Anzacs Over England*\(^\text{18}\), a book accompanying the documentary of the same title, is the sole popular history devoted to the AFC. Despite appearing promising through its claim to reveal 'an extraordinary cultural clash' between the AFC and the people of Gloucestershire, it only scrapes the surface of this complex relationship, and offers little analysis of the implications that this wartime relationship holds for the wider British and Australian cultural relationship.

The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) has, however, been better served. Dennis Winter's *The First of the Few*\(^\text{19}\) examines the men in the RFC. He writes a democratic history, one that approaches its subject from below and grants the men in the RFC a rich cultural identity. Winter has written extensively in Australian infantry history and the application of this approach in British military history is rare. Winter's prose is colourful, evocative and paints a vivid impression of the mental and material worlds of the RFC. This thesis adopts a similar approach. Furthermore, the men of Winter's RFC provide a logical point of comparison for the subjects of this thesis, as the two corps' developed alongside one another\(^\text{20}\), cooperated strategically, and were both forced to come to terms with a rapidly evolving style of warfare. Yet this thesis will argue that they maintained their own identities based on their national and cultural identities. Such contrasts between Australian and British army culture have previously been well established, and it is interesting to now examine this relationship in the context of the socially elite flying services.

This thesis is not an attempt to write a Rankian style history, endeavouring to 'show it how it really was', but to rather examine how these men reacted to war in light of their own social and cultural backgrounds, and how they


\(^{20}\) With the AFC classified as part of the RFC until October 1918.
responded to the very new type of war that they were engaged in. Such notions as class, occupation, ethnicity and religion are examined in light of responses to training, fighting, working, killing and dying in an AFC squadron. In other words, this thesis is an attempt to understand the human element of the Australian Flying Corps 'specific to time, place and culture'\textsuperscript{21}.

The research for this thesis has relied heavily upon primary source material and the theoretical and methodological approaches developed by historians such as Gammage, Keegan\textsuperscript{22}, McQuilton, Lynn and Winter. The Australian War Memorial (AWM) and National Archives of Australia (NAA) hold a vast collection of private and official sources relating directly to the AFC. In addition to these, the National Library of Australia (NLA) holds recorded interviews with several Australian aviators, undertaken by historian Fred Morton during the 1970s. These rich sources have scarcely been used in historical enquiry to date, and have proven invaluable in examining the nature of culture, class and experience in the AFC.

In terms of its structure, the thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter I undertakes a statistical analysis of the AFC's social background. Sources such as the AWM's Embarkation Rolls and Honour Roll Circulars have been used in a discourse with private and official correspondence regarding the AFC's social structure. The flying officers and mechanics have been differentiated in this chapter in order to establish their unique identities and roles within squadron culture. Significantly, this chapter reveals that the AFC possessed a distinct social profile that contrasts the profiles of Robson's AIF, and Australian society as suggested by the 1911 Census Report.

Chapter II takes this social character and places it in the context of aviation training in England. Through the private records and correspondence of Australian cadet airmen, a picture emerges of the cultural disparity between the RFC and AFC men during training. Chapter II also demonstrates the


attitudes and preconceptions that Australian cadets developed as they began to contemplate the reality of fighting a war in the skies.

Chapter III examines the culture of active service squadrons at the front, through the private writings of Australian airmen, flying logbooks and official statistics. The dichotomous 'double life' of the combat aviator becomes a strong theme in this chapter, as the extremes of life on the ground and life in their air are discussed. It is within the very essence of this dichotomy - hot meals and tennis matches, violent air combat and unpredictable schedules - that a remarkably different experience of war emerges to that had by the 'digger'. Chapter III also examines the importance of middle class culture within squadron life, particularly within the contexts of command and mess culture.

The focus of Chapter IV shifts to the AFC's mechanics. Central to this chapter is the unusually close and informal relationship that developed between the aviators and their ground crews. This relationship is in stark contrast to the strict cultural conventions that Winter identified between RFC ranks. The differences between AFC and RFC inter-rank relationships are explored within the paradigm of wider British and Australian perceptions of identity and class.

Finally, Chapter V demonstrates how the AFC experience of combat contrasted with the experiences had by the men in the trenches. A great variety of responses (both official and unofficial, contemporary and past) are considered in the course of this chapter, and are examined in the context of middle-class combat rhetoric. The work of several psycho-military historians is also employed to assess the responses of the Australian aviators and consider the psychological effects of air combat.

The thesis concludes with some suggestions for future inquiry, in light of what has been established in the course of researching the AFC.
I

The Social Character of the
Australian Flying Corps

In Vol. 1 of The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, C. E. W Bean claimed that

...there were in the Australian force no special corps in which University or "public school" men enlisted apart from others....for the most part the wealthy, the educated, the rough and the case hardened, poor Australians, rich Australians, went into the ranks together, unconscious of any distinction.¹

A study of the AFC however, reveals a very different picture. The men who filled the ranks of the Flying Corps typically possessed a level of professional training and education that was disproportionate to both the AIF² as a whole and Australia's working male population³. The members of the AFC were heavily urbanised, of a highly select age group, overtly Anglicised and a high percentage had private and tertiary educations. These factors all suggest that the AFC was a somewhat socially elite force, and that they certainly did not go to war rubbing shoulders with the 'case hardened, poor Australians'. Indeed, the AFC's flying ranks at least, may have presented men of higher social status with an opportunity to avoid fighting alongside their social inferiors.

A Flying Corps squadron possessed a unique operational makeup.⁴ It was a force in which only a minimal proportion engaged in actual combat (all officers) whilst the majority (enlisted and non-commissioned ranks) undertook highly specialised support roles.⁵ Lieut. Nunan's lecture notes disclose the

² Unless otherwise stated, all comparative figures on the AIF are taken from or tabulated from Robson.
³ Unless otherwise stated, all comparative figures on the Australian male population are taken from or tabulated from Knibbs, G. H, The 1911 Census of the Population of Australia, McCarron, Bird & Co. Printers, Melbourne, 1914.
⁴ See the Appendix (p. 79) for a detailed description of the AFC's operational structure.
⁵ In the AFC, flying ranks were 2nd Lieutenant and above, although ranks above Captain were rarely attached to combat flights, and were most regularly assigned to Squadron H.Q (particularly in Western Front squadrons with their high aviator mortality rates). The statistical sample of 'flying ranks' includes all 129 commissioned officers in combat flights or reinforcements on AWM 8. Other ranks assigned to combat flights made up the ground crew which most
ideal reconnaissance squadron makeup—eighteen pilots, twelve aerial observers and 218 support staff. It is necessary then, to grant these groups independent identities within the analysis in order to better understand both the unique operational structure of the AFC and the social contrast between its different ranks and occupations. Aviators (both pilots and observers) are referred to henceforth as ‘flying ranks’ whilst all non-commissioned ground staff (mechanics, riggers, armourers etc.) are ‘other ranks’.

The Sources

The Unit Embarkation Rolls are a rich source for constructing the social background of men enlisted in the AIF and the AFC. They provide information of age, occupation, residence, religion, previous military service and marital status at individual unit level. For the AFC this includes squadron and combat flights. For this study, the flying ranks from all combat flights and reinforcements on the rolls were examined (129 individuals in total), whilst other ranks (the ground crew- 403 individuals in total) have been taken from combat flights in 1, 2 and 4 Squadrons. The Unit Embarkation Rolls, however, have one methodological problem: they only provide information for the men who enlisted and embarked from Australia as part of the Flying Corps. The AFC’s ranks were largely filled outside Australia by men transferring from other AIF units whilst overseas. This latter group made up a very significant proportion of the AFC by the war’s end, leaving a blind spot in any attempt to construct a social profile of the AFC. Other sources, however, were available and were used to fill in this lacuna.

The Roll of Honour contains the records of 202 AFC servicemen who were killed during active service. Within these records, 112 Roll of Honour Circulars exist. These cards were filled out by the deceased’s next of kin for the purpose of commemoration, and a large proportion name the educational commonly held the rank of Air Mechanic. The statistical sample of ‘other ranks’ consists of the 403 enlisted men and N.C.Os assigned to combat flights in 1, 2 & 4 Squadrons, as listed on AWM 8.

6 Nunan, AFC Lecture Notes, AWM Private Records 3DRL/6511.
7 AWM 8 Unit Embarkation Nominal Rolls, 1914-1918 War (hereafter AWM 8).
8 I believe that at least 1/2 and as much as a 2/3 of the AFC was recruited overseas from AIF units already on active service.
9 AWM 145 Roll of Honour Cards, 1914-1918 War (hereafter AWM 145).
10 AWM 131 Roll of Honour Circulars, 1914-1918 War (hereafter AWM 131).
institution(s) that the deceased attended. This frequently overlooked resource discloses information about the social background and education levels of servicemen, and provides a sample of those who transferred into the AFC from overseas AIF units and are hence missing from the Embarkation Rolls.

Official records relating to the recruitment of AFC personnel from overseas AIF units provide evidence to suggest that this group possessed a similar social background to those included on the Embarkation Rolls. Finally, the private records of the aviators and mechanics can corroborate with the statistical evidence to great effect. The quantity of written material and its character can suggest much about the literary capability of any group; whilst its content reveals social character through assumptions, perceptions and relationships.

The Flying Ranks

In the case of flying ranks, the AFC was overwhelmingly drawn from those with specialised industrial backgrounds or the professional occupations (see Table 2.1).\(^\text{11}\) Almost half (47 per cent) came from professional industrial backgrounds and of these 21 per cent\(^\text{12}\) possessed a background in either mechanical or electrical engineering. Both were highly specialised professions in the Australia of 1914, indeed only being practiced by 1 per cent of the working male population.\(^\text{13}\) The flying ranks needed men who were either already familiar with a specialised mechanical proficiency, or had the educational background that enabled them to acquire the knowledge of not only how to fly but to know the technical nuances of their machines. The lecture notebook of Capt. Cummings, for example, contains extensive

\(^{11}\) To assist with the comparative analysis between the AFC and Australia's working male population, the occupational classifications used in this analysis are the same as those used during the 1911 Census and are as follows:

- **Professional**- military, government service, ministers, clerks, students, administrative, journalists
- **Domestic**- chefs, barkeeps, hoteliers
- **Commercial**- retailers, business owners, merchants, traders, importers
- **Transport & Communications**- drivers (Car, Train, Truck, Tram, Bus), wireless & telegraph operators
- **Industry**- mechanics, builders, factory hands, craftsmen, electricians, tradesmen
- **Engineers**- mechanical, electrical, civil
- **Labourer**- brick, builder, rural
- **Primary**- farmers, graziers, stockmen, orchardists
- **Independent**- artists, explorers, traveller

\(^{12}\) AWM 8, *op cit.*

diagrams and notes on the science of flight, the characteristics of aeronautics, electrics, meteorology, mathematics, engine design, rigging and so on.\textsuperscript{14}

Such knowledge had practical applications for the combat aviator who was often required to conduct running diagnosis and repairs on his aircraft, weapons and reconnaissance equipment during operations. Lieut. Conrick applied his technical skills after crash landing in the Palestinian desert in October 1918, when he and his pilot had to replace a broken magneto before being able to take off and fly home- a life saving skill in this instance.

Professional occupational backgrounds were also heavily over-represented in the flying ranks of the AFC, with 39 per cent classed as such, predominately hailing from clerical, administrative, government, and student positions. Compared to just 11 per cent in the AIF and 5.8 per cent of the working male population, this figure suggests that a significant proportion of AFC airmen were drawn from the upper-middle class, a factor reflected in contemporary cultural constructs of ‘the airman’. Even before powered flight had been invented, popular fiction had often depicted the flying man as its fantastical, knightly figure and in doing so, had developed the construct of the ‘airman’ as moral and virtuous. Hence, when aviation became a reality in years prior to the Great War, its pioneering airmen were cast in this epic ‘mould’.\textsuperscript{15} As Mosse writes, ‘to control an airplane was considered not so much a technical feat as a moral accomplishment’.\textsuperscript{16} Such preconceptions were just as evident in Australia as in Europe and America, especially during the years leading up to the Great War. Australia’s security paranoia, borne out of its remoteness from Europe and especially Britain led to a keen interest in aviation, and the subsequent dubbing of the aviator and his machine as the decisive force in the future of national security and warfare. In an article titled \textit{Sovereignty of the Air} published in 1912, \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald} claimed that:

\textsuperscript{14} Cummings, Personal Papers, AWM Private Records PR83/187.
\textsuperscript{16} Mosse, G.L, \textit{Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars}, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990. p. 120.
The nation that commands the air, that nation will rule the world, and such supremacy will be attained at a far less expense than by means of fleets and armies.17

The airman was therefore seen as the absolute cream of manhood - the virtuous, educated and hence, professional man from the upper-middle class. Capt. Cobby observed firsthand the impact of this mindset upon the recruitment of No. 4 Squadron's aviators:

We came from all walks of life - farmer, bank clerk, college graduate, and one or two university people with degrees. One was a dentist, another was an engineer and another was a doctor.18

This group hardly represents 'all walks of life', but rather, reinforces the notion that the flying ranks of the AFC were dominated by middle class professionals.

The Roll of Honour Circulars also provide evidence to support this domination of the AFC's flying ranks by the upper-middle class. Almost half (49 per cent: see Table 2.2) of the flying ranks attended prestigious private schools such as Sydney Grammar, Fort Street High, Wesley College, Kings, Geelong Grammar and St. Peters Adelaide. Nationally, only 13.74 per cent of Australian males were receiving private education in 1911. As Western argues, Australian education is class bound19 and is hence an effective indicator of social background.

Official records relating to the recruitment of the Flying Corps often demonstrate that it favoured virtues characteristic of a private school education within its recruits. The Medical Requirements for the Australian Flying Corps, 1918 instructed examining doctors that

...the moral effects of the previous mode of life are of the highest

17 The Sydney Morning Herald, 13 May 1912, p. 8.
18 Cobby, High Adventure, p.34. That Cobby claims this group represents 'all walks of life' is interesting within itself, and could demonstrate the introspective nature of his middle class perception.
importance. The youth who has developed courage, self-reliance, alertness and a sense of obligation to "play the game", whether these qualities have been cultivated in the Public School or the coal mine, is by their possession rendered eminently more suitable for flying than the less fortunate youth whose circumstances have tended towards a monotonous unadventurous or unsocial life.  

Likewise, orders in the First Anzac Circular of 1917 stated that

[AFC] Cadets...should be accustomed to driving a motor car or riding a motor bicycle. Preference is given to candidates who can ride, play games, have a marked personality, good education and have some knowledge of Vickers and Lewis guns, Morse Signaling, Wireless telegraphy and map reading.  

Needless to say, such characteristics and skills were infinitely more likely to be acquired in the Public School Cadets than in a coal mine.

Private records also provide evidence that men with upper middle-class educations dominated the flying ranks. It appears that such men strongly identified with, and took great pride in their private school heritage. Lieut. Lewis wrote regularly in his diary of meeting fellow Wesley Collegians in the AFC:

Streeter, an old Wesley chap has turned up as a pilot. Unfortunately, he has been allotted to 'C' flight. As we wish to fly together we have asked Knox if he can arrange [this].

Likewise, Capt. Cobby described an instance where the private school background of one of his pilots was proudly exhibited:

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20 Medical Requirements for the Australian Flying Corps, 1918, AWM 25 Written Records, 1914-18 War (hereafter AWM 25) 481/115.
21 Selection of candidates for appointment as flying officers. 1st Anzac Circular, AWM 10 Australian Imperial Force Administrative Headquarters Registry, "A" (Adjutant-General's Branch) files (hereafter AWM 10), 4343/29/17.
22 Lewis, Diary, 2 February 1918. AWM Private Records PR00709- other references to Wesley Collegians in entries for 10 March 1918 and 15 March 1918.
I can remember Willmott industriously painting his college badge on his machine just before he came to France, with its motto 'Resurgam', which I understood meant, 'I will arise again'.

The age profile of the AFC’s flying ranks also differed from the AIF as a whole. The majority (64 per cent) of flying men were aged between twenty and twenty-four, and another 29 per cent were between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine. Hence, 93 per cent of the AFC’s airmen were under the age of thirty (see Table 2.3). Winter’s study of the RFC’s pilots demonstrates a similar age profile and suggests that recruits became younger as the war progressed. A similar trend is evident in the AFC. The average age of flying ranks listed in the Embarkation Rolls, for example, dropped from twenty-five years and two months in 1916 to twenty-one years and four months in 1918. McQuilton has noted a similar decline in the average ages of AIF recruits between 1916 and 1918, arguing that this reflected the fact that most of the men in the eligible age group had enlisted by 1916, and by 1917 were drawn from the younger men coming of age. This may hold true for the AFC but it seems far more likely that medical theories account for the drop in average ages.

During the war, air combat occurred at increasingly higher altitudes and the development of aviation medical opinion suggested that younger men were better suited to endure the resultant strain. As early as August 1917, AFC Administrative HQ set an age limit of 30 for men enlisting in the AFC with a preference for ‘those under 23’. (In the AIF as a whole, the age limit was forty-five). Likewise, in 1918, Medical Requirements for the Australian Flying Corps reinforced this point:

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22 Cobby, High Adventure, p.47.
24 Winter, D, The First of the Few: Fighter Pilots of the First World War, Penguin Books, London, 1982, pp.24-25, Winter claims that by 1917, 60% of RFC aviators were 22 years old or under.
26 AWM 10 4343/29/17, op cit.
If over 30 a man should only be accepted if he is either exceptionally young for his age, or has some special characteristics to render him suitable for air work.27

The AIF drew its volunteers from across Australia and the proportion of men enlisting basically matched their state's share of the national population. Robson's study, for example, noted that Victorians, with 28.34 per cent of Australia's population, provided 27 per cent of the men in the AIF. Members of the AFC, however, were predominantly Victorian: 47 per cent came from that state (see Table 2.4). More significantly, three quarters of these men (74 per cent: see Table 2.5) came from Melbourne. The explanations for this lie in the location of Point Cook Central Flying School and Melbourne's industrial history.

The Central Flying School at Point Cook became active in 1914 and was the sole military aviation school in Australia until a School of Aviation was established at Richmond in New South Wales in 1916. This second school, however, never commanded the same authority as Point Cook during the war. And in an age of limited transport, the proximity of Point Cook offered upper-middle class Victorians an alternative to enlisting in the infantry, an alternative denied men living in other states. Furthermore, the high proportion of metropolitan Victorians in the flying ranks is not unanticipated considering their industrial and professional backgrounds, as Melbourne's manufacturing industry had boomed during the late nineteenth century, making it an industrial and commercial heartland.28

The religious profile of the flying ranks clearly reflects Australia's class and ethnic structure in 1914 (see Table 2.6). The majority were Anglican (44 per cent) and Presbyterian (18 per cent), two denominations firmly entrenched in Australia's upper-middle class29 from which the flying ranks were drawn, and denominations noted for their support of the war. Catholics were under

27 AWM 25 481/115 op cit.
represented, accounting for just 10 per cent of the flying ranks. In Australia during the early twentieth century, Catholicism was traditionally associated with the working class and Australians of Irish descent. The working class possessed neither the expertise required for the AFC nor their pre-conceived cultural identity. And of those flying ranks who did declare Catholicism as their religion, less than half (42 per cent) appeared to be of Irish decent. In other words, the small Catholic element within the AFC represented Catholicism in its non-traditional form - neither working class nor Irish.

The flying ranks however, did match the AIF’s profile in terms of marital status (see Table 2.7). They were overwhelmingly single (85 per cent).

The Other Ranks

As with the flying ranks, the occupational profiles of the other ranks differed markedly from the AIF as a whole. The other ranks of the AFC were overwhelmingly from industrial professions (see Table 2.1). Just under three quarters (74 per cent) had worked in industry prior to the war, with 16 per cent of these being engineers. In 1911 just 1 per cent of Australia’s working male population was engaged in engineering. There was also a significant gathering (13 per cent) of transport and communications workers in the AFC other ranks. This figure is higher than the AIF (9 per cent) and Census (9.7 per cent) figures but reflects the specific requirements of the AFC for engine mechanics and wireless operators. Indeed, ground crew in the AFC were specifically targeted by recruiters for their technical skills.

These recruits were targeted in order to fulfil specific and specialised roles within their respective squadrons. Official correspondence requesting volunteers for the Flying Corps (see Figures 2.8 and 2.9) from the AIF during

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30 Surmised from the names and N.O.K addresses of those declaring Catholicism as their denomination.
31 Russel Ward has identified a grossly disproportionate number of Irish (and ‘by implication’, Catholics) amongst the unskilled working population of Australia. Qtd in Mol, p. 77.
32 AWM 8, op cit.
1915 provides an example of this qualification specific recruitment, and the emphasis placed upon previous experience. Watchmakers commonly became aircraft instrument fitters, boat builders and other woodworkers specialised in airframe rigging and communications experts typically worked with squadron wireless sets. The AFC then, possessed a highly specialised ground crew, drawn from Australia's leading skilled tradesmen.

In terms of education, a surprisingly high proportion (36 per cent: see Table 2.2) had a private education background although less came from the Great Public Schools associated with the flying ranks. The majority came from the state school system and developed their trades either through tertiary study or apprenticeships. This group included men such as Davis, who attended a state school before training as an electrical engineer, and Marsden who attended Parramatta State School before apprenticing as a fitter and turner. The occupational and educational profiles of the other ranks suggests that these men were drawn from the lower middle classes where education and technical training were seen as avenues for upward social mobility.

The statistics for the ages of other ranks are more evenly distributed across the age cohort spectrum than in the case of flying ranks, and even bear a limited resemblance to Robson's AIF statistics (see Table 2.3). It is interesting to note that despite a 65 per cent concentration of other ranks between twenty and twenty-nine, there remains 29 per cent distributed across the older age groups of thirty to forty plus. It is difficult to ascertain the precise cause behind this wider distribution, but one can certainly speculate upon the relative merits of both older and younger ground crew. Many younger recruits had more recently completed their trades before enlisting, and may have been considered better equipped to work with such new mechanical wonders as the rotary engine and the machine gun interrupter gear. The older recruit on the other hand, was likely to possess several years of valuable peacetime experience in his trade, and hence was also of great value to the AFC- a fact

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34 First and Second Half Flights (Australian Flying Corps) Establishment, Formation and Organisation Recruitment and Selecting of Personnel, 21 July 1915, National Archives of Australia, A2023, A 38/8/188.  
35 AWM 131, cards for AM/2 Marsden, Stanley Noel and AM/2 Davis, Francis Gordon.
that explains the older man’s smaller, but nonetheless significant presence in AFC ground crews.

In terms of the state from which the members of the other ranks came and their religious affiliation, the profile neatly matches that recorded for the flying crew: the majority were Anglican and Presbyterian and the majority came from Victoria and especially Melbourne. As noted earlier, Melbourne was the industrial heartland of Australia in 1914, having expanded thirteen fold in the decades between 1861 and 1891 alone. Correspondingly this region housed the infrastructure most suited to train the mechanical and technical specialists that the AFC would primarily target for prospective enlistments.

In terms of marital status, however, the men in other ranks departed from the statistical norm. Almost 30 per cent were married, a substantial difference from the flying ranks at 15 per cent and the AIF as a whole at 16 per cent (see Table 2.7). In a comparative study of active service casualties in the British Expeditionary Force, J.M Winter found that RFC ground crew had the safest occupation, with only 1 in 206 being killed. It is possible that young, married, Australian volunteers with the appropriate technical qualifications saw the AFC as a ‘safe’ option in which to undertake war-service and survive for their families.

**Conclusion**

The AFC, then, had a distinctive social profile. It drew heavily from Australia’s middle classes who had the education and background to meet its needs, especially for the flying ranks. The Australian combat aviator fulfilled societies’ construct of the airman- a man that was ‘the “new man”, symbolic of all that was best in the nation’. He was almost certainly a professional man in civilian life, engaged in study, white collar work, or a specialised trade. He had probably received a private education, and if not, then most likely would have taken up tertiary studies following high school. Extra-curricular pastimes

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36 McCarty, J.W, Schedvin, C.B (eds.), op cit, p. 68.
38 Mosse, op cit, pp. 120-121.
typically included motoring, motorcycling, yachting, horse-riding, hunting and cadets- healthy male activities defined by his upper-middle class culture. These cultural characteristics further dictated that he was most likely Anglican, possibly Presbyterian, but highly unlikely Catholic. Victoria was most likely the airman's home state, with New South Wales being a reasonably strong second possibility. In either case he was almost certainly a city boy, to whom the proximity of the flying schools at Point Cook and Richmond had played a role in his decision to pursue a service career in military aviation. Being young, most typically between twenty and twenty four years of age, the Australian airman was very unlikely to have a wife. And he was one of a select few.

A call for applicants for the AFC in the Windsor and Richmond Gazette makes the point rather neatly. Applicants had to be between 18 and 30 years of age, they had to pay £60 up front for instruction and they had to provide medical evidence that they were fit for 'aerial service' with 'a sound heart and good eyesight'. Preference would be given to men who had held a commission in the senior cadets, or those who had completed at least two years of instruction in engineering at some university, and those possessed a fair knowledge of internal combustion engine39 Unofficially, there was an expectation that men enlisting would have experience in the 'gentlemanly' pursuits mentioned above. Lieut. Fry, after being accepted by the AFC after several failed attempts, wrote:

...it has taken me a long time to get my hearts (sic) desire, with many applications and hard work and many white lies wrangling it. I must say that in my last application for this transfer I stretched the facts a bit and made myself out to be quite a most desirable person ...I made myself appear much younger than my birth certificate actually showed, my weight out at least a stone and a half lighter....I stated that I had done everything that the Powers to Be wanted to hear, rode a horse like a jockey, hunted, played polo, drove a car, almost a human marvel.40

39 The Windsor and Richmond Gazette, 11 August 1916.
40 Fry, R.H, Diary, 10 October 1918, AWM Private Records 3DRL/0481.
When all else failed, an applicant could turn to friends and family in the upper echelons of Australian society. Many of the private records contain letters of reference from influential relatives and acquaintances of applicant’s families. Lieut. Day had his cousin, a Major on H.Q staff, write a letter on his behalf (see Figure 2.10), claiming that ‘good influence was absolutely essential. Admission into the flying corps (sic) was almost impossible without it’. 41 One veteran claimed in 1977 that bribery was part of the process: parents even donated motor cars to the AFC to get their sons into the service. 42

The rigger or mechanic in the AFC was more likely to be a lower-middle or upper-working class skilled tradesman, experienced in a highly specialised trade such as rigging, fitting and turning. He may have attended a private school but rarely one of the major private schools and his training had given him the expertise required by the Flying Corps. Like his commissioned superiors in the flying ranks, the air mechanic was almost certainly from metropolitan Victoria - an environment conducive to his technical calling due to its highly developed industrial base. There was a good chance that he was a little older than his flying superiors, and also married. Yet, like his flying arm counterpart, he came from a specialised background.

The AFC man then, was from a select place within Australian society. For him at least, C.E.W Bean’s notions of a democratic and egalitarian force did not apply, for he went to war with a socially and professionally elite group, surrounded largely by his middle-class peers. The AFC man was much more akin to his ‘young certainly, rich probably’ 43 counterpart in the RFC, a fact that does not sit well with the ‘digger’ mythology that is central in Australia’s identity, and could well explain the cold shoulder that Australian military history has traditionally offered the Australian Flying Corps.

41 Day, Diary ?? September 1917, AWM Private Records PR85/344.
43 Winter, D, op cit, p. 25.
Table 2.1
Occupational Backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Professional</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>Commercial</th>
<th>Transport &amp; Communications</th>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Labourer</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flying Ranks</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Ranks</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIF</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911 Census</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2.2
Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>State Schools (With Evidence of Tertiary Training)</th>
<th>State Schools (No Evidence of Tertiary Education)</th>
<th>School Unknown/Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flying Ranks</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Ranks</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males in Australia</td>
<td>13.74%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13.38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures unavailable for Males in Australia: State Schools with Tertiary and State Schools without Tertiary.

Sources: AWM 131; The 1911 Census of Australia.
Table 2.3
Age Comparison

![Age Comparison Chart]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>AFC Flying Ranks</th>
<th>AFC Other Ranks</th>
<th>DAIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40+</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2.4
Distribution by State

![Distribution by State Chart]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Flying Ranks</th>
<th>Other Ranks</th>
<th>Robson's A.I.F</th>
<th>Australian Males 1911</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.S.W</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>37.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.A</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W.A</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>6.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAS</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QLD</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.T</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.C.T</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.5
Distribution by Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Metropolitan</th>
<th>Rural/Regional</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flying Ranks</strong></td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Ranks</strong></td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2.6
Religious Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Church of England</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Presbyterian</th>
<th>Methodist</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Nil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Flying Ranks</strong></td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Ranks</strong></td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AIF</strong></td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1911 Census</strong></td>
<td>40.97%</td>
<td>21.81%</td>
<td>12.51%</td>
<td>11.65%</td>
<td>8.99%</td>
<td>4.33%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.7
Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Single</th>
<th>Widowed/Divorced</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flying Ranks</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Ranks</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIF</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Males</td>
<td>41.90%</td>
<td>56.71%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>0.18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commandant,
2nd Military District.

1. In order to anticipate the formation of an additional half flight of the Australian Flying Corps for active service with the Indian Army, it has been decided to select a certain number of air mechanics for training, already enlisted in the A.I.F.

2. Would you please cause the O.C. Training Camp at Liverpool to select 20 good mechanics possessing a working knowledge of any one of the undermentioned trades:

**WOOD WORKERS**
- Patternmakers
- Boat-builders
- Coach-builders
- Cabinet makers
- Carpenters & Joiners

**METAL WORKERS**
- Turners & Fitters
- Blacksmiths
- Tinsmiths
- Copper-smiths
- Motor Mechanics

Ten of these mechanics should be metal workers and ten wood workers.

In addition, men possessing knowledge of the rigging of aeroplanes and the care and construction of internal combustion engines, should be granted priority over other volunteers.

3. A list showing the names of the men and their qualifications for the position of air mechanic should be forwarded to this office without delay.

4. You will be notified later as to the date when these mechanics are to be sent to the Central Flying School at Werribee.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Trade</th>
<th>Firm employed</th>
<th>Period of Employment</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, Vincent,</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Aviator</td>
<td>Nalders Ltd.</td>
<td>8 to 10 years</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; Aernant. Tent maker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson, Mervyn,</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Diamond set</td>
<td>Grout &amp; Co.</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Diamond Setter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grouter. 5 yrs private study design construction engineer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinclair, Alexander,</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Marine Eng.</td>
<td>Union S. Co.</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Chief Eng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkham.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Union S. Co.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter, Alexander,</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>C.H. Hoskins,</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Foreman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McPherson.</td>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; Joiner.</td>
<td>Lithgow.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aitken, George</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Pattern Maker</td>
<td>A. Gordon &amp; Co.</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Leading Hand Pattern Shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maker.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Wickham.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turner H. W.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter &amp; Joiner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaine, William,</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Shipwright.</td>
<td>Adelaide Steam Co.</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Tradesman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton, C.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Turner &amp; Fitter.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwards A.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Turner &amp; Fitter.</td>
<td>Department Pub. Works,</td>
<td>2 yrs 9 months</td>
<td>Driller &amp; Grinder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Walsh Island Newcastle.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baxter, M.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Motor Mechanic.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part of the reply to the previous request. Note the parallel expertise and youth of many of these applicants.

National Archives of Australia, A2023, A 38/8/188.
PRIVATE.

Dear Colonel Dodds,

I have a cousin who has been trying without success, for several months now, to join the Australian Flying Corps.

He has had over two years overseas service, (Lemnos, Egypt, England and France), with the A.A.M.C., and seeing only a dead-end ahead for his advancement he has asked me if your kindly attention may be enlisted in obtaining him a transfer to the Australian Flying Corps.

He is under twenty years of age and should have no trouble about the eye-sight test or medical fitness.

He is No. 4720 Pte. D.F. Day, A.A.M.C., 2nd., Australian Casualty Clearing Station.

I would appreciate your kind assistance in arranging his transfer.

Obediently yours,

[Signature]

Headquarters,

1/9/17.

A letter from Lieut. Day's cousin, a Major in H.Q attempting to employ his influence to secure Day a position in the AFC. At less than 21 years, Day already apparently sees 'a dead end ahead for his advancement' within the army.

Day Private Records AWM PR86/344
I

A Clash of Cultures:
Aviation Training in England

Goodland & Vaughan's Anzacs Over England provides a study of the cultural impact that the AFC Training Wing had upon the region of Gloucestershire, where it was based during 1918 and 1919. They argue that their research 'reveals an extraordinary clash of cultures between English people and the colonials from the land of the Southern Cross'. Anzacs Over England however, primarily focuses on the impact that the AFC had upon British society whilst training. They do not examine the significant cultural clash moving in the opposite direction- the experience of the Australians themselves, as they were placed under British command for training in both flying and officer protocol.

The vast majority of AFC recruits- irrespective of where they fought and when they enlisted- trained with the RFC in England. The British wanted uniform training experience for its aviators whether British or colonial born. Even pilots who had received instruction at Point Cook in Australia were required to complete the entire British-run course. Lieut. Ross perceived this as the British establishing themselves as Australia's military superiors, adding 'Our Aust’In (sic) Certificate doesn’t stand for much and they [cadets from Australia] generally start all over again when they reach here [England]'. He had a point. British cadets graduated from preliminary schools at Oxford and Redding with their commissions and without ever having flown a plane. The Australians were not commissioned until they had flown a service machine.

1 Anzacs Over England is the literary companion to the television documentary of the same title.
3 Ross, Letter, 31 July 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/4111.
Flight training for AFC recruits in England\(^4\) was broken up into three distinct phases. The first occurred at the School of Military Aeronautics at either Oxford or Redding where all recruits were stripped of previous rank and became cadets. This initial phase concentrated upon theoretical instruction in aviation and British style officer training. It was here that many Australians—particularly transferees from the infantry ranks—described an alien experience characterised by new definitions of discipline and privilege. In the second phase, AFC cadets were posted to flight training squadrons. This represented another world entirely, as cadets experienced a relaxed schedule on the ground, but confronted the possibility of accidental death during solo flights. A cadet's final phase of training before overseas duty occurred at the schools of aerial gunnery and special flying. It was here that cadets experienced the aircraft as a weapon of war for the first time, and subsequently began to contemplate their imminent experiences of aerial combat at the front.

The Australian cadet was typically taken aback by his first experiences at the School of Military Aeronautics. Compared to the notoriously lax drill and discipline in the AIF, British officer drill was of the 'old army' type, and was sharp, unforgiving and relentless. As a result, transferees from the AIF perceived the drill and discipline as especially oppressive. Upon transferring, all facets of life changed seemingly overnight for the cadets. Drill was 'carried out vigorously'\(^5\) and compliance to British officer etiquette was mandatory. Lieut. Day, who had previously served in the A.A.M.C felt this change keenly:

> Being under British control, the discipline was very strict; we had to mind our P's and Q's and comply exactly with all regulations relative to behaviour, hours and habits.\(^6\)

Day also noted the emphasis placed upon formal behaviour, etiquette and military drill at Queens College, Oxford:

---

\(^4\) For a comprehensive empirical description of the AFC training process, see Cutlack, Appendix No.5, p. 430.

Dinner (7.30pm) was the principal meal of the day and we all had to dress in our best uniform for this occasion and solemnly march into our table position. We had a fairly free run of each college but had to observe certain permanent regulations as to etiquette etc. particularly relative to meals in the old dining hall and behaviour in the Oxford streets. ...discipline was especially strict and we had a maximum of drill.⁷

Likewise, Lieut. Ferguson who had previously been on active service with the AIF, was confronted by the great contrast between his earlier service in the frontline and the formal expectations placed upon him at Queens College, Oxford. He noted to his family that 'Everything has to be done on the double, boots and belts "not only cleaned but highly polished"⁸.

With British Army drill and discipline however, there also came a world of privileges that was entirely foreign to the prior experiences of many AFC recruits. Despite being cadets, they were expected to live and behave as officers- a fact that created a profound impression, especially upon those who had previously been enlisted men or N.C. Os. Ross, who was initially accepted into the AFC as a mechanic but then transferred to aviator training, compared the contrasts between the two:

It's the fun of the world isn't it? Gee and I think it's a great joke. A couple of weeks ago we were poor dirty air mechanics being pushed from pillar to post. Now its "Gentlemen will you do this please?" "Very well Sir". It's a most fearful insult to be termed men on parade. But believe me theres (sic) SOME discipline here. We don't get much time for anything.⁹

Day also noted the striking contrast between arriving at Salisbury Plains as a Private in the AIF and then, a year later at Wendover as a Flying Corps cadet:

⁸ Ferguson, Letter, 12 January 1918, AWM Private Records PR00005.
⁹ Ross, Letter, 24 July 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/4111.
Firstly as a Pte at Salisbury Plains- during the train journey we had to keep together like a lot of sheep and on arrival at destination [sic] we were surrounded by a crowd of station Mil. Police. Packs were shoved on, then a mile march to camp. 2 blankets were collected by each of us, then bread and jam, bed on floor of cold hut...

Now, as a Cadet at Wendover [aerodrome] - our luggage taken to train for us, and we wandered down at our leisure, just before the train left. We travelled first class and on arrival were met by Orderly Officer of camp who announced that dinner was to be ready for us at 7:30pm in best hotel of Wendover. Whilst we had a jolly good dinner our luggage was carted to camp and we followed at 9pm to find stretcher beds ready in a nice warm hut- six blankets each.  

Being treated as officers in the British Army also had material privileges for recruits. The Australian's noted with glee that the 'swanky' food and facilities available to British officers were, seemingly overnight, available to them as Flying Corps cadets. Ross wrote of the culinary delights made available to him whilst training at Waddington:

For breakfast we get porridge and something like bacon and eggs or steak and mushrooms with the usual padding of marmalade etc. Then lunch usually runs into three or four courses. Afternoon tea at 4pm. Dinner at 8pm- another 4 courses....We have batmen to clean the tent, make the beds etc. If one requires a drink of any sort while in the lounge just ring the bell and the waitress hops out.  

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11 Ross, Letter, 10 July 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRU4111.
12 Ross, Letter, 9 August 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRU4111.
Ross also wrote of other privileges that came with his new status. Upon being accepted into the AFC and purchasing his uniform, Ross immediately exercised his right to utilise officers' accommodation in London where the more exclusive hotels were reserved for the use of officer's only:

Lee and I had a bonza weekend, stayed at the Regent Palace Hotel. It's a rather swanky place- full of officers and flash people, but as we had our 'glad rags' [Flying Corps officers uniforms] on were quite able to keep our end up.¹³

This comment is of particular interest because it suggests a sense of cultural inferiority felt by some Australian cadets. As far as Ross was concerned, it was their 'glad rags' that enabled them to assimilate into the British officer circles. The Flying Corps uniform was perceived as a symbol of status. Day also reflected this when he wrote, 'One of the earliest and to us, most important duty was to procure our uniforms...We were wonderfully important at first appearance in our 'joy rags'.¹⁴ Lieut. Fry described feeling 'fine and exalted' upon procuring his uniform and wearing it to a dance.¹⁵ And Lieut. Sutherland observed that the Flying Corps uniform was 'cut so as to set off our distinctive manliness and beauty'.¹⁶

Australian cadets typically endeavoured to live up to the constructs of the RFC and popular fighter pilot mythology. This is evident in the efforts that some cadets made to meet the expectations placed upon them by the Flying Corps culture. Lieut. Hoddinnott for example, was initially prepared to sleep on a sheepskin on the floor whilst at his training unit. When his British room mate purchased a wicker bed however, he did likewise, reasoning that 'one had to live up to the dignity of the RFC'.¹⁷ During training, Ross reported to his family that he had taken up smoking cigarettes because 'its [sic] absolutely essential to smoke a cigarette after crashing an aeroplane. This

¹³ Ross, Letter, 10 July 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/4111.
¹⁵ Fry, Diary, 30 October 1918, AWM Private Records 3DRL/0461.
¹⁷ Hoddinott, Autobiographical Account, p. 77, AWM Private Records MSS0791.
creates a great impression and everyone accordingly wonders and marvels at the coolness of the daring aviator’.\textsuperscript{16}

As the Australians settled into these luxuries and moved onto practical training squadrons, an uncomfortable reality became apparent: as officers, they may have had privileges but they also had financial obligations – they had to pay for their own kit.\textsuperscript{19} As Ross realised, ‘...it’s going to take some financing as we’re only cadets yet’.\textsuperscript{20}

British cadets graduated from Oxford and Redding with a £50 kit allowance. The Australian cadets, however, were given just £8 by the AFC to finance their kit requirements. The impossibility of this task was demonstrated by Lieut. Paterson, who recorded spending £44/8 on his kit.\textsuperscript{21} The meagre allowance created a rather difficult and potentially embarrassing situation for the Australian cadets, who were required to dress and live as officers. Lieut. Forsyth wrote that ‘George and I went all over London trying to make the £8 spin out. I priced everything at at least a dozen places and in the end bought nothing’.\textsuperscript{22} Five days later, desperate to fulfil his dress obligations, he recorded: ‘Ordered pair of breeches and have not enough cash to pay for them. Have sent to Chickens [family friends in London] for £5’.\textsuperscript{23} A few men were fortunate enough to have savings from prior service. Able to delve into his own savings for £20, Ross assured his mother that ‘I’m [sic] not wasting a bean. We have an awful lot of gear to buy. We haven’t got a quarter of it and most of the boys are broke’:\textsuperscript{24}

Mess bills further impoverished the Australians, as the costs outstripped what they were paid as cadets. Lieut. Nunan, who tried to live up to the gentlemanly fighter pilot construct, was clearly frustrated by the situation. During flight

\textsuperscript{16} Ross, Letter, August or September(?), 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/4111.
\textsuperscript{19} The kit entailed both an officer uniform and flying attire. The private records of Paterson (AWM 3DRL/4151) and Ross (AWM 3DRL/4111) mention the purchase of trench coat, fur lined boots, gloves, cap, jacket, tunic, breeches, gaiters, woolen underpants, shifts, a revolver, goggles and camp gear.
\textsuperscript{17} Ross, Letter, 9 August 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/4111.
\textsuperscript{21} Paterson, Letter, AWM Private Records 3DRL/4151.
\textsuperscript{22} Forsyth, Diary, 7 July 1917, AWM Private Records MSS1276.
\textsuperscript{23} Forsyth, Diary, 12 July 1917, AWM Private Records MSS1276.
\textsuperscript{24} Ross, Letter, 9 August 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/4111.
training he claimed that it was 'rotten being a cadet'\textsuperscript{25} and that he had 'had a rotten time for money lately. Our mess bills are 35/- weekly on an A.I.F 24/6 allowance\textsuperscript{26}. His frustrations led him to complain to AFC H.Q, and the Australians had their allowance increased to 35/- weekly: just enough to pay for mess without anything to spend on sundries or leave. Even after an Australian cadet earned his wings, his commission (and hence an improvement in his financial situation) could take weeks before being officially granted. Over three weeks after earning his wings, Forsyth wrote

\begin{quote}
I have no money and have also a bill from Retford [training aerodrome] for £10 hanging around my neck. I am getting fed up of this, rang the adjutant for information. Am again to write to H.Q London re my Com. I do hope something comes of it this time.\textsuperscript{27}
\end{quote}

These Australians then, faced an impoverishing and culturally belittling experience. It was one which contests the typical picture of men in the AIF: Australians on overseas service with the AIF were amongst the highest paid Allied soldiers, and were as a result, commonly seen by their British allies as both over-paid and spendthrifts.

The prospect of accidental death during the second phase of training was always present. Winter claims that 8,000 out of the 14,166 RFC pilots killed during the war met their deaths in England whilst training.\textsuperscript{28} Indeed, during their fourteen month stay in Gloucestershire, the AFC Training Wing buried seventeen cadets in Leighterton cemetery, and another seven elsewhere in England.\textsuperscript{29} Despite this, however, Australian cadets seldom dwelt upon the subject. Winter noticed a similar trend within the written records of RFC cadets, and suggests that 'so pervasive was the fear of death [during training] that few memoirs chose to probe that area deeply'. For transferees who had previously survived battle, the prospect of death whilst training in such a comfortable environment must have seemed alien. Lieut. Lewis for example,

\textsuperscript{25} Nunan, Letter, 12 August 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/6511.
\textsuperscript{26} Nunan, Letter, 25 September 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRL/6511.
\textsuperscript{27} Forsyth, Diary, 17 November 1917, AWM Private Records MSS1276.
\textsuperscript{28} Winter, D, \textit{op cit}, p. 38.
who had previously served on the Western Front and whose writings were characteristically forthright, skimmed this topic, only admitting to feeling ‘a little afraid’ at the prospect of flight training. Forsyth who had been in the Light Horse also addressed the subject with distance, noting that ‘A DH1 had an awful crash tonight, pilot badly hurt. That makes 7 in 3 days. It is a disgrace no doctor is here’. 30

When the Australian cadets moved into the final stage of their training at the schools of Aerial Gunnery and Special Flying, they gained their first practical experience of air-combat weaponry and tactics. It seems that this, alongside the prospect of an imminent posting to the front, prompted cadets to openly contemplate active service and, finally, the likelihood of death or injury.

Despite the glamour associated with the scout squadrons, some AFC cadets were willing to forgo the glory for safer forms of aerial warfare. Two-seater bombing/reconnaissance squadrons, it seems, were perceived to be safer than scout squadrons. Ross wrote to his mother that ‘I think I’ll go for artillery observation work. Its one of the safest jobs and being a wireless op. im [sic] pretty good at it’. 31 Ferguson reasoned that reconnaissance is ‘the best job because there is always a crowd go together, and they are protected by scouts’. 32 Irrespective of what they wanted however, positions were generally allocated depending on flying skill. The best pilots were allocated to scout squadrons, the average pilots to reconnaissance/bombing squadrons and the least-able to observer positions in the latter. 33

Some cadets also perceived their approaching experience of air combat as less arduous than previous service in the AIF. Ferguson assured his concerned family that his role in the Flying Corps would consist of just

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29 Goodland & Vaughan, op cit, p. 74.
30 Forsyth, Diary, 16 October 1917, AWM Private Records MSS1276. (Medical Officers were typically not assigned to RFC training aerodromes, a factor which may well have increased the apprehension held by cadets to flying).
31 Ross, Letter, 18 August 1917, AWM Private Records 3DRU4111.
32 Ferguson, Letter, 12 January 1918, AWM Private Records PR00005.
33 These assessments were based upon medical fitness as well as piloting skill. See Medical Requirements for the Australian Flying Corps, 1918, AWM 25 481/115.
...two or three hours a day flying in France and the rest about ten miles behind the line in comfortable quarters. Judging by the casualties of the Flying Corps I should say its on par with the army service and that will do me.34

Such sentiments were most likely rooted in the popular Flying Corps mythology of a ‘gentlemanly war’ that had encouraged many AIF men to transfer out of the trenches in the first instance, as noted in Chapter I.

For other cadets, such as Capt. Cobby who joined the AFC from civilian life in Australia, an active service squadron represented not only an introduction to aerial combat, but to war itself. Cobby was clearly anxious about the dangers associated with active service:

I can remember the nervousness that assailed me during the months of training in England...I quite freely admit that if anything could be done to delay me that hour, I would have left nothing undone to bring it about, but unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, I had no control over the supply and demand of pilots.35

With training completed, the newly appointed AFC officers were posted to a depot to await their postings to either Palestine or France. They were not told when their posting would occur, and the uncertainty could prove unsettling for the new pilots. Lieut. McDougall described waiting at Wendover for his posting. ‘One of the Observers [is] going to France today and Roberts and I are the next to go. May be tomorrow, may be a week or two. Nothing definite is known’.36 For McDougall, the wait was to be a tedious three weeks, during which he described long periods of ‘loafing around’ punctuated by monotonous expeditions to town, sporting matches and occasional clerical duties. This period of inactivity, wedged between the stress of advanced training and the tension of anticipated combat, affected morale. Lewis’s diary entries during this time reflect this and a fatalism developing amongst his

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34 Ferguson, Letter, 3 February 1918, ANM Private Records PR00005.
35 Cobby, High Adventure, p. 33.
peers:

Some say that inactivity in England means so much longer to live. After all if one has to die it matters very little whether it is in 1 month or 6 months time. I would rather to not die at all, as I think is the case with most healthy minded individuals. 37

As their postings came up, the Australians were promptly whisked away to AFC squadrons in either Palestine or France but had they been fully trained? Cobby noted that some of the men in his flight had not even fired a machine gun in the air before arriving in France. Others, such as Lieut. Hoddinott reported being taken out of training prematurely in order to keep up with the desperate demand for pilots at the front. 38 Nunan was rushed through a two month course in just three weeks. 39 Few of the men realised how insufficient their training had been for what awaited them at the front.

36 McDougall, Diary, 29 August 1918, AWM Private Records PR01381.
37 Lewis, Diary, 25 January 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
38 Hoddinott, Autobiographical Account, p. 107, AWM Private Records MSS0791.
The Aviators’ War

Denis Winter has described the Great War combat aviator’s existence as ‘one of daily fluctuation between the most violent combat and total idleness, between the depths of terror and the greatest ease, yet with periods of being grounded by bad weather or flying without meeting the enemy mixing predictability and confusion in a Russian roulette’. The private records of AFC aviators reflect this sharp dichotomy between ground and air duties. And furthermore, they demonstrate how active service swiftly amended the naive preconception that Flying Corps work would be ‘only about three or four hours of work a day, the rest spent well behind the lines in comfortable billets’.

Initial Impressions

After experiencing the physical comforts of training, newly posted AFC airmen were likely to be taken aback by the comparatively basic accommodation on service aerodromes. Some aerodromes were better equipped than others, and the seasons could greatly affect the comfort that they provided. Lieut. Smith considered that ‘living conditions were generally dependant upon prevailing circumstances’. Accommodation generally consisted of either fixed Nissen huts or tents pitched over a sunken floor (of 3ft) to offer protection from ‘daisy cutters’. Whilst based at Bailleul, Smith described being ‘comfortably quartered in heated huts housing one or more men each depending upon rank, duties and space available’. Lieut. Lewis on the other hand, perceived his hut accommodation at Abeele as ‘nothing to write home about’, possibly because he had to share with four other men. Lieut. Lockley experienced tent accommodation at Reclinghem. He wrote, ‘Our ‘drome is a good way behind the lines...we are camped in tents and are very

1 Winter, D, op cit, pp. 82-83.
2 Ferguson, Letter 22 February 1918, AWM Private Records PR000005 (written whilst stationed at Wendover training aerodrome).
4 A tunnel shaped hut of corrugated iron with a cement floor. Named after its inventor, the British engineer P.N Nissen.
comfortable...under the trees of an old orchard'. 6 Lieut. Edols shared similar accommodation at Reclinginghem. But he found them to have an uncomfortable disadvantage during the wet conditions of July:

It has been raining for the last two days and my tent has been leaking most gloriously. It is so nice to wake up in the night with an ear full of water. 7

Despite being several miles behind the front-lines, service aerodromes did not always convey a sense of safety. At aerodromes on the Western Front, the new arrival was typically greeted by the ominous 'crump' of not-so-distant artillery. Darkness would reveal their brilliant flashes across the eastern sky, and could herald the onset of a bombing raid. Lieut. Pomroy described his rather uncomfortable introduction to life in No. 3 Squadron:

It was almost dark and I was very hungry. Had just been served with some grub when we had to put our light out as there was a Hun over dropping bombs and we finished our meal in the dark and slept in a tent. I was kept awake most of the night with the noise of the guns. 8

Although German bombing raids were infrequent, the enemy would remain an ever present if often unseen force for the men who had yet to fly their first combat mission. On his first day with No. 3 Squadron, Lieut. McDougall witnessed an unnerving sight:

One of our machines had a rough handling at the hands of 5 Fokker biplanes. Lt. Prince our observer came home badly wounded in both legs. Machine riddled with bullets. 9

Capt. Cobby described the enemy's unnerving presence during meal times:

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6 Smith, Interview, op cit.
7 Lockley, Letter, 17 July 1918, Lockley Family Private Collection.
9 Pomroy, Diary, 25 September 1918, Pomroy Family Private Collection.
Our evenings when not on late flying, were full of the gossip of the outstanding fighters on both sides. The Baron Von Richtofen was our principal bogey. He seemed to be unassailable. Evidently he was a dead shot, an excellent pilot and a man of superb courage and still in his early twenties. The combination seemed too much for we lesser mortals.

These early, intangible experiences of the enemy afforded the new arrival a tensely reversed perspective of cause and effect. On an aerodrome, the enemy was sensed but could not be seen- a sensation that would place an already nervous new comer into a state of perpetual windup. As Cobby observed 'Consequently he [the newly posted airman] knows nothing about his foes, and they become to some pilots an ever-present menace...Thus his [the enemy’s] abilities and prowess are magnified'. The rookie airman grappled with this deadly enemy in his mind before facing him in the sky.

Newly posted AFC airmen typically anticipated their first combat patrol with feelings of apprehension and inadequacy. Training had afforded them the ability to fly, but had not necessarily prepared them for what to expect of combat. Capt. King recalled that, following his first patrol, 'I immediately realised that, despite my whole-hearted efforts during training, I had not learned half enough'. On the day preceding his first ‘trip’ Lewis described being ‘keen to get started and just a little bit nervous as to what my experiences are going to be like’. Cobby described a feeling of ‘smallness and trepidation’. As Kellett has noted, inadequate training is a prime catalyst for fear when experiencing combat conditions.

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9 McDougall, Diary, 26 September 1918, AWM Private Records PR01381.
10 Cobby, High Adventure, p. 51.
13 Lewis, Diary, 30 January 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
14 Cobby, High Adventure, p. 34.
But once in the air, the preconceptions built by the men were dramatically changed as Cobby's description of his first patrol over the Western Front demonstrates:

Imagination had always led me to visualise miles of bursting shells, masses of smoke and the line itself defined with some boldness by a continuous series of earthworks....actually it was very much to the contrary. A most tranquil state of affairs existed in the vicinity of the trenches during the daytime. Looking down from anything above two thousand feet, all one could see was a long irregular smudge... a feeling of strangeness was the entire absence of movement for miles on either side of this 'ribbon'. An absolute stillness pervaded the scene.\(^\text{16}\)

The flight commander usually inducted a new arrival with brief patrols over friendly territory. Because enemy aircraft rarely mounted offensive patrols, new arrivals were initially unlikely to confront them. Edols reported 'I made my first trip over the lines this morning and was introduced to archie [anti-aircraft fire]. We only saw one Hun but he didn't want to play and we couldn't entice him along'.\(^\text{17}\) Lewis was surprised at how little could be seen at all- 'I was bang on the lookout the whole time and could only distinguish the machines when they were quite close'.\(^\text{18}\)

An airman's first direct experience of the enemy was much more likely to be in the form of anti-aircraft fire, or 'archie' as it was known amongst allied pilots. Cobby described it as 'the bugbear of new pilots' for although it claimed few victims, it 'had a kind of hoodoo on beginners'.\(^\text{19}\) Lieut. Sutherland, a veteran of the Gallipoli campaign experienced this on his first patrol over Palestine:

On the ground, one became accustomed to lethal things being thrown about, but in your first aerial action, the machine seems to

\(^{16}\)\textit{ibid.} p. 45.
\(^{17}\) Edols, Letter, 2(?) July 1918, AWM Private Records PR86/385.
\(^{18}\) Lewis, Diary, 4 February 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
\(^{19}\) Cobby, \textit{High Adventure}, p. 59.
take on a new fragility; the ground is so far away....Imagine what would happen, I was thinking, if Archie scored a direct hit! Or if one of those tracer bullets set fire to our machine, killed the engine, or cut away the controls!\footnote{Sutherland, \textit{op cit}, pp. 142-143.}

This effect was akin to the helplessness that soldiers of the Great War commonly confronted when faced with the arbitrary destructiveness of artillery barrages. Indeed, 'archie' was similar in character as it exploded across the sky at seemingly random points. Following induction and an 'introduction to archie', an AFC aviator would be assigned to the exceptionally tight-knit community of the combat flight and would henceforth be introduced into the 'Russian roulette' of comfort, danger, predictability and uncertainty that was AFC squadron life.

\textbf{‘Total Idleness & The Greatest of Ease’- Ground Duties}

When not in the air, the AFC aviator led a life that on the surface at least, appeared to be leisurely and comfortable. Indeed, to those airmen who had previously experienced trench life in the AIF, leisure time in the AFC was, comparatively speaking, lived with 'the greatest of ease'.

The private records of many AFC aviators indicate that between patrols, they spent an inordinate number of hours on the ground pursuing leisurely activities. For these typically young, privately educated and healthy men, sport was an obvious choice. Lieut. Conrick claimed that 'Since I joined the squadron, I seem to have spent more time in the water [swimming] than in the air'.\footnote{Conrick, \textit{op cit}, p. 88.} Most Australian aerodromes possessed basic sporting equipment and some, including No. 1 Squadron at Ramleh (in the desert) even had a tennis court. Conrick described having 'the tennis court rolled before breakfast' (by an enlisted rank one must assume) in preparation for a match between the
AFC and RFC squadrons that shared the aerodrome. Lewis and his fellow aviators in No. 3 Squadron took daily strolls in the peaceful rural settings surrounding their aerodrome, and often kicked a football around, much like they had done just a few years prior at their schools and colleges. Lewis also learned French and German from a local priest and regularly visited friends at other aerodromes and camps. Lockley invested what appears to be a great deal of time in building a model aircraft.

Despite being a particularly British military practice, the AFC readily cultivated an ‘Officers Mess’ culture on its aerodromes, a practice introduced to the Australians whilst training with the RFC in England. Considering the recent private school backgrounds of many young Australian airmen, the regimental spirit fostered by the mess was greatly enjoyed. Indeed, much time and effort was expended by the Australian aviators in developing their mess culture. Lewis wrote frequently of flying to other squadron’s aerodromes to lunch in their messes, and of having officer guests at his own. On being elected to the ‘Mess Committee’ of No. 3 Squadron, he wrote of his new responsibilities and the restaurant-like nature of their establishment:

I messed about most of the morning in connection with the new squadron mess. We got hold of a chap named Knox to run the business. He has absolute control and we have given him a staff to run the show. We had our first meal together at lunch time and it was quite a success. I fixed up A flight mess accounts…

Squadron Commanders also placed a great emphasis upon developing a Mess culture that could foster a ‘cheerful spirit’ and reflect the class values of its airborne ranks. The social influences at work in No. 4 Squadron’s Officer Mess are evident in the writings of its C.O., Maj. McClaughry

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22 ibid, p. 77.
23 For analysis of the relationship between the cultures of the Officer Mess, the British military and private schools see Kellett, p. 48.
24 Lewis, Diary, 24 March 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
The officers' mess should always be comfortably furnished, well lit and cheery, a piano and gramophone being absolutely essential. The whole atmosphere of the mess should be so arranged that officers cannot help taking a pride and interest in it and the squadron. Good meals should be provided, even if it is necessary to provide a cook from outside the squadron... I do believe that when the occasion arises to celebrate some special success of the squadron... this should always be celebrated in a proper fashion, and a special dinner arranged with speeches, toasts and music.25

Within this tightly knit community of officers and men from a similar class background, a uniquely egalitarian command culture was developed. Sutherland explained how Col. Borton (C.O of 40th Wing RFC)26 'gave you the impression, when he asked you to have a spot [artillery observation patrol], that he was taking you up to his rank- not that he was coming down to yours...'.27 Similarly, he claimed with admiration that Maj. Williams (C.O No. 1 Squadron) 'knew every man in the squadron by name, rank, regimental number, old unit and qualification'.28 Winter noticed similar occurrences in the way that RFC C.Os related to their flying officers. He described it as 'a form of democratic dictatorship, a formulation of majority opinion, a leadership of equals'.29 Yet even amongst equals there could be points of tension. Sutherland noted an element of jealousy between the flying men in his squadron and attributed it to the distribution of assignments and decorations.30 Interestingly, he is the only one of the AFC airmen examined for this thesis who commented on the issue. Likewise, Winter did not identify jealousy within his RFC cohort. Perhaps envious and contemptuous feelings were tightly repressed in recognition that a high degree of teamwork was integral to survival in the air. Besides, the expression of such feelings amongst gentlemen officers would have been considered most inappropriate.

26 Borton was C.O. of the British Wing under which No. 1 AFC operated during its time in Palestine. As a result, he had significant contact with the Australian officers in No. 1 AFC.
27 Sutherland, op cit, pp. 53-54.
28 ibid, p.58.
29 Winter, D, op cit, p.178.
The proximity of civilian populations, coupled with great amounts of free time afforded airmen an opportunity to regularly juxtapose experiences of civilian life amongst their experiences of war. In this, the aerodrome represented a limbo between war and peace, combat and comfort. As Winter comments, whereas infantrymen faced sustained periods of battle and rest, 'for fighter pilots, there were periods of leave and going over the top perhaps each day'. The uniqueness of this existence became particularly evident to those who had previously experienced warfare on the battlefield. Cpl. Billings noted the vast differences between life in the trenches and life in the limbo of a service aerodrome:

My life in France [with No. 2 Squadron] was the direct opposite of my life on Gallipoli and in the Sinai Desert during 1915-1916...In France at such places as Bailleul, we were located on the outskirts of a city where civilian life carried on a more or less normal way, women living with their children (only very old men left at home), they took in our washing and mending too, shops were open, estaminets carried on and suppers of fried eggs and chips were very common.

Life on the ground then, represented the easy going extreme that consumed the majority of a combat aviator's hours. There was however, what RFC pilot Cecil Lewis dubbed 'the extraordinary double life' of the Flying Corps airman. In direct opposition to the easy-going existence on terra firma were the bursts of air work in between.

'Violent Combat & The Depths of Terror' – Air Duties

An atmosphere of tension underpinned the easy-going façade of aerodrome life. Sutherland compared it to that of a 'fire brigade station' with its 'same air
of alert preparedness'. Theoretically, the squadron was expected to fly daily to fulfil H.Q.'s insistence upon consistent, offensive patrolling.

The 'democratic dictatorship' that the Squadron Commander commonly exercised in the relaxed confines of the officers mess vanished when it came to flying. An order to fly was considered final, and any disinclination to do so was dealt with swiftly and harshly as one of Lewis's colleagues in No. 3 Squadron discovered. Lieut. Treacy had been ordered to stand by for an artillery observation patrol. Instead, he accompanied Lewis and some other aviators to St. Omer for a day's outing. On his return, he was immediately charged, placed under open arrest and taken before Wing H.Q. Such measures by command were not frowned upon by the airmen. They, more than anyone, understood the importance of obedience and teamwork in the context of a six man flight, where each man depended upon the next for survival.

Those who came under the suspicion of cowardice were ostracised by their squadron mates. Cobby described a fellow airman who, it was noticed, was reluctant to cross the lines: 'He was chipped in front of the whole mess one night at dinner, and broke down. Next day, he was a physical and mental wreck...'. Winter identified a similar mentality within RFC squadrons. He cites pilot Mclanachan who, after leaving a patrol prematurely due to a broken Lewis Gun fell under the suspicion of those in his flight. 'I showed them the broken pieces of bolt', he recorded, 'but even then they did not acquit me. There was the bald fact. I had left them in the middle of a dogfight and when Captain Bath and the remainder returned, it appeared that I was going to have a rough time'.

34 Sutherland, op cit, p. 3.
35 Lewis, Diary, 31 March 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
36 Cobby, High Adventure, p. 61.
37 Winter, D op cit, pp.176-177.
AFC airmen had little trouble coming to terms with the obligation to fly whenever they were ordered to so do. As Winter suggests, this strict adherence to orders provided the aviators with a 'supportive institution': patrol duty was perceived and accepted with an 'oriental passivity'. But flights were neither regular nor predictable.

In examining the overall service lives of RFC aviators, Winter calculated that 'about a flight every second day' was average. But this average disguises the marked variations in air work that occurred from month to month, depending upon such factors as offensives, counter-offensives and the weather. In June 1918, Lieut. Lockley of No. 4 Squadron flew forty-one sorties for a duration of fifty-two hours and forty-five minutes. He flew on twenty-five out of thirty days, and on eleven days, he was sent on multiple operations. On average then, in June 1918 Lockley flew 1.36 sorties per day, for a duration of about an hour and a quarter each. In the following month however, he was airborne on a substantially fewer number of occasions, and for less time. Indeed, during July 1918 he spent just thirty-four hours and thirty-five minutes airborne on twenty-five sorties. He flew on only seventeen days of the month, flying multiple sorties on just seven days. In July 1918 then, Lockley's average was 0.8 patrols per day, and he had almost as many days on the ground (14) as he did in the air (17).

This phenomenon of irregularity and unpredictability is further reflected in the official records of the squadrons. Below is a quantitative summary of No. 4 AFC's operational activities.

38 Winter, D op cit, pp. 175.
39 ibid, p. 79.
40 Lockley, Pilot's Flying Log Book, Lockley Family Private Collection (all quantitative evidence relating to Lockley's operational record is tabulated from this source unless otherwise noted).
TEN MONTHS' WORK EPITOMISED.
(From January 7 to November 11, 1918.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Bombs Dropped</th>
<th>Hours Flown</th>
<th>Rounds Fired</th>
<th>Machines Crossed Lines</th>
<th>Enemy Aircraft Destroyed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>377 15</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>10,550</td>
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<td>1090 90</td>
<td>20,446</td>
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<td>—</td>
<td>297 10</td>
<td>10,850</td>
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<td>378,946</td>
<td>5,549</td>
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The table, of course, reflects the war being fought on the ground. During May 1918, No. 4 Squadron's efforts doubled from the previous month. In the official history, Cutlack explains that during this period the squadron was involved in 'heavy and incessant' air fighting and ground attack (hence the spike in bomb loads) as the result of a German push into the River Lys region. Throughout this period of the German offensive, the greatly increased demand of battle flying was keenly felt by Cobby. 'We all averaged about six trips a day and this went on for nearly four weeks. The pace could not last and it was not long before we were all starting to show signs of the strain' General Allenby's Palestine offensive had a similar impact upon No. 1 Squadron's aviators during September 1918. This period saw Lieut. Nunan's air-work triple from previous months. Between 19 September and 3 October, he recorded flying three sorties a day consistently, clocking up a total of sixty

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41 Cutlack, *op cit*, p. 277.
one hours and twenty minutes of flight time for the month. Two months previously during a quieter period, he flew just once every three days for a monthly total of twenty-three hours, thirty-five minutes.

The impact of unsuitable flying weather is also evident in No. 4 Squadron’s operational statistics. The squadron’s least active month was February 1918, a month of wet, wintry conditions that ‘made flying impossible’ along the entire front. During this month Lewis described being frequently placed on evening standby for dawn patrols, only to wake in the morning to find the patrol scrubbed due to ‘dud’ weather. Such weather was secretly welcomed by many airmen who perceived it as salvation. During the foul weather of February 1918, Lewis admitted, ‘This morning I was pleased to hear that the weather was fairly dud. I am afraid that I am always pleased when that is so’.

Even when flying, there was no guarantee that one would actually engage the enemy. Lockley rarely saw enemy aircraft during his first month at the front, despite mounting forty-one sorties during this time. His log book recorded such encounters as

31.5.18- Very few Hun aircraft about.
1.6.18- Huns always keep over own side [of the lines].
4.6.18- Fleeting glimpses of Hun planes.
5.6.18- Sighted 4 Phalz (sic) Scouts. Nothing doing.

It was to be a full month of flying before Lockley actually engaged an enemy aircraft. Not sighting the enemy during patrol work could however, prove more stressful than meeting him directly. In his ten weeks with No. 3 Squadron, Lewis was not once attacked by an enemy aircraft although his diary regularly reveals the fear and subsequent strain of anticipated but unconsummated combat. After his second patrol with No. 3 Squadron he remarked, ‘The job of

43 Nunan, Pilot's Flying Log Book, AWM Private Records 3DRL/6511. (all quantitative evidence relating to Nunan's operational record is tabulated from this source unless otherwise noted)
44 Cutlack, op cit, p. 217.
45 Lewis, Diary, 23 February 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
aerial gunnery is not an enviable one, and it is a pretty good strain upon the eyes as to be constantly scanning the skies- especially piercing the sun for possible lurkers (sic) there.\textsuperscript{47}

After flying several patrols without encountering enemy aircraft though, an AFC aviator might suddenly be surrounded by a sky full of them. Enemy scouts generally only attacked when they had a numerical and tactical advantage, and as a result, combat for the Australian aviator was often chaotic, deadly and fought at a disadvantage. Capt. King believed that what the Germans 'invariably did was to follow or wait about over our patrol in the hopes that one of our pilots would lag behind or straggle from the formation'.\textsuperscript{48}

Following a second month of seldom encountering enemy aircraft, Lockley was jumped by fourteen enemy scouts during an escort operation.\textsuperscript{49} He escaped but was clearly shaken by this sudden onset of enemy aggression, describing it as 'a narrow squeak, my plane was severely damaged by bullets and had to have two new planes fitted'.\textsuperscript{50}

Six weeks later, Lockley's flight was again surprised, this time in a furious ambush by some thirty Fokker scouts. Lockley and two other Australian pilots were killed within minutes of the ambush, and a fourth was shot down and captured.\textsuperscript{51} Lieut. Flight was flying alone when he was caught in a similar engagement on 28 March 1918. He survived as a POW to describe the violent chaos of being swarmed by enemy scouts:

On looking round, I saw 3 enemy Albatross Machines [sic]. I pulled round in a climbing turn, but two of the machines had too much height on me. The fire was more or less incessant for a minute or so... About this time, four enemy triplanes joined in the fight and gradually forced me down to within 150 feet of the ground. Bullets were coming from all directions. All at once one machine got a big

\textsuperscript{46} Lockley, Pilot's Flying Log Book, Lockley Family Private Collection.
\textsuperscript{47} Lewis, Diary, 5 February 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
\textsuperscript{49} This action occurred on 7 July 1918 and is recorded in his log book as 'Escort (Shot up by 14 Huns)'.
\textsuperscript{50} Lockley, Letter, 17 July 1918, Lockley Family Private Collection. 'Plane' was a contemporary term for the aircrafts wing assembly.
\textsuperscript{51} For a comprehensive account of this 5 September 1918 action see Cutlack, pp. 356-359.
burst into my right plane and rear strut also severing a flying wire. A few seconds later my rear strut flew out; the bottom socket had been blown out... The machine then dived into the ground tearing down a number of enemy telephone wires. I was rendered unconscious.\(^{52}\)

The AFC aviator’s life then, was indeed a ‘Russian roulette’ of comfort and combat, predictability and confusion. It was an alien existence unlike any experienced in more conventional forms of warfare, where something as seemingly arbitrary as a change in the weather could decide if a man would survive for evening drinks in the officer’s mess. Each day brought about opportunities for hot breakfasts, lunch dates with pretty French girls, tennis matches and swimming; as well as flying for monotonous hours without meeting danger and the potential of violent combat several kilometres above the earth and an agonising death in a burning aircraft. Did this existence of diametric extremes affect them adversely? Few private records dwell upon battle-fatigue or delve into self analysis. Despite this silence however, there is much implicit evidence to suggest that the extreme push and pull of the combat aviator’s lifestyle invariably led to severe physical and mental strain.

\(^{52}\) No 2 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps, 28 March 1918, Etaing, Statement made by prisoner of war [Lieut. O Flight], AWM 30 Prisoner of War Statements, 1914-18 War (hereafter AWM 30), B3.6.
The Aircraft Mechanic of the AFC experienced a remarkably different war to his airborne superiors. Although he expected not to see combat, service aerodromes were a potential target for enemy action. On his first evening with No. 3 Squadron (based at Bailleul, approx 10 miles west of the lines), Aircraft Mechanic Edwards, fresh from civilian life in Australia, witnessed the war at a much closer range than was comfortable:

Just before turning in I went to the door and watched the illuminations of the firing. It is like sheet-lighting in a great semi-circle sometimes bright, sometimes feint [sic], oft' times vivid; but incessant, and accompanied by low rumblings all the time. Occasionally a very heavy gun roars or sometimes a H.E [high explosive] shell comes this way. Flares and signals appear at intervals. As night closed in, shells exploded over our aerodrome, the shrapnel striking our 'Nisan' [sic] huts....The shelling increased and one poor chap - a despatch rider - almost completely disappeared, cycle and all; a shell burst right on him. The only trace of him was found on the wall of a brick building on the side of the street in deserted Bailleul.¹

Edwards had a particularly intimate experience of the arbitrary nature of artillery when, on one occasion he returned from a fatigue to find a foot long hole ripped into the wall against his work bench. A jagged ten inch piece of shrapnel lay on the other side of the hut, and in his words, 'one or both feet

¹ Edwards, Diary, 15 March 1918, AWM Private Records PR86/387.
could well have been severed had I been at my usual duty'.\(^2\) Being non-combatant then, certainly did not preclude the aircraft mechanic from the arbitrary nature of modern warfare. Yet the nature of their occupation ensured that they lived a strangely isolated existence wedged somewhere in between war and peace. Whereas the aviator experienced war in acute bursts, the air mechanic’s war trickled by continuously and at times tediously with little change to be experienced in day to day routine.

Central to the AFC air mechanic’s wartime experiences was an arduous workload.\(^3\) The mechanical fragility of Great War aircraft, and the strain subjected on them by regular aerial work required that maintenance be carried out consistently and thoroughly. Routine work for engine mechanics involved cleaning and tuning the engine, in addition to periodic overhauls. Diligence was required in engine maintenance as worn engine components could cause catastrophes, as happened in the case of Lieutenants Lewis and Best who were incinerated alive as the result of a twisted cam shaft.\(^4\) Meanwhile, the riggers were routinely detailed to repair structural battle damage (sewing patches and/or replacing timber struts) as well as precisely balancing the aircraft’s trim - a process involving over 100 high tension wires and 250 yards of flax fabric. For the armourers, machine guns required meticulous cleaning and calibrating to fire safely through the spinning propeller. Each mechanism and every single round of ammunition had to be painstakingly checked for faults as a misfire of just 1/250th of a second could smash the propeller. The mentality then, was one of precision that required mechanics to think in terms of 1/10,000th of an inch tolerance.\(^5\) As even minor mechanical errors were likely to cost lives, the responsibility placed upon the aircraft mechanic was immense. Whilst training in England, Aircraft Mechanic (later Lieut.) Nunan noted his responsibilities as an engine mechanic:


\(^3\) In a combat flight, three classes of mechanics worked. Engine mechanics or ‘fitters’ took charge of their machine’s engine. Structural mechanics or ‘riggers’ worked on the airframe and rigging of the aircraft, whilst the armourers were responsible for the aircraft’s machineguns and ordinance. The Squadron also employed technicians to maintain and fit wireless and photographic equipment in addition to transport drivers, cooks, clerks and batmen.


\(^5\) Winter, D, *op cit*, p. 119.
I have charge of the engine of a machine. 8 cylinders, 80 H.P. If it stops in the air, I would be court martialled if it was through negligence on my part. It is the very sort of job I have been dwelling on for years. I hope to be a Flight Sergeant, responsible for a dozen machines one day.6

As is evident in Nunan’s comments though, this responsibility was typically approached with anticipation rather than trepidation. The opportunity for these skilled tradesmen to work on a piece of machinery as innovative and complex as a military flying machine was eagerly anticipated: it presented both a personal challenge and an opportunity to gain unique vocational experience. It is also noteworthy that Aircraft Mechanic Nunan, with his aspirations to become a Flight Sergeant7, would, within a year of writing become a distinguished combat aviator in No. 1 Squadron. Indeed, it was possible for AFC aviators to begin their careers as air mechanics.

In an era preceding electronics, performing precision maintenance under active service conditions involved many hours of intensive labour. Lieut. Sutherland claimed that in No.1 Squadron, ‘There is no forty-four hour week here. These lads work night and day to keep their charges serviceable’.8 The strain of this workload is evident in the diary of Aircraft Mechanic (later 2/Lieut) Forsyth. Following an accident involving the aircraft in his care, Forsyth described ‘having to work until finished’ on repairing it for the following day’s operations. He worked through the day and night, finishing up ‘very tired’ at 6:30am the following morning.9 He went on to describe feeling ‘never so tired before’10 after another twenty-four hour working day, and regularly wrote of days running from 6am until 11pm, even throughout the winter months.

The mental focus required by the air mechanic’s work was often accompanied by immense physical demand, as the aircraft required a great deal of man-

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7 The rank of Flight Sergeant was equivalent to the Army rank of Sergeant and would have put Nunan in charge of several Aircraft Mechanics.
8 Sutherland, op cit, p. 11.
10 Forsyth, Diary, 21 May 1917, AWM Private Records MSS1276.
handling. Forsyth described being exhausted as he ‘chased machines all day and swung propellers’. These long hours and the subsequent fatigue prevented air mechanics from being as diligent in writing as the airmen were. As a result, the air mechanics are somewhat under-represented amongst AFC private records.

As specialised as he was in his particular profession though, the Australian air mechanic would also be regularly required to fulfil a wide range of other duties or ‘fatigues’. There was always an abundance of work to be done on an aerodrome occupied by over two hundred men. Aircraft Mechanic Bull was assigned to No. 1 Squadron as an aircraft rigger but regularly fulfilled roles outside of this posting. In addition to rigging aircraft, Bull also described being assigned to ordinance arming, anti-aircraft watch, mess duty, aerodrome relocation, quartermastery and the salvaging of crashed aircraft. Aircraft Mechanic Edwards also noted his additional duties as he reflected upon his ‘average day’ as an AFC instrument fitter, during a 1990 interview:

Well, there always seemed to be fatigues of some type or another, I often did work with the HQ electrician... There was also my share of guard duties. Vince Smith, ‘the Ram’ we used to call him, would come around. ‘Edwards, on guard’ or ‘Edwards, cook house’ he’d say. But usually I’d have my set time each day at my work bench.

The onus was upon the ground crew to carry out these duties as Flying Corps convention forbade the airmen to engage in such manual tasks, as is reflected by Lieut. Lewis:

We got a load of coal today which Lt. Suess accompanied. They would not let us take the tender past the hangers so it had to be trucked a distance. Prince and another batman were on the job, as

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11 ibid.
12 Duties described throughout Bull’s Diaries, published in Lax, M (ed), One Airman’s War: Aircraft Mechanic Joe Bull’s Personal Diaries 1916-1919, Banner Books, Maryborough, 1997 (Bull's original diaries are in AWM Private Records PR01547)
well as 3 men from the flight [aircraft mechanics]. The batmen were going dead crook about it.¹⁴

In spite of the arduous work load, Australian air mechanics typically approached their work with pride and devotion. This mentality was fostered in the AFC by assigning mechanics to specific flights and aircraft. They would adopt a machine and its pilot for a duration of time, and hence, invest personal interest in it. Bull was assigned as B.E.2.c No. 4312’s rigger at the end of January 1917. In his diaries, this aircraft (‘old 4312’ as he calls it¹⁵) receives regular attention as he labours for many hours upon it, commenting with pride that ‘she looks fine now, like a new bus’¹⁶ following an overhaul during May 1917. The devotion of these specialists to their craft is further demonstrated in the memoirs of Cpl Billings, a wireless technician:

I was fully engaged most of the time on checking and adjusting the fifty odd [wireless] sets that we had....I am pleased to say that we never had a failure of a set attributable to mal-adjustment...In our spare time the four of us [in the workshop] discussed technical problems and made various experiments.¹⁷

This commitment meant that, regardless of rank differences, the deaths of flying officers were felt keenly by the air mechanics. Whereas empty seats in the mess and vacant beds in the officer’s huts symbolised bereavement for the officers, missing aircraft and equipment came to symbolise the loss felt by aircraft mechanics. In his memoirs, Billings described attending ‘many funerals’¹⁸ for pilots during his two years with a service squadron. He adds:

Our planes were sent on Artillery Observation every day and some were lost by enemy action. My wireless transmitters were kept on

¹⁴ Lewis, Diary, 4 March 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
¹⁵ Lax, op cit, p. 61.
¹⁶ ibid, pp. 45-46.
¹⁸ ibid, p.107.
four shelves in our lorry and several spaces represented sets lost, and were sad reminders of men we knew.¹⁹

Such feelings of dedication were recognised and reciprocated by the airmen. The private records of the flying officers reflect the deep admiration that they had for their mechanics. Sutherland, who was particularly outspoken on this subject, opened his memoirs claiming that

The best pilot, the prince of observers would not have been worth a burial service unless he had had the right kind of backing on the ground....the pilot was after all, only one of a team; that there were many other chaps playing, and they all earned their Allies' guernseys.²⁰

This opinion demonstrates the egalitarian mentality that encouraged AFC men to perceive the squadron as a ‘team’. ‘Service in a flying squadron’, as Sutherland also noted, ‘is entirely different from that of any other unit. Here it’s a kind of family team work’. Winter identified a similar mentality in the RFC, but suggested that the conventions of British class prevented inter-rank relationships from developing on a personal level.²¹ For instance, he offers the example of hand crafted workshop souvenirs²², stating that ‘Most valued of all by the pilot, and something which by strict convention no pilot could ask for, was the walking stick made of the leather washers of petrol tin tops....’²³ Such souvenirs were likewise valued by the AFC’s officers, but the relaxation of formal conventions allowed them a close enough relationship with their mechanics to personally request them. Lieut. Edols wrote to his sweetheart:

I have got my engine mechanic making a couple of good souvenirs which if they turn out all right I will send out to you. One is a

¹⁹ ibid, p. 111.
²⁰ Sutherland, op cit, pp. 1-2.
²¹ Winter, D, op cit, p. 119.
²² These pieces were regularly crafted by air mechanics during their spare time from the parts of aircraft. Such pieces included artwork on propellers, walking sticks made from petrol caps and tobacco boxes fashioned from propeller bosses. The Flying Corps workshop souvenirs were akin to the ‘trench art’ that soldiers often created during the Great War.
²³ Winter, D, op cit, p. 119.
buttonhook and the other is a shoehorn. They both have fancy handles made from different materials and composites used in aeroplanes.24

The manner in which pilot and mechanic communicated also differed greatly between the Australian and British squadrons. Winter described the RFC relationship as bound by the 'stiffest formality' and quoted British pilot Macmillan who noticed that apologies from pilot to mechanic were rare.25 In direct contrast to this were the experiences of Bull with No. 1 AFC:

The Colonel went away in No. 4312 and got back just before dark. The Colonel is a fine chap and talks to us the same as he does to the Major. He always thanks us and apologises if he comes back at an inconvenient hour.26

Bull subsequently described several other instances of such informal behaviour between ranks. The officers of No. 1 Squadron 'shouted' the enlisted ranks Christmas dinner27, and Bull was taken on several 'stunts' (joy flights) in two seaters: 'The Major went up to test No. 4312 and took me with him. Lieut. Manwell kindly lent me his cap and goggles. I took photos of the camp from the air'.28

RFC squadrons also tended to be more segregated along the lines of rank than the Australian units were. Winter quoted RFC fighter pilot Baker, who noted the 'very infrequent' visits of pilots to the hangars.29 Likewise, Australian Lieut. Hoddinott who was attached to a British squadron in Palestine remarked,

25 Winter, D, op cit, p. 119.
26 Lax, op cit, p. 34.
27 ibid, p. 14.
28 ibid, pp. 34-35.
29 Winter, D, op cit, p. 119.
Life in the R.A.F (sic) was very different. One lost personal responsibility for, and contact with “other ranks” and did not share with them the risks and hardships of war.\textsuperscript{30}

Such notions are certainly far removed from the mentality of ‘family team work’ that was identified by Sutherland in the Australian squadrons. It is however, important to remember that despite adopting an informal approach to inter-rank relationships, the AFC also readily adopted many British conventions into other facets of squadron life. As established previously, such conventions governed various aspects of AFC culture, including messing and fatigue duties, not to mention the elitist social composition of the Australian squadrons themselves. Indeed, it is fascinating to note the informal approach that the AFC took towards inter-rank relationships amongst some otherwise very British conventions.

These contrasts between inter-rank relations in the AFC and RFC are not altogether unanticipated, as they reflect the cultural characteristics of their respective nations. Chapter I profiled the Australian air-mechanic as a lower-middle or upper-working class skilled labourer, and emphasised his highly specialised role within the context of early twentieth century Australian society. Winter however, whilst identifying the British equivalent’s specialist skills, socially characterises him as a ‘labourer\textsuperscript{31}’ an image aligned with post-war RFC mythology such as Biggles that has historicised the British air mechanic as a ‘tousle-headed Cockney fitter\textsuperscript{32}.

The suggestion here then is not that the RFC man was less skilled than his Australian counterpart, but rather, that the aircraft mechanic was perceived differently, reflecting Australian and British attitudes towards class. Whereas the British mentality was strongly entrenched in notions of name and status, the Australian mindset tended to identify more with practical notions of skill and ability. As a result, the AFC was less likely to employ the discourse of class and caste when perceiving its air mechanics- a significant feature of

\textsuperscript{30} Hoddinott, Autobiographical Account, p.96, AWM Private Records MSS0791.
\textsuperscript{31} Winter, D, \textit{op cit}, p. 119.
both the Australian aircraft mechanic's experience of war and AFC squadron culture.
Six months after arriving in France, Capt. Cummings wrote to a young acquaintance who had recently enlisted in the AFC: ‘Lad old dear why did you join that dreadful flying corps I do wish you hadn’t’.¹ At first glance, the sentiment may have seemed odd because Cummings was an aviator in the AFC. To outside observers, his had been a comfortable, even privileged, war. Apart from flying for a few hours on odd days, the pilots in the AFC had at their disposal many hours to fill with sport, social appointments and leisure. Food and drink was abundant, they wore the Flying Corps ‘glad rags’, and civilian populations were always close by and accommodating. And the AFC’s casualty rates were amongst the lowest recorded during the war. What then, had led Cummings to perceive the Flying Corps as ‘dreadful’ enough to dissuade others from joining?

The answer lies in the structure of the AFC and the fact that, irrespective of its frequency or intensity, combat remained central to the Australian aviator’s experience of war. And the inherent possibilities of aerial combat –namely killing and dying- brought about a confusing and often contradictory mixture of elation and revulsion that aviators found difficult to reconcile. Responses varied not only between individuals but also within individuals over time. Furthermore, the discontinuous push and pull of the Flying Corps lifestyle subjected the AFC airman to a form of mental stress unknown in the trenches.

Casualties and the Experience of Loss

As noted in Chapter I, the bulk of the personnel in a scout squadron were ground crew. Less than 10 per cent of a scout squadron’s personnel actually engaged in combat, i. e. the airmen. If the casualty rates of this group is examined, rather than the AFC as a whole, a very different picture emerges.

¹ Cummings, Letter, 13 September 1918, AWM Private Records PR83/187.
In No. 4 Squadron, for example, an airman was killed or wounded every week on average. Statistically then, the unit's standard fighting establishment of twenty-one was wiped out more than twice over during its eleven months at the front. Thus, the odds were against an Australian airman surviving his first eighteen weeks or so at the front with this AFC unit.

Australian aviator Lieut. Dibbs witnessed this phenomenon whilst serving with No. 11 RFC:

[At No. 11 Squadron RFC] we had an establishment of thirty-six—that is eighteen pilots, eighteen observers—... we had a tremendous amount of fighting. At that time we were fighting for ascendancy in the air—the latter half of 1917—and out of thirty-six, for the period that I was with them of four months, I was informed that we'd had sixty casualties. They must have been all killed because it was very seldom that we had anybody wounded.

J.M Winter has demonstrated that the British and dominion air corps' lost 1 in 6 of their combat aviators—the highest mortality rate in any service; the next highest being in the army officer corps (1 in 7). The other Australian squadrons on active service in Europe also sustained similar casualties to No. 4 AFC.

Kellet argues that the greatest amount of conformity and psychological integrity occurs in combat units of five men—close to the size of an AFC flight unit. Yet death and casualties disrupted this cohesion. The problem was further exacerbated by the practice of constant rotation of airmen between squadrons. For example, in a photograph of No. 4 Squadron's 'C' Flight taken on 16 June 1918 (see Figure 6.1) there are eight flying officers. Within four

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2 Cobby claims that in early 1918 No. 4 Squadron had seven airmen in each flight, rather than the regular six, so that one man in each flight could rest whilst the squadron maintained its operational strength of 18 pilots in the face of heavy action.
5 No. 2 AFC sustained 25 KIA and 8 WIA during a period of thirteen months. No. 3 AFC sustained 32 KIA and 23 WIA during its fourteen month tour.
6 Kellet, op cit, p.45.
weeks of this photograph, two were casualties and another two had been posted to RAF\textsuperscript{7} squadrons. By the cessation of hostilities in November, none of the men in the photograph were flying with the squadron. Hence, whilst in theory the flight provided a solid support for flyers, in practice it was regularly disrupted by casualties and transfer.

Figure 6.1

No. 4 Squadron’s ‘C’ Flight about to embark on a patrol. 16 June 1918, Clairmarais. Left to right: Lieutenant (Lt) R. C. Nelson (POW 14/7/18); Lt E. C. Crosse (Retuned to RAF 7/18); Lt G. S. Jones-Evans (WIA 28/6/18); Captain Edgar James McCloughry (WIA Sept 18); Lt E. V. Culverwell (Returned to RAF 7/18); Lt V. G. M. Sheppard (Transferred to Home Est. 10/18); Lt R. H. Yondale (Transferred to Home Est. 11/18); Lt J. C. F. Wilkinson (Returned to RAF 8/18).

AWM Collection E02655. Used with permission.

The loss of comrades also had a profound impact upon the individual. Fatalities in the squadron provided airmen with a striking premonition of their own deaths: as Winter articulated, ‘the man who had died had worn the same uniform, flown the same type of aeroplane and had done the same sort of work as the survivors’.\textsuperscript{8} As a result, the fatalism noted in Chapter II was reinforced. Lieut. Lewis described himself as ‘a poor blighter who can see no

\textsuperscript{7} The RFC had by this time, been amalgamated with the Naval Air Service to form the Royal Air Force (RAF).
chance of ever getting home again\textsuperscript{9} after the deaths of several squadron mates, including a friend whom he had attended school with. Lieut. Pomroy also reflected this attitude -indeed the attitude of many of his peers- when he considered that '[I] will think my self lucky if I get out of it [active service] alright'.\textsuperscript{10}

Witnessing a comrade fall in flames produced a sense of helplessness. Whereas the infantry man often had the opportunity to bury a stricken comrade and retrieve his effects, the shot-down airman was perceived as completely lost. Indeed, the British insistence upon offensive patrolling resulted in the vast majority of allied air casualties falling east of the frontlines-85\% in 1918\textsuperscript{11}. Capt. King reflected this in his description of a comrade's death:

Before anyone could thoroughly realise what was happening, a huge, leaping ball of fire was hurtling some thousands of feet to earth...It is a sickening sight to see one of your mates going down in a hell of flames, and to have to sit by and not be able to render the least assistance. We went back to the aerodrome when the patrol was finished, feeling very sick at heart. We knew there would be a vacant place in the mess that night, and that the next day's cables would strike deep and remorselessly at the hearts of loving relatives at home.\textsuperscript{12}

Dibbs translated this sense of loss to a more personal level during a 1976 interview. 'I remember' he reflected, 'on at least one occasion we sat down for breakfast and we were five short- they'd all been shot down'.\textsuperscript{13} Dibbs continued, recalling how swiftly death could come to a mate:

\textsuperscript{8} Winter, D, op cit, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{9} Lewis, Diary, 16 March 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
\textsuperscript{10} Pomroy, Diary, 25 September 1918, Pomeroy Family Private Collection.
\textsuperscript{12} King, R, Formation Flying, in Richards, op cit, p.66.
\textsuperscript{13} Dibbs, Interview, op cit.
I had a great friend... Arthur Thorndyke, and we shared a tent at one stage. We were great pals. [When] I went off to London on leave (we didn’t get a great deal of leave; about every three months we got a fortnight) I shook hands with Arthur and he wished me happy holidays and so on. I got back to London and the next morning I was having my breakfast and I picked up the Morning Post, and I found his name on the casualty list. He was killed—killed in that period between the time I had said goodbye to him on the previous day and the time I was having breakfast in London.14

Dibbs openly discussed his feelings during the 1970’s, but he may well not have done so at the time. Contemporary private records suggest that, despite death’s overwhelming presence, grief was rarely mentioned and death was treated in a matter-of-fact manner. Indeed, these letters and journals rarely reveal the emotional attachments that Dibbs recalled long after the war, despite the boyish squadron camaraderie. Kellett has suggested that the experience of loss discouraged the men from ‘making too profound an emotional investment in their fellows’.15 Winter, however, suggests that dying was part and parcel of the air war, a literal matter of fact, and with it came a fatalistic resignation as part of Flying Corps culture.16 ‘When I went to the equipment store to draw flying gear’, Lieut. Hoddinott wrote, ‘I noticed two coffins and crosses with blank plates. I thought it was a rather grim advance provisioning at the time but when I found that we filled them most weeks it seemed quite a good idea in that climate’.17

Responses to Combat

Unlike the quagmire below, the sky was a highly transparent fighting environment. Once combat began, adversaries would be visually confronted by one another. And the combination of unsealing fuel tanks, flammable

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14 Ibid.
15 Kellet, op cit, p. 264.
16 Winter, op cit, p. 159.
doping agents\textsuperscript{18} and incendiary bullets made burning machines a typical sight. New pilots, then, were often confronted with a striking sense of their destructive potential. Some, such as Capt. Cobby described feeling 'just about as ill as I have ever been in my life'\textsuperscript{19} after watching his first victim hurtle earthwards, break up and burst into flames. On the other hand, Capt. Jones was deeply fascinated by the sight of his first victim's destruction.\textsuperscript{20} So transfixed was he by this morbid spectacle that he momentarily forgot the dogfight raging about him, and was almost shot down himself.

Some reacted to combat with elation. Grossman has identified the phenomenon of a 'killing high' that could become addictive for combatants, especially fighter pilots.\textsuperscript{21} Lieut Nunan provides an example.

Nunan experienced air combat for the first time with No. 1 Squadron over the Sinai Desert in June 1918. He sent a detailed account of the action home to his family:

\begin{quote}
Dear People,

I have not heard from you since the last couple of letters I have written. This is just to tell you that I have had my first air fight and got my man. I will tell you how it happened on the understanding that it is strictly private and confidential.

.....They split up all over the sky. I followed two who kept together. Put a long burst into one of them with my front gun. He put his nose down vertically. I followed him down at 200mph. My observer got both guns to bear on him and ripped them into him. I could see his tracers (flame bullets) gleaming off his machine. The Hun burst into flames and crashed into an orchard.

.....I circled with them for 15 minutes and had the time of my life. Between us (observer and I) we put into them nearly 1000 rounds
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Nitrate cellulose or acetate finish applied to the fabric skins of Great War aircraft.
\textsuperscript{19} Cobby, A. H, Aerial Fighting, in Richards, op cit, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{20} Jones, Interview, 1976, National Library of Australia TRC 425/2.
of ammunition and got so close at times that we could almost see
the colour of their eyes.
....I enjoyed it immensely as soon as I got past the first touch of
stage fright. The others were awfully bucked too.
....It is not considered "the thing" to give a detailed account of ones
exploits like this. You will of course remember this please.\textsuperscript{22}

For Nunan, the killing high had clearly been experienced during what he
described as, 'the time of my life'. His enjoyment of the action had eclipsed
any consideration for the human beings that he had just killed; indeed, he was
even excited at the prospect of being almost close enough to see 'the colour
of their eyes'. However, the enemy was perceived as more machine than
man. Perhaps subconsciously, Nunan was comforted by this; he described
the effect of bullets striking metal but not the resultant fire upon flesh.
Likewise, Lieut Dibbs, who described air combat as 'terribly exciting',
perceived his adversaries as a mechanical 'other'. He became emotionally
detached, claiming that he did not perceive the enemy as a young man with a
family like himself.\textsuperscript{23}

In other instances, aerial combat was a harrowing experience that became too
intimate. Firing with a pair of 1918 Vickers machine-guns (as fitted to No. 4
AFC's Sopwith Camels), a three second burst sent 100 .303 projectiles
towards a target at a rate of 800 yards per second. Accuracy, however, was
compromised by engine vibration (which created a firing cone of 30 feet at
500 yards\textsuperscript{24}), and the effects of deflection\textsuperscript{25}. Aerial gunnery then, was deadly
at close range but ineffective at distance. And as a result, Great War fighter
pilots needed to get within 250 yards and preferably as close as 100 yards for
their firing to be effective. Capt. Pentland described the consequences of the
proximity that aerial combat required:

\textsuperscript{22} Nunan, Letter, 28 June 1918, AWM Private Records 3DRL/6511.
\textsuperscript{23} Dibbs, Interview, op cit.
\textsuperscript{24} Winter, op cit, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{25} With the target and the shooter's aircraft both moving at high speeds through a three dimensional world, pilots were
required to aim in front of their targets to compensate. A very difficult practice that involved accurate assessment of
I was shown -I am not certain whether it was Mcudden's or Ball's [RFC aces]- windscreen where there was blood on it. That was to show us how close you had to get. There was no good shooting at anything unless it came in just the centre section [of the gun sight] or about two or three hundred yards, where you could see exactly where your tracers were going.26

It was not uncommon for combat aviators to witness their bullets hitting the human centre of an aeroplane. Many private accounts and combat reports from the Australian squadrons describe enemy pilots 'slumping' or 'dropping' in their cockpits. Capt. Cobby described hitting an enemy pilot during a dogfight over La Bassee:

I went round the cloud to the right and met the other chap [enemy Albatross scout] almost head on. There was just time to press both triggers and to dive under him to get out of his way. He went down into the cloud in flames, but I had hit the pilot, too, as he almost jumped backwards out of the cockpit when I fired.27

The airmen often employed the discourse of middle class sportsmanship to describe their killing. The most popular sporting metaphors included hunting and riding- typically upper class pastimes that had traditionally been linked to aviation via popular literature.28 As Bourke argues, such metaphors 'ennobled fighters by linking them to traditionally upper class activities and it allowed for a certain amount of emotional distancing'.29 This, as Lynn claims, is an example of the discourse of war (the ideal) being employed to modify the reality of war30, so as to make it more culturally and socially palatable. Hence, Dibbs was able to describe the violence and fury of large scale dogfights as 'a

ones speed, the targets speed, and the distance involved, all within a split second whilst contending with the physical strain of sharp, high speed manoeuvring.

27 Cobby, High Adventure, p. 90.
duel\textsuperscript{31} - a gentlemanly bout governed by strict conventions. Inexperienced or naive airmen could also employ such metaphors to avoid the reality of what was happening to them, and to even share the illusion with loved ones at home. After being at the front for just over two weeks, hunting and game motifs were employed most effectively by a naive Lieut. Edols in a letter to his sweetheart:

Later in the week we were out over Hunland and fell into a nicely baited trap that the Huns had laid for us. They had a very tempting dummy balloon up which we dived on. As soon as we dived, four of us were dived on by twelve Huns all firing for their lives. ...a race for seven miles ensued and we won. It was quite exciting.\textsuperscript{32}

Others relied upon the metaphors of sportsmanship to cope with the guilt associated with killing. In the case of ground strafes\textsuperscript{33}, where targets were numerous, unmistakably human and vulnerable, sporting symbolism was employed in an attempt bestow an honourable character to what might otherwise have been described as slaughter. Lieut. Conrick likened an attack on a German aerodrome (in Palestine) to a rabbit shoot, claiming that '[t]here were troops and mechanics dashing all over the place, looking, for all the world, like a lot of rabbits searching for a funk hole. I had great fun and used up four hundred rounds of ammunition...'.\textsuperscript{34} Edols used a hunting score metaphor to describe a raid on an aerodrome:

We got three hangars full of machines on fire, and blew up the officers quarters and then flew around shooting everything we could find. One chap got a Hun on a motor bike, another got a staff car and I got a pair of lorries in a supply wagon and a search light.\textsuperscript{35}

He could have been describing a successful shoot on the moors.

\textsuperscript{31} Dibbs, Interview, \textit{op cit}.
\textsuperscript{32} Edols, Letter, 21 July 1918, AWM Private Records PR86/385.
\textsuperscript{33} In both theatres, the AFC was heavily engaged in ground attack roles.
\textsuperscript{34} Conrick, \textit{op cit}, p. 104.
'Kills', particularly those made in the air, were a measure of one's talent as a pilot; and on a larger scale, they were indicative of the prestige held by a flight or squadron. 'The squadron got its 100[th] Hun this morning', wrote Edols with pride, 'not bad going for 8 months work'.36 Some fighter pilots, such as Cummings for example, regularly reported their kills to friends and family, using language and imagery redolent of the Boy's Own Annual:

My word we had a fine scrap the day before yesterday. I was leading my patrol of six machines and I spotted 15 Fokker Biplanes coming towards us. Two of my machines dropped out, leaving four of us so we attacked the fifteen. They were at about 16,000 feet. In the first dive I got one down in flames and then we started into a hell of a fight which lasted 35 mins during which time I got 3 of them.37

Kill counts were also proudly displayed in mess huts (see Figure 6.2) with a game-like classification of how the enemy fell: in flames, out of control, crashed, forced down or destroyed in mid air. This encouraged a competitive approach to killing the enemy, so that as Maj. McClaughry claimed, a 'keen inter-flight rivalry [could] be fostered' in order to maintain an aggressive fighting spirit.38 The victims then, became symbols of prestige: they functioned as trophies reminiscent of a game hunter's prize pelts, thus satisfying Bourke's claim that such behaviour ultimately 'enabled men to link death of the 'other', the enemy, with love of themselves'.39

37 Cummings, Letter, 16 October 1918, AWM Private Records PR83/187.
39 Bourke, op cit, p.40.
An improvised chalk board, most likely on the wall of the officers mess at Serny. The respective scores for 80 Wing RAF’s squadrons are listed, including No. 2 and No. 4 AFC. The scores represented prestige, and were hence perceived competitively.

AWM Collection P02163.16. Used with permission.

The evidence, however, suggests that the men who enjoyed the ‘killing high’, or saw war as a gentleman’s game or as a sport, were a minority. In No. 4 Squadron, for example, 48 per cent (112) of enemy aircraft were destroyed by just 5 per cent (six) of the squadron’s fighter pilots. No. 2 Squadron reflected a similar kill distribution, with 42 per cent (seventy-seven) of enemy aircraft being accounted for by just 8 per cent (six) of its flying establishment. Interestingly, Grossman found that similar figures governed kill ratios in U.S squadrons during the Second World War, and suggests that most fighter pilots did not even attempt to shoot down an enemy aircraft. 40

Some Australian airmen expressed revulsion at the experience of strafing ground troops. Bourke, who identified a similar response from combat aviators throughout various conflicts, suggested that airmen felt

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40 Grossman, op cit, p. 110. Grossman calculated that 1% of U.S fighter pilots accounted for 40% of enemy aircraft during World War II.
uncomfortable shooting at their ‘inferiors’. Her observation may be true yet Conrick’s case suggests a more complex picture.

Part of Allenby’s final offensive in the Middle East in 1918 involved the use of ground strafes to annihilate the retreating Turkish Army. Conrick, who had described his attack on a German aerodrome as a ‘rabbit shoot’, found the sporting metaphor wanting in the face of such a massacre. He could not reconcile the notion of gentlemanly war implicit in the sporting metaphor with shooting a defenceless, retreating enemy. He described an attack on Turkish troops along the Khurbet Ferweh-Waddy Farra road:

They had little chance of escape from my guns as we were so close to them. As I fired I saw chips of rock fly off the cliff face and red splotches suddenly appear on the Turks who would stop climbing and fall and their bodies were strewn along the base of the cliff like a lot of dirty rags... While I kept firing my guns I had to close my mind to all that I could see, to the abject terror on the faces of the Turks, to the dead piling up on the road, to the burning transports, to the horses stampeding over the cliff edge or being crippled and trying to stand up again and again and always falling back until they died in the heat and the dust and the flies along the roadside.  

Here his victims were seen as men, not rabbits. He described their suffering, fear, helplessness and the carnage he wrought. Significantly, he closed his mind to carry out the job. The reality of war had begun to erode the discourse of war.

Aerial warfare in the early stages of the war had been characterised by a chivalrous rhetoric. But by the time the AFC reached the Western Front in 1917 and 1918 that image had all but vanished. Chivalrous sentiments were rare. Bourke argues that aerial warfare was not a noble, balanced affair, but that it was rather a case of the experienced preying upon the inexperience of

41 ibid, pp. 234-235.
42 Conrick, op cit, p. 138.
others. 43 Or in the words of O'Connell, ‘The majority of kills achieved by the major aces were at the expense of fledgling pilots, barely able to control their planes’. 44 No. 2 Squadron provides a fitting example of this: 41 per cent of its casualties were men with less than four weeks of combat experience. 45 Such a situation prompted men like Conrick to perceive themselves as ‘old hand[s]’ after just one month at the front. 46

Sportsmanship had given way to a grim determination to survive. As Pentland observed, ‘In the end, when they were firing at you, there was no sporting instinct’. 47 Indeed, the final twelve months of the air war were characterised by merciless ground strafes, deceptive tactical ruses and the machine-gunning of downed opponents and parachuting balloon observers 48. Underneath the veil of mythology then, the AFC’s airmen experienced a war as merciless and unchivalric as that raging in the trenches below them.

The Consequences

On 26 February 1918, Maj. J. L Birley reported to his superiors in the Medical Corps:

At the present moment I think it right to draw attention to the somewhat high proportion of breakdowns among pilots and observers of the A.F.C in France, especially as this wastage is, in my opinion, to some extent preventable, seeing that it is in a large measure due to the fact that the majority of these officers have already served many months in combat units, and have experienced the strain incidental to such arduous campaigns as Gallipoli, Egypt and the Somme. 49

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43 Bourke, op cit, p. 65.
44 Ibid.
45 Tabulated from data in No 2 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps: Huns brought down, AWM 224 Unit Manuscript Histories (hereafter AWM 224), MSSS17 PART 3.
46 Conrick, op cit, p. 80.
47 Pentland, Interview, op cit.
48 Cutlack offers the example of Capt. Watson of No. 4 AFC who, during a balloon attack on 1 June 1918, ‘shot through the rope of a descending observers parachute’. Cutlack, op cit, pp. 284-285.
49 Medical Requirements for the Australian Flying Corps, 1918, AWM 25 481/115.
Birley's report is interesting for two reasons: its frank acknowledgment of stress ('strain') and mental health problems within the AFC's airmen; and the simple belief that this was solely due to previous combat experience. What Birley did not consider was the dislocating impact of the Flying Corps' lifestyle.

The prolonged periods of inactivity between concentrated bursts of danger created a sense of uncertainty amongst combat aviators. Winter has compared the aviator's lifestyle to that of the infantryman, concluding that the severe mental strain experienced by the latter when returning to combat after his yearly leave was experienced by the airman on a daily basis. Kellet refers to this phenomenon as 'discontinuity', and describes it as a particularly severe type of stress that 'was occasioned by... rapid transition from a secure and comfortable environment to a combat zone...'. Its essence lies in a fear of what might happen. Military psychology did not identify both the phenomenon and its effects until the strategic bombing campaigns of World War II. Many years later, the condition would be given a clinical designation: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

As one might expect, the letters, diaries and memoirs consulted for this thesis rarely acknowledge mental trauma as such. It was both beyond the ken of the men and their cultural conditioning. Yet they record, in sometimes bewildered detail, its existence.

Lieut. Lewis had been severely wounded during service with the RFC. Long after his physical wounds had been healed, his diary disclosed severe anxiety about flying and fighting. He described it as a 'really nerve racking job'. He continued, 'I am sure that it will tell on me, though I hope to be able to do a few months before my nerves really go'. He was not however, so well positioned to identify the subtle manner in which it began to affect him and his fellow aviators. After several weeks at the front, Lewis was surprised by a

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50 Winter, op cit, p. 82.
51 Kellet, op cit, p. 278-279.
52 ibid.
53 Lewis, Diary, 4 February 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
sudden loss of appetite.\textsuperscript{54} Cobby had a similar experience, noting that 'My principal trouble was that I could not eat, but champagne and brandy, with the odd biscuit seemed good enough'.\textsuperscript{55} Loss of appetite and a dependence on alcohol are now recognised as symptoms of PTSD.\textsuperscript{56}

Another now well documented symptom of PTSD is the anger outburst.\textsuperscript{57} The camaraderie of the squadron was often upset by fierce and unexpected outbursts of anger. Edols noted the trivial nature of arguments amongst his fellows, citing in one instance 'a most heated argument as to what day of the week it was' as 'no body had the foggiest idea'.\textsuperscript{58} Lewis also noted the occurrence of fist-fights in No. 3 Squadron over minor disagreements.\textsuperscript{59}

Sleep disturbance and nightmares are also clinical symptoms of PTSD\textsuperscript{60}. And Winter noted that almost every memoir he consulted mentioned it.\textsuperscript{61} One of Edols' fellow pilots had survived a terrifying experience of flying through a thunderstorm. In a letter home, he commented, 'One chap was most amusing when he tried to go to sleep after it, he would start kicking and thinking that he was back in it again'.\textsuperscript{62} Edols had only been at the front for a few weeks. Conrick, however, described the tragic effects that sleep deprivation could have:

Another Flying Corps officer was buried today. It has been said that he was burnt to death while waiting on standby in his aircraft.

Apparently he went to sleep in the middle of the day with a cigarette in his mouth. The poor chap must have been exhausted.\textsuperscript{63}

Alongside fatigue, traumatic experiences could also render an otherwise able man incompetent at the controls of an aeroplane. Capt. Jones' aircraft ran out of petrol in a dogfight and he crash landed in a shell hole. His plane was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Lewis, Diary, 20 March 1918, AWM Private Records PR00709.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Cobby, \textit{High Adventure}, pp. 83-84.
\item \textsuperscript{57} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Edols, Letter, 27 July 1918, AWM Private Records PR86/385.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Lewis, Diary, AWM Private Records PR00709.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Barlow, D.H, \textit{op cit}, pp. 141-143.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Winter, \textit{op cit}, p. 145.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Edols, Letter, 21 July 1918, AWM Private Records PR86/385.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Conrick, \textit{op cit}, p. 2.
\end{itemize}
retrieved and repaired but Jones, with 'badly shaken' nerves, found that he was incapable of piloting his machine. On his first flight he carelessly attempted landing at double the recommended speed and wrote the machine off, nearly killing himself. As he related:

It took a lot of hard thinking and that to get myself into a condition of stability to keep on flying. Every time I thought of it I could hardly hold a knife and fork if I were having a meal... they would always fall out of my hands.64

Jones soon returned to the air but his mental state was fragile. Whilst attacking an enemy train, a bullet passed through his fuel tank and penetrated his back. In agony, he struggled home:

I reached our aerodrome just on dark, landed and taxied up to the hangar and called to the mechanic "Lift me out I'm bleeding to death!" I really thought I was, but though I had lost a good deal of blood, my main trouble was my flying suit was full of petrol [from the punctured tank], and this had burned most of the skin off my back. An experience like that can be very demoralising for a rather immature young man of twenty-one years.65

One of the most striking characteristics of the AFC airman's war, and one that set it apart from the AIF as a whole, was the brevity of active service. In No. 2 Squadron, where fighting was heavy, the average time served by a flying officer was just four months and two days.66 In the instance of No. 1 Squadron, a relatively quieter unit, airmen served for only marginally longer: just six and a half months on average.67 The brevity of average active service can be partly accounted for by the high casualty rate, especially among rookie pilots. But it also reflects the numbers of men who were permanently transferred from combat squadrons because of 'strain'. In No. 4 Squadron, for

64 Jones, Interview, op cit..
65 ibid.
66 No 2 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps: Huns brought down, AWM 224, MSS517 PART 3.
67 No 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps: Reports and statistics, AWM 224 MSS515 PART 2.
example, 15 per cent were admitted to hospital for 'natural causes' serious enough to end their active service careers. A further 20 per cent were posted to home establishment units. Although they could no longer fight, their skills could still be used to instruct the cadets. This probably accounts for the common observation amongst cadets that their instructors seemed 'a little war strained'.

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68 Tabulated from data in Richards, et al. op cit. This percentage is tabulated from the total number of airmen who at some stage served with No. 4 Squadron but were not serving with the squadron when it returned to England following the armistice.
69 ibid.
70 Hoddinott, Autobiographical Account, p.105, AWM Private Records MSS0791.
Conclusion

Although C. E. W. Bean may have argued that the AIF was a force 'unconscious of any distinction'\(^1\), this study of the AFC suggests that the AIF's social structure was more complicated than he allowed. The Flying Corps was drawn from a specific social class and group in Australian society, from the middle class and skilled specialist tradesmen. And although the AIF in its broad social structure may have basically matched Australian society in 1914, the AFC did not.

The AFC's experience in training and its cultural affiliation with the RFC also set it apart from the general experience of the AIF. The capacity of its members, however, to modify British forms and to reflect both a sense of cultural inferiority as well as a sense of national superiority matches other experiences in the AIF.

The nature of combat in the AFC was also different to that described by the general literature of the AIF. The war in the air was fought in different circumstances. The airman's experience was characterised by privilege and unpredictability: prolonged periods of leisurely inaction punctuated by intervals of combat in a discontinuous and often unpredictable pattern. They employed middle class discourses to characterise aerial warfare and inform behaviour on the ground. The nature of the mechanic's war did not involve combat at all. Rather his war was fought against machinery, in the relative safety of the squadron's workshops. It was characterised by a demanding workload and an immense responsibility.

The experience of combat for the airmen also set them apart from the experiences of their comrades in the trenches below. And although mental strain may have been a part of combat experience for the AIF as a whole, its nature differed in the AFC, a difference reflected in the short active service life

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of its air men. Like the men on the ground, however, many quickly lost any sense of the chivalric nature of warfare or that war was a gentleman’s game.

In broader terms, this thesis has demonstrated through the example of the AFC that the AIF’s social and cultural structure may be far more complex than has previously been suggested. Other specialist units outside of the infantry may provide further examples of difference within the AIF. Units such as the Artillery or the Medical Corps for example have yet to be singled out by social-military historians. It is worth questioning whether these units shared the traditional experiences and culture of the ‘digger’ or whether they too had their own war.
Appendix
Operational Structure of the Australian Flying Corps

Active Service Squadrons

No. 1 Squadron
(No. 67 AFC)
Palestine

No. 2 Squadron
(No. 68 AFC)
France

No. 3 Squadron
(No. 69 AFC)
France

No. 4 Squadron
(No. 71 AFC)
France

No. 5 Squadron
(No. 29 AFC)
England

No. 6 Squadron
(No. 30 AFC)
England

No. 7 Squadron
(No. 32 AFC)
England

No. 8 Squadron
(No. 33 AFC)
England

Training Squadrons

No. 6 Squadron
(No. 30 AFC)
England

No. 7 Squadron
(No. 32 AFC)
England

No. 8 Squadron
(No. 33 AFC)
England

The squadron numbers in brackets are the official British designations that were changed to the Australian numbers in October 1918.

Two-seater bombing/reconnaissance units also had an establishment of aerial observers attached to each flight.

Squadron H.Q
CO Major
92 Officers & Men

'A' Flight
CO Captian
6 Aircraft
6 Pilots (inc. CO)
47 Ground Crew

'B' Flight
CO Captian
6 Aircraft
6 Pilots (inc. CO)
47 Ground Crew

'C' Flight
CO Captian
6 Aircraft
6 Pilots (inc. CO)
47 Ground Crew

These figures tended to vary greatly in the reality of active service.
Sources: Nunan, Lecture Notes, AWM Private Records 3DRL/6511; Records Circular No.29 General Information, 25 October 1918, AWM 25 81/18.
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Conrick, Lieut. F. C, No. 1 Squadron AFC, Grazier of Coopers Creek QLD, b. 1891. Diary published in *The Flying Carpet Men*.

Cummings, Capt. E. D (DFC), No. 2 Squadron AFC, Student of Franklin TAS, b. 1896. Personal papers held in AWM PR83/187.

Day, Lieut. D. F, AFC Training Wing (previously Australian Army Medical Corps AAMC). Diary in AWM PR85/344.

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Edols, Lieut. T. R, No. 4 Squadron AFC (previously Artillery), of Burrawang NSW, b. 1897. Diary and logbook in AWM PR86/385.

Ferguson, 2/Lieut. D. A, AFC Training Wing, Mechanical engineer of Brisbane QLD, b. 1889, Killed accidentally 18/8/18. Personal correspondence in AWM PR00005.

Flight, Lieut. O. T, No. 2 Squadron AFC (previously Engineers), Student of Bendigo, b. 1895, POW 28/3/18. Statement regarding circumstances of capture in AWM 30 B3.6.

Forsyth, 2/Lieut. R. H, AFC Training Wing (previously Light Horse), Commercial traveller of Cumberland NSW, b. 1893, Killed accidentally 16/2/18. Diary in AWM MSS1276.

Fry, Capt. R.H, AFC (previously Light Horse). Diary in AWM 3DRL/0461.

Hoddinott, Lieut. R.U, Attached to Royal Flying Corps (previously Light Horse), Student at Royal Military College, Duntroon. Autobiographical account in AWM MSS1037.

Jones, Lieut. G., No. 4 Squadron AFC (previously Light Horse), Motor mechanic of Melbourne, b. 1896. Audio interview at NLA TRC425/2.


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