AN INTERESTING POINT

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AN INTERESTING

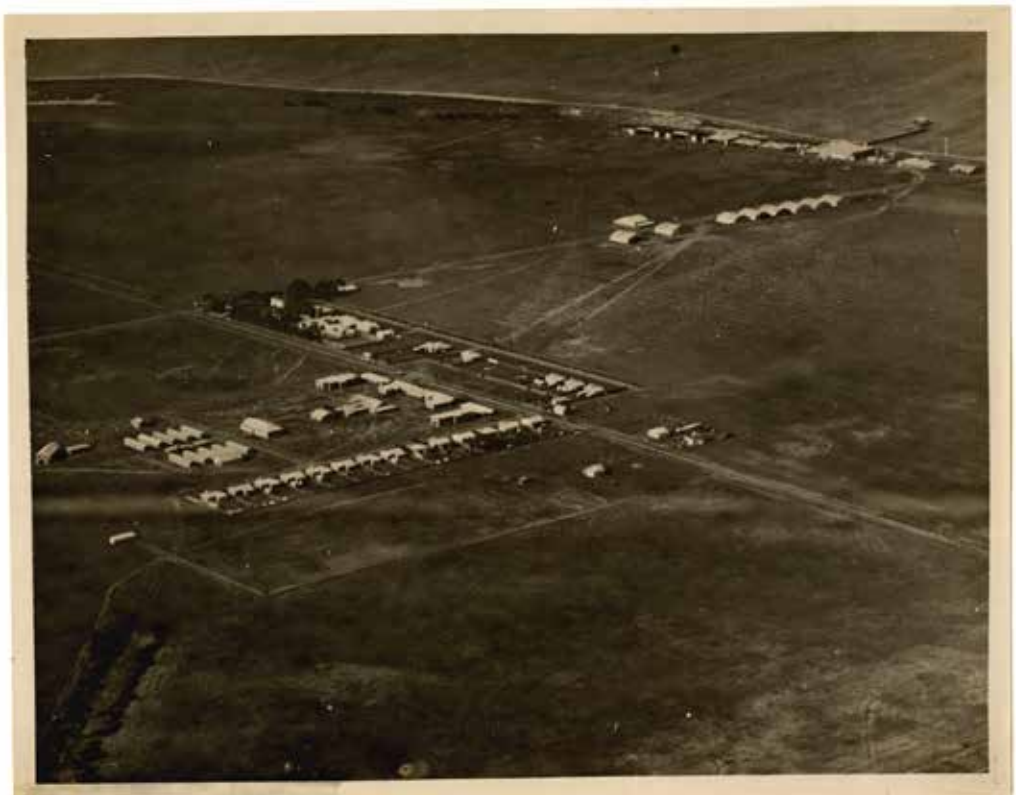
POINT

A History of Military Aviation at Point Cook 1914 – 2014

Steve Campbell-Wright

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Campbell-Wright has served in the Air Force for over 30 years. He holds a Masters degree in arts from the University of Melbourne and postgraduate qualifications in cultural heritage from Deakin University. He has deployed to most major areas of operations over the last decade and has taken part in representational visits to the United Kingdom, South Korea, Malaysia, Tonga, Brunei, Canada, Ireland and Turkey. He has written on subjects as diverse as heritage homes of the Australian Defence Force and Australia's motoring heritage. His recreational interests include agricultural heritage and education, vintage car restoration and rebuilding historic aircraft.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book began as a desire on my part to gather into one place the research that my wife Susan and I had carried out over many years about Point Cook. Our research was always strongly supported by Wing Commander David Francis (retired), who for nearly half a century has championed Point Cook and has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for its rightful recognition as a place of great significance in the heritage of Australia.

The writing was given impetus by Mark Pilkington, who suggested that the centenary of military aviation would be a good time to publish such a book. Mark's encouragement kicked off the planning and writing that has consumed all of my spare time for the two years of actual writing. His passion and energy to retain Point Cook are remarkable, and my thanks go to him for believing that I was the person to write this book.

The offer to publish the book by the Air Power Development Centre is a generous one indeed. My thanks go to RAAF Historian Dr Chris Clark for making the decision to take on the publication shortly before his retirement and to Martin James—his successor as RAAF Historian—for suggesting and facilitating the offer. My thanks go to Dr Gregory Gilbert, who took initial carriage of the project and kept it moving through the early steps in the publication process at the Air Power Development Centre. He has reviewed each chapter and helped me to retain a balanced perspective. My further thanks go to Martin James for his detailed review of the manuscript and for seeing the project through the final steps to publication.

The process of writing and seeking out those additional stories to attempt to enliven the narrative has been made most enjoyable by my friend for over a quarter of a century David Gardner of the RAAF Museum. Our regular chats to review chapters and hunt for photos that have not seen the light of day for a long time have been one of the most agreeable parts of writing the book. He is supported by a dedicated staff, all of whom welcome me on my visits, especially research librarian Monica Walsh, who can place her hands on any photo or document in the museum's collection at a moment's notice. Inveterate aviation image collector John Hopton is also thanked for the use of images from 'The Collection'.

I am indebted to my good friend Group Captain Ron Gretton (retired), who—aside from overseeing the restoration or replication of many historic aircraft—has shared my aviation heritage interests and helped to 'workshop' the many research conundrums I have faced. He has also introduced me to many people who have assisted in my research. Along the way, I have been fortunate to see the remarkable workmanship of Geoff Matthews along with Ron on the Bristol Boxkite replica and Andrew Willox on the B.E.2a replica.

I am also grateful to those I have met through my research and have shared my interest in Point Cook, including Mrs Jan Fischer, Mrs Barbara Gilbert, Air Vice-Marshal Ian Sutherland (retired), Norman Clifford, Group Captain Nader Abou-Seif and Squadron Leaders Mike Dance and Peter Meehan and Barry Turner (retired). I am especially indebted to the descendents of many of our early airmen, notably those of the Lord, Lukis, Cole and Wrigley families, for their information and reminiscences. Chris Hawker, grand-nephew of famous aviator Harry Hawker, has also been of great assistance by providing early documents and photos. I am indebted to Suzanne Birrell for providing a unique photo of her grandmother.

Above all, I am indebted to my family for their patience and understanding. My wife Susan has acted as sounding-board, critic and proof-reader over the two years of writing, and I am grateful

for her unstinting support. If writing history is about drawing the most likely conclusions from the available evidence and constructing a narrative for a contemporary audience, then any errors in interpretation in this book rest entirely with me.

Steve Campbell-Wright
Point Cook
March 2014

Crossley Light Tender Pt Cook
C. 1928

Unit Xmas Card - No 1 Flying Training School - C.1930

21743 CPE

Technician Sergeant / Pilot, Aircraft Mechanic 2 & Technician Sergeant at original 'Aircraft' Siding, Laverton Base - C.1928

21744 CPE

Avro 504K Trainers at Pt. Cook
21 Jan. 1927

FOREWORD

I have vivid and fond memories of Point Cook. Indeed, I started my Air Force career at Point Cook in January 1970 as a member of No 76 Pilots Course. While I enjoyed flying the Winjeel at Point Cook, I was relieved when I successfully passed the first phase of my pilots course. Interestingly, my last flight as a pilot in the Air Force terminated at Point Cook in 2007. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to fly the Iroquois helicopter A2-377 on its last flight from Canberra to Point Cook. I remember the flight very well as the arrival was in mid-winter just before dusk in perfect weather with Point Cook looking beautiful as we approached to land to deliver the helicopter to the RAAF Museum.

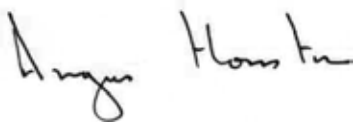
Point Cook is the birthplace of military aviation and the Royal Australian Air Force's ancestral home. The centenary of Lieutenant Eric Harrison's historic flight, at Point Cook on 1 March 1914, is an ideal time to pause and reflect on the Royal Australian Air Force traditions of service and sacrifice that were forged at Point Cook from its earliest days to the present.

Much has occurred at Point Cook in its 100 year association with the military and I commend Steve Campbell-Wright for writing *An Interesting Point: A Centenary of Military Aviation at Point Cook 1914 – 2014.*

Point Cook was central to the birth of military aviation in a country remote and distant from the centres of technical innovation in Europe and the United States. However, this remoteness provided the incentive for Australian aviators to mount some impressive feats of skill and endurance. Indeed, Point Cook played a large part in many national and international 'firsts'. Sadly though, over the years, too many aircrew lost their lives at Point Cook in the challenge of providing air power for Australia, particularly in the early years when aircraft were unreliable and pilots were not as well trained and supervised as they are today.

Point Cook is the oldest continously operating military airfield in the world and, for us today, is an important link to military aviation's illustrious past with both the Australian Flying Corps and the Royal Australian Air Force. While the buildings can't talk, *An Interesting Point* focuses on the people at Point Cook bringing the place to life. Steve's eye for the quirks of life show that people have not changed over the years. The book also debunks some myths and shines a light into some of Point Cook's darker corners, but it all helps to complete a fascinating picture of an historic place.

The history of Point Cook is an important story. One which should be better known to all Australians. Accordingly, I thank Steve for writing this book which tells the Point Cook story.



Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, AC, AFC (Ret'd)
Chief of the Defence Force 2005–2011
Chief of Air Force 2001–2005

PREFACE

Point Cook is an interesting place. Its physical presence demonstrates this, and the stories that are associated with it attest to its unique place in Australia's cultural heritage. Through this book, I have attempted to bring together the tangible past (the site itself and the objects that remain) and the intangible past (the stories, memories and significances) of Point Cook.

An important anniversary is often a time to reflect on the events of the past, and the centenary of military aviation in Australia on 1 March 2014 marks 100 years since Australia took its most important practical step towards the establishment of what is now considered by many to be one of the most capable air forces in the world—the Royal Australian Air Force. A history that covers 100 years of Point Cook could easily consume many volumes, so I have attempted to provide a central narrative that covers the main events that define the military presence at Point Cook and to illustrate these with the stories of the people involved.

Many stories from Point Cook have been told before, so I have sought to tell some of the stories that have not previously made it into print alongside those that have helped to define the present-day Air Force. This history is a failing of sorts, in that it must leave out more than it addresses. The choice of what to include has been made easier by always seeking to tell stories that have a strong element of human interest.

The search for stories and voices from the past is always a challenge to historians. Official sources can be dry and biased in favour of the conservative side any story. The carefully written published accounts of retired senior officers provide another account; while newspapers often seek a sensational approach. My account of life at Point Cook seeks a balance between the available sources, which have evolved over time. For example, the media blackout after the threat to mainland Australia during World War II dramatically reduces the information available to historians from newspapers of the period. However, operational history records of World War II provide an excellent source of information of a type that was not captured for Point Cook in World War I. I was lucky enough to have experienced much of the life of Point Cook in the last quarter of a century first hand, so the last two chapters form something of a personal account.

Historical inaccuracies can evolve through the repetition of old research—even though they are usually based on the best available sources at the time—and I have attempted to tell the seminal stories of the Australian Flying Corps and the Royal Australian Air Force at Point Cook through original sources where possible. Above all, however, I have aimed to write less of a military history and more of a social history. In doing so, I have taken a 'warts and all' approach that attempts to record what occurred without undue glorification or undue pessimism. I was fortunate to have travelled to Gallipoli on a number of occasions for ANZAC commemorations, and I met some wonderful Turkish guides and interpreters. In the words of one of them—a highly qualified historian and philosopher—'there is no such thing as good or bad, there only is what there is'.

On the matter of conventions, references to monetary values have been expressed as they were at the time; and because there is no simple formula to convert all types of goods and services into modern equivalents, the reader must apply their own discretion. All measurements have been converted to metric equivalents, and the ISO standard of feet for aviation altitude has been used. The original rank of aircraftsman has been used. It reflects that, as more trades were required in the RAAF, the rank of 'air mechanic' was redefined by the broader term of 'aircraftsman'. The adoption in recent years of the term 'aircraftman' (seeming to denote 'aircraft-man') does not seem logical to me in this light.

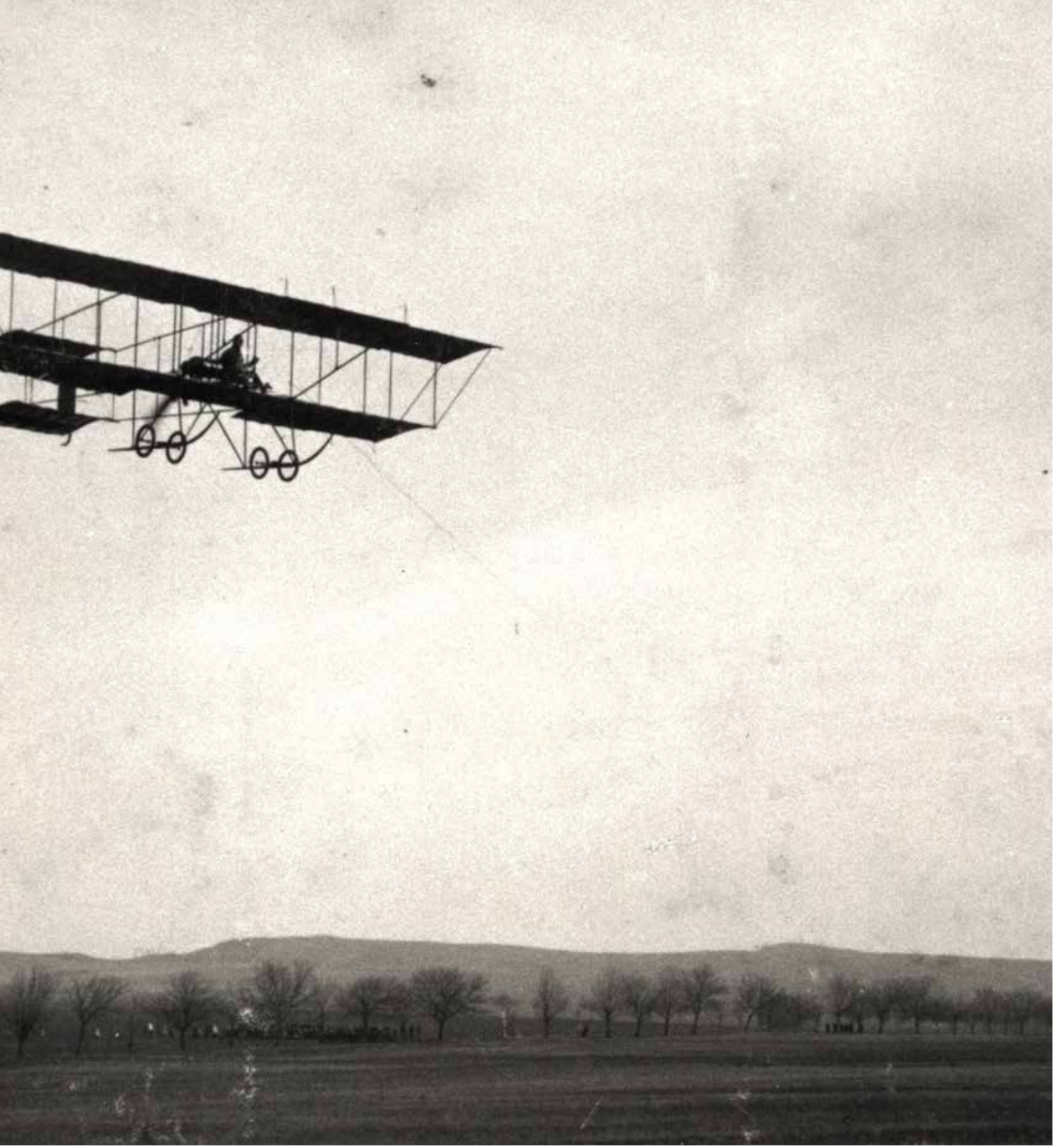
Finally, I have adopted the convention of spelling the location as 'Point Cook' throughout the book, despite the prevalence of the spelling as 'Point Cooke' at some times in the past. The geographic point is named after John Murray Cooke, mate of the frigate HMS *Rattlesnake* under the command of Captain William Hobson (later Governor of New Zealand). The ship brought the first government officials to Melbourne and surveyed the shore of Port Phillip during September to November 1836. Cooke later became a lieutenant and commander in the Royal Navy, serving in India and the Far East. The connection with armed forces at Point Cook goes back to the early days of white settlement in Melbourne.

Without doubt, the correct spelling is 'Point Cooke', but some official maps had dropped the 'e' from as early as 1861. The matter of spelling came to attention in 1937, when research was conducted to confirm whether or not famous navigator Captain James Cook had any connection with the place, which he had not. The Air Force and the press have used both spellings interchangeably in the past, but the weight of common usage has forced the 'e' to be dropped seemingly permanently. Notwithstanding, Joan Stewart (daughter of Air Vice-Marshal William Bostock) was successful in having the name of the geographic feature restored to its historically correct form, with the aid of my advice to the Place Names Committee, in 1998.

I hope you agree that Point Cook is indeed an interesting point.

Steve Campbell-Wright
Point Cook
March 2014

1912: Bristol Boxkite flown by Eric Harrison at Halberstadt, Germany, where he was chief instructor at the Bristol flying school. Harrison instructed and examined German military pilots who later took part in World War I. Within two years, he made the first flight in Australia by a military aircraft at Point Cook (RAAF)




POINT COOK
ROYAL AUSTRALIAN
AIR FORCE
FIRST AND FOREMOST

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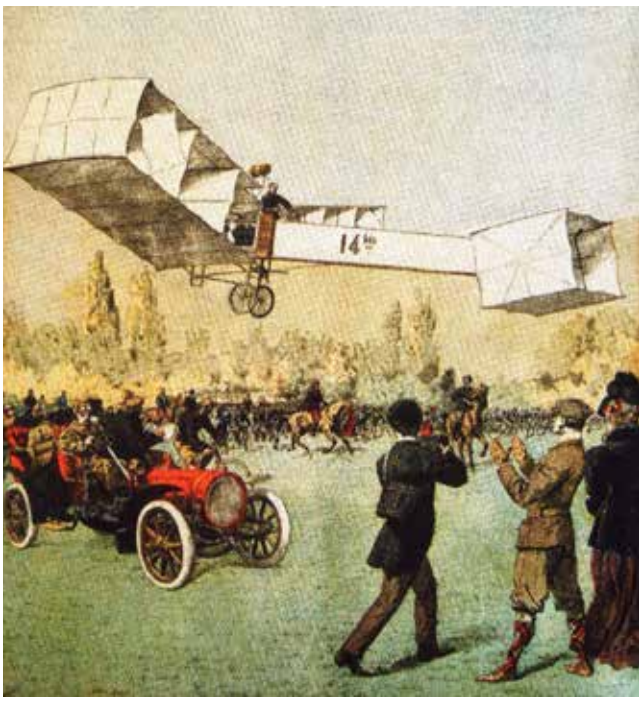
Chapter 1 - Introduction

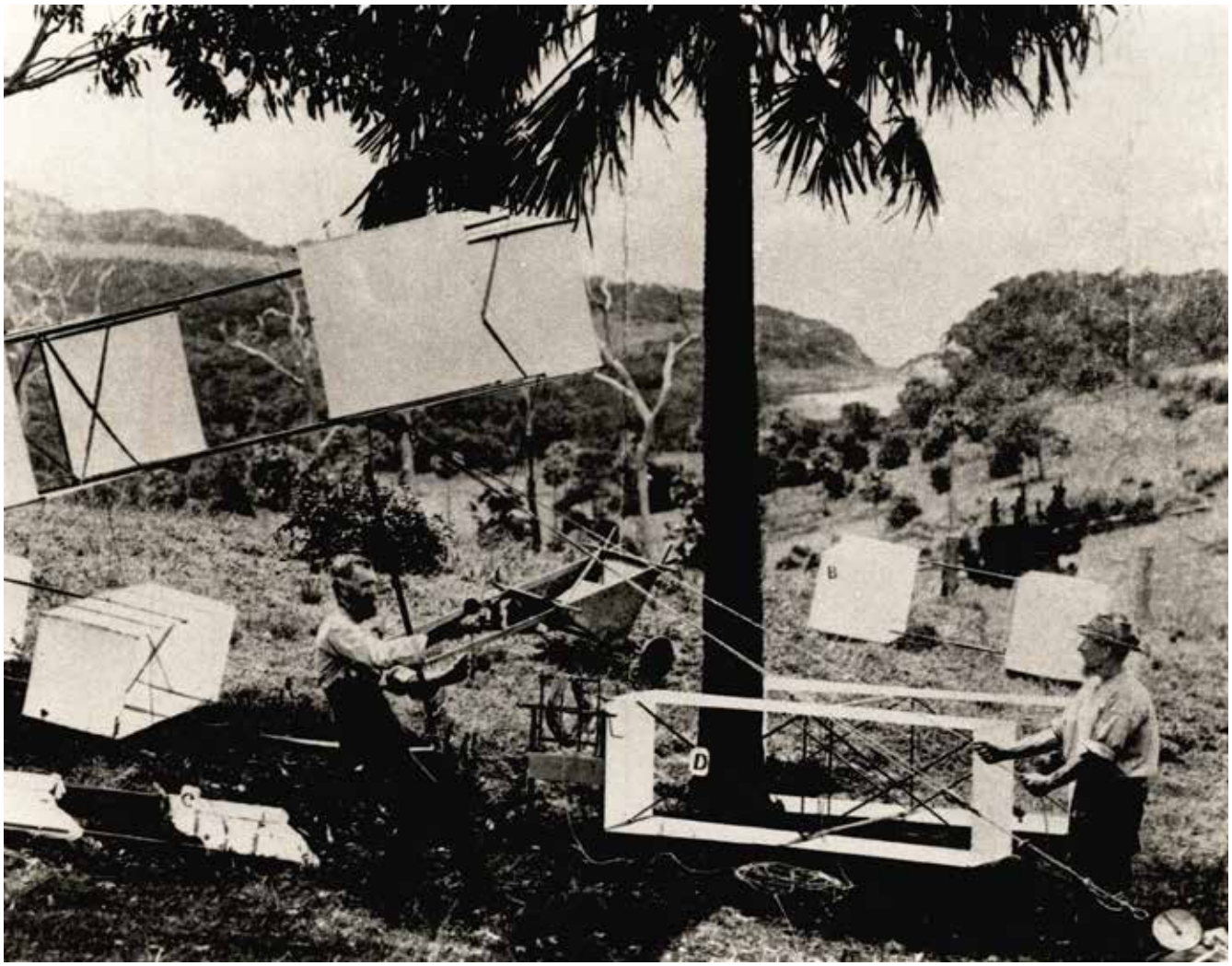
The events that led to the first flight in an Australian military aircraft by Lieutenant Eric Harrison on 1 March 1914 reflect the struggles faced by Australia to come to terms with military aviation and to set it on the path to the significant place it now holds in the nation.

The 2014 centenary of the day that Harrison took to the sky marks the birth of Australia's own air power capability. This book seeks to tell the story of the significant part played by Point Cook as the birthplace of military aviation in Australia, and its ongoing role as the nation's first training establishment for generations of Australian airmen and airwomen. The story is not simple, and the beginning—the establishing of the Central Flying School and Australian Flying Corps at Point Cook—was a difficult process at a time of war preparation, rapid technological advances and acute public interest in aviation.

Controversy surrounds the claims about who was the first to fly a practical powered aircraft in a controlled and sustained manner. As with most complex problems, the contributions of many over a long period of time contributed to the solution. For example, the experiments with gliders by George Cayley in England and Otto Lilienthal in Germany, followed by demonstrations by Lawrence Hargrave in Australia—who migrated from England as a youth—showed that flying could be stable and safe. These and other mid-to-late 19th century efforts fuelled a public interest in the quest for manned flight that gained momentum as each step closer was made. Some steps were widely reported, others drew little attention, and many false claims were made.



1906: Alberto Santos-Dumont flying his *14 Bis* aircraft over Paris (*Le Petit Journal*)



1894: Lawrence Hargrave (left) and James Swain at Stanwell Park, New South Wales with Hargrave's experimental boxkites capable of lifting a man (RAAF Museum)

The development and proving of usable flight controls by the Wright brothers in 1903 was a major step forward, but it did not receive a lot of favourable reporting at the time. Arguably the most significant demonstration that heavier-than-air powered flight was achievable came from the Brazilian-born Alberto Santos-Dumont when he flew his *14 Bis* aircraft at a chateau near Paris in December 1906. His flights caught the public imagination and set France on the course to becoming the premier aviation nation of the time.

By 1906, France had long-established cycle and car manufacturing industries and was not unduly hampered by conservative or restrictive legislation. This allowed for the rapid transfer of existing engineering knowledge to the emerging field of aircraft manufacture. Flying—like cycling and motoring—was seen as a form of sport to be enjoyed by the wealthy or fanatical; and Santos-Dumont, as the heir to his father's Brazilian coffee fortune, saw himself as a sportsman of the air. Like Hargrave before him, Santos-Dumont was not concerned with patent rights or the need for financial gain from the development of flying. Instead, he actively encouraged aviation experimentation and published many of his designs for all to use. This was in marked contrast to the Wright brothers who—having applied engineering design, test and evaluation methods to develop incremental improvements in their original Wright Flyer design—attempted to

restrict access to many of their developments and sought to enforce patent rights.

Louis Blériot's much publicised crossing of the English Channel in July 1909 showed the public that flying had uses well beyond a thrill for sportsmen. Lord Northcliffe, the proprietor of Britain's *Daily Mail* newspaper—which offered the £1000 prize for the aerial channel crossing—famously affirmed his view that Blériot's achievement showed that 'England is no longer an Island'.[1] European military authorities had realised the military potential of flying well before the Channel crossing. Observation balloons had been used in war since the 1790s. During the first decade of the 20th century military forces tended to see early aircraft as aerial extensions of their reconnaissance, observation or communications units. Not long after, the first recorded use of aerial bombardments came in the Italo-Turkish War of 1912, when Italian dirigibles bombed Turkish troops in Libya from airships and aeroplanes.[2] In the United States, the Army Signal Corps had developed a design specification for a military observation aircraft as early as 1907.

Britain was slower to take up the flying craze that had taken such a firm hold on the Continent. In 1908, the Brooklands motor car racing track in Surrey became home to one of Britain's first airfields. Alliott Verdon-Roe (later to form the AVRO Aviation Company) carried out the first trials of a British-built aircraft at Brooklands in that year; and in 1910, Hilda Hewlett and Gustave Blondeau opened Britain's first flying school at Brooklands. Brooklands became an international centre of aviation training and experimentation, with British, Australian, French, German, Russian and Chinese experimenters and enthusiasts rubbing shoulders and sharing their newfound aviation knowledge. It was one of many airfields that were established about the same time in southern England at places such as Sheerness in Kent, Salisbury Plain in Wiltshire and Farnborough in Hampshire. From 1910, pilots were issued with an internationally recognised Aviator's Certificate by the Royal Aero Club.

In 1910, France was responsible for over 50 per cent of the world's aircraft production, and Britain was keen to catch up. Aero engines were for sale to the public in Britain as early as 1909, and flying could be seen at Hendon near London every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday. The Balloon Section of the Royal Engineers was expanded into the Air Battalion in February 1911, by which time France had 200 aircraft in military service compared with 19 in Britain, most of which were unserviceable. *The Sydney Morning Herald* noted in May 1911 that: 'Even in Great Britain, proverbially slow to move in these matters, military aeroplanes have become a recognised arm of the service, and an aviation corps is in regular training at Aldershot'.[3]

The development of aviation was spurred on by governments in many countries following the 1909 Imperial Conference in London, which considered that military aviation was likely to be necessary

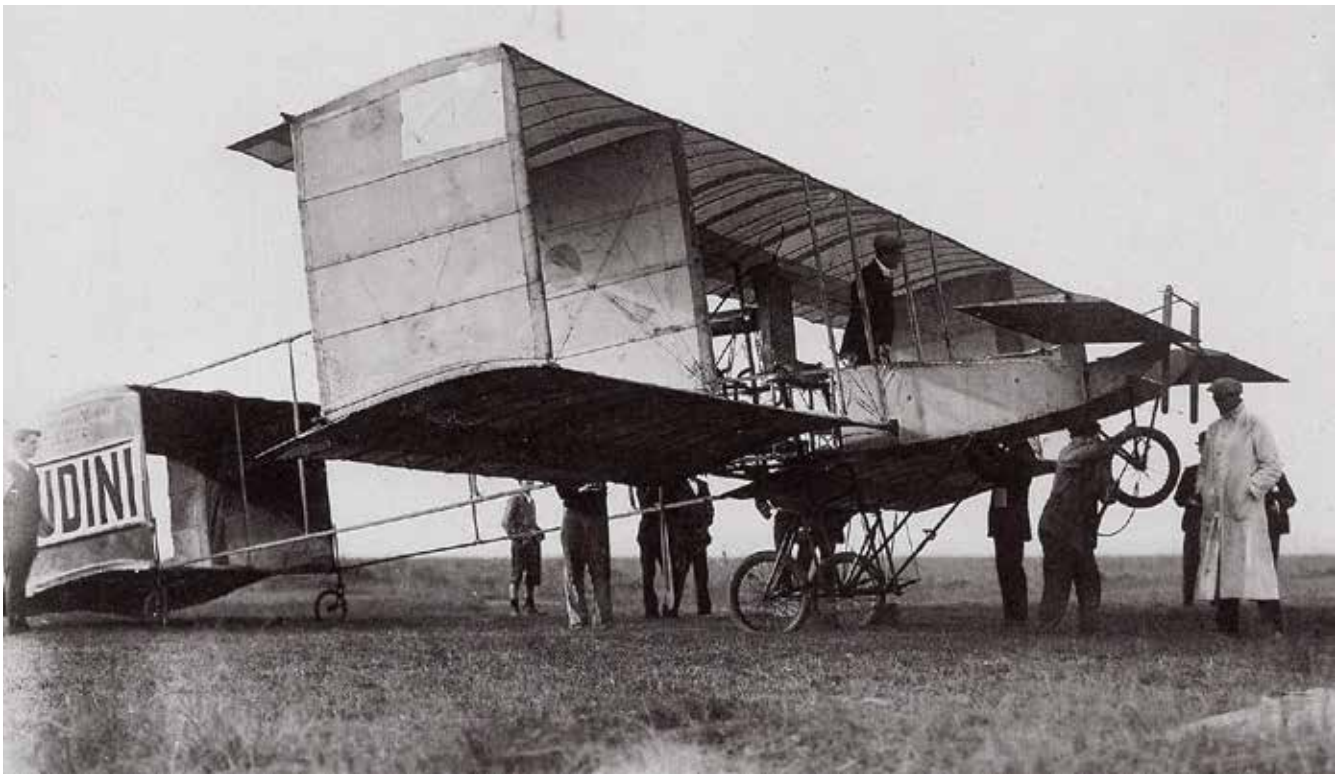
1909: Louis Blériot crossing the English coast at Dover to claim the £1000 prize for the first heavier-than-air manned flight across the English Channel

to counter German and Japanese militarism. The Australian Government offered an enormous prize of £5000 for an Australian-made aircraft that met a specification making it suitable for use as a military observation aircraft. A closing date of March 1910 was set. This contributed to the Australian public's interest in aviation, and the newspapers of the day contained regular updates about the likely 40 or so entrants in the competition. Some papers employed a special aviation correspondent. No aircraft met the optimistic specification by the closing date, and after a short extension, the competition was cancelled. Brothers John and Reg Duigan of Mia Mia, Victoria built a biplane—the first Australian-designed and built aircraft—that met the specification, but it was not successfully test flown until October 1910.[4]

On 4 December 1909, Londoner Colin Defries had attempted, but failed, to achieve powered flight at Sydney's Victoria Park Racecourse in a newly imported Wright Flyer—the first powered, fixed-wing aircraft imported into the country.[5] A similar unsuccessful attempt was made by Fred Custance in a Blériot monoplane at Bolivar, South Australia, on 17 March 1910.

Demonstrations by visiting overseas aviators, or 'aeronauts' as they were often called, added to the public's interest. Hungarian-born American showman Harry Houdini flew a Voisin aircraft at Diggers Rest, Victoria on 18 March 1910. His feats of showmanship made him a household name, and reports of his flight—the first verified powered flight in Australia—generated further interest in aviation.[6]

New Zealander Joseph Hammond demonstrated a Bristol Boxkite aircraft extensively in Australia—first in Perth, then in Melbourne and Sydney—on behalf of the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company in 1911, on what can only be described as a sales mission. He flew it at Altona, Victoria in February and made an overland flight to Geelong in March. The company's activities were widely reported, and many people were able to see that flying was stable, controllable and safe. Such demonstrations inspired a number of Australians to travel to England to learn to fly. Some, such as Harry



1910: Harry Houdini (Erik Weisz) with his Voisin aircraft at Diggers Rest, Victoria (RAAF Museum)

1911: J.J. Hammond (at right) on his Bristol Boxkite aircraft about to carry out a reconnaissance demonstration flight with Lieutenant Colonel John Antill at the Liverpool Army Camp near Sydney, New South Wales (RAAF Museum)

Hawker, Bert Hinkler, Harry Kauper, Harry Busteed, Billy Stutt and Horrie Miller became famous through their aviation exploits.

The newly formed Commonwealth of Australia was concerned about the nation's lack of military preparedness, and as a result the Universal Training Scheme was passed into law in 1909. The scheme formally began on 1 January 1911 and required men to take part in a form of national service in the reserve forces, or Militia as it was known at the time. Senator George Pearce, Minister for Defence for much of the period 1908 to 1921, was responsible for introducing the scheme. He invited Lord Kitchener, British Secretary of State for War, to visit Australia in 1909 to prepare a report for the Government on the land defence of Australia. The Australian Navy was also strengthened significantly from 1909, with the purchase of ships that would form an Australian fleet unit. Renamed the Royal Australian Navy, the fleet unit concept became reality when HMAS *Australia* led the rest of the fleet into Sydney Harbour in October 1913.

Pearce was also a strong advocate for the use of aircraft in support of the Navy and Army. He had first considered formal plans for a military aviation corps in December 1910, and there was no shortage of proposals from serving military officers and aviation enthusiasts, notably Charles Campbell, honorary secretary of the Aero League of Australia. Kitchener's visit heightened interest in the use of

aviation in war amongst an increasingly air-minded public. Pearce, a carpenter and son of a blacksmith, was a Labor politician; and as early as 1901, he expressed the view that Australia should not be a mere 'component part of the British Empire'[7], a view which was to permeate the organisation of Australian defence and ensure that Australian combatants served under Australian leaders where possible.

As a result of the favourable report about Joseph Hammond's flying demonstrations in Perth in January 1911 by Lieutenant Colonel Godfrey Irving[8], Pearce instructed Major Cecil Foott of the Royal Australian Engineers at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne to report on Hammond's flights at Altona in February 1911 and make recommendations regarding the military use of aircraft. Foott observed Hammond's flying activities in the Bristol Boxkite around Melbourne for a week in late February, just managing to miss out on his promised flight due to the wind exceeding eight kilometres per hour. His report to Pearce recommended the formation of a flying corps of four aircraft, eight aviation officers and 10 mechanics.[9]

Hammond moved his Boxkite demonstrations to Ascot, Sydney in April 1911, and the Commandant of Military Forces in New South Wales, Colonel Josef Gordon, invited him to fly to the Liverpool Army Camp on 3 May. Hammond made the 35-kilometre flight successfully, carrying Captain Joseph Niesigh of Gordon's staff as his passenger. Their landing was watched by the soldiers in camp along with the Governor-General Lord Dudley, who was visiting the camp as Commander-in-Chief and greeted Hammond on the ground.[10] Hammond used the invitation to take some officers for reconnaissance flights, including Lieutenant Colonel John Antill—the training camp commandant.[11]

Gordon had hoped to take a flight with Hammond on 3 May, but Hammond had left the camp before Gordon had completed his other duties. However, Gordon was invited by Hammond's manager to be the first passenger to take a flight over the centre of Sydney on the following day, which

1912: Oswald Watt—Australia's only qualified pilot serving in the military forces in 1912 wearing the uniform of the French Foreign Legion with which he served at the outbreak of World War I (RAAF Museum)

he readily accepted, although Hammond was not available, and his assistant, Leslie Macdonald, acted as pilot.[12] Gordon spent two hours in the air with the 20-year-old Macdonald, whom he described as 'cool as a cucumber'.[13] Spanish born and of Scottish descent, Gordon was a highly experienced professional officer and a veteran of the Second Boer War. He was adventurous, respectful of his subordinates and a highly regarded leader. Gordon's experience with Hammond's Boxkite was to play a significant role in the future of Point Cook.

In June 1911, Pearce travelled to London as an Australian representative at the Imperial Conference, which discussed defence and economic matters between Dominion nations. While in Britain, Pearce visited Brooklands to see the regular Sunday flying firsthand and was convinced of the

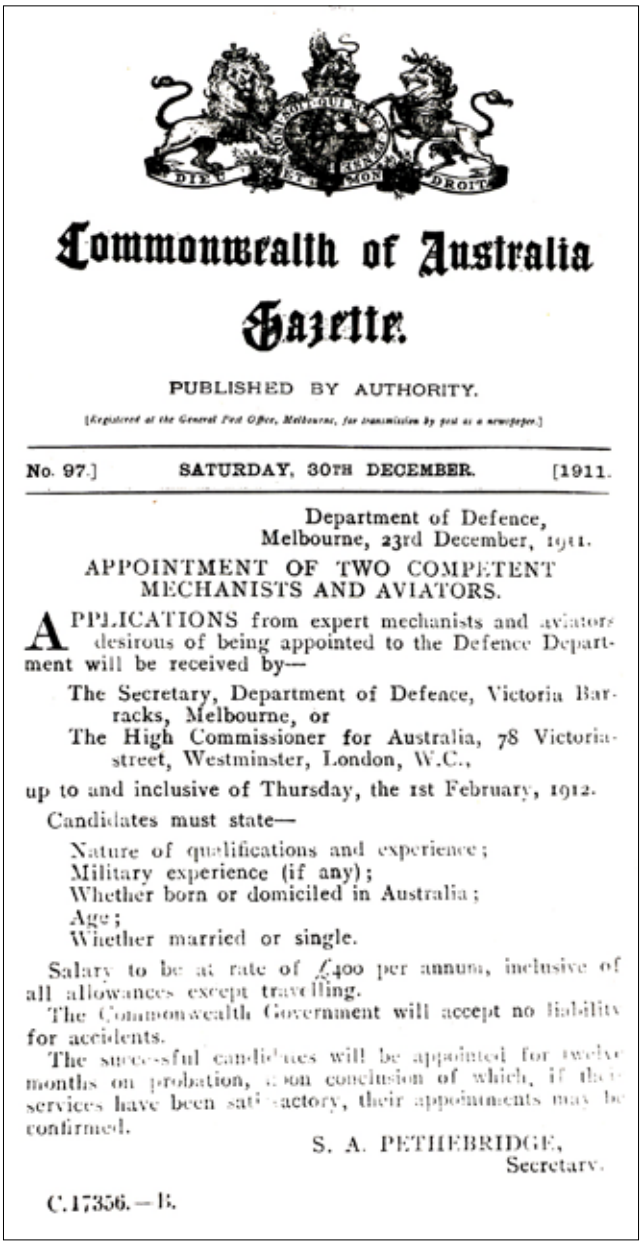
1911: Eric Harrison (top left) and fellow instructors on a Boxkite aircraft at the Bristol School on Salisbury Plain, England (RAAF Museum)

value of flying to national defence. He later said, 'what I saw that day and the talks I had with the flying men convinced me of the wisdom of our having a flying school in the Defence Department'.[14] The need for a military air capability was supported by Billy Hughes as Attorney-General and later Prime Minister.

As an initial step, an advertisement was published in the *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette* for 'two competent mechanists and aviators' on 30 December 1911.[15] Much of the detailed advice needed to establish a military flying school and corps was to be sought from the successful appointees. Meanwhile, the broad plan was formed that the school and eventual flying corps would be established along British lines—if not on the same scale—and taking as long as four years to be implemented.[16] The school and corps were to be part of the Militia. Under Pearce's direction, potential sites were inspected by the only qualified pilot in the Army, Captain Oswald Watt[17], in March 1912. Pearce decided to locate the school near the newly formed Royal Military College that he had established at Duntroon in the Federal Capital Territory.[18] Land was set aside for the purpose, and flying training was set to commence by the end of 1912.[19]

The aviators, to be commissioned as officers in a new Aviation Instructional Staff, were to be paid £400 per annum, which was more than three times the national average wage, and the mechanics were to be paid £200 per annum. Four aircraft were to be operated at the school with a staff comprising four officers, seven warrant officers and sergeants, and 32 air mechanics to formally commence in January 1913. It was envisaged that, as each course was completed, the size of the corps would increase and more aircraft would be purchased.[20]

In Britain, the Royal Flying Corps and British Central Flying School were formed in May 1912 at Upavon on Salisbury Plain, and the school started its first course on 17 August. By the end of 1912, the school had 36 aircraft. The term 'Central' was standard usage in the British Army, where Central



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Department of Defence,
Melbourne, 23rd December, 1911.

APPOINTMENT OF TWO COMPETENT MECHANISTS AND AVIATORS.

APPLICATIONS from expert mechanists and aviators desirous of being appointed to the Defence Department will be received by—

The Secretary, Department of Defence, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, or
The High Commissioner for Australia, 78 Victoria-street, Westminster, London, W.C.,

up to and inclusive of Thursday, the 1st February, 1912.

Candidates must state—

Nature of qualifications and experience;
Military experience (if any);
Whether born or domiciled in Australia;
Age;
Whether married or single.

Salary to be at rate of £400 per annum, inclusive of all allowances except travelling.

The Commonwealth Government will accept no liability for accidents.

The successful candidates will be appointed for twelve months on probation, upon conclusion of which, if their services have been satisfactory, their appointments may be confirmed.

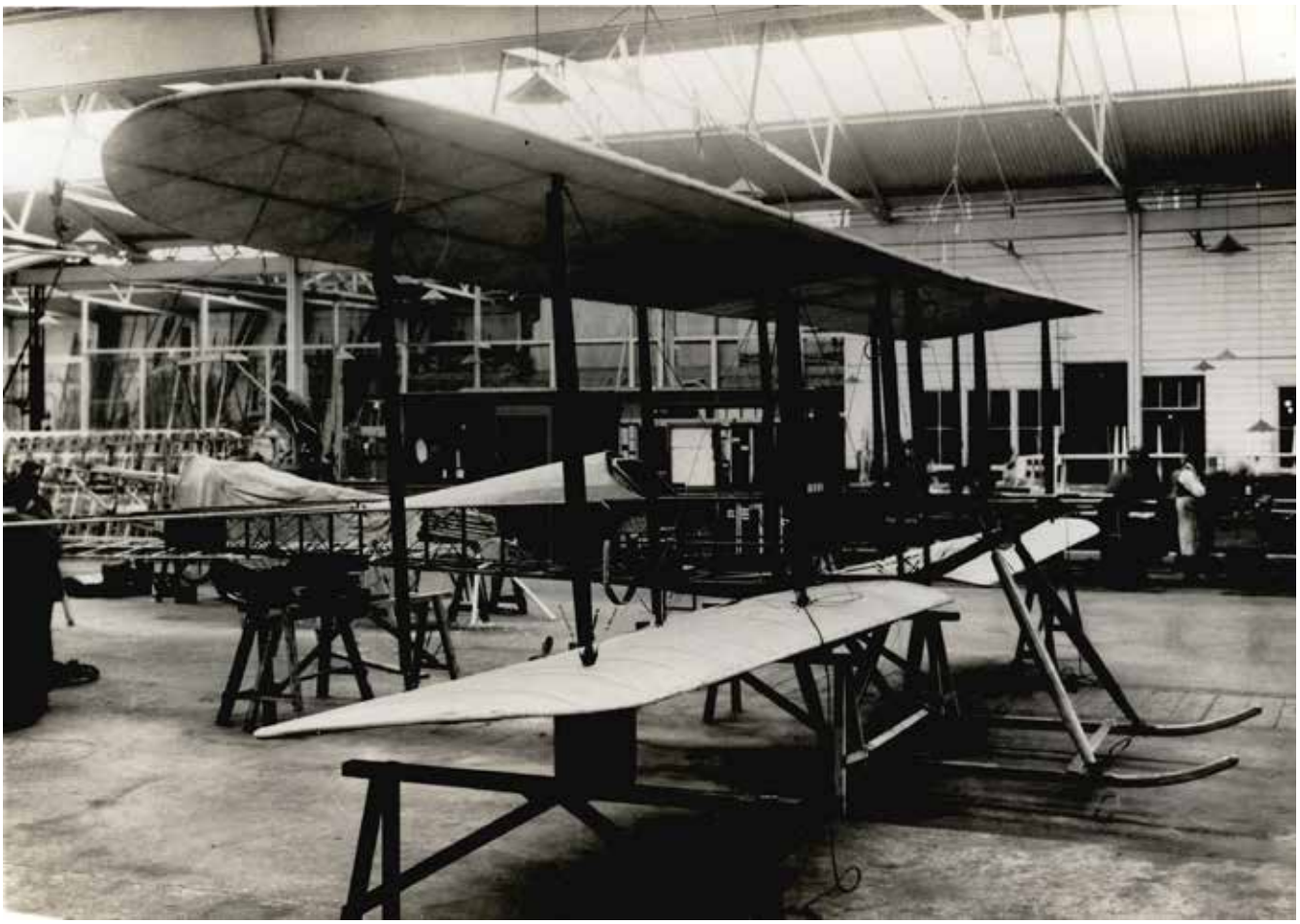
S. A. PETHEBRIDGE,
Secretary.

C.17356.—B.

1911: advertisement for Australia's first military flying instructors (RAAF)

units developed policy and procedures as well as carrying out required tasks, while outlying units were only expected to carry out tasks.

While waiting for applicants to fill the two instructor positions of Australia's Central Flying School, the Department of Defence went ahead with the selection and purchase of the aircraft needed for the school. As there was no local aircraft industry, the aircraft had to be imported. With little knowledge of suitable aircraft types to purchase,



1913: one of Australia's two B.E.2a aircraft under construction in England (RAAF Museum)

the Department of Defence sought advice from the War Office through the military adviser on the High Commission staff in London, Major Buckley.[21] The War Office recommended purchase of two Deperdussin Monoplanes and two B.E.2a biplanes. There was considerable debate among aviators and in the press about the relative value of biplanes and monoplanes, with the British preferring biplanes. In fact, Harry Hawker said that the only reason the French did not build biplanes was because 'they cannot build a decent biplane'.[22] Hydroplanes, capable of take-off and landing on water, had been demonstrated in Britain in the summer of 1911, and this added the prospect of naval cooperation to the debate about aviation in war. The purchase of Australia's first four military aircraft was confirmed by Pearce on 27 June 1912 before the appointment of the instructors who were to train pilots on them.[23] This decision affected the final selection of instructors.

The advertisement for military flying instructors in December 1911 drew no applicants from Australia by March 1912. This might have been expected, because virtually all Australians engaged in flying were doing so in Britain and continental Europe. The assistance of the High Commissioner in London was sought to advertise the positions. Over 108 applications were received, 58 being through the High Commission.[24] In July 1912, it was announced that Henry Petre (pronounced 'Peter') and Harry Busteed had been selected.

Petre was a British-born solicitor who had learnt to fly at Brooklands in 1910. He and his brother had attempted to build their own aircraft before Petre was engaged by the Deperdussin aircraft company as a flying instructor on their aircraft at Brooklands.

He was the great-grandson of the 11th Baron Petre and was born at the family seat of Ingatestone Hall in Essex, England. He claimed to have some limited military experience as a gunner and bombardier in the Honourable Artillery Company—effectively a branch of the Reserve Forces at the time. He was appointed as an honorary lieutenant in Australia's Aviation Instructional Staff on 6 August 1912 while still in Britain, and he later claimed that his ability to fly the Deperdussin monoplane secured him the position.

Busteed was an Australian-born pilot and mechanic from Melbourne. He was the second Australian to be awarded an internationally recognised pilot's licence from the British-based Royal Aero Club, with Certificate No. 94 issued in July 1911.[25] Busteed was a highly regarded pilot and well versed in practical engineering and aircraft design. He was employed by the British and Colonial Aeroplane Company—makers of the Bristol Boxkite—at their school on Salisbury Plain.

Petre and Busteed were engaged on an initial 12-month contract. By employing these two aviators, Australia appeared to have done well. The two provided a mix of British experience and Australian practical know-how. Both had experience in airframe construction, and Busteed suggested that Australia should start to build airframes locally. However, Busteed wrote to the Australian High Commissioner in September asking to be relieved of his contract, citing the offer of better employment.[26] He was employed by the Bristol Company as a test pilot before joining the Royal Flying Corps in 1913.

Eric Harrison was appointed in Busteed's place in October 1912. Like Busteed, he was Australian-born and living in Britain. From Castlemaine, Victoria and trained as a mechanic, Harrison saw Hammond fly at Altona in 1911 and 'took the next boat for England'.[27] He leant to fly the Boxkite at the Bristol Company's school, and went on to instruct on Boxkites in Spain, Italy and Germany[28], where he was working when offered the Australian position.

1912: Harry Busteed (front seat) and Eric Harrison on a Boxkite aircraft at the Bristol School on Salisbury Plain, England (RAAF Museum)

1913: Henry Petre used a motorcycle to carry out initial inspections of suitable sites in the Melbourne area for Australia's first military flying school (RAAF Museum)

In an ironic twist, he awarded flying brevets to German pilots who were later to fight against Allied pilots. His Australian contract officially commenced on 16 December 1912. He was not one of the original 108 or so applicants, and he later said that he welcomed the offer as a chance to get home to Australia. Harrison's recommendation for the position probably came from Busteed at the time of his resignation. It appears likely that Harrison and Busteed suggested the purchase of a Bristol Boxkite—which was ordered on 6 December—as an introductory trainer to supplement the original four aircraft.

Meanwhile, steps were taken to create the necessary structure and personnel establishment for the Australian Flying Corps and Central Flying School. After consideration by the Military Board on 11 September, Senator Pearce approved their formation on 20 September 1912. This was reflected in Army Order 132/1912, issued on 26 September, which brought the school and corps into being. The whole arrangement was placed under the command of Major Cyril 'Brudenell' White, Director of Military Operations at Army Headquarters in Melbourne's Victoria Barracks, who later planned the Gallipoli landings and subsequent evacuation of ANZAC Cove.[29]

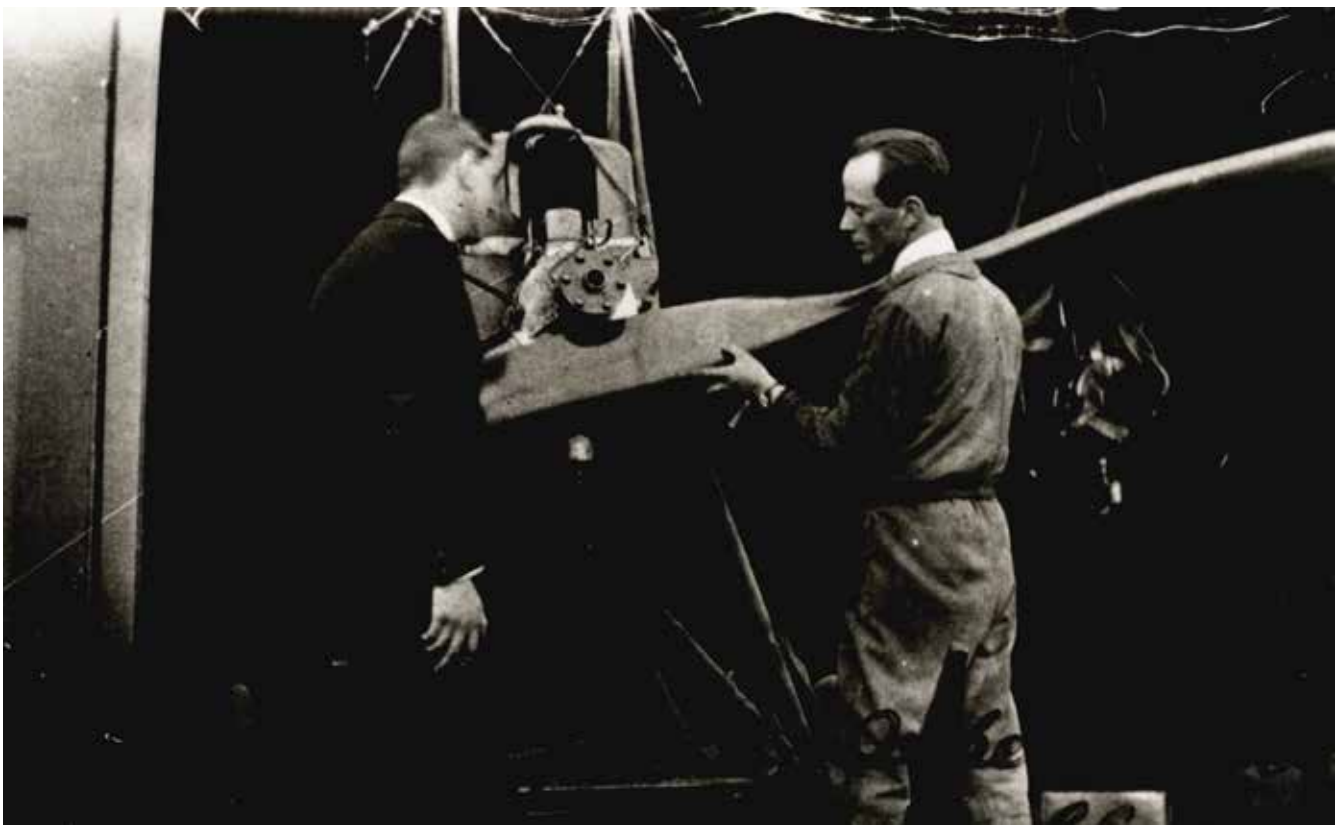
Petre sailed from London on RMS *Omrah*—a steamship of the regular passenger and mail service of the P&O Line—in mid-December 1912. Unbeknown to him, his brother Edward, with whom he had built the experimental Petre Monoplane in 1910, was killed in a crash attempting to fly from Brooklands to Edinburgh on Christmas Eve. He was met with the sad news when he arrived in Fremantle, Perth on 7 January 1913. Petre was interviewed on board the *Omrah* in port and said very little about his work with the Department of Defence, except that his stay 'all depended on how they liked him and he liked them.'[30] He did, however, predict that flying

would become routine within a very short time and that Atlantic crossings would be made within a few years.[31] He was also quoted as saying that flying 'is bound to become more or less of a chauffeur's business'.[32] On the Adelaide stopover en route to Melbourne, he was invited to inspect a locally made aircraft.

Petre was noted for being reserved and academically inclined and had acquired the moniker of 'Peter the Monk' at Brooklands.[33] He was set to the task of planning the administrative procedures for the school and corps; and in conjunction with the Department of Home Affairs, he designed the hangars, workshop and office to be built at the flying school.[34]

Harrison was more practical in nature. His first task was to oversee the construction and test flying of the aircraft for Australia. This included test flying by staff of the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough and then by Harrison himself, as well as test running of the spare engines and propellers. The engines were stripped and reassembled under Harrison's observation, and it was proudly reported that the 'tests were done with the thoroughness required for British purposes'.[35] Once the tests were completed, he sailed for Australia on RMS *Otway*, landing at Fremantle on 27 May 1913. Harrison was accompanied on the voyage by Richard 'Henry' Chester and Alexander Edward 'Ted' Shorland, two of the four mechanics recruited in Britain for the Central Flying School.

Chester was also a mechanic born in Mount Gambier, and was a colleague of Harrison at the Bristol School. He assisted Harrison in overseeing the preparation of the aircraft for dispatch to Australia. Shorland was English-born and was also an aircraft engine mechanic. Petre was en route to Australia when recruiting for mechanics began on 1 January 1913, so it is likely that the choice of mechanics was left entirely to Harrison and the High



1913: Henry Chester (at right) fitting the propeller to the Deperdussin engine prior to engine tests at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne (RAAF Museum)

1905: 'From Point Cook looking N.E.' — A view of the foreshore at Point Cook before the arrival of the military (L. Stalker, National Library of Australia)

Commission staff in London. Chester and Shorland were enlisted in the Aviation Instructional Staff on 6 June 1913 after their arrival in Melbourne. The other two mechanics sailed a month later. They were Cyril Heath, who was formally enlisted in Melbourne on 4 July 1913, and George Fonteneau, who enlisted the following day. Fonteneau was a French-born mechanic, who had worked for Deperdussin in France.[36] All four mechanics were enlisted as sergeants.

The Bristol Boxkite had been shipped to Sydney on the *Norseman*, arriving on 3 May, and was held in the Ordnance Stores pending further instructions.[37] The Deperdussins arrived in Sydney soon after Harrison and the mechanics arrived in Melbourne. It was anticipated that they would be moved by road to Duntroon. The aircraft deteriorated in storage, and the wings needed to be re-covered due to mildew damage. The work was carried out by Chester and Shorland after the aircraft were eventually moved to Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. They used sailcloth provided by a yachting supplier.[38] The two B.E.2a aircraft were shipped direct to Melbourne and did not arrive until February 1914.

Senator Pearce had already determined that the flying school was to be located adjacent to the newly established military college at Duntroon. However, public criticism of the site, notably by well-known Australian aviator William Hart of Penrith, New South Wales, led to a halt in establishing the aerodrome. Hart had bought Hammond's spare Bristol Boxkite in 1911 when the Bristol demonstration team left Australia. He planned to fly the first Sydney to Melbourne flight, and he scouted landing grounds near Goulburn in early March 1913. His view was that the altitude of Canberra, at 1600 feet, was above the ceiling height of the aircraft; and without more powerful engines, the aircraft would not even be able to take off.

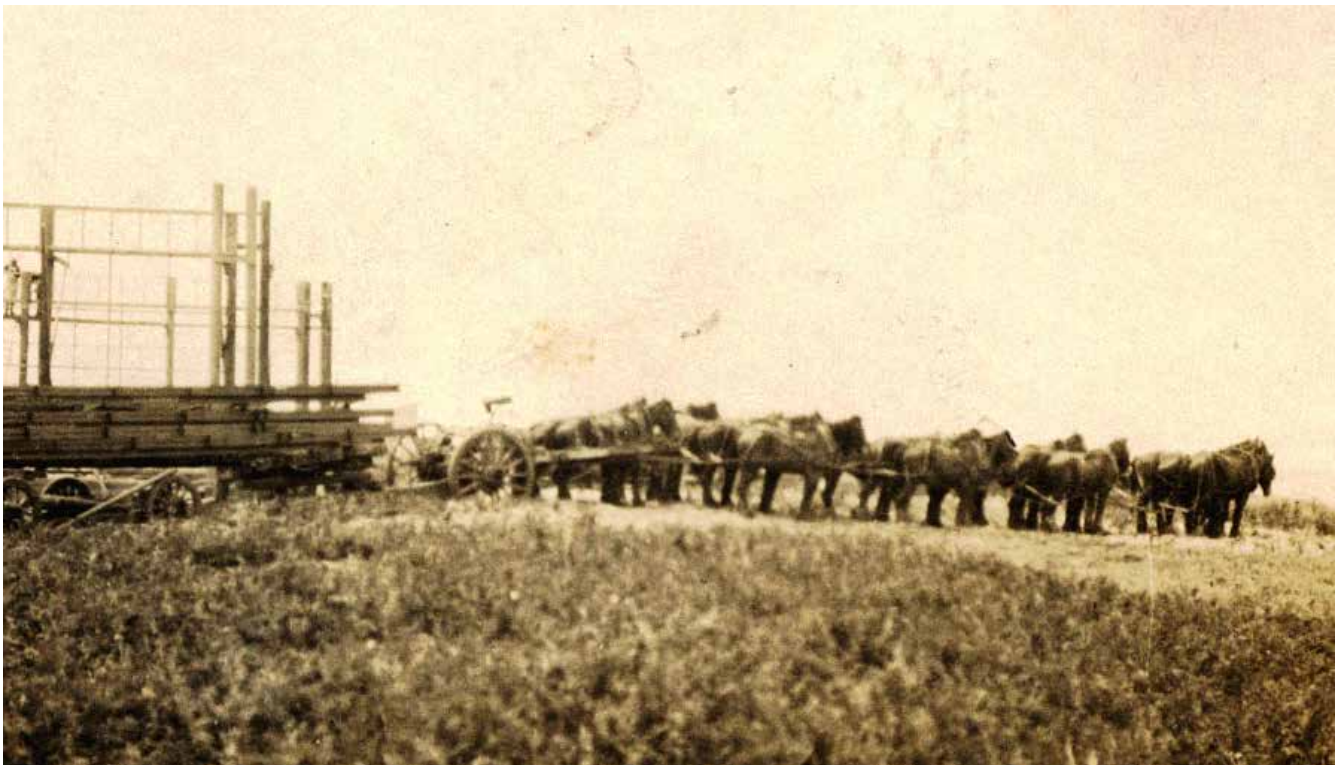
Petre was sent to Canberra in May to inspect the site at Duntroon and was not favourably impressed. Perhaps ironically, he said that, 'the atmosphere was so rarefied at Canberra'.[39] He went on to inspect alternative sites at Langwarrin, Cribb Point, Werribee and Altona Bay, all not far

from Army Headquarters in Victoria.[40] Soon after Harrison arrived from Britain, he and Petre carried out a further inspection of the alternative sites. By coincidence, their chauffer driver was Horrie Miller, who later went on to become an aviator and founder of the MacRobertson-Miller Airline.[41]

Petre and Harrison concluded that the Altona Bay site (the site of the present base at Point Cook) was the most suitable. It was flat land located beside the bay near Point Cook. It had the advantage of being suitable for landplanes and seaplanes to meet the Navy's proposed requirements.[42] Petre later also admitted that he did not wish to suffer the isolation of Canberra. Harrison pointed to the greater availability of aircraft parts in Melbourne than elsewhere in the country. The land at Point Cook had little vegetation compared with the site near Duntroon, which needed to be cleared at a cost estimated to be over £1000. However, the Point Cook site required the surveyed road to Laverton Railway Station to be turned from a farm track into a decently made road.[43]

The Labor Government was ousted by the Liberals in June 1913, and Senator Edward Millen replaced Pearce as Minister for Defence. It may have been a simple matter of administrative timing, but the decision on 7 July to ratify the Altona Bay site near Point Cook as the preferred site for the school was taken only two weeks after Millen became Minister. It is possible that Pearce was wedded to the notion of locating the Central Flying School next to the Royal Military College, from where most students were envisaged to come and where medical support would be readily available—Pearce was nonetheless responsible for the establishment of both training institutions.

The land selected at Point Cook belonged to the Victorian State Government, and this was an important reason for it being considered. It was not in the hands of the Chirnside family as previous histories have stated. The majority of the vast Werribee Park estate—which was bounded by Laverton in the east and Werribee and Hoppers Crossing in the west—was purchased by Victorian



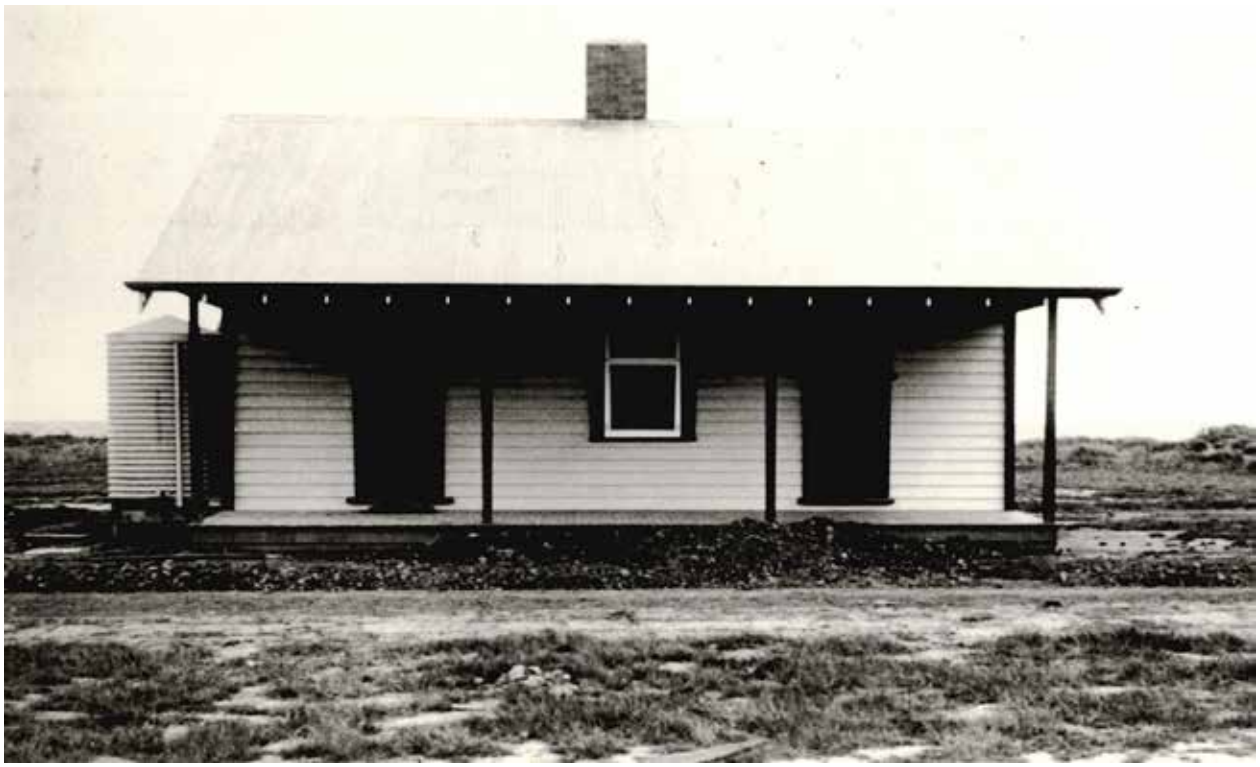
1914: the first hangar at Point Cook under construction with the office just visible behind (RAAF Museum)

1914: aerial view of the camp area at Point Cook with a B.E.2a in front of the canvas hangar (RAAF Museum)

Premier and infamous 'land boomer' Thomas Bent in a controversial land deal in 1905. The purchase was to be the subject of a Royal Commission in 1909. The land was under the management of the State Closer Settlement Board, which was having difficulty in selling the poor quality grazing land. Its proximity to the nearby sewerage treatment works and the resulting noxious odours added to their difficulties.[44]

There was some urgency in deciding on the Point Cook land option, because the Victorian Government had listed it for public allotment on 13 July 1913. The land was reserved from the sale to address the question of which level of government should make and maintain the road between Point Cook and Laverton Railway Station, because the Australian Government was reluctant to pay for a minor local road.[45] This led to a significant delay in purchasing the land. Nonetheless, the October 1913 Federal Budget statement announced that, 'as soon as the necessary buildings are completed, for which a provision of £10,000 is made … the school will be established.'[46] The land still belonged to the Victorian Government, and it took more than a year for the 734 acres (297 hectares) to be transferred to the Australian Government. The gazettal finally occurred on 17 October 1914 for the sum of £6040 2s 3d—over seven months after flying finally commenced.[47]

Petre and Harrison inspected the site with Federal Director of Works, Thomas Hill, on 4 October 1913 to peg out the locations for the hangars, workshop and office—the plans having been drawn by the Department of Home Affairs with advice from Petre over the preceding months. Tenders, due in December, called for the construction of the buildings, and the contract was awarded to Walter Cooper in January 1914. He commenced building on 3 February. The relatively rapid progress made after the Minister's decision to locate the school at Point Cook was set against the backdrop of public criticism that a considerable amount of money had been spent with no tangible result. Referring to Petre and Harrison, the *Argus*



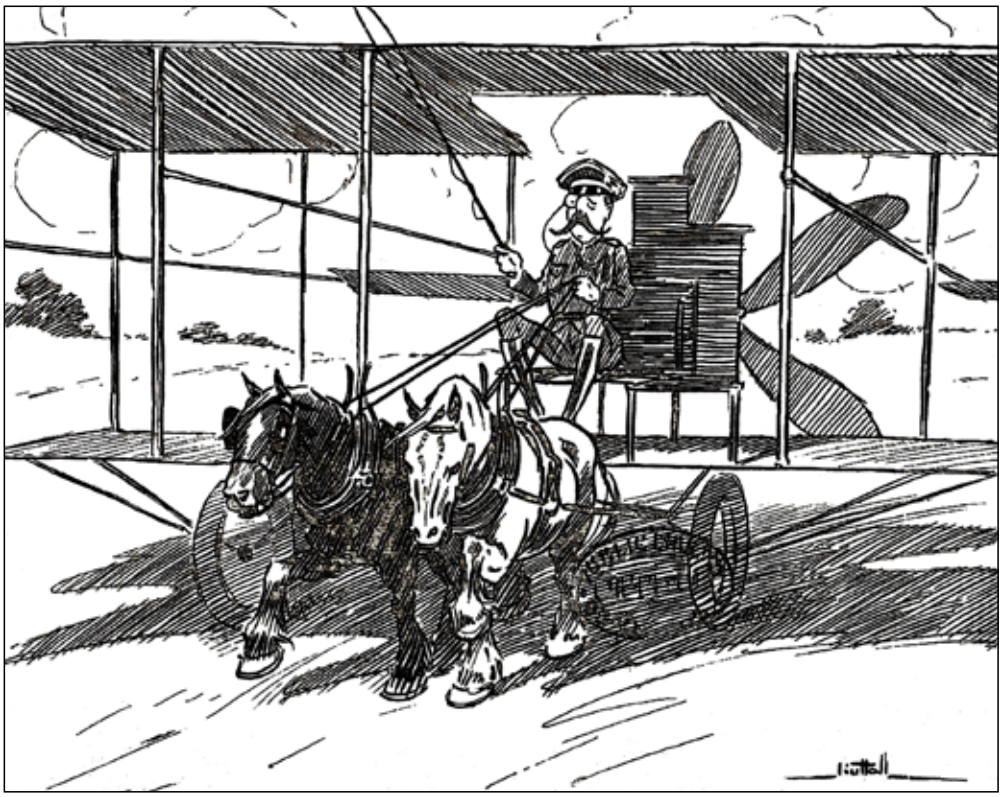
1914: the office by the shore at Point Cook—the first permanent building completed (RAAF Museum)

newspaper wrote that, 'there would almost seem to be a possibility of the experts going stale for want of practice'.[48] A date for the first flight was set as New Year's Day 1914—a date that came and went.

By early 1914, Australia had been actively engaged in planning and forming a flying corps for over two years and had owned its first military aircraft for close to a year, yet no military flying had taken place. The aircraft had deteriorated, and the construction of an aerodrome had only just commenced. The flying instructors had not flown for 12 months, and public dissatisfaction was high.

Comments by Harry Hawker in February 1914 that the aircraft were 'out of date, and practically useless for defence purposes' did nothing to allay public concern[49], adding that, 'they can only be used … for schooling purposes'.[50] Despite frequent barbs that Petre and Harrison were drawing very high wages for doing nothing more than routine staff work, opinion was against the Government for not providing suitable infrastructure for the Central Flying School to commence its work.

Civilian aviators had the lead on the military at every turn. Hawker was a household name, and his sleek Sopwith aircraft, his daring flying manoeuvres and his opinions were considered the most up-to-date. Local and visiting aviators were setting new 'firsts' and showing that flying had a firm future, while *The Sydney Morning Herald* declared that, 'Australia has thus placed herself in a ridiculous position in the aviation world'[51], and a poem published in *The Mail* on 10 January 1914 summed up the public sentiment:[52]



1914: 'The Flier'. Military Aviator: 'True we haven't flown; but the machines are not wasted. We get about a bit.' (*Punch*)

Though the clouds of war may thicken,
Does Australia fear a foe?
Every fellow's pulse will quicken
As he boldly answers, "No!"
For above the cannons' thunder
They will hear the motors' roar,
Drumming out the latest wonder—
Australia's Flying Corps.
Till now each biplane's rested in its crate;
They haven't had a chance to aviate.

We have bought all it requires
For a corps to be complete;
British aeroplanes and flyers,
With a record hard to beat.
Though they came out here and landed
Many, many months ago,
They've done nothing; to be candid,
They are sure, if they are slow,
And if we've got the patience just to wait,
In several years, perhaps, they'll aviate.

They have got to build a hangar
When they've picked a flying ground;
So please safety-valve your anger,
Till the chosen place is found.
They are drawing handsome wages,
And they answer, "Bye-and-Bye,"
When the poor taxpayer rages,
Asking when they hope to fly,
Perhaps flying will be getting out of date,
When really they begin to aviate.

Endnotes

1 Alfred Gollin, *No Longer an Island: Britain and the Wright Brothers, 1902–1909*, Heinemann, London, 1984, p.2. Northcliffe had used this turn of phrase on various occasions from 1905 to 1906.

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3 'Aeroplanes and the Army', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 May 1911, p. 8.

4 F.J. Kendall, 'Duigan, John Robertson (1882–1951)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, Canberra, available at: http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/duigan-john-robertson-6036/text10319, accessed 22 November 2013.

5 Neville Parnell and Trevor Boughton, *Flypast: A Record of Aviation in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1988, p. 10.

6 'Air Flight', *The Brisbane Courier,* 21 March 1910, p. 5.

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8 Commonwealth of Australia, file 1907/2/533 dated 16 January 1911; Irving later served as Chief of the General Staff in 1915.

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10 'Across Country in an Aeroplane: Remarkable Flight by Aviator Hammond', *The Advertiser*, 4 May 1911, p. 6.

11 'New South Wales: Sydney Citizens Surprised', *The Border Morning Mail and Riverina Times*, 4 May 1911, p. 3.

12 Macdonald died in the Thames River, London after a crash in a Vickers monoplane on 14 January 1913.

13 J.M Gordon, *The Chronicles of a Gay Gordon*, Cassell, London, 1921, pp. 300–2

14 Sir George Foster Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet: Thirty-Seven Years of Parliament*, Hutchinson, London, 1951, pp. 82–83.

15 *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, No. 97, 30 December 1911, p. 2399.

16 'Aviation Corps', *The Argus*, 10 July 1912, p. 14.

17 Walter Oswald 'Toby' Watt, OBE, MID, Legion of Honour, Croix de Guerre (1878–1921) had learned to fly at the Bristol School on Salisbury Plain and was awarded Royal Aero Club Certificate No. 112 on 1 August 1911. He joined the French Foreign Legion at the outbreak of World War I and transferred to the AFC in 1916, going on to hold squadron and wing command positions.

18 'Oswald Watt: The Leader the RAAF Never Had', http://mhhv.org.au/?p=1664, accessed 20 January 2013.

19 'Aviation Corps', *The Argus*, 6 August 1912, p. 9.

20 'Aviation Corps: A School at Duntroon', *The Register*, 8 July 1912, p. 7.

21 'War in the Air: Australian School to be Formed', *The Advertiser*, 10 August 1912.

22 'Aerial Navigation: Hawker's Biplane', *The Argus*, 7 February 1914, p. 10.

23 National Archives of Australia: A289, 1849/8/205, 'Estimates 1911–1912 – Aircraft and Equipment for Aviation Corps'.

24 'Aviation Corps', *The Argus*, 10 July 1912, p. 14.

25 Lieutenant Arthur Longmore was awarded Certificate No. 72 on 25 April 1911.

26 'Aviation Corps: One Instructor Resigns', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 September 1912, p. 10.

27 'Australia's Air Ships: Arrival of Lieutenant Harrison', *The West Australian*, 28 May 1913, p. 6.

28 John McCarthy, 'Harrison, Eric (1886–1945)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, Canberra, available at: http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/harrison-eric-6583, accessed 3 January 2013.

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30 'Flying: Australia's Development', *The Daily Mail*, 7 January 1913, p. 7.

31 'The Aeroplane in Warfare: Commonwealth Aviation School', *The West Australian*, 8 January 1913, p. 10.

32 'Various Points of View', *The Independent*, 1 February 1913, p. 3.

33 'The Yorkshire Disaster', *Flight*, vol. V, no. 1, 4 January 1913, p. 10. Henry Petre was from

a staunchly Catholic family, and many of his antecedents were clerics.

34 Frank Doak, *Australian Defence Heritage: The Buildings, Establishments and Site of our Military History that Have Become Part of our National Estate*, Fairfax, Sydney, 1988, p. 106.

35 'Australian Aircraft: The Flying Corps', *Northern Star*, 3 June 1913, p. 3.

36 W.E. Dobney, 'The Story of the First Half Flight', MSS, 1973.

37 National Archives of Australia: A289, 1849/8/205, 'Estimates 1911–1912 – Aircraft and Equipment for Aviation Corps'.

38 'Airships and Defence: Australian Officers Dissatisfied', *The Advertiser*, 15 September 1913, p. 17.

39 'Australian Flying Corps: Site for Aerodrome', *The Argus*, 8 July 1913, p. 6.

40 From Federation in 1901, Melbourne acted as the seat of the Federal capital prior to the construction of the city of Canberra, and the headquarters of the Department of Defence was located in Melbourne's Victoria Barracks. The Federal Parliament moved to Canberra after the opening of Parliament House in 1927, and the Department of Defence moved to Russell Offices in 1958.

41 H.C. Miller, *Early Birds*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1968, p. 7.

42 National Archives of Australia: A289, 1849/8/398, Revised Proposals for Formation of Flying Schools and Corps.

43 National Archives of Australia: A2023, A38/5/4.

44 'Land Commission: Sir Thomas Bent's Evidence', *The Argus*, 3 July 1909, p. 21.

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46 'Federal Budget', *The Argus*, 3 October 1913, p. 11.

47 'Purchase of Land for Defence Purposes at Werribee, in the State of Victoria', *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, No. 83, 17 October 1914.

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51 'Commonwealth Flying Corps', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 January 1914, p. 22.

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1913: Henry Chester preparing the Deperdussin for an engine test run at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne (RAAF Museum)

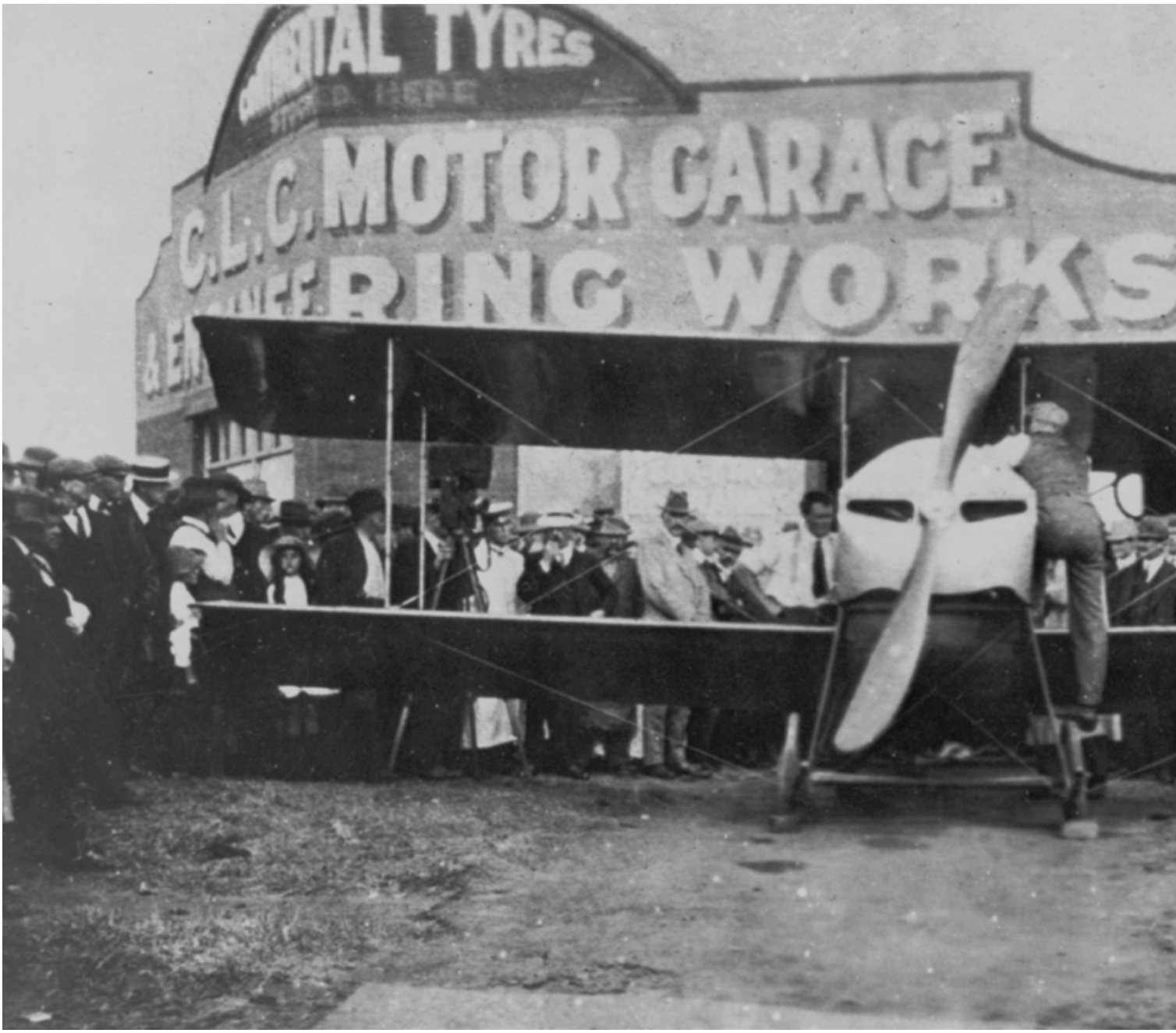
Chapter 2 - The Camp

Public interest in military aviation was very high at the beginning of 1914, and the Australian Government had so far failed to deliver what it promised. Despite having taken delivery of the modest fleet of training aircraft and employing six staff members on high wages, no military flights had taken place. However, by the end of the year, Australia had a fledgling military aviation training capability and the first course of pilots and mechanics had been trained.

Andrew Fisher's Labor Government was ousted by Joseph Cook's Commonwealth Liberal Party Government in June 1913, and this change led to a delay in establishing the flying school. More significantly, war preparations had been going on for over four years, and the cost was mounting. The implementation of the Universal Training Scheme, suggested by Lord Kitchener, proved to be very expensive, and public support for military expansion for a European war began to wane. Pearce's successor as Minister for Defence, Senator Edward Millen, commenced what he termed a 'go slow policy'.[1] This further delayed the contract for the hangar construction at Point Cook and pushed back the start of military flying.

In the path worn by Kitchener in 1910, General Sir Ian Hamilton visited Australia to make an inspection of the nation's war preparations in February 1914. Hamilton was Britain's Inspector-General of Overseas Forces and was to earn a further place in Australian history as the commander of the Gallipoli landings. His visit was instigated by the Australian Government, and he was hosted on his inspection tour by Brigadier General Josef Gordon, who had been promoted from state commander in New South Wales to Chief of the General Staff. It was even suggested that Sir Ian Hamilton might be taken for a flight in an Australian military aircraft during his visit.[2] Hamilton was a strong supporter of military aviation for Australia, but he also understood the need for the Navy and Army to fund higher priorities.[3]

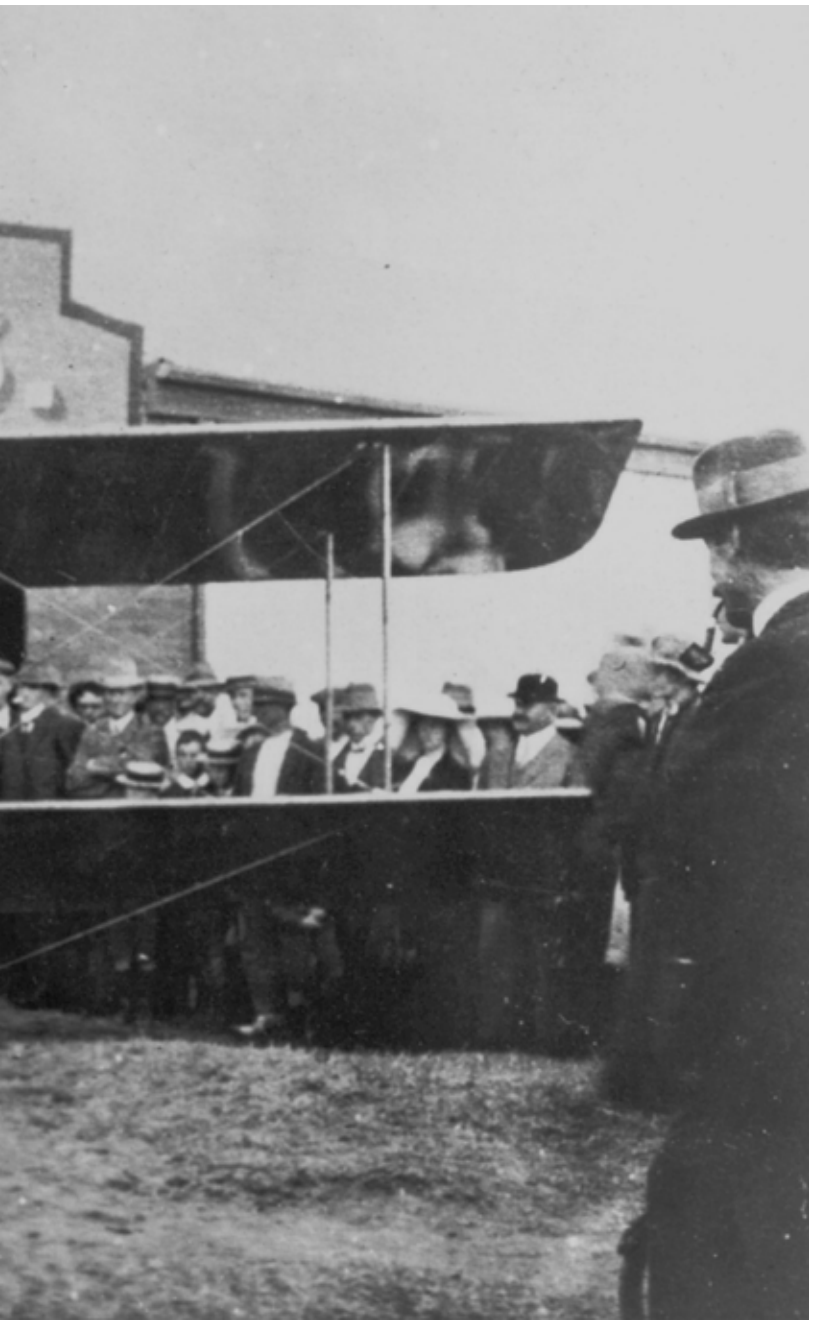
On 7 February 1914, Harry Hawker flew a series of demonstration flights at Caulfield Racecourse in Melbourne, where he took paying passengers on a few flights at £20 each. His flights made flying look very easy, and Senator Millen was there to see them. *The Sunday Times* reported, 'If Hawker is satisfied with a suburban garage as a hangar and an unfrequented road as an aviation ground, Mr Millen could see no reason why the departmental airmen should not fly by the end of February'.[4] To gain firsthand experience, Millen arranged to fly with Hawker during a test flight at the Elsternwick golf



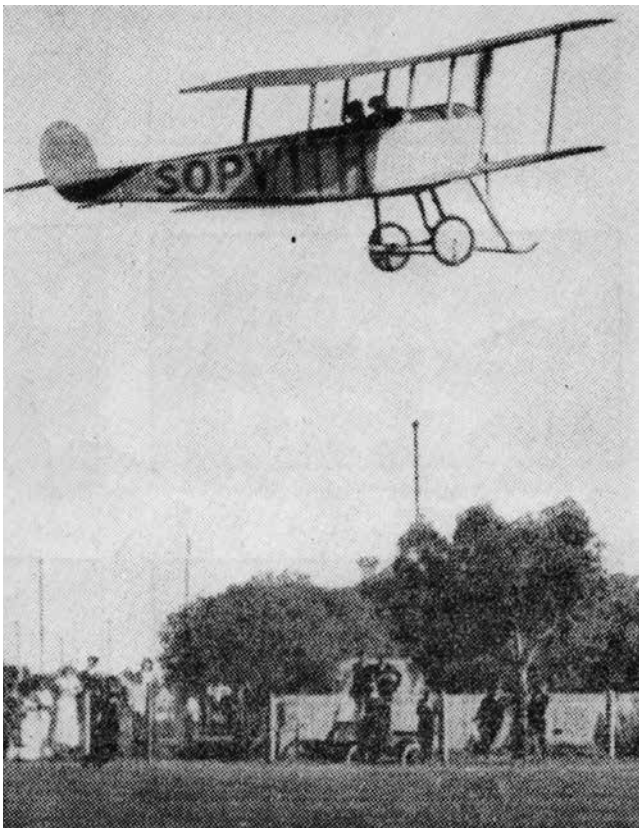
1914: Harry Kauper (Hawker's mechanic) preparing Harry Hawker's Sopwith Tabloid aircraft for its first Australian flight on New Street, Elsternwick, Victoria (Chris Hawker)

links on 11 February. Millen's intention to fly was kept a closely guarded secret. Petre and Harrison—who knew Hawker from their time together at Brooklands, England—watched from the ground, and Hawker took Harrison for a flight after Millen.[5] The press, in later comment, understood Petre and Harrison's frustration and noted that, 'They have possessed their souls in patience outwardly, but inwardly have fumed at the delay. The airman deprived of the opportunity for flying is a sad man.'[6]

The die was cast, and military flying had to commence at Point Cook, whether the facilities were ready or not. Senator Millen declared that the military aviation scheme 'has been a muddle from beginning to end'.[7] He ordered the instructors into the air before the end of February



and authorised the use of a large tent to act as a temporary hangar awaiting the permanent hangar and workshop, due to be completed in May. The two Deperdussin monoplanes and single Boxkite biplane were repaired at Victoria Barracks after their deterioration in transit and storage, and engine run tests were carried out. Stores were requisitioned and assembled, and an overland telephone line was



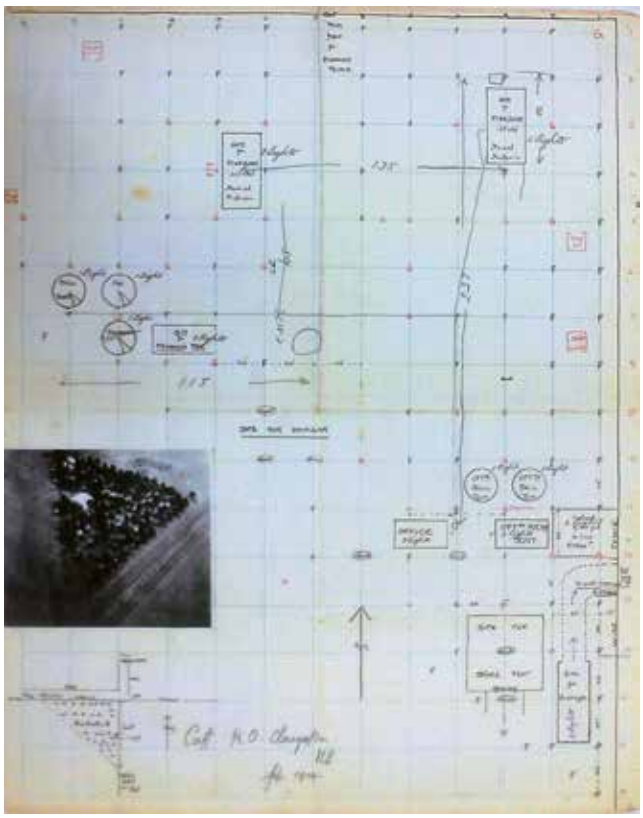
1914: Harry Hawker taking Senator Edward Millen for a flight at Elsternwick golf links (Coles Funny Picture Book)

connected from Point Cook to the Williamstown exchange.[8] However, the access road was still not made.

The advance party—comprising flying instructor Harrison, mechanics Chester and Fonteneau, and caretaker Bill Lord—arrived at Point Cook on Monday 16 February 1914 and set up camp.[9] Their basic set of stores included tents, bedding, lamps, cooking equipment, water buckets and washing tubs.[10] The advance party was joined a week later by Petre, mechanics Shorland and Heath, and military stores clerk Williams[11]; and on Saturday 28 February—the last day of the month—the crates containing the Boxkite and one of the Deperdussin aircraft were moved from Victoria Barracks to Point Cook.[12] Arrangements were also made to grub out about 20 tree stumps from the paddock.[13]

The permanent hangar and workshop being constructed by builder Walter Cooper were located at the southern end of the aerodrome near the shore of Port Phillip Bay. However, there was no shelter

1914: additional camp stores arriving at Point Cook on 28 February—two weeks after the advance party (RAAF Museum)



1914: Captain Clougston's February 1914 grid plan of the aviation school camp showing the location of the trees and tents (photo of camp area glued to map many years ago) (RAAF Museum)

for a summer camp in the vicinity of the hangar. The only shelter on the entire Point Cook property was at the opposite northern end, where a triangle of about 100 trees had been planted to provide shelter for grazing sheep during the time of the Chirnside family's ownership. The plantings were a mix of tall pine and gum trees.

Captain Clougston of the Royal Engineers drew a sketch plan of the camp layout in February. Within five months, he was serving at Gallipoli and was responsible for work on roads in the ANZAC occupied areas, including the well-known Artillery Road. His Point Cook plan showed the location of the living tents, latrines, stores tents and the large canvas hangar designed by Petre to house the aircraft. The plan was annotated with notes about providing electric light to the tents. In typical engineering manner, Clougston described every tree and shrub planted in their triangle of trees, and he even graphically 'rectified' the misalignment of the plantings. The plan suggested places where the wire fence should be cut to provide access to different parts of the site. One of those gaps in the fence, which gave access to a proposed garage, survives

1914: the Boxkite aircraft after first assembly at Point Cook with Henry Chester at the controls and mechanic Ted Shorland behind (RAAF Museum)

1914: the view from inside the camp at ground level (RAAF Museum)

today as the intersection of Cole Street and Williams Road.

The first flight by a military aircraft in Australia took place on Sunday 1 March 1914. Under a cloak of secrecy, the Boxkite and one of the Deperdussin aircraft were test flown on the day after they arrived at the camp from Victoria Barracks. The day started dull and cloudy—with reports of rain and wind up to 25 knots[14]—but cleared by late morning and reached 18 degrees Celsius. Harrison took the Boxkite for a short flight around the aerodrome, and then he took Petre for a flight as his passenger.[15] The flights lasted for about 15 minutes each, reaching a height of about 1000 feet, and the aircraft 'worked splendidly'.[16] The disgruntled press were not informed until after the flights and belatedly informed the public on 3 March.

Further flying of the Boxkite on 1 March was curtailed by the first military flying accident, when the spinning propeller was damaged beyond repair by a dog running into it.[17] Petre took the Deperdussin for a short flight later that day. Both airmen had not piloted an aircraft for over a year. Harrison flew the Boxkite again the next day after a new propeller was fitted. Three days later, he flew a circuit over Werribee, Laverton, Williamstown and Newport several times in a two-hour flight in the Boxkite.[18] Petre flew the Deperdussin along the coast to Williamstown and back on the same day.[19] These two flights were the final preparation for the first official flight, due to take place the following day, on 5 March.

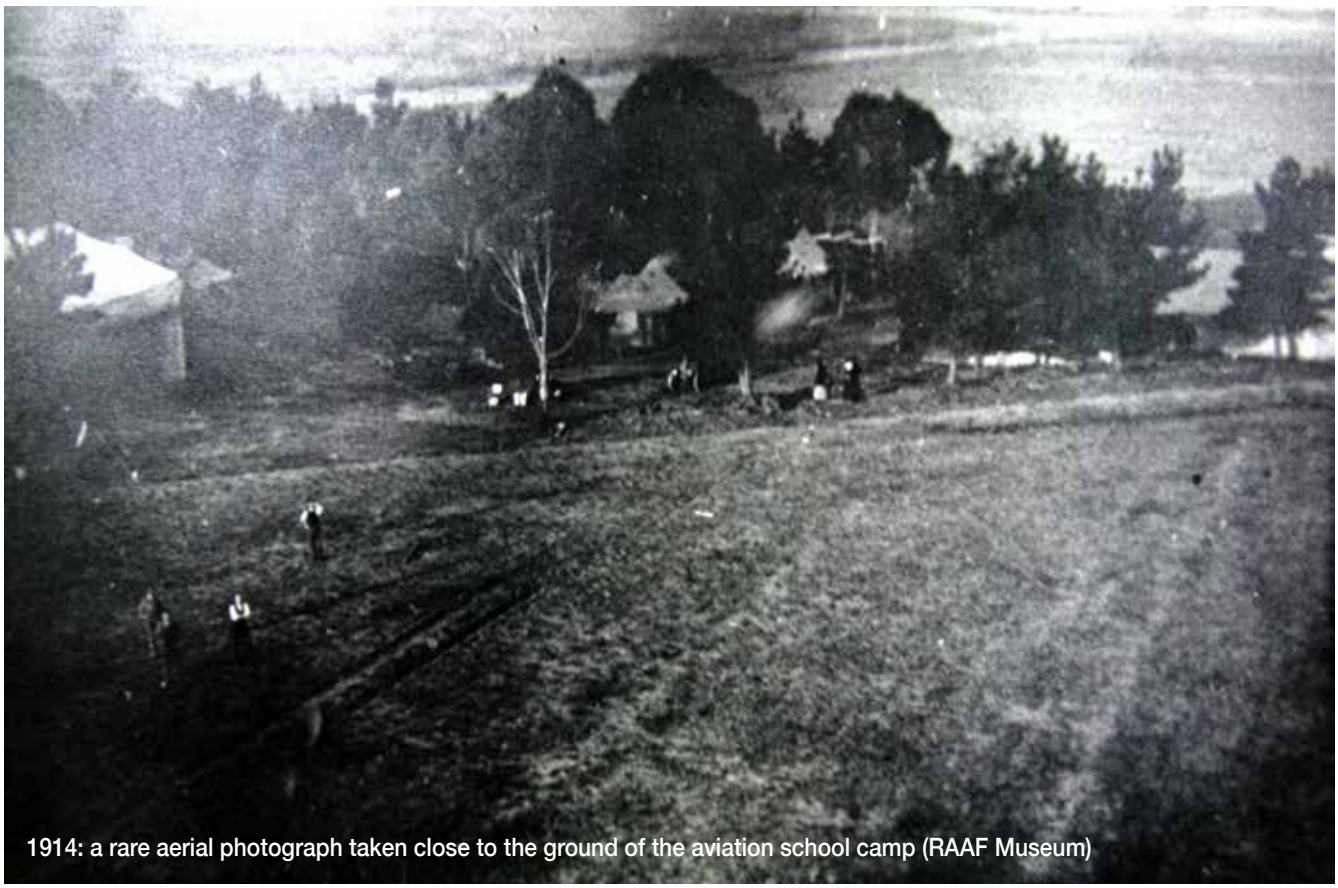
Meanwhile, Hawker in his more modern Sopwith Tabloid aircraft stole a march on the military. He had travelled to Sydney, where he took the Governor-General Lord Denman for a flight on 22 February during one of his many public displays[20], and he even proposed a flight from Melbourne to Sydney. His popularity was so high that even the cavalry camped near Goulburn, New South Wales offered £100 by their own subscription for Hawker to give a flying demonstration at their camp on

his way to Albury.[21] As *Punch* (a British satirical magazine) reported, 'The visit of Hawker has not been without excellent public effect', adding in reference to the 1 March flights at Point Cook that, 'It has actually resulted in inducing our military airmen to take to the air'. The report caustically added that, they had not flown 'till young Hawker's exploits and the resulting comments shamed them into an effort'.[22]

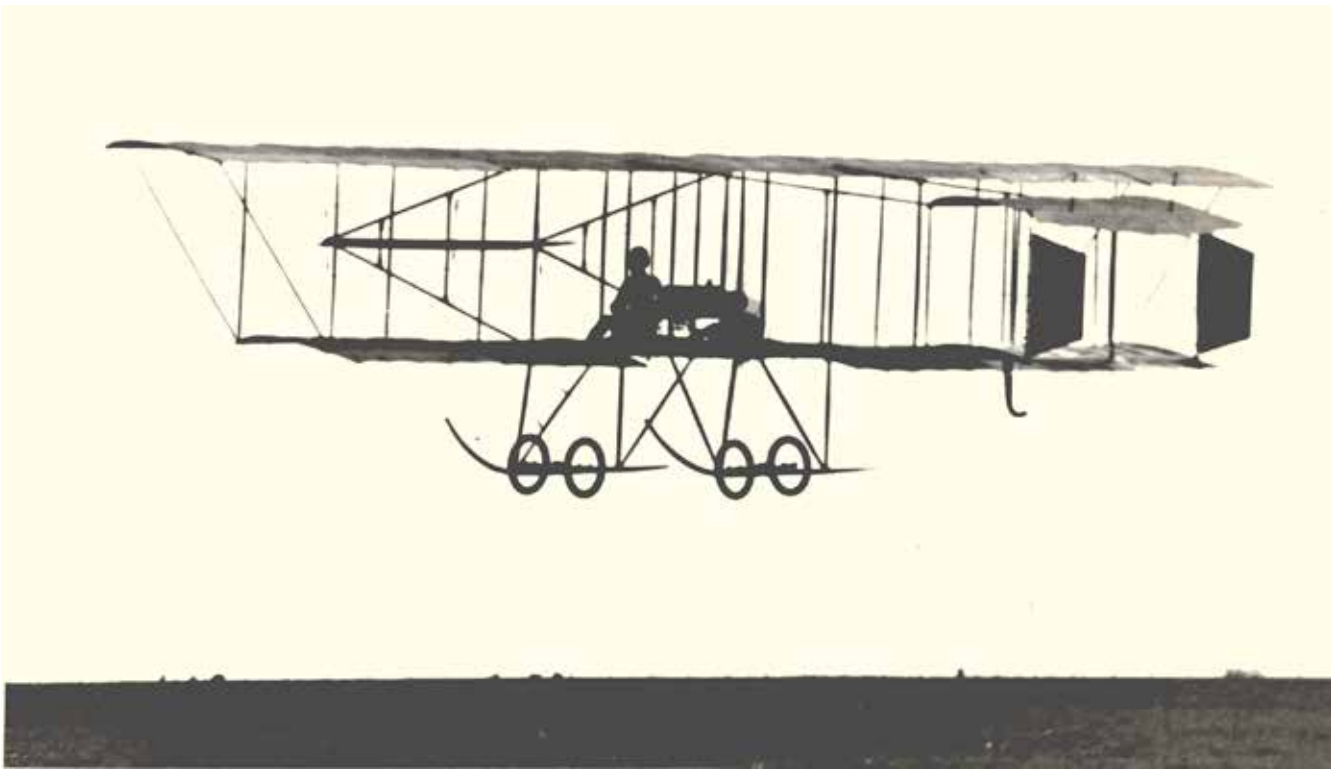
If there was any serious thought of having Sir Ian Hamilton make the first official flight, it was dashed by his full itinerary. In fact, Hamilton inspected a drill hall that morning, before paying a visit to the Governor of Victoria and attending the races at Flemington.[23] The honour of the first official flight fell to the Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier General Josef Gordon. It was planned to carry out the flight in the morning, but the wind was too gusty, and flying was postponed to the afternoon. The wind dropped straight after the postponement, and the calm day was only interrupted by more

1914: Harry Hawker taking Governor-General Lord Denman for a flight in Sydney (National Library of Australia)

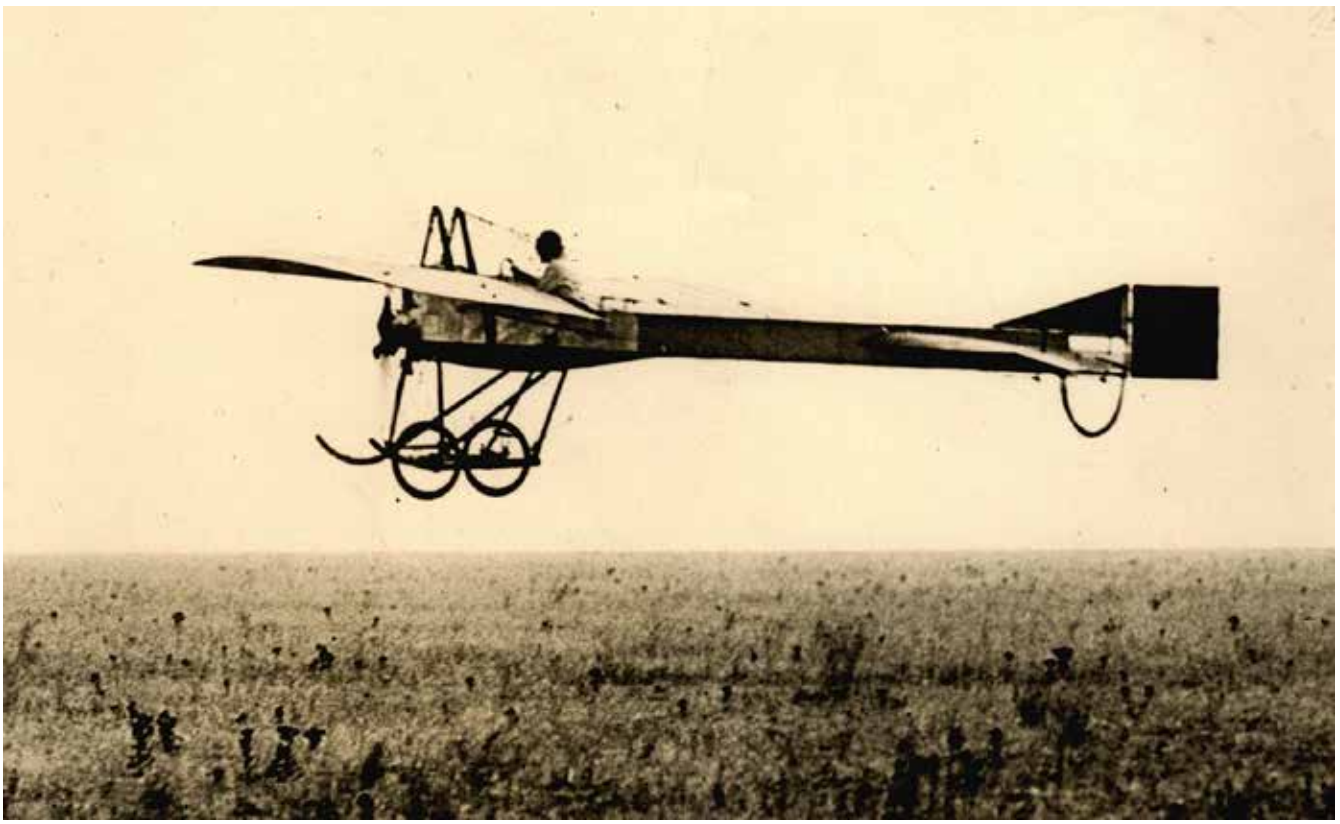
30 knot gusty winds when Gordon and his party arrived at Point Cook midafternoon. The party included Major Cyril 'Brudenell' White—who was the headquarters officer responsible for the early development of the school and corps[24]—and his successor, Major Eric Reynolds. Petre was landing the Deperdussin as they arrived. He had decided it was too windy to continue flying. However, Gordon



1914: a rare aerial photograph taken close to the ground of the aviation school camp (RAAF Museum)



1914: Bristol Boxkite aircraft CFS3—the first Australian military aircraft to take flight (RAAF Museum)

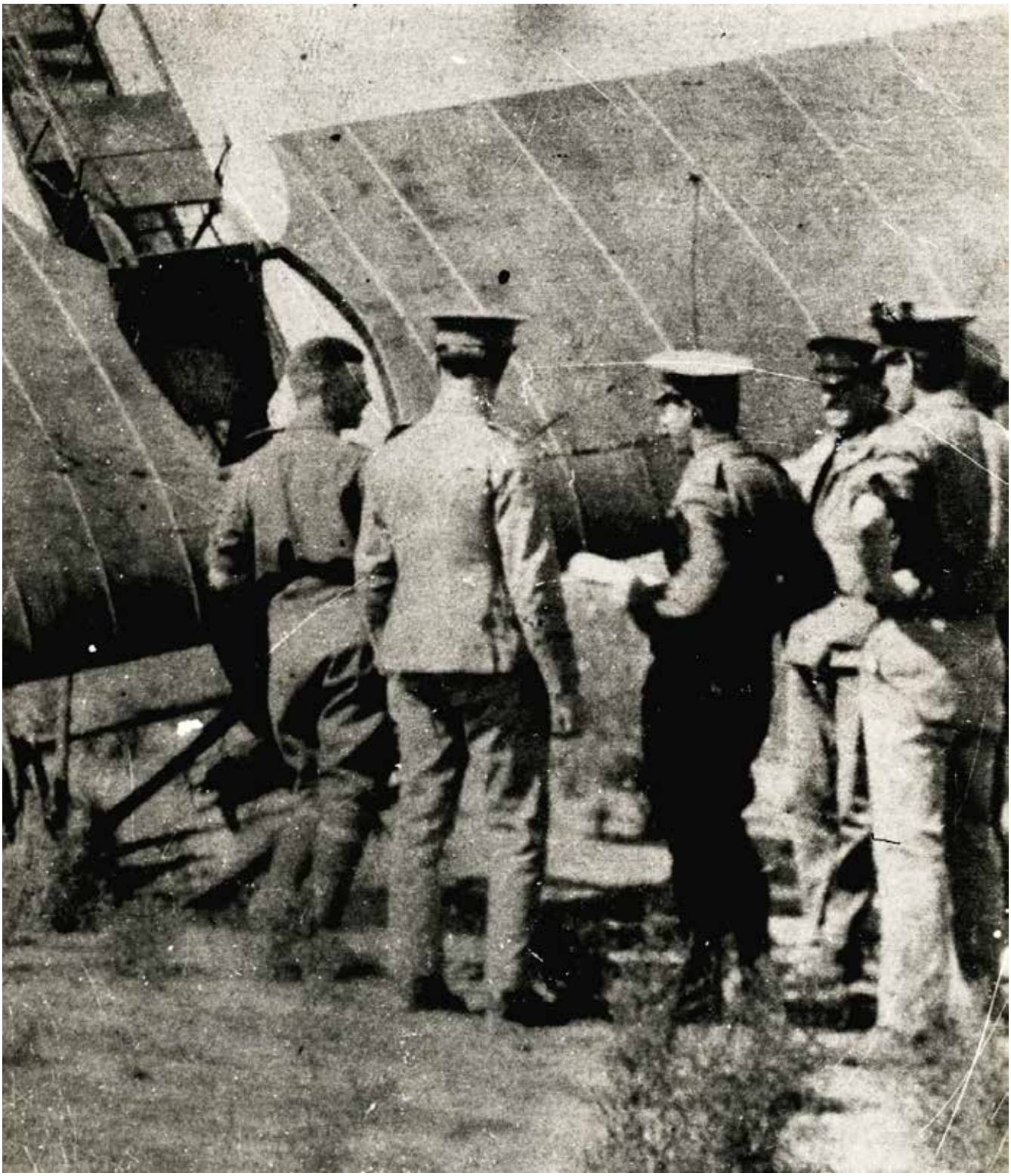


1914: Deperdussin monoplane CFS4—the second Australian military aircraft to take flight (RAAF Museum)

insisted on being taken for a flight. He had flown in a Boxkite with Hammond when he was the New South Wales Commandant, so he felt confident in his demand. Harrison took him on board the military Boxkite, which almost overturned on start-up due to the wind gusts. The low power of the aircraft and the weight of two people, combined with the 30 degree air temperature and gusty wind, made it impossible for the Boxkite to gain any height. During a take-off roll of over six kilometres, the aircraft only lifted from the ground a few times to a height of about 30 feet. The wind was so strong that the Boxkite appeared to hover for 30 seconds at one point, and it even appeared to fly backwards under full power for a time.

To the horror of the small official party of onlookers, the Boxkite only just managed to clear the three-rail timber fence that divided the paddocks, and Harrison was launched momentarily from his seat. Harrison was not game to turn the aircraft broadside to the wind for fear of it tipping, and he gave up his attempt to take Gordon for a flight many kilometres from the start at the triangle of trees. He shut the engine down and asked Gordon to alight into a thistle patch. The mechanics came by car to swing the propeller for Harrison to take off solo and to rescue the general, who was described as 'somewhat weather-beaten and sunburnt, but quite collected'.[25]

1914: Chief of General Staff Brigadier General Josef Gordon (at rear) on Bristol Boxkite CFS3 with Eric Harrison at the controls—Gordon took the first official flight on 5 March (RAAF Museum)



1914: crashed Deperdussin CFS4—the result of Henry Petre striking the telephone wire while landing on 9 March (RAAF Museum)

Harrison proceeded to give a flying demonstration; and on the approach to land, a gust of wind caused the aircraft to drop so that he could not feel the seat beneath him. He corrected and landed safely. After landing he said, 'I tell you, it took me all my time to scramble back and get control'. Further flying was cancelled.[26] One of the more powerful Royal Aircraft Factory B.E.2a aircraft would have been more suitable for such a flight, but they had not arrived in Australia until early February and were not ready for flying.

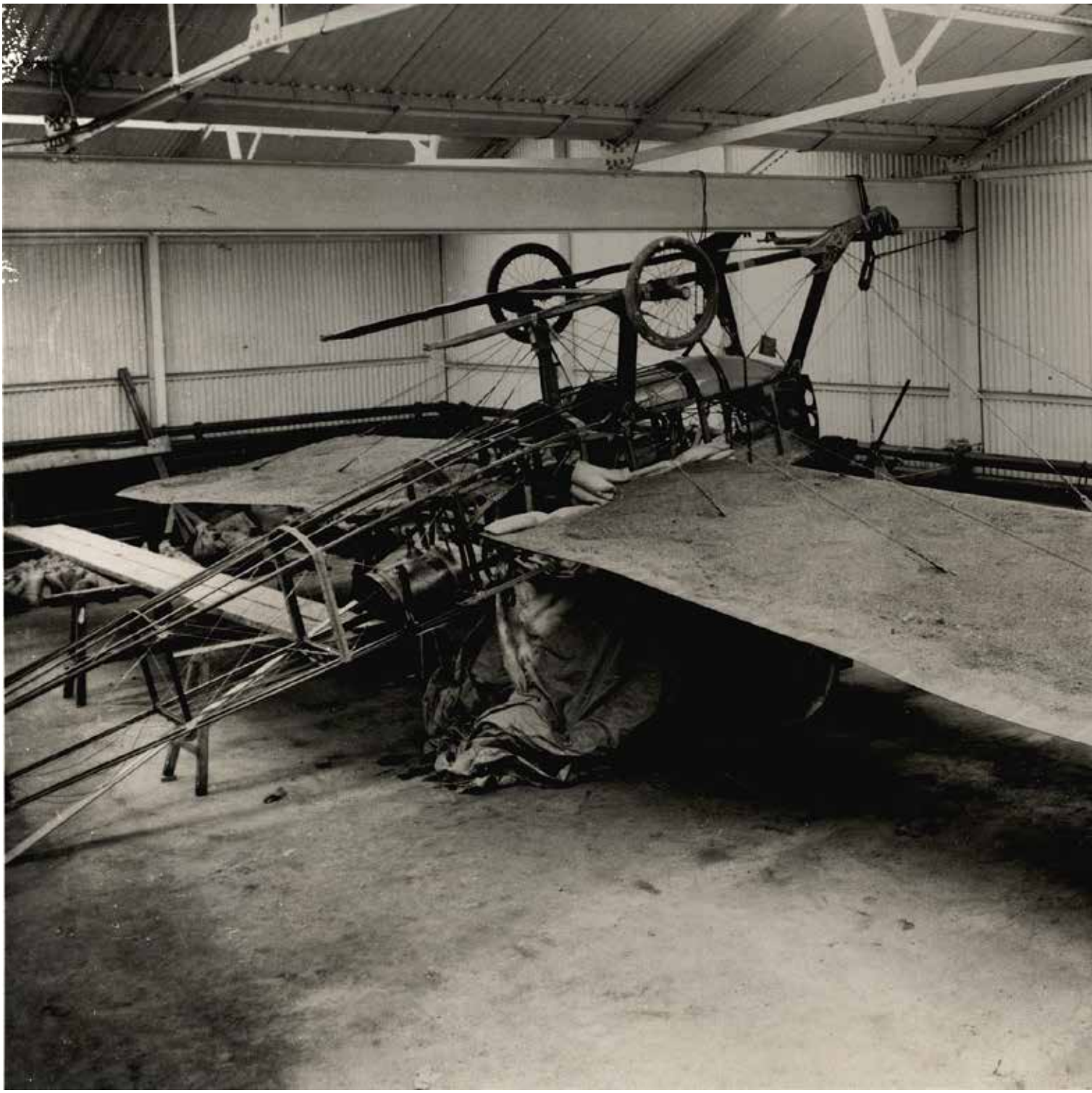
The local farming families at Point Cook and Werribee South took to their new neighbours well. The aircraft had flown over their houses, and they were curious to see the airmen at closer range. Word had got around that locals would be given a flight, and young Jo Cunningham turned up at the 'drome' at the appointed time in her slacks and sturdy shoes to go flying. She was told that only males could be taken for a flight, and she felt that disappointment keenly well into her nineties.[27]

The first air crash in an Australian military aircraft occurred on 9 March, four days after the first official flight, when Petre was 'volplaning' the Deperdussin to land at Point Cook. Volplaning was a standard practice that involved gliding the aircraft with the engine off. He only noticed the telephone wire when it was too late to avoid. He turned sharply close to the ground and stalled. The right wing struck the ground, and the propeller smashed into the ground causing it to shatter. The engine was bent, as was the fuselage; and the aircraft was beyond repair. Luckily, Petre only sustained bruising. As a result, the Boxkite remained the only serviceable flying aircraft. The other Deperdussin was a 'taxi model' for ground training only; and the B.E.2a aircraft were not suitable as an initial trainer due to only one person being able to reach the controls—regardless, they had not been assembled.

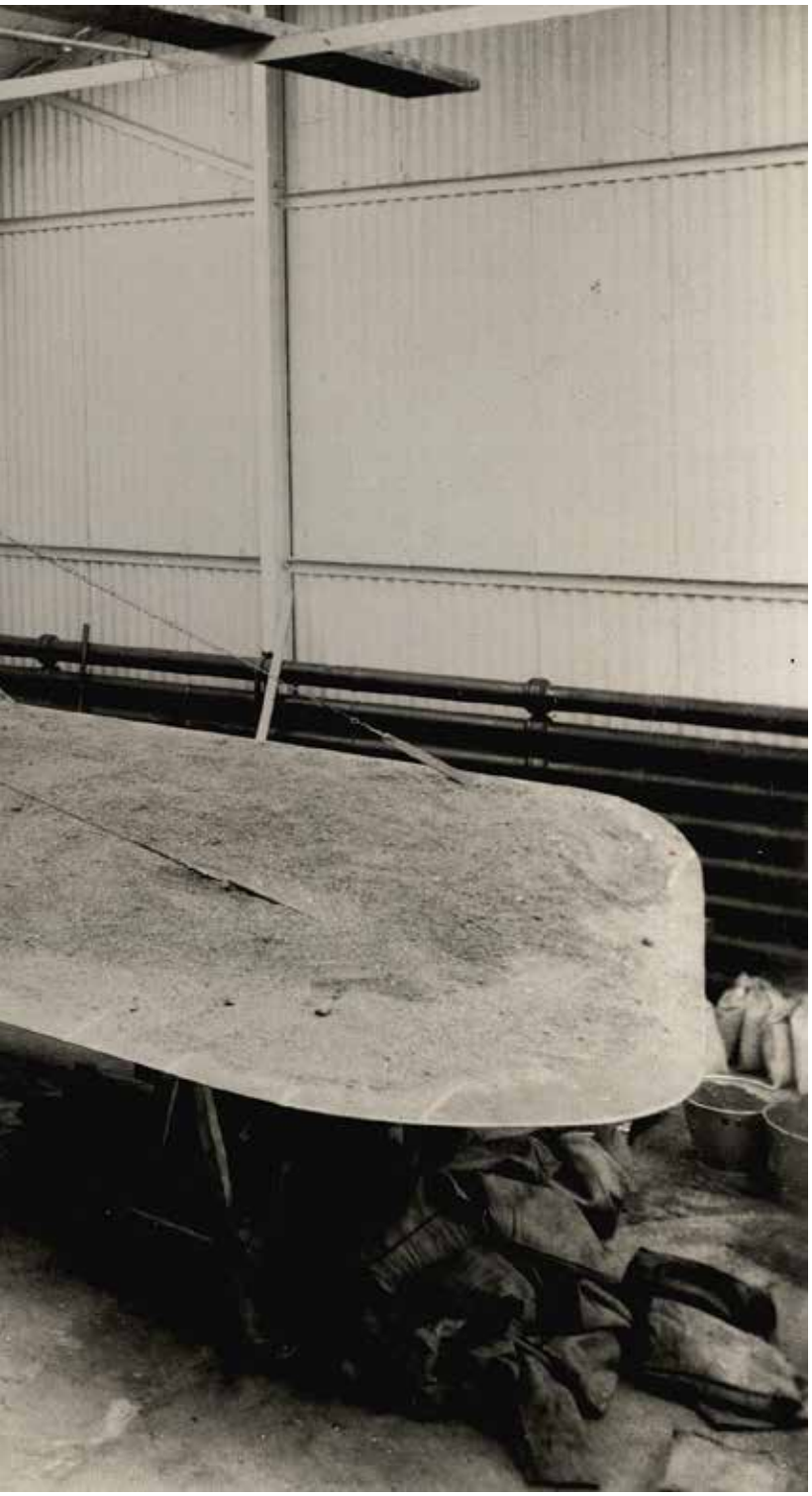
Minister for Defence, Senator Millen, had previously expressed concern about a crash reducing the ability to train pilots. He made a reportedly unannounced late afternoon visit to Point Cook two days after the crash on 11 March. He was joined

1914: Ruby Millen and Eric Harrison on 11 March—inscription reads: 'Reminiscences of your first flight, after a dusty and rough ride with yours truly.' (Suzanne Birrell)

by Harry Hawker with his chief mechanic, Harry Kauper, and two friends. Petre was not at the camp, and Harrison had finished work for the day. Millen inspected the wreckage, and Harrison decided to make a short demonstration flight in the Boxkite despite an unfavourable hot, northerly breeze. He landed and invited Millen to join him for a six-minute flight. Setting aside the rule to only take male passengers, Millen's daughter Ruby accepted Harrison's invitation for a short flight, which she enjoyed very much. The Minister was placated, and he made it clear that he did not blame the aviators for the delays in finally getting the military aircraft into the air.[28] Hawker's presence on the day, at the invitation of Millen, is telling and gives strength to the report that, 'had it not been for the recent displays by Mr Hawker it is quite possible that they [the military aircraft] would still be lying idle'.[29] Hawker's befriending of Millen and his public



1914: wrecked Deperdussin stored in a hangar (RAAF Museum)

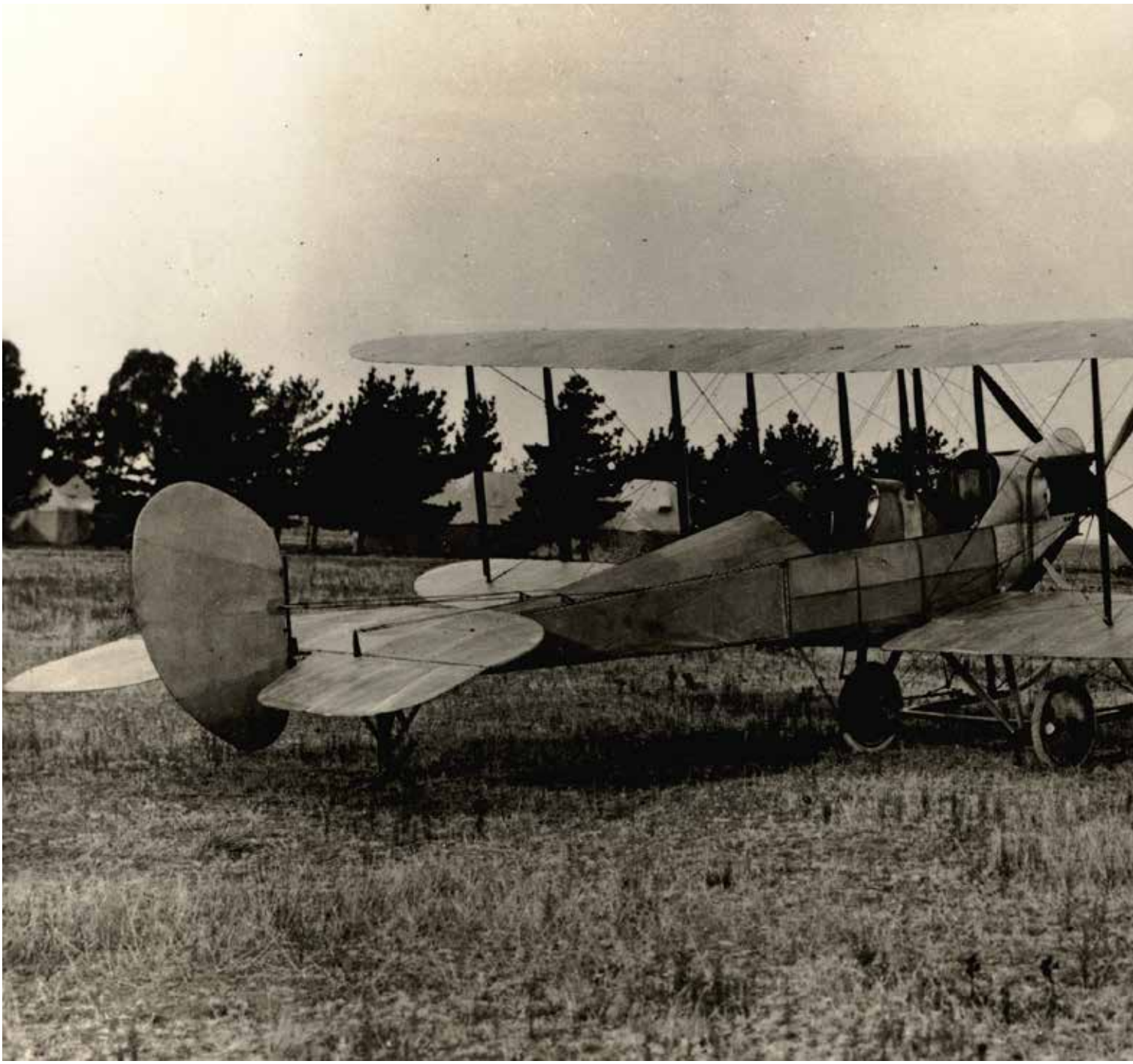


criticism of the outdated military aircraft types were motivated by his desire to secure a contract to supply Sopwith aircraft to the Department of Defence.[30]

Despite the success of the first military flights, Millen was not prepared to approve the expansion plan proposed by Petre and Harrison: 'their proposals were regarded by him as far too ambitious for such a young nation'.[31] By contrast, in March 1914, Lieutenant Eric Conran—an Australian-born member of Britain's Royal Flying Corps on holidays in Australia—reported that the British Army had 75 trained pilots in five squadrons operating 250 aircraft. They were flying every day in all weather conditions. The Royal Navy had more again.[32] In fact, while Australia was concerned about spending in the order of £10 000 for its aerial defences, Britain had voted £1 000 000 for the purpose in 1914.[33]

The next few months were spent with Petre learning to fly the Boxkite and both men testing the two B.E.2a aircraft. Flying activities included overland trips to nearby Gisborne, Winchelsea, Colac, Geelong and Queenscliff. For many inhabitants of these towns, it was the first time they had seen an aircraft. Harrison flew a B.E.2a with Major Reynolds as his passenger—a privilege Reynolds often insisted upon—on a flight across Altona Bay to Albert Park in May, and Harrison was very pleased with its performance. Albert Park was almost deserted in the late afternoon, but Reynolds later requested that the public keep to the fences if they see an aircraft likely to land in a public park.[34]

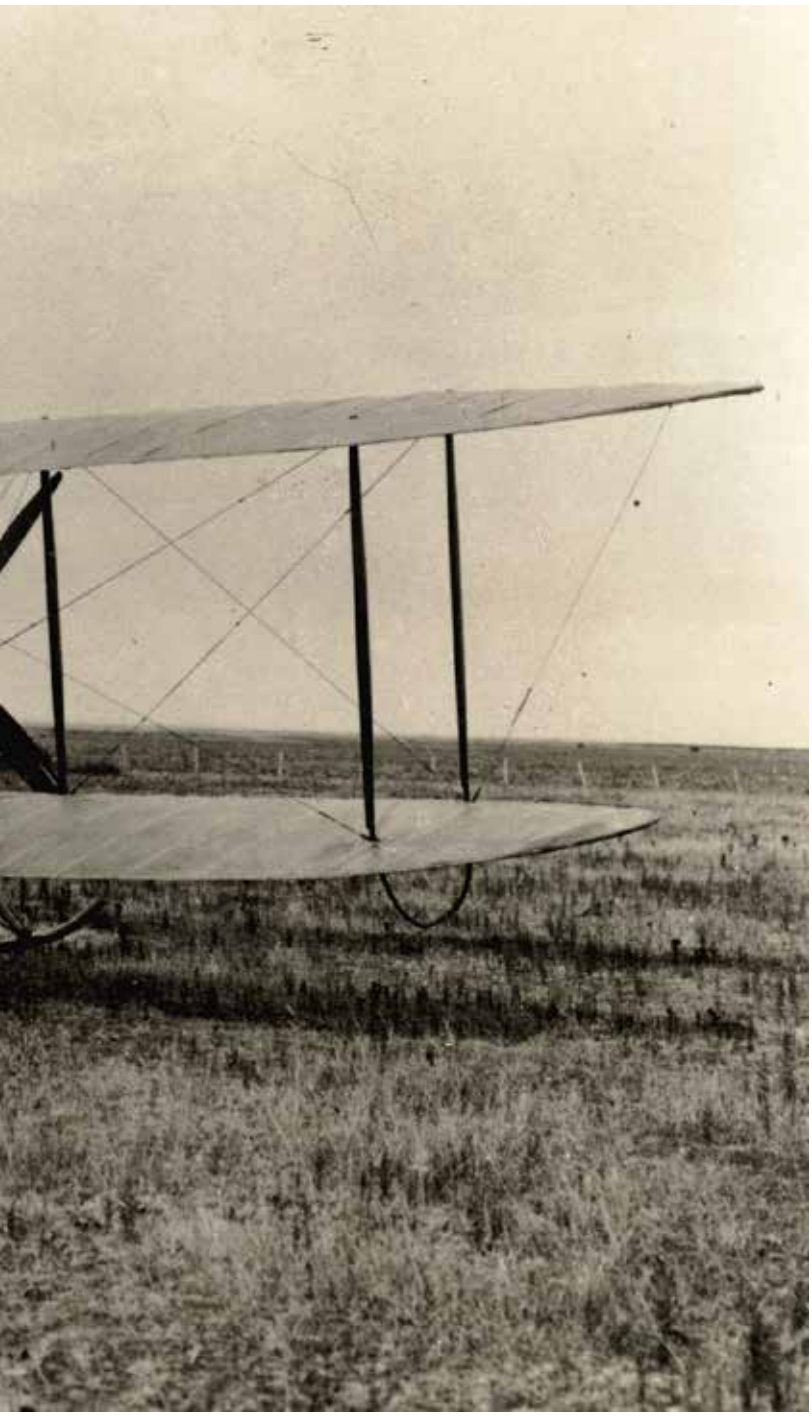
Despite overall satisfaction with the B.E.2a aircraft, the propeller coupling failed in both aircraft in June and August due to a design failure, without causing mishap in each case.[35] The ease and utility of flying was well demonstrated by Harrison, who used



1914: B.E.2a biplane CFS1 immediately after assembly (RAAF Museum)

the B.E.2a aircraft to carry out errands. The state of the road to Point Cook was so bad over the 1914 winter that Harrison found it easier to fly than drive to Werribee to collect the mail.[36]

There was heavy fog at Point Cook on the morning of 21 May 1914, but Harrison made two flights in a B.E.2a soon after dawn. He took military staff officers from Victoria Barracks with him on the flights. He flew through the cloud and into the clear air above, much to the delight of his passengers. On the first flight, he had no visibility of the ground at all and simply plunged into the cloud to land at the aerodrome once more.[37] The B.E.2a had none of the modern instruments that might allow flights in such



dangerous conditions. The following day, Harrison flew a B.E.2a over the official arrival of the new Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, at St Kilda in Australia's first military flypast.[38] If Harry Hawker had the lead on the military by taking the outgoing Governor-General for a flight, Harrison had made amends by greeting the new Governor-General in such style.

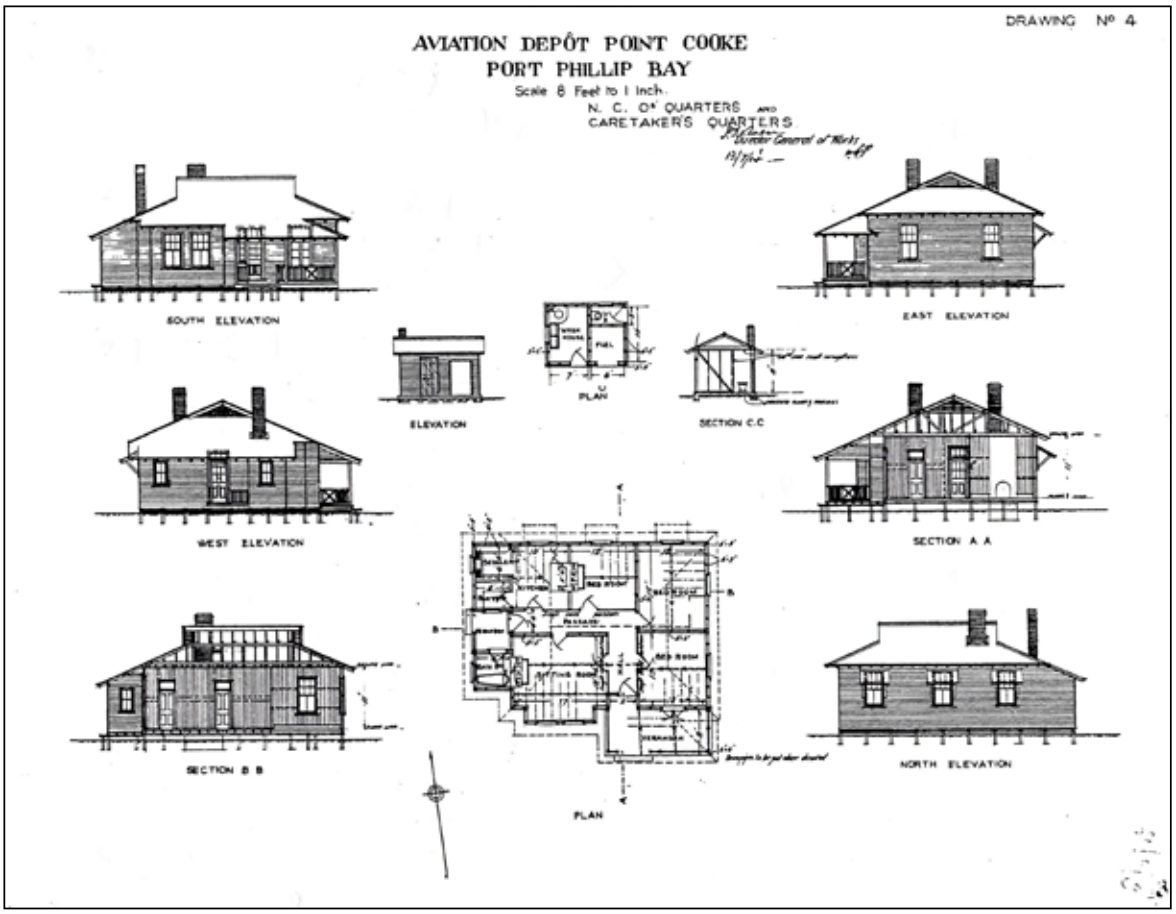
French aviator Maurice Guillaux arrived in Australia in May 1914, and carried out daring flying displays that included his signature manoeuvre of 'looping the loop.' While in Sydney, he made the maiden flight of Lebbeus Horden's new Maurice Farman hydroplane, which took off from the waters of Double Bay.[39] Naturally, the military use of hydroplanes became a topic of public conversation, but Senator Millen did not 'propose to rush and buy a number of seaplanes simply because a clever French aviator has demonstrated their utility.' Moreover, Millen had not been convinced of the role to be played by naval aviation in the defence of Australia.[40] However, in September, the public-spirited Horden offered the hydroplane to the Defence Department. Senator Millen accepted the offer, and the aircraft was housed at Point Cook.[41]

At Point Cook, the camp was gradually made more comfortable, and it included officers' and Mechanics Mess tents, two large tents for married mechanics, a stores tent and a kitchen. Caretaker Bill Lord and his wife Delia (nee Bree) lived on site in a 24 foot by 12 foot hospital tent with a canvas latrine until their cottage was completed in early 1915. The Lords had lived in Footscray, and Bill had been a baker and a storeman and was something of a jack-of-all-trades. Delia was a cook with some management experience and was engaged as the officers' cook and manager of their mess tent. She had previously been employed as a cook at the Missions to Seamen in Melbourne. It seems that her job at the camp came with being married to the caretaker, because she was not listed on the staff roll. Delia had great strength of character and was strict but kind-hearted, and she earned the respect of the young officers who passed through the mess at Point Cook. She was born in Ireland and migrated to Australia via Scotland after being disowned by her family at the age of 14. Her first kitchen at the camp was in one of the crates used to transport the stores and aircraft to Point Cook.[42]

Despite 1914 being one of the driest years on record in Australia, April had heavy rains in Melbourne, and the tents at Point Cook were not up to the task. The mess and stores tents leaked badly, because the rain pooled on top.[43] The wet weather also played havoc with Petre's canvas hangar. His roof design was too flat, and water pooled on it. While waiting for the permanent hangar to be completed, the solution was to fit three brass eyelets and place buckets under them.[44] The temporary repairs were carried out by a carpenter and sailmaker from the Government Harness Factory.[45]

The matter of the road to the camp was not resolved. It remained dusty in good weather and almost impassable in wet weather. In June 1914, the local council called for tenders to have the track that sufficed for the surveyed road given a decent surface. The work had been devolved to the local shire by the State Government with a payment of £2000. This was not sufficient, and the efforts to keep costs down ensured that a poor job was done—and even this was not completed until late 1915.

Meanwhile, building progressed on the workshop, hangar, office and oil store at the southern end of the aerodrome. The hangar was completed in July 1914, and it was due to be formally handed from the Department of Home Affairs to the Department of Defence in a ceremony on 13 July. However, the road was impassable due to mud, and the ceremony was cancelled.[46] The workshop was used to house the Boxkite, and the canvas hangar in the triangle of trees housed the two B.E.2a biplanes and the remaining Deperdussin monoplane[47], which was a ground taxiing trainer only. Also in July, the peacetime Army establishment was amended to



1914: plans for the Caretaker's Cottage and Non-Commissioned Officers' Quarters drawn by John Smith Murdoch (RAAF Museum)

1914: 'Flying Start'—one of the B.E.2a aircraft (foreground) and the Boxkite during one of the many sessions of hosting visitors prior to training the first course of pilots (Norm Clifford - QinetiQ Pty Ltd)

authorise the establishment of No 1 Flight of the Australian Flying Corps.[48]

Arrangements were finally in place to commence training flying students and mechanics. After advising the selection criteria and calling for nominations, three flying students were selected from applicants already serving in the militia: Captain Thomas White and Lieutenants David Manwell and George Merz. One was chosen from the Permanent Forces: Lieutenant Richard Williams. Due to White's rank of captain, Petre was promoted to the same rank.[49] Six aviation mechanic students were chosen: Leslie Carter, Norman Dyer, George Mackinolty, Reginald Mason, Hugh McIntosh and Arthur Murphy.

As senior mechanic, Sergeant Henry Chester was promoted to warrant officer in preparation for the courses, and Squadron Quartermaster Sergeant Samuel Hendy—who had served for six years in the garrison artillery—was posted to the camp. The staff was completed by the clerk, Mr Dearman: although before long, mechanic Pivot from the Renault engine factory in France joined the staff as a mechanic.[50] Training for the flying and mechanical students started on 17 August 1914, two years to the day after the British Royal Flying Corps' first course commenced. War was declared on 4 August 1914, and recruiting and training for overseas deployment commenced immediately. The lesser urgency of advising students of the need to attend the Central Flying School meant that the students were given short notice—less than two days in Richard Williams' case.[51]

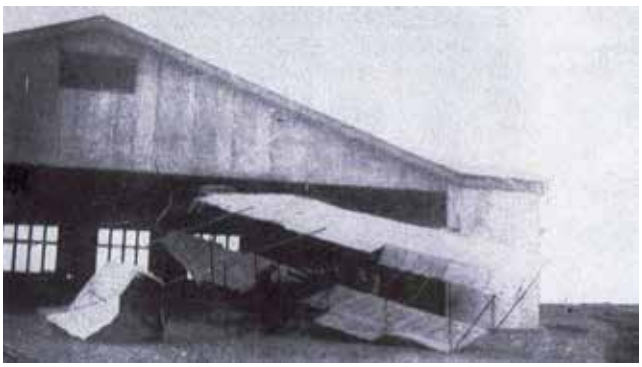
Williams described the scene at the camp well when he said, 'there was no air of an army establishment, apart from the tents, and the ground was in the same condition as when it was purchased—a sheep grazing area, now covered in long grass.'[52] However, a second phase of construction was planned that included the domestic buildings required to turn the camp into a permanent establishment. The building program beginning in October 1914 included single officers and mechanics quarters, a caretaker's cottage, a commandant's residence with garage, and four cottages for married mechanics. Sergeants Heath and Fonteneau were already married when they arrived in Australia, and Quartermaster Sergeant Hendy and Warrant Officer Chester advised that they were to be married early in the next year. Harrison had married Kathleen Prendergast—the daughter of State politician and later Labor Premier of Victoria, George Prendergast—in June 1914, with Petre as best man.[53]

The buildings were designed by John Smith Murdoch of the Department of Home Affairs, who was later responsible for the design of many of Canberra's early buildings as the department's Chief Architect.[54] The buildings follow a distinct style now termed 'Early Commonwealth Vernacular'[55], and all but the Mechanics Mess and commandant's garage survive.

1914: Lieutenants Petre (front passenger) and Harrison in CFS1 preparing for a demonstration flight (RAAF Museum)

The latter half of 1914 was concerned with training the students. The weather conditions were good on the whole, but as summer came on, the daily temperatures were too hot for the poor flight characteristics of the Boxkite. So, flying was usually done in the early morning and late afternoon, when the winds were also at their lowest. Petre kept a bulldog as a pet—perhaps a successor to the dog involved on the first day of flying—and it felt that running engines of aircraft were a threat to be dealt with. While the dog was usually kept on a chain during engine starts, he was left untethered on a few occasions; and twice he took a flying leap at the propeller of the Boxkite. He passed through, miraculously unscathed, on both occasions.[56] The mechanic students were instructed on the job, and they prepared the Boxkite for flying as well as keeping it clean and 'attending to it in the field', which usually meant retrieving it after distant landings. They also rebuilt the Boxkite after crashes, from the supply of spare parts.[57]

The most serious of those crashes was made by Tommy White while attempting to land the Boxkite on the morning of 11 September 1914. He had been on a short solo flight and was aware of the efforts required of the mechanics when landing far from the hangar. He tried to land too close in a crosswind and struck the gable of the workshop. The dent remains in the building to this day. The flying students pitched in with the aircraft repairs by stitching and doping the fabric.[58] As Senator Millen had feared, this left the school with no aircraft suitable for training students until the repairs were carried out, because the B.E.2a aircraft used wing-warping controls and were considered too difficult for students to fly. Throughout the first flying course, the flying students were grounded a total of four times due to aircraft damage, White and Manwell scoring two crashes each.[59]



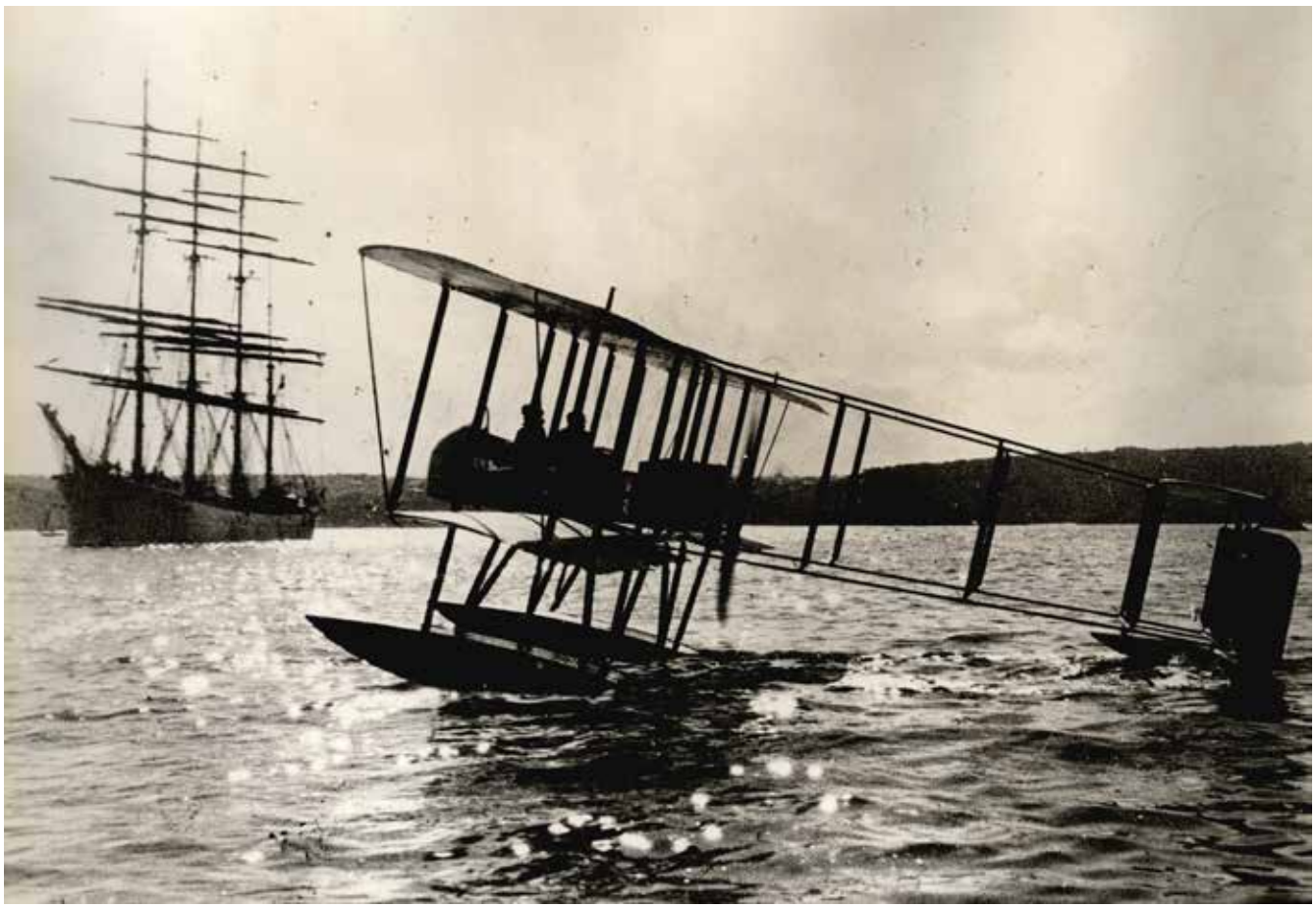
1914: Tommy White's crash in the Boxkite on 11 September (RAAF Museum)

A large degree of natural talent was required to fly in 1914. As White later said, 'Our instruction, in the light of subsequent advancement in aviation, was decidedly primitive.' Noting that there were no dual controls, he added, 'Our labouring box-kite, capable of only forty-five miles per hour, was provided with no instruments other than a barometer', and 'the senses took the place of instruments. One's ears did duty as engine counters; the rush of air in the face told whether the climb or glide was at the right angle.'[60] The flying students graduated in November 1914, with Merz being dux of the course. Williams was technically the first to qualify, having drawn

second straw to White, who failed to meet the requirements on his first attempt. The fortunes of the four men led in widely different directions. The mechanic students initially remained on the staff of the Central Flying School.

The Australian Aero Club was formed on 28 October 1914, when a meeting of the officers based at the camp at Point Cook decided to form a club to advance the cause of aviation in Australia and to act as a controlling body and social club. The meeting was chaired by Petre, and White was the club's first Secretary.[61] State sections of the club were formed in 1919, and the Victorian branch moved to the Commonwealth aerodrome at Essendon, adopting the name Victorian Aero Club. The 'Royal' prefix was awarded in 1935.[62]

By late 1914, military aviation had been established in Australia, and the newly fledged Central Flying School had met its aim of training aviators and aviation mechanics. While still somewhat novel, flying was overshadowed in public and political attention by the war in Europe; and the demand for resources was high from all military and naval quarters. Nonetheless, the work of the school was to carry on, and the World War I period was to be a heyday for the development of Point Cook. Point Cook overcame its faltering start to become the first permanent airfield and to have the first purpose-built aircraft hangar in Australia. It was the site of Australia's first military flight, first military crash and first aviation training centre—albeit operating with one obsolete aircraft. Point Cook remains the oldest continuously operating military airfield in world, and it has rightly earned the title of the Birthplace of Military Aviation in Australia.



1914: Maurice Farman hydroplane imported by Lebbeus Horden on Sydney's Double Bay (RAAF Museum)

1914: staff with flying and mechanic students—only Mrs Lord is missing from the full complement of those working at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

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34 'Fine Military Flight: Six Thousand Feet High', *The Leader*, 9 May 1914, p. 40.
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1914: aerial view of the camp showing the tents, notably the canvas hangar designed by Henry Petre (RAAF Museum)

Chapter 3 - Wish Them Luck

With the advent of World War I, the Central Flying School at Point Cook increased its training responsibilities and took on the additional role of staging contingents and reinforcements for overseas deployment with the Australian Flying Corps. Wartime flying instruction at Point Cook allowed all ranks to receive as much training as the time prior to embarkation permitted. Throughout World War I, eight flying instruction courses were conducted at the Central Flying School with 100 pilots commencing training.[1] The school did not have the ability to conduct anything more than basic flying and observation training, so more advanced on-the-job training in tactics and operations was conducted closer to the areas of operations in England, Europe and the Middle East. However, sound mechanical training was conducted at Point Cook, and the tentative beginnings of an aviation manufacturing and maintenance industry for Australia were established.

Australia's first Federal double dissolution election was held in late 1914 after the sitting Liberal Government was unable to pass legislation due to Labor's control of the Senate. War was declared midway through the election campaign; and under the return of the Labor Party, the school's champion, Senator George Pearce, reclaimed his old portfolio of Defence.

The new Government supported the war effort and, while staunchly advocating independent Australian armed services, 'recognised that a supreme effort by the Commonwealth is called for by the present war, and it is prepared to use its whole resources in men and money in order to give the greatest possible aid to the mother country.'[2] Military aviation was allocated £41 980, and Point Cook was promised additional hangars and workshops, as well as the purchase of several new biplanes. Under the plan—much of which was not achieved—a flight of the Australian Flying Corps was to be activated

1915: entrance to the Central Flying School (RAAF Museum)

and flights established in New South Wales and Queensland. Three courses of pilot training were to be carried out each year, with 12 pilots graduating annually, and 25 mechanics were to be trained each year. Significantly, aircraft manufacturing was promised to commence at the headquarters airfield at Point Cook.[3]

The first wartime deployment of an Australian aviation force came early in the war, when a small party from Point Cook left for German New Guinea at short notice in November 1914. The territory had been largely brought under Australian control in September 1914. The six-man party was led by Lieutenant Eric Harrison and comprised the newly graduated pilot Lieutenant George Merz, mechanics Sergeant Shorland and Private McIntosh and two other mechanics. They left Australia with one of the B.E.2a aircraft and Horden's Farman hydroplane, which he had donated to the war effort. The party steamed with an infantry battalion raised for garrison duties in the captured German Pacific territories that was given the initial task of ousting a reported German wireless station remaining on the Sepik River near Madang. The aircraft were to be used for observation and intelligence gathering. In anticipation of more robust action, Harrison and the mechanics fitted fixed propellers to the back of a number of artillery shells to convert them into bombs. However, the German wireless station was captured without the need of aircraft, and the disappointed contingent returned to Australia in January 1915.[4] The aircraft had not been unpacked, and on its return to Australia, the Farman joined the fleet at Point Cook. The aviation deployment was kept a secret until the personnel returned, and Harrison's absence was explained by a cover story that he was on his honeymoon after his recent marriage. All party members returned with malaria.[5]

A week before the return of the party from New Guinea in January, Captain Henry Petre and a mechanic caught the express train to Sydney to collect a Caudron aircraft that had been privately imported to Australia. Harrison had inspected the aircraft in November 1914, and the Defence Department had decided to buy it for £1500.[6] With some fanfare, it was proposed that Petre

1915: officers and soldiers of the Mesopotamian Half Flight posing beside their mess tent at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

1915: Mesopotamian Half Flight training camp at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

would deliver the aircraft in a flight from Sydney to Melbourne. They carried out a day and a half of testing of the aircraft at Richmond and declared it ready to make the flight to Point Cook by stages on 15 January. However, with the mechanic on board, the aircraft could only ascend to 1000 feet. Petre rightly refused to attempt the journey and they returned to Melbourne by train.[7] His landing of the Caudron at Point Cook would have coincided with a visit by the military State Commandants at the end of their conference in Melbourne. The aircraft was eventually bought a year later at a reduced price of £500 and taken into the small fleet of training aircraft at Point Cook. Richard Williams later said that, 'the Americans referred to it as a flying tub and declared that anyone who could fly it could fly a barn door.'[8]

In February 1915, the first course for aerial observers was held at Point Cook. Over a fortnight of training, the students—all serving artillery and staff officers—were taken on a number of flights and learnt to recognise terrain and spot enemy manoeuvres. To add realism to the training, troops were placed in the countryside and ordered to attempt concealment. In a curious twist, the aircraft were marked to identify them as Australian so that ground troops unaware of the training would not attempt to bring them down in accordance with standing orders.[9]

Early in 1915, the Indian Government made a request for Australia to provide 'trained aviators for service in Tigris Valley' along with the necessary aircraft, transport, spares and personnel. In his request, the Viceroy of India explained that 'all our trained officers are in Egypt and England'. He suggested that if aircraft were not available, they could be provided from England. Australia replied, offering a 'half flight' for service in Mesopotamia of four pilots and complementary support, as opposed to a full flight of eight pilots.[10]

Petre was selected to command the Mesopotamian Half Flight, and he invited Tommy White from the first pilots course to join him as pilot and adjutant. George Merz, also from the first course and by then instructing at Point Cook, was also selected. The fourth officer was William Treloar, an Australian who had gained his flying qualification in England.[11] The senior non-commissioned officers were selected from staff at the Central Flying School. As Petre was required to leave in advance of the contingent, White had the task of selecting the remaining non-commissioned personnel. They were selected from personnel in the Universal Training Scheme at the Broadmeadows camp, and 300 volunteers assembled for him to consider. As White

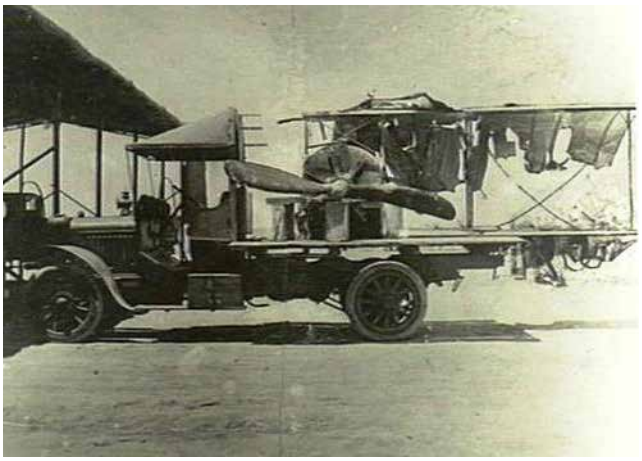
explained, 'selection of suitable men from among so many was not as easy as might be imagined, for competition was keen and scarcely a man seemed to lack the requisite qualifications'.[12]

White recognised and selected the twin sons of Point Cook caretaker Bill Lord to serve in the group of mechanics, woodworkers, riggers, metalworkers, blacksmiths, mule drivers and wheelwrights. Hector and Will Lord were well known at Point Cook and were highly regarded. They joined the 66th Infantry Regiment in Footscray in 1911 when Universal Training began. Preparation of the Half Flight was held at Point Cook, and on 20 April, they steamed for Mesopotamia via Bombay.

In a very distressing situation, a girl from Footscray, Annie Hogan, claimed shortly before embarkation that Will Lord was the father of her expected child. Annie and her mother visited Mrs Lord at Point Cook to demand redress. Mr and Mrs Lord believed their son's denial of paternity, but they urged him to act honourably, and he married Annie and allotted part of his pay to her. He did not see her again after the marriage service. Will declared himself single on his military documents, and his letters home show that he intended to return to Point Cook and his parents after the war.[13]

At Basra, the Half Flight joined with some British and Indian Army personnel and a New Zealand pilot, Lieutenant Burn. They went into action at Basra in May 1915. White and Treloar were captured in separate actions and made prisoners of war by the Turks. In July 1915, in the first wartime death of Australian and New Zealand airmen, Merz and Burn were killed during a running gun battle with local Arabs after a forced landing due to engine trouble. Their Caudron aircraft did not perform well in the extreme desert conditions. Armed only with revolvers and running and shooting for about eight kilometres, one of them was fatally wounded, and the other died fighting beside him.[14]

A group of fresh reinforcements was sent from Point Cook to join the Australians at Basra, arriving in September 1915. They were selected from the camp at Seymour and completed two weeks of



1915: the recovered wreckage of the Caudron GIII flown by Lieutenants Merz and Burn (RAAF Museum)

training at Point Cook on aircraft and vehicles.[15] This group of 10 mechanics was led by Sergeant Mackinolty from the first course of mechanics to be trained at Point Cook.[16] In April 1916, the British and Australian forces surrendered at Kut under overwhelming enemy numbers, and Mackinolty, Will Lord and 42 other Australians were among the 13 000 prisoners marched over 1000 kilometres to build a railway in the Taurus Mountains. Many died during the march and many more died in the construction camps. Of the original nine air mechanics from Point Cook taken prisoner at Kut, only two survived.[17] Mr and Mrs Lord at Point Cook and their son Hector Lord in the Middle East pursued all the channels available to discover Will's fate in captivity, but it was not until late 1917 that reports of his death from dysentery and exposure were confirmed by the Red Cross.

Henry Petre avoided captivity by being ordered to fly one of the two remaining serviceable aircraft from Kut before the surrender, and he carried out many flights to drop relief items to those who remained under siege. He was decorated for bravery and was known as a very skilled and gallant pilot. However, he was not cut out for leadership, and it was noted that he had insufficient control of his men and allowed too many stores and financial accounting discrepancies under his command.[18] After being overlooked for a promotion, in favour of Richard Williams, he applied for transfer to the

Royal Flying Corps, which eventually accepted him. He did not return to Australia for another 45 years.

Back at Point Cook, and with Petre on active service, Harrison took command of Central Flying School in April 1915. Those preparing for war there had direct contact with the 'enemy' when German internees were employed at Point Cook on work party duties from late 1915. They did tasks such as weeding, which probably involved removing the notorious thistles from the aerodrome.[19] They also began making the officers tennis court under Harrison's direction. At least two of the detainees escaped from custody at Point Cook: 20-year-old Ernest Boehme, in December 1915, and 19-year-old Ernest Golz, in February 1916. Their descriptions were circulated in an effort recapture them.[20] In August, Richard Williams, who was instructing on the third pilots course, took his mother and his newly married wife for a flight in a B.E.2a with Harrison's consent.[21] Joy flights were not uncommon, and there was even a report of a motorist running out of petrol a couple of kilometres from the Central Flying School. He walked to the camp to borrow a can of petrol and one of the pilots flew the petrol to his car.[22] The novelist Katherine Susannah Prichard was taken for a joy flight in July 1916.[23] There were even reports of aircraft racing trains along the Geelong line at slightly higher than carriage height masquerading as bomb-dropping drills on enemy trains.[24]

Despite such a seemingly relaxed attitude to flying, engineering standards were very high. The Gnome engines were reported to be overhauled after every 12 hours of flying, and the airframes were stripped of their fabric and checked every 50 hours. The remaining Deperdussin, which was used for taxiing and engine starting practice only, was maintained by the flying students to give them mechanical experience.[25] There is a rumour that Harrison once gave the taxi Deperdussin a short hop flight of a few seconds in 1915—its only ever time in the air.

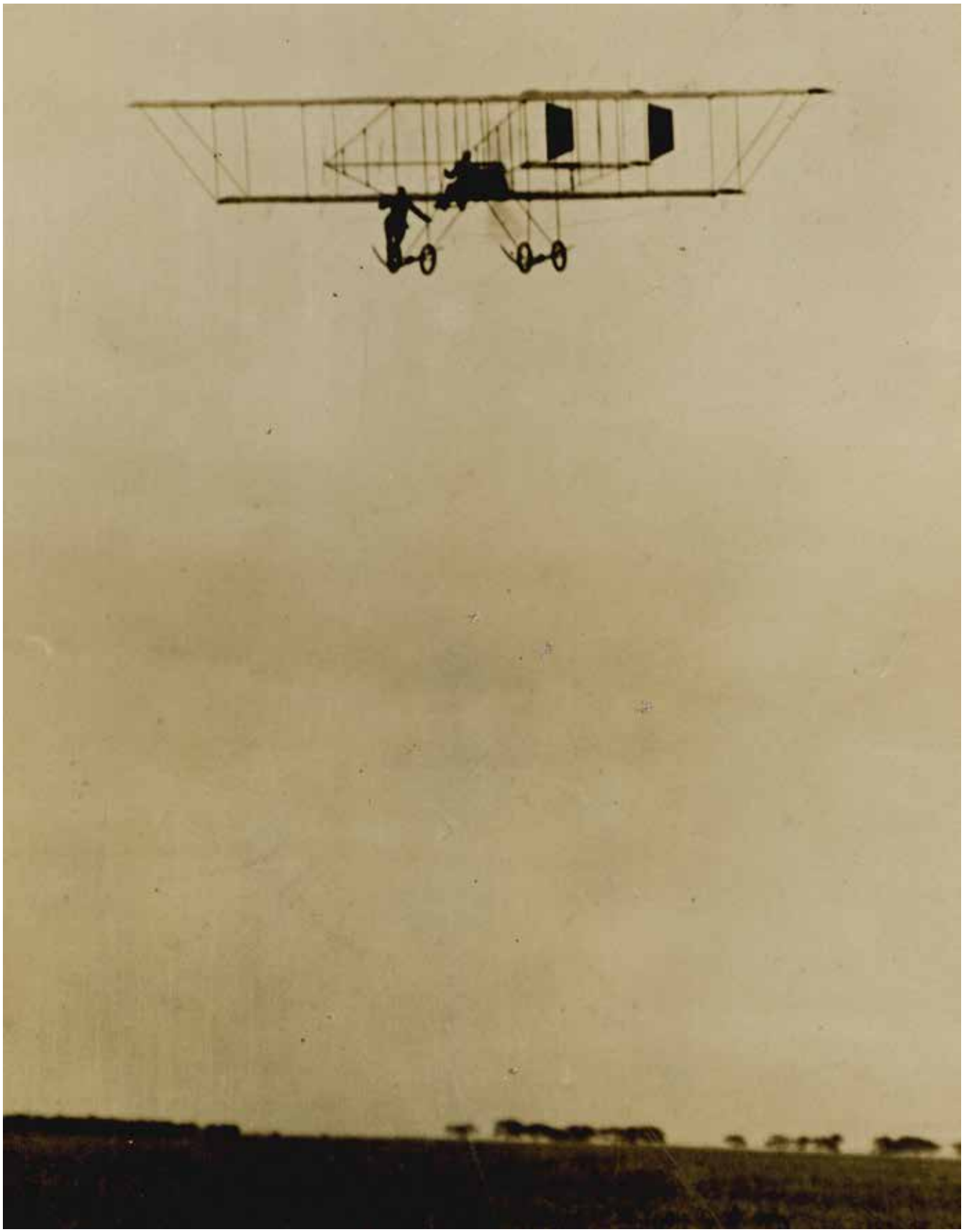
1915: Lieutenant Richard Williams and his mother on a joy flight (RAAF Museum)

On 10 August 1915, the first of the promised Australian-made military aircraft was taken for its maiden flight by Harrison.[26] The Boxkite aircraft was assembled from the many spares held in store at Point Cook, and it used one of the spare imported Gnome engines. The mechanics were very proud of their efforts, and most importantly, a second training aircraft was made available.

Senator George Pearce accepted an invitation to inspect the Boxkite at the end of August. He also inspected the additional workshop and hangars under construction, including one for Horden's Farman hydroplane and the B.E.2a that was taken to New Guinea, which was in the process of being converted to a hydroplane. However, a pier still needed to be built to run the aircraft on trolleys out to deeper water. After a short flying demonstration by Harrison, Pearce was taken for his first flight in an aircraft. He described the experience as one of the most exhilarating of his life and that, 'the feeling of great freedom and easy motion was simply glorious'.[27]

The need for aircraft and engines in the war in Europe restricted exports from Britain. So, in February 1915, the Department of Defence called for Australian manufacturers to make Renault pattern V8 aircraft engines for use in the B.E. type airframes. Two manufacturers responded, providing three samples each. The first engine was fitted to an airframe at Point Cook in September 1915 in the hope of laying the foundation of an 'Australian aerial fleet'.[28] No further orders were placed after the sample engines were made, and a slow series of imports and donations added to the Point Cook fleet. A Blériot XI was donated by Mr T. Reynolds of North Melbourne in September 1915, and Horden's Farman hydroplane was converted to a landplane. A Bristol Scout D was acquired from the Royal Naval Air Service and shipped from Britain, and Grahame-White Boxkites and Maurice Farman Shorthorn biplanes were purchased. An F.E.2b 'battleplane'

1915: group of mechanics by the workshop (RAAF Museum)

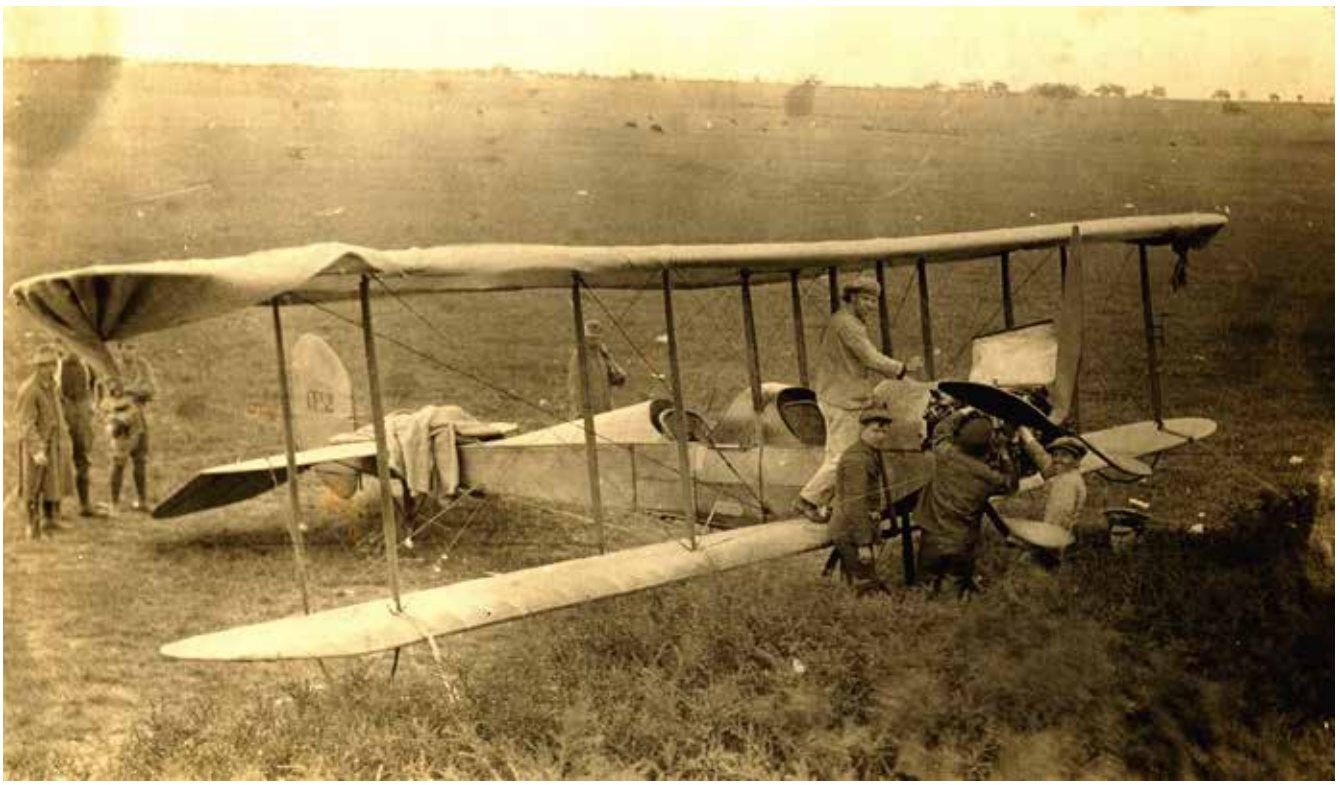


1915: Captain Eric Harrison at the controls with Captain Bill Sheldon riding in an unorthodox position (RAAF Museum)

was donated by Alfred Muller Simpson of Parkside, South Australia in 1917, and a dedicated hangar that still survives was built to house it. B.E.2e and de Havilland D.H.6 aircraft were ordered in 1918.[29]

Caretaker Lord and his wife settled into life in their new cottage at the front gate of the camp, and with their sons away with the Half Flight, their daughter May and granddaughter Lesley came to live with them. May—married to Scottish-born engineer, William Oliphant Smith who had signed up and was also on active service—was pregnant with her second child. On 3 June 1916, she gave birth to a son in the cottage. The camp's medical officer attended her and suggested that the child be named after the newly arrived aircraft, a Grahame-White. May liked the name Graham but baulked at the 'White', and the baby was named Graham Robert William Smith, recognising the aviation link and both his grandfathers. Later in life, Graham Smith joked that he was glad a Maurice Farman had not arrived that day, because he would not have liked to be named after it.[30]

In September 1915, the sergeant mechanics formed their own mess, electing Warrant Officer Henry Chester—who was assigned Service Number 1 and recognised as Australia's first enlisted airman—as its first president and making improvements to the small room at the rear of the Officers Mess that was their own. However, it was not all peace and harmony in 'Harmony Row', as the small street of permanent married quarter cottages was to be dubbed. Chester decided that he wished to train as a pilot, and he did so with Harrison's approval, but not as part of one of the training courses. He was promoted to lieutenant for the purpose in January 1916. However, he turned out not to be suited to flying, despite Harrison trying hard to get him through the training. Further, Chester did not get on with Squadron Quartermaster Sergeant Sam Hendy, and the two were at loggerheads. Hendy was a career soldier with many years of experience, and he had earned his rank, while Chester was promoted over him and



1915: B.E.2a aircraft CFS2 being recovered after an overnight stranding protected by armed sentries (RAAF Museum)

1915: mechanics to the rescue with a spare wheel and rigging wire (Australian War Memorial)

was granted his more senior rank with less than two years' service.

With Petre gone and his old Castlemaine and Bristol School colleague Harrison in command, Chester began to take liberties. He countermanded orders, was frequently late for parade and did not accept Harrison's authority. He blamed the need to attend to his ill wife for his behaviour.[31] Chester was reverted to warrant officer and discharged 'at own request' six weeks after being commissioned.[32] He moved to Richmond as the chief mechanic of the New South Wales Aviation School and was responsible for the school's first accident, when he attempted to take a Caudron for an unauthorised flight.[33]

For much of 1916, Point Cook was occupied with raising and training three squadrons of the Australian Flying Corps and their reinforcements. No 1 Squadron was established under canvas in January 1916 and deployed to Egypt in May under the initial command of Lieutenant Colonel Reynolds. Captains Williams and Manwell from the first pilots course and Captain Sheldon from the second course commanded the three flights.[34] The squadron's relative lack of training, due in part to the low performance of the Boxkite, was apparent when the squadron arrived in Egypt. They were sent to England for the advanced training that was not available in Australia then returned to Egypt.

A second squadron, later to be known as No 3 Squadron, was formed in September and embarked for advanced training in England in October. Commanded by Major David Blake, the squadron went on to serve in France. A third squadron, to become known as No 4 Squadron, was formed in October and, under the command of Major

1915: Major Edgar Reynolds congratulating Captain Eric Harrison after the successful first flight of the Australian Boxkite CFS8—mechanics Murphy (right) and Fonteneau grin proudly from below the wing (RAAF Museum)

Arthur Lang, departed in January 1917 for training in England and then on to France and Germany. Harrison provided the training of all three squadrons along with keeping the ageing training aircraft flying.

Facilities at Point Cook were given a significant boost during 1917 and 1918 with the construction of the first of two water towers and the supply of electricity further south to the hangars and workshops, which were extended to accommodate the growing fleet of aircraft. A facilities master plan was drawn by the Department of Home Affairs, and vacant land to the north-west was purchased to provide an enlisted men's accommodation precinct just north of the old triangle of trees. A new Officers Mess and associated kitchens, single officer quarters, servant quarters and a sergeants dining room were approved in late 1918 and completed the following year. It is most likely that the old 1914 Officers Mess became the Sergeants Mess, allowing the sergeants and warrant officers greater room than their small dining room perched behind it. The new mess was later used as the Cadets Mess and then the Sergeants Mess, and it survives in remarkably original condition, as do the servant quarters. When used as accommodation for the warrant officer disciplinary courses in the 1990s, the humble servant quarters were facetiously known as 'Pine Lodge'.

The first death of a pilot at Point Cook occurred in March 1917 when private pilot Basil Watson's aircraft crashed at the water's edge. Watson was the son of a mining investor and had travelled to Britain before the war to train as a pilot. He joined the Sopwith Aviation Company and became an assistant test pilot. Once home, he built his own Sopwith Sparrow aircraft at his parents' house at Brighton, Victoria, which he tested at Point Cook. He was well known for his long-distance flights in Victoria, particularly to Bendigo, where his father had property and mining interests. Watson was flying to Point Cook from Albert Park on 28 March and decided to demonstrate a loop manoeuvre—for which he was well known—over the troops camped at Point Cook. The wings of the aircraft folded, and he plummeted into the shallow water of the bay's

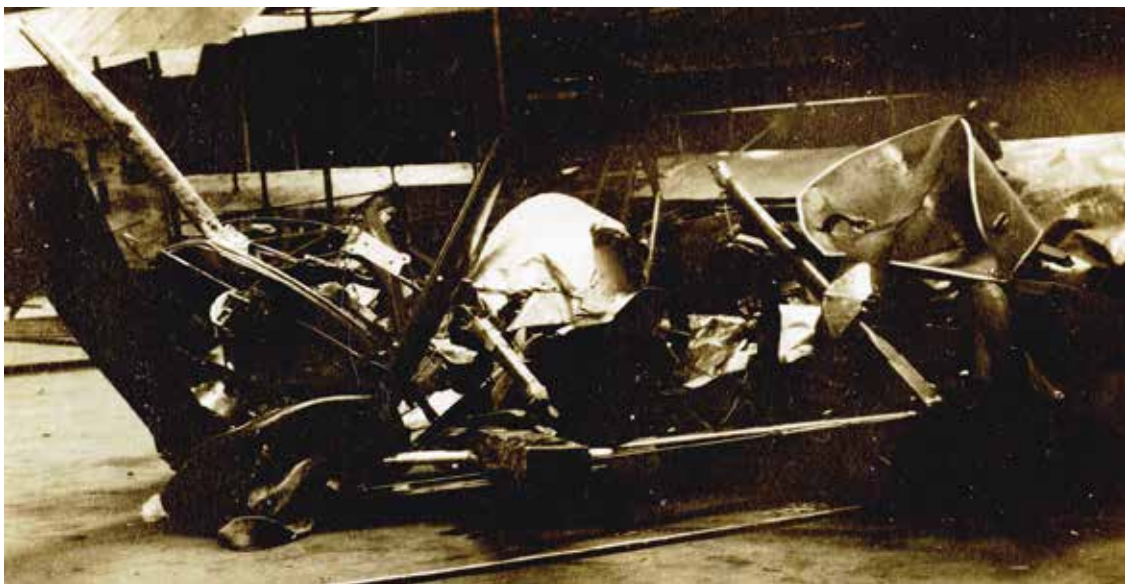
edge from 2000 feet, dying instantly. The crash narrowly missed tents and bathing soldiers. His father was driving to Point Cook at the time to meet Basil after landing, and assuming his son had landed safely, was told the tragic news by Harrison.[35] His body was marched from the camp mortuary the following day between lines of airmen with officers as pallbearers.[36] A broken blade of his propeller, decorated with flowers by the officers and men at Point Cook, was carried to the grave a couple of days later.[37]

In October 1917, Lieutenants Ray Galloway and Jean Marduel joined Harrison in a week of daily flights over Melbourne to promote the Government's Liberty Loans. The loans aimed to raise £20m for the war effort. The aircraft were painted with the words 'WAR LOAN' on the underside of the wings in an early use of aircraft for aerial advertising purposes. Liberty Loan leaflets were also dropped over the city.[38]

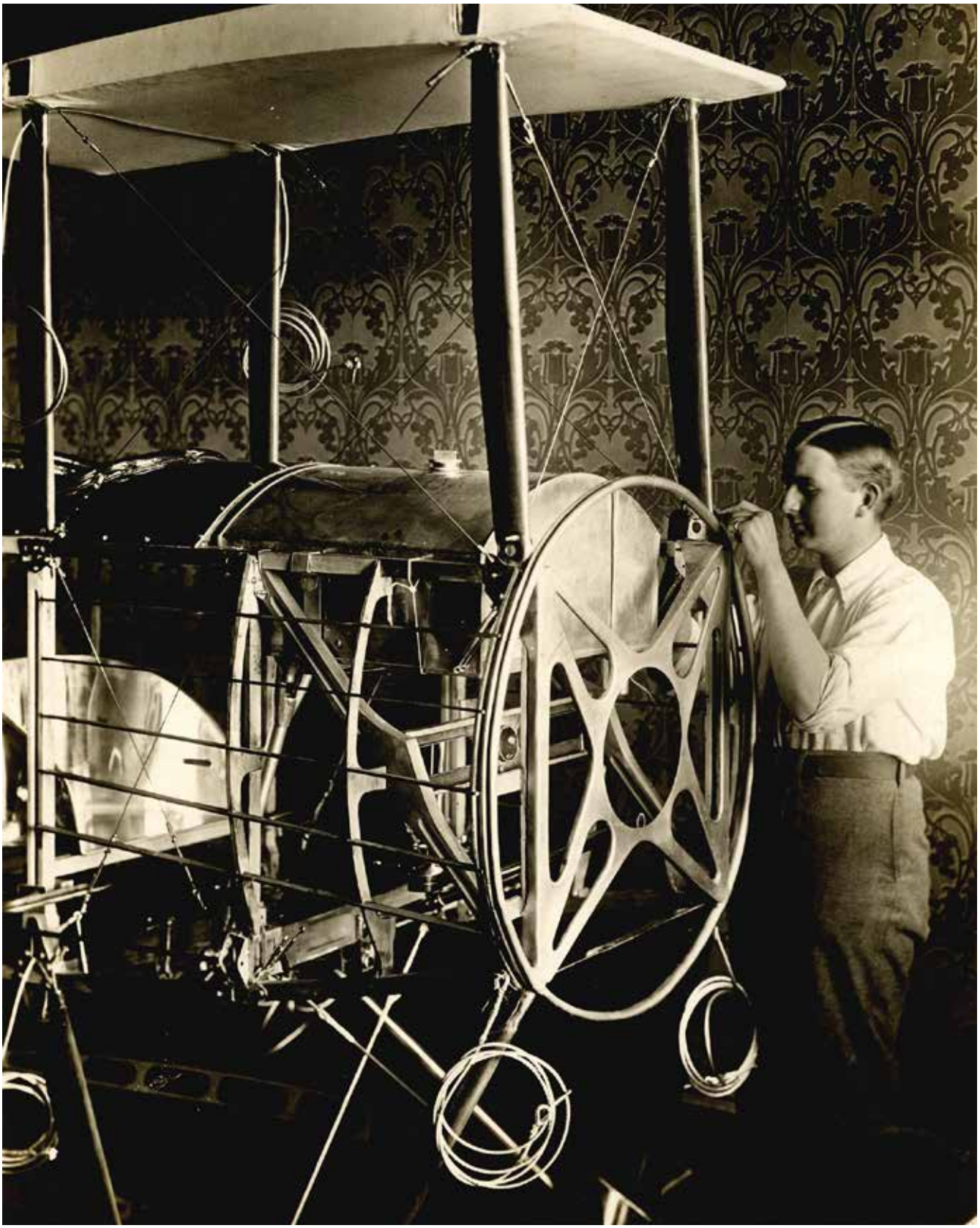
Billy Stutt—an Australian-born, ex-Royal Flying Corps pilot—had been selected as the new head of the New South Wales Aviation School, where Chester was chief mechanic, in July 1917. Stutt was a superb pilot with natural talent, and he decided to attempt a flight from Sydney to Melbourne on 1 November. His school was a State Government enterprise, and its attempt to train aviators for military service caused friction with the Central Flying School. Word that Stutt was to attempt the flight from Richmond to Point Cook was too much for Harrison and others at Point Cook to bear. Stutt was planning to use a new, American-made Curtiss Jenny aircraft: a far better aircraft than anything in use at Point Cook and not of British manufacture.

In a clear attempt to take the shine off the New South Wales Curtiss flight, Galloway was authorised to fly from Point Cook to Sydney under the ruse of dropping Liberty Loan leaflets on towns along the way three days before Stutt's departure. He had an engine failure near Wagga and hit a stump on landing, causing extensive damage to the aircraft. The aircraft was freighted home.[39] Stutt, despite some setbacks, arrived at Point Cook on 2 November as planned. To rub salt into the wound, the recently sacked Henry Chester was on board as his mechanic.[40]

Tragedy befell the camp again on 16 November 1917, when the first death of a serving military pilot at Point Cook occurred. Lieutenant Reginald Duckworth accidentally side-slipped his Maurice Farman aircraft at 1000 feet and failed to regain control. He crashed in a paddock just beyond the



1917: wreckage of Basil Watson's aircraft stored in a hangar—the first aviation death at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)



1917: Basil Watson building his Sopwith-type biplane in his parents' house at Brighton, Victoria (RAAF Museum)

aerodrome. Galloway was instructing Duckworth on what was only his fourth solo flight.[41]

The first warlike air operations from the Australian mainland were conducted in 1918 after news broke that the German raider *Wolf* had laid sea mines in the shipping lanes off the coast of south-eastern Australia. A mine had sunk an Australian coastal freighter in July 1917, although its source was not known at the time.[42] Claims were made that the ship had operated its seaplanes over Sydney in March 1918, and this led to numerous alleged sightings with the assumption that another German raider was present. Two detachments from Point Cook deployed to carry out costal patrols and possible interception missions. Captain McNamara, VC, with the F.E.2b aircraft and a ground party deployed to Gippsland in April, and Warrant Officer Hendy manned a Lewis gun from the observer's seat.[43] Lieutenant Galloway with a Maurice Farman Shorthorn aircraft deployed to Bega on the New South Wales south coast.[44] The operations concluded in mid-May without finding any sign of enemy forces, and the public was reassured that air assets in the defence of Australia were responsive and useful.

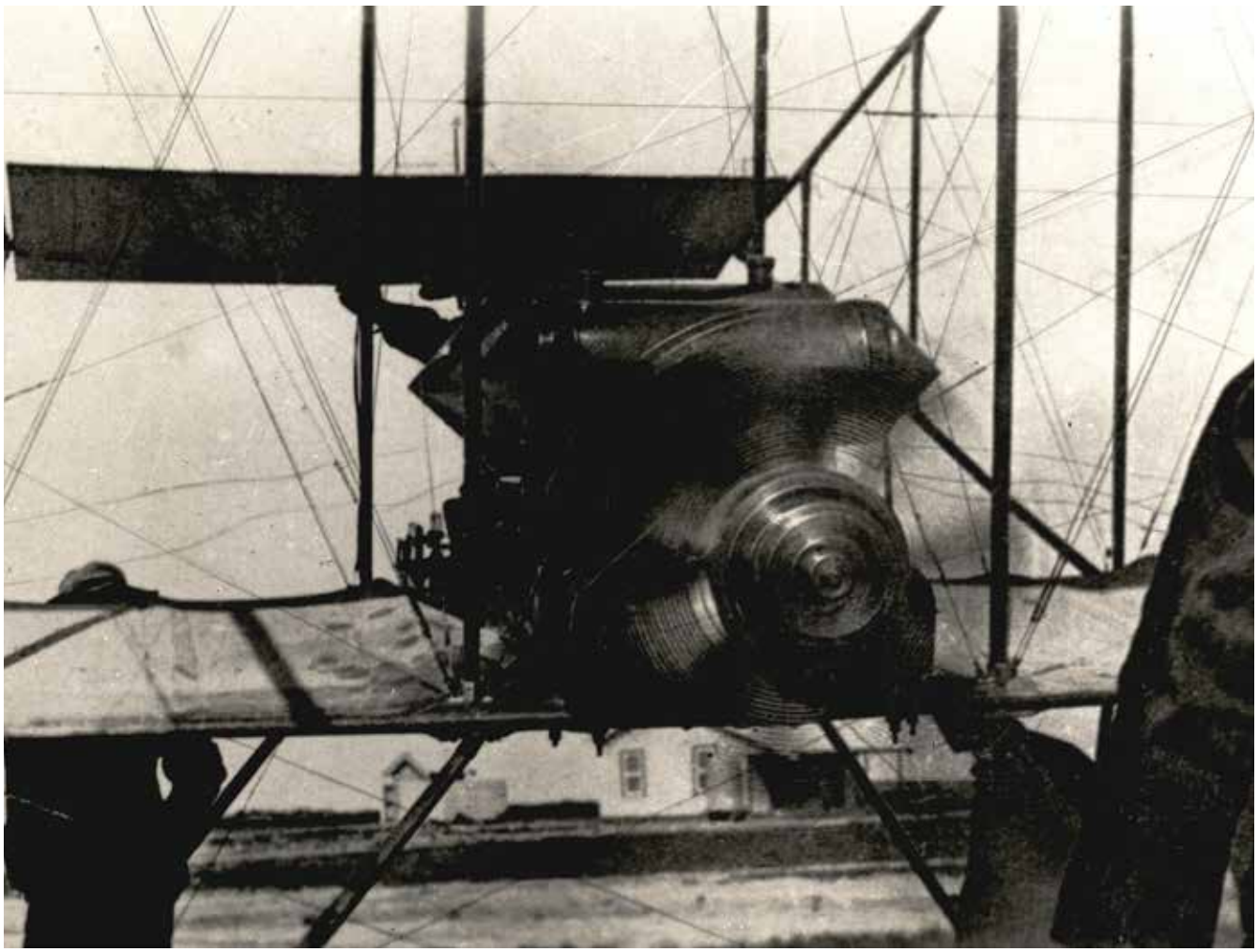
By September 1918, the staff at Point Cook had grown to about 100, and Central Flying School was reorganised to become part of the Australian Imperial Force, rather than the militia. Its new structure comprised No 1 Home Training Squadron and Aeroplane Repair Section; and the Australian Flying Corps Reinforcements Camp became No 1 Home Training Depot.[45] Major William Sheldon was appointed to command, replacing Major Eric Harrison, who had overseen the work of Point Cook for the majority of the war. Consideration was being given to proposals by Army and Navy for a separate air arm each, with the knowledge that Britain had formed a single Service in April 1918, the Royal Air Force, to manage and operate its military air assets.

Over the period of World War I, the Defence presence at Point Cook had developed from a camp of leaking canvas to a well laid out school with a strong sense of purpose that made a significant contribution to the nation. Aircraft technology advanced rapidly in Europe during World War I, and

1917: Maurice Farman crash that killed Lieutenant Duckworth on 16 November—the first death of a military aviator at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

the Central Flying School did well to train aviators and mechanics on obsolete equipment. Most importantly, Point Cook was the launching place for many who went on after the war to make their name in Australian and international aviation.

With the cessation of overseas operations, Point Cook was to become the centre of Australian military aviation operations and support to a burgeoning civil aviation industry. The focus of activities shifted from training pilots for war to applying aviation to civil use and national defence.



1915: Gnome engine of CFS8 clearly showing the rotary type construction with the cylinders attached to the propeller and stationary crankshaft (RAAF Museum)

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40 'Aviator Describes Flight: Wanders 240 miles in Fog', *The Melbourne Herald*, 2 November 1917.
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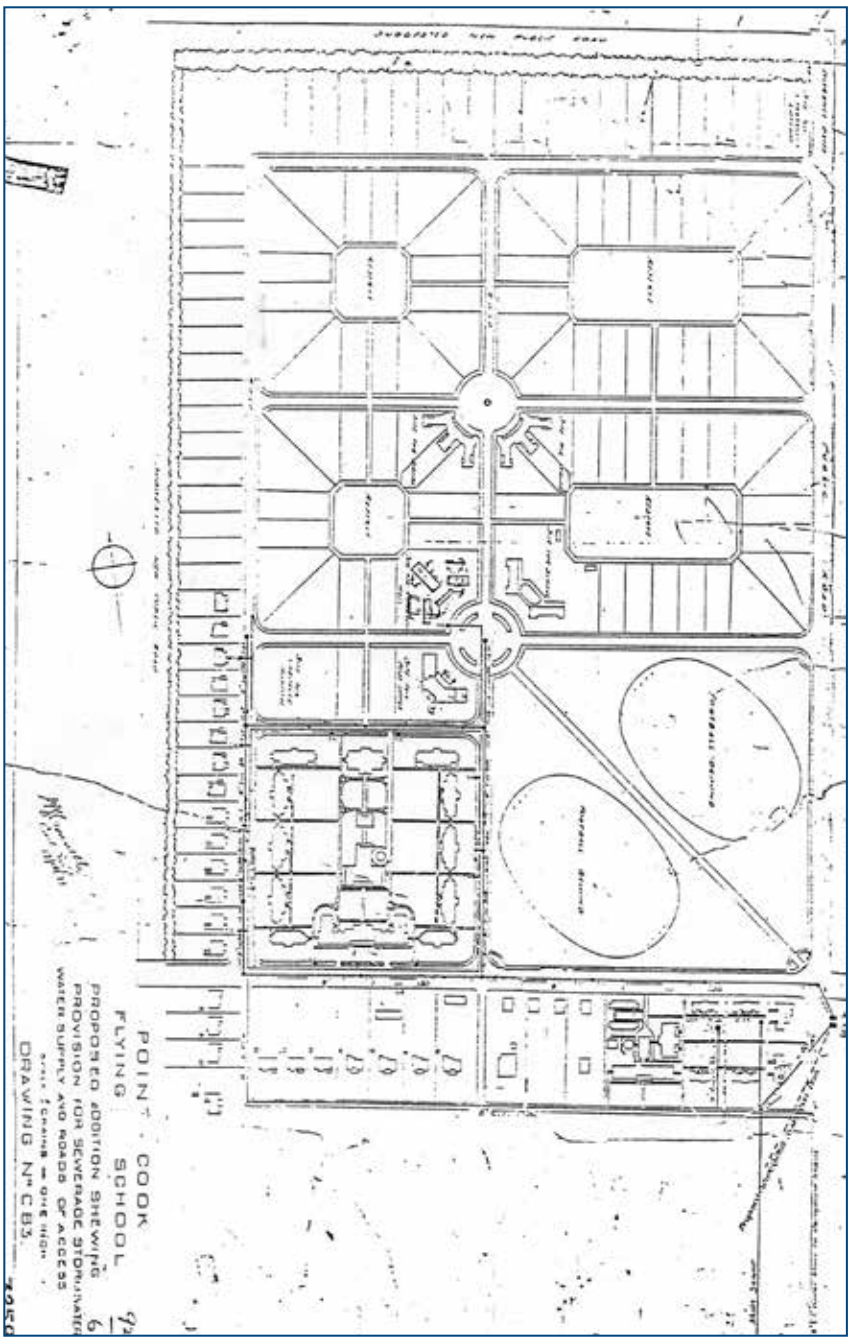


1917: 'garden city' master plan for Point Cook (RAAF)

1917: Australian Flying Corps Reinforcement Camp on the south east shore at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

1918: Australian Flying Corps mechanics at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

1917: New South Wales State Aviation School No 2 Course with Billy Stutt (centre standing) and Henry Chester (right of Stutt in waistcoat) (RAAF Museum)

1918: Friedrichshafen FF.33e floatplane on board the German Raider *Wolf*—affectionate known as 'Wolfchen' or wolf cub (RAAF Museum)

1918: Navy radio operators assigned to coastal patrols against potential enemy raiders off the coast of New South Wales and Victoria—here hosting a couple of local visitors (RAAF Museum)

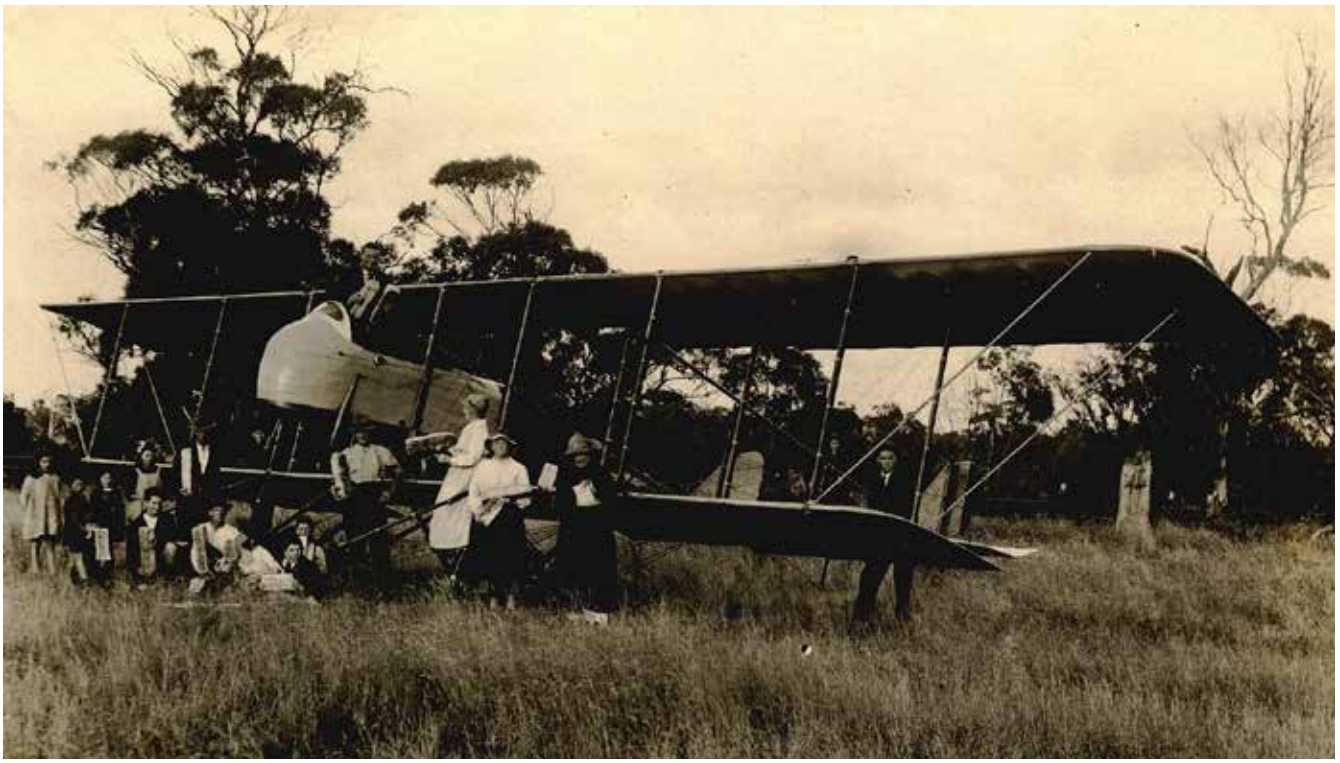
Chapter 4 - Peace

Aircraft had proved to be very useful in the war, and pilots greatly enjoyed the thrill of flying them. Returning to a job on the ground held the promise of a humdrum existence. 'We all want peace, but we all want to keep our jobs', was the sentiment expressed so well by a Royal Air Force pilot at the end of World War I. Politicians and the public began to see the value of aviation in the Australian environment, and the establishment of a peacetime Defence air service that could also promote the civil uses of aviation promised to be the answer for the 'cavalry of the clouds'. With the cessation of overseas air operations, Point Cook changed from a training centre to the operational centre for Australian civil and Defence aviation. It hosted many of the pioneering flights that helped establish Australia's commercial aviation networks, and it was the operational base for what soon became the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).

The experience gained during World War I highlighted the need for the air defence of the nation as part of a wider air defence system of the British Empire. As early as October 1918—just before the end of the war—consideration was given to forming a separate Australian Air Force along the lines of the Royal Air Force in Britain. British wartime experience demonstrated the need for a coordinated means of air defence as well as an offensive aerial

1919: sleeping out on hot summer evenings by some of the few staff at Point Cook as a respite from the heat of the accommodation (RAAF Museum)

bombing capability and confirmed that a system divided between the Army and Navy did not work. During 1917, the decision was taken to combine the British Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service, and the Royal Air Force was subsequently formed, as an independent air force, on 1 April 1918. After World War I, most of Australia's military aviators favoured the British precedent to establish an independent air force for their own country. Australia's first Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Richard Williams, later wrote that, '… it had been Australian policy to follow the same organisation in its Defence forces as did the United Kingdom. It was clear also, from the actions of the Minister for Defence, Senator



1919: ex-Central Flying School Maurice Farman Shorthorn biplane operated by Robert Carey under his Melbourne Air Service—here seen delivering bread and hot cross buns to Phillip Island at Easter (RAAF Museum)

Pearce, that he was determined to do this.'[1] The decision to form a single air service in Australia was also swayed by the lack of agreement on competing plans by Navy and Army for their own air branches.

On 19 April 1919, the Australian Government announced details of its decision to form a separate air force that would satisfy the needs of the Army and Navy. In a philosophy that resonates in the 21st century, the Australian Air Force was to be 'small but efficient'.[2] Awaiting the necessary legislation to form the separate air force, the interim 'Australian Air Corps' was formed on 1 January 1920. At the same time, there was international recognition that civil aviation needed to be controlled.[3] Unregulated civil aviation formed a threat to public safety, and while the Australian Government realised this, rivalry between it and the States over aviation licensing and registration placed plans for the proper control of civil aviation in abeyance.[4] The Department of Defence was well aware of the problems posed by unqualified pilots and ageing, ex-military aircraft, many of which were imported by pilots returning from the war. As a result, Defence assumed the role of providing support to civil aviation.

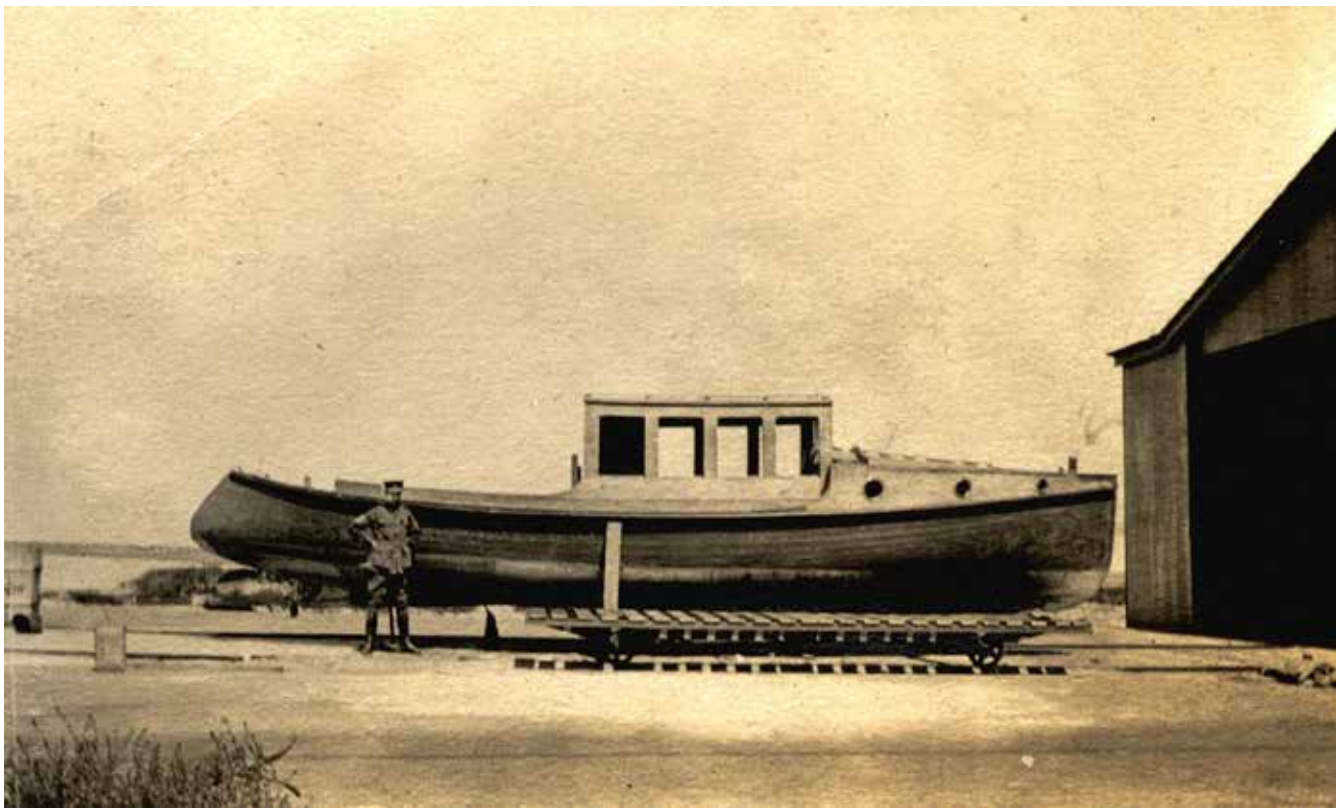
This role was strongly encouraged by Britain; and just as pilots wanted to keep flying, aircraft manufacturers wanted to keep making aircraft, and the Dominions were a rich source of potential sales. That aside, one of the best ways to ensure air defence in the Dominions was to develop regional and imperial air routes. For Australia, the routes would enable mail services, commercial operations and ultimately passenger services. The routes would also allow for rapid military mobilisation to the north in the event of a military threat. The immediate needs were for the mapping of defined air routes and the identification of suitable aerodromes, as forced landings were still a regular feature of aviation.

The work of providing a sound basis for civil aviation formed the majority of the work done at Point Cook immediately after the war. Flying training had ceased at Point Cook with the end of the war, and there were about 100 personnel on the staff. They were mainly engaged in maintenance of

the aircraft and associated equipment. Chief of the General Staff, Major General James Legge, called for significant staff reductions across the Army in February 1919. However, he and the Government had plans for military aviation, and the sum of £370 000 was allocated for its development and expansion. On 19 April 1919, further details of the new air force were announced. The overall plan was to establish a small air force as the basis for future expansion, and the allocation of funds was increased to £500 000.[5]

One of the first postwar tasks undertaken from Point Cook was a road trip in a Model T Ford car by Lieutenants Horrie Miller and Steve Oakes in December 1918. Their task was to survey an air route between Melbourne and Sydney, and identify suitable aerodromes. Aerodromes required no infrastructure at first; almost any piece of land of the correct minimum size that was flat and had good air approaches could be considered. An aerodrome was required every 30 kilometres or so. Miller later said of his time at Point Cook after the war that, 'the Air Force provided a good living, gay companionship, social life, and plenty of prestige, and although people still considered flying—particularly testing old service machines—a perilous occupation, it offered a secure enough job for a veteran war pilot.'[6]

Another attempt to stimulate civil aviation was through the disposal of obsolete aircraft from Point Cook. New aircraft were on order, so an auction was held at Point Cook on 19 March 1919 to sell two D.H.6 aircraft and four Maurice Farman Shorthorns, along with sundry other items. The aircraft failed to attract any serious bids, and the press reported that the auction 'ended in a fiasco'. It seemed that most of the 150 people in attendance were there to see the promised flying display.[7] However, the low performance capabilities of the aircraft may also have played a part. They were sold later by private treaty, with the D.H.6 aircraft being ferried to a new owner in Sydney by Captain Gordon Taylor and



1919: motor launch *Isabel B*—wrecked in a storm off Point Cook Pier, 5 April (RAAF Museum)

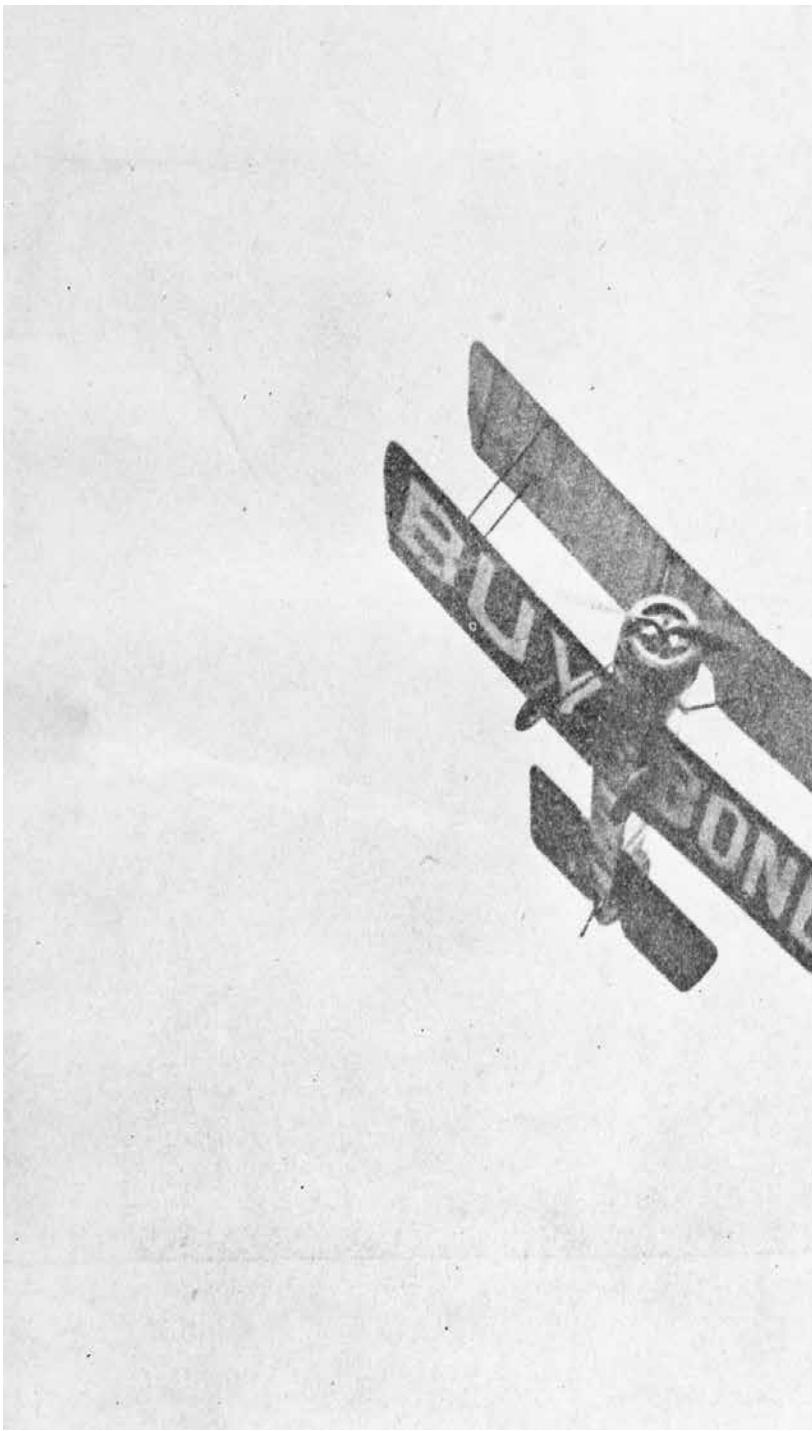
Lieutenant Steve Oakes.[8] The Farmans remained in Melbourne and began private operations.

On the same day as the auction, the Australian Government—in a bold gesture to stimulate civil aviation—announced details of a competition for the first Australian airmen to fly from England to Australia. The prize was £10 000, and among other conditions, competitors had to arrive in Australia by 31 December 1920. While the finishing line was at Port Darwin, competitors were expected to go on to the interim Federal capital of Melbourne for a ceremonial welcome, and a visit to Sydney was also envisaged. Such an enterprise was not possible without Government assistance, and much of the work fell to those at Point Cook. In fact, to give further aid to the competitors, they were temporarily enrolled in the Australian Flying Corps on appropriate pay.[9]

With the air route from Melbourne to Sydney mapped, the route from Melbourne to Darwin to identify landing grounds and fuel points required attention. Lieutenants Hudson Fysh and Paul McGinness surveyed the overland route from Darwin to Longreach, Queensland, while Major Rolf Brown and Lieutenant Roly McComb surveyed from Cootamundra, New South Wales on the Melbourne to Sydney route, to Longreach.[10]

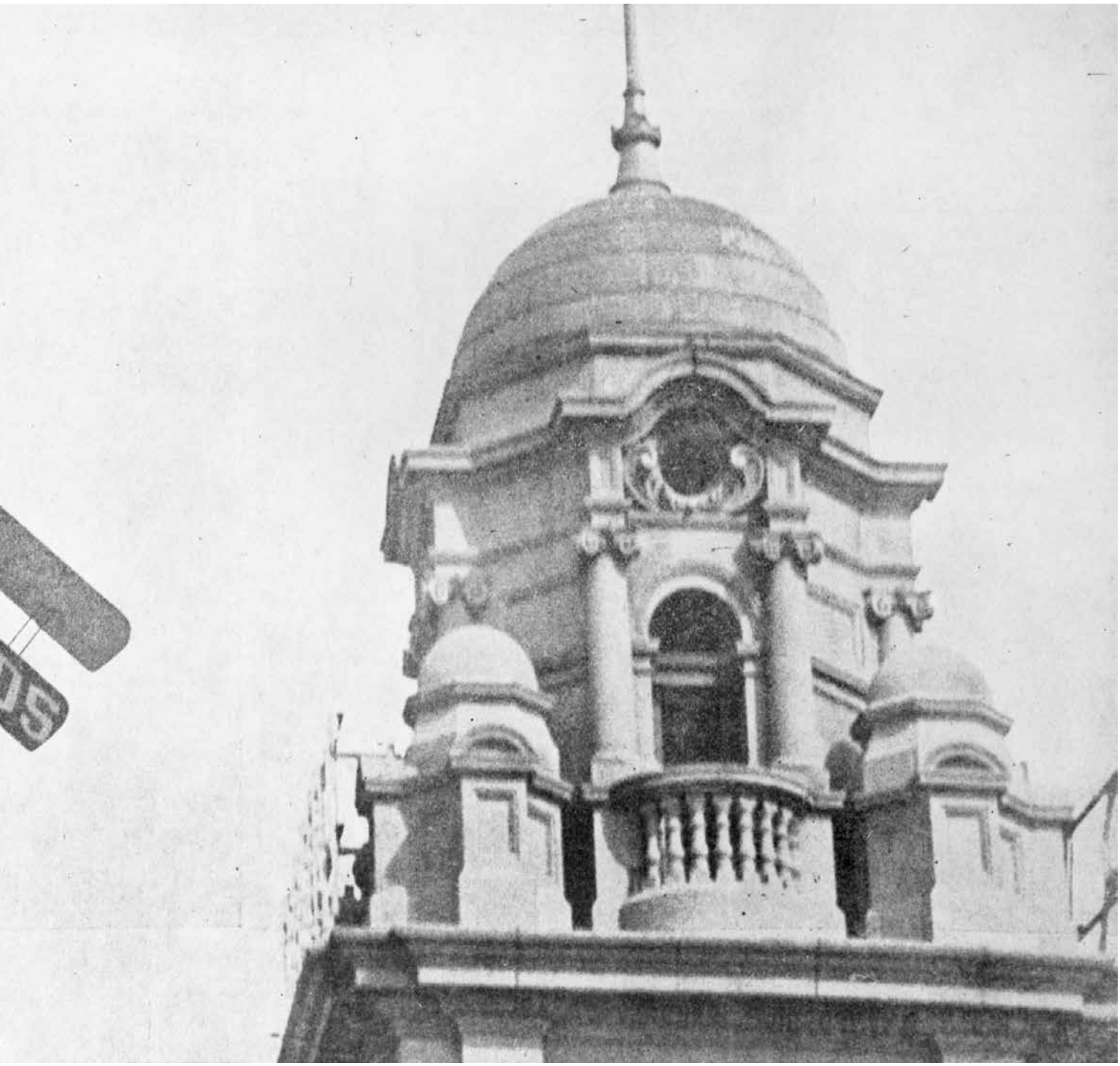
As the nation's capital, Melbourne was the host city for all significant official arrivals in Australia, and greetings by the Governor-General, Prime Minister and Federal ministers were a regular occurrence. Peacetime military aviation began to play a ceremonial role on most such occasions. In April 1919, the new Avro 504K and Sopwith Pup aircraft ordered the previous year began to arrive at Point Cook. Their first official task was to welcome home fellow airmen from the Australian Flying Corps on the *Hygeia* as they steamed into Port Phillip. They circled around the ship as it docked at Port Melbourne, and one aircraft flew low enough to drop a message of greeting onto the deck.[11]

Fear of a land aircraft being forced to ditch in the bay was ever present at Point Cook. In the beginning of a Marine Section capability that



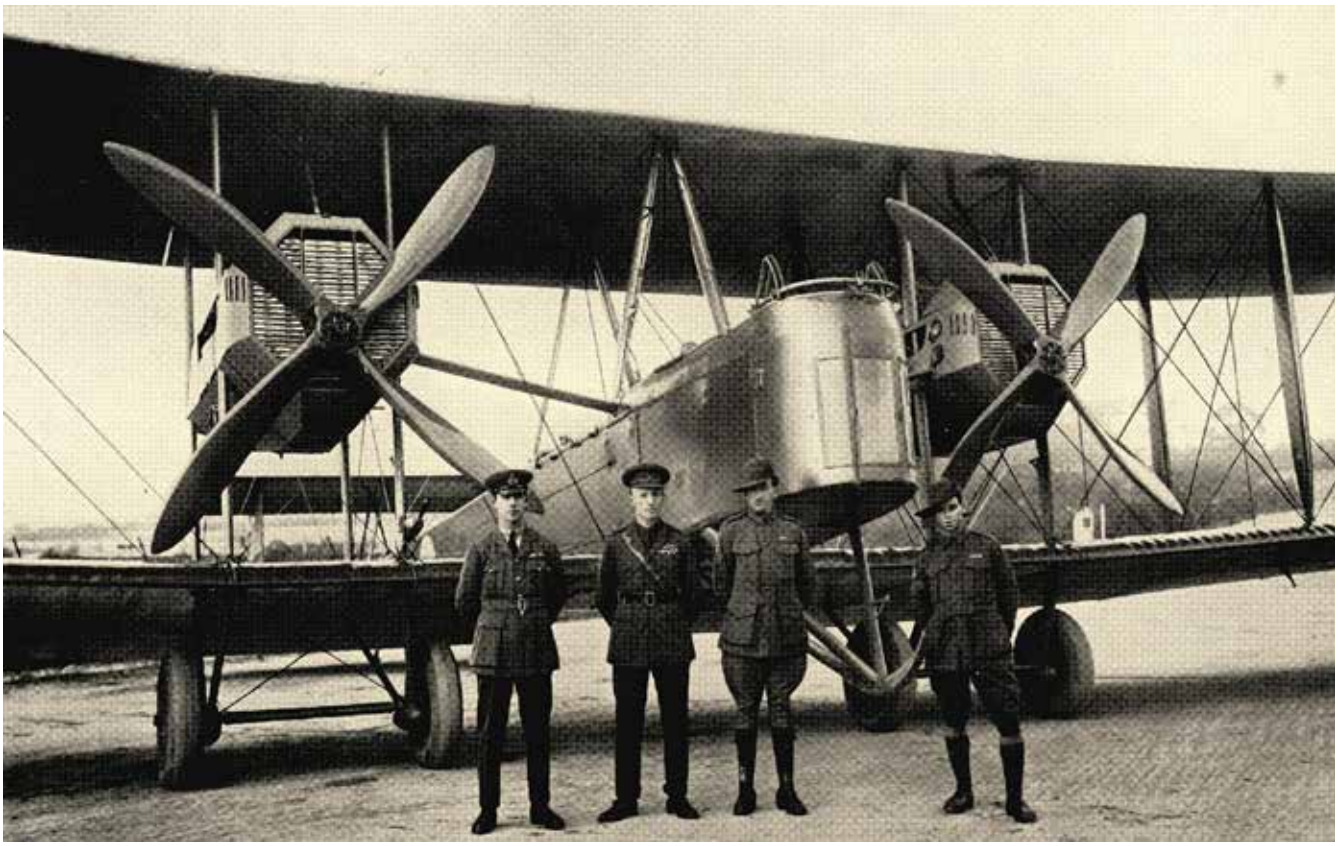
1919: Captain Eric Cummings flying around the Hobart GPO with his Sopwith aircraft marked 'BUY BONDS' (Australian War Memorial)

carried on into the 1990s, the motor launch *Isabel B* was purchased late in the war for rescue use and to assist with any handling of hydroplanes. It was wrecked in a storm while moored at the Point Cook Pier on the night of 5 April 1919. Its engine and



other serviceable parts were salvaged, but the hull remains off the pier to this day as a heritage listed shipwreck.[12]

A contingent of 800 Australian Flying Corps troops arrived home on the *Kaiser-i-Hind* in June 1919, and aircraft from Point Cook were not able to fly an aerial escort as had been promised. A report in *The Argus* suggested that the military pilots had been shamed by their civilian counterparts when Robert Carey arranged to fly two of his recently purchased,



1919: crew of the Vickers Vimy—(l to r) Lieutenant Keith Smith, Captain Ross Smith, Sergeant Jim Bennett and Sergeant Wally Shiers (RAAF Museum)

ageing, ex-Point Cook Maurice Farmans overhead with female passengers on board.[13] This incensed the military pilots, all decorated war veterans including Victoria Cross winner Frank McNamara, and they carried out a mock strafing run down Bourke, Collins and Flinders Streets soon after in protest.[14]

Matters were made worse for those at Point Cook by public comments from returning airmen that Australia's latest 504K and Sopwith Pup aircraft were out of date compared with those flown by Royal Flying Corps and Australian Flying Corps pilots at the end of the war.[15] Some of the criticism may have been justified when a flight of three Sopwith Pups and four 504K aircraft set off from Point Cook for Ballarat to begin the mapping of Victorian air routes in June 1919. Only one aircraft got through, with the remainder turning back due to strong headwinds and the consequent high fuel usage rate.[16]

Nonetheless, the new Pup and 504K aircraft were put to appropriate use in flypasts and displays that kept public attention on aviation. These included the arrival of Admiral of the Fleet Lord John Jellicoe, the controversial British naval hero, at St Kilda in May 1919[17] and the arrival of Prime Minister Billy Hughes on his official visit to Bendigo in September.[18] Record attendance on the last day of the 1919 Royal Melbourne Show was attributed in part to the advertised attendance of two aircraft from Point Cook. Most activity at the show stopped as they arrived overhead and entered into a spinning dive towards the arena. After shocking the crowd, they recovered from their spins, and the Sopwith Pup flown by Lieutenant Steve Oakes landed before the crowd, while the other aircraft circled overhead. Oakes and other officials made speeches encouraging subscription to the Peace Loan.[19]

The Peace Loan was launched by the Australian Government in August 1919 to raise funds for

postwar economic recovery. Major parts of the fund raising effort were flying demonstrations and speeches by well-known, decorated pilots. Most were from Point Cook and included Captains Frank McNamara, Harry Cobby and Harry Butler.[20] All States except the Northern Territory were visited with leaflet drops over major towns. Joy flights were given, and speeches encouraged the purchase of interest bearing government bonds to help defray the costs of repatriating injured sailors and soldiers. One report used the argument that, 'The fighting Australian has cleaned up his job in a workmanlike manner. Now the stay-at-home must get to work and discharge his obligations to the men who kept him from knowing a war was on.[21] This Peace Loan was undersubscribed, and a second one was launched a year later, again using aircraft and pilots from Point Cook.

1919: Sergeant Arthur 'Spud' Murphy (left) and Captain Henry Wrigley on the first south-north transcontinental crossing of Australia (RAAF Museum)

Applications to be considered for enlistment in the Australian Air Corps closed on 28 June 1919. Many returned pilots were keen to be employed in the Air Corps, and quite a number put off civilian employment while waiting word from the Department of Defence.[22] When word came for the lucky few, they were only offered temporary employment. This mirrored the cautious approach taken in Britain, where 2500 returned pilots were offered a three-year commission as a way of keeping the nation's flying skills alive while the future of military aviation was determined. Many remaining on staff at Point Cook at the end of the war were not offered employment in the Air Corps, and this caused considerable controversy, especially when the Victoria Cross awardee, Frank McNamara was not offered a position initially.[23]

Preparations by competitors in the air race from England to Australia were carried out over the months since its announcement in March 1919, and word reached Australia that a team led by Captain Ross Smith had departed on 12 November in a Vickers Vimy bomber aircraft. Smith, who was a decorated Australian Flying Corps pilot, was accompanied by his brother Lieutenant Keith Smith and Sergeants Wally Shiers and Jim Bennett.[24] They were expected in Darwin within the month. The air route from Darwin to Melbourne had been surveyed on the ground, but it had not been tested by air. Furthermore, it was decided to position an aircraft from Point Cook at Darwin to carry out coastal patrols in search of contestants making landfall and to drop them food by parachute if they were found in distress.[25]

Captain Henry Wrigley and Sergeant Arthur 'Spud' Murphy—of the Point Cook first mechanics course in 1914—left for Darwin on the same day the Smith aircraft left England. Their aircraft was the outdated B.E.2e fitted with extra fuel and oil tanks. However, they returned after less than 20 kilometres with an engine fault, only to depart in earnest on 16 November. Wrigley and Murphy arrived in Darwin on 12 December, two days after the Vimy, having completed the first south to north

1920: Vickers Vimy preparing to fly to Adelaide from Point Cook, 23 March (RAAF)

crossing of the Australian continent. This was a magnificent achievement, especially considering the B.E.2e aircraft was a well-worn prewar machine. They had flown 4000 kilometres in 46 hours of flying time. Mindful of the age and condition of the B.E.2e, Wrigley and Murphy disassembled it for sea freight back to Point Cook and travelled home by coastal steamer. On a port stopover in Brisbane, Wrigley modestly said that he felt the trip was 'only the forerunner of regular services and flights across the continent', and he felt sure that 'the time was not far distant when the journey might be accomplished in four or five days'.[26]

After 27 days of flying, the Smiths' Vickers Vimy had reached Darwin on 10 December 1919 without major incident and met the conditions to claim the £10 000 prize. On the day after Smith's arrival, Vickers Ltd instructed him to hand the Vimy to the Australian Government upon arrival in Melbourne for display in the new war memorial. Flemington Racecourse was set as the landing place with Point Cook as the alternative in case of unfavourable wind conditions. Meanwhile, Lieutenants Miller and Oakes flew the surveyed route from Point Cook to Sydney in preparation for that leg of the triumphant tour of the Vimy that was to follow.[27] It was not long before the mapping and identification of aerodromes for the Smith brothers' flight was used in civil aviation, when the first commercial flight between Sydney and Melbourne was flown by Nigel Love, landing at Point Cook on 16 April 1920.[28]

1920: official dinner for ex-Australian Flying Corps members to welcome the crew of the Vickers Vimy—the catalyst of the Australian Flying Corps and RAAF Association (RAAF Museum)

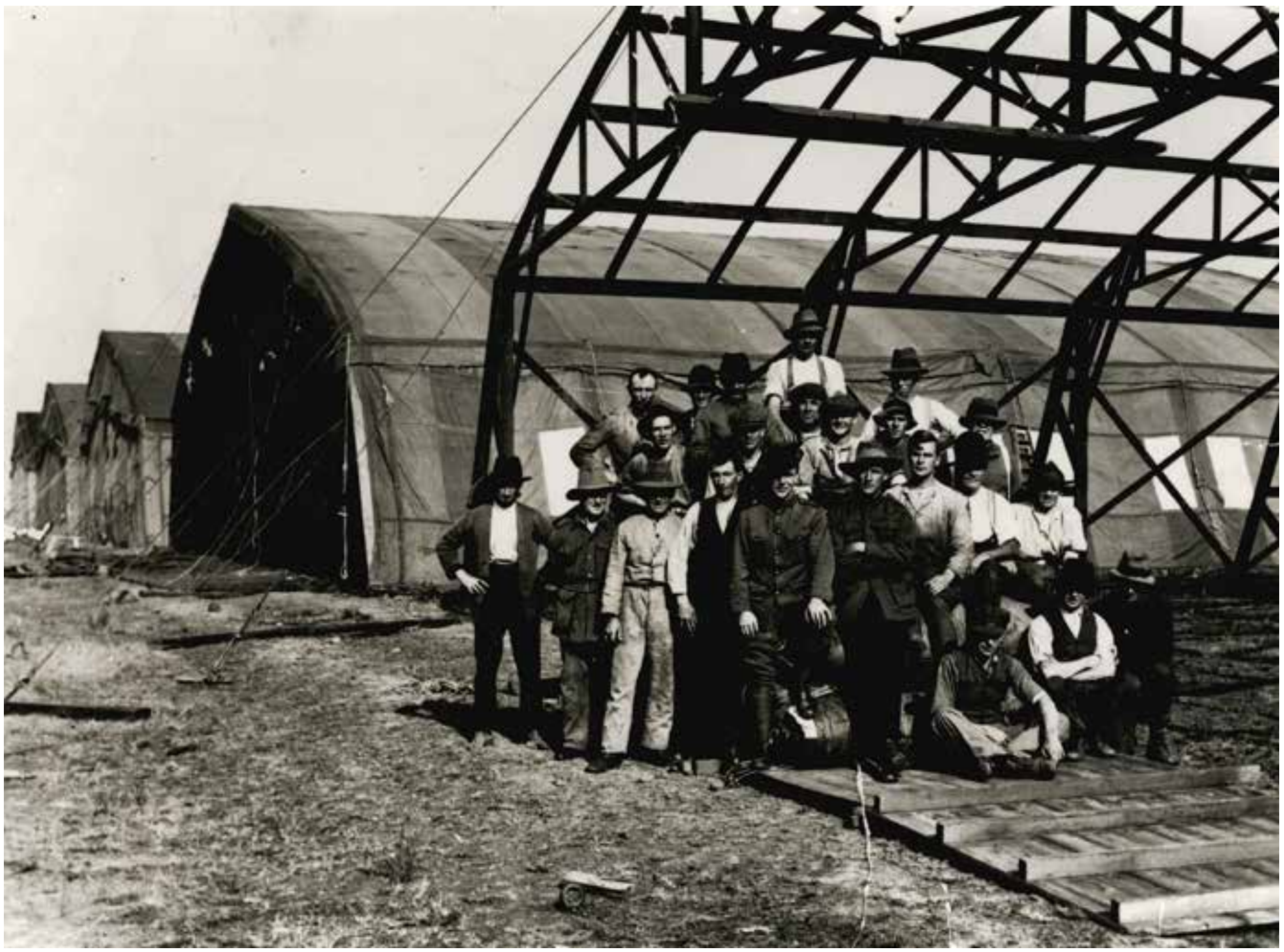
The Vimy, which had travelled so well to Darwin, broke a con rod and damaged a propeller north of Charleville, Queensland on Christmas Day, and major repairs were required. The Queensland Government offered the services of the Ipswich Railway Workshops to carry out the repairs, and three mechanics from Point Cook, Sergeants Carter and Chester, and Corporal Grange, were sent by the Chief of the General Staff to assist with the repairs.[29]

Preparations were made for a 'heroes welcome' at Flemington Racecourse in Melbourne—including a greeting by the Governor-General and handing over of the prize cheque by the Prime Minister—when the Vimy was finally ready to fly again in February 1920. However, further engine troubles caused a delay at Henty, New South Wales, and the crowd of 50 000 assembled at Flemington had to content themselves with a display of stunt flying by the intended aerial escort party from Point Cook.[30] The Vimy landed at Point Cook on 25 February with only 100 people present and was taken on charge of the Australian Air Corps. After further repairs at Point Cook, it was flown to Sydney and Adelaide by Smith and his crew. One of the propellers from the Vimy was displayed in pride of place over the fireplace in the Officers Mess at Point Cook for over 70 years. The official dinners to welcome the Vimy crew in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide were some of the first postwar gatherings of ex-Flying Corps members. The camaraderie felt at the dinners was the catalyst for the formation of the Australian Flying Corps Association, which

1920: Ray Parer and John McIntosh—runners up in the England to Australia air race in their D.H.9 biplane (National Library of Australia)

still addresses the needs of serving and ex-serving members of the Air Force as the Australian Flying Corps and RAAF Association.

Runners-up in the England to Australia air race were Ray Parer and John Mackintosh, whose ex-military D.H.9 aircraft suffered many problems on the flight and only managed to limp as far as Culcairn, New South Wales. Unlike the twin-engine Vimy, their aircraft had a single engine, and the significance of their achievement was well noted. A D.H.9A aircraft was dispatched from Point Cook in August 1920 and loaned to Parer and McIntosh to make their official arrival at Flemington Racecourse. Meanwhile, their dilapidated aircraft was disassembled, transported and reassembled in front of the members stand at Flemington by mechanics



1920: Bessoneau hangars of the Imperial Gift being erected along the road between the camp area and the southern tarmac—Warrant Officer Ted Shorland (with slouch hat and puttees) supervised (RAAF Museum)

from Point Cook. Four aircraft from Point Cook formed an escort for their arrival, and Captain Stutt flew the war trophy Fokker that was kept at Point Cook.[31]

As an encouragement to imperial air defence, the British Government had announced in May 1919 that 100 wartime aircraft surplus to British needs would be made available to any Dominion wishing to establish an air force. These became known as the Imperial Gift aircraft, and 28 additional aircraft were given to replace the presentation aircraft donated by the Australian people under a wartime aircraft sponsorship scheme. Associated support equipment was included in the gift, including motor vehicles, canvas hangars and even oil and ammunition. The Australian Government accepted the offer, and Lieutenant George Mackinolty—also of the first mechanics course at Point Cook—supervised the packing of some 19 000 crates in England.[32]

Imperial Gift aircraft and equipment began arriving in March 1920, and extra mechanics were employed along with equipment officers, clerks and storemen to begin storing equipment and assembling some of the aircraft.[33] There was insufficient storage space at Point Cook, and most equipment was stored at Spotswood and North Fitzroy in stores rented from the Railways Department. Some of the canvas hangars were erected at Point Cook and a makeshift Stores Depot was established for assembling and testing some of the new aircraft.[34] They were the D.H.9, D.H.9A and S.E.5a aircraft, and extra Avro 504K and Sopwith Pup aircraft were also included. In what may have been a rather demeaning situation, Major Eric Harrison, who had overseen flying operations at Point Cook through most of World War I, was appointed the officer in charge of Motor Transport Repair Section at North Fitzroy.[35] However, it was perhaps seen as a suitable appointment, because of his prewar trade skills as a motor mechanic.

The first official flight of Imperial Gift aircraft was for the arrival of the Prince of Wales on 26 May 1920, when 20 aircraft from Point Cook, including some newly arrived D.H.9As, were seen by 400 000 people assembled to greet the Prince.[36] An aircraft exhibition was held in the Melbourne Exhibition Buildings in June 1920, and a 504K aircraft converted to a 504N floatplane was flown from Point Cook to land on the Yarra River on the afternoon of 16 June in another Australian aviation 'first'. It was disassembled there and trucked to the exhibition, which included various war trophies such as the German Albatros and Fokker aircraft—now on display in the Australian War Memorial—along with the Smith brothers' Vickers Vimy and the old taxi-type Deperdussin from the first days of Point Cook.[37] Aircraft from Point Cook dropped leaflets over the city advertising the exhibition.[38] The pilot of the floatplane was Australian-born Captain Hippolyte 'Kanga' De La Rue, who had enlisted in the Australian Air Corps as a seaplane pilot only a few weeks earlier, after a career as a merchant seaman and then a seaplane pilot in the Royal Naval Air Service.[39]

1920: Avro 504N floatplane on the Yarra River, Melbourne flown by Captain Hippolyte De La Rue

On the morning of the Yarra River landing, De La Rue and World War I air ace Captain Adrian Cole broke the Australian altitude record. In a D.H.9A, they climbed to 27 000 feet, reportedly without setting out to make a high-altitude flight. They only stopped at that altitude for fear of fainting.[40] Both pilots showed signs of hypoxia and were unwell for a few days afterwards. They were treated by the medical officer at Point Cook, Captain Arthur Lawrence, who took such an interest in their condition that he convinced Major Anderson

1920: aircraft at Royal Exhibition Buildings, Melbourne (Australian War Memorial)

to take him on a similar high-altitude flight. After attaining 22 000 feet without supplementary oxygen, Lawrence realised that he was no longer able to make accurate observations. His experiments at Point Cook were effectively the beginning of aviation medicine in Australia.[41]

De La Rue was also involved in the first seaplane trials by the Royal Australian Navy in Australian waters in September 1920 when the 504N floatplane was assigned to the Navy for sea trials with HMAS *Melbourne*.[42] The trials were conducted off the coast of Queensland but were not a success, because the 504N was not designed for work at sea. It was returned to Point Cook and converted to parts due to its deterioration on board the deck of the ship.[43]

The Second Peace Loan was launched on 6 August 1920, this time using Imperial Gift aircraft. Again, each State was provided with aircraft from Point Cook. The Victorian flying schedule concluded with an 'aerial derby' in the form of a race from Serpentine near Bendigo to Melbourne. It was no doubt inspired by the aerial derby held in London the previous month that gained worldwide attention. The four competing Air Corps pilots raced towards the finishing line at the Melbourne GPO via the spire of Christ Church in St Kilda. Lieutenant Treloar—who was captured by the Turks while serving with the Mesopotamian Half Flight in 1915—won the race, which was viewed by Senator Millen from an adjoining rooftop.[44] A similar derby concluded the South Australian section of the Peace Loan flights and was won by Captain Harry Butler. These set the tone for a rash of aerial derbies that followed.

The small group of officers at Point Cook formed a close community, and as comrades engaged in a still dangerous profession, they enjoyed their time together. They had to make their own evening entertainment, and Lieutenant Horrie

Miller later recalled some fine examples of their horseplay—literally, on one occasion. Hawaiian dance bands were very popular at the time, and Lieutenants McNamara and Oakes formed a quartet whose ragtime music was a popular entertainment. Lieutenant Jack Tunbridge was an insomniac and frequently disturbed the sleep of his mess mates, so one day, McNamara decided to pay him back. While Tunbridge was on leave, he locked a draught horse in Tunbridge's fashionably decorated room in the mess. In another incident, Lieutenant Fred Shepherd became so enraged by Tunbridge playing his gramophone late at night that he discharged a full magazine of ammunition into the gramophone player.[45]

In September 1919, a skeleton was unearthed at Point Cook by one of the staff members. The remains were collected by the local police, who came across another skeleton in the same vicinity. They were discovered close to the beach and assumed to be part of an aboriginal burial site.[46] The Marpeang-buluk clan lived on the land occupied by the school until they were moved to a reserve at nearby Mount Franklin in 1840[47], and the remains may have been from their number. In another gruesome incident, Private Basil Meredith, a mess orderly on the staff at Point Cook, accidentally shot himself in the arm while 'examining the [Service] revolver' in May 1920.[48] He had four years' experience in the 4th Light Horse and should have known better.[49]

Perhaps a good indication that the rate of training had dropped and the Flying Corps reinforcement camps had gone was that offers for 12-month grazing rights were called for in late 1919 over nearly half of the land area of the school.[50] However, some flying training was offered, in the form of refresher training for returned Flying Corps pilots if they had a firm offer of employment as a civil pilot. They were to be accommodated in the Officers Mess at their own expense and not given pay or allowances.[51] However, it was likely more a case of allowing pilots some time in the cockpit rather than actually giving them instruction. The civil crash causing the death of Phillip Nunn and injury of Arthur Vigers while delivering newspapers on the Mornington Peninsular in January 1920 reinforced the need for control in civil aviation.

Tragedy struck the small community at Point Cook in September 1920 when Australia's first attempted air-sea search and rescue mission ended in the loss of two staff members. Captain Billy Stutt, who ran the New South Wales Aviation School for the last two years of the war, and Sergeant Abner Dalzell, an experienced rigger and ex-merchant and Navy seaman, departed in convoy with Point Cook's commander, Major Bill Anderson, and Sergeant Herbert Chester in two D.H.9A aircraft. They were sent in search of a missing coastal coal freighter, the three-mast schooner *Amelia J*. Stutt and Dalzell lost contact with Anderson and Chester around

1920: schooner *Amelia J*—lost without a trace in Bass Strait in September (Allan C. Green Collection)

1920: Captain Billy Stutt (National Library of Australia)

Cape Barren Island, between Flinders Island and the Tasmanian coast. Anderson flew on to Hobart, and Stutt and Dalzell were never seen again. For some time, hope was held that they had made a successful forced landing[52], and Anderson and others searched the route by air, ground and sea without success, finally calling the search off almost a month later.[53] During the search, Anderson set an Australian flying endurance record of six hours and ten minutes.[54]

Dalzell, originally from Tasmania, lived at Fitzroy, Melbourne and had not told his wife that he was departing on the search effort. He had three children under seven.[55] In a curious coincidence, his regimental number in the Australian Flying Corps was 666[56], and his Service number in the Australian Air Corps was 13.[57] Stutt and his wife Stella were at the centre of many of the social activities during their short time at Point Cook. Being classical music lovers, they often hosted concerts at their house. They had two boys under two years old. Their loss was keenly felt, and as a mark of respect, the two main streets of the school were later named after them as part of a tradition of naming the streets after significant persons at Point Cook. Another street was named after Lieutenant George Merz, who died in Mesopotamia in 1915, and one was named after Sir Ross Smith, who died in a flying accident in England in 1922.

From late 1920, the Australian Air Corps started to be referred to as the Australian Air 'Force' in public circles and official correspondence, despite not being formally gazetted as such until 31 March 1921.[58] Due to the potential for a lengthy delay in having the Air Defence Act passed in parliament, the gazettal was a short-term expedient that established the 'Australian Air Force'[59], giving it its new name and identity. It remained technically part of the Army until the Act was finally given Royal Assent on 1 September 1923. Applications were invited for those wishing to join the Australian Air Force on 17 March 1921 and closed on 9 April.[60] Over 4000 applications were made for the 150 permanent positions to be offered initially.[61]

1920: Sergeant Abner Dalzell (RAAF Museum)

With the cessation of hostilities in 1918, aviation naturally began to move from the fighting sphere to its invaluable place in Australian civic life. Point Cook was central to many of the initiatives that placed postwar aviation on a firm footing, including the promotion of civil aviation and the establishment of the independent Royal Australian Air Force. Point Cook played a significant role in many of Australia's aviation 'firsts'. The decade of the 1920s offered many challenges for the new service including financial challenges, the fight to survive against Navy and Army attempts to gain control and ultimately the need to modernise the aging fleet of Gift aircraft.

1921: warrant officers and sergeants of the Australian Air Corps—Honorary Warrant Officer Arthur Murphy centre of middle row (RAAF Museum)

Endnotes

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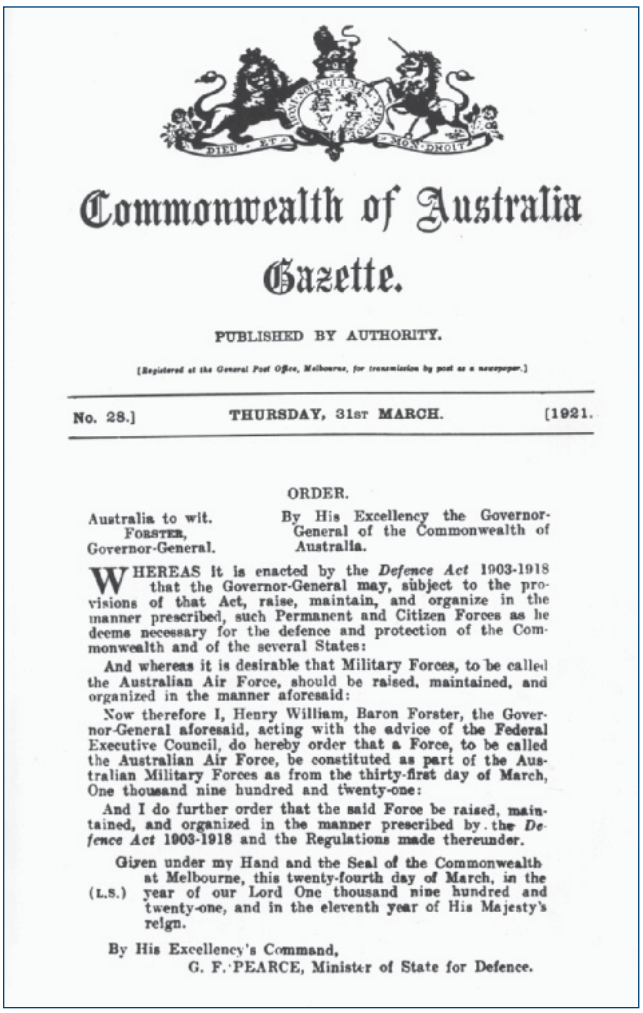
Chapter 5 - An Independent Air Force

The Australian Air Force came into being on 31 March 1921. The vice-regal order that established the Australian Air Force was signed by military aviation's faithful champion, Minister for Defence Senator George Pearce. It was just short of 10 years since he visited the Sunday flying display at Brooklands in England and became convinced of the need for military aviation in Australia. The March date gave time for sufficient administrative arrangements to be put in place, and it deliberately avoided the more usual government practice of commencing a regulatory change on the first day of a month. Wing Commander Richard Williams—graduate of the 1914 pilots course—was the leading figure in the administration of the new Air Force, and he wished to avoid the inevitable jibe of 'April fools' experienced by Britain's Royal Air Force, which was founded on 1 April 1918.[1] The Australian Air Force's 'Royal' prefix was formally granted on 13 August 1921.[2]

The 1920s were a golden era for Point Cook, as it assumed a significant role in the life of the nation. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) continued the pattern set by the Australian Air Corps of supporting civil aviation through the development of national and international air routes. The training of pilots recommenced, and many more Australian



Commonwealth of Australia Gazette.

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No. 28.] THURSDAY, 31st MARCH. [1921.

ORDER.

Australia to wit. By His Excellency the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

FORSTER, Governor-General.

WHEREAS it is enacted by the *Defence Act* 1903-1918 that the Governor-General may, subject to the provisions of that Act, raise, maintain, and organize in the manner prescribed, such Permanent and Citizen Forces as he deems necessary for the defence and protection of the Commonwealth and of the several States:

And whereas it is desirable that Military Forces, to be called the Australian Air Force, should be raised, maintained, and organized in the manner aforesaid:

Now therefore I, Henry William, Baron Forster, the Governor-General aforesaid, acting with the advice of the Federal Executive Council, do hereby order that a Force, to be called the Australian Air Force, be constituted as part of the Australian Military Forces as from the thirty-first day of March, One thousand nine hundred and twenty-one:

And I do further order that the said Force be raised, maintained, and organized in the manner prescribed by the *Defence Act* 1903-1918 and the Regulations made thereunder.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the Commonwealth at Melbourne, this twenty-fourth day of March, in the (L.S.) year of our Lord One thousand nine hundred and twenty-one, and in the eleventh year of His Majesty's reign.

By His Excellency's Command,
G. F. PEARCE, Minister of State for Defence.

1921: proclamation creating the Australian Air Force on 31 March (RAAF Museum)

1922: aerial view of Point Cook as taken on by the RAAF (RAAF Museum)

aviation 'firsts' involved Point Cook under the auspices of the newly formed RAAF. The new Service also needed to establish an independent identity, and much of the first decade of its existence was spent carrying out public relations tasks. The fight for the RAAF's survival against economic threats and the lack of acceptance by the Navy and Army was largely fought by senior officers at RAAF Headquarters in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne; and life for those stationed at Point Cook gradually settled into the routine of a permanent operational camp.

The report on the RAAF structure, training and operations sanctioned by the Government in 1928, and carried out by Air Marshal Sir John Salmond from Britain, paved the way for a much needed re-equipping of the RAAF, which had operated the surplus World War I Imperial Gift aircraft from its inception. By the end of the 1920s, Point Cook was instrumental in setting aviation on the path to becoming a part of everyday life in Australia.

While some have characterised the early days of the RAAF as a gentlemen's flying club, such oversimplifications focus more on the sensational aspects of exuberant aircrew activities rather than the serious aspects of gaining and maintaining technical mastery during a time of peace and severe resource constraints. By the end of the 1920s, the RAAF had flown hundreds of thousands of hours, photographed much of the interior, islands and reefs of the country, surveyed aerodromes for future civil and military use, fostered a fledgling aviation manufacturing industry and expanded its bases beyond its home at Point Cook.[3]

Point Cook was the sole operational base of the RAAF in 1921, but plans were made for a considerable expansion of the Service. Along with the existing stores and transport detachments at Spotswood and North Fitzroy, an experimental section was created at Randwick, New South Wales and an aeronautics school was planned for Queenscliff, Victoria. Land at nearby Geelong, land at Newcastle, New South Wales and the existing aerodrome at Richmond, New South Wales were considered for purchase as operating bases. Land was purchased at Laverton for No 1 Aircraft Depot to store, assemble and test more Gift aircraft and other stores. Point Cook—where No 1 Aircraft Depot was located in 1921—was not on a railway line, and the cost of extending a spur line there for goods freight was found to be greater than

purchasing available land on the railway line at Laverton.[4]

Under the plan for the newly formed RAAF, Central Flying School was disbanded on 31 March 1921, and No 1 Flying Training School was created in its stead. The name of the unit that established military flying training in Australia was not to be used by the RAAF until 1940. No 1 Flying Training School and No 1 Aircraft Depot were grouped under the new title of No 1 Station RAAF.[5] As a temporary step, Squadron Leader Bill Anderson was appointed Officer Commanding No 1 Station, and he was also to act as Commanding Officer of the school and depot.

The renaming of units was part of a larger plan of organisation for the RAAF that included the creation of seven squadrons in two wings and expansion into New South Wales.[6] However, the beginnings of the upcoming Depression of the 1930s severely curtailed government spending in Australia in the 1921–22 Financial Year, and the plans for expansion were held off. The seven proposed squadrons were reduced to five, and the plan to staff squadrons with 70 per cent Reserve personnel was amended to about 90 per cent. Regardless, insufficient funding was available for training. Approval was given to store much of the Imperial Gift equipment in the operating hangars at Point Cook, and a row of canvas Bessoneau hangars were erected for operating aircraft.[7] The RAAF was formed just in time, and if not for the determination and foresight of Senator Pearce in pushing through the necessary regulations, the RAAF may not have been formed for another two decades.

While awaiting the selection and training of personnel for the RAAF, some flying operations were carried out at Point Cook in 1921. These included the important tasks of mapping proposed aerial routes, including Melbourne to Perth and Geraldton to Derby in Western Australia. The Civil Aviation Authority was formed three days before the RAAF on 28 March 1921 under the auspices of the Department of Defence, and the surveys were officially 'to assist civilian aviators'.[8] The surveys were also of some military value as they helped the RAAF identify air routes, suitable for the transit of military aircraft, throughout Australia. In June 1921, Squadron Leader De La Rue flew a D.H.9 aircraft via Sydney to Jervis Bay, New South Wales for fleet cooperation exercises with the Navy.[9] In further assistance to civil aviation, Major Norman Brearley travelled from Perth to Melbourne by train to select, test and train pilots for his Western Australian Airways. The two-week refresher training for his selected pilots was carried out at Point Cook in October 1921.[10] Among his new team of six was Charles Kingsford Smith.

Not all was good news at Point Cook in 1921 though. On 6 April—one week after the RAAF came into existence—the Service sustained its first crash and casualty. Flying Officer James Fryer-Smith and mechanic Corporal Bertie Whicker took off at about 3.00 pm in an Avro 504K aircraft. The aircraft climbed to 500 feet and inexplicably nosedived into the ground a short distance north of the hangars by the beach. Mechanics working at the hangars ran to the scene of the accident and an ambulance followed. The crew was cut from the wreckage and transported to Caulfield Military Hospital, where Whicker died that night.[11] Reflective of the cold nature of military administration, the routine order that listed personnel for posting in the RAAF said:

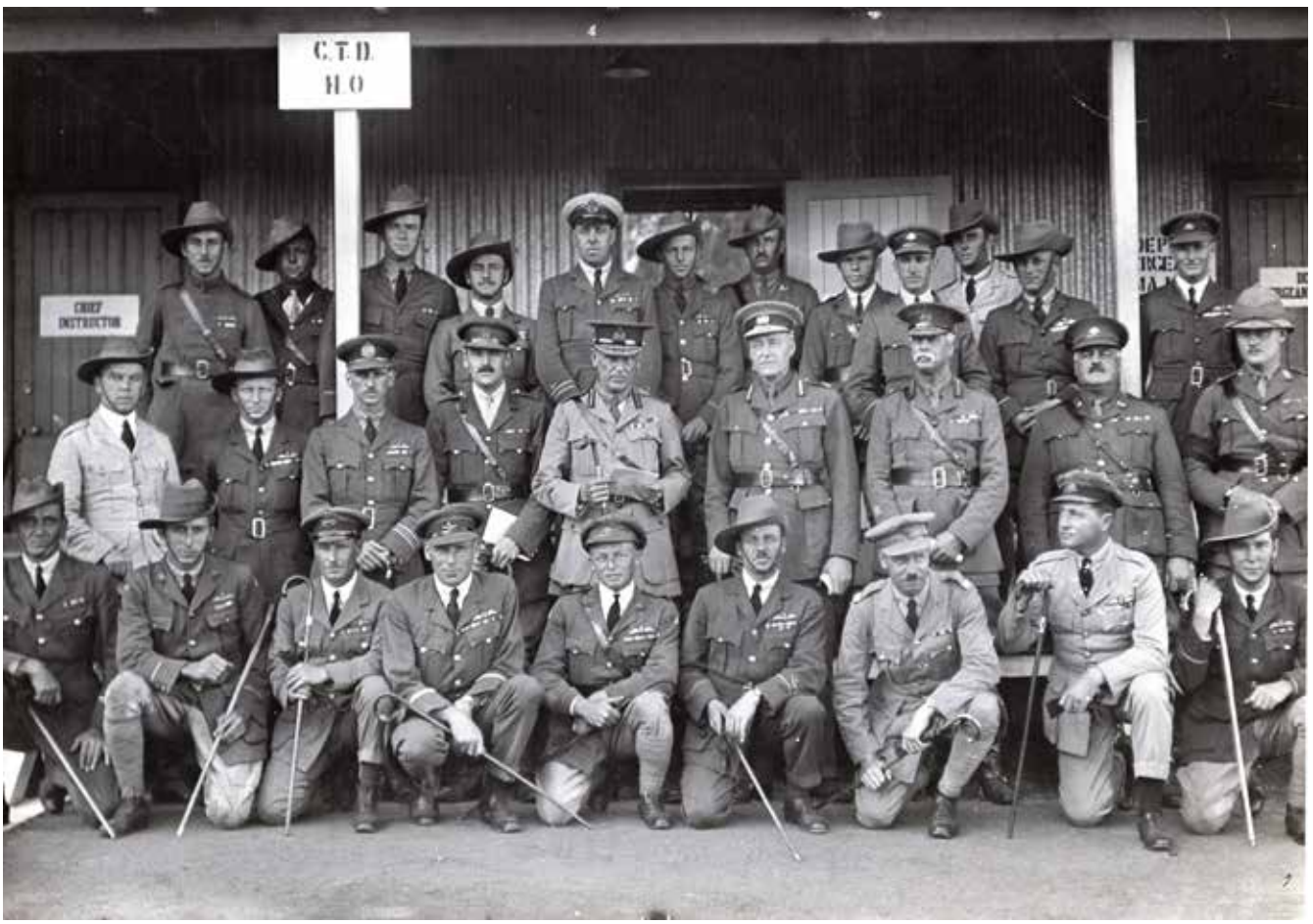
> The Commanding Officer regrets to announce the death, as the result of an Aeroplane Accident on 6/4/1921, of the undermentioned Airman, who is struck off the strength as from that date : -
>
> L.A.C. Whicker, B.W. (No.1 F.T.S.) – Fitter, Engine

Fryer-Smith was born in Perth and had served in the Royal Naval Air Service.[12] He remained in hospital for over a month and eventually recovered from his injuries. However, he was discharged as no longer fit for flying duties in 1925 after serving in the Quartermasters Branch.[13]

The task of selecting members of the RAAF from the 4000 applicants was enormous. Wing Commander Stanley 'Jimmy' Goble—an Australian-

born ex-Royal Naval Air Service and Royal Air Force officer who had been engaged by the Royal Australian Navy in the lead-up to the establishment of the RAAF—was appointed Director of Air Personnel and Training. He oversaw the task of selecting the officers and enlisted men.[14] Assisted by the first Permanent Air Force officers to be offered places, Wing Commanders Jimmy Goble and Richard Williams conducted interviews in Melbourne, Adelaide, Hobart, Launceston, Sydney and Brisbane over the first few months of the new Service's existence. Preference was given to Australian aviators who had served in World War I, especially ex-members of the Australian Flying Corps, to ensure a good range of experience and expertise could be maintained in the middle ranks as the RAAF grew.[15]

After a few weeks at Point Cook, the newly appointed RAAF officers and airmen underwent a drill and basic training course at the Army's Central Training Depot at Holsworthy Army Camp near Liverpool, New South Wales.[16] They went in two detachments commencing in September and November 1921 and trained together. They had not been issued with their new RAAF uniforms, and they wore their old Australian Flying Corps or Royal Air Force uniforms. The rank system of the Royal Air Force was adopted when the RAAF was formed in March 1921, although it had been proposed to do so earlier. The system recognised the two parent Services by adopting the Royal Flying Corps chevron and propeller ranks for enlisted men and the Royal Naval Air Service lace braid and eagle ranks for officers. The officers under training at Holsworthy



1921: majority of the officers appointed to the RAAF—under training at the Central Training Depot, Holsworthy, New South Wales with the Governor-General Lord Forster and his entourage (Author)

had their new RAAF rank braids affixed to their old uniforms. As a sign of the interest in the fledgling Service, Governor-General Lord Henry Forster paid the camp an official visit on 24 October 1921.

The new Commanding Officer of No 1 Station, Squadron Leader Allan Murray Jones, and his adjutant, Flying Officer Edward Howells, along with the RAAF's first disciplinary sergeant-major, Warrant Officer Hugh Cully, arrived at Point Cook on 3 January 1922, leading an advance party to reactivate the station that lay almost dormant for months.[17] The trained personnel arrived over the next few weeks and were allotted to their units. The majority were posted to No 1 Aircraft Depot, with No 1 Flying Training School and Nos 1 to 5 Squadrons (Provisional) receiving a cadre of one or two officers and a handful of men.[18]

With the personnel for the RAAF selected and trained, and No 1 Station at Point Cook settling into a routine of servicing and testing aircraft, Richard Williams saw it as vitally important to take 'every opportunity to demonstrate the possibilities and usefulness of aircraft, remembering that, '… few Australians had much knowledge of aircraft'.[19] Building an independent identity and a sound public reputation became the focus of the RAAF from 1922. A critical step was to issue the airmen with the new RAAF uniform, which became available from March 1922.[20] Reflecting the role of the 'cavalry of the air', the service dress uniform sported riding breeches and leggings for all ranks, and officers carried a black and silver riding stick. The four-dip indigo fabric of the winter uniform—later to be known as the 'passionate purple' during World War II[21]—was darker than the British equivalent and gave the RAAF an identity that still holds it apart from all other Commonwealth air forces. The white cotton version for summer use was replaced by a light khaki version after a short time. The cap badges and senior officer 'scrambled egg' bullion peaks included a wattle leaf and blossom motif, rather than the British oak leaf 'scrambled egg' peaks and the laurel leaf cap badge. Distinctive peaked caps were worn by all ranks, as opposed to the soldier's slouch hat and the sailor's peakless flat-top cap.

Within days of the first detachment of personnel arriving after training at Liverpool, the first ministerial visit took place, when Minister for Defence Walter Massy Greene inspected the hangars, workshops and stores.[22] This was followed soon after by a public open day at Point Cook organised as part of the local 'Back to Werribee Week' festival. Hangars were open for the 200 or so visitors to inspect aircraft and talk with mechanics and pilots. An aerobatic display was performed, and the visitors walked to the end of the pier to watch the landing of a Fairey IIID floatplane.[23] The aircraft was one of six ordered by the Navy for use with the fleet stationed at Rushcutters Bay in Sydney; but without the facilities or personnel to operate them, they were transferred to the RAAF and stored at Point Cook. The display aircraft was assembled for pilot training.


Aircraft

Australia's First and Only Aeronautic Journal

Vol. 3. No. 7. New Series, Vol. 1, No. 11. MARCH 31, 1922 Price 1/-

New Uniforms for R.A.A.F.

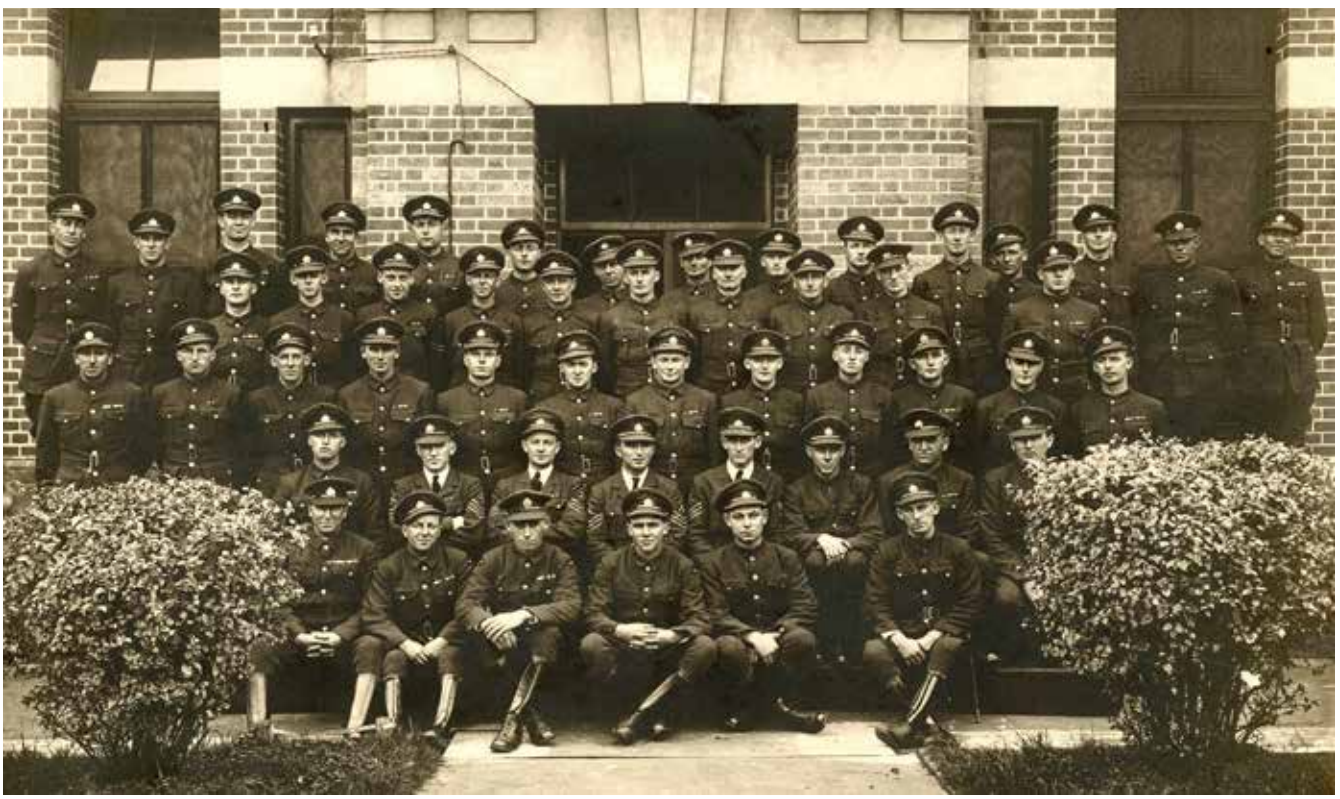
OUR THIRD ARM OF DEFENCE

1922: *Aircraft* magazine showing the new RAAF uniforms (Author)

A limited amount of building works approved in the previous annual budget was carried out at Point Cook in 1922. These included a small hospital, the aeronautics school that was originally planned for Queenscliff, additions to the old 1914 workshops and a motor transport garage.[24] With the completion of the garage, the Motor Transport Repair Section at North Fitzroy closed down, and most of the staff was transferred to Point Cook in April 1922. The garage still stands and is considered the spiritual home of motor transport in the RAAF. The ex-RAAF Motor Transport Drivers Association held reunions there in the 1990s.

In May 1922, five aircraftsmen were dismissed from the RAAF as unfit for Service life after a prima facie dispute over uniforms. Builders were extending the Airmen's Mess, and the men were required to eat dinner in the recreation room on forms that had become greasy from overalls worn at lunchtime. They, and most of the 230 other men, disregarded the general order to wear formal service dress at dinner.[25] This was not the official reason for their dismissal, but they cited it in a complaint to the press alleging wrongful dismissal. They also complained that life at Point Cook comprised routine camp work and excessive drill practice.[26] Wing Commander Richard Williams countered in the press that some 222 hours of flying training had been achieved in the previous two months, and drill was confined to a single two-hour session each week. He said that the five men had shown signs that air force work did not suit them and that it was 'both in their own interests and in the interests of the service, to give them an opportunity of making a fresh beginning in civil life, where they might be more successful'.[27]

In April 1922, Sir Ross Smith and Lieutenant Jim Bennett—national heroes in Australia for winning the 1919 England to Australia air race—had been killed on a test flight soon after taking off from Brooklands, England. They were preparing for an around-the-world flight. Smith and Bennett's bodies were repatriated to Australia, and each was given a state funeral in their home state: Smith in Adelaide and Bennett in Melbourne. As they had served in



1922: firing party dispatched from Point Cook to Adelaide for the funeral of Sir Ross Smith (RAAF Museum)

the Australian Flying Corps during the war, full military honours were to be paid by the RAAF. The funerals were used by the RAAF to showcase the new Service, and the RAAF's senior officer, Williams, organised the RAAF's involvement in the funerals himself.[28] With the bodies arriving by ship, he had almost two months to plan the details. However, it is unlikely to have been possible to perform drill at the exceptionally high standard reported in the press with drill practice confined to a single two-hour session each week as Williams had claimed in May.

Military funerals are laden with symbolism, and the RAAF displayed the customs its members had acquired during World War I. In place of the horse-drawn gun carriage used at Army funerals, a tender (or light truck) carrying floral tributes towed an aircraft trailer carrying the coffin, which was draped with the Union Jack and had the officer's decorations, flying helmet, goggles and gloves placed on top. The use of motor transport—rather than horse-drawn transport—marked the flying services apart during the war. No 3 Squadron Australian Flying Corps had used a tender to carry the Baron von Richthofen's coffin at his funeral in France in 1918.

1922: funeral cortege for Sir Ross Smith using a RAAF tender and trailer (State Library of South Australia)

For Smith's funeral on 15 June 1922, tenders and trailers were sent by rail from Point Cook along with a firing party. Three D.H.9 aircraft were flown to Adelaide to perform the aerial escort for

1922: body of Sir Ross Smith lying in state in Adelaide with a RAAF catafalque party (RAAF Museum)

the cortege, and a guard of honour was mounted by Smith's comrades from the 3rd Light Horse and No 1 Squadron Australian Flying Corps.[29] Tens of thousands of people attended the funeral or lined the route. The Adelaide Returned Services Band played the funeral march, and Sergeant-Trumpeter Harris of that band played the *Last Post*. Similar arrangements were made for Bennett's funeral two days later, with the guard of honour being provided by men stationed at Point Cook and the support of the Melbourne Returned Services Band. That band was deliberately chosen by Williams, rather than an Army band, because it wore a dark-blue uniform and blended better with the all-RAAF appearance he wanted. One reporter mistook the band for an 'Air Force Band'. Bennett's cortege led from Queen's Hall in Parliament House through the crowded streets to the cemetery at St Kilda. Four aircraft flew overhead in a cross formation trailing black streamers.[30]

Smith and Bennett's funerals highlighted that a ceremonial marching band was part of the essential trappings of a military service, and forming its own band became a priority for the RAAF. Among the Motor Transport Fitters posted from Fitzroy to Point Cook in April 1922 was Corporal Birk Thacker, a talented bandsman. Thacker had served in the Australian Flying Corps in World War I[31], and he established a part-time brass band of musicians serving as airmen at Point Cook in January 1923. At Thacker's suggestion, Mr Hugh Niven—the highly regarded musician and bandmaster of the Brunswick City Band who migrated from Scotland before World War I—was engaged on a string of short contracts as a civilian band instructor from August 1923, working two half-days a week.[32] He was later granted honorary warrant officer rank and ultimately an honorary commission. Staffing the band was a priority for the RAAF and, unofficially, tradesmen

3. AMENDMENTS - STATION STANDING ORDERS - ROUTINE :

Reference Station Standing Orders, Part 4, Para 8, Sub-para V is cancelled, and the following substituted :-

SUMMER ROUTINE.

TRUMPET CALL.	MONDAY.	TUES. WED. & THURSDAY.	FRIDAY.	SATURDAY & SUNDAY.
REVEILLE.	0630	0630	0630	0700 Hrs.
BREAKFAST.	0745	0715	0715	0745 Hrs.
QUARTER-WARNING.	0815	0745	0745	0745 (Watch)
5 mins. WARNING.	0825	0755	0755	0755 Hrs.
ADVANCE.	0830	0800	0800	0800 Hrs.
STAND-DOWN (SmokOh)	1045	1045	1045	---------
STAND-TO.	1100	1100	1100	---------
FALL-IN (By UNITS at HANGARS)	1215	1215	1215	---------
DINNER.	1235	1235	1235	1235 Hrs.
QUARTER-WARNING.	1305	1305	1305	---------
5 Minutes WARNING.	1315	1315	1315	---------
ADVANCE.	1320	1320	1320	---------
STAND-DOWN (SmokeOh)	1500	1500	----	---------
STAND-TO.	1510	1510	----	---------
FALL-IN (By UNITS at HANGARS).	1705	1705	1545	---------
DISMISS (On UNIT PARADES)	1715	1715	1600	---------
TEA.	1730	1730	1615	1730 Hrs.
FIRST POST.	2200	2200	2200	2200 Hrs.
SECOND POST.	2230	2230	2230	2230 Hrs.
LIGHTS OUT.	2245	2245	2245	2245 Hrs.

1924: camp routine regulated by trumpet calls from 1922 (RAAF Museum)

1920s: airmen marching along the 'Burma Road' to lunch (RAAF Museum)

who could play a band instrument were favoured in recruitment.[33]

Station routine at Point Cook was regulated by trumpet calls, with everything from reveille to lights out on weekdays having its own distinctive trumpet call.[34] The ensign was lowered each weekday to the sound of *Retreat*, the times of sunset being given to the trumpeter by the station sergeant-major weekly.[35] The handful of tradesmen qualified as trumpeters also provided a service to the community by playing the *Last Post* at the funerals of local ex-servicemen and ANZAC Day commemorations.[36]

Discipline and regimentation were part and parcel of life at the station. The Orderly Sergeant called the roll after the sounding of *Tattoo* each evening in the recreation hall[37], and the gates were locked after the sounding of *Lights Out*.[38] When marching from the hangars by the shore to the camp—as the domestic area was still known—the men were regularly reminded in routine orders that they were to 'march at attention.'[39] The junior officers in charge of the marching airmen may have been as much at fault, as Flying Officer Horrie Miller said 'once past headquarters our progress degenerated into a pleasant amble.'[40] Airmen also needed reminding that, 'The practice of wearing fancy socks, tunics opened at the neck, with civilian pattern ties and collars, etc, when Airmen appear in uniform away from the Station, does not add to the prestige of the R.A.A.F.'[41]

Camp security, mostly involving incidents of theft, was a problem for a while in 1923. Enlisted

men were banned from entering their living quarters during work hours, and—in the start of what later developed into a RAAF Service Police capability—a 'Station Policeman' was appointed.[42] Equally disappointing was when Aircraftsman Harold Munro walked into the Adelaide Detective Office and announced, 'I believe there is a warrant out for my arrest'. He was correct and was charged with embezzling £250 from the funds of the mechanics' mess.[43]

Some refresher training for veteran war pilots with offers of civilian aviation employment was carried out in the first few years of the RAAF. The first *ab initio* flying course after World War I commenced in January 1923, and No 1 Flying Training School finally was as good as its name. The course was the first of four conducted between 1923 and 1926, with each course including graduates from the Army and Navy officer training colleges, Duntroon and Creswell. The training brought the usual dangers of learning to fly, notably stalling, and eight members of the RAAF died in flying accidents during 1925 and 1926. The first death, that of flying instructor Flying Officer Stewart Mailer, was also the first RAAF officer death.[44]

As the 1923 flying course progressed, it was decided to employ a professional 'Science Instructor' to teach the theory of aerodynamics, navigation, wireless, aerial range-finding, optics, internal combustion engines, bombing and gunnery. The position was taken up by Dr Richard Hoskins, who also provided lectures on mathematics and technical subjects out of hours for staff employed at Point Cook. Hoskins stayed with the RAAF until 1939, by which time his role was termed Principal Education Officer, in charge of five other RAAF education officers.

The training of wireless operators for members of aircraft crews commenced in February 1924[45], and from the same year, recruit courses were conducted on the station for newly enlisted airmen.[46] In 1925, the flying training course accepted civilian applicants—for future employment in civil aviation—and the course also trained RAAF members as non-commissioned pilots. Applications were allowed from serving RAAF members for the civil training places without the need to discharge from the RAAF initially.[47]

Point Cook played host to one of the most unusual aircraft of the immediate postwar period when Vickers Limited shipped its latest Vickers

1923: the 'Flying Pig'—Vickers Vulcan eight-passenger aircraft assembled at Point Cook for evaluation by QANTAS (RAAF Museum)

1923: Avro 504K trainers in the hangar (Author)

1923: carpenters' shop (Author)

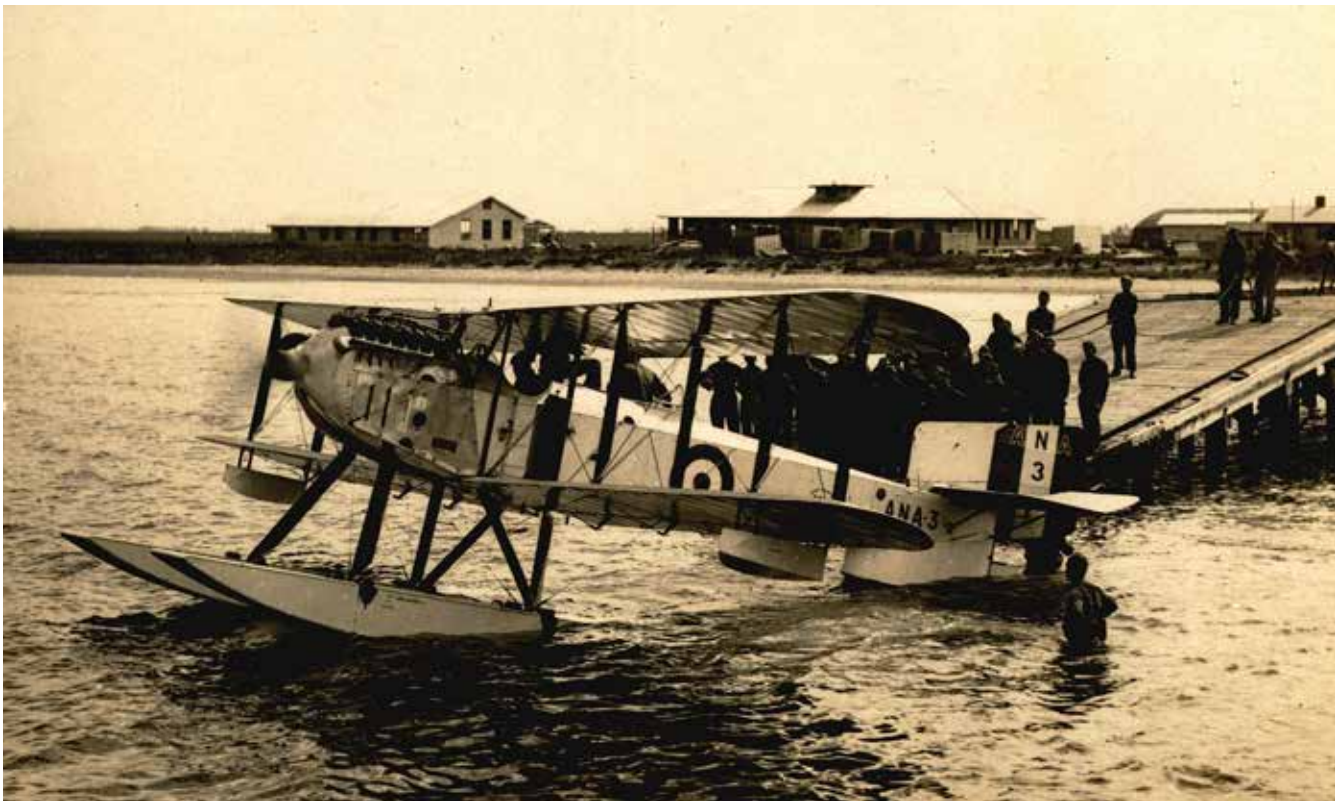
Vulcan eight-passenger aircraft to Point Cook in February 1923. The aircraft was a development of the Vickers Vimy with a taller fuselage and only one engine. The aircraft was in Australia for appraisal by the newly formed QANTAS airline. The assembly took a month, and the Vickers pilot, Geoffrey Wigglesworth, flew the aircraft—dubbed the 'Flying Pig'—to Longreach, Queensland in March 1923.[48] Interest in the 'Flying Pig' amongst the RAAF mechanics was sufficiently high that an order was issued stating, 'the Vickers Vulcan Aeroplane at present being erected … is out of bounds to all ranks with the exception of those engaged in its erection'.[49] Ultimately, the aircraft was rejected by QANTAS due to its poor performance, and orders were cancelled.

A fresh building program commenced in 1923—following the Parliamentary Select Committee on Public Works deliberations and tour of Point Cook—and it helped to cement the village atmosphere at Point Cook. The master plan for the station identified areas for different functions. The Airmen's Mess was already located in the officer precinct, so it needed to be moved 200 metres north into the newly identified airmen precinct. The opportunity was taken to enlarge the mess. Building relocations were not rare, and the old Navy hall at Williamstown was dismantled and relocated to the community services precinct of the station. It served as the recreation hall before becoming the gymnasium, and it briefly

1923: some of Point Cook's famous cypresses soon after planting (RAAF Museum)

1923: the primary school for children of Point Cook and the local community (RAAF Museum)

1925: Voight floatplanes of the United States Great Grey Fleet at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)



1924: Fairey IIID floatplane used by Wing Commander Jimmy Goble and Flying Officer Ivor McIntyre in the first aerial circumnavigation of Australia (RAAF Museum)

housed the School of Photography before ultimately becoming the station cinema during World War II. A library, recreation room and canteen were added to the precinct along with a state primary school. The school catered for the local farming community as well as the RAAF families living on the station. Sewerage and electricity were upgraded, and the second water tower was constructed. The cypress tree planting program that still makes Point Cook such a distinctive site was commenced. A planting program of sugar gums was carried out in 1921, but the trees did not offer sufficient protection from the prevailing winter southerlies.

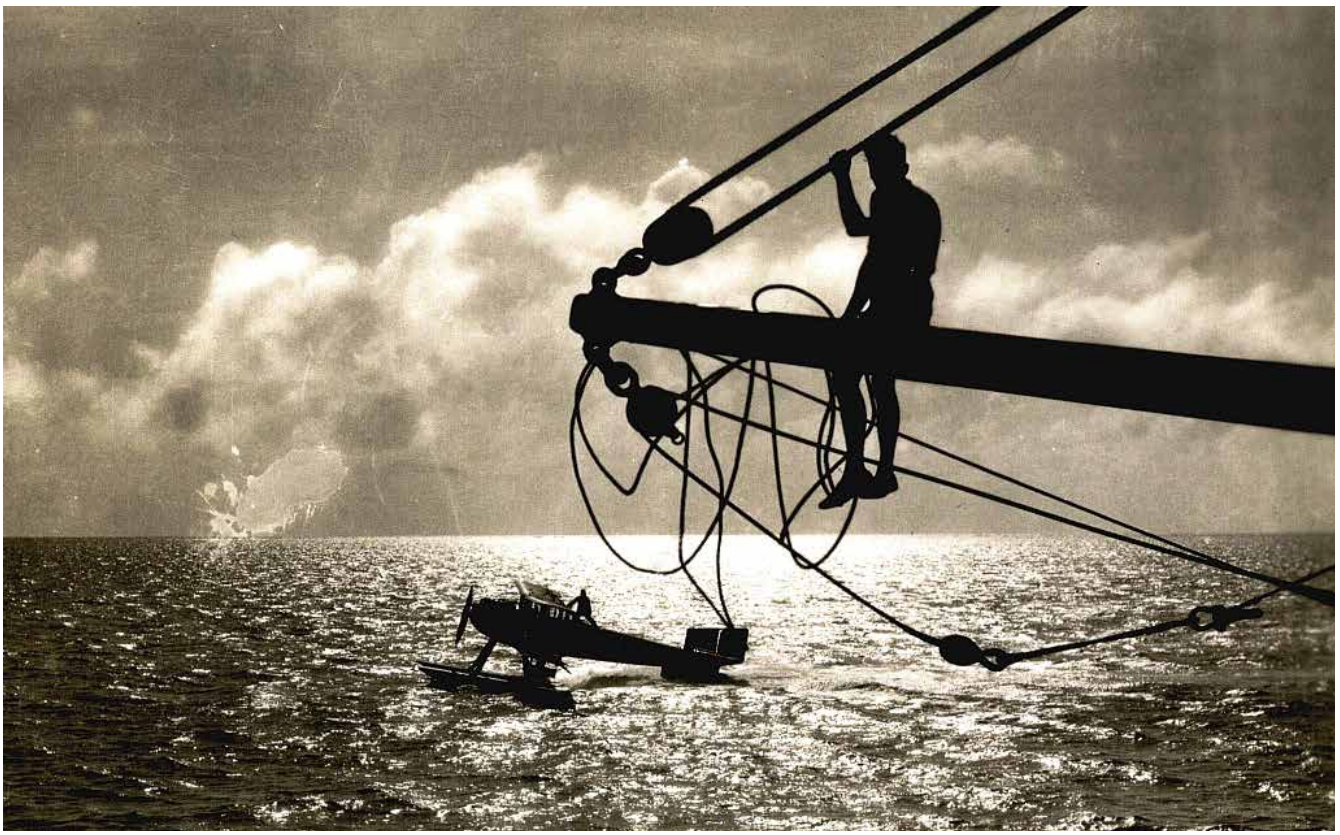
The difficulty of transporting heavy building materials to Point Cook meant that most buildings were constructed of timber. As the fear of fire in such an environment was ever-present, a fire shed was constructed equidistant from the Officers Mess, Airmen's Mess and married quarters.[50] Fire sentries were posted in weekly orders, and by the mid-1920s, a dedicated firefighting squad—precursors to the RAAF firefighter mustering—underwent regular training with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade at Eastern Hill, Melbourne.[51] Snakes were also a threat, and Wing Commander Adrian Cole's daughter recalls her father killing a tiger snake with a piece of fencing wire while she, being very young, was perched safely on his shoulders.[52]

From the start, flying at Point Cook was mostly carried out on the west side of the road leading from the camp to the hangars, and the land to the east was not used. The road was alongside a north-south fence that divided the original sheep paddocks, and the 40-hectare 'west aerodrome' was in reasonably good condition through regular use. It was decided to establish the 60-hectare 'east aerodrome' in 1921, and the site was gradually levelled, and couch grass was planted over both aerodromes. The concept of runways had not developed, and a white circle in the centre of each aerodrome indicated the best landing spot. This could be approached from any angle depending on the wind direction. Parades were held in a few places near the camp area, including on the northern edge of the west aerodrome. A small saluting base was built there, and drill practice therefore ranged over parts of the west aerodrome. A routine order was issued in 1923 that, 'In future parties are not to be marched across the Western Aerodrome while flying is in progress.'[53] However, the order was rescinded in 1924 when the eastern aerodrome became available for use, and a new order that increased the status of drill practice read, 'When drill parades are being held on the Western Aerodrome … care is to be taken to avoid interfering with such parades, and machines landing will land on the Eastern Aerodrome.'[54]

Alongside the minimal student training, significant flying activities were conducted at Point Cook, or by its personnel. Pilots formed an informal aerobatic display team that took part in public displays[55], including the RAAF's first aerial pageant, held at Flemington Racecourse near Melbourne in December 1924. The displays included formation flying, aerobatics, picking up and dropping messages, bombing and mock air combat. Aircraft from Point Cook flew at significant military and naval occasions such as the visits of the Royal Navy Special Reserve Squadron in 1924 and the United States Great Grey Fleet in 1925. The unchallenged detection of the United States fleet off the coast by RAAF aircraft—in conditions too rough for the United States Navy Voight floatplanes to fly—was reciprocated by a morning surprise 'raid' on the pier at Point Cook by aircraft from the USS *Richmond*. The spectacular display was spoken about for many years. On the ground below many of the official flypasts, a RAAF guard of honour and the Air Force Band took centre stage, because the RAAF had the largest body of permanent Defence personnel based in the Melbourne area. They were also involved in more routine work, such as guard duty at Melbourne's Federal Parliament House and the Governor-General's garden party.[56]

Aside from ceremonial work, the important role of helping to open up Australian air and sea navigation was supported. In 1924, a Fairey IIID aircraft, flown by Flying Officer Ernest Andrew 'Pard' Mustard and supported by a crew from Point

1924: Avro 505K flown by Lieutenant 'Bones' Kennedy, Royal Australian Navy, after it struck, and was suspended by, the power line on the vacant site of the recently removed Airmen's Mess in Harmony Row (Author)



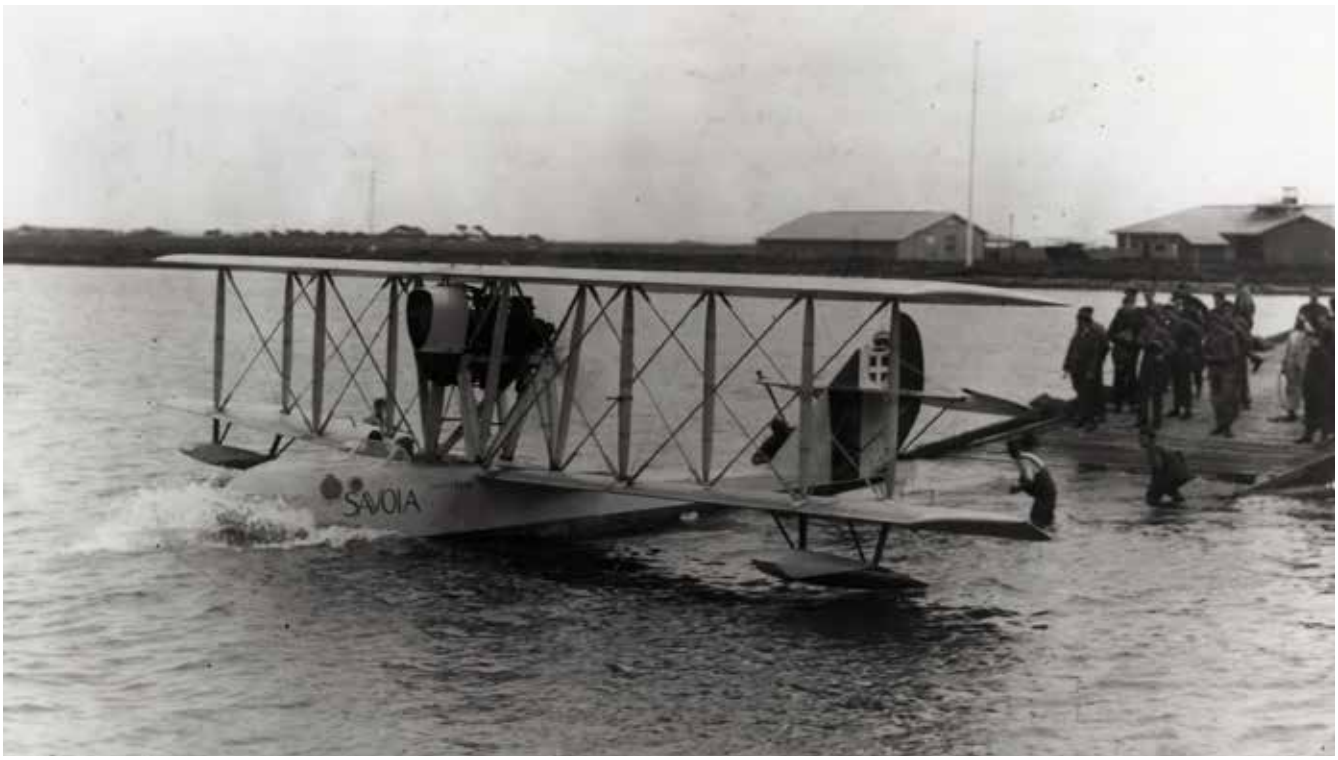
1920s: an excellent photographic study of a Fairey IIID floatplane (RAAF Museum)

1924: Goble and McIntyre held high in triumph at St Kilda beach, Melbourne (RAAF Museum)

Cook, was dispatched to Queensland to take aerial photographs to help the Navy map the Great Barrier Reef. The route across Bass Strait as far as Hobart was also surveyed with RAAF assistance. In another national first, an aerial photography laboratory was built behind the aeronautics school at Point Cook in 1924.[57]

One of the most celebrated aerial activities of the 1920s was the first aerial circumnavigation of the Australian mainland by Wing Commander Jimmy Goble and Flying Officer Ivor McIntyre. They left Point Cook in a Fairey IIID floatplane on 6 April 1924 and landed back in Melbourne at St Kilda beach after the 44-day anticlockwise journey to be greeted by a crowd of 10 000 people. Their arrival was escorted by a fleet of 12 aircraft that joined them as they flew over Point Cook.[58] McIntyre was a newly recruited ex-Royal Air Force seaplane pilot, and he acted as pilot while Goble acted as navigator.[59] The

1924: Flying Officer Ivor McIntyre carrying out maintenance on the Fairey IID engine during the first aerial circumnavigation of Australia (RAAF Museum)



1925: Italian Air Force Savoia-Marchetti flying boat off the end of the Point Cook pier (RAAF Museum)

feat was replicated four months later by the first landplane to circumnavigate Australia—a D.H.50A under trial by the Civil Aviation Authority—which completed the journey in 22 days. The flight left from Point Cook, and six RAAF aircraft provided an aerial departure escort.[60] In August 1926, the D.H.50J flown by British pioneer long-distance pilot and de Havilland test pilot Alan Cobham was overhauled by mechanics at Point Cook. Cobham departed from Point Cook on the return leg of the first England-Australia-England flight.

The RAAF played host to Vice Commandante di Stormo Marchese Francesco di Pinedo, the head of the Permanent Italian Air Force, and his mechanic Ernesto Campanelli in 1925. They were on a 32 000 kilometre flight from Rome to Tokyo via Australia. Over their 10 weeks in Australia, they circled the mainland anticlockwise from Broome to Cooktown in their Savoia-Marchetti flying boat.[61] Williams arranged receptions for them in all states and provided them with a map of the coast of Australia prepared by Goble and McIntyre the previous year. Once in Melbourne, their flying boat was overhauled

1925: Stormo Marchese Francesco di Pinedo and Ernesto Campanelli of the Italian Air Force departing Point Cook after overhaul of their Savoia-Marchetti flying boat (RAAF Museum)

at Point Cook by No 1 Aircraft Depot; and perhaps not being accustomed to a senior foreign military dignitary, those at Point Cook were reminded that, 'Airmen will be most punctilious in paying compliments to him during his stay'.[62] In a later counterpart to the story, RAAF members serving in Italy during World War II came across the same

1926: (l to r) Flight Lieutenant Ivor McIntyre, Sergeant Les Trist and Group Captain Richard Williams beside the D.H.50A on the survey flight to New Guinea and the Solomon Islands (RAAF Museum)

aircraft, still with the RAAF badge and wording 'Pt Cook Melbourne' that was painted on the hull by the RAAF mechanics.

Group Captain Richard Williams and Flight Lieutenant Ivor McIntyre surveyed the route to New Guinea and the Solomon Islands in the de Havilland D.H.50A that was shipped to Australia for use by the Governor-General in 1926, but considered more useful in survey duties. Accompanied by mechanic Sergeant Les Trist, the flight from September to December 1926 covered over 16 000 kilometres and was the first time that an Australian-based aircraft flew beyond Australian territory. As with the flight with Goble, McIntyre acted as pilot due to Williams' lack of experience in flying seaplanes. Their aircraft was the first to carry the lettering 'Royal Australian Air Force' on its fuselage.

In August 1928, Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm took off from Point Cook in the *Southern Cross*—the same aircraft in which they were the first to cross the Pacific Ocean by air—and made the first nonstop east-west crossing of the Australian continent, landing in Perth.[63] They were accompanied by wireless operator McWilliams and navigator Litchfield and completed the flight in 23 hours and 24 minutes. They flew overnight using 'blind flying' instruments and battling storms that blew them off course.[64]

By the mid-1920s, the financial situation in Australia improved sufficiently for the original plan for the RAAF's development to be reinvigorated,

1928: Charles Kingsford Smith and Charles Ulm refuelling the *Southern Cross* at Point Cook prior to the first nonstop east-west transcontinental crossing of Australia (RAAF Museum)

and a five-year program was announced in 1924. This allowed No 1 and No 3 Squadrons to be raised as independent units at Point Cook—although they each remained about the size of a flight—which formally occurred on 1 July 1925. No 1 Station Point Cook reverted to its previous name of No 1 Flying Training School.[65] The aircraft needed to establish the squadrons were reconditioned aircraft from the British Imperial Gift.[66] On 29 June 1925, the aircraft of No 3 Squadron departed from Point Cook with Squadron Leader Frank Lukis leading the squadron to Richmond, New South Wales. In March 1926, No 1 Aircraft Depot moved to Laverton under command of Squadron Leader Paddy McBain, along with most of the Imperial Gift stores from Point Cook and 60 railway truckloads from Spotswood. At first, there was no accommodation on Laverton, so the personnel posted there who lived at Point Cook commuted the eight kilometres north each day, taking packed lunches from the Point Cook messes. No 1 Squadron joined No 1 Aircraft Depot at Laverton under command of Flight Lieutenant Harry Cobby in January 1928.

Parachutes were tested for use in the RAAF at Point Cook in January 1926. The tests were supervised by Flight Lieutenant Ellis Wackett, who had trained in parachute procedures in Britain. The Irving parachutes made in the United States were attached to wooden torso-shaped dummies and released from the bomb rack under the wing of a D.H.9 aircraft. The tests on Sunday 25 January were watched by the Chief of the Air Staff, Group Captain Williams, and over 100 boys from the Young Australia League who were on one of the many aerodrome inspections arranged for boys in the 1920s as an encouragement to future aviators and mechanics.[67] The first live parachute jump from a military aircraft in Australia was carried out by Ellis Wackett on 26 May 1926 at Richmond.[68]

Further tests were conducted in June 1926 with wooden dummies at Point Cook, and Wackett took the first jump at the station on 23 June along with students of the 1926 flying course. To jump from the aircraft, they climbed down a short ladder with handrails fitted outside the rear cockpit and pulled a ripcord three seconds after letting go of the ladder. Williams jumped in August 1926 from a D.H.9A aircraft, later saying that, 'I judged that it would be a good example if, before issuing an order for the compulsory wearing of parachutes, I showed my confidence in them.'[69] On that jump, he narrowly missed the water tower and the high voltage power lines in the camp area of the station, later admitting, 'I told my wife of my decision to make the jump – after the event'.[70]

1926: wooden torso dummy for parachute testing mounted under the wing of a D.H.9 aircraft (RAAF Museum)

1926: preparing for a parachute jump from D.H.9A aircraft (RAAF)

1926: moments after jumping from the ladder of a D.H.9A aircraft with an Irving parachute (RAAF Museum)

Those on the ground also had cause for concern at times, when the weighted wooden torso dummies used for testing parachutes came crashing to earth if the parachute failed to open—one going through the roof of the billiard room in the Officers Mess and wrecking the billiard table. Air Commodore Paddy Heffernan later recalled that the mess secretary had the presence of mind to throw broken cues and chairs into the wreckage, which were subsequently claimed for replacement at public expense.[71]

The visit to Australia by the Duke of York in 1927 was another major public relations opportunity for the RAAF. The results, however, were mixed. The gloss was taken off the fine ceremonial turnout of the guard of honour for the Duke's arrival in Melbourne on 21 April when two D.H.9 aircraft in a seven-ship V formation from Point Cook collided midair and crashed, killing all four crew members. Contrary to orders, none of them was wearing a parachute. The Duke paid an informal visit to Point Cook a few days later, where he toured the station and planted a tree near the main parade ground, in what later became the memorial grove beside the parade ground.

The Duke and Duchess were in Australia for the opening of the Provisional Parliament House, Canberra in the Australian Federal Territory on 9 May 1927. Again, the grand spectacle, involving a guard of honour and bands from the three Services, was marred when the singing of the National Anthem by Dame Nellie Melba and the Duke's speech were all but drowned out by the sound of the RAAF flypasts.[72] During the military review later that afternoon, an S.E.5a aircraft crashed very close to the YWCA tent, and the pilot was given immediate assistance but died that evening in hospital.[73] He was Flying Officer Francis Ewen, adjutant of No 1 Flying Training School at Point Cook.[74] To make matters worse, an S.E.5a crashed near Mount Buffalo on the way back to Point Cook. The pilot, Sergeant Orm Denny, survived.

The RAAF's ex-Navy Fairey IIID floatplanes had performed very well, but they were superseded by Supermarine Seagull III seaplanes in early 1926. These amphibians were assigned to No 101 Fleet Cooperation Flight in June 1926 and were soon dispatched to Richmond for work in support of the Navy at Sydney.[75] In late 1927, Squadron Leader Ellis Wackett commanded the Papuan Survey Flight from Laverton in two Seagull III aircraft, returning to Point Cook in January 1928.

The RAAF took delivery of two ex-Royal Air Force Southampton flying boats in January 1928, and the Point Cook pier was lengthened and a large hangar built to house them as well as the Australian-made Widgeon I aircraft built by Ellis Wackett's brother Lawrence in Sydney. The Widgeon was used for flying boat training, having made a nonstop flight from Mascot to Point Cook in June 1927. The Southamptons were the largest aircraft in the RAAF inventory at the time. After arriving by steamer at Port Melbourne, the huge crates were taken by road to Point Cook where the aircraft were assembled. Press reports spoke of the difficulty of transporting

1927: The Duke of York with guard of honour in front of Point Cook's first permanent building—the office at the southern tarmac (RAAF Museum)

the crates over the still poor road to Point Cook.[76] The aircraft were accompanied by Flying Officer Frederick Briggs of the Royal Air Force, who supervised their erection and test flew them.[77]

Later in 1928, the RAAF played host to a flight of four modern Southampton II flying boats from the Royal Air Force Far East Flight. Unlike the wooden-hulled RAAF Southamptons, they had aluminium hulls. The aircraft were on their long-distance 'great flying boat cruise' to fly the British flag in South-East Asia. One of the RAAF Southamptons departed from Point Cook in June to rendezvous with its British counterparts in Adelaide as they flew anticlockwise from Broome, Western Australia.[78] Unfortunately, the RAAF aircraft overturned in a freak wind gust on the Torrens River and needed to be salvaged by a floating crane.[79] The British Southamptons stayed at Point Cook for two months from July 1928 and were overhauled at the station.[80]

Out of hours life for those living on the station at Point Cook in the 1920s meant making their own entertainment. Movies were shown at the cinema, lectures were given in the recreation room, debating and rifle clubs were formed, concerts by visiting entertainers were organised monthly, and on one occasion, 'Professor Bell' and members of the Australian Society of Magicians performed a show.[81] Sports were also important, especially against other organisations, such as football matches against the Post and Telegraph Department and participation in the Werribee District Cricket Association competition. Sport was held on Wednesday afternoons—a practice that remains well into the 21st century—and from late 1923, a white sports singlet with a winged RAAF motif badge was the standard athletics uniform. Being located on the bay, fishing was a popular pastime. Airmen used RAAF dinghies for fishing by 1922, but after repeatedly returning them dirty, the privilege was revoked in 1924.[82]

Air Marshal Sir George Jones later said of his time at Point Cook in the 1920s, 'in those first ten years it was an intimate club, in which everybody knew or was known to each other'.[83] Officers held a formal dining-in at the mess every few months—although there is no evidence that sergeants and warrant officers did. Officers and airmen attended the tri-service balls held in Melbourne each year

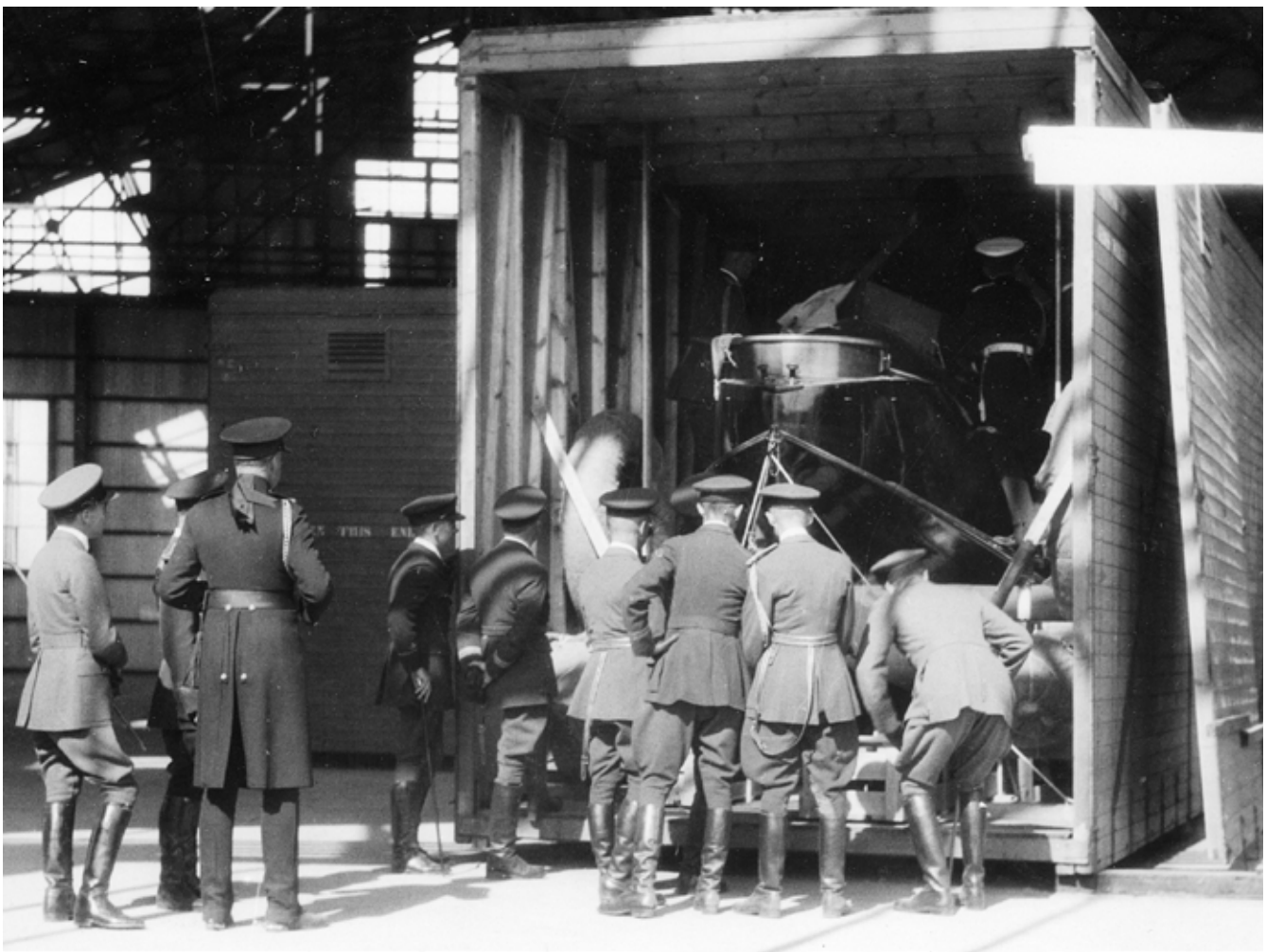
1927: remains of Flying Officer Francis Ewen's S.E.5a after crashing during the military review for the opening of Parliament House, Canberra (RAAF)

1927: The Duke of York inspecting a Supermarine Seagull III seaplane (RAAF Museum)

as well as occasional RAAF balls. For the 1924 ball, transport was provided from the motor transport section in the form of an ambulance for officers and their wives, while airmen and their wives travelled in an open char-à-banc.[84]

Families living on the station were carefully vetted, because life in the relative isolation of Harmony Row—now known as Cole Street—could be very difficult if there was any friction. The new station commander's residence, first occupied by Wing Commander Adrian Cole, was built in 1927 and looked down Harmony Row in a manner that reflected the hierarchical layout of seating at a formal dining-in. The heritage listed streetscape of Harmony Row remains intact—protected by Point Cook's inclusion on the National Heritage List—and includes an aircraft packing crate that was recycled for use as a stable in the backyard of the 1927 station commander's residence.

By the late 1920s, the high aircraft crash rate was a serious cause of concern for the Government. Ground accidents, such as the death of Aircraftsman Leonard Devine, added to the mounting toll of dead and injured. Devine, a 25-year-old keen cricketer, was struck by a propeller during the swinging procedure to start an aircraft engine on 4 February 1926. He died the next day following an operation in Caulfield Military Hospital.[85] A faulty contact switch was blamed as the cause of the accident that resulted in his death.[86] The visit of Air Marshal Sir John Salmond in 1928, on a government-invited inspection tour similar to Lord Kitchener and



1928: official acceptance of the ex-Royal Air Force Southampton flying boats (RAAF Museum)

1928: open day for the Southampton II flying boats of the Royal Air Force Far East Flight (RAAF Museum)

Admiral Jellicoe's earlier visits, was used to look into all aspects of the RAAF including its accident rate. Salmond's report, in short, found that there was an urgent need to modernise the ageing, mostly Imperial Gift fleet of aircraft and for training and stores accounting to be overhauled.

Point Cook served the newly formed RAAF and the civil aviation sector very well through the 1920s. It was frequently in the newspapers as well as the minds of the general public, being the base for many of Australia's significant pioneering aviation feats. Point Cook had grown into its new role and had effectively become the practical form of Australia's growing airmindedness. As the sole operational base for the RAAF from the time of the new Service's inception, Point Cook spawned the

1928: mechanics preparing to start the engines of a Southampton flying boat (RAAF Museum)

modest expansion of Australia's military aviation. The decade to follow heralded a new era at Point Cook with the gradual implementation of Salmond's plan, the introduction of new aviation technologies and the transition once again to war.

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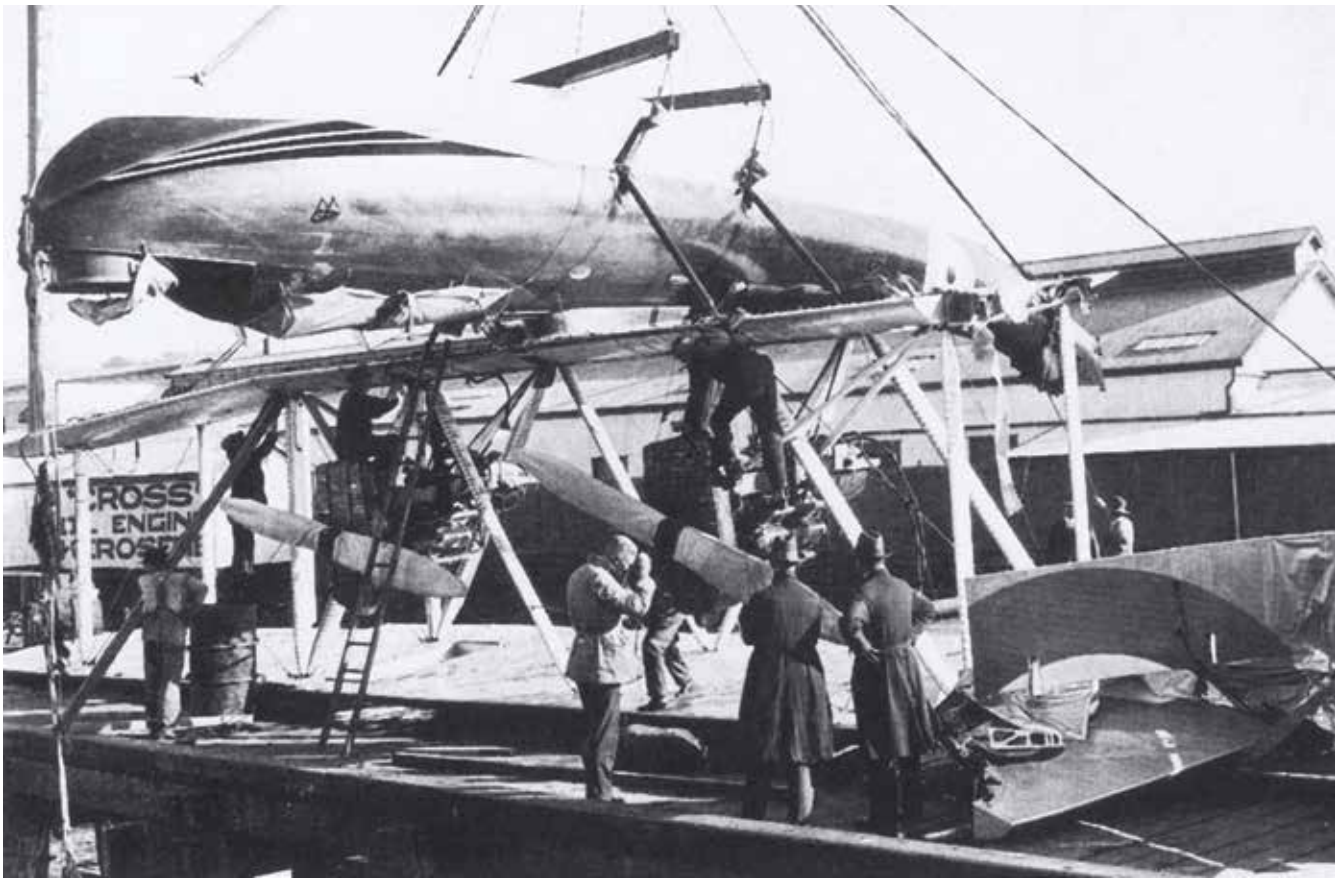
83 Jones, *From Private to Air Marshal: The Autobiography of Air Marshal Sir George Jones KBE, CB, DFC*, p. 29.

84 1AD Routine Order 180, 2 October 1924.
85 'Struck by Propeller: Airman's Death', *The Argus*, 6 February 1926, p. 24.
86 'Point Cook', The *Werribee Shire Banner*, 11 February 1926, p. 5.

1928: Air Marshal Sir John Salmond inspecting airmen at Point Cook

1928: Southampton on the Torrens River, Adelaide after being overturned by a freak wind gust (RAAF Museum)

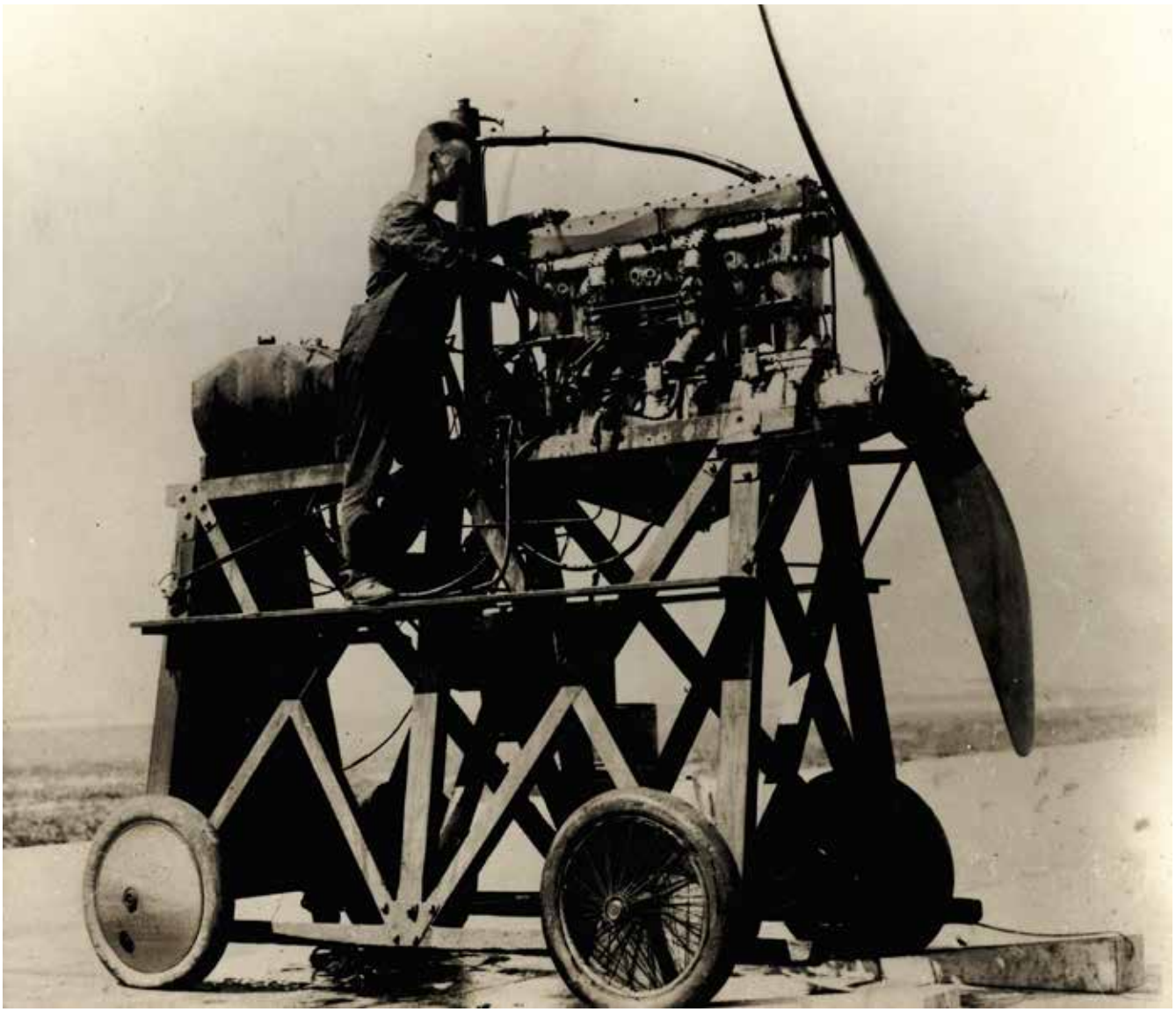
1928: launching a Southampton flying boat at the end of the Point Cook pier (State Library of Victoria)



1928: Southampton being salvaged on Torrens River, Adelaide (RAAF)

1926: students of mid-1920s *ab initio* flying training course, including graduates from Creswell and Duntroon (RAAF Museum)

1926: Sergeant Ward and Air Mechanic Capel with Alan Cobham after overhauling his D.H.50J at Point Cook during the England-Australia-England flight (RAAF Museum)



1920s: engine test rig (RAAF Museum)

1920s: armament training room (RAAF Museum)

1920s: navigation training room (RAAF Museum)

1928: Point Cook's first soccer team—posing with Wing Commander Adrian Cole (RAAF Museum)

1923: one of the first band practices by the Air Force Band—outside the gymnasium (RAAF Museum)

1923: first public appearance of the Air Force Band—Watton Street, Werribee, Victoria (RAAF Museum)

Chapter 6 - A Drip-Fed Plan

British Air Marshal Sir John Salmond's report of September 1928 highlighted the many deficiencies in RAAF organisation, administration, training and policy, most of which—according to Australian Chief of the Air Staff Air Commodore Richard Williams—were already well known and were pointed out to the Air Marshal.[1] Salmond placed much of the blame on a lack of government expenditure on the RAAF; and while his plan for RAAF development was generally well received by the Government, the financial situation in 1929 did little to allow Salmond's recommendations to be actioned in a timely manner. In fact, a proposal by the Chiefs of the Navy and Army to divide the RAAF into two separate elements and absorb them into the other Services was seriously considered as a cost-saving measure.[2] In the climate of international disarmament, Williams recalled that 'the Service was more or less at a standstill'.[3]

The Depression of 1929–33 forced the RAAF to cut back severely and allowed little more than a trickle of flying training to be carried out at Point Cook. However, with the return of Senator George Pearce as Minister for Defence in 1932, the decision to keep the RAAF as a separate Service was confirmed in September[4]; and the economic recovery from 1933 allowed for the purchase of some new aircraft and a modest expansion of RAAF personnel.[5] By 1936, it was evident that war in Europe, and possibly the Pacific, would soon eventuate, and much needed modernisation, including a new uniform, followed in the lead-up to World War II along the lines suggested by Salmond.

The RAAF had operated the surplus World War I Imperial Gift aircraft at Point Cook from its inception, and Salmond's report of 1928 had recommended a modest but achievable program of development. The planned capabilities included additional fighter aircraft for Point Cook and Richmond, coastal reconnaissance aircraft for Point Cook and Port Macquarie, bomber aircraft for Laverton and Richmond, and the formation of an Army cooperation squadron for Canberra. There was also to be a cadet wing at Duntroon, a stores depot at Richmond, a recruit training depot at Laverton and a Reserve squadron in Perth. The plan also included seaplane slipways at Albany, Brisbane and Darwin, as well as RAAF aircraft operating from Navy cruisers.[6] It took a decade to drip-feed Salmond's plan to maturity. By comparison, Britain's Royal Air Force already had 35 bomber squadrons and 17 fighter squadrons stationed on mainland Britain in its Air Defence of Great Britain Command, headed by Salmond from 1925.

Naturally, only British aircraft were considered for the modernisation of the RAAF aircraft fleet, and

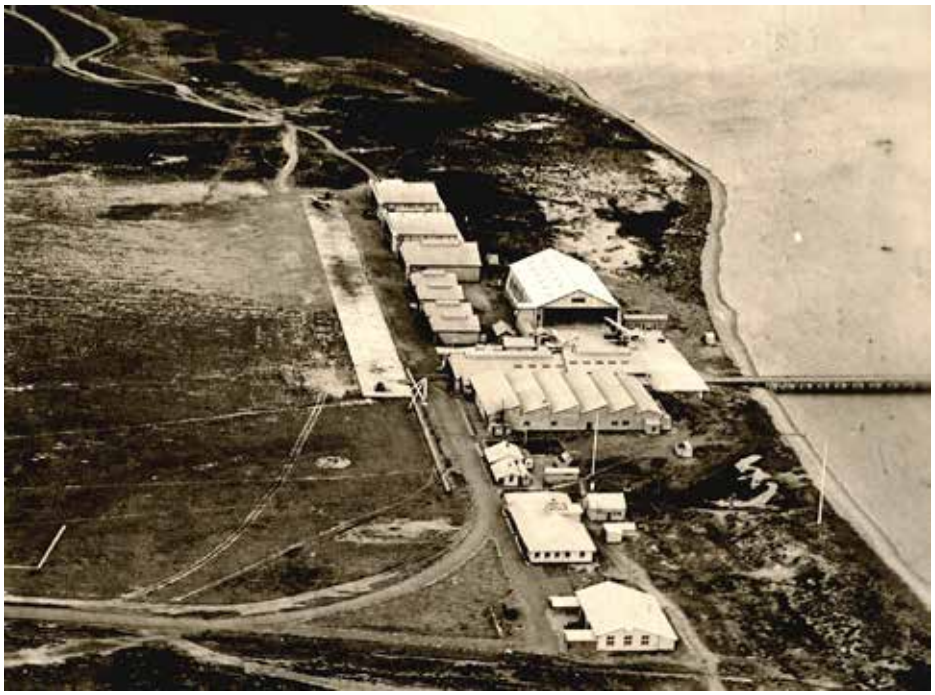
1929: domestic area looking north-west—the development of the 1920s is evident (RAAF Museum)

because Britain applied unofficial protectionism of its aviation industry, many of the technological advances made in the United States were not available. The aircraft selected to modernise the fleet were Bristol Bulldog fighters, Westland Wapiti light bombers and Supermarine Seagull III amphibious aircraft—all biplanes—which were ordered in 1929. Salmond recommended that making aircraft in Australia was a waste of effort. In fact, Lawrence Wackett's Widgeon I was deliberately burnt at Point Cook in February 1929 due to the high cost of overhaul after it was no longer needed for training.[7]

Before the Depression struck—and with No 3 Squadron already well established at Richmond and No 1 Squadron successfully moved to Laverton in January 1928—No 1 Flying Training School at Point Cook settled down to its core business of flying training. No 101 Flight also remained at Point Cook conducting seaplane and flying boat training. Flying cadetships were announced for the 1928 midyear course, with 250 applications for the 26 positions that were offered.[8] Plans were approved for building another block of cadet living accommodation similar to the 1918 block of single officer accommodation that was built on the site of Henry Petre's canvas hangar.[9] In addition, the first of a series of blocks for airmen accommodation was built in the airmen precinct to the north. These buildings survive and were in use as late as the start of the 21st century.

Plans were approved for a two-storey headquarters building in late 1929. The location of the headquarters was in accordance with the master plan developed by 1918, and the headquarters marked the boundary of the parade ground. The clay surface of the parade ground caused a lot of problems, and after attempts to break it down with gypsum[10], a gravel surface was laid. The entire area was surrounded by ornamental plantings of cypresses. The significance of the location of the parade ground must have been clearly understood, as it was the place from which Eric Harrison made the historic first military aviation flight in 1914. The plan gave it pride of place in the centre of the sweeping road junction that led from the old camp to the flight line. The north-facing open-air balcony provided a fine vantage point for VIPs to view the graduation and annual inspection parades.

The parade ground remains Australian military aviation's *sanctum sanctorum*.



1929: southern tarmac looking east (RAAF Museum)

Flying training at Point Cook in the late 1920s was not without its mishaps. Flying Officers Brown and Bailhashe struck an electric streetlight wire near Werribee in June 1928 and nosedived into deep mud. They were uninjured, but it took 45 minutes to extract Brown from the soft mud that held him in his seat.[11] Point Cook was not so fortunate with the death of one its most interesting and celebrated ground staff members. Henri Hermene Tovell was a war orphan whose parents were killed in France in World War I when he was five years old. After a remarkable story of survival, included being wounded twice, he was adopted by No 4 Squadron Australian Flying Corps as its mascot in 1917. They fitted him with a Flying Corps pattern uniform, complete with two wounded stripes. Tim Tovell and other mechanics of the squadron smuggled him to Australia from Flanders on the troopship *Kaiser-i-Hind* in 1919. He was hidden in bags of official records and stitched into a sack containing loaves of bread in a successful attempt to elude British and French police. After being brought up in Queensland with the Tovell family, 'Digger', as Henri was affectionately known, went to Point Cook and was unofficially apprenticed as a motor mechanic by the RAAF.

While awaiting naturalisation papers to allow him to formally enlist, he was killed on a motorbike in a collision with a taxi in Spring Street,

1930: new headquarters building—the observation deck for viewing parades is on the second storey (RAAF Museum)

1928: 'Digger' Tovell on his motorcycle (RAAF Museum)

1928: 'Digger' Tovell's grave (RAAF Museum)

Melbourne on the night of 24 May 1928. Despite being issued with a RAAF uniform, Henri was not entitled to a military funeral. However, his semiofficial funeral was organised by the RAAF, which provided the customary trailer for the coffin, and RAAF officers—including World War I air ace Roy King—acted as pallbearers. Until recently, his grave in Fawkner Cemetery retained the small bronze statue of him provided by subscription of the ex-Flying Corps members.[12]

Flying operations before the Depression reflected the growing normality of aviation in everyday life. There was 'mild excitement' when the RAAF responded with three aircraft from Point Cook to assist the police search for four missing fishermen whose boat disappeared off Rosebud in Port Phillip in November 1928.[13] As something of a personal taxi fleet—and by way of reinforcing the safety of modern aircraft—senior RAAF officers used military aircraft to visit various locations around the country. Air Commodore Richard Williams took a 'practice flight' from Point Cook to Adelaide, where he enjoyed his Christmas holidays in 1928 before returning to Melbourne.[14] Flight Lieutenant Frederick Briggs, the British-born officer who introduced the Southamptons into RAAF service, planned to fly Group Captain 'Jimmy' Goble to Tasmania in one of the mighty Southamptons in November 1929 to interview applicants for commissions. Goble fell ill, so Briggs conducted the interviews and gave flying demonstrations at Launceston's Tamar Regatta.[15] A significant civilian flight from Point Cook was the departure of the Guinea Gold Company's Junkers W33 German seaplane—flown by 'Pard' Mustard of the 1924 photographic survey of the Great Barrier Reef—which was assembled at Point Cook and flown as a floatplane to Lae, New Guinea in December 1928. It was then converted to a landplane for use on the goldfields.[16]

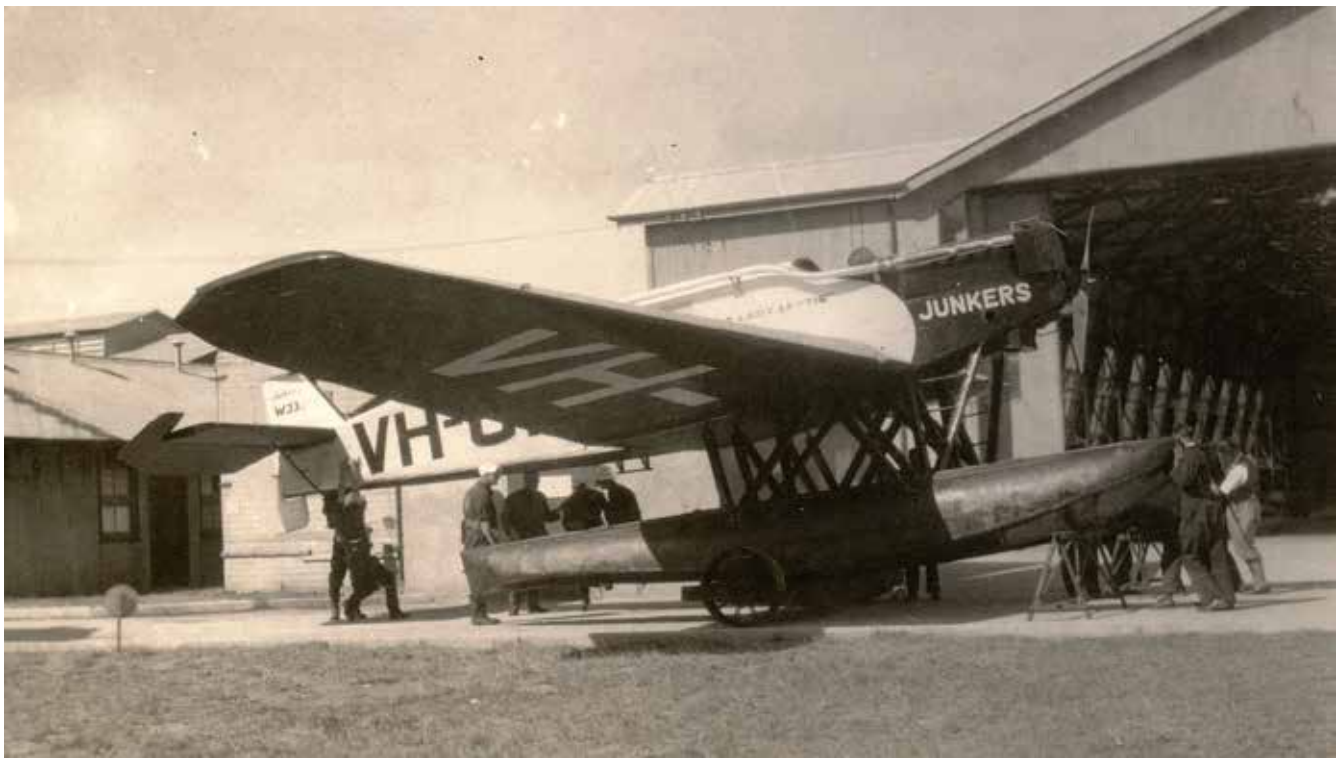
An unpleasant affair played out in 1929 with the court martial of Aircraftsman Keith Hooper at Point Cook. Hooper was a clerk in the headquarters of No 1 Flying Training School, handling the commander's files and correspondence. He had disobeyed standing

orders by communicating official information to the Sydney tattle sheet *Smith's Weekly*. The prosecution alleged that Hooper's information was designed to make the RAAF appear inefficient, and he was paid for his information. He was defended in vain by Flying Officer Frederick Scherger[17], as Flight Lieutenant 'Moth' Eaton produced a damning diary found in Hooper's effects. One entry read, 'If anyone suspected my Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde scheme it would be the finish so far as I am concerned'.[18] Indeed it was, and Hooper was discharged from the RAAF after serving a 28-day sentence of imprisonment.[19]

Point Cook was the scene of a tragedy in January 1930 when the Australian-made Wackett Widgeon II amphibious aircraft suddenly nosedived from about 400 feet into the bay not far from the end of the seaplane pier. The crew of three drowned in the incident. On board were the highly experienced seaplane pilot Frederick Briggs, mechanic Leading Aircraftsman Ewen and the Aide-de-Camp to the Governor of South Australia, Captain the Honourable Hugh 'Puck' Grosvenor. Briggs' wife with their young child was advised of his death while on board a ship bound for England. Ewen had only served at Point Cook for 12 months, and had only married a fortnight earlier.[20] Grosvenor was the son and heir of Lord Stalbridge and was planning to beat the Australia to England record in his own aircraft. He took the flight at Point Cook to gain some seaplane experience[21]; but as he was not a member of the RAAF, the flight was described as a routine test flight with Grosvenor as a passenger.[22]

The Widgeon was resting in 10 metres of water, and no trace of the bodies was found, even after there was a report that a search aircraft had sighted Ewen clinging to a piece of wreckage in the rough water.[23] A flying jacket and two flying caps, one of them belonging to Briggs, were found along with some floating wreckage of the aircraft. The Widgeon was raised the following day by a floating derrick from the Melbourne Harbour Trust.

After criticism that only landplanes were used in the search for survivors, a Seagull III floatplane was kept on standby at Point Cook for search and



1928: Junkers W33 assembled at Point Cook prior to flying to New Guinea (RAAF Museum)

rescue duty. In particular, the Seagull was intended to be used to search for any fishing boats that may go missing on Port Phillip bay. This arrangement was maintained over the next few years, and searches were also made for lost ships outside of the bay in Bass Strait, most notably the loss of the coastal steamer *Casino* off Apollo Bay in July 1932[24], and the search for the missing collier *Christina Fraser* between Gabo Island and Cape Howe in June 1933. On the later occasion, a crew of six in a Southampton flying boat employed three observers with binoculars and a wireless operator.[25] A Southampton and other Point Cook aircraft also assisted in the search over Bass Strait for the ill-fated commercial airliner *Miss Hobart* in October 1934.

The RAAF aided the civil community through further aerial mapping when two Wapiti aircraft from Point Cook took photographic equipment to Tasmania to help map the state's north-west forests.[26] Assistance was also given to the British, Australian and New Zealand Antarctic Research Expeditions of 1930 and 1931, when the Gypsy Moth aircraft was overhauled at Point Cook between the two journeys.[27]

However, not all of the RAAF's good deeds involved aircraft. While bathing at ocean rock pools near Lorne, Victoria over the 1932 summer holidays, a man and a woman were washed into deep water and, being unable to swim, began to drown. Responding to cries for help, RAAF member Victor Kempson from Point Cook rescued the woman just in time, and another rescuer attempted to retrieve the man but was not successful.[28]

Many aerobatic displays to demonstrate the RAAF's modern capabilities were carried out before the Depression began to hit hard. The displays especially used the new Bulldog and Wapiti aircraft, often at regional air pageants and even over the strait in Tasmania. The first major public display of the Bulldog aircraft was during an 'At Home' at Point Cook on 4 May 1930. Mirroring the social custom of being 'at home' to receive visitors, school commander Wing Commander Rolf Brown invited the wives and friends of RAAF personnel to an afternoon of tea and aerobatics. Over 1200 guests, including the

1930s: two Seagull amphibians following a Southampton flying boat in a formation take off (RAAF Museum)

Minister for Defence, were served afternoon tea in the hangars and treated to a spectacular flying display that included a 40-ship V formation flypast, mock dogfights, bombing displays by the Wapitis and handling displays by the Bulldogs.[29] The Air Force Band 'played cheerily' on the day.[30]

By October 1930 'stunting', as aerobatics were known, was banned for RAAF pilots as petrol needed to be saved for essential training.[31] Night flying training was introduced in 1930 using the new Gypsy Moth trainers with flares outlining the airfield. It was not without its mishaps, and the difficulties of night landings were apparent when Flying Officer Henry and his passenger Flying Officer Clarke crashed at Point Cook on the night of 12 November, both surviving.[32] In February 1932, the first course of 'blind flying' was introduced, modelled on the Royal Air

Force's course.[33] The instrument training used a hood over the student's cockpit in the Moth trainers.[34] By February 1932, the ban on aerobatics was relaxed, when aircraft from Point Cook and Laverton took part in the first air show to be held in Hobart.[35] In a precursor to what later became the more formal annual 'Australian Flying Corps Pilgrimage', members of the Flying Corps Association and their families were entertained at a picnic at Point Cook on 12 March 1933. The hangars were opened for inspection, and the Moths, Bulldogs and Wapitis gave flying displays in the unfavourable hot weather.[36]

The introduction of the Bulldog and Wapiti aircraft allowed a renewal of training in bombing and gunnery, although—as Air Marshal Sir George Jones later noted—'firepower had not progressed one iota in twenty years and the science of gunnery was not much more advanced'.[37] Air-to-ground gunnery used large inclined panels placed on the range at Point Cook.[38] Bombing practice was conducted with the Wapiti aircraft, initially carrying 20-pound bombs and later using 250-pound bombs made in Australia at the Government Munitions Factory at Maribyrnong, Victoria.[39] The notices warning the public about the bombing practice advised people living in the vicinity to leave their doors and windows open and to remove fragile items from shelves.[40]

Bombing practice was carried out on floating targets, and one report claimed that some bombs dropped from 10 000 feet exploded within 30 metres of their target.[41] Dive-bombing was also practised in Wapiti aircraft for a while, but crashes—perhaps caused by pilots focusing too much on the target rather than on their altitude—put an end to that type of training.[42] There was a curious occurrence in July 1932, when a 20-pound high explosive bomb was dropped from a Wapiti aircraft and failed to explode. It was marked by ground crew, but when they went to retrieve it the following day, it had been stolen. Police were said to be 'making enquiries'.[43]

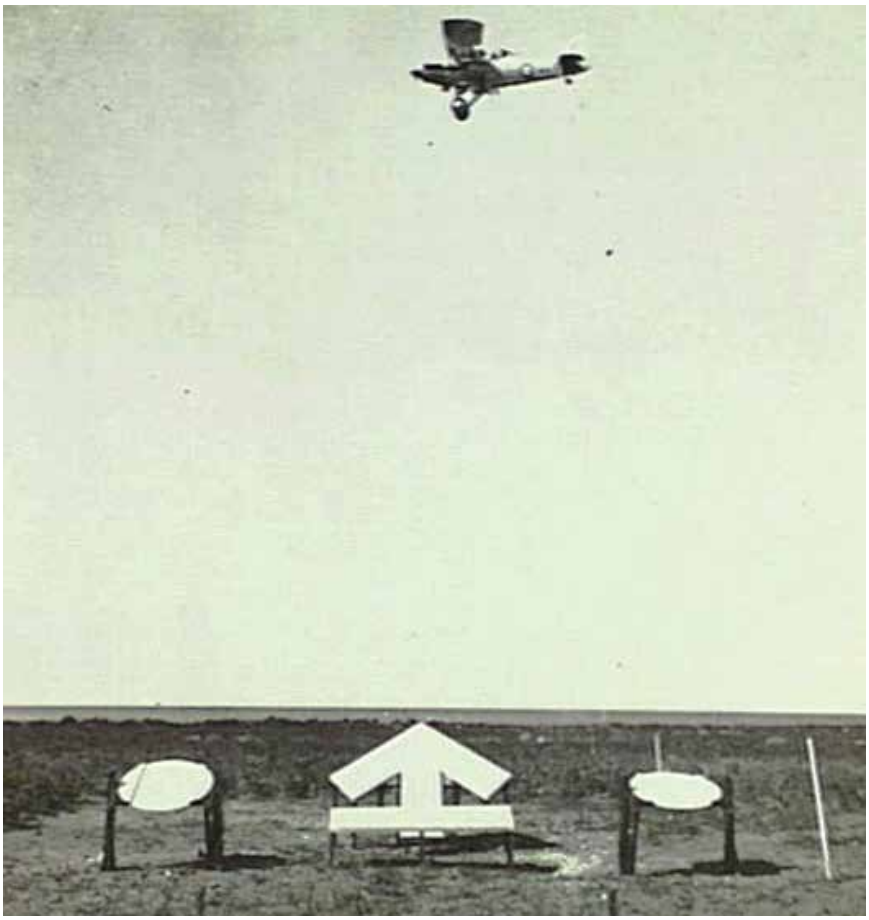
By 1933, RAAF aircraft were used for target towing. In joint exercises with the Navy off Point Cook in March, a Wapiti aircraft flew at 7000 feet towing a conical canvas sleeve 600 metres behind

1930s: under-wing bomb rack of a Wapiti light bomber (State Library of Victoria)

1930s: Wapiti light bomber taking part in a message grabbing display (RAAF Museum)

it attached by a wire cable. The aircraft flew parallel to the Navy cruiser squadron, which trained its 4-inch guns at the target. One shot severed the cable and brought the sleeve down into the bay.[44] The increased rate of Navy cooperation coincided with the experienced seaplane pilot, Wing Commander 'Kanga' De La Rue, taking command of Point Cook in February 1933, a position he held for almost five years.

Reducing the need to drop 20-pound high explosive bombs, nine-pound incendiary bombs were later used for bombing practice. These gave off a puff of white smoke on impact, and airmen in bunkers on the foreshore marked the location of the bomb's impact. Group Captain Frank Lukis' son Rob recalled seeing the incendiary bombing practices and also recalled that, later in the decade, bombing



1930s: gunnery range target indicators with a Hawker Demon above (RAAF Museum)

practice over water was carried out on barges towed by a Royal Air Force type armoured towboat painted bright yellow. Apparently, the armour plating was necessary, because bombs occasionally missed the barge and struck the towboat.[45]

Most of the aircraft accidents at Point Cook in the early 1930s were not fatal. However, a double fatality occurred on 6 February 1933, killing two cadets under pilot training. Having qualified to fly on Moth trainers, Air Cadets Kenneth Crispe and John McDonnell were taking solo flights in Wapitis. In a manoeuvre similar to the volplaning glides of World War I aircraft, the standard landing procedure was to make a series of zigzag descending turns aimed at the landing point. As George Jones believed, it was seen as a point of dishonour if a pilot needed to use the engine on landing.[46] Apparently Crispe and McDonnell were fixated on their landing approaches and accidentally turned their aircraft into each other. The two aircraft locked together, and the uncontrollable airborne smash struck the ground, killing the men instantly before the wreck was engulfed by fire. They were wearing parachutes but had no time to jump.[47]

Adopting parachutes in the late 1920s did however pay dividends on 15 May 1930 when the wings of a Bulldog aircraft, piloted by Pilot Officer William Gordon Rae, collapsed while attempting an outside loop manoeuvre at Point Cook. His life was saved in the first emergency use of a parachute from a powered aircraft in Australia.[48] From a height of 4000 feet, he entered the manoeuvre, and while inverted, he heard a loud crack, and the aircraft entered an inverted spin. As he jumped from the aircraft, the upper wing separated from the aircraft.[49] Rae became the first Australian member to join the exclusive 30-strong Caterpillar Club and to wear the small gold silkworm badge presented by the Irving Parachute Company.[50] Rae later had a lucky escape when he was thrown clear of a Wapiti aircraft that crashed after take-off in August 1935 and struck the high voltage wires at Point Cook, killing Air Cadet Thomas Laws.[51]

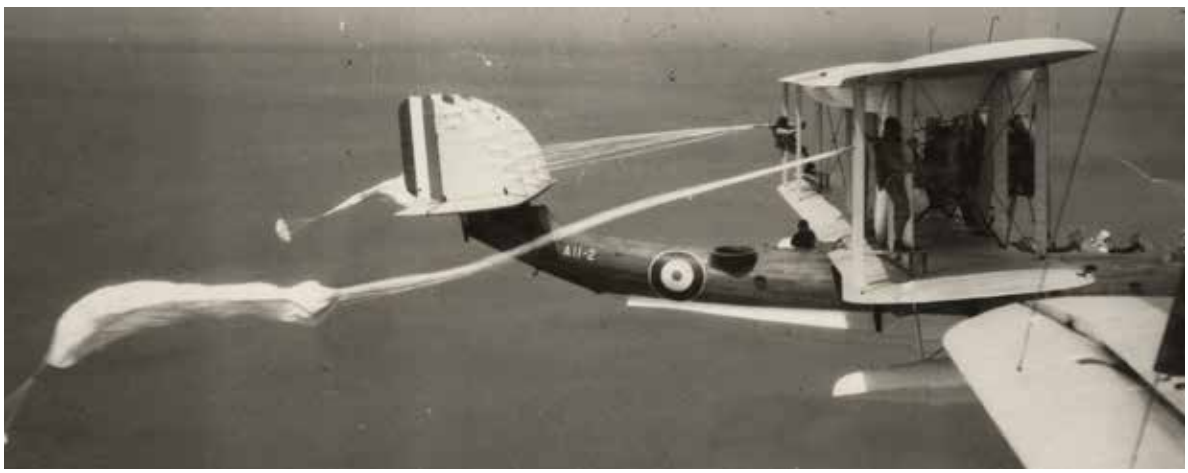
The earlier parachute training method of jumping from a ladder on the side of an aircraft was replaced for the 1932 course by jumping from a platform on the lower wing of a Southampton flying boat in the style used by the Royal Air Force. There was, in fact, no jumping involved. Instead, the parachutist deployed the small drogue chute with the ripcord, and—as the narrator of a 1930s British documentary on the Royal Air Force stated—the officer 'had no further say in the matter'.[52] At that point, he was pulled off the wing by the drag of the main chute. The airmen packing the parachutes made 'pull-off' jumps

as well, and one reported that pilots were often the more terrified jumpers. They were used to feeling that an aircraft was one solid piece of machinery, and once standing on the end of a severely flexing wing, they thought the aircraft was falling apart.[53]

The RAAF noted 17 August 1932 as the 18th birthday of the 'Point Cook Flying School'. Published in the press, this coming-of-age announcement must have been drafted by the self-publicising Chief of the Air Staff, Air Commodore Richard Williams. It focused on the first flying course, as though the Central Flying School only came into existence once the students arrived, and none of the work in assembling or testing the aircraft by Harrison, Petre and the mechanics counted. The announcement only mentioned Williams and Tommy White, whom it noted as serving in World War I, neglecting Lieutenant Dave Manwell's war service and the service and subsequent death of Lieutenant George Merz.[54]

Life for the families residing on Point Cook remained somewhat like an isolated village, where they had to make their own entertainment. As personnel changed, so did their habits, and Wing Commander Frank McNamara is credited with introducing wine into the mess to complement the usual beer.[55] Mounted in the Officers Mess was a hunting trophy of an actual wapiti head, symbolic of the light bomber aircraft. It was positioned opposite the Vickers Vimy propeller on the double chimney

1930s: pull-off parachute jumps from a Southampton flying boat—the jumper turns to face the front and pulls the ripcord (RAAF Museum)



1930s: pull-off parachute jumps from a Southampton flying boat—the drogue chute pulls the main chute (RAAF Museum)

that divided the dining room from the ante room. Some years later, a small wooden shield was mounted on the other side of the chimney bearing a tail that made it appear as though the whole beast was inside the chimney. One late-night mess game for the junior officers was reported to have been to climb the wall and shimmy along the roof beam then through the steel tension hoop in the beam and to kiss the wapiti on the nose.

The first post-Depression investment in the RAAF began in 1933, overseen by the now knighted Sir George Pearce as Minister for Defence. The RAAF was promised the lion's share of the overall proposed Defence expenditure in the October 1933 Federal budget estimates, with a new equipment program of over £400 000. This compared more than favourably with the £1000 available in the previous year.[56] The recommendations of the Salmond Report were hoped to finally be carried out. However, after the usual consultation with the British Government, Australia discovered that the cost of modern aircraft was so high that plans to expand much beyond Point Cook, Laverton and Richmond were once again held in abeyance. The promised establishments at Port Macquarie, Canberra and Perth had to wait, but new aircraft were ordered, including the Hawker Demon two-seat fighter-bomber and the Supermarine Seagull V coastal reconnaissance aircraft.

The 1934–35 budget delivered £5 600 000 to the three Services in the beginning of a three-year program of increased spending designed to catch up after the Depression.[57] This followed the pattern set by Britain, which increased the size of the Royal Air Force by 71 squadrons and 25 000 extra men. The British actions were given added impetus by the formation of the German Luftwaffe in March 1935.[58] Australia's modest increase in funding allowed for 12 extra squadrons and gave the ability to train

1936: Sergeant Somerville's Avro Cadet crash at the southern tarmac of 9 December (RAAF Museum)

1934: hull of the Southampton flying boat stranded on Lake Reeve being carried overland to Lake Wellington (RAAF Museum)

1000 extra personnel initially.[59] The number of pilots trained at Point Cook increased steadily under the expenditure plan, placing strain on No 1 Flying Training School's capacity.

Nonetheless, Point Cook still managed to host significant Australian aviation events. The first interstate night flight took place on 2 March 1934, when three Gypsy Moth aircraft took off from Point Cook bound for Parafield aerodrome near Adelaide. The flight, commencing at 7.40 pm, arrived at its destination at 12.40 am and landed with the aid of 'grass flares'. Grass heaps in a 200-metre circular formation were set alight to mark the landing point.[60] The aircraft were fitted with blue lights. Also, meteorological observation flights were conducted to gather data on upper-air conditions for use by civil and military aviation.

The skill of mechanics from Point Cook was tested in April 1934 after a Southampton flying boat heading from Metung, Victoria to Point Cook made a forced landing on Lake Reeve with engine trouble. The huge flying boat landed in water less than half a metre deep. The crew was forced to camp in a hut by the lake and walked along the bush track to nearby Seaspray for provisions.[61] Within days, a team of about 20 mechanics from Point Cook began dismantling the seaplane ready for transporting it to Lake Wellington about five kilometres away. A large lorry was dispatched from Point Cook for the purpose, but the ground was too soft to drive all the way to the stranded aircraft, so it was driven to the closest piece of hard ground, and a five-kilometre corduroy track was cut to the lake to allow the aircraft parts to be carried to the lorry.[62] The Southampton was reassembled on Lake Wellington and arrived back at Point Cook under its own power 38 days after its forced landing thanks to the remarkable efforts of the Point Cook mechanics.[63]

In July 1934, Charles Ulm and his crew departed from Point Cook in *Faith In Australia* on the first official airmail flight to New Guinea; and in October, most of the RAAF's fleet of aircraft took part in the welcome for the Duke of Gloucester to Melbourne. They combined with 12 civilian aircraft and three visiting Royal Air Force Short Rangoon flying boats on a visit to Point Cook from Basra, Iraq to make a

1934: Charles Ulm's *Faith In Australia* preparing to depart on the first official airmail flight to New Guinea (RAAF Museum)

total of 50 aircraft in the aerial escort to the Duke's ship.[64] Also in 1934, Sir Macpherson Robertson gave £10 000 for an air race from England to Melbourne to mark the centenary of the city and to promote aviation. The Centenary Air Race from Mildenhall was won by Charles Scott and Tom Campbell Black on 23 October 1934 in their scarlet de Havilland Comet aircraft, named *Grosvenor House*. They overflew the official finish line at Flemington Racecourse before landing at Laverton. The race was completed in just short of three days—a remarkable feat that showed how far aviation had progressed in only 20 years. To those who could see it, the race made it clear that air power could now extend across long distances, and that south-eastern Australia was by then within striking distance of Japan.[65]

The increased funding allowed for further facilities development at Point Cook, beginning in 1936. More accommodation was built for cadets under training. A new aeronautics school was built, and gunnery stop butts were erected for zeroing machine guns on aircraft. Garages were built as more officers and airmen bought their own cars. The old caretaker's cottage was moved next to the row of senior non-commissioned officer cottages from its site by the old entrance. After the road to Werribee was diverted around the north of the aerodrome, a new formal entrance—with sentry boxes and huge

wrought-iron gates in art deco style with 'RAAF' lettering above a seascape motif—was erected. The original 1914 office, store and casualty room that doubled as a morgue were moved from beside the bay to the domestic area next to the primary school.

The second Australian member of the Caterpillar Club took up his membership on 24 April 1936. He was Aircraftsman Leslie Clisby, who was flying a Moth aircraft near Point Cook when he lost control and jumped from 2000 feet. After he landed safely with his parachute, it was reported that the only comment he made to the dairy farmer who came to his aid was: 'What a sensation.' The initial rush of adrenalin must have masked the shock that he suffered, as he was too shaken to be questioned after his return to Point Cook.[66]

The 1936 Empire Day display at Point Cook featured a Gypsy Moth floatplane performing manoeuvres near the end of the pier. It was the same bright yellow aircraft that left Point Cook the previous December in the international rescue mission for Lincoln Ellsworth and Herbert Hollick-Kenyon. They were overdue from an American trans-Antarctic flight and were presumed missing. The Moth and a Wapiti aircraft were fitted with optional skis and floats and, after disassembly, were loaded on board the British Royal Research Ship *Discovery II*. The yellow Moth, modified by the mechanics of Point Cook and strengthened for Antarctic conditions, discovered the missing men safe on its first flight.

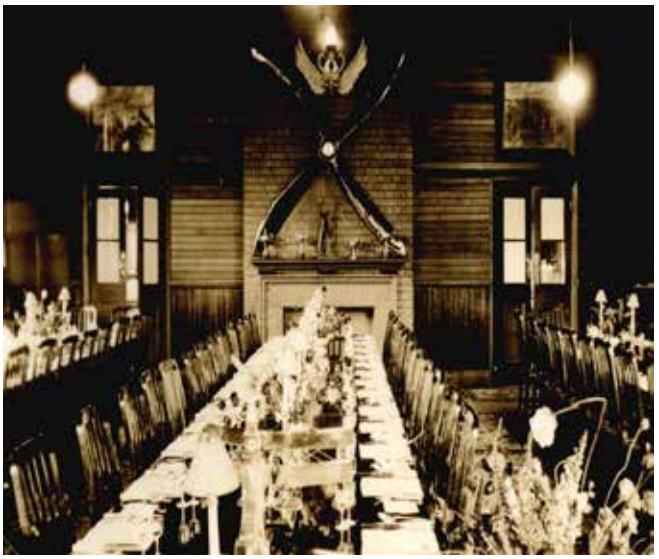
The 1937 Imperial Conference made it clear that war was almost inevitable, and the Australian budget that followed gave the RAAF a massive boost. It allowed the building of wireless and air navigation schools and a headquarters for the seaplane squadron at Point Cook as part of a plan to increase the RAAF to operational strength on a national scale. It also allowed for the building of the four well-known prewar RAAF Officers Messes. Built in the art deco style and on massive proportions, the messes at Point Cook, Laverton, Richmond, New South Wales and Pearce in Western Australia were the representational showpieces of a fighting service that was confident of its abilities and place in the life of the nation. The messes were an almost extravagant statement that the RAAF was here to stay. The new mess was the first brick-built building of any substance at Point Cook. Williams was criticised for the extravagance but replied that, when the war came, there would be plenty of money for aircraft but none for buildings, so he was building now.

The old timber 1918 Officers Mess became the Cadets Mess and gave them some distance from their instructors. Harmony Row was also extended, with the construction of three houses for squadron leaders and a new two-storey commander's residence to take over from the previous 1927 house. The new residence, later named Lukis House after its first

occupants Group Captain Frank Lukis and his family, was known as 'The Ark' to the Lukis family because of its unusual, almost American, style. It was built with the Lukis' knowing that they were to be the first occupants, and when the family viewed progress on the weekends, Mrs Florence Lukis tried to convince the builders to change elements of the design to suit her firm ideas of how the house should be—usually without success. She had a concealed button for a buzzer installed in the dining room floor and, responding to it, the staff always managed to appear at the appropriate moments during formal dinners. This impressed diners, who were not aware of the buzzer. The family had a tennis court in the backyard, seconded from the previous commander's residence next door, and stables were erected in the grounds.

Social status was very much a part of everyday life. There was considerable consternation in the late 1930s, when a young officer married the daughter of one of the sergeants. Group Captain Henry Wrigley's daughter recalled that, 'she was a very nice girl, but things like that weren't done then'.[67] It might also have been social status at play, when Lukis' son Rob said that, 'there was no objection to the children climbing into the seaplanes' after hours, and he recalled that the Southamptons smelled of 'varnish and seaweed'. One occasion on which Rob and his brother should have been disciplined was when they hid behind the front fence of Lukis House and fired pellets from

1936: 'Sunday Soberness'—officers enjoying a quiet Sunday in the Officers Mess (RAAF Museum)



1936: tables set for the graduation dinner in the Point Cook Cadet's Mess—the Vickers Vimy propeller hangs above the mantle piece (RAAF Museum)

their B B guns at the leather leggings of airmen on the nearby parade ground.[68]

It was not long after this that the distinctive leather leggings, riding breeches and high collars of the 'Cavalry of the Clouds style' RAAF uniform were modernised to the form that could be passed off as the present uniform. The Royal Air Force modernised its uniform in 1936 to include straight-leg trousers and open-neck jacket collars for all ranks—not just the ranks of sergeant and above—and the old Royal Flying Corps pattern garrison cap was reintroduced. The RAAF enthusiastically followed suit the next year, and Williams was cunning enough to retain the distinctive Australian dark-blue, despite protests from Britain.

In response to public concern over the high accident rate in the late 1930s—and particularly with persistent complaints from Queensland union official Clarrie Fallon, whose son had died in a Demon aircraft crash—the Government sought a review of the RAAF. Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Edward Ellington, arrived to conduct his review in June 1938.[69] He was a retired British Chief of the Air Staff, and his report on the organisation and proposed further expansion of the RAAF found, amongst the expected recommendations for development, that the accident rate was unusually high and was caused in

1938: Australian Flying Corps Memorial on the day of its unveiling (RAAF Museum)

part by a lack of discipline.[70] While his findings were controversial, they were perhaps indicative of the last vestiges of the 'flying club' atmosphere evident in the RAAF before World War II.

On the brink of war, a dedication to those who had died in the air services in the last war was unveiled. The Flying Corps Association began raising funds for a national memorial to their fallen comrades from late 1934. The memorial was unveiled at the northern edge of the Point Cook parade ground by Governor-General Lord Gowrie on 16 November 1938 with a full ceremonial guard of honour and before the members of the association. The memorial stands on the spot where military aviation in Australia was born as Lieutenant Eric Harrison took off in the Bristol Boxkite on 1 March 1914. Sand brought home from Mesopotamia was reputed to be sprinkled on the parade ground. While this may be apocryphal, it is firmly within a tradition practised by military members around the world. The memorial is inscribed:

> Dedicated to the glorious memory of our comrades of the Australian Flying Corps, Royal Naval Air Service, Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force who, at the birth of the air service during the Great War 1914-19 made the supreme sacrifice and whose sacred trust of imperishable honour and duty to country is now given into the keeping of the Royal Australian Air Force
>
> Per ardua ad astra

Despite the best intentions to put the recommendations of Sir John Salmond's report of 1928 into effect, Australia's poor financial state during the 1930s ensured that it took over a decade to achieve. The RAAF staved off proposals by the Navy and Army to subsume it, and the scant level of flying and technical training at Point Cook during the Depression gradually increased as the nation recovered. The impetus of an inevitable war accelerated that pace; Point Cook and its sister establishments at Laverton, Richmond and Pearce were soon to be part of a vast expansion of training and operational bases around the country. By the end of the 1930s, the new aircraft introduced to replace the ageing Imperial Gift aircraft were virtually obsolete, and the RAAF urgently needed re-equipping once more, this time with aircraft suitable for aerial warfare in the 1940s. Throughout the drip-fed growth of the 1930s, Point Cook remained the centre of excellence and development for the RAAF's expanding range of capabilities.

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1930s: a classic study of a Southampton flying boat (Norm Clutterbuck, RAAF photographer)

1936: Hawker Demon test firing its machine guns at the stop butts—the engine needs to run to check the interrupter gear (RAAF Museum)

Chapter 7 - Home Front

Point Cook had enjoyed the status of the Royal Australian Air Force's (RAAF) primary operational establishment from the beginning of the Service's existence in 1921. While joined by other permanent bases at Laverton, Richmond, Pearce and Darwin by the end of the 1930s, Point Cook was the focal point of RAAF capability development and training. However, the rapid expansion required by the war in Europe re-postured Point Cook as one of many training establishments needed to fulfil the demands of air training for the Empire, and the pre-eminence of Point Cook—or 'The Point' as it was affectionately known throughout the war—was eclipsed as it took its place beside a large number of new training establishments, many of which were only to last the duration of the war.

The establishment of the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) in May 1940 changed the character of Point Cook significantly. Before the war, Point Cook had a relatively static population of officers and airmen in comfortable facilities focused on training a handful of pilots, carrying out work in aid of civil aims and participating in minor Navy and Army cooperation exercises. However, during the war, there was a mostly transient population of trainers and trainees in a range of fields required for war in the air, and a building program—mostly of uncomfortable temporary facilities to accommodate the rapid expansion in population—changed the character of the station. At the end of the war in 1945, Point Cook emerged as a different place in a changed world.

On 3 September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany and, shortly after, Australia was also at war. The Government offered to support Britain with a scheme to dispatch six squadrons—four bomber and two fighter—and associated units, with a total of 3200 men. They were to operate as a self-contained Australian air expeditionary force. However, before the force was raised, Britain proposed an Empire-wide training plan—known as the EATS—where Dominions would provide large numbers of aircrew for training within the Empire and subsequent service with the Royal Air Force. Little thought was given by Britain to the possibility of attack from Japan.[1] The Australian Government accepted the proposal and agreed to participate in the EATS on 17 December 1939. Despite an ensuing lack of Australian identity in the European war, this was perhaps the only realistic option for the RAAF due to its lack of modern aircraft suitable for training the anticipated 28 000 Australian aircrew needed for service over Europe. Under the EATS, a series of flying, navigation, bombing, gunnery, wireless, armament and other schools were established around Australia to supplement the training that was being conducted in Canada, South Africa, Rhodesia and Britain. The increased demand

for skilled personnel also led to the formation of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF) and the Air Training Corps.

Throughout 1938–39, No 1 Flying Training School had continued to train pilots for the RAAF with Group Captain Frank Lukis as station commander. As an immediate response to the need for additional aircrew, courses for civilian pilots to be trained in 'service flying' began at Point Cook in late 1939. Some 236 civilian pilots were trained by February 1940, many becoming flying instructors to meet the needs of the expanding RAAF.[2] Lukis was also the Vice-President of the Naval and Military Club in 1939, becoming President in 1940.[3] In an interesting demonstration of planning and foresight, he knew the privations that war could bring and ordered an enormous quantity of Scotch whisky for the club. His actions were praised when the club was the only one in Melbourne able to serve Scotch by the end of the war.[4]

In 1939 Australia purchased a small fleet of Short Sunderland Flying Boats to equip a squadron for coastal reconnaissance. No 10 General Reconnaissance Squadron was formed at Point Cook on 1 July 1939 to operate the Sunderlands, and an advance detachment left later that month for conversion training onto the aircraft in England. Rather than return to Australia, the squadron was offered to the British war effort by the Australian

1939: inspecting a parachute prior to packing (RAAF Museum)

1939: relaxing on the rudimentary golf course after a day of service flying conversion training (State Library of Victoria)

1939: qualified civilian pilots undergoing service flying training (State Library of Victoria)

Government, and it became the first Australian air unit to see combat action in World War II.

Meanwhile, under the guidance of Flight Lieutenant George Pither—a RAAF pilot trained by the Royal Air Force in radio engineering—the RAAF Signal School was formed at Point Cook in September 1939 from the embryonic Signals Training School at Laverton and began training wireless operator-mechanics. Pither did not remain at the school, instead being posted to RAAF Headquarters and to England and then Canada for specialist training in the then secret technology of radar. He went on to establish a network of long-range radar stations in Australia and the Pacific, earning the epithet of the 'Father of RAAF Radar'.

A new facility was built at Point Cook to house the signals school along with a school for air navigation training, both at the southern tarmac area by the bay.[5] Additional two-storey sleeping accommodation with individual rooms was built in the airmen precinct of the domestic area to match the one built in 1928. Airmen's tennis courts were added, and officers were treated to a squash court. With flying activities moved entirely to the eastern aerodrome, a golf course was laid out on much of the western aerodrome.[6]

1939: practical training for wireless operators (State Library of Victoria)

1939: learning Morse code at the RAAF signals school (State Library of Victoria)

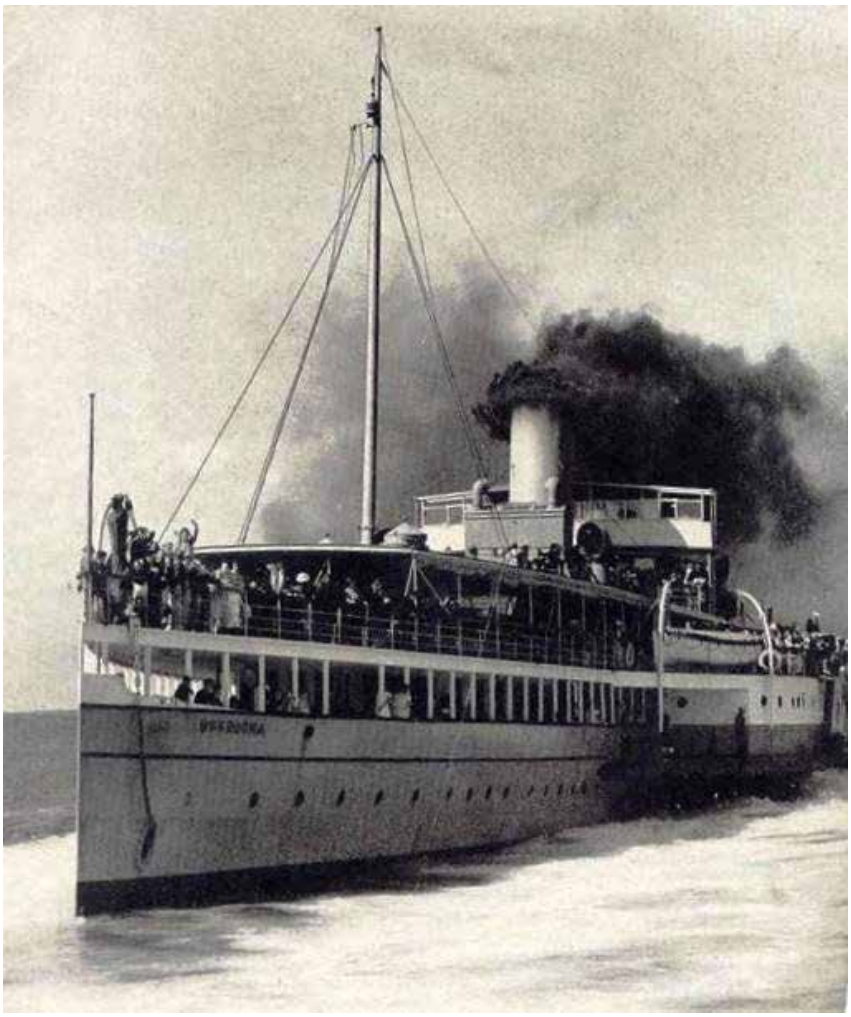
With the declaration of war in September 1939, security at Point Cook was increased. Airmen serving as sentries at the front and back gates were issued with bayonets, and those rostered for guard duty carried out patrols on the ubiquitous black-framed aerodrome bicycles. There were check point devices mounted on short posts installed at key installations that were wired to the guard room. Each had a clockwork switch mechanism, and an alarm was triggered at the control panel if a check point was not rewound in time. The sight of guards trying to dash between check points on heavy bicycles with a .303 rifle slung over their shoulder and bayonet fixed was described as comical by Lukis' young son, Rob. There was a small shop, known as the 'greasy spoon', established outside the back gate on private land that served some of the out of hours snacking needs of the airmen. On one occasion, a group of airmen returning through the back gate was challenged by the sentry and ordered to produce their passes. One had forgotten his but insisted on being allowed entry. The sentry, taking his duties too seriously, stabbed

the airman with his bayonet. Luckily his injuries were relatively minor.[7]

In preparation for the commencement of the EATS, Lukis was posted to command Laverton, and Group Captain Johnnie Summers was posted to command Point Cook in December 1939. An extraordinary event occurred early in his command on 15 February 1940, when an amphibious aircraft was engaged on a training sortie in Port Phillip some 20 kilometres south of Point Cook. Squadron Leader Connelly was instructing Pilot Officer Thompson on take-off and alighting procedures when the aircraft caught fire. After unsuccessfully fighting the fire, they abandoned their stricken aircraft as it burst into flames. After treading water for nearly half an hour, the PS *Weeroona*, which was attracted by the smoke of the burning aircraft, came to their rescue. The *Weeroona* was an ocean-going paddle-steamer taking 1500 real estate agents and family members on their annual works picnic pleasure cruise. As the steamer came to a halt, Connelly made a hitchhiking gesture with his thumb and asked, 'Give us a lift.'[8]

The EATS formally commenced in Australia on 1 May 1940. Seaplane Training Flight of No 1 Flying Training School had been transferred from Point Cook to Rathmines, New South Wales in March 1940 as part of the reorganisation, and navigation reconnaissance training began in April at the General Reconnaissance School before it moved to Laverton in July. The training involved long-range navigation flights in Avro Anson aircraft from Point Cook to Tasmania and South Australia. The training also involved noting shipping movements and searching for any hostile raiders.[9]

The Central Flying School was created as the RAAF's flying instructor training unit at Point Cook on 29 April 1940 out of the Instructor Training Squadron at No 1 Flying Training School, pending the building of its facilities at Camden, New South Wales. The resurrected unit once again gave life to the title of the original flying unit that was established under canvas at Point Cook in 1914. The unit began its move to Camden in May 1940, flying out its Tiger Moth, Wirraway and Anson aircraft. On 16 May, a flight of three Anson aircraft relocating from RAAF Station Pearce to Camden took off from Point Cook. The weather en route was poor, and one made it to Cootamundra, one returned to Point Cook, and the third, with a crew of four, went missing. The search for the aircraft involved over 17 aircraft from Point Cook and Laverton, later joined by another



1940: PS *Weeroona*—the paddle steamer that saved Squadron Leader Connelly and Pilot Officer Thompson (RAAF Museum)

1939: RAAF No 1 Administration Officer Course—many had served in the last war and were keen to contribute to the next (RAAF Museum)

two from Richmond. The search was called off, and nine months later, the aircraft was finally discovered to have crashed on Mount Torbreck near Eildon, Victoria by a group of men mustering sheep. A plaque cast from some aluminium alloy taken from the wrecked aircraft was erected as a memorial near the site.[10]

On 1 May 1940, No 1 Flying Training School was disbanded as part of the RAAF restructure for the EATS, and No 1 Service Flying Training School was created in its stead. With the change, Point Cook adopted the name of the new school. It took on its role as a 'service' flying school, which provided intermediate and advanced flying training after students graduated from an 'elementary' flying training school. The last of the students already enrolled in the prewar cadet scheme graduated in November 1940 and were posted for duty in Australia, unlike their EATS counterparts who were liable for overseas war service.

On 1 June 1940, Signal Training School was renamed No 1 Signals School. To increase efficiency, training was changed to graduate wireless operators and radio mechanics as two separate trades, instead of those who could perform both roles. Many mechanics went on to further training in the technology of radar at Richmond. In all, the school trained over 7000 personnel in areas that also included telegraphists, signals clerks, cipher assistants, electricians, electrical fitters and signals officers. A number of British and United States airmen were also trained at the school. There were even experiments carried out in late 1941 in the use carrier pigeons.

In October 1940, Summers, who had overseen the reorganisation at Point Cook caused by the EATS was posted, and Group Captain John 'Black Jack' McCauley commenced his short nine-month period in command of the station. He accepted the new Armament School building that was approved in early 1940 and the new hospital, built around the original 1922 hospital. The Armament School building was distinctive for having a target motif built into the brickwork of its façade. The building of new RAAF establishments around the country was marked by the building of huge quantities of prefabricated huts and hangars made of galvanised corrugated iron.

The area to the north of the airmen precinct at Point Cook became a 'silver city', as it was described in one official document. These temporary buildings were erected by private contractor Squire and McBean of Melbourne under contract to the Department of the Interior for a cost of £24 347.[11] Despite a planned ten-year life, many of these huts still stand today.

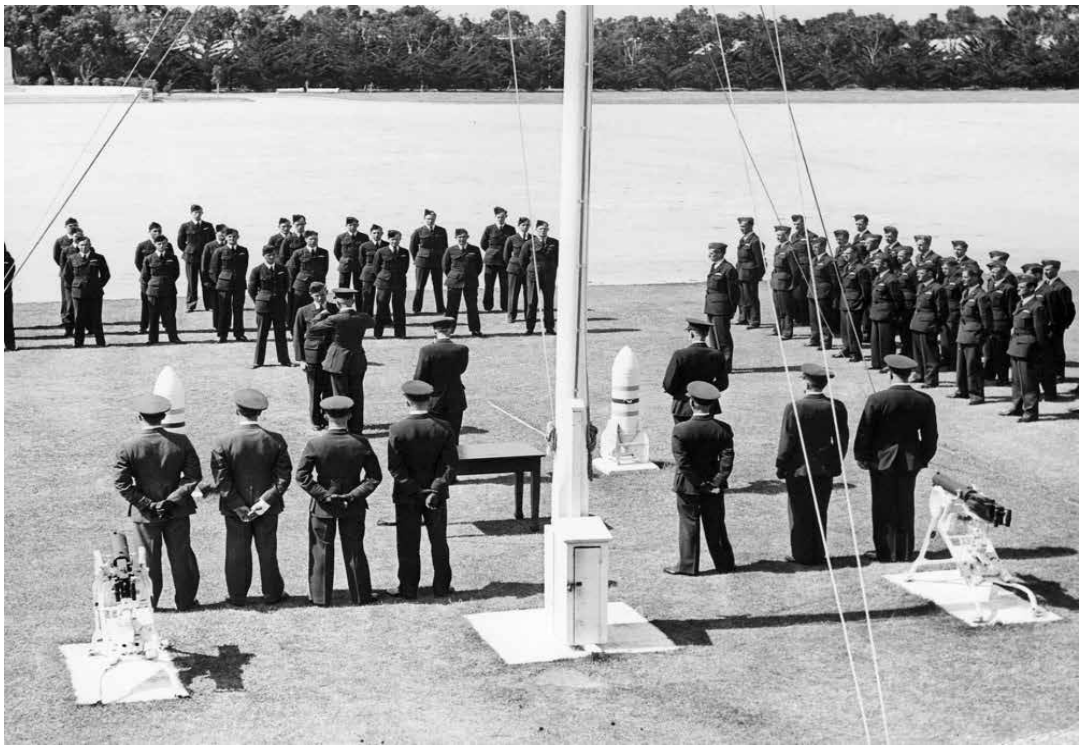
At the southern tarmac, prefabricated Bellman hangars were put up to provide increased aircraft storage and workshop space. The four southern tarmac Bellman hangars are the very first ones brought to Australia from Britain. As ubiquitous symbols of military aviation, the many subsequent Australian-built Bellman hangars survive at locations all over Australia. The 1927 seaplane hangar was doubled in size, and this necessitated the move of the first hangar of 1914. The expansion was supplemented by the building of stop butts for test firing and zeroing aircraft machine guns.[12]

1940: aircrew recruiting poster (RAAF)

A new central tarmac precinct, comprising 10 Bellman hangars and sundry huts, was established on the edge of the eastern aerodrome. These now form the majority of buildings occupied by the RAAF Museum. Sleeping accommodation huts and ablution blocks were also installed in the excised backyards of the married quarters in Harmony Row in an effort to accommodate extra personnel. A post office was established in December 1940—with Mr James King as its first postmaster—to service the correspondence of those far from home.[13] The busy building program went on well into 1941, so that by the time Wing Commander Roy 'Beau' King assumed command of No 1 Service Flying Training School in July 1941, Point Cook appeared a vastly different place from the one those who served there before the war knew. The 1917 master plan for a garden city was interrupted by the need for the 'temporary' silver city.

Wing Commander King was Australia's fourth highest scoring air ace of World War I, having achieved 26 victories in the air. He was a large-framed man with a genial smile and was a very effective leader.[14] He oversaw the acceptance of the 'silver city', which he termed the New Camp Area, from the Department of the Interior. New work facilities also came into use, such as the Dental Section and rooms for the Pharmacy Officer, who was posted to Point Cook in October 1941. An enormous new warehouse with a distinctive sawtooth roof was completed in the same month[15], but it could not be occupied, because the Department of the Interior had not fitted out the building. It was six months before the warehouse was able to be occupied.[16]

The increased number of people living on the station brought problems. There was a high rate of influenza infections reported in the summer of 1941, and venereal disease was regularly treated. Illustrated lectures were given in an attempt to educate airmen and reduce its incidence.[17] Opportunities for corruption also presented themselves in the black market that developed as goods and supplies became harder to acquire. Over 1000 litres of high grade aviation petrol was stolen by airmen and civilian staff at Point Cook, and the ensuing court martial



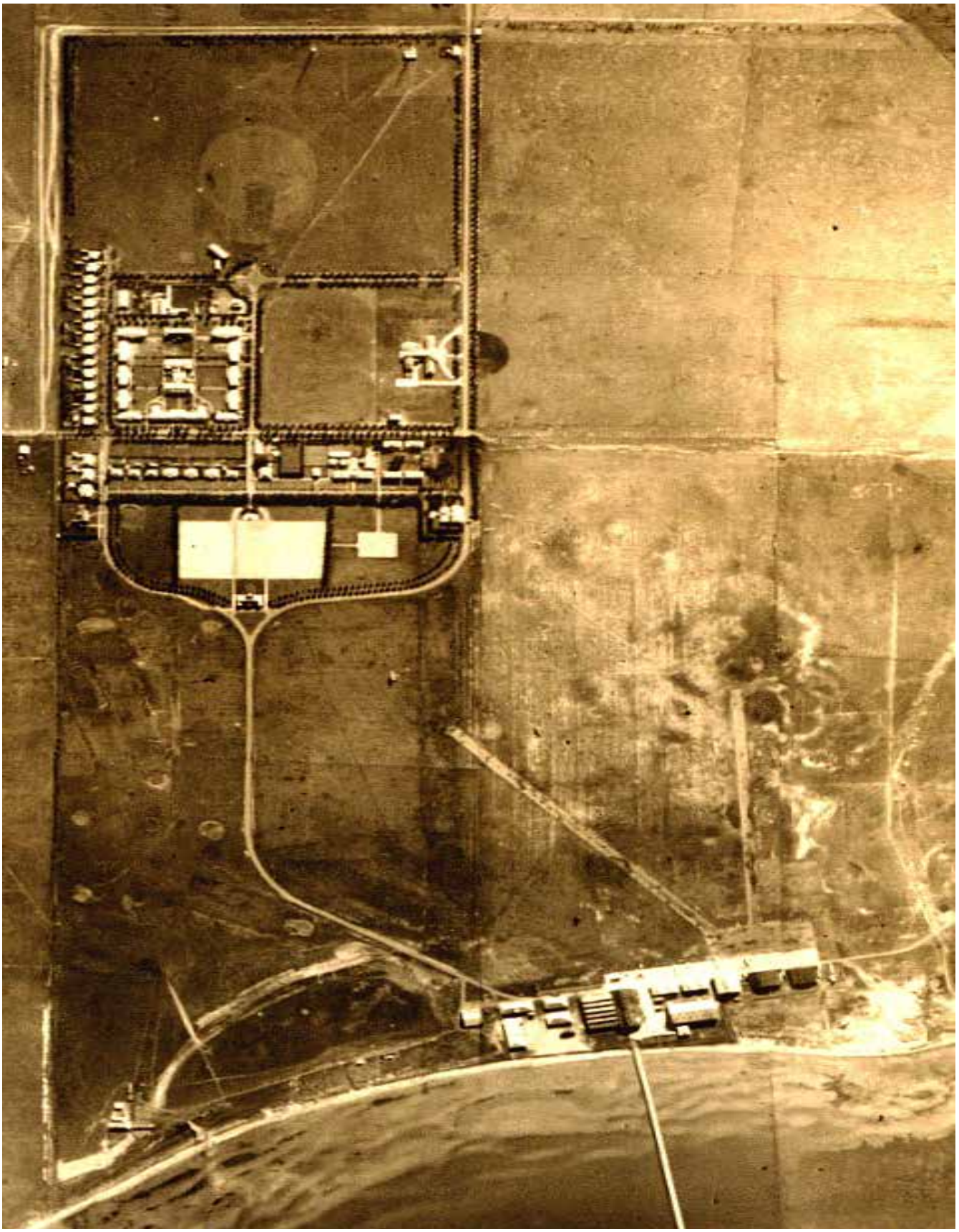
1940: typical EATS wings graduation ceremony (State Library of Victoria)

found two corporals and five aircraftsmen guilty of the thefts. The corporals were reduced to the ranks, and all were awarded between 65 and 90 days of detention.

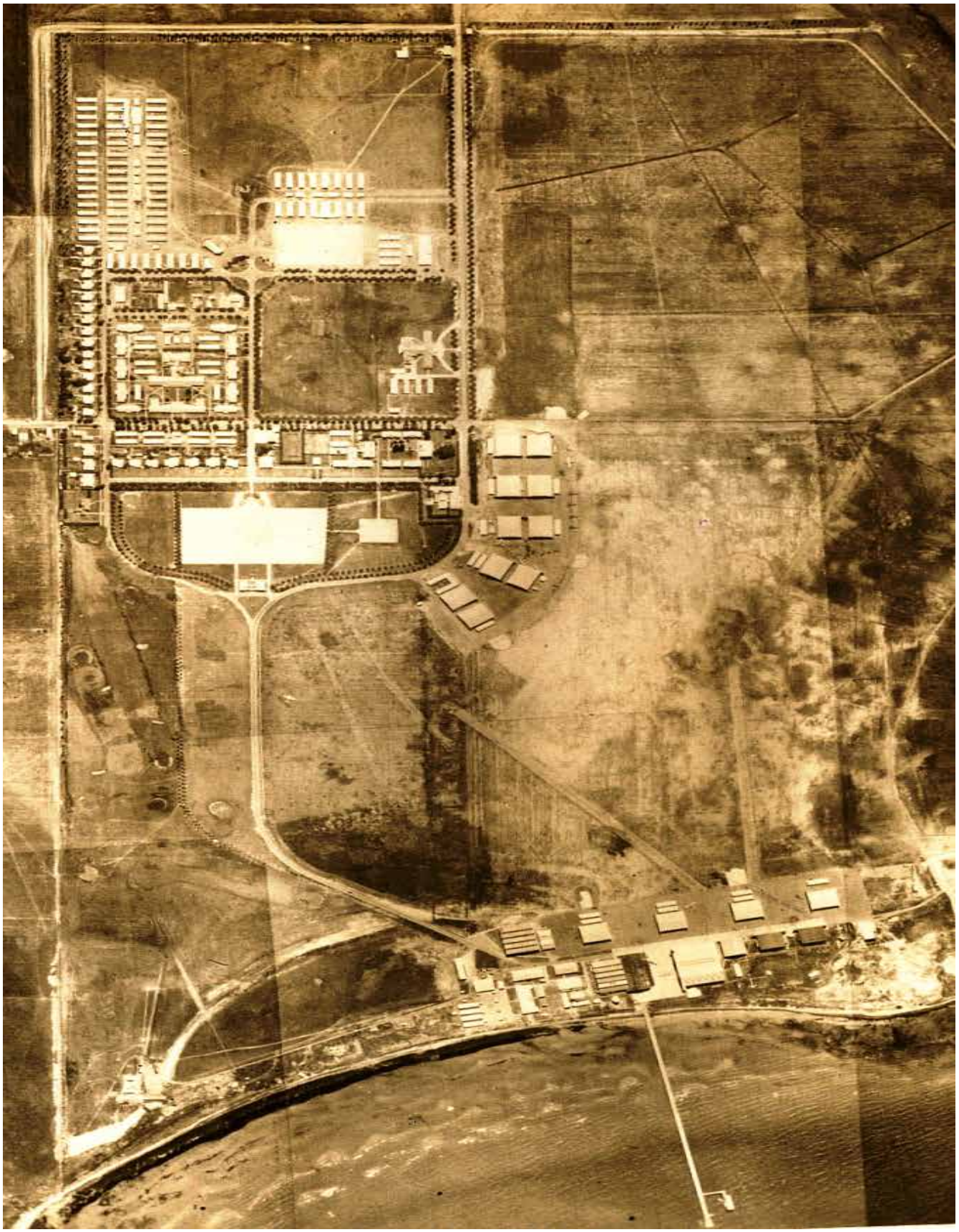
Coincident with acceptance of the new facilities, the name of the station was changed to RAAF Station Point Cook—recognising the status of the signal and armament schools alongside pilot training, which also by then included the Beam Approach Landing School. As the station grew in importance, Roy King was promoted to group captain, and Wing Commander William Rae, the first Australian member of the Caterpillar Club, took command of No 1 Flying Training School. In an indication of the fear that the war might come closer to home, preliminary blackout tests, designed to make the station less visible from the air at night, were conducted. King had the foresight to have an aerial photo of Point Cook taken in October 1941 to show the marked difference caused by the temporary expansion. Flying activity increased dramatically as the EATS expanded. Cross-country navigation training became a feature, with many aircraft visiting from interstate locations such as Cootamundra, Uranquinty, Camden, Bankstown, Deniliquin and Wagga in New South Wales, Mt Gambier in South Australia and Western Junction in Tasmania.

On 27 November 1941, King retired home to Lukis House on the station unwell and died early the following morning from cerebral oedema, aged 47.[18] Wing Commander Bill Rae took command until the new station commander, Group Captain Rolf Brown, arrived in December. Brown served in the heyday of Point Cook's contribution to World War II in a command that lasted for over three years. He arrived a week after the 7 December 1941 Japanese bombings at Pearl Harbor that forced the entry of the United States into the war.

With the commencement of the war in the Pacific, the increased threat of an attack on mainland Australia was evident, and the ground defence of RAAF Station Point Cook was extensively upgraded over the following six months. Equipment for air raid defences and additional blackout materials were obtained in December 1941, and works were commenced immediately including the digging of



1939: Point Cook at the start of World War II (RAAF Museum)



1941: Point Cook after the rapid EATS expansion of 1941 (RAAF Museum)

slit trenches and the erection of first aid casualty stations. The old station commander's residence, built in 1927, was designated as a subsidiary hospital, and a cemetery ground was allocated by the foreshore. The grass on the aerodrome was burnt off to reduce the fire risk. The station headquarters were sandbagged, and concrete submerged gun pits were constructed on the approaches to the aerodrome.[19] The building blackouts were tested, and an air raid alarm was installed.

1941: classified map showing the location of ground defences (RAAF Museum)

From January 1942, the station was in continuous blackout at night along with the rest of the Australian community. The Fall of Singapore in February 1942, along with the bombing of Darwin city and attacks on Broome and RAAF Station Darwin in February 1942, added a sense of urgency at Point Cook. The Metropolitan Fire Brigade visited the station and gave demonstrations of fighting fires caused by incendiaries and petrol or oil fires. A program of building camouflage was commenced in March, and as married quarters became vacant due to postings, they were not occupied. The Volunteer Defence Corps—Australia's equivalent of 'Dad's Army', comprising mostly World War I veterans—was allocated four huts in March[20], and they helped to build the ground defence works and communications. They had carried out practices in establishing overnight radio communications with Southern Command at Victoria Barracks in the previous January.[21]


1940s: Sergeant Blythman of the Volunteer Defence Corps digging a trench for a communication line (RAAF Museum)

Unknown to those at the time, a Japanese 'Glen' floatplane had taken a three-hour reconnaissance flight over Melbourne on 26 February 1942. Warrant Flying Officer Nobuo Fujita and Petty Officer Second Class Shoji Okuda flew over the munitions factory at Maribyrnong, the fort at Williamstown and RAAF Station Laverton. The Glen floatplane was launched from the submarine *I-25* that surfaced near Cape Wickham, King Island in Bass Strait.[22] It was the same aircraft that had flown a reconnaissance flight over Sydney on 17 February. Although the potential threat of air attack had decreased by the middle of 1942, the personnel at RAAF Station Point Cook remained vigilant. To test the station's response to air raid drills, dummy air raids were conducted by Brewster Buffalo aircraft from Laverton in July 1942. However, by the August drills, complacency had set in, and Brown

1942: Japanese 'Glen' floatplane and its mother submarine

warned the station that they had suffered 'heavy losses' due to personnel not taking cover during the air raid drills.[23]

Food rationing was introduced in the messes at Point Cook in February 1942. Initially, this seems to have gone ahead without complaint, although the lack of fruit was a recurring complaint with the coming of winter, and medical staff later complained of the excessive administration caused by the 'Army ration system'. To help keep spirits up, a station concert party called 'Krazy Kampers' put on shows[24], and a vegetable garden was started to supplement rations. Physical training also played a large part in keeping people occupied, with unit cricket and tennis matches played each night after stand down. Basketball and boxing were added to the range of sports; and as winter approached, hockey and rugby league teams were formed, often playing against the Army. World champion billiards player Walter Lindrum gave demonstrations of his skill on the station[25], and in the following summer, a very successful boxing and wrestling tournament was organised. The bouts, held in a hangar, included exhibitions by the world famous American welterweight champion boxer 'Alabama Kid'.[26]

The WAAAF was established in 1941. The first WAAAF officer to arrive on posting at Point Cook was Assistant Section Officer Mary Peck.[27] She had served in the WAAAF as an aircraftswoman and was commissioned three weeks before arrival.[28] She oversaw the growing number of WAAAFs posted in for training at No 1 RAAF Signals School and those assigned for duty to replace airmen, initially as storekeepers, clerks and fabric workers. Peck's role included dealing with the station commander to see that welfare, accommodation, clothing, food and working conditions were suitable for the airwomen. Hers was a task that required considerable skills in persuasion and tact. As Group Officer Clare Stevenson, Australia's most senior WAAAF officer, described the role, 'it was a difficult job and often a lonely one'.[29] Stevenson made her first official inspection of the WAAAF personnel at Point Cook in September 1942. Peck later held the distinction

of being the last WAAAF to be discharged from the Service when it was disbanded in July 1947. Peck was later the first officer commissioned in the postwar Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF).[30]

The mingling of men and women working on RAAF stations brought its own inevitable problems in the days before oral contraception. Stevenson was quite candid when she later wrote, 'always a realist, I had arranged what we would do about pregnancy outside of marriage long before we had a reported case'. Motherly, if perhaps devious, methods were employed by some WAAAF officers who checked on any young charges who did not draw their monthly ration of 'WAAAF Kit', as the chits used in exchange for feminine hygiene products were euphemistically known.[31] Such items were very scarce during the war, and issue of them through the supply system was one of the perks of being in the WAAAF.[32]

The entry of the United States into the war soon brought American servicemen to Point Cook. Some of the first arrived by mistake. A flight of 11 P40 Warhawk aircraft of the United States Army Air Forces landed on the afternoon of 12 February 1942. The entry in the station operations log noted 'mistaken destination', and one of the aircraft arrived 45 minutes later making a forced landing due to lack of fuel.[33] In May 1942, 150 American servicemen arrived for a 16-week wireless course at the Signals

1941: the WAAAF established 4 February (RAAF)

1941: Australia's most senior WAAAF officer Clare Stevenson (left) with British WAAF officer Sybil-Jean Burnett, daughter of the Chief of the Air Staff (State Library of Victoria)

1942: WAAAF personnel learning unarmed combat (State Library of Victoria)

1942: United States flag being raised in front of the headquarters beside the Australian and British flags on 4 July (RAAF Museum)

School. This coincided with an outbreak of German measles amongst the WAAAF personnel.[34] As a mark of respect for their visitors, the station flew the 'Stars and Stripes' next to the Australian flag on 4 July.[35] In August, WAAAF personnel were trained in unarmed combat by Flight Officer Doris Carter, the WAAAF Staff Officer for Physical Training.[36]

The EATS was rationalised in early 1942, and No 3 Service Flying Training School at Amberley, Queensland was disbanded. The personnel and aircraft were divided between its sister schools at Point Cook and Mallala, South Australia in April 1942. The growing number of personnel on the station placed strain on the living and working accommodation, and by August 1942, the establishment of the Signals School alone had increased to 1460 personnel. One means to alleviate the pressure was to accommodate some WAAAF personnel in the vacant married quarters at 3 and 4 Cole Street.

The winter of 1942 brought heavy rains that flooded the aerodrome, so very little flying was carried out for nearly a year at Point Cook. Instead, the three satellite aerodromes at Werribee, Little River and Lara, which had been developed during the first few months of 1942, were used to meet the training needs. Working and living accommodation of 'silver city' style huts, along with hangars, were erected and staffs of the relevant sections were gradually transferred to the satellite aerodromes.[37] Others were driven daily to their respective aerodromes in RAAF and hired vehicles. Night flying commenced at the satellites in June 1942, and politicians visited to inspect the working arrangements in the following month. The YMCA provided a mobile canteen for personnel on duty during night flying from August, and in September, vegetable gardens were established to supplement rations.

Aerodrome repair and drainage works at Point Cook offered the opportunity to establish and pave concrete runways. The work took a year, with flying operations finally returning to Point Cook on 5 June 1943.[38] One flying activity not affected by the wet was the build and departure of five Vought Sikorsky Kingfisher seaplanes completed in July and sent to Rathmines in August 1942.[39]

In February 1943, Professor Douglas Wright of the Flying Personnel Research Committee (and Professor of Physiology at, and later Chancellor of, the University of Melbourne) carried out experiments at Point Cook with anti-glare goggles and windscreens.[40] The tests were designed to reduce the glare experienced by pilots and watch personnel of maritime patrols.[41] Wright had been responsible for developing an apparatus that predicted a student's likelihood of success in flying training by testing reactions.[42] Point Cook was also the venue for more lethal experiments, with Group Captain Pool of the Royal Air Force carrying out skip-bombing tests using Beaufort and Lightning aircraft in early 1943, and Wing Commander Lambert using Mustang aircraft for tests with rocket projectiles in 1944. Some of Pool's skip-bombs failed to explode, and a public warning needed to be issued for people not to tamper with the 'flares' if found on the shores of Port Phillip.[43] The search for them was especially urgent, considering that five children were killed while playing with a similar object found on the shore of Lake Macquarie, New South Wales in February 1943.[44]

To mark the third anniversary of the war, King George VI called for a day of prayer across the Commonwealth that included a two-minute silence on 3 September 1942. The day was commemorated with a church parade at Point Cook.[45] The Station Band was very active in the summer of 1942–43, and it took part, along with RAAF and WAAAF personnel, in many street marches to raise funds for such causes as the Red Cross Prisoner of War Fund, the Commonwealth War and Austerity Loan Campaign, and the National Shilling Drive Appeal for Comforts for Women's Services. On 7 April 1943, the band was filmed while playing the National Anthem *God Save the King* at Point Cook. The footage was later overdubbed with the sound recorded at Melbourne Town Hall of the band joined by the WAAAF Choir. In a major publicity coup for

1942: Werribee satellite aerodrome—sister to Little River and Lara aerodromes (RAAF Museum)

1943: Leading Aircraftsman Boag (wearing a 'blind flying' hood over his helmet) with instructor Flying Officer Paterson in an Avro Anson (Australian War Memorial)

the RAAF, the final product was to be played in all cinemas across Australia prior to the main feature.[46]

Group Captain Rolf Brown had been Aide-de-Camp to the Governor-General from 1927 to 1931[47], where he likely acquired a keen sense of protocol. In what was claimed as a first for the RAAF, Brown presented pilot wings to his son, Leading Aircraftsman Charles Brown. Charles had completed his intermediate flying training at Deniliquin, New South Wales, and the presentation of his wings was delayed to allow him to travel to Point Cook, where he received his at the short ceremony to mark the completion of advanced training of No 25 course on 16 December 1942. Those pilots had received their wings some weeks earlier at completion of their intermediate training, and the young Brown was the sole recipient of wings that day. In addressing the parade, Group Captain Brown warned the newly qualified pilots against overconfidence in the air in words that would sound familiar to newly graduated pilots today. This was indicative of a marked change in the attitudes of pilots over some prewar counterparts. Those found to be in breach of flying discipline, especially conducting unauthorised low flying, were often court martialled, and dismissed in some instances, in the post-Ellington RAAF.

There had been deaths at Point Cook at an average rate of two per month since the start of the war, most associated with flying training. However, the winter of 1943 was a disastrous one for the station's personnel. Within days of a fire in the new warehouse in May, in which nobody was injured, Aircraftswoman Phyllis Williams was transporting a patient in the station ambulance at St Kilda when it collided with a car and overturned. Williams was killed, and the patient, Corporal Natalie Pettigrew, sustained a fractured thigh.[48] In July, four trainee pilots from Point Cook were killed in a midair collision near Meredith, 60 kilometres west of the station.[49] In August, two midair collisions resulted in multiple fatalities. On 4 August, a Boomerang aircraft from Laverton collided with an Anson trainer from Point Cook, killing all three on board. The Boomerang pilot was uninjured.[50] On 10 August, a further four

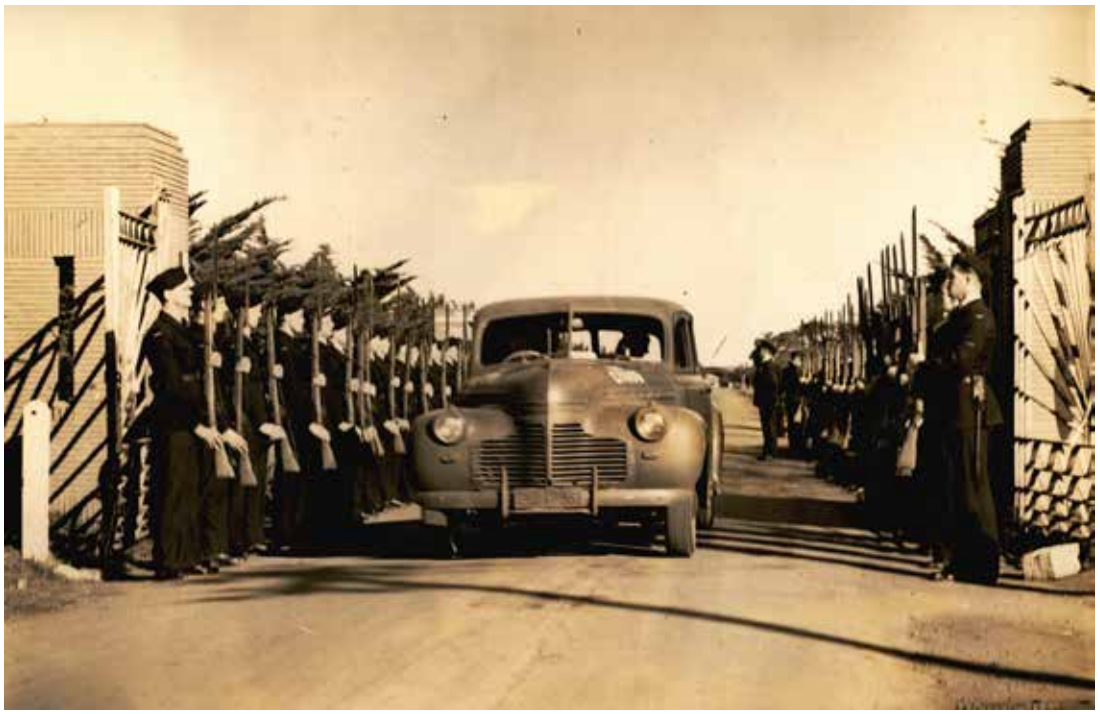
aircrew were killed when two aircraft collided over the Werribee satellite aerodrome[51], and three more died in a collision on 13 September. Ground accidents were mercifully rare, so it came as a shock when Aircraftsman Roberts died from injuries after being struck by a propeller.[52]

As the war continued, annual milestones were marked. The third anniversary of the WAAAF was celebrated on 15 March 1944 in the time-honoured military manner—with a parade. This was followed by a dinner then a dance in the gymnasium.[53] The fourth anniversary of the EATS was celebrated on the 'wings' parade for No 42 Course on 1 May 1944. The Governor of Victoria, Sir Winston Dugan, reviewed the parade, which was the first to be open to the general public. Bad weather intervened marring the parade, which was attended mostly by friends and relatives of the graduates, and the final march-past was subsequently abandoned.[54]

With increased successes in the war in Europe, the demand for aircrew trainees from Australia dropped sharply in 1944. In preparation for the inevitable reduction in training schools, a round of command postings took place in May, and Group Captain Brown was posted to Tocumwal, New South Wales. Functions to farewell the commander who had led Point Cook through the height of the war were held in the Officers and Sergeants Messes, and he made an elaborate ceremonial departure through the gates of the station, lined by a guard of honour giving a 'present arms' on 26 May 1944.[55] This ended Brown's third command of Point Cook[56], and Wing Commander Hal Harding took over as station commander.

Harding was a long-time Point Cook veteran, having served there before the war as an airman and even as drum-major of the RAAF Band.[57] He had fond recollections of Point Cook as the 'show station', with sweeping lawns and garden beds around the messes. He was disappointed to see the vegetable gardens in their place and the general neglect brought by the war.[58] In many ways, he was the perfect appointee to oversee the dismantling of the Point Cook elements of the EATS. In his first monthly report, Harding said that, 'Point Cook has the reputation of being a happy station' and that, 'the high standard of work put out by all ranks is very largely attributable to this fact'. He planned to return Point Cook to the 'show station and garden city' of the RAAF. His only real criticism was an acute shortage of cooks, but he found that other staff members were doing a good job of preparing the meals.[59] Harding was proactive in his approach and took over as the president of the welfare committee. He began removing the camouflage, starting with the

1944: composite photograph of the wings parade for 42 Course that celebrated the fourth anniversary of the EATS (RAAF Museum)



1944: ceremonial departure of Group Captain Rolf Brown (RAAF Museum)

publically visible gates and guard room, and he had the parade ground regraded.

The success of the Normandy landings in June 1944, following earlier success in the Battle of Stalingrad and the success of the Allied offensives launched from New Guinea and the north of Australia, showed that moves towards a peacetime footing needed to be made. Under direction from senior headquarters, Harding wound up the Point Cook operations of No 1 Service Flying Training School and interviewed each aircrew trainee, offering them ground jobs if they wished. Staff and aircraft were sent to Mallala, South Australia in August, and flying ceased at the satellite aerodromes. Remaining aircrew trainees were employed in dismantling the air raid protection measures.

Harding felt a real sense of closure about flying training at Point Cook, and three days after the fifth anniversary of the war on 6 September 1944, he presided over the last EATS 'wings' parade. The EATS had graduated 2642 pilots at Point Cook.[60] The very last graduate was Leading Aircraftsman Coy, who was laid up in hospital due to a football injury. Harding pinned wings to his chest in his hospital bed.[61] Harding's command was short-lived, as—with the move of Central Flying School from Parkes, New South Wales to Point Cook under the planned peacetime structure on 12 September 1944—he relinquished command to Group Captain Du Pont of the Royal Air Force, who was appointed to the dual role of Commanding Officer of RAAF Station Point Cook and Commandant of Central Flying School.

As Central Flying School settled in, the Army Service Reconnaissance Department made a surprise night landing to place dummy charges on aircraft and vital installations in September 1944. They had no difficulty, and the exercise was considered a training success, at least by the Army. Further Army 'raids' were carried out in the following January with mixed success, but the water tower was successfully 'mined'. No aircraft was allowed to fly until cleared by the maintenance personnel.[62]

In fact, very little flying training was conducted over the summer of 1944–45, and in November, the only aviation courses being held were No 2 Chief Ground Instructors' Course and a ground crew training course to service the Liberator bomber, which was allocated to Point Cook for ground training.[63] Some WAAAF personnel used their handicraft skills to knit articles to send to England for

child victims of the German V-1 rocket attacks. The project was organised by Mrs Copp of the YWCA, wife of the Church of England chaplain.[64] Over the summer, a number of six-day camps were held by squadrons of the Air Training Corps. The Corps was formed in 1941 to encourage airmindedness in Australian youth and to act as a recruiting base for the RAAF.[65] The cadets were given 'as much flying training as possible'.[66]

As Christmas 1944 approached—and with a sense of the coming victory—a gala sports carnival was held. The station log reported in unusually joyous tones that, 'as any ex "Point Cook" man will tell you, Sports Day at the "Point" is a real gala day and this year was no exception. Flags, pennants, etc., decorated the oval and despite the scarcity of rain the old oval looked really well dressed up for the occasion.' Mr Eric Welch, a professional sports announcer from 3DB radio was engaged, and the station band played. The carnival was topped off with a cocktail party in the Officers Mess then a dance at Airmen's Mess. Father Christmas gave presents from a big tree placed in the hall at 2300 hours.[67]

Air Commodores De La Rue and Wright made an inspection of the station in January 1945 and were not pleased with standards at the station.[68] That may not have been the reason, but Du Pont was replaced by Wing Commander Norman Ford the following month. He was appointed in time to prepare Point Cook for a formal visit from the Governor-General, the Duke of Gloucester. In assessing his new command, Ford found living conditions at Point Cook to be 'only just adequate' and difficult to keep hygienic. He said, 'This is mainly brought about because of a lack of pride in personal and station cleanliness, which once again must be laid at the doors of N.C.O's and Junior Officers', and he commenced a 'campaign to decrease the apathy'. He noted that the higher headquarters policy to reduce the full two-day weekends and to eliminate the three-day weekend once a month would cause further morale problems.[69]

1944: final wings parade of the EATS at Point Cook—6 September (RAAF Museum)

A problem with morale is perhaps understandable, because Central Flying School was not able to carry out its role of training Qualified Flying Instructors. Without a sense of purpose, and reading daily about men being decorated for heroic acts overseas, the instructors—some with as many as 5000 non-operational flying hours—may have been lamenting that they were stuck with station duties in Melbourne.[70] Marching rehearsals for the vice-regal visit in February would also have taken their toll, and the situation could have worsened in April when 60 aircrew personnel were posted in 'to be used at the discretion of the Commanding Officer'.[71]

The visit of the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester on 26 February 1945 was to present a gold cup from the Royal Air Force as a gift 'to mark the comradeship and show the esteem with which the R.A.F. holds the R.A.A.F.'[72] The cup was accepted by the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Vice-Marshal George Jones, on a ceremonial parade, during which a 'guard of 100 men, drilled to perfection,' gave the Royal Salute.[73] However, the Duchess stole the day through her knowledge of air force matters and by wearing the British summer uniform of Honorary Air Chief Commandant of the British Women's Auxiliary Air Force. She and the Duke toured the facilities and spoke with many airmen and airwomen.[74] In an amusing incident, the Duchess, although quite accustomed to military protocol, entered the Officers Mess on one occasion forgetting to remove her hat—required even of female officers—and avoided her duty to stand a round of drinks because everyone was too polite to point out her error.[75]

1945: arrival of the Duke of Gloucester on 26 February (RAAF Museum)

1945: Duke and Duchess of Gloucester officiating at the ceremony to hand over the Royal Air Force gold cup (RAAF Museum)

Victory in Europe was declared on 7 May 1945 with little effect on the morale of those serving at Point Cook. Winter had set in, and there was still a very low rate of activity at the station. Efforts to improve morale were made by improving facilities and forming tea clubs at the southern and central tarmacs to serve tea, coffee and soup at 'smoko'. Lectures were organised, including ones on music appreciation by one of the navigation instructors and one by the celebrated journalist Dr Peter Russo, who lived in Japan for 10 years before the war. Other lectures were given by serving airmen who had escaped as prisoners of war.[76] Minor operational work was carried out, with tests to drop and retrieve an air-sea rescue life boat from a Hudson bomber near the end of pier, as well as rescue supply canister drop tests from a Beaufort bomber.[77]

In contrast, the surrender of Japan ending World War II, as announced in Australia at 9.30 am on Wednesday 15 August 1945, was a day of great joy and relief. All except duty personnel at Point Cook were stood down for the remainder of the day on orders from higher authority.[78] No doubt, many went to Melbourne and rejoiced on the streets and in the hotels along with an estimated half million other

citizens. A station full dress parade was held the following Wednesday, on which Wing Commander Ford read a message of 'thanks and appreciation of the loyal service rendered by members during hostilities' from Air Vice-Marshal George Jones.[79]

To mark the end of hostilities, the Victory Aerial Pageant was held at Essendon aerodrome on 1 September 1945. During the planning and rehearsals for the pageant, Point Cook hosted the Royal Navy Seafire, Corsair and Avenger aircraft taking part. None of the Point Cook aircraft took part in the spectacle—the public wanted to see fighting rather than training aircraft.

1945: rescue dinghy after being dropped from the Hudson bomber (State Library of Victoria)

From September, the staff of Signals School, numbering some 1400, began to be posted for discharge and the disbandment of the school, but a number of British trainees remained stranded in Australia for many months. The cessation of hostilities was an unsettling time for the staff at Point Cook, with boredom setting in and shortages in many musterings bringing operations to all but a halt. The education officer organised educational and vocational classes during work hours, while some painted the recreation facilities. The welfare committee worked hard and organised a victory ball

1945: Hudson bomber with rescue dinghy mounted below the fuselage (State Library of Victoria)

in October. Sports were organised, and the badly neglected golf course was cleared and mowed. A shark-proof swimming pool was created off the end of the pier. The remnants of No 3 Squadron arrived from overseas, and RAAF Staff School also moved in as a lodger unit. The RAAF Band was posted back from No 1 Engineering School at the Melbourne Showgrounds after almost a year away and began a round of official and charitable engagements, and Wing Commander Norman Ford relinquished command of Point Cook to Group Captain Reginald Burrage.[80]

One benefit of the reduced number of personnel was that the first dining-in of the Officers Mess in years was able to be held on 13 December 1945. A week later—in a tradition carried on well into the 1990s—Christmas dinner was served to the airmen and airwomen of the station with the members of the Sergeants and Officers Messes acting as waiters.[81] On Christmas morning, the children and parents on the station and those in the sick quarters were visited by 'Santa Claus', who distributed gifts from under a Christmas tree after arriving in an aircraft.[82] His arrival by air was a first for the station that had a chilling conclusion some 40 years later.

World War II proved to be the period of greatest intensity at 'The Point'. As part of the rapid expansion of the RAAF to accommodate the EATS, Point Cook joined the many training schools hastily established

around Australia. By the end of the war, Point Cook had trained 2691 pilots (in 44 courses) and 7137 signals trainees and had provided numerous other skills and qualifications to so many Australian men and women, as well as members of the Services of Allied nations. Point Cook could also claim to have trained two recipients of the Victoria Cross awarded in World War II—Hughie Edwards and Bill Newton.

The war ended too abruptly for the Government to have mature plans for the future of the peacetime Air Force, despite some senior RAAF officers working towards a proposal. After the rapid demobilisation of wartime personnel, the Interim Air Force was established to fly and maintain the aircraft that were to be retained. The RAAF was faced with a whole set of new challenges; but Point Cook remained central to flying and specialist training for the postwar RAAF.

1944: dance band formed for the Christmas season (RAAF Museum)

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73 'Duke Presents RAF Cup to Point Cook: "Cradle of RAAF"', *The Argus*, 27 February 1945, p. 3.
74 'Duchess in Uniform Captures RAAF: another busy day', *The Argus*, 27 February 1945, p. 7.
75 'But Nobody was Game to Tell Her!', *The Argus*, 27 February 1945, p. 7.
76 Operations Record Book: Station Headquarters, RAAF Station Point Cook, Sheet No. 100, Appendix A, June 1945.
77 Operations Record Book: Station Headquarters, RAAF Station Point Cook, Sheet No 101, July 1945.
78 Operations Record Book: Station Headquarters, RAAF Station Point Cook, Sheet No. 106, Appendix A, August 1945.
79 Operations Record Book: Station Headquarters, RAAF Station Point Cook, Sheet No. 106, Appendix A, August 1945.
80 Operations Record Book: Station Headquarters, RAAF Station Point Cook, Sheet Nos 115–117, Appendix A, November 1945.
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82 ibid.

1942: packing rigging lines for a parachute (State Library of Victoria)

Chapter 8 - Postwar Years

The immediate postwar period was a very unsettling time for the RAAF. The pressures to demobilise personnel rapidly and to set the national economy on a sound peacetime footing were far higher priorities for the Government than determining the shape and size of the peacetime RAAF. The Interim Air Force was formed to act as a caretaker for RAAF assets until firm plans were made and enacted.[1]

The Central Flying School had moved to Point Cook in the later stages of the war as part of an initial consolidation of resources and was a sure indication that the station was to have a postwar role; but what that role may be was not fully determined. Early postwar activities at Point Cook included launching the nation's first government-owned airline, aiding the introduction of jet age technologies and placing the RAAF at the forefront of aviation medicine. However, by June 1947, the Government settled on a plan for the future of Australia's armed forces, taking a far-sighted view of the need for modern equipment and a professional approach to military education and training. Point Cook's role involved educating senior officers and teaching linguists, but most significantly, it trained new officers through a newly formed RAAF College. As Point Cook became recognised as the 'Cradle of the RAAF', it nurtured a new generation of leaders.

RAAF total enlistments during World War II had been 189 700[2], including 27 874 WAAAFs, and 160 808 RAAF personnel were still serving at the war's end in October 1945.[3] The RAAF paid a high price for victory in World War II; over 14 000 men and women were casualties—including those who had lost their lives, were missing or suffered injury. The rate of postwar demobilisation was rapid—as high as 5500 per week by October 1946—and this allowed little time to consider the skills that the RAAF needed to retain beyond the caretaker role of operating the limited number of aircraft that were not disposed of after the war.[4] The size of the Interim Air Force was set at a nominal 15 000 men[5], and the WAAAF was fully disbanded. However, by 1947 the RAAF was in crisis with personnel numbers dropping to just over 12 000 men, and in 1948 it reached a low of 8025—well short of the 15 000 needed to maintain operations. Qualified aircrew and ground staff, when presented with few opportunities for interesting work or advancement within the Interim Air Force, left in droves. Without the ability to carry out meaningful defence operations, the RAAF took on more mundane local tasks.

The Government also used the engagement conditions of the Interim Air Force as a way to cull many of the senior officers from the Service. The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Vice-Marshal George

Jones, remained, but many other career permanent officers lost their jobs in the postwar purge. These included Air Marshal Richard Williams and Air Vice-Marshal Goble, both of whom had been sidelined for much of the war, and Air Vice-Marshal William Bostock, who had commanded the operational arm of the RAAF throughout much of the South-West Pacific Area campaign. A highly critical Bostock said, 'Australia's air force may be capable of many things. It can joy-ride Government loan subscribers, destroy grasshoppers and carry out bushfire patrols. But, in its present condition, it can't fight.'[6] He identified a need for training of staff officers and field commanders in the postwar RAAF and pointed out that the handful that had trained in Britain were not sufficient to meet future needs. Bostock was not alone in his analysis. However, before such matters could be fully considered, more urgent national priorities needed to be addressed, and in the meantime, many skilled and experienced people, especially technical tradesmen, were lost to the Service. Furthermore, the RAAF was left with no initial training organisations, which could result in 'an ugly gap in its ranks' in due course.[7]

A priority that had an immediate effect on Point Cook was Prime Minister Ben Chifley's wish to start a government-owned airline. He set up the Australian National Airlines Commission in late 1945 and appointed Arthur Coles—founder of Coles Variety Stores and later Coles Supermarkets—as its inaugural chairman. The newly retired Richard Williams was appointed as Director General of Civil Aviation, and the operational arm of the commission was to be known as Trans Australia Airlines (TAA). Captains, first officers and maintenance engineers for the new airline began training at the National Airlines Training School at Point Cook in July 1946 using ex-RAAF DC-3 Dakota aircraft.[8] All of the pilots had served in the RAAF or Royal Air Force, and many were decorated for bravery.[9] They were trained under John Ryland, who had served with No 13 Squadron at Ambon during the war and Ansett Airlines prior to that.[10]

From 1946, TAA's first airline hostesses were trained at Point Cook under Miss Helen Somerville. Hostesses had to be between 22 and 28 years of age and were 'accepted for training on the grounds of personality, intelligence and good appearance'. They had to be between 158 and 168 centimetres tall and not weigh over 55 kilograms. Preference was given to applicants with knowledge of nursing or first aid and ex-Service personnel were preferred.[11] Passenger operations were brought forward by six months on the orders of Prime Minister Chifley, to occur before the upcoming Federal election. Flights were to be conducted at Essendon aerodrome, but heavy rain had caused mud, and the first flight—Melbourne to Sydney—took off from Laverton on 9 September 1946.

1946: TAA maintenance personnel being trained on a radial engine (John Hopton [TAA714 - *Aircraft* magazine, via The Collection])

Students at the school, renamed TAA Pilot and Engineer Training School[12], were mostly ex-Service personnel and lived in the 'silver city' huts in conditions not far removed from their wartime service. Over 250 personnel were under training by November 1946, by which time the new DC-4 Skymaster aircraft arrived at Point Cook for crew and engineer conversion. Referring to the wartime experience of those under training, a press report said, 'one could not fail to get the impression that here

were a lot of young people who had been through much together and were now determined to make a success of the new venture'.[13] By the time the school left Point Cook for Essendon in March 1947, it had trained 150 pilots in seven courses, 221 aircraft mechanics and ground engineers, and 75 hostesses.[14]

Public recognition for the efforts of the men and women who had served the RAAF so well throughout the war was also a national priority, but a victory parade needed to wait until sufficient numbers of personnel had arrived home. As part of a national day of parades, the Victory Day parade in Melbourne was held on 10 June 1946. General Sir Thomas Blamey on his white charger led 20 000 marchers before a crowd of 250 000 onlookers.[15] Members of the Air Training Corps from all over Victoria marched. They had camped and trained at Point Cook in preparation. Aircraft from Point Cook flew over the parade, including the prototype CA-15 Kangaroo piston-engine fighter. The first 'jet-propelled' aircraft in Australia also took part. This was a Gloster Meteor on loan from the Royal Air Force, which was assembled and operated by No 1 Aircraft Performance Unit, based at Laverton. It had arrived in Australia three weeks earlier.[16]

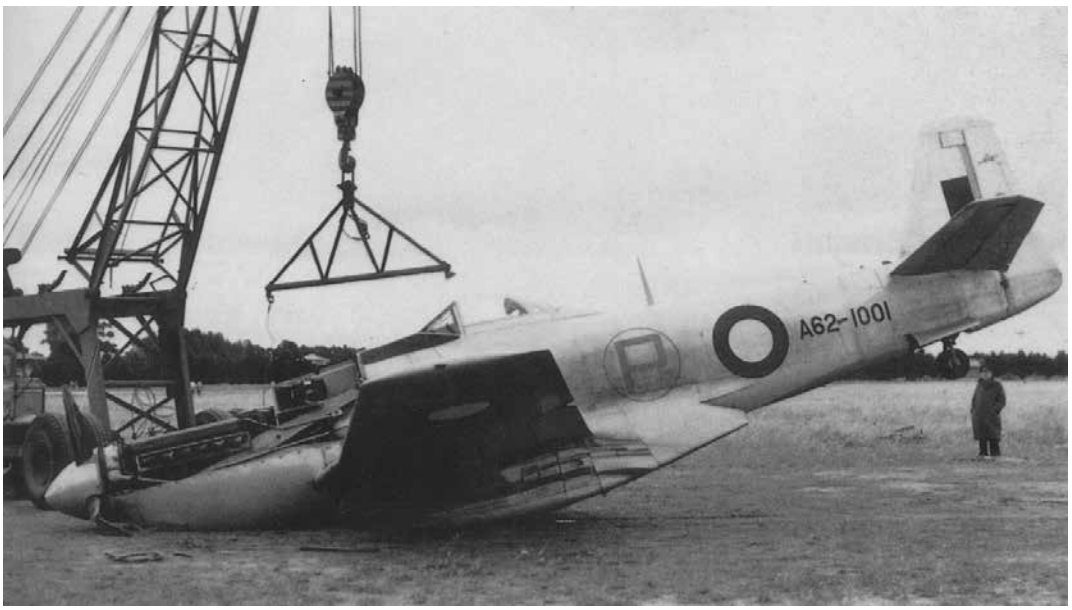
1946: postwar makeshift married quarters in 'silver city' huts (RAAF Museum)

Shortages were very much part of life in the immediate postwar period, with rationing of clothing, petrol, gas, tobacco, liquor and some foodstuffs

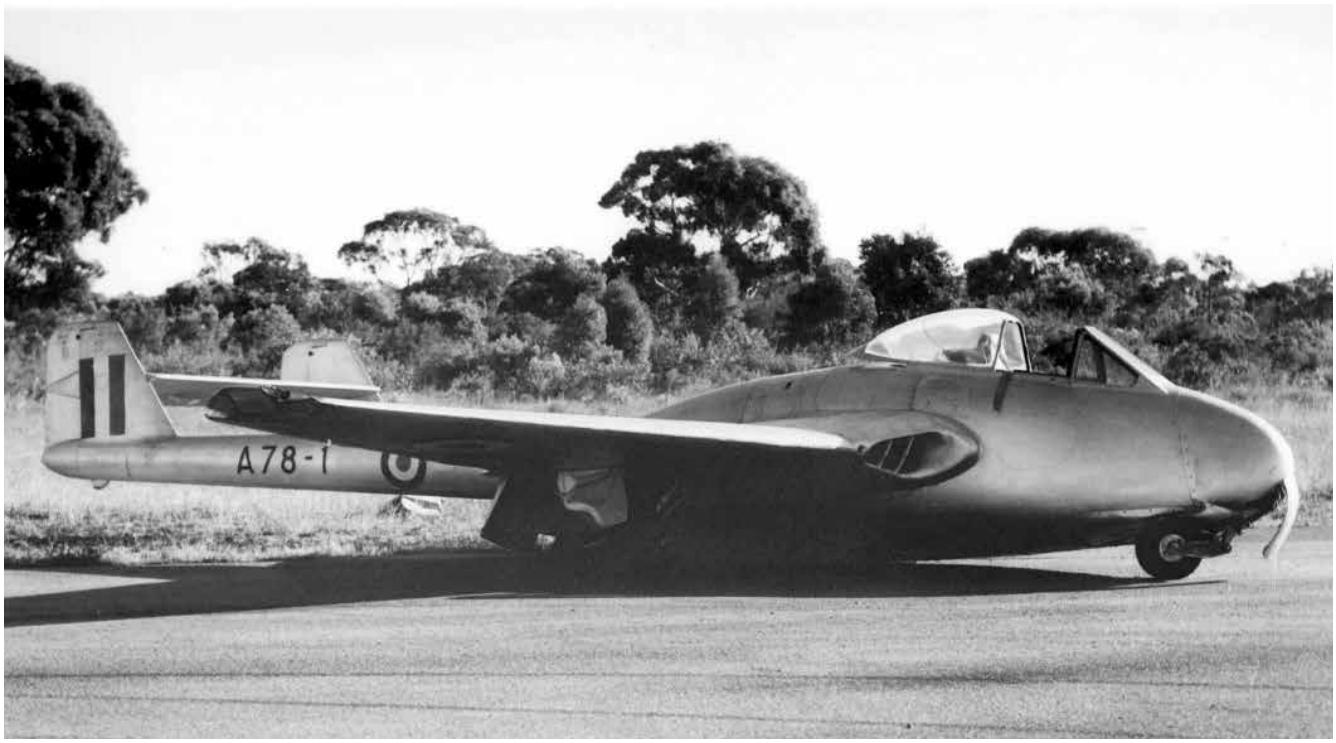
1946: Trans Australia Airlines DC-4 Skymaster

continuing until late 1949. The housing shortage became critical as personnel returned from overseas and were reunited with their loved ones. Many newly married couples were in search of a home. The Commanding Officer of RAAF Station Point Cook, Group Captain Reg Burrage, married the daughter of recently retired Group Captain 'Moth' Eaton in August 1946, and the press reported, 'they are among the lucky people who have a home, for the CO's modern home on the station awaits their return.'[17] In a short-term attempt to provide more married quarters on the station, many of the 'silver city' huts in the north-west part of the station were converted into two-bedroom homes by lining and partitioning them. In a practice common to other stations, they were painted inside and out, bathrooms and toilets were fitted, and they were fenced to provide separate backyards.[18] Compared with the comfort of the Burrages, they must have been miserably cold in winter and stifling hot in summer, as they were lined with tar paper and insulated with sugar cane boards. They proved to be a deathtrap, as one family tragically discovered in 1955. On 26 March, Leading Aircraftsman John Harvey and his wife Kathleen awoke to find fire and smoke in their quarters at five in the morning. Harvey managed to save two of his children, but their three-month-old daughter Margaret died soon after admission to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne. On the day after the inquest into Margaret's death, the RAAF organised for the flammable linings to be removed from the temporary married quarters.[19]

A 1947 press report said of Point Cook that, after 'the high pressure training of thousands of aircrew to meet the demands of war, there is to-day a quietness at Point Cook, but "behind the scenes" a staff of specialists is very much alive.'[20] No 1 Aircraft Performance Unit moved operations from Laverton to Point Cook, most likely for the seclusion that Point Cook offered. Some of the trials of the Gloster Meteor jet fighter took place at Point Cook before it was sent to Darwin for tropical trials, where it was subsequently written off after a heavy landing in February 1947.[21] While awaiting its next jet aircraft, Aircraft Performance Unit tested the Australian-made CA-15 Kangaroo, which suffered a similar fate when the undercarriage failed to lower fully during a landing at Point Cook. Tests were carried out in conjunction with the Forestry Commission of Victoria into the possibility of using Mustang fighters as chemical dive-bombers to extinguish bushfires or to exfoliate firebreaks. The tests in February



1946: CA-15 Kangaroo prototype after crashing at Point Cook with partially lowered undercarriage (RAAF Museum)



1947: the first Vampire F1 A78-1 after a hard landing at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

1947 involved setting alight platforms of dry grass soaked with oil by the edge of the aerodrome and were reasonably successful, but their effectiveness in heavily wooded areas was doubted.[22] There was even consideration given to using high explosive bombs dropped from RAAF Liberator bombers to snuff the bushfires.[23]

Australia's second jet aircraft, a de Havilland Vampire and the only extant flying jet aircraft in the country, was assembled at Laverton and test flown there on 21 May 1947. Further trials were carried out at Point Cook, where it was put out of action three weeks later due to a heavy landing. The second Vampire arrived in February 1948 and was trialled at Point Cook.[24] Also in May 1947, a Mosquito and a Lincoln aircraft flew to Pearce, Western Australia to test the efficiency of aircraft at different altitudes. On the return flight to Point Cook, the Mosquito broke the transcontinental record time with a flight time of five hours, beating the record set nine months earlier by a civilian DC-4 Skymaster aircraft of six hours and one minute.[25]

In June 1947, the Aircraft Performance Unit also carried out trials with a troop-carrying glider loaned by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research. The glider was towed by a C47B Dakota aircraft.[26] A Dakota was also used in August 1947 for pesticide spraying tests beyond the pier at Point Cook. They did not know that the DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) pesticide that was sprayed could cause cancer and damage the environment. The tests determined that 650 hectares could be covered in one flight, and plans were made to spray the RAAF camp at Morotai in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia).[27]

In September 1947, the first helicopter arrived in Australia and was assembled at Point Cook. The Sikorsky S-51 helicopter was imported from the United States and was planned to be used for bushfire spotting, air-sea rescue and jungle rescue.[28] It was test flown in November by Australia's only helicopter pilot, Squadron Leader Ken Robertson, who had earlier made a mark for himself as the test pilot assisting Professor Frank Cotton—known as the 'father of sports science in Australia'—with the development of the anti-G suit. He confessed that

keeping the helicopter hovering took an immense amount of effort and concentration, and one report said he looked like an 'overworked Wurlitzer organist' as he struggled with the hand, foot and console controls.[29] This first helicopter flight, coming just 33 years after the first military aircraft took to the air, again reinforced Point Cook as the birthplace of Australian military aviation.

The Aircraft Performance Unit was responsible for a number of other innovations, including rain seeding experiments and testing of civil experimental aircraft, such as the unsuccessful three-engine de Havilland Drover.[30] The unit also trialled floating survival suits for aircrew forced down into sub-zero temperature waters.[31] One of the most notable experiments was the successful 1948 jet-assisted take-off (JATO) trial on a Catalina flying boat in the bay off Point Cook.[32] The rocket assistance packs were acquired from the United States Navy and ground tested at the Werribee range before fitting to the aircraft. Attempts were made to use the JATO Catalina in support of operations in the Antarctic;

1947: Squadron Leader Ken Robertson at the flight controls of the Sikorski S-51–Australia's first military helicopter (RAAF Museum)

1940s: Squadron Leader Ken Robertson wearing Professor Frank Cotton's experimental anti-G suit (RAAF Museum)

however, the mission was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.[33] In 1948, the unit moved back to Laverton and was later renamed Aircraft Research and Development Unit—an important RAAF unit which has a long and illustrious record of innovation and technical prowess.

Much of the RAAF postwar assistance to Australia's Antarctic activities was staged from Point Cook. In March 1947, three flights were made into the Antarctic Circle in what was dubbed by the war-savvy press as 'Operation Antarctica'.[34] The first two flights, in Liberator bombers from Pearce and Laverton, were to check on weather conditions, aircraft performance and crew conditions. The third flight, in a Lincoln bomber, flew as far as Macquarie Island, taking aerial photographs in preparation for establishing the Australian National Antarctic Research Expedition's permanent base. The crew of nine in the No 1 Aircraft Performance Unit Lincoln bomber from Point Cook was captained by test pilot and long range expert Wing Commander Derek Cuming. The flight took over 14 hours, and 239

1948: fitting rocket assistance packs for the jet assisted take off (JATO) trial of a Catalina flying boat (RAAF Museum)

1948: Catalina on jet assisted take off (JATO) (RAAF Museum)

photographs were taken.[35] It was the furthest south that any aircraft had travelled from Australian soil.[36] In July 1948, a Catalina amphibious aircraft flew from Point Cook to Macquarie Island via Hobart to resupply the newly established outpost[37]; and in 1954, an Auster floatplane of RAAF Antarctic Flight trained at Point Cook for flights in connection with the icebreaker *Kista Dan* and its ill-fated trip to establish Mawson Station in 1954–55.[38] Floatplanes can experience difficulty separating from dead calm water, so during the training, a boat from Point Cook's Marine Section was used to create some turbulence and break the water surface.[39]

In another example of RAAF assistance to the civil community and the resourceful application of technology, a rescue mission was mounted in March 1947 to help John Kelly—a cattleman working in Victoria's high country—who sustained serious head injuries after being thrown from his horse on Mount Tamboritha. Flight Lieutenant Thomas Ruston was dispatched in a Tiger Moth from Point Cook with medical officer Wing Commander Charles Leleu on board, and a civilian Tiger Moth from Heyfield with a civilian medical officer joined the rescue effort. Kelly was carried to a Forestry Commission outpost near a clearing suitable for the Tiger Moths to land, where he was attended by the medical officers. He was transported to the hospital at East Sale in the private aircraft. Engine difficulties prevented the RAAF Tiger Moth from taking off, and the pilot and medical officers remained on the mountain overnight while waiting for ground crew. A Dakota aircraft from Point Cook flew above the rescue operation and coordinated the operation by receiving radio communication from a pedal-powered Forestry Commission radio on the ground. The Dakota remained in constant radio communication with Point Cook.[40]

Aviation medicine employed some of the most advanced technology in the country at Point Cook when the Aviation Medicine Flight of Central Flying School acquired a hypobaric chamber in the late 1940s. The chamber simulated air pressures at high altitudes and was used to train aircrew to recognise

1947: pedal-powered radio set

1949: RAAF Nursing Service sisters in the hypobaric chamber (State Library of Victoria)

the effects of hypoxia. In April 1949, the first session for RAAF Nursing Service sisters was conducted; and by 1953, RAAF and Navy medical officers, including at least one from New Zealand, were put through similar training. Aviation Medicine Flight also conducted aeromedical evacuation and air-sea rescue training for RAAF nurses from 1952, using experience gained in Allied casualty movements to Japan during the Korean War.[41] In February 1956, Aviation Medicine Section and Medical Training Section merged to form the RAAF School of Aviation Medicine under the command of Wing Commander William Rait, former medical officer at the Aircraft Research and Development Unit. Announcing the formation of the unit—claimed to be the first aviation medicine school in the southern hemisphere and the

fourth of its kind in the world—the Minister for Air, Athol Townley, said it would 'train medical officers in special medical problems of the jet age'.[42]

The postwar indecision about the future of the RAAF ended when the Government announced plans to form the postwar Permanent Air Force (PAF) in June 1947, and as a result recruiting for the Interim Air Force ceased on 1 September 1947. The PAF was to be 11 900 men with a Reserve of 500 to form a highly trained nucleus for major expansion in time of war. The Iron Curtain was in place and the Cold War was increasing in intensity, and the Government did not want to be caught unprepared as it had been before World War II. The RAAF was to have strike and home defence capabilities with 16 squadrons and an initial complement of 114 aircraft. A five-year plan was envisaged to modernise the RAAF by 1952. The plan rationalised training bases, with Point Cook, Laverton, East Sale and Ballarat being retained in Victoria and Forest Hill near Wagga Wagga being retained in New South Wales. All were to have a secondary role of home defence. As part of the reorganisation, Central Flying School—which had been engaged on flying standardisation tasks—moved to East Sale, and No 1 Flying Training School moved from Uranquinty to Point Cook to commence the first postwar *ab initio* pilot training from February 1948 in an 18-month course.[43] However, there was yet another good reason to bring No 1 Flying Training School back to Point Cook.

1948: Air Commodore Val Hancock with No 1 Course RAAF College (RAAF Museum)

Along with the planned restructure, a newly conceived RAAF College was formed on 1 August 1947 with the ideal to provide professional education and training for future generations of the RAAF's senior leaders. The establishment of RAAF College was ably championed by the RAAF's chief personnel manager, Air Commodore Joe Hewitt, who had a visionary commitment to RAAF education.[44] The college's four-year course was designed after an examination of officer education in a number of countries and was ultimately based on United States and British models according to its first Commandant, Air Commodore Val Hancock, who described the college as 'a cross between Duntroon and Cranwell'. He said, 'the college will impart a knowledge, not only of warfare right up to the atomic age and beyond, but of the political, scientific, social, and economic questions so important to an understanding of the modern world'.[45] To that end, a strong emphasis was placed on personal qualities and knowledge of the humanities.[46] This emphasis on the profession of arms was a sign of the RAAF's increasing maturity and its desire to provide the best education available for its future leaders. Whether the RAAF College achieved such high aims in practice, is an issue that is still debated by RAAF veterans of different persuasions.

The course, which comprised academic study for the first two years and flying training in conjunction with No 1 Flying Training School in the final two years, would 'forge, carve, and hammer them into one of the best disciplined and highly trained groups of men in the Air Force'. The formal education component was provided in conjunction with the University of Melbourne, but a degree was not awarded. The location of Point Cook was deliberately chosen, because 'it is in surroundings rich in association with the pioneers of aviation in this country'[47]; and while location at Canberra was preferred by some, it was not suitable due to the nature of the aerodrome.[48]

1948: No 1 Course RAAF College in its first year (RAAF Museum)

RAAF College took up residence in the recently vacated Armament School buildings north of the Officers Mess, comprising mostly 'silver city' huts. Hancock was a 1928 graduate of Duntroon, and he brought some influence of that institution to Point Cook. He was 41 years old when took command and was described as, '… a man of considerable energy and enthusiasm. He is a stickler for punctuality and efficiency, but not a martinet. A great believer in physical fitness, he neither drinks nor smokes.'[49] Hancock chose Squadron Leader Lou Spence as the college's first adjutant and later to command Cadet Squadron.[50] The college's first four-year course commenced in February 1948, after processing fewer than expected applications. While the college's 22 air cadets settled into their books, other students commenced the first postwar 18-month flying course. That course included 12 Navy flying students for the Fleet Air Arm. The Navy's first aircraft carrier, HMAS *Sydney*, was on its way with 50 aircraft on board.

That first four-year RAAF College course graduated, and was presented with 'wings' by Prime Minister Robert Menzies, in December 1951. Course graduates found themselves deployed to Korea within months of graduation, where Pilot Officers Bill Simmonds and John Surman shot down an enemy MiG-15 jet fighter each by May 1952, and the dux of the course, Pilot Officer Douglas Robertson, carried out successful ground attacks.[51] Robertson was reported missing believed killed when his Meteor jet was hit by ground fire on 15 May 1952; Surman was

1949: pilot trainees for the Navy Fleet Air Arm training at Point Cook (State Library of Victoria)

subsequently killed during a ground attack mission on 9 June 1952.[52]

As an aid to the cadets' military education, items of historic interest began to be collected by RAAF College, particularly those relating to the earliest days of Australian military aviation. Some were placed on display at the college, but most were held in storage at Point Cook and these artefacts were the genesis of the RAAF Museum's highly significant collection.

1951: Prime Minister Robert Menzies pinning on 'wings' of graduates of No 1 Course RAAF College (State Library of Victoria)

With entry-level officer professional education placed on a sound footing, the needs of higher professional education for middle-ranking officers needed to be addressed. Following in the footsteps of RAAF Staff School—which moved to Point Cook from Mount Martha in November 1945 before being disbanded—RAAF Staff College was formed in 1949 and moved to Point Cook.[53] The college, to train unit commanders and senior staff officers, used the vacated Signals School buildings at the southern tarmac area. With the PAF considered to be the nucleus for future wartime expansion, the college sought to train future generations of planners and administrators as professional staff officers, recognising that the annual training requirement would be about 24 students. This was a marked increase over the two places available per year at Britain's Royal Air Force College before the war.[54] The college buildings, being located at some distance from the accommodation area, were not conducive to the collegiate approach that was intended during the intensive six-month, and later slightly less stressful 12-month, courses. Over 50 years later, retired Air Marshal David Evans—a student in 1957—still vividly remembered how poor the conditions actually were.[55] After suffering the Spartan conditions for over a decade, RAAF Staff College moved to Fairbairn, Canberra in 1960.

Japanese language training remained an essential part of RAAF capability after World War II. The RAAF School of Languages, formed in March 1944, moved from its comfortable surroundings at the Coogee Bay Hotel near Sydney to Point Cook in February 1946. The school, commanded by Squadron Leader Max Wiadrowski, was situated in the vacated Aeronautics School buildings. It continued to offer training in written and spoken Japanese before closing in October 1948.

After a period of uncertainty, the school was reopened in May 1950 under the command of one of Point Cook's most colourful characters, Flight Lieutenant Toby Garrick. The school had the strong support of Air Vice-Marshal Joe Hewitt. Garrick, originally known as Gavriloff, was born in Russia and raised in Shanghai, from where he escaped to Hong Kong in 1938 at the age of 18.[56] From there, he moved to Perth and headed east with a friend on two old bicycles, before joining the RAAF and being formally

trained in Japanese. After assisting at the Japanese surrender, he was recalled to Australia to command the RAAF School of Languages. Russian was offered from 1950, Chinese (Mandarin) from 1951 and Indonesian from 1956.

The study of Japanese was notably difficult, with the intense training of up to eight hours per day causing considerable stress. The failure rate was about 50 per cent, and students referred to a psychological condition they called 'Japan brain', which caused many students to break down and some to commit suicide.[57] Despite this, the language training at Point Cook was considered world class, and civilian employees of the Department of Foreign Affairs studied there beside members of the three Services. Many early employees of Radio Australia trained at the school, as did Australia's first ambassador to China, Dr Stephen Fitzgerald.[58]

1948: Squadron Leader Max Wiadrowski supervising Corporal Funch (left) and Sergeant Cotter from New Zealand in a Japanese language class (State Library of Victoria)

The period of intensive restructuring at Point Cook, driven by the postwar plan for the RAAF, was ably supported by station commander Group Captain Bruce Courtney. Like Burrage before him, he considered himself well off to have a house to move into when he was posted to Point Cook in 1947. In his previous posting as the senior resident officer in Tasmania, he had lived with his wife's family at Sandy Bay due to the housing shortage.[59] After settling into Point Cook, their young son, Christopher, chose to play with matches one day and burnt down the stables and one of the now heritage listed cypresses, much to his father's chagrin—the gap in the row of trees at Lukis House is still evident.[60] Another incident, around the same time, that drew Courtney's ire was when he ordered officers not to drive their cars between the southern tarmac and the domestic area due to the dust it created for the airmen marching to lunch. Some officers chose instead to taxi across the airfield in a Lincoln bomber to the mess, convinced that they had not contravened his order not to drive their cars!

RAAF College caused quite a stir in local sporting circles when it chose Rugby Union as the college's football code over the State sport of Australian Rules in 1948. The college argued that rugby was 'a more searching test of character than other codes'. It also argued that it allowed a triangular contest with Duntroon and Flinders Naval College and that it would be useful when posted to Britain, none of which appeased Australian Rules officials.[61] Other organised sports included cricket, hockey, basketball, table tennis and athletics.[62] Air cadets later had a brush with sporting fame, when two members of the Australian Test Cricket side accepted the invitation to officially open the new turf wicket on the sports oval in October 1954. Lindsay Hassett and Neil Harvey also gave the cadets some tips on the game and played a short demonstration match.[63] Hobbies were encouraged, and the building of canoes, skis and toboggans was undertaken along with other less practical activities. Air Cadet Alan Heggen later recalled that he and others spent some of their leisure time exploring 'the "graveyard" of wartime aircraft that in 1949 occupied part of the semi-wetland by the far side of Point Cook airfield'.[64]

Australia's 1948 Grand Prix was held at Point Cook on 26 January 1948. The 162-kilometre race took 26 cars over 42 laps of an almost four-kilometre circuit along taxiways, around buildings and using the runway as the main straight. It was the first grand prix not conducted on public roads and was notable

for the participation of World War II air ace Squadron Leader Tony Gaze. The race was watched by 40 000 spectators and was won by Les Pratt of Geelong in a BMW. The race was marred by intense heat taking its toll on engines and drivers, and only 10 cars finished.

On 6 February 1950, the new Minister for Air, Tommy White—one of the first four flying students at Point Cook in 1914— visited the station. Group Captain Courtney and the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal George Jones hosted White's nostalgic tour of the facilities; and while at the southern tarmac, he noticed the dent he made in a hangar when he crashed the Boxkite in 1914. Jokingly, White said, 'You are very unenterprising if you haven't taken that out in all those years'; and quick-wittedly, Courtney replied, 'It's a historic landmark'.[65] From that moment on, the significance of the dent has been realised, and it is still not repaired. White made further returns to Point Cook, including to the Australian Flying Corps Pilgrimages that became an annual event from 1953. The first Pilgrimage featured the newly formed RAAF Central Band, an 80-voice Services' commemoration choir and a flypast in the form of a Christian cross.[66] Often presided over by Richard Williams, the event brought back many World War I officers and men, with many attending until well into their nineties.

United States Air Force (USAF) General George Kenney, who had commanded the United States and Australian air forces in the South-West Pacific Area during World War II, visited Point Cook in September 1950. By that time, he was commander of the USAF Air University—the counterpart of RAAF College. Kenney formally presented the flag of the USAF to the RAAF in a ceremony at Point Cook. In accepting what was described as the RAAF's 'first foreign colours', Air Marshal Jones—putting aside any remaining animosity from the 'Morotai Mutiny' of 1945—promised 'the two services will continue to fly wing-tip to wing-tip'.[67]

The ceremony took place less than a week after the death of popular RAAF College staff member Squadron Leader Lou Spence, who was killed on 9 September 1950. He was posted to Japan to command No 77 Squadron's operations in Korea in February with a temporary promotion. His wife and two children joined him in Japan soon after. Spence had

1950: RAAF College cadets speaking with USAF General George Kenney (State Library of Victoria)

1950: members of the RAAF marching under the first foreign colour—the USAF flag presented by General George Kenney (State Library of Victoria)

initiated many of the students' adventurous training activities, including an annual long-distance canoe trip down the Murray River in the spruce and canvas craft made by the cadets.[68] His death occurred on a mission over Korea when, leading a sortie of four Mustangs on a ground attack mission against a communist-captured storage facility, he failed to pull out of a steep dive.[69]

Adventurous training for the young students of RAAF College took on a more realistic style with the introduction of an exercise that commenced in February 1951. The students, pretending to be pilots forced down in enemy territory, were left at Wilsons Promontory and had to make their way to Dandenong (a distance of 170 kilometres) evading the police and informants without being captured. They were dressed in blue overalls and were not allowed to speak English. They were provided with a survival kit comprising a miniature compass, jungle knife, ground sheet, spare socks, chocolate and beef tea, as well as five shillings to buy dinner on arrival in Dandenong.[70] The students had to live on their wits and resorted to some interesting measures to survive. A group of them stole the supper laid out on the table at the Koo-wee-rup RSL Club one night.[71]

Dubbed Operation *Sore Feet* from 1952 and Operation *Walkback* for later courses[72], the evasion exercise became an annual event, and Gippsland police and residents got into the spirit of the exercise, some residents refusing to aid the pursuers.[73] The police were embarrassed in 1952 when two policemen were found asleep in their car by two of the cadets. By the 1953 exercise—in which New Zealand and Pakistani cadets took part—the public was very much on the side of the cadets, and the senior detective in charge of the police operation told the cadets at the debriefing that, 'We've got to make them realise that you are the enemy'.[74] By the fourth exercise in 1954, the college issued press statements saying 'any assistance given to the airmen is misguided and unwelcome and is unfair to the airmen themselves'. Adding that, 'one day, one of these airmen really may be a fugitive in a hostile community and his life may be at stake.'[75] In 1955, the students—acting as escaped prisoners of war for that year—were also supplied with a booklet of repayment chits to allow victims of their food thefts to be recompensed.[76]

1950s: air cadets at their goal on Operation *Sore Feet* (State Library of Victoria)

1950s: RAAF College air cadet resting on Operation *Sore Feet* (State Library of Victoria)

By late 1950, staffing levels of the RAAF had become critically low, so a major recruiting drive commenced on 1 October 1950. This was part of a wider recruiting campaign for all three Services. There were sufficient applicants for aircrew positions, but there was a severe shortage of applicants for ground crew, especially technicians. By mid-November 1950, the recruiting rate was only 57 per week[77], but although this gradually increased, the growth to 15 000 proved to be slow. In October 1951, the civilian clerical staff at Point Cook was given one week's notice of dismissal and was replaced by uniformed clerks.[78]

Air Marshal Jones had earlier suggested reforming the women's Service as a way of increasing numbers, but the suggestion was only accepted after the election of the Menzies' Liberal Government in December 1949. The first three WRAAF officers were engaged in December 1950. They were Lois Pitman, Hope Forster and Mary Peck.[79] Peck had previously been the first WAAAF officer to serve at Point Cook and was the last WAAAF member to be discharged from that Service when it was disbanded after the war. The first WRAAF recruits were engaged in January 1951 and were trained at various stations before the WRAAF Recruit School was formed at Point Cook in 1954. The new uniform caused public comment because it included free issue of gloves, nylon stockings and a handbag, which were still considered luxury items under postwar rationing.[80] In deliberate ignorance of the broad range of skills demonstrated by members of the WAAAF during World War II, members of the WRAAF were initially only employed as cooks, stewards, clerks, drivers, orderlies and telephonists.[81]

A new National Service Training scheme commenced in July 1951 in response to the Korean War and the Malaya Emergency. It was a means of maintaining a trained Reserve to supplement regular forces if major expansion was needed urgently. The scheme required Australian males over 18 years old to register for a six-month period of training. RAAF trainees assembled at the North Melbourne drill hall before dispersal to Laverton, East Sale, Tottenham and Point Cook, which hosted No 6 National Service Training Unit.[82] After five weeks of marching and drill, training units provided trade training in a variety of musterings. Some young men at Point Cook labelled the station headquarters 'Bullshit Castle' but later appreciated the trade training it administered that gave many of them lifelong employment. National Service ceased for the RAAF in 1957.

Two major ceremonial occasions were hosted at Point Cook in the 1950s. The first was the parade to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 3 June 1953—the day following the coronation itself. The public was invited, and after accepting the salute, Air Marshal Sir Donald Hardman—the Royal Air Force officer who succeeded Jones as Chief of the Air Staff in January 1952—pledged on parade, 'We pray that our Queen may have a long, brilliant, and very

1951: first RAAF National Servicemen arriving at Spencer Street Station before assignment to training units (State Library of Victoria)

happy reign. We can lighten her task by giving her our devotion, allegiance, and service'.[83]

The second occasion was during the Queen's visit to Australia in 1954, when the Royal couple visited Point Cook on 6 March 1954. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh inspected the guard of honour at the Queen's Colour Parade from the back of a Landrover. The 8000 people in the audience were all invited guests, mostly RAAF families and friends. Unlike the coronation parade, the public was not admitted. However, the route travelled by the Royal entourage was published, and thousands unexpectedly lined the road between Laverton's Aircraft Railway Station and Point Cook.[84] ABC Radio broadcast a description of the parade around Australia.[85] RAAF members who had recently carried out significant achievements were introduced to the Queen, including Flight Lieutenant Bill Scott, who was the first person to break the sound barrier in Australia, which he did in an Australian-made Sabre jet fighter.[86] The Royal Salute was marked by a flypast of 12 Vampire jets at a height of 350 feet travelling at an impressive 400 knots.[87]

Point Cook's Marine Section had continued to carry out rescue and recovery of crashed aircraft and crew, and provided sea patrols under the flights during the Royal visit.[88] In one early memorable activity, a Marine Section crash boat and crew were sent to capture a large motorised barge containing high explosives that had broken from its mooring in Port Phillip during a storm in 1947 and was drifting towards the shore near Altona. The crash boat came alongside in rough seas, and crew members scrambled aboard. Able to start the engines, they managed to steer the barge to safety.[89]

The demands of the Korean War and the fiscal restraint of 1952–53 brought some changes to flying training in the RAAF. The most significant change was the reduction of the 18-month flying course to 12 months to allow for a higher training rate ready for—in Prime Minister Menzies' view—another major war by 1954.[90] The other significant change was the breaking up of all-through flying training into three phases in three locations: initial training at Archerfield, Queensland, basic training at Uranquinty, New South Wales and applied training at Point Cook.

Under the new scheme, No 1 Applied Flying Training School was established at Point Cook in 1952, and those selected for navigator training went to East Sale after the initial phase. Increased airspace was achieved by separating the phases of flying training geographically; however, land at Bacchus Marsh, not far from Point Cook, was acquired for a satellite aerodrome. Air traffic controllers were also trained by the flying training school at Point Cook until Central Flying School at East Sale took over that responsibility in 1957.

The RAAF's faithful initial trainer, the Tiger Moth, was gradually replaced by the Australian-made Winjeel trainer, and the first three of 62 Winjeels were handed over by the General Manager of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, Sir Lawrence Wackett, at Point Cook on 16 September 1955.[91] The last Tiger Moth left Point Cook in early 1957 to join others at Tocumwal, New South Wales for disposal to the public.[92]

The Wirraway was finally retired in 1959, and following a farewell flypast at Point Cook in December 1958, the last flight bound for disposal at Tocumwal occurred on 27 April 1959. The Wirraway had a chequered career as a training aircraft, with many students losing their life in them in accidents, often without explanation. Perhaps the most baffling was the loss of Wirraway A20-753 on a routine night training flight by 19-year-old Cadet Terence Peter Hallinan on 21 July 1953. He failed to return from a night navigation exercise on a track from Point Cook to Ballarat and return. Aerial searches in the suspected crash area only resulted in false alarms, and the search was called off. A rudder found in Port Phillip proved to be from an Airspeed Oxford trainer, which created more questions than it answered. The wreckage—with Hallinan's body still strapped into the cockpit—was found over a year later by a Forestry Commission working party, on 16 August 1954, in thick scrub while building a road in the Mount Disappointment area.[93]

Air Commodore William Henry 'Bull' Garing was appointed Air Officer Commanding Point Cook in December 1955, staying as the station's senior

1953: Cadet Terrence Peter Hallinan with a Wirraway—disappeared on a night navigation exercise on 21 July 1953 (Vicki Shaw)

officer until April 1960. Under his tenure, Point Cook settled into a routine of providing officer, language, aeromedical and flying training for the reminder of the decade. The three-phase flying training approach remained in place until 1958, when advanced training in the Vampire jet aircraft necessitated the introduction of a two-phase approach, and Point Cook's 'applied' school moved to Pearce, to be replaced by No 1 Basic Flying Training School.[94] A brief foray was made into all-through jet training in 1959, when two trainees were selected to take part in a six-month trial on the British-made Jet Provost trainer.[95]

The RAAF Fire Service had its origins at Point Cook during this period. The first four members of the fireman mustering were selected after applications were called for in January 1956. They completed their training at the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade Headquarters at Eastern Hill like

1958: remains of the Lincoln bomber gradually destroyed over successive fire-fighting courses (RAAF Museum)

their prewar counterparts, who were members of various musterings placed on a temporary fireman roster. They were Sergeant Blair 'Tiny' Jackson (the mustering's first warrant officer from 1960), Corporal Ernie Yardley, and Leading Aircraftsmen Menzies and Gibbons. The first course of the RAAF Fire Service Training School—No 1 Basic Fireman Course—was run at Point Cook by Jackson and Yardley with 15 students in early 1957. Another five courses followed before the end of the decade.[96] Training was realistic, with real fires and equipment being used as much as possible, often in open pits filled with flammable liquid. One of the retired Lincoln bombers was acquired for fire training use at Point Cook in 1958.

By the end of the 1950s, Point Cook was firmly established as the RAAF's premier training establishment. The foundations that developed before World War II were built on by the experiences of that war and the subsequent Korean War. By the late 1950s, RAAF education and training had progressed into a far-sighted approach that was capable of supporting the major innovations that were to follow during the 1960s. The training and education was modern, professional and often world-class, covering core skills like command, flying and basic officer training, as well as highly specialised skills like language, firefighting, air traffic control and aviation medicine. Point Cook had helped to usher in the jet age in Australia and had become the showpiece station fitting of its title of the 'Cradle of the RAAF'. The next two decades allowed for a refinement of the training offered at Point Cook that kept pace with the challenges offered by the conflicts in South-East Asia and especially the Vietnam War.

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1950s: practical aeromedical evacuation training following the experiences gained in Korea (RAAF Museum)

Chapter 9 - Academy Years

After the turbulent succession of changes to flying training in the years after World War II, Point Cook finally settled into a period of stability that lasted for over a quarter of a century from the early 1960s. The postwar prosperity that gradually took hold in Australia during the 1960s brought a growing sense of national pride, with Australia seeing itself less as a part of the British Empire and more as a nation with influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War placed increased demands on RAAF training, and the Cold War environment kept Defence expenditure at a steady rate of around two per cent of Gross Domestic Product from the 1960s through the 1980s, despite the economic downturn of the early 1970s and the recession of the early 1980s.

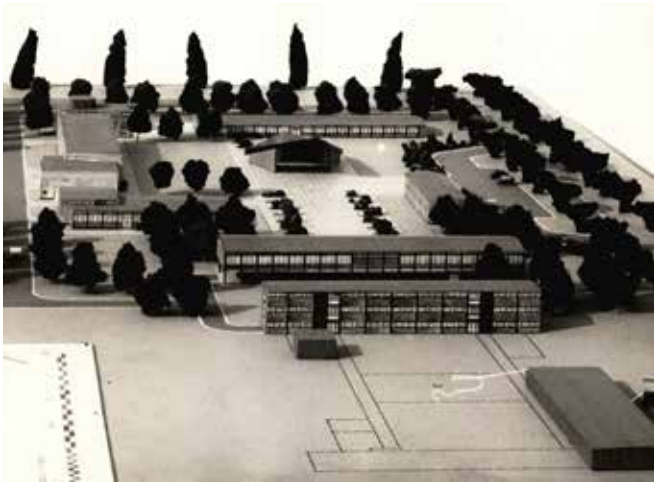
For Point Cook, this new national outlook translated into the decision to upgrade the RAAF College to an academy, with the University of Melbourne conferring undergraduate science degrees, and the building of a modern teaching facility to house it. Language training and aeromedical training and research continued to excel, while non-academy initial officer training moved to Point Cook. Along with the increased awareness of Australia's independence came recognition of the value of the nation's heritage, achieving public prominence initially through the 'green bans' in Sydney. The RAAF began to celebrate its heritage through museum displays and flying pageants, and heritage assessments were carried out on Point Cook's nationally significant built heritage.

Recommendations to align the education provided at the RAAF College with a complete, rather than the previous partial, university degree had been considered since 1956, and a report of late 1957 provided formal recommendations to restructure the RAAF College and its training syllabus.[1] As a result, the RAAF Academy was formed on 1 January 1961 and offered the Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Melbourne for the new course starting in that year with a bridging arrangement for existing cadets. Along with the Navy and Army during this period, the RAAF saw a need to provide a higher standard of education for its officers, noting that, 'the increasing rate of technological change has decreed that the RAAF train officers with the ability to comprehend not only the military problems of modern warfare but also the technical details of modern weapons which will play an increasingly important part in future RAAF planning'.[2]

The 28 cadets of No 14 Course, starting on 23 January 1961, were the first to commence their military education at the new RAAF Academy.[3] The increased contact with the University of Melbourne brought a more relaxed atmosphere to the academy,

and in addition to the cadets having increased interaction with civilian students, academic staff members had greater influence over the academy's activities. In particular, the Warden, Dr Walter Hardy, who served from 1954 to 1976, was reputed to hold considerable power over the running of the academy.[4] Some academic staff even lived at Point Cook, including mathematics Professor Basil Rennie, who lived in the upstairs apartment created when Air Commodore William 'Bull' Garing had Lukis House—the married quarter assigned to the base commander—converted into two dwellings in 1959. Garing preferred to live in the mess at a lesser expense after a marital separation and avoided being forced to live in the representational house by the conversion.

The RAAF Academy's first Commandant was Air Commodore Keith Parsons, a prewar Point Cook flying graduate and decorated World War II bomber pilot with over 100 operational missions over Europe. He was also appointed Officer Commanding Point Cook, as was the final commandant of the RAAF College, Group Captain David Colquhoun. The appointment divided his attention between heading the academy and looking after the issues presented by the station, so the Assistant Commandant took care of the daily running of the academy. The first incumbent of the position to have graduated from the Academy or College was Group Captain Bill Simmonds, a graduate of No 1 Course. Air Commodore John Whitehead—a graduate of No 3 Course—was the first ex-college graduate to be appointed Commandant in 1977.



1960s: architectural model of the RAAF Academy precinct (RAAF Museum)

1960s: cypress plantings of the 1920s paying dividends in the 1960s by providing Point Cook's famous street linings (RAAF Museum)

2013: Arts and Military Studies building (Author)

As Air Vice-Marshal Roy Frost—a graduate of No 2 Course—later pointed out, none of the Commandants was tertiary qualified at the time.[5]

A new level of practical experience was injected into the Academy in 1968 when Air Commodore John 'Ginty' Lush was appointed Commandant. He had just returned from a tour of Vietnam as Deputy Commander of the Australian Task Force and Air Component Commander.[6] In 1975, Flight Lieutenant Colin Hingston—a student on No 20 Course of the RAAF Academy—was the first graduate to become a Rhodes Scholar. On his return from Oxford, England, he was employed as an engineering officer on the new F-111 aircraft.[7] Hingston was in fact the second Rhodes Scholar for the RAAF, having followed in the footsteps of Aircraft Research and Development Unit engineer Flying Officer Robert Shaw, who was a Rhodes Scholar in 1948.[8]

The higher status of the academy was not matched by its facilities, because it remained in the old Armament School complex, comprising mostly World War II 'silver city' huts. Academic staff complained in 1961 that, 'existing facilities are quite unsuitable for a university degree course and that the University could not be expected to carry on for any period under conditions as they now exist'.[9] A new and modern facility that reflected the forward-looking, technology-based training of the new academy was needed, and funding was approved by the Parliamentary Works Committee in late 1961. The first building of what was to become the cohesive quadrangle of the new RAAF Academy precinct was the science block, opened on 15 August 1963.

Other buildings that completed the quadrangle were the aeronautical science building, the arts and military studies wing, the physics building, the chemistry building and the academy headquarters. Cadet living quarters, a laundry and the Cadets Mess were also built nearby. The precinct was completed by a centrally-located assembly hall with a roof line cleverly designed to appear to be reaching ever skyward. The architectural design of the precinct was in the modern International Style adopted by the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, which was built in the late 1950s by the famous firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The United States Air Force Academy's modern architectural styling was in marked contrast to that of the United States Army's historic Military Academy at West Point, New York; and in turn, the RAAF Academy modernist precinct was deliberately in marked contrast to that of the older style of Duntroon. When the building program was complete in 1967, the RAAF Academy quadrangle—despite differing greatly from the other buildings on Point Cook—formed an architecturally successful self-contained enclave that befitted the needs of academia and the Service alike.

2000s: United States Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs (USAF)

The RAAF Academy graduation 'wings' parades were a major annual ceremonial event. Practice was conducted over the preceding weeks, with the RAAF Central Band joining the rehearsals for hours each day during the final week. Nothing was left to chance in the RAAF showpiece event, down to the precision timing of the flypast, often using the latest fast jet aircraft.

Alongside the path to commissioning as an officer through the RAAF Academy, cadets and direct entry officers were trained at the Officers' Training School, which relocated to Point Cook from Rathmines, New South Wales in January 1961.[10] The school took up residence in the vacant Signals School buildings at the southern tarmac and offered a three-month course that was affectionately known as the 'knife and fork' course, because of its aim of inculcating new officers in the attitudes, customs and manners of the RAAF. Squadron Leader Frank Korbl was a student on No 51 Course in 1965; and as one of 25 students on the course, he later recalled that, 'as a hitherto unheard of novelty, it also included five female officers'. He also recalled that their self-introductory speeches on the first day were recorded to be played back at the completion of the course to show their improvement in public speaking. The broad-ranging syllabus covered psychology, management, military law and administration, as well as instruction in English usage, logical argument, public speaking, Service writing, current affairs, moral leadership and customs of the Service. In keeping with the course's facetious nickname, Korbl recalled being told the still-valid finer point of etiquette that 'officers don't wear brown suits'.[11]

Under the greater emphasis placed on university studies, RAAF Academy cadets studied for three years before commencing their flying training at No 1 Basic Flying Training School, rather than the previous two years.[12] Naturally, this situation was an enormous test of their resolve, as many of their number commenced the course to learn to fly and to have a degree only to fall back on if needed. The academy cadets learnt to fly alongside the potential pilot graduates of the Officers' Training School. The flying training course was facetiously dubbed the 'pre-nav course', because many who found that their skills were not best suited to flying were offered training as navigators and posted to East Sale, Victoria for training. Pilot training continued to be carried out on the Winjeel twin-seat trainer.

Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War in the early 1960s increased the demand for pilots, and airline pilot recruitment campaigns accounted for many pilot discharges. So, pilot training at Point Cook was placed under considerable pressure as the expected annual graduation rate increased from 38 before 1964 to 100 by 1968. In addition to this, Point Cook trained pilots for the Navy and Army at a rate of

1967: RAAF Academy hall under construction (RAAF Museum)

12 and 28 each year respectively. On busy days, it was not unusual to have four parallel runways operating at Point Cook as aircraft also departed for training at Laverton and Bacchus Marsh. There could be over a dozen aircraft in the circuit at one time.[13]

Accidents during flying training in the Winjeel basic trainer were a much rarer occurrence than they had been with the Tiger Moth basic trainer and Wirraway intermediate trainer. Nonetheless, there were some notable accidents. On 6 June 1964, a Winjeel clipped the tail of another while at about 40 feet above the airfield. The aircraft piloted by Army Lieutenant Pinkham landed on its wheels, but the aircraft piloted by Air Cadet Robertson somersaulted, and he was trapped in the wreckage until rescued moments later by the firefighters and transported to the hospital at Laverton base with head injuries.[14] On 20 December 1965, a Winjeel piloted by Flight Lieutenant Leslie Morris with William Clark, an Air Training Corps instructor, on board ditched near the end of the Point Cook pier after an engine failure. They were rescued by Wing Commander Warren Bishop who was fishing nearby in his speedboat.[15]

A feature of flying training at Point Cook was the infamous 'sight board run'. Almost any week of the year, a trainee pilot could be seen running on the perimeter of the airfield in a flying suit and still donning a helmet, life vest and parachute. The trainee had been sent on the run by their instructor immediately after a sortie as a technique to reinforce a lesson when the student had demonstrated poor 'airmanship'—the term used to describe the professionalism and discipline required to operate an aircraft safely and efficiently in the air and on the ground. The trainee's destination was one of the sight boards placed beyond the end of the runways to help students maintain a visual reference while landing, and the round trip was about four kilometres. Students adopted the habit of writing their name on the back of the board, often citing their infraction. Group Captain Glen Coy—Officer Commanding Air Training Wing in 2013 and a past 'Roulette' aerobatic display team leader—points out that the runs were not rampant bastardisation, but were an effective

1960: Winjeel training operating from the satellite airfield at Bacchus Marsh (RAAF Museum)

1961: result of the Winjeel trainer crash with loss of the crew—Flying Officer Scutt and Cadet Davey on 28 June (RAAF Museum)

means of reinforcing a critical training point. As a cadet on No 34 Course of 1984, his sight board run was ordered for the incorrect and dangerous procedure of closing the throttle before flaring the aircraft while landing. He said, 'I am sure my

instructor would have no recollection of that event, but that was one airmanship mistake I did not make again!'[16]

The robust Winjeel trainer was anticipated to retire in 1968, but it carried on until 1975, when it was replaced by the New Zealand Aerospace Industries CT4 Airtrainer—affectionately known as the 'Parrot' because of its highly visible bright green and yellow paint scheme, which was later changed to orange and white. Many pilots did not consider the CT4 to be as good as its predecessor.[17] One of the reasons was that it could not fly inverted for any length of time. The first CT4 was handed over to the RAAF at Bankstown, New South Wales in January 1976, and No 1 Flying Training School—as No 1 Basic Flying Training School was renamed in 1969—began training students in them at Point Cook from March 1976. [18]

No 1 Flying Training School acquired a procedural trainer for the CT4 in 1979 due to an odd event at East Sale, Victoria on the afternoon of 13 December 1978. Procedural trainers allow students to practise flying procedures—such as engine starting checks, pre-landing checks and so on—on the ground in a realistic cockpit without having to use a flying aircraft. CT4 trainer A19-057 based at East Sale was used for Santa Claus to make a grand entrance at the East Sale family Christmas function. With Flight Lieutenant Paul Derbyshire, an exchange officer from the Royal Air Force, as pilot and Warrant Officer Tom Baker dressed as Santa, the aircraft made a low pass over the crowd, and Santa waved to the 400 people below. On the second pass, the aircraft clipped a tree and struck the ground before skidding for 30 metres and catching fire. Derbyshire was unhurt, but Baker sustained a fractured right leg. The children were spirited away to the gymnasium, where presents were handed out and an announcement was made that Santa had been admitted to hospital and was doing well.

Another CT4 trainer was taken out of service in February 1984 after aircraft A19-067 ditched in Port Phillip near Point Cook during a simulated engine failure. The crew, Squadron Leader Allen—thereafter

1979: wreck of CT4 A19-057—Santa (Warrant Officer Tom Baker) was fortunate to escape with only a broken leg (RAAF Museum)

know as Alfred 'Splash' Allen—and Air Cadet Richard Gration survived, and the aircraft was towed to shore from its shallow resting place and up the concrete slipway beside the pier. With fuel leaking from the battered airframe, the rescue party scattered for fear of sparks from the friction setting the aircraft alight.[19]

The staff of No 1 Flying Training School was called on to assist the civil community in early 1985 by deploying to fight a bushfire at Mount Buffalo, Victoria. They camped in tents at Nug Nug Reserve near Myrtleford for seven days and worked in shifts to fight the fire in conditions very dangerous for non-professional firefighters working under the State's Disaster Plan, known as *Displan*. With an appalling lack of gratitude, local youths looted the camp while the airmen and airwomen were out fighting fires, stealing protective clothing and some personal items. Civil court action dealt with them appropriately.[20]
In the early 1980s, No 1 Flying Training School upgraded its facilities with the addition of a new headquarters and training complex, avionics workshops, a flight line office and a parachute drying facility. The old air traffic control tower dating back to World War II was replaced by a modern tower, and removed to Barwon Heads, Victoria. To mark the bicentenary year, a mass formation of 24 CT4 trainers formed the figure '88' on 1 May 1988.

Alongside Point Cook's primary focus of academic and flying training, a range of other units provided a valuable contribution to RAAF capability, all supported by Base Squadron that managed the running of the 'base'—a term that gradually replaced 'station' during the 1960s. The School of Aviation Medicine became the RAAF Institute of Aviation Medicine on 1 July 1960 and continued to offer hypobaric training to aircrew and medical officers while also conducting research into aviation medicine. In 1960, three officers from the institute

1970s: CT4 A19-061 in the skies over Point Cook (RAAF)

were invited to give lectures on space physiology and engineering at the 1961 Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science conference in Brisbane. Of note, Flight Lieutenant Campbell-Burns delivered a paper on 'The Impact of Space on Air Power'. Also in 1961, Squadron Leader Warren Bishop delivered a paper at the Institute of Defence Science Symposium entitled 'Project Mercury – Medical Aspects' regarding the United States 'Man in Space' Project.[21] Bishop went on to be one of the two medical monitors in the important role played by Australia as astronaut Scott Carpenter carried out his three-orbit mission in the Mercury-Atlas 7 rocket on 24 May 1962.[22]

In 1964, the institute again assisted in NASA's space program with Dr John Colvin, RAAF Reserve officer and Melbourne optician, designing sunglasses for wear by Astronauts Pete Conrad and Richard Gordon on the Gemini V mission. Medical officers Bill Walsh and John Lane acted as medical monitors on the Gemini program in 1965–66; and Dr Nader Abou-Seif recalled that Lane was fond of relating how all communications between the spacecraft and the monitoring station at Carnarvon, Western Australia were relayed to the control centre at Houston along a solitary public telephone line laid on poles across the Nullarbor. Surprisingly, interruptions did not occur.[23]

In the 1970s and 1980s, civilians with a debilitating low blood pressure condition were fitted with anti-G style pants suits that helped them to regain their mobility.[24] The introduction of the ejection seat in jet aircraft brought new training challenges, and an ejection seat training device was installed beside the World War II hospital that continued to house the institute. The Aircraft Research and Development Unit's Pan Climatic Section also operated from Point Cook[25], as did the RAAF Antarctic Flight.[26] Training for WRAAF airwomen had been consolidated at Point Cook in 1954 at the WRAAF Recruit Training Section, and training for WRAAF senior non-commissioned officers commenced in two-week courses held twice a year from 1962. The section moved to Edinburgh,

1962: Australian staff of the NASA Mercury program at Muchea, Western Australia—Wing Commander Warren Bishop seated front row right (Jack Duperouzel)

1962: Astronaut John Glenn in the Friendship 7 module of the *Mercury-Atlas 6* on 26 February (NASA)

South Australia to become a squadron of No 1 Recruit Training School in 1965.

Always responding to the needs of Defence, the RAAF School of Languages started teaching Vietnamese in 1961 in preparation for the coming Vietnam War involvement, and French was taught from 1962 for the RAAF's Mirage jet fighter acquisition program. By 1964, the school was also teaching Mandarin Chinese, Bahasa Indonesian and Malayan.[27] Thai was taught from 1965, and Italian was introduced in 1966 to support the Macchi jet trainer acquisition program. Japanese was taught again from 1969, and Khmer was later taught to personnel who

1970s: ready for a run in the ejection seat trainer

...and a split second later (RAAF)

supported the United Nations peacekeeping efforts in Cambodia in 1992. Modern language laboratories with prerecorded teaching tapes and individual learning stations were installed in 1963, making the training at Point Cook some of the most advanced in the world.[28] A system described as 'total immersion' in the language was employed, whereby conversation in English was forbidden in the classroom.[29] The school remained in the old Aeronautics School buildings located by the shore at Point Cook. A visiting staff officer was noted as saying that the school was 'an institute of world standing, housed in a collection of country outhouses, with a smell to match.'[30] Squadron Leader Barry Turner, a staff member in 1982, recalled employees from the Commonwealth Serum Laboratories collecting tiger snakes on the foreshore to be milked for the production of anti-venin.[31]

The RAAF Fire Service Training School remained active, continuing to operate from the surviving 1917 F.E.2b battleplane hangar at the southern tarmac and using the site of the adjacent two World War I hangars that were demolished in 1960 as a storage and training compound. The school also used the rubbish tip along the shore to the east of southern tarmac buildings for training in the control of large fires. As retired Warrant Officer Pat Mildren, Chief Instructor of the school in 1977, later said, 'we used to burn anything that we could get our hands on.'[32] This included over 100 different types of flammable chemicals and all manner of old vehicles and equipment—all for the purpose of providing realistic training. The school closed in 1986, and training moved to Amberley, Queensland. The contamination that resulted from the training was not considered to be a problem at the time, but as environmental awareness has increased over the ensuing decades, the scale of the damage has become apparent and was being remediated from 2013.

A new awareness of the RAAF's heritage emerged during the 1960s. The likes of retired Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams ensured that regular articles were written about the early days of the Australian Flying Corps and the RAAF. These focused on the deeds of aircrew for the most part and, in Williams' case, were often set to portray the protagonists in a positive light. Despite a long-held notion of Point Cook as the birthplace of military aviation in Australia, little research had been carried out into its built heritage, and no heritage assessments had been conducted. The return visit of Henry Petre—one of the first two instructors at Point Cook in 1914—to Australia on 26 January 1961 provided an excellent opportunity to gather information about the earliest days of Point Cook. He toured the base and was

photographed in the cockpit of the pre-World War I taxi-type Deperdussin, which had survived and was kept at Point Cook prior to moving to the Australian War Memorial in 1970.[33] Petre died only months after returning to London at the age of 77. The first attempt at recognising Point Cook's built heritage was over 1964–65, when the Department of Works, under the authority of the Commandant and Officer Commanding, Air Commodore Keith Parsons, placed markers on buildings of known heritage significance. Inappropriate modification of the buildings was prohibited by local RAAF order.

The Freedom of the Shire of Werribee was granted to the RAAF establishments of Point Cook and Laverton on 1 February 1963 and exercised for the first time on 4 March of that year.[34] The military tradition of freedom of the city is symbolic of the strong bonds between a city and a military force. In ancient times, it was granted to the military force that protected the city to allow that favoured force to enter and receive shelter and hospitality, which was denied to enemy forces. In modern times, exercising the freedom of the city is as much a way of showing a force's pride in its service as it is a community relations exercise. The freedom has been exercised at infrequent intervals ever since 1963.

1971: training fire fighters to use the proximity suits (RAAF Museum)

The RAAF Golden Jubilee in 1971 celebrated 50 years of service to the nation. With a world war and a number of other major conflicts behind it, the RAAF felt that it had come of age. The official publication *The Golden Years* sought to recognise the achievements of the Service, and as the RAAF began to place an increased importance on its past, it decided to give itself a new image to take it into the future. The most obvious way to do so was with a new uniform. The uniform borrowed much from the United States Air Force and was a departure from the uniform that had served the RAAF through the previous 35 years and had gained it worldwide recognition for its distinctive dark-blue colour, known as the 'passionate purple'.

The new uniform was a blue-grey colour, and the cut of the jacket was a drape style that dispensed with the traditional belt and belt buckle. It made the previous practical map pockets into mere imitation flaps that did not cover a pocket at all. The one significant advantage of the jacket style was that it allowed overweight personnel to hide a multitude of sins. Air Vice-Marshal Val Hancock, the RAAF College's first Commandant and later Air Member for Personnel, had railed against 'pot-bellied airmen' in 1954[35], but the problem was significantly worse by the early 1970s. While the uniform may have been favoured some—and the tangible approach to a fresh Service outlook was perhaps refreshing—it was not well received by all. Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Sir Colin Hannah had a new style blue-grey uniform made for Sir Richard Williams and arranged for him to be photographed in it. When presented with his new portrait during a brief stay in hospital, Williams is said to have torn up the photograph.[36]

The RAAF Museum had been established in 1952, and its first part-time curator, Education Assistant Warrant Officer Gould, had been appointed in 1966, but it did not open its doors to the general public until 1971. The finalisation of the move of the RAAF Academy from the old Armament School building to its modern quadrangle of buildings had paved the way for the museum to expand from its modest beginnings in a single 'silver city' hut to a far more suitable venue. Some of the huts of the old Armament School were moved and joined together to make a complete square of buildings that provided a continuous path for the public galleries. A staff area and library were created in a central hut. Credit must also be given to the Commandant of the RAAF Academy from 1972 to 1977, Air Commodore Tony Tonkin, who took a great interest in the museum and donated much of his considerable personal collection of artefacts to the museum.

Tonkin was instrumental in bringing heritage flying to Point Cook with the invitation for Bob Eastgate to fly his privately owned ex-RAAF Mustang A68-104, registered VH-BOB, at RAAF Museum events.[37] Tonkin had flown the very same aircraft in RAAF service. Other significant aircraft at Point Cook in the 1960s and 1970s were a World War II-era Messerschmitt Me 163 Komet rocket-powered fighter and a Messerschmitt Me 262 jet fighter, both later returned to the Australian War Memorial. The RAAF Museum hosted many flying days during the 1970s and 1980s that were immensely popular with the aviation-minded public. Historic aircraft like the Messerschmitts were towed from the storage hangars and placed on display beside such aircraft as the Canberra bomber, Dragon navigation trainer and Meteor jet fighter, while Cessna and Piper dealers gave flying demonstrations, and Mirage fighter jets gave flypasts. An Ansett DC-3 Dakota was even known to give joy flights.

The RAAF Museum embarked on its first major aircraft restoration in 1979. Hawker Demon A1-8 had crashed in February 1937 and was recovered from near the town of Wynyard, Tasmania in 1977. A team led by the Commanding Officer of No 1

1971: new blue-grey 'Golden Jubilee' uniform—the drape style proved effective for some wearers (RAAF Museum)

Aircraft Depot, Wing Commander Ron Gretton—utilising technical staff from various units and his father, retired Warrant Officer Ern Gretton—spent eight years in the painstaking restoration of what is the only fully restored Hawker Demon in world. The aircraft was formally accepted on behalf of the RAAF Museum by Air Vice-Marshal Peter Scully on 3 February 1987 from Ron Gretton, 50 years to the day after its crash.[38]

In December 1987, Wing Commander Jim De Bomford led a team of 13 personnel on an 18 day rescue mission to recover the remains of a Spitfire fighter that suffered a forced landing on the mudflats at St George's Sound near Derby, Western Australia. The battered remains of the aircraft went into storage

at the RAAF Museum.[39] Also stored at the museum for a short period in the early 1990s was a German V-2 rocket. It was one of two sent to Australia from Britain after World War II and was used for evaluation purposes by Army engineers as well as in a War Bond Savings rally that travelled between Melbourne and Sydney. It became a gate guardian at Holsworthy Army Barracks after the rally.[40] It deteriorated at Holsworthy and was placed in storage at a RAAF stores depot at Dubbo, New South Wales and later transferred to Point Cook before ultimately making its way to the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.[41]

A dogfight display given by Flight Lieutenants Dave Freedman and Jeff Kubank was a very popular spectacle at the RAAF Museum flying displays during the 1970s and 1980s. They engaged in mock aerial combat in two Tiger Moth aircraft, one painted with World War I German markings, and they styled themselves as Sir Percy Goodfellow and Baron von Dreadful in their 'flying circus' type performances. Freedman wore a German flying helmet, and Kubank wore a flowing white scarf. After the dogfight, they landed and fought with a pistol and a dagger, Goodfellow always triumphing over von Dreadful, much to the delight of the crowd.[42] Freedman lived in the downstairs apartment of Lukis House, and he sought permission from the Officer Commanding—who also stretched the rules by allowing him to live in the apartment his with de facto partner—to remove the front wall from the study and extend the floor sufficiently to make a workshop to rebuild his Belgian 1933 Stampe SV.4 aircraft. The fuselage projected out of the front of the house and was protected by a canvas tarpaulin.[43]

In 1985, the RAAF Museum was the recipient of an aircraft exchange that was negotiated by Air Force Headquarters in 1982. In the exchange, the museum gained a restored and flying World War II era Lockheed Ventura light bomber and patrol aircraft in return for a Canberra bomber.[44] On 31 March 1988, the RAAF Museum became a unit in its own right with its own commanding officer, the first being Squadron Leader Peter Allen. With a permanent staff

1970s: Tiger Moth used by Flight Lieutenant Dave Freedman in character as 'Baron von Dreadful' (Wal Nelowkin)

of six, the RAAF Museum relied on a growing corps of volunteers to maintain and restore its historic aircraft and to conduct research. This ultimately led to the formation of the Friends of the RAAF Museum.

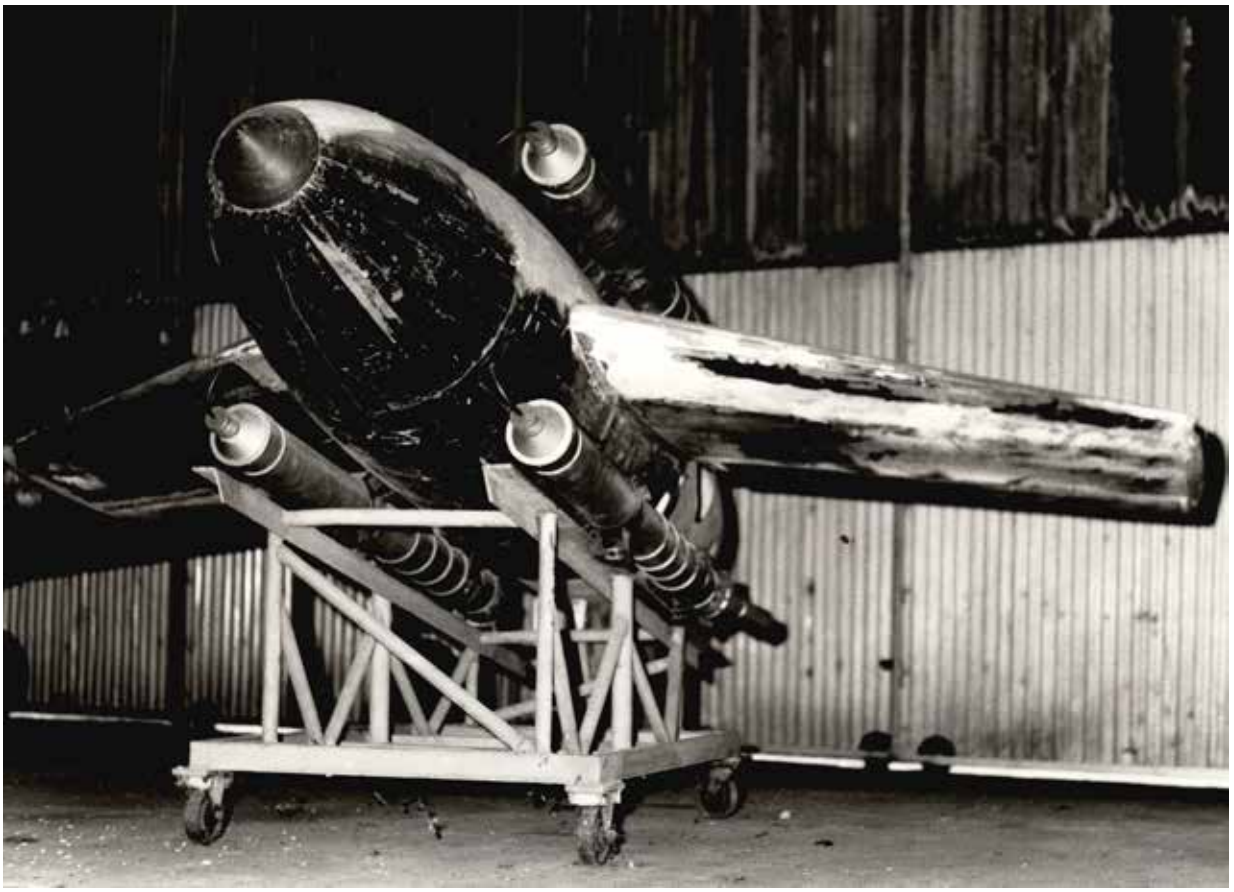
The era of openness reflected by allowing more frequent public access onto Point Cook in the 1970s coincided with the flowering of the 'New Wave' in the Australian film industry brought about by the support and policies of Prime Ministers Gorton and Whitlam. This coincided with the move from black and white to colour television, and Point Cook started its long association with the film and television industries. Many local television dramas were filmed at Point Cook, in part for its proximity to the bay, but more importantly for its seclusion. One example that was more interesting than most was the filming of an episode of 'Homicide' on the partially submerged wreck of the passenger ferry *Queenscliffe*. The ferry, built in 1905, was caught in rough seas on 30 December 1973 and headed for the Point Cook pier. It bumped against a beam jutting out from the pier and a hole was gouged in its hull. It foundered off the end of the pier, where it sat for years during a dispute over responsibility for its removal. In an interesting turn of events, sports divers discovered that the *Queenscliffe* was resting on the wreck of another vessel.[45] That vessel turned out to be the *Isabel B*, the World War I Central Flying School motor launch that sank in May 1919.[46]

Film and television productions of the period often celebrated Australia's unique culture or achievements. The television mini-series 'A Thousand Skies', released in 1985, charted the exploits of Charles Kingsford Smith and used Point Cook as one of its filming locations. A full-size replica of his *Southern Cross* was kept in a RAAF Museum hangar during the filming. It was not a flying version but was very accurate in its detail, down to the oil stains from the engines. One of the Bellman hangars was painted to look like Mills Field San Francisco Airport, where Smithy was based in United States.[47] A hangar was also painted to look like the fictional outback town of Coopers Crossing and was used in the filming of 'The Flying Doctors' television series for eight years from 1985. The unserviceable Nomad aircraft used for the series was kept near the hangar.

The Victorian branch of the National Trust began in 1956, and the Australian Council of National Trusts was incorporated in 1965, but they did not initially place great importance on industrial heritage in Australia. The tide turned in the 1970s, when the State President of the National Trust was a retired Army officer, and one serving RAAF officer in particular took an interest in the built heritage of Point Cook. Wing Commander David Francis, also an active member of the National Trust, drafted a recommendation for heritage recognition of three buildings at Point Cook's southern tarmac in 1975. They were the original 1914 hangar, the heavily extended 1914 workshop and the 1917 F.E.2b battleplane hangar. He did so in conjunction with the champion of Point Cook's heritage, Air Commodore Tony Tonkin.

The first 1914 hangar had survived the upheaval of the rapid World War II development and the years of gradual relocations and demolitions that followed. The hangar was moved in 1940, but because it had a use—as an equipment store at that time—it survived. The unique significance of this hangar is that it is the nation's first architectural response to a new problem: the need to safely house a fragile piece of new technology, the aeroplane. The workshop, incorporating the first seaplane hangar and extensions, remained on its original site and was being used as the gymnasium and carpenters' workshop in 1975. The battleplane hangar was also on its original site and was being used by the Fire Training School. Other buildings of outstanding heritage significance survived because new uses were found for them. These included the seaplane hangar that once housed the Southhampton flying boats, which was used as the Transport Section hangar, and the 1914 office and casualty room, which were used as the barracks store, having been moved from the southern tarmac to the domestic area.[48]

Francis was posted to the United States in late 1975 and was only able to complete his report once established in California in 1977. His report went on



1970s: German World War II Enzian missile at RAAF Museum (RAAF Museum)

1970s: captured German World War II Messerschmitt Me 262 Schwalbe jet fighter at Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

to form the basis of the National Trust's classification of the three identified significant southern tarmac buildings. As part of the broader heritage recognition of the Point Cook estate and neighbouring wetlands, the base was added to the Register of the National Estate in 1980. In 1983, the Point Cook Historical Committee was formed by the RAAF and included representation from the Department of Works and the National Trust. The committee commissioned a professional heritage assessment by consultants Span and Neale in 1984. The comprehensive report identified the previous uses of surviving buildings and captured a vast amount of information that might have been lost. The report surveyed the built heritage of Point Cook and placed it within a wider context of national heritage. The work of the consultants and the heritage committee led to the National Trust classifying the entire base and airfield in November 1984, and the entry on the Register of the National Estate was amended to recognise the built heritage of the base.[49]

Despite serving only 30 kilometres from the Melbourne central business district, those posted to Point Cook were paid Isolated Establishment Allowance, which recognised that no public transport services were available to the base. The relative isolation and the long period of stability from the 1960s through to the 1980s allowed the village atmosphere that had existed before World War II to be re-established, but with far greater amenity. The post office remained active to support the students, staff and families, and it was joined by a sub-branch of the National Bank, a Caltex service station, a hairdresser, a drycleaners shop and a canteen that supplied daily needs from bread, milk and newspapers to toiletries along with a minor line of grocery and snack items.

Support groups were established, such as a kindergarten and the RAAF Wives' Club, which ran the Thrift Shop—a store that sold household goods on consignment with a sales commission going to the RAAF Women's Association. The wife of the Officer Commanding was usually expected to be the president of the club. A Scout group was formed and provided recreational activities for the children of families posted to the base as well as the local Werribee South farming families, who had remained in close association with Point Cook since it earliest days. The cinema continued to operate, and welfare clubs, formed under RAAF governance guidelines, supported the recreational interests of those on base. These included the golf club, pistol club, gun club, snow ski club and flying club.[50] Most clubs used old 'silver city' huts as their meeting rooms, and the RAAF Point Cook Flying Club—formed in 1971 to coincide with the commencement of the RAAF Museum's public displays and fly-ins—was assigned a Bellman hangar at the southern tarmac. The club was formed to give enlisted airmen and non-aircrew officers the chance to learn to fly. Its first chief flying instructor was Squadron Leader Kevin Duffy, the senior engineering officer at No 1 Flying Training School.

Along with the new RAAF Academy buildings constructed through the 1960s, other new facilities were erected. The Sergeants Mess had received its new dining room and badly needed kitchen in 1957[51], and the Officers Mess likewise received a new dining room and kitchen in 1972. This was followed by a new two-storey single officers accommodation block linked to the north end of the Officers Mess. A new two-storey accommodation block, complete with a private walled garden, was built for

1970s: National Bank branch—part of the community facilities at the Point Cook village (RAAF Museum)

1979: fun and games at the 'Anything Goes' sports afternoon (RAAF Museum)

airwomen in 1971 and was known as the 'WRAAFery' by all. Without a mature understanding of heritage matters, the historic Cole Street landscape was intruded on by a series of condominiums built to accommodate single airmen in the early 1980s, and similar condominiums were built behind the Officers Mess.

A new mess and recreation facility for airmen was built in 1981. Along with a modern kitchen and dining room, the facility had a television room, pool-table room, bar and recreation areas. The facility was named the 'Henry Chester Club' in honour of the Australian Flying Corps' first airman—although, a different pioneer may have been honoured if Chester's circumstances were better known at the time.[52] The disused first Airmen's Mess, with elements dating back to 1914, burnt down one night in September 1984. One person who was especially disappointed was a Special Air Service soldier who had restored and kept his Harley-Davidson motorcycle in the mess. His machine was destroyed in the fire. The duty member that night was RAAF Museum Senior Curator Warrant Officer David Gardner.[53]

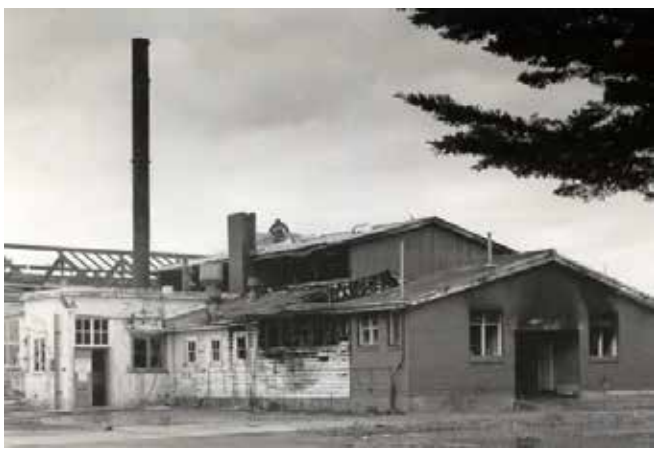
The row of non-commissioned officer houses along Dalzell Road dating from not long after World War I was in a poor state of repair, and these were demolished in the early 1980s, as were the converted 'silver city' married quarters in the north-west corner of the base. Some prefabricated eight-square houses had been erected in the 1960s under a so-called 'crash' program of married quarter construction to provide a recruiting incentive.[54] They were all gradually replaced by new brick-veneer houses throughout the 1980s. To cap off the public face of the base, a retired Vampire jet was mounted on a post in a dynamic flying attitude to act as a gate guardian. The base had finally become the garden city envisaged by Wing Commander Hal Harding at the end of World War II, and it was recognised for its outstanding example in the 'Tidy Towns' awards scheme conducted by the Keep Australia Beautiful Council with awards in 1983 and 1984.

Despite the shining façade, the base had its share of problems like any other community, some amusing in hindsight and some tragic. Alan Cook, an instructor at the School of Languages, was

1983: RAAF Point Cook Gun Club (RAAF Museum)

known to be 'popular with the ladies', and they allowed him to sneak into the WAAAF-ery on occasion. They also provided him with an escape route over the garden wall, even using a rake to cover his tracks in the garden bed.[55] The young man who was later responsible for Melbourne's Hoddle Street massacre of 9 August 1987, Julian Knight, lived with his adoptive parents at North Laverton in 1972 while his father studied at the RAAF School of Languages prior to the family's posting to Hong Kong. As a four-year-old at the time, Knight attended the RAAF Point Cook Kindergarten. After the family's return from overseas, they lived at Laverton from 1976. The ten-year-old Knight was a member of the 1st Point Cook Scout Group and became the pack leader of the Cub section in 1979.[56]

Tragedy occurred in 1977 with the death of young air traffic controller Pilot Officer Steve Andrews. Towards the end of each year, the pressure on air traffic controllers increased, as flying sorties were crammed into the schedule to make up for sorties missed due to bad weather or the need to conduct assessments prior to the end of the course. The pressure of work became too much for Andrews who—while also suffering from the effects of a relationship breakup and living in the mess, where he had few distractions from his problems—attempted to gas himself in his car in the garage block on Dalzell Road. Comrades had noticed him taking tubes and tape into his room but had not thought to ask why. He was discovered with a faint pulse by the Commanding Officer of Base Squadron, Wing



1984: remains of the much altered World War I Airmen's Mess after destruction by fire (RAAF Museum)

1983: Pilatus Porter A14-702 crash that claimed the life of Captain David Groves (RAAF)

Commander Neil Pollock, when he went to his own garage the following morning. Andrews was rushed to No 6 RAAF Hospital at Laverton, where he died. In an incredibly organised fashion, he had written letters to his family and work supervisor, as well as filling out the casualty report to save others from the inconvenience.[57]

There was another tragedy on 7 December 1983 when Army Pilatus Porter A14-702 crashed at Point Cook. The aircraft was piloted by Captain David Groves—who had twice resigned from the Army to stand for election with the Australian Democrats—and was on a flight from Laverton to Fairbairn, Canberra. He sought clearance to overfly Point Cook on the way to Fairbairn, where his family was awaiting his arrival. It was his last day in the Army, and overflying his alma mater seemed a fitting way to mark the occasion. However, it seems that emotion overcame airmanship, and he decided to 'beat up' the airfield, flying low and slow down the north-south runway. As the aircraft turned past the control tower, it stalled and crashed beside the taxiway in front of the tower.[58] Grove survived the initial impact but succumbed to his injuries despite an immediate response from rescuers.[59]

The suggestion of a single officer training academy to meet the needs of the three Services was first mooted in 1967 with the establishment of an inquiry by the Minister for Defence, Allen Fairhall. This was followed by a Federal Cabinet decision to establish the Australian Defence Force Academy in March 1974.[60] It took a further decade of planning and construction before the Australian Defence Force Academy was ready to accept its first students in 1986. Naturally, this led to the closure of the RAAF Academy. The last RAAF Academy graduation parade—that of No 35 Course—was held on 11 December 1985, and was reviewed by the Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen, in front of a record audience of 1500 dignitaries and family members. The

Queens' Colour for the RAAF Academy was laid up in the Officers Mess after the parade, and a handling display of the latest F/A-18 Hornet jet fighter was given by Flight Lieutenant Mark Binskin.[61] Some 660 students had graduated from the RAAF College and RAAF Academy in their near four-decade existence.

The defunct title of RAAF College was reinstated in January 1986, and it integrated the Officers' Training School, the RAAF School of Applied Management and Engineer Cadet Squadron, which had closed at 'Frognall' in Melbourne, because new engineering students were also to be educated in Canberra. The Officers' Training School took over the RAAF Academy's science block and chemistry building, while the School of Applied Management took over the physics building, and the RAAF Academy headquarters building became the RAAF College headquarters. The arts and military studies building became the RAAF College library, and the assembly hall was consecrated as the Chapel of the Holy Trinity, perhaps reflecting the spirit of tri-Service cooperation, in 1987. Most of the RAAF's laid up colours are now displayed in the chapel.

The position of Commandant of the RAAF Academy reverted simply to Officer Commanding Point Cook in 1986, with Air Commodores Bob Walsh then Ron Tayles being the first two to hold the position in that form. In recognition of the wider training responsibility of the position, it was renamed as Director Training in 1989 and then renamed once more as Air Officer Commanding Training Command when the RAAF Training Command was re-established in 1990 under Air Commodore Ken Blakers. He moved his headquarters from the previous RAAF Academy headquarters building to the pre-World War II wooden two-storey headquarters, overlooking the parade ground and Australian Flying Corps Memorial. He later moved to the RAAF Academy aeronautical science building near the front gate, sharing it with the base's medical facility.

1987: RAAF Academy assembly hall repurposed as the RAAF Chapel of the Holy Trinity (RAAF)

The closure of the RAAF Academy ended an era of tertiary-linked initial officer education at Point Cook that produced many of the Service's most senior officers. Its precursor, the RAAF College graduated two who became Chief of the Air Staff—Air Marshals Ray Funnell and Barry Gration (both of No 6 Course)—in its 13-year existence. However, in its 25 years, the RAAF Academy has only produced one chief—Air Marshal Geoff Shepherd (of No 24 Course)—to date. Only time will tell whether any more graduates of the intended breeding ground for the RAAF's most senior commanders will produce another Chief of Air Force. The professionalism of the RAAF officer corps, and the development of the RAAF and the wider Australian Defence Force, owe a considerable amount to the education and training provided at Point Cook. The co-location of the three Service academies was a precursor to the period of economic rationalism following the halcyon days of 1980s that ultimately placed Point Cook under threat of survival.

1987: colours laid up the RAAF Chapel (Author)

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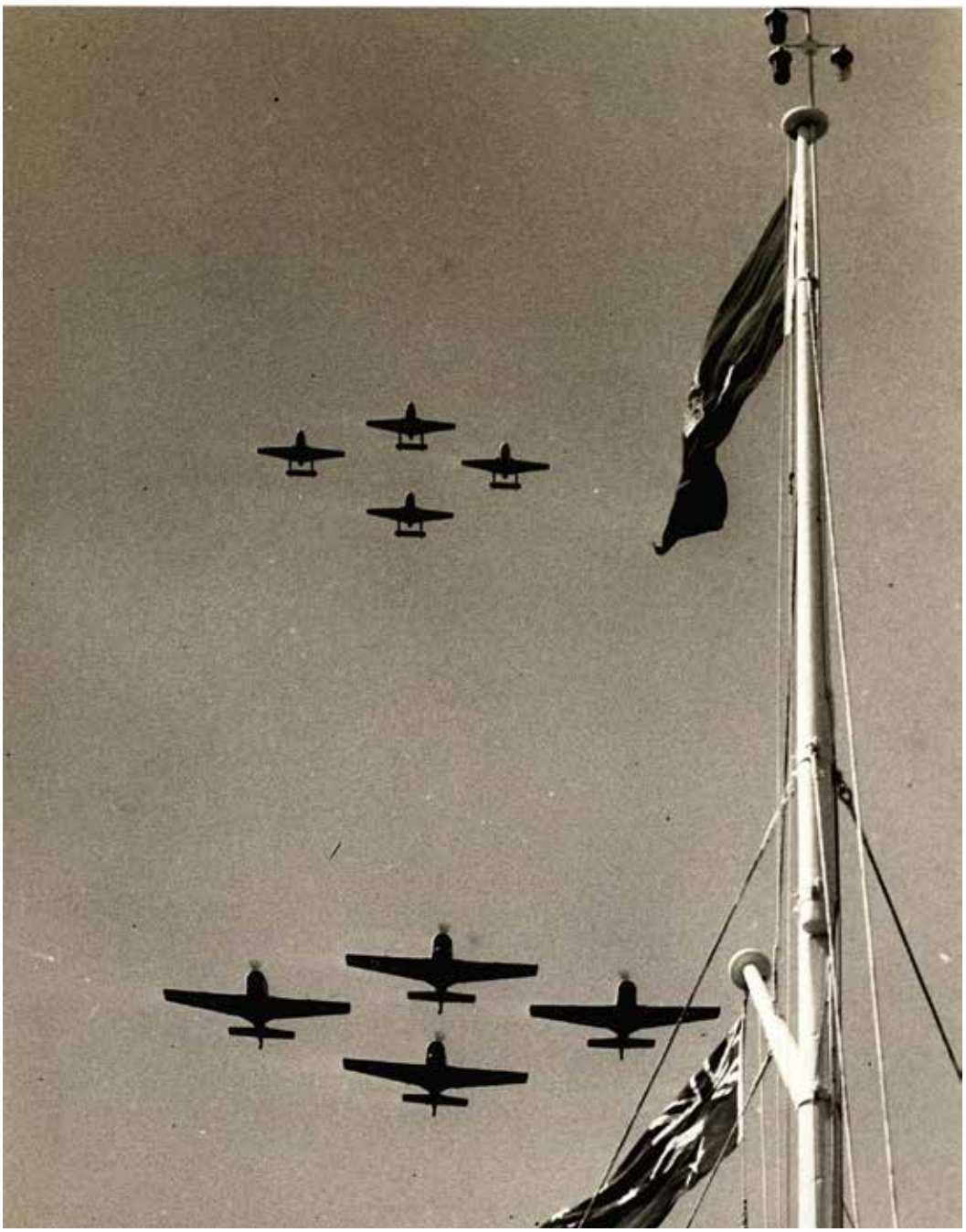


1962: ceremonial flypast to mark a No 1 Basic Flying Training School graduation (RAAF Museum)

Chapter 10 - Threat of Disposal

Economic rationalism—the drive for savings in efficiency and effectiveness—gained momentum through the late 1980s and favoured deregulation, a free-market economy and privatisation of state assets. The recession of 1990—Treasurer Paul Keating's 'recession that Australia had to have'—hit the Australian economy hard. The economic environment of the time had a serious effect on the management of the Australian Defence Force. A series of reviews sought to increase the efficiency of Defence operations without decreasing capability. Point Cook was amalgamated with Laverton under a single command and management structure, and the notional administrative entity of RAAF Williams was formed. It was not long before Point Cook was identified as suitable for disposal as surplus to Defence needs.

However, the heritage value of Point Cook to the nation was too significant for some members of the community to allow it to pass into the hands of developers, and a concerted effort to save Point Cook was mounted. The situation caused a long period of indecision that led to a decline in base maintenance, and the gradual departure of RAAF units. By the early 21st century, the shift in focus from training operations to heritage significance was clear, and the political will to sell Point Cook eventually faded. This

Point Cook unit badge (RAAF Museum)

was driven by a successful combination of aviation activists, the local community and politicians.

RAAF Point Cook, once the RAAF's only base, lost its status as a stand-alone base on 31 March 1989, when it was amalgamated with RAAF Laverton to form RAAF Williams (named in honour of Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams). The bases became known as RAAF Williams–Point Cook Base and RAAF Williams–Laverton Base respectively.[1] The amalgamation was a result of the Force Structure Review undertaken in the wake of the Government's White Paper *The Defence of Australia 1987*, which recommended the sale of the airfield at Point Cook and the retention of the domestic and working areas. It announced the planned closure of No 1 Flying Training School but foreshadowed the move of other units to the base.[2] The amalgamation met its desired outcome of reducing the staff by one group captain and much of the subordinate staff. The two Base Squadrons were combined to form Support Unit Williams. In a higher level restructure, the RAAF Director Training was redesignated Air Officer Commanding Training Command when it was reformed in 1990.

Communication between Laverton and Point Cook was critical, and this was addressed by the establishment of a microwave link for telephone and the incipient computer networks. Care was taken to ensure that the bases were held on an equal footing, with the weekly Officer Commanding's conference being held at each base on alternating weeks. While RAAF members might have been accustomed to the semantics of the renaming of the bases, the situation caused considerable public confusion, with visitors frequently reporting to the wrong base for meetings.

The move from the southern tarmac into the RAAF Academy buildings provided something of a breath of fresh air for Officers' Training School, literally in fact, because the summer aroma of rotting seaweed provided a foul smell remarked on by all who worked there. It is debatable whether the seaweed was the cause, because once improvements were made to the Board of Works sewerage farm settling tanks at Werribee South in the late 1990s, the seaweed did not seem to smell as much.

RAAF Williams unit badge—combining elements of the Laverton and Point Cook badges (RAAF Museum)

The Officers' Training School provided two main courses. Junior Officer Initial Course gave three months of induction training to almost all non-academy officer entrants to the RAAF and non-commissioned airmen who had been selected for commissioning. Junior Officer Executive Course gave a further two weeks of management training to those moving straight into the RAAF workforce. A shortened course was provided for RAAF medical and legal officers, although dentists and nurses were required to do the full course. Officer cadets did not complete the executive course and went straight on to training as pilots, navigators or air traffic controllers. Warrant Officers Disciplinary were also trained in a separate course as the need arose from the early 1990s.

1990s: dining room of the Officers Mess prepared for a dining-in (RAAF Museum)

The arrival of Wing Commander Ray Borysewicz as Director of Officers' Training School in 1988 after a posting to the United States provided a new perspective on initial officer training, as he oversaw the first of the 'hard' courses, which moved from the leisurely 'knife and fork' course to one based far more on experiential learning, teamwork and values. Borysewicz led pre-breakfast 'battle PT' where students carried out close-hand fighting moves with their self-loading rifles in a large circle in the centre of the quadrangle, with Borysewicz at its centre. The 'hard' course commenced with a shock deployment to the Brisbane Ranges, west of Melbourne, on the third day. The group of 20 or so students was taken by bus and then truck in the early evening to an unspecified location in the bush and told to make their way to a grid reference on a map provided, set up camp and go to bed. No training had been provided in bush navigation or fieldcraft skills, and students were expected to cope by teaching each other from their own experience. Most courses had a high proportion of non-commissioned airmen with years of experience in the RAAF, and they provided much of the training within their courses in what was in many ways a 'boot camp' for officers.

That first bush phase of the course was designed to take students, new and ex-serving alike, out their 'comfort zone', in the new jargon of the time. It included abseiling, rock climbing, raft building and even a pre-dawn abseil into the seeming abyss. Lower standards of safety applied than in later years, and cases of hypothermia were common in winter. In the spirit of outsourcing, the climbing and abseiling component was provided by an external provider, the first of which was an ex-Special Air Service warrant officer with considerable skill and experience with a hard attitude to match. He was very comfortable on the rock, but complacency took his life when he fell while assisting a student without using his own safety equipment in late 1989 at Mount Arapiles in the Grampians. Students on that course were provided with counselling.

Inter-Service sport expanded from an activity mainly for cadets of the separate academies to an

opportunity for all members of the Services to compete and socialise. The base, still boasting its fine playing fields from the RAAF Academy days, hosted many such events. The post office continued to operate but the National Bank branch gave way to the Defence Force Credit Union as it began to establish itself on military bases.

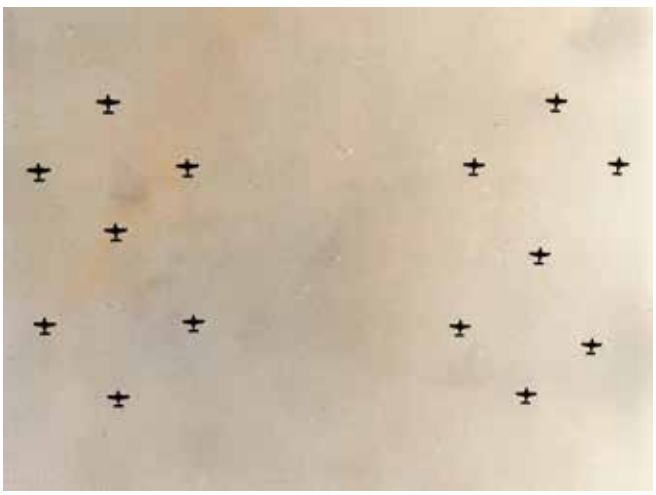
With the mid-1980s program of married quarter building complete, over 80 Defence families lived on the base. Point Cook remained the vibrant village it became during the 1970s and 1980s. Families supported each other, and there was a strong social connection where it was not uncommon for senior non-commissioned officers to be invited to parties at senior officers' married quarters. A toddler belonging to a civilian employee working at the base went missing late one afternoon and the family's search was aided by many living on the base. The search had a sense of urgency because it was not long after a similar disappearance on Laverton ended in the death of the child when caught in a drain. The girl was found alive and well under the floorboards of 8 Cole Street, which was vacant and under renovation.

In something of a low point for Point Cook, a group of four children from families living on the base broke into one of the No 1 Flying Training School hangars late one Saturday evening in March 1990. They vandalised 16 CT4 aircraft using spray paint. The exteriors of the aircraft were painted, and two instrument panels were destroyed. They were surprised by the then Curator of the RAAF Museum, David Gardner, who had entered the hangar after hours to attend to another matter. After apprehending one culprit, he headed to the Cadets Mess to gather workers to remove the not fully dry paint with suitable solvents. The cadets worked all night, and Gardner's actions redeemed the majority of the aircraft and saved the RAAF much of the repair costs. He was awarded a commendation for his actions.[3]

The Government commenced the Commercial Support Program in 1991. It aimed to commercially contract Defence support services 'when it is operationally feasible, a viable market exists and industry can demonstrate better value for money'.[4] The mechanism used was to make a cost comparison for a support service between potential contractors and Defence's 'in-house option'. However, as Defence lost competitive tenders, skills eroded and personnel were discharged. This reduced the Service's ability to tender for future support service contracts. For Point Cook, the most tangible result of the Commercial Support Program was the decision in 1992 to outsource flight screening and initial flying training, which moved to Tamworth, New South Wales.

In the preceding few years, No 1 Flying Training School had carried out some interesting and significant tasks. In May 1988, a formation of 14 CT4 trainers formed the figure '88' as a part the national bicentenary celebrations. Formation flying skills were used again in 1989 to form the figure '75' to celebrate the 75th anniversary of military aviation in Australia. In November 1989, a CT4 was used to re-enact the first south to north transcontinental crossing of Australia to coincide with the 70th anniversary of Wrigley and Murphy's 1919 milestone. A small flight of CT4s crossed Bass Straight to take part in a commemorative event in Hobart, Tasmania. The school had been the primary provider of flying training to the Papua New Guinea Defence Force, which also posted some of its flying instructors to the school.

The intensity of military flying training for young students could be quite stressful. They were



1988: CT4 trainers in '88' formation to mark Australia's bicentenary (RAAF Museum)

1990s: CT4 Airtrainer over Point Cook (RAAF Museum)

expected to assimilate the information and acquire the skills learnt during each sortie without the need for revision. In an over-joyous release of stress, students one day climbed onto the Winjeel placed as a guardian in front of the Cadets Mess and cracked the perspex cockpit canopy. The justifiably enraged Officer Commanding had the aircraft removed to storage at the RAAF Museum saying that the students did not deserve the honour of their guardian. The other students may have been just as happy without it, because washing it was used as a training tool to allow students the time to reflect on their errors after poor performance in a sortie. A tap had even been installed next to it to connect the hose.

Prior to the days of professional social workers, the role fell to instructors, particularly those living on base. In part to allow students with a problem to find a sympathetic ear, most of the married quarters on Point Cook were adorned with a black and white sign that identified the occupant by rank and surname. The tradition of the 'alpha strike' was maintained, where students planned a surprise strike on an unsuspecting instructor's house for the purpose of holding a party. Naturally, the students brought all of the food and drink.

Tragedy struck the base on 30 November 1991 when Group Captain Mike Birks from Headquarters Training Command and conversion student Flight Lieutenant Rick Davies from No 1 Flying Training School crashed in the RAAF Museum's Tiger Moth trainer aircraft while practising recovery from an engine failure after take-off. Davies survived the crash and was held back in his attempts to rescue Birks, who was killed on impact. In a seemingly odd, but perhaps appropriate move, Davies was appointed Base Flying Safety Officer soon after. Almost certainly, no stronger advocate for flying safety could be found.

The decision to disband No 1 Flying Training School meant that no new students were accepted from June 1992, which left the situation of a fully functioning flying training school with instructors, aircraft, fuel and authorised flying hours but no students on which to maintain their instructing skills. With the disbandment over six months away, the Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Bob Anderson, offered flying instruction for base personnel who had assisted the unit.[5] Surprisingly, very few took advantage of the offer. No 1 Flying Training School formally disbanded on 31 January 1993, and the CT4 trainers were sold, with some going to the new flying training provider at Tamworth and most of the others being sold at public auction. With reference to a contemporary movie and the CT4's nickname, the social club that organised the disbandment events called itself the 'Dead Parrots Society'.

After the move of flying training, there was no requirement for the RAAF to maintain an airfield fire response capability, so fire responses were left to the civil fire services. This created an odd situation for RAAF Williams, because Laverton was in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade's jurisdiction, while Point Cook was in the Country Fire Authority's jurisdiction. It was not unusual for both services to attend calls from the automated fire response system. False alarms were very common—with about two each week—and each call-out cost nearly $1000.

Another change under the 1991 Commercial Support Program was to employ civilian contractors to provide security guards at the entry points to Point Cook and Laverton as part of a national rationalisation. The cost benefit was that serving members employed on those duties could be more gainfully employed in their primary roles—at their higher rates of pay. After a short period with civilian gate guards, even that cost was brought under economic rationalist scrutiny, and a trial of an 'open base' was conducted for RAAF Williams. After an initial flurry of local civilians roaming relatively freely

1990s: RAAF Museum in the former Armament School headquarters—complete with ubiquitous 'yellow peril' airfield bicycle parked in front (Susan Campbell-Wright)

over the bases to see what Defence was doing and some 'hooning' in cars around the base's streets, there was seemingly little effect on base security. However, thieves did manage to take thousands of dollars of new computer equipment from the School of Languages one night. In Point Cook's case, it appeared very reasonable to remove the guards, because it allowed for easier access to the RAAF Museum.

In 1993, the RAAF Museum moved its headquarters to the facilities vacated by No 1 Flying Training School, and this offered an immense improvement over the old Armament School buildings (which were later the RAAF College and first RAAF Academy headquarters). Under the command of Squadron Leader Gary Westley with Warrant Officer David Gardner as Senior Curator, the museum made great leaps forward. Gardner was responsible for converting the No 1 Flying Training School maintenance complex into the award-winning RAAF Museum Heritage Gallery, which opened on 11 October 1996, and operating days were held to display the museum's flying aircraft beside invited warbirds and antique aircraft. The annual RAAF Museum visitor rate increased to over 120 000.

Following the successful completion of the Hawker Demon restoration of 1987, the RAAF Museum carried out further major restoration projects including the Maurice Farman Shorthorn—a 1917 Australian Flying Corps aircraft from Point Cook—with the efforts of retired Group Captain Ron Gretton, his father Ern Gretton and David Gardner in 1993. This was followed by the restoration of the ex-RAAF Antarctic Flight yellow 'Snow Goose' Supermarine Walrus that was wrecked at Heard Island in 1947 and completed by Ron Gretton, Gardner's son Ben and retired Wing Commander Geoff Matthews in 2002.[6]

Meanwhile, Flight Sergeant David Jones brought Mustang A68-170 to flying condition between 1991 and 1999. It had been completed as a static display aircraft in the 1970s under Squadron Leader Kevin Duffy's guidance.[7] Other projects included the restoration to static display standard of a Vampire jet aircraft in 2000 by the Friends of the RAAF Museum, a volunteer group that continues to provide valuable assistance to the museum and its operations.

1993: Maurice Farman Shorthorn replica (RAAF Museum)

A second Vampire, which was restored at RAAF East Sale, was acquired and placed on display in 1996. Along the same lines, the museum acquired a 1942 Boston Bomber restored at Amberley, Queensland in 1998 and a 1966 Iroquois UH-1B helicopter restored by No 21 Squadron at Laverton in 2002.

The move of a 1959 C-130A Hercules transport aircraft from Laverton to Point Cook in May 1994 was a complex logistical exercise involving a number of agencies. The aircraft had its engines, wings, tailplane and fin removed at Laverton, and the fuselage was towed the eight kilometres south along Point Cook Road. In the planned pre-dawn move, the electricity and phone authorities temporarily removed overhead wires, and the council removed traffic signs along the route, allowing the fuselage to be towed down the road and over roundabouts. As might have been expected, the move took much longer than planned, and the aircraft finally arrived through the west gate midmorning.

The heritage focus of the base increased, with such activities as the continuation of the Australian Flying Corps Pilgrimages and Odd Bods Association commemorations. There was the occasional scattering of ashes from aircraft over the airfield, and the chapel was used as the site for the funeral of the wartime Chief of the Air Staff, Sir George Jones. In the wake of the decision to disband No 1 Flying Training School in 1992, the Federal Member for Lalor, Dr Barry Jones, chaired a consultative committee to determine the future uses of Point Cook and Laverton. His committee recommended potential use in aviation heritage through the continued presence of RAAF training and the RAAF Museum along with appropriate civil aviation use. The 1992 Port Phillip Airport Study examined potential civilian activities at Point Cook and Laverton as part of the wider civil aviation network plan. Conservation architects Allom Lovell & Associates carried out a comprehensive heritage appraisal of both bases. Their report codified the heritage significance in line with modern professional heritage practice.[8] Meanwhile, the Victorian Government pressed for a National Air and Space Museum of Australia (NASMA) to be established—initially at Laverton but later at Point Cook—to display civil aviation heritage items.[9] The new museum required joint State and Federal funding and would have integrated the RAAF Museum into its structure.[10] The proposal was dropped in 1996 due to lack of State and Federal funding commitment[11], and the decision 'finally removed the NASMA millstone from around the RAAF Museum's neck'.[12]

Meanwhile, the Government-sponsored 'Australia Remembers' program commenced in 1995 on the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. The program caused a public awakening of defence heritage and, as veterans were asked to tell their stories by younger generations, the

2002: restored Walrus 'Snow Goose' (Giles Campbell-Wright)

1990s: Vampire gate guardian (Author)

1994: base residents watching the C-130A Hercules fuselage entering the west gate (Susan Campbell-Wright)

significance of military heritage sites gained a wider public recognition. Attendance increased dramatically at dawn services around the country, and the Australian Flying Corps Memorial at Point Cook became the focal point of military aviation focused dawn services.

RAAF Williams had held its Beating Retreat ceremony and associated RAAF Central Band concert at Laverton since the 1980s and moved the event to the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance in the early 1990s under the sponsorship of Headquarters Logistics Command. It grew in scale over time, with more aspects being added each year, and in the mid-1990s, the event moved to the more suitable venue of the parade ground at Point Cook. It continued to increase in scale there as well, changing its title to the 'RAAF Williams Twilight Spectacular'. A massive castle backdrop was used, along with an enormous sound system and seating blocks borrowed from the Melbourne Grand Prix Corporation. By the last few events, the show included afternoon viewing of the RAAF Museum and the tethered RAAF Balloon followed by a heritage flying display of RAAF Museum aircraft, the RAAF Roulettes flying display, a parachute descent with a large flag, the formal Beating Retreat ceremony with a sunset flypast, a military working dog handling display, a concert and a performance of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. This was followed by a VIP cocktail party at the Officers Mess while the crowd that peaked at 10 000 one year made its way out of the base under the traffic control of Service and civilian police.

The RAAF Museum's operating Vampire jet trainer was used for the sunset flypast one year and was piloted by the Commanding Officer of the RAAF Museum, Squadron Leader Jeremy Clark. At the rehearsal, he flew the flypast at an altitude of 400 feet and was chastised by the Officer Commanding, Group Captain Ian 'Tiny' Ashbrook—himself a pilot of the same Vampire—and ordered to make the flypast at 500 feet or higher for the event itself. Instead, Clark did the flypast at 250 feet in the inverted position. Ashbrook left his position on the saluting dais and headed straight for the Laverton flight line, where he banned Clark from flying the Vampire ever again.[13]

After the disbandment of No 1 Flying Training School in 1993, the RAAF Aviation Medicine Institute was no longer co-located with an operational flying base. As it was located in the World War II hospital based around the first hospital of 1921, the unit was in desperate need of modern facilities, and it moved

to Edinburgh, South Australia in 1995. In the years before leaving Point Cook, the institute had continued to offer routine hyperbaric training to aircrew and to carry out aviation medicine research. One notable task was research assistance for extreme altitude parachute jump tests for application in space rescue. In a substantial loss for military aviation heritage, the original hospital that housed the institute was demolished in 1996, despite inclusion in the heritage listings.

One of the Aviation Medicine's most colourful commanders was Wing Commander Tony Austin, who made quite a splash when he arrived at his posting at Point Cook in 1991—having applied to be reimbursed for the cost of his travel by a means known as 'use of own conveyance'—in his own yacht. He and his wife Kath became heavily involved in the village lifestyle of the base, and Kath became the base's Cub Scout leader.

The Thrift Shop became something of a centre of family interaction. For a small commission, the store sold surplus household goods on consignment with profits originally going to the RAAF Women's Association Educational Patriotic Fund. After the RAAF Women's Association became defunct in early 1990s, profits were spent on amenities for families, including playground equipment, barbecues and donations to welfare clubs. The shop was managed by the RAAF Point Cook Wives' Club, later renamed the RAAF Point Cook Social Club. Longstanding committee secretary Susan Campbell-Wright produced a newsletter, called *To the Point*, keeping families informed of social, community and Service matters in the days before electronic social media.

On one of the few occasions that the 'open base policy' let the base down, the safe was stolen from the Thrift Shop. It was a heavy item, taking two men to shift it along the floor and probably more to lift it into a van. It was found months later at Cobbledick's Ford beyond Werribee having been smashed open. For their efforts, the thieves discovered that it only contained the record cards of the sales of second-hand bicycles, mowers and baby cots. With no plan to reallocate the vacant 1914 Caretaker's Cottage to

1997: the Caretaker's Cottage after restoration for use as the Thrift Shop (Susan Campbell-Wright)

a family, there was a danger of the Service's oldest married quarter falling into disrepair or even going the way of the hospital, so the social club took it over as the new Thrift Shop, without awaiting permission from the Defence authorities. The committee even arranged for the very supportive wife of the Chief of the Air Staff, Mrs Jan Fisher, to travel from Canberra to officially open the new facility.

One positive effect of the open base was that it allowed members of the local community to more easily access the social life of the base. The cinema committee had a club that allowed locals to attend screenings on production of their membership card and to enjoy the latest movies for a small fee. The January 1996 visit by the Canadair fire-bomber aircraft to Point Cook provided a good deal of local excitement. The amphibious aircraft paid a visit as part of a world demonstration tour and gave a spectacular display of its water collecting and dropping ability. One demonstration concluded with the spectators standing at the end of the pier being showered with the water they had just watched being collected. The Dutton car rallies were a popular motorsport event during the 1990s, and one of the closed stages was held on the central tarmac with catering provided by volunteers from the Point Cook Social Club and the Defence Special Needs Support Group. The RAAF Point Cook Flying Club dropped the 'RAAF' from its title and became a civilian entity, encouraging other aviators to visit Point Cook on its fly-in picnic days. Its operations were taken over for

2002: Canadair water bombing aircraft giving a demonstration off the end of the pier (Giles Campbell-Wright)

a brief period by the Royal Victorian Aero Club from January 1999, re-establishing its presence on the base where it had been formed in October 1914.[14]

The kindergarten continued to serve the community and thrive under Mary Michelon's guidance, and a playgroup called 'Aerotots' was started by parents from on and off the base. A before and after school care centre was established as more women began to enter the workforce with the name of the WOSH Centre (short for Williams Out of School Hours Centre). Older children played together on the base, and many things were on offer to amuse them, including the fuselage of a World War II Hudson bomber that rested behind a hangar at the southern tarmac for many years.

The disused fire training ground and rubbish tip also provided hours of playful enjoyment and exploration amongst the old aircraft and vehicle parts and field training dugouts. There was a large metal tank partially buried on the shoreline that took the children's interest as they climbed over it and tried to work out what it was.[15] It later proved to be an anti-shipping mine and, once identified, bomb disposal experts were called in to deal with it. News reports indicated that the mine was detonated by explosives experts after the establishment of a one-and-a-half-kilometre exclusion zone with Victoria Police helicopter enforcement of a no-fly zone over the beach.[16] In fact, the mine was found to be inactive and was salvaged. It is now in the RAAF Museum's collection.

A popular television program about fishing in Australia hosted by Rex Hunt told the public that there was good fishing to be had from the end of the pier, and keen fishermen visited the base at all hours of the day and night. Some lit a fire in the Marine Section shed one night that set the shed alight. The ensuing fire burnt the pier and made it unsafe, so a barbed-wire reinforced gate was erected on the shore to stop people from using it. Nonetheless, some climbed over the wire and continued to fish from the dangerous structure.

The relative quietness of Point Cook allowed Victoria Police to carry out training in the recently vacated married quarters and along the disused residential streets. From 2003, the Force Response Unit conducted training in the use of shields and batons for riot control as well as house incursion and arrest techniques. A section of the undercover drug squad was housed in one of surviving World

War II huts, well away from public attention. Staff members at Point Cook remember the squad members as friendly and recall invitations to their weekly barbecues with roast vegetables as a respite from the snack food they ate while on most of their operations.[17]

On a very unfortunate note—but one which helps to illustrate the significance of Point Cook in the minds of many who have been associated with it—past Commanding Officer of No 1 Flying Training School and then Ansett pilot Jeff Radbone chose Point Cook as the place to end his life in 1997. In a letter explaining his actions, he said that he chose Point Cook because it was where he had been happiest.[18]

Point Cook has the reputation of being the most haunted aviation site in Australia. Normally fearless firemen have been spooked by the banging and rattling sounds in their hangar located near the air traffic control tower. The tower is on the site of the World War II tower, from which a United States airman is reputed to have hanged himself. According to Sergeant Dusty Miller, the footsteps of a ghost affectionately known as 'George' have been heard, and he is known to have closed doors and rattled cups, causing at least one young fireman to refuse to stay overnight on the duty shift. Miller also claimed that a figure dressed in a modern flying suit could be seen strolling on the edge of the airfield in the central tarmac area near the site of the 1983 Porter crash and 'several of us have seen him walking past our hut'. Miller sighted him firsthand in 1989 while looking out of the window when having a shower around midnight, saying that he walked around 15 paces and then disappeared.[19]

Reports have been made of a figure dressed in a long World War I flying coat being seen near the edge of the airfield from the southern tarmac area. Walking and jogging around the perimeter of the airfield was a common way to keep fit, and one early evening walker saw the figure standing there in 1992. Being a lone female, she decided not to pass him, and before she turned to walk back to the married quarter area, he disappeared. A guard on security patrol had the same experience.

The old museum in the Armament School, dating to World War II, is the site with the most numerous ghost stories. Museum staff members have many stories of lights and heaters being turned on or off after security alarms have been set and of items being moved, including a heavy weapons storage case.

1990s: the pool area of the pier prior to becoming damaged through public use (RAAF Museum)

The display of a re-creation of Sir Richard Williams' study drew many reports with it being 'tidied' after dusting or books being physically returned after being temporarily taken for research. The display, containing many items of historic significance, was protected by a perspex screen that needed to be partially dismantled to gain access.

The central research and staff rest hut had more than its fair share of strange occurrences. Retired Army Warrant Officer Class II Jock Smith was a museum volunteer and not known for his humour. One day in the early 1990s, he saw a figure walk through the wall, pause and face him, then continue walking through the opposite wall. His anger at not being believed by others working there when he told them was so great that they thought they might have to call an ambulance for fear of him having a heart attack. He never returned to the museum again. Similarly, two female officer cadets who had elected to be discharged early in their training had been attached to the museum awaiting discharge, as was a common practice, and were working in the central research hut, when the bloodcurdling scream from one of them brought staff running. After many minutes of consoling by the other, she was finally able explain that she been rubbed against by a figure walking through the room.[20]

There was an exorcism of sorts conducted at Lukis House in August 1998. After operating as two apartments for 40 years, it was converted back into a single residence to accommodate a large family. Unfounded rumours had circulated that Air Commodore Reed, who lived next door, had noticed the ghost of a young girl in the upstairs master bedroom and on the adjoining sundeck. The girl even had a name and was reputed to have been six-year-old Estelle, who was said to have died in the house in the late 1950s or early 1960s. While not proved to have occurred, the fact that Group Captain Roy King had died in that room was blissfully unknown. The family residing in the house at the time called upon Chaplain Jim Curtain to bless the upstairs room to quiet the noises heard by the woman of the house.

Point Cook remained a favourite filming location with movie and television production companies. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation and a private production company filmed part of *The Great Air Race*, released in 1990, on the base. It was a fictional story based on the events surrounding the 1934 MacRobertson Trophy Air Race from Mildenhall to Melbourne in 1934. A wooden replica of the winning bright red D.H.88 Comet *Grosvenor House* languished behind a hangar on the southern tarmac for years after the filming.

A horizon tank for filming movies to appear as though filming is occurring in the middle of the ocean was created at Point Cook in 1997. Careful use of camera angles and heights hides the piece of coastline that remains to protect the set. Point Cook's tank is one of only three in the world, the others being in Malta and Mexico.[21] The base commander at the time, Group Captain Dudley McArdle, was not consulted in the planning process and, when advised by the film company that construction was going ahead, understandably refused permission. He received a telephone call directly from the Minister for Defence, who offered to relieve him of his command that afternoon if he did not comply.[22]

The $800 000 tank was constructed with finance from the film industry and government assistance and was originally planned to be dismantled after the filming of the movie *Moby Dick*, starring Patrick Stewart and Gregory Peck.[23] Many items of historic interest were unearthed as the tank was dug, including the wing of a Mustang fighter, practice bombs, silk stockings new in their packets and other objects from the one-time World War II rubbish dump. Rather than filling the tank in, it was leased to Meniscus Productions under the title of Point Cook Film Studios and used for the 1999 filming of the movie *Noah's Ark*, starring John Voight and Mary Steenburgen.[24] Point Cook was also used by the local film and television industry for series such as 'Blue Heelers', which was filmed in the local Werribee area and used the base's service station in at least one episode in the late 1990s. Television advertisements were also made, including one for the EL model Ford

1997: horizon tank (RAAF Museum)

1997: filming of *Moby Dick* (RAAF Museum)

Falcon, which used a large bamboo arch constructed over the road to the southern tarmac.[25]

The Defence Reform Program commenced in April 1997 based on the recommendations of the 1996 Defence Efficiency Review.[26] The program further pushed the Government's desire to invest in combat and combat support, with Minister for Defence Ian McLachlan—a pastoralist by profession—expressing the view that, as a sheep farmer, he would rather invest his money in sheep than buildings. The resulting restructure of Defence placed the stewardship of all Defence properties in the newly formed Defence Estate Organisation (DEO) from 1997. One of its aims was to raise revenue through the disposal of properties by a 'rationalisation of the Defence estate through the continuing business review of selected establishments'.[27] In 1998, Point Cook was one of the properties identified for disposal in the 2001 financial year.

1997: Flight Sergeant David Jones with the Mustang wing unearthed while digging the horizon tank (RAAF Museum)

In 1998, as a first step towards the sale of the base, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) was allowed a lease on part of the vacated No 1 Flying Training School that was not used by the RAAF Museum. RMIT offered initial and advanced flying training for first officers in the Chinese domestic airline industry and leased five vacant married quarters from Defence in 1999 to house the students of two courses commencing in 1999. It was hoped that living in the married quarters would help to integrate them into the community and make them feel welcome in Australia.[28] With over 50 students and their Chinese instructor living in five houses, coupled with the pressure of flying training, tempers must have been tested on occasion. This erupted into violence one day when a student was stabbed by one of his fellow students; thankfully, not fatally. The lease arrangement was not continued for further courses.

Major development also began in the fringe areas of Melbourne, and notably for RAAF Williams, the Sanctuary Lakes estate commenced construction on the site of the defunct Cheetham Salt Works midway between Point Cook and Laverton on the Point Cook Road in 1998. The development was backed by Malaysian business interests and traded on the name of Australian golfer Greg Norman, who designed the golf course in the 'resort style' estate. Developers placed additional pressure on Defence to sell Point Cook for housing. A new suburb was created to the west of Laverton and was designated as Western Gardens, because this had a better ring to it than Laverton West. However, the developers, the Urban Land Corporation, made a request to local council to change the name to Point Cook, despite being over six kilometres inland from Point Cook, as it believed 'the Point Cook tag is more desirable for the area.' Wyndham Council voted four to three in favour of the proposal despite strong objections from some councillors on historical and commercial grounds.[29]

Thus, 'Point Cook' migrated north-west; and as new residents came to Point Cook, few had any idea of its bay-side origin.

Efforts were made to relocate units, such as the move of the language school—renamed the Australian Defence Force School of Languages in 1993—to Laverton in 1998 into a purpose-built training complex. The planning to move the Officers' Training School to East Sale, Victoria began, with the strong support of the sitting member for Gippsland, Peter McGauran. Headquarters Training Command, which had moved into one of the RAAF Academy buildings and a large demountable building, was relocated to Laverton after the closure of Logistics Command. The RAAF College had continued to act as an overarching headquarters for the Officers' Training School, the Basic Staff School, the External Studies School and the single Service training for Australian Defence Force College cadets. Under a structural change, No 1 Recruit Training School and Airman Leadership Flight's elements in Wagga, Richmond and Amberley were added to its span of control. The RAAF College therefore commanded all core professional training for the RAAF. The last dining-in of the RAAF's oldest Sergeants Mess was held on the evening of 26 February 1999.[30] The original two-storey headquarters building was allocated to the Air Training Corps, which was rapidly becoming the largest uniformed presence on the base, especially during its annual camps and drill competitions.

The Point Cook Airfield Preservation Action Group was formed on 12 December 1998 at a meeting called by Colin Grey as an umbrella group for lobbying to save the base from inappropriate development.[31] It had representation from the Sport Aircraft Association of Australia, the Antique Aircraft Association of Australia, the Australian Warbirds Association, the Gliding Federation of Australia, Moorabbin Air Museum and the Aviation Historical Society of Australia. Its aims were to preserve the heritage of Point Cook, keep the airfield operating, retain the RAAF Museum at Point Cook and encourage wider civil use and access.[32] Historian Geoff Bellamy of the National Trust said that the site

1990s: an enduring shot of Point Cook—looking north from Port Phillip (RAAF Museum)

should be given World Heritage listing because of its significance as 'the only remaining intact pre-world war military airfield in the world'.[33]

David Francis continued to agitate from within the National Trust, and lobbyists such as Mark Pilkington, Ted Ilton, Ian Sutherland and Susan Campbell-Wright agitated through meetings and letters to parliamentarians and senior RAAF officers. The local Federal Parliament Member, Julia Gillard, recognised the operating and heritage value of Point Cook to her electorate and became a strong supporter. Recreational aviation groups and airfield tenants joined forums with the Returned and Services League and the RAAF Association, and Gillard tabled a petition in Parliament in 1999 with 11 000 signatures—collected in three months—calling for the preservation of the site as a centre for aviation preservation, education, training and heritage tourism. The Air Officer Commanding Training Command, Air Commodore Doug Chipman, said, that the 'RAAF cannot afford to dither any longer', emphasising that, 'the lack of action has resulted in sapping of Point Cook's lifeblood' through lack of spending on maintenance.[34]

In October 1999, Point Cook Operations Limited (PCOL) was formed to potentially lease and operate the base as a disposal solution for Defence. PCOL board of directors included retired Air Vice-Marshal Peter Scully, former RAAF test pilot Randall Green, former RAAF Museum Commanding Officer Gary Westley and businessman Gordon Kennett.[35] PCOL saw the benefits of its control of Point Cook as the preservation of Point Cook, the retention of the RAAF Museum at the site and sympathetic residential and community development. This included achieving the RAAF Museum's planned Project *Pegasus*, which was to cover a number of the central tarmac Bellman hangars and other museum buildings under a single wing-shaped structure allowing the ability to preserve large historic aircraft.[36] PCOL's proposal later developed to include a retirement village for retired RAAF members in the north-west corner of the base.

Meanwhile, community support for Defence grew as a result of the Australian Government's 'Their Service – Our Heritage' initiative in the lead-up to the Centenary of Federation celebrations. Married quarter residents were encouraged to apply for alternative houses off base from 2000, the canteen and cinema were closed and the Thrift Shop was moved to Laverton. Private aviation operators who had longstanding arrangements for the use of facilities, such as the flying club, and heritage aviation operators like Bob Eastgate were issued

1999: Wapiti head above the fireplace (RAAF Museum)

with eviction orders by the DEO. Battle lines were drawn for a protracted political fight that led to an Australian National Audit Office investigation and a Senate Inquiry into sale of Defence facilities in 2001. The Senate Committee took evidence from users of leased premises at Point Cook, and reported 'it would not be an overstatement to say that the criticism was trenchant and harsh of the management of the leasing arrangements put in place by DEO'. The Committee, citing lack of consultation between DEO and users, went on to say that, 'some good old-fashioned manners and common courtesies would go a long

way to resolving many of the problems created by DEO and its agents'.[37]

Chief of Air Force, Air Marshal Angus Houston, was at RAAF Williams on 11 September 2001 and had paid visits to half of the units at Laverton and Point Cook, with the other units to be visited the following day. He and the officers of the bases retired late after a dining-in at the Laverton Officers Mess ready for the next day's activities. Instead, Houston left Point Cook in his hired jet the next morning to attend security briefs in Canberra. The terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September 2001 had a significant effect on Defence operations in Australia. The open base arrangement ceased on 12 September 2001, and security guards were stationed on the gates at RAAF Williams once more. Any non-Defence person requiring access to Point Cook had to be issued with a security pass, and the queues of cars entering the base extended north along Point Cook Road for the first few days while the passes were issued, most notably to civilian parents with children at the on-base primary school.

The 2001 Victorian Government Ambidji Report into airfield capacity recommended retention of Point Cook as part of the wider network of general aviation operations. In May 2001, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, Dr Brendan Nelson, announced the retention of Point Cook as an operating airfield, due mainly to the view expressed by Victorian Parliamentary Secretary for State and Regional Development Tony Robinson that, '… Point Cook must retain an operating capacity for the long-term benefit of general aviation in the state'.[38] Despite headlines such as 'Point Cook Saved' and quotes from Julia Gillard that, 'this is fantastic' and 'it is what we have been fighting for the past three years', the Government still planned to go ahead with the sale of the base to private interests.[39] A Project Steering Committee to review the method of disposal was chaired by Don Hayward, former Victorian Minister for Education. Hayward's committee appointed the company Sinclair Knight Mertz as project consultants, which devised four proposals for land use and embarked on a round of community consultation before presenting recommendations to the new Parliamentary Secretary, Fran Bailey. Matters such as the decontamination of the RAAF Fire Training School burn sites, which was required to be carried out by the vendor under new environmental protection legislation, were brought to light in the process.

In August 2003, Bailey announced the freehold sale of Point Cook by June 2004. A heritage precinct was designated that was to be retained by the Commonwealth and included the RAAF Museum complex, the World War I wooden messes and associated accommodation, the original two-storey headquarters, the parade ground and the Australian Flying Corps Memorial, but little else.[40] The 1914 Caretaker's Cottage would have been marooned in an area to be disposed, so plans were made to physically relocate it within the heritage precinct. Despite the impending sale of what he described as the RAAF's 'ancestral home', Air Marshal Houston said, 'our history is important to us, and Point Cook holds a symbolic place in the history of the Royal Australian Air Force—it is the foundation on which we have built the organisation we are today'.[41]

In September 2003, the Australian Council of National Trusts placed Point Cook on its Endangered Sites List and lobbied the Government not to go ahead with the sale, and Dr David Kemp, Minister for Environment and Heritage, visited with representatives of the Point Cook Airfield Preservation Action Group and the National Trust. This was followed by a visit by Fran Bailey in November. In February 2004, the Action Group nominated Point Cook for inclusion on the Commonwealth Heritage List and National Heritage List, which was the highest level of heritage recognition in Australia.[42]

After due consideration, Fran Bailey announced a review of the decision to sell Point Cook in February 2004, choosing the RAAF Museum's air pageant to celebrate the 90th anniversary of military aviation in Australia as the occasion for the announcement. Instead, the site was to be retained in government hands and operated by a new body, the National

Aviation Museum Trust. Don Hayward was appointed to establish the trust; however, after further consideration, the new Parliamentary Secretary, Teresa Gambaro announced the closure of the trust, and the full retention and operation of Point Cook by the Department of Defence in November 2005. In place of the trust, the newly formed RAAF Heritage Advisory Council was to 'be responsible for providing the Chief [of Air Force] with strategic and policy advice to engage the ongoing community interest in preserving the RAAF heritage values of Point Cook'.[43]

Through the passion and determination of a number of dedicated individuals and groups—Point Cook had survived its greatest threat, having almost gone the way of its British counterpart, the RAF Museum at Hendon, surrounded by close development and without an operating airfield. The forces of economic rationalism brought arguably much needed reform as the economy began to suffer in the late 1980s, and Point Cook weathered the lowest point in its existence. The process of saving Point Cook focussed attention on its unique place in Australia's heritage and brought its significance to the attention of a national audience. In the ensuing decade, that significance was bolstered by the activities of the RAAF Museum and the increased use of Point Cook as a commemoration site, along with further steps to protect its heritage.

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Chapter 11 - Epilogue

It was one thing to have saved Point Cook from inappropriate commercial development in 2005, but it would be another matter to return it to a fully operating base after the neglect caused by the years of indecision over the base's future. The in-ground infrastructure was in need of refurbishment, and by 2006, only a handful of units remained at Point Cook. Funds were set aside for redevelopment, but competing priorities caused delays in carrying out the work, and the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq placed pressure on domestic Defence expenditure. However, the heritage significance of Point Cook was by then well established, and the concept of a 'Working Heritage Base' was developed as Point Cook was included on the Commonwealth Heritage List and the National Heritage List in 2007 that afford protection under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.[1] The RAAF Museum continued to go from strength to strength, and the airfield remained active, supporting the museum and civilian flying training. The use of Point Cook as a site for commemorative events increased. As the centenary of military aviation approached, the parlous state of many of the base's buildings was obvious to the general public, so a demolition program removed most of the unused non-heritage buildings, and steps were eventually taken to provide a basic measure of physical protection to the remaining heritage buildings. With 1 March 2014 approaching, planning to mark the centenary of military aviation in Australia at the nation's most significant aviation heritage site began.

In 2005, the headquarters of RAAF College remained at Point Cook overseeing the Officers' Training School, No 1 Recruit Training Unit and the School of Applied Management (renamed School of Postgraduate Studies). The RAAF Museum and RAAF Central Band were added to its span of control in July 2005, as was Combat Support Unit Williams for a brief period, even though it remained at Laverton. RAAF Air Command Band was added to the suite of units in 2006. The consolidation of these units under the RAAF College headquarters was designed to place Point Cook as the custodian of core military training and heritage assets for the RAAF.

No sooner had the RAAF College's structure settled than it was reconstituted. The restructure of the College on 1 January 2008 coincided with the planned move of Officers' Training School to East Sale, Victoria and the disbanding of Ground Training Wing, which managed most of the technical training in the RAAF. This created the so called 'super RAAF College' that combined all of the RAAF College and Ground Training Wing units under a single command and reaped the saving of a group captain position and associated support staff. The super wing encompassed

10 units and was to have its headquarters in Wagga, New South Wales. The RAAF Museum was transferred to the control of Air Training Wing at East Sale due to the need for governance of its flying activities.

The Government introduced its Gap Year Program in 2008 in an effort to increase recruiting through the exposure of young people to a year of military service after leaving high school and before entering tertiary studies. The RAAF chose to manage the scheme by appointing the participants as officer cadets at the Officers' Training School. It was unlikely that students would have been attracted to a year at East Sale, so a Gap Year Flight of Officers' Training School remained at Point Cook while the parent unit was moved under the command of Wing Commander Tony Dolin to East Sale. The RAAF offered the program in three annual intakes from 2008. Despite the life-changing experiences for most Gap Year cadets, the program was not economical for the RAAF, because it did not have the same recruiting problems experienced by Navy and Army. The skills in greatest recruiting demand for the RAAF at the time were medical officers, dentists and airfield engineers—all skills that were not to be found in teenagers.

Point Cook is located in the City of Wyndham, and its 'Tourism and Events Strategy' described the RAAF Museum as one of 'the unique selling points of the region'.[2] The RAAF Museum's interactive flying program remains a major contributor to its success. These flying demonstrations, given three times a week, involve the audience witnessing a short aircraft display at very close range. The aircraft is positioned in front of an audience on tiered seating, and the pilot goes through the pre-flight checks, engine start and taxi in front of the audience with a commentator explaining the pilot's actions. After take-off, the short flying display is also explained by the commentator, with the radio calls by pilot being relayed over the speakers. After the aircraft lands and is taxied back to the start point, the pilot is available to answer questions from the audience. The program is especially popular with school groups and is a highlight for international visitors, including foreign military personnel studying at the Defence International Cooperation School at Laverton. The RAAF aerobatic team, the Roulettes, based at East Sale, usually makes its first away from home flying demonstration practice at Point Cook due to its close proximity and the services available from the RAAF Museum flight line. This special interactive day attracts a very large crowd. The RAAF Museum continues to hold its air pageants, and these have fallen into a regular biennial pattern to alternate with the Avalon International Air Show held about 35 kilometres to the south-west.

2005: Jack Gillies building the Deperdussin replica in his workshop (Jack Gillies)

The RAAF Museum has continued to acquire aircraft for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations. Thankfully, the value of keeping at least one example of aircraft types as they are retired from service is now widely recognised. Recent acquisitions include a Hawker-Siddeley HS-748 navigation trainer, a Caribou light tactical transport aircraft, an Iroquois helicopter, a C-47 Dakota transport aircraft, a C-130H Hercules transport aircraft and two F-111 interdiction and strike aircraft. The museum has also completed gaps in its collection through the acquisition of restored and replica aircraft such as the World War I S.E.5a fighter and Avro 504K trainer aircraft—both built to flying condition in the United Kingdom. However, with the centenary of Australian military aviation approaching, the collection of pre-

2007: Avro 504K replica (Giles Campbell-Wright))

World War I Australian military aircraft needed to be completed. A replica of the Deperdussin monoplane flown at Point Cook in 1914 was donated by former Ansett Airlines captain Jack Gillies, son of an Australian Flying Corps mechanic who had worked on the original aircraft; and a replica of the B.E.2a biplane is generously being donated by Andrew Willox. He is constructing the replica, complete with its archaic wing-warping flight controls, from the original drawings, and he uses the RAAF Museum's extensive archive of photos and documents to ensure authenticity. It is not uncommon to see a current or retired Chief of Air Force showing a political leader or foreign visitor around the RAAF Museum displays and restoration projects, explaining how each aircraft or artefact is a visible representation of the RAAF's past and a signpost for the future of Australian air power.

The team of Ron Gretton and Geoff Matthews, who completed the museum's Supermarine Walrus aircraft restoration, built a replica of the 1914 Bristol Boxkite that will be available to fly at Point Cook on 1 March 2014. That flight will celebrate 100 years of military aviation in the best possible way—by flying a replica of the aircraft that made the first flight.[3] The aircraft was built and tested at Point Cook in the RAAF Museum facilities under the *Project 2014* banner and is registered with experimental certification by the Sport Aircraft Association of Australia. A test flight program was prepared by one of Australia's most highly regarded military test pilots, retired Air Vice-Marshal Mark Skidmore, who flew the replica on 11 September 2013.

Air Force Headquarters conducted Operation *Magpies Return* in 2009 to recover and identify the remains of the crew of Canberra bomber A84-291 that crashed in Vietnam in 1970. The No 2 Squadron aircraft was crewed by Flying Officer Michael Herbert and Pilot Officer Robert Carver, the last Australian servicemen missing from the Vietnam War.[4] The RAAF Museum identified the first aircraft parts recovered, thereby helping to confirm the crash site. The remains of the crew and aircraft were returned to Australia, and the RAAF Museum now protects many

of the objects found at the crash site, including some personal effects of the crew. In a very generous offer, Pilot Officer Carver's family has donated a substantial amount of personal effects, providing a rare complete collection of material relating to the life of Australian aircrew in the Vietnam War era.

A crashed Spitfire fighter aircraft found in north-west France in November 2010 proved to have been that of Flight Lieutenant Henry Lacy Smith, who was shot down by German forces on 11 June 1944, five days after the D-Day landings at Normandy during World War II.[5] After the recovery of the pilot's remains, the aircraft was placed in the hands of the Australian Government, and Prime Minister Julia Gillard—who was also the local Federal Member of Parliament—ensured that the aircraft was placed in the care of the RAAF Museum.

The horizon tank built at Point Cook in 1997 has not been used since the filming of the movie *Moby Dick* in 1999, but other parts of the base have been used as a film set. Most notably, the telemovie *Curtin*, with an Australian cast headed by William McInnes and Noni Hazlehurst, used the Officers Mess for many interior and exterior scenes, along with Wrigley House at Laverton in 2007. Lukis House at Point Cook was scouted as a filming location for the joint Australian-American television miniseries *The Pacific,* released in 2010. Lukis House made a very suitable location to shoot the main protagonist's American childhood home due to its unusual, almost American style. The proposal was supported by the occupants, but approval for the filming was declined by Defence Support Group.

2008: virtual house—Leckie's house concept for filming of *The Pacific* (First Division Productions)

As a result of the Melbourne Accommodation Review of 2006, Point Cook served as a temporary accommodation host for major events in the Melbourne area. Events have included Operation *Acolyte,* the Australian Defence Force support to the 2006 Commonwealth Games, and the biennial Avalon International Air Show, when Defence aircraft and crews are accommodated for the duration of the event. The activity on these occasions brings back some of the feel of the base in World War II, with a variety of aircraft departing, returning and rehearsing their display routines in the skies above the historic airfield. The sound and feel of a formation of Blackhawk helicopters landing with full blackout on the main oval at night in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games was a rare treat for the few families that remained on base in the evenings. The line of sight and clear airspace between Point Cook and the central business district of Melbourne remains a valuable attribute of Point Cook in Defence's role of protecting public assets from potential terrorist attack.

Point Cook was used for other police, emergency services and Defence training, including the Country Fire Authority occasionally conducting helicopter rappelling and winching drills over the airfield for remote terrain rescue practice. Due to Point Cook's rare situation of being a vacant urban landscape, Victoria Police used the remaining parts of the heritage married quarter area for conducting training in urban arrest techniques. On one occasion, one of the last remaining married quarter residents was suddenly confronted by two heavily armed police officers in his backyard asking for directions over the neighbouring fences in order to reach the house being used in the exercise. An Army Reserve artillery unit, the 2/10th Medium Regiment, conducted an urban incursion training exercise in the brick married quarters on Dalzell Road on 20 July 2008. Due to

2008: Mustang VH-BOB recovered from the site of the forced landing (Giles Campbell-Wright)

inadequate checking of one soldier's modified webbing equipment after a previous live firing exercise, a round of live ammunition found its way into his weapon along with the blank ammunition being used in the exercise, and a colleague was accidentally shot in both forearms. He was rushed to hospital and thankfully survived.[6]

Tiger Moth joy flights by a private operator—Vintage Tiger Moth Joy Flights—remain a feature of Point Cook's part in the community. The flights are a popular weekend activity, often given to the passenger as a birthday present or to mark another significant occasion. Mustang VH-BOB owned by Bob Eastgate, who had conducted heritage aviation activities on Point Cook since the 1970s, gave joy flights until 5 April 2008. On that day, the Mustang, piloted by John Dorward, approached the airfield to land, but the undercarriage failed to lower fully, jamming in a partially lowered position after a hinge on the undercarriage door cracked and broke. In a textbook response, Dorward circled Point Cook burning off fuel while engineers on the ground observed the faulty door and offered alternative actions to try to lower the wheels. Meanwhile, emergency services vehicles arrived and positioned themselves at points along the grass east-west runway, and an ambulance helicopter prepositioned with the rotor turning. Dorward carried out a final low pass to indicate his landing path and put the aircraft down on the next approach. The forced landing was perfect, and Dorward jumped from the cockpit and helped passenger Frank Mullins from the aircraft. The planned 20-minute joy flight was his 70th birthday present and ended up lasting almost two hours.[7] In an odd coincidence, passenger Mullins, pilot Dorward and the Mustang itself were each 70 years old.

The Australian Flying Corps Memorial continued to be the focus for commemorative events, especially as members of World War II and Korean veterans associations began reaching an age of greater reflection as their surviving colleagues were passing. The *sanctum sanctorum* that is the site of the first

2008: Mustang VH-BOB at the moment the propeller struck the ground (Giles Campbell-Wright)

military flight in Australia retained its attraction for many veterans groups wishing to place a bronze plaque on the grass verge of the memorial that it was in danger of being overcrowded. Instead, a semicircular set of low walls was constructed around the grass verge by No 21 Squadron for the unveiling of plaques and to act as an area for reflection under the cypresses that have provided shade since the 1920s. Many people visit the memorial, some ex-serving members and their families and some interested members of the public.

Throughout 2008, consultation took place for the Point Cook Redevelopment Program, which used information by the Melbourne Accommodation Review and the RAAF's Rebalance and Reshape Program that emerged under the influence of the Global Financial Crisis. The aims of the $100 million redevelopment program were to redevelop the RAAF Museum facilities, relocate Combat Support Unit Williams, No 21 Squadron and the Rifle Flight Detachment of No 1 Airfield Defence Squadron to Point Cook and provide facilities for the Air Force Band at Point Cook.[8] The Redevelopment Program assessed the risks of inaction to environment and heritage at Point Cook, noting that it was almost certain that lack of maintenance of existing assets would degrade them to a point of no return and they would become unsafe. It noted that 'further deterioration of assets will necessitate removal for safety reasons, which is contrary to the objectives of the Commonwealth Heritage List and National Heritage List'. The associated risk to Defence's reputation from public, media and political attention was also noted.[9] Funding for the program was allocated in the Green Book—the government list of proposed major public works.

To protect the heritage values of Point Cook and to ensure its future care and appropriate use, the RAAF Williams Point Cook Heritage Management Plan was published in April 2008. The plan reinforces the decisions of the Redevelopment Program and introduced the concept that the base is envisioned to be a 'Working Heritage Base' to conduct operations 'while preserving and displaying Air Force and Australian aviation history'. The plan states that, 'the aim is to "re-blue" the Base with a range of RAAF uses, functions and support'. Various proposals are authorised under the plan for adaptive re-use of heritage buildings and new purpose-built facilities.[10]

The RAAF Central Band and the RAAF Air Force Band amalgamated in 2008 to re-form the Air Force Band under the Rebalance and Reshape Program, and that program required that the newly formed band be moved to Point Cook as soon as possible. The Air Force Band remains temporarily in the substandard Central Band facilities at Laverton pending the

move to Point Cook, which was foreshadowed in the 1991 Force Structure Review to move units to Point Cook.[11] The proposal was supported by the most senior levels of the RAAF, because it collocated most of the RAAF's heritage assets in the one place—the RAAF Museum, the parade ground, the Australian Flying Corps Memorial and the Air Force Band. The Airmen's Mess and the RAAF Academy arts and military studies building were each suitable for conversion to a band facility; however, the move of the band did not eventuate due to strong resistance from the Defence Support Group. Combat Support Unit Williams and No 21 Squadron were effectively amalgamated in July 2010 under the Base Accountability Model, and the newly constituted unit moved to Point Cook.

The Victorian branch of the Australian Air Force Cadets, No 4 Wing, continues to use Point Cook as its headquarters, and No 404 Squadron of the wing moved from Laverton to Point Cook, bringing over 100 cadets onto the base each week for training. Much of No 4 Wing's leadership training is conducted at Point Cook, and the annual drill competition and parade is held on the highly significant parade ground. The wing's headquarters is in the former RAAF Academy chemistry building, which was later used as Officers' Training School headquarters. It shares the building with a Navy Reserve bay surveillance detachment.

In order to commence the Redevelopment Program, the base was cleared of occupants in all but the RAAF Museum and RAAF Academy precincts, and commercial and community tenants were evicted. Bob Eastgate, who had been invited to operate on the base in the 1970s, was required to move after claims that the hangar he rented was unsafe. He and other tenants paid $100 000 collectively in rent and were at a loss to understand why the money had not been invested in maintenance of their facilities. Local Federal Member of Parliament Julia Gillard said, 'these tenants have been treated outrageously and we are absolutely convinced there is no safety issue'.[12] The 1st Point Cook Scout Group moved to new facilities in the community, followed by the Point Cook Primary School (now Point Cook P-9 College) and the RAAF Point Cook Kindergarten, whose convenor, Mary Michelon, had served at Point Cook for 23 years. With the cessation of the Gap Year Program at the end of 2010, the RAAF Academy Cadets Mess, by then known as the Officers Mess Annex, was closed, as was the gymnasium. The last two families in the heritage married quarter precinct moved off base in 2010 and 2013.[13]

2009: new memorial plaque walls behind the Australian Flying Corps Memorial (Author)

2009: demolition program (Duncan Campbell-Wright)

2011: demolition of the 1950s Sergeants Mess dining room (Author)

2000s: Protective fencing on the historic pier (Giles Campbell-Wright)

2011: accommodation block (1918) and Officers Mess (1914) after a protective coat of paint and new guttering (Author)

2013: replica Bristol Boxkite on the day of its maiden flight on 11 September—99 years to the day after Tommy White crashed the original (RAAF)

A series of demolitions of non-heritage buildings commenced in 2010. Most of the buildings had been identified as intrusive to the heritage values of the base in the 2008 Heritage Management Plan. Public criticism had been levelled at the unoccupied brick 1980s married quarters in the north-west part of the base due to the perception of a housing shortage in the community, so they were the first buildings to be demolished in a few tranches over two years. The primary school site was cleared of the portable classrooms that gradually augmented the school over the previous decade, and the service station was taken down. The base swimming pool had already been filled in when it developed a leak a few years earlier, and the rifle range—in place since 1923—had been reduced from 600 metres to 23 metres when the local council approved the construction of a house on the private land neighbouring the south-west corner of the base. The single airwomen's quarters—still known as the WRAAFery despite the full integration of a separate women's Service 30 years earlier—and the airmen's condominiums were demolished. The officers' tennis courts and the intrusive 1957 dining room that had been added to the Sergeants Mess were demolished in 2011 along with the Airmen's Mess and associated Henry Chester Club and the Officers Mess Annex.

Along with the removal of many intrusive elements, some essential maintenance was completed in 2011, such as the erection of boundary fences and the replacement of the rotting wooden covers of the drain that crosses the airfield. The 1922 motor transport hangar lost its roof in a storm in July 2008, and after almost succumbing to the elements completely, the spiritual home of RAAF motor transport drivers was re-roofed. The local Federal Member of Parliament and Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, after lobbying from aviation heritage activist Mark Pilkington, provided over $2 million for urgent protective maintenance in 2011. Gillard said that, 'this has included urgent work on various heritage buildings to protect the buildings from deterioration and to enhance their appearance'.[14] A further $27 million has been allocated for the remediation of the former fire training ground east of the southern tarmac, and the process commenced in 2013. The $100 million Point Cook Redevelopment Plan was forecast to commence in 2015 according to former Prime Minister Julia Gillard[15], who shortly after announcing her intention not to stand for re-election in 2013 and reflecting on her most significant achievements said, 'I have been pleased to play a part in getting … the RAAF base at Point Cook saved'.[16]

Financial pressures on the Department of Defence in 2013 were considerable, and these forced the Redevelopment Plan to be postponed to commence in 2021. However, some funding will be available to make the Officers Mess functional again and to recommission some transit accomodation for visiting military staff.

The heritage listings—achieved by the hard work of many dedicated and passionate advocates—recognise the outstanding heritage value of Point Cook to Australia as the oldest continuously operating military airfield in the world and the central role it has played in the development of military and civil aviation and the formation of the RAAF.[17] The overarching Defence Heritage Strategy recognises that:

Defence owns and uses a variety of places that are significant for their cultural, Indigenous, historical, natural and social heritage values. These places are not only significant for their association with Defence and our achievements, but are also important to the broader Australian community. It is important that we manage our heritage places responsibly and openly, demonstrating to the community that we are worthy of their trust in the contribution we make to ensure a positive legacy for future generations.[18]

On 1 March 2014, Point Cook celebrates the centenary of the historic flight that marks the beginning of military aviation in Australia. That event commemorates the sacrifices of those who have dedicated themselves to Australian military aviation, and it celebrates the many achievements of the past century at Point Cook. More than any other site in the world, Point Cook embodies the spirit of military aviation in Australia.

2009: aerial shot of Point Cook

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9 ibid., pp. 7-3 – 7-4

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11 Department of Defence, 'Defence Update', May 1991, p. 14.

12 'Hangar', *Werribee Star*, 25 April 2008.

13 Warrant Officer Ross 'Frog' Chavasse and his family moved in 2010, and Squadron Leader Steve Campbell-Wright and his family moved in 2013 after living on Point Cook for 24 years.

14 Letter C12/55459: Prime Minister Julia Gillard to Rob Fox, 7 September 2012.

15 ibid.

16 Letter Julia Gillard to Janet Campbell-Wright, undated July 2013.

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2007: Caribou light transport aircraft on arrival at Point Cook (Giles Campbell-Wright)

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