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A Hero's Dilemma

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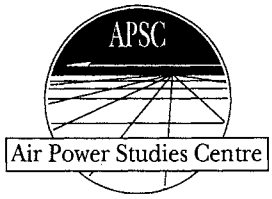

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INTRODUCTION

F.H. McNamara occupies a special place in history as the first and only Australian airman to be decorated with the Victoria Cross during the First World War. As a young lieutenant in the sole squadron of the Australian Flying Corps (AFC) serving in Palestine in 1917, he landed his aircraft to rescue a fellow officer who had been forced down in enemy territory. This exploit was hailed by the official historian of the AFC as 'a brilliant escape in the very nick of time and under hot fire', made all the more remarkable by the fact that McNamara had been badly wounded before embarking on it.[1]

McNamara's selfless act was in the finest traditions of battlefield gallantry for which the Victoria Cross was instituted, being among a clutch of such awards resulting from soldiers turning to rescue stranded comrades under fire. Indeed, no fewer than five of the six VCs won by Australian army members in the South African War of 1899-1902 were presented for feats precisely of this kind.[2] Lord Gowrie (a British VC better known to Australians as governor-general from 1936 to 1944) received his decoration the same way in Egypt in 1898, rescuing a wounded officer in the face of fire from advancing dervishes.[3]

In the 1914-18 conflict, there had been one similar instance involving a British airman before McNamara's. In November 1915 a Royal Naval Air Service pilot, Squadron Commander Richard Bell-Davies, had landed under enemy fire to lift out a colleague whose machine had been shot down during a bombing raid on a railway junction near the Maritza River, just inside Bulgaria's border with Turkey. When Davies' award was announced in the *London Gazette* the following month, the man he rescued on this occasion was also decorated for courage with the Distinguished Service Cross.[4]

Even in the air services of other western powers, comparable instances can be found. The first Congressional Medal of Honor awarded to a member of the United States Air Force went to Major Bernard F. Fisher, for an act of bravery performed at Ashau, South Vietnam, during March 1966. When the propeller-driven A-1 Skyraider flown by a fellow pilot, Major Dafford W. Myers, was hit and forced to crash-land on the airstrip immediately outside the Special Forces camp which was then under heavy ground attack, Fisher had gone to his rescue on learning that a helicopter would take 15-20 minutes to arrive on the scene. After aborting one approach, he landed in his

1 F.M. Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p. 59.
2 L. Wigmore (ed.), *They Dared Mightily*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1963, pp 18-24.
3 *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (hereafter ADB), vol 9, pp 63-4; *Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter DNB), 1951-1960, pp 506-8.
4 Chaz Bowyer, *For Valour: The Air VCs*, William Kimber, London, 1978, pp 59-60.

own Skyraider and dodged bullets, oil drums, and debris from Myers' aircraft which littered the runway. Myers rushed out from where he had been sheltering beside the strip and was dragged into the plane by Fisher, who then took off again amid a torrent of enemy fire and got away at tree-top level.[5]

What sets McNamara apart in the Australian context was the fact that he was the only VC holder to enjoy a subsequent career in the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). After being among the 21 officers who comprised the original officer corps of that service on its formation at the end of March 1921, he served for another quarter of a century before retiring soon after the Second World War. During that period he rose steadily in rank and seniority, concluding his distinguished career as an air vice-marshal with the additional honours of Companion of the Bath (CB) and Companion in the Order of the British Empire (CBE).

By the time of his departure from the RAAF another two members had also performed acts of wartime valour which won them the VC. The first of these was Flight Sergeant R.H. Middleton, who was captain and first pilot of a Stirling bomber of No. 149 Squadron, Royal Air Force (RAF), sent from England to attack the Fiat works at Turin, Italy, in November 1942. Encountering heavy anti-aircraft fire during this mission, Middleton, his co-pilot and the radio operator were all wounded. Having sustained grievous head injuries and other wounds to his body, Middleton was barely conscious as he brought his crippled machine back across the Alps with the aim of making for England where the crew would have a chance of rescue after leaving the aircraft by parachute.

On reaching the coast of Kent, Middleton ordered those of the crew who could to bale out while he maintained a course paralleling the shore. Five men were thus able to save themselves before the Stirling crashed into the sea, killing Middleton and two others who - like him - could not leave. The bodies of the latter were recovered the following day, but of Middleton there was initially no trace. By the time the award of a VC to the brave pilot was gazetted on 15 January 1943, his promotion to pilot officer's rank had also been promulgated with effect from two weeks before his death; the survivors of the final flight were each awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross or Medal, according to rank. In a sad footnote to this incident Middleton's remains were finally washed onto a Dover beach two weeks later, and interred in the churchyard of St. John's church at Mildhenhall, Suffolk.[6]

Later in 1943 Flight Lieutenant W.E. Newton became the first RAAF member serving in a RAAF unit and under RAAF control to receive the VC, unusually though for more than a single action. As a pilot with No. 22 Squadron in New Guinea from May 1942, he had taken part in more than 50 sorties against Japanese positions. Many of these missions had been on important targets at the vital enemy coastal base at Salamaua, and it was here on 16 March 1943 that he showed great courage in maintaining his attack after his Boston bomber suffered repeated hits from groundfire. As a result of his action the raid was a success, resulting in the destruction of many buildings and dumps, including two fuel installations. Despite severe damage to his aircraft Newton managed to reach his base in safety and successfully land.

Undaunted by this experience, two days later he returned to Salamaua to attack a heavily defended target. With characteristic determination he carried through with his

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[5] John Slight, *The United States Air Force in South-east Asia: The War in South Vietnam: The Years of the Offensive 1965-68*, Office of Air Force History, USAF, Washington DC, 1988, p 200.

[6] Wigmore, *They Dared Mightily*, pp 245-7.

mission despite being subjected to sustained groundfire, achieving his objective at the same time that his Boston burst into flames. Calmly turning his machine away from the target area while paralleling the shore for as long as possible, eventually he was forced to put the crippled machine down into the sea. Other members of the attacking force reported seeing two of the three-man crew escape the wreck and swim ashore, but it was initially believed that Newton was not one of these. In fact he was, and he and his companion were held as captives of the Japanese for ten days before both were barbarously executed. In the belief that he had already perished, Newton was recommended for the VC and the award gazetted in October. Evidence of his fate was only discovered when his remains were recovered following the allied recapture of Salamaua six months after his death.[7]

The posthumous nature of these two Victoria Cross awards meant that McNamara remained the only hero of this calibre which the RAAF could boast even after the Second World War. One other VC winner of Australian birth, H.I. Edwards, had also survived the conflict just ended, but his connection with the RAAF was tangential in comparison. He had enlisted in the RAAF in 1935 and undergone flying training at Point Cook the following year, but he was among nearly 150 Australian officer pilots passed across to the RAF in the pre-1939 period. It was, therefore, as a wing commander of No. 105 Squadron of the British service that on 4 July 1941 he led the daring low-level attack on the heavily defended German port of Bremen by twelve Blenheim bombers which resulted in his award.[8] While he later returned to his native country, serving as Governor of Western Australia in 1974-75 as Air Commodore Sir Hughie Edwards, he had no special connection with the service which initially launched his distinguished career.

As a consequence of all these factors, McNamara was - and remains - unique in the true sense of the word. A career such as his might well have formed the fitting subject of a biography long ago. McNamara may not be the first, or even the only one, to have discovered that a single act of great gallantry could change the course of his life, for better and for worse. The status of VC winner has taken many quite ordinary men and presented them with opportunities beyond their wildest dreams, and often beyond their true capabilities - but at a cost, not least in terms of becoming public icons expected to live up to an unrealistic image. In his case the dilemma represented by this transformation was compounded by being a solitary symbol within a whole branch of a nation's armed forces.

In presenting this account of Air Vice-Marshal McNamara's life, I am grateful to have received the cooperation of my subject's son, Mr Robert McNamara, a retired civil engineer living in England. Through his generosity, it has been possible to flesh out the story of his father's life and career by supplementing official records with information from the papers and photographs which the Air Vice-Marshal left on his death 35 years ago. In addition to passing on personal recollections which he has retained, he checked minor points where necessary with his mother, the Air Vice-Marshal's widow, who passed away on 12 February 1996 at the age of 94 shortly after the writing of the text was completed.

At the Historical Section of the Department of Defence (Air Office) in Canberra, ready access to records was provided by the Assistant RAAF Historian, Mr David Wilson, while the staff of the RAAF Museum at Point Cook was also unstinting

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[7] *ibid.*, pp 248-50.
[8] *ibid.*, pp 227-30.

in the assistance they gave to me. The copying of some of the illustrations included here was generously undertaken by Wing Commander Graham Walton at the Central Photographic Establishment at RAAF Base Williams, Victoria. The Librarian at Rushworth Secondary College, Mrs Floss Holschier, made available the records held there on one of that school's most distinguished past students.

Valuable assistance must also be acknowledged from a number of other researchers who shared with me various materials which they have gathered over the years, especially Mr Anthony Staunton, Mr Colin Owers, Mr Norm Clifford and Wing Commander Mark Lax. From England, Mr Chaz Bowyer very kindly sent me copies of the research notes he used in writing his 1978 book on air VC winners. While expressing gratitude for their contributions, I must stress that I remain solely responsible for all opinions and interpretations expressed in this biography. It is hoped nonetheless that the fruits of my research presents a fuller portrait of a figure remarkably little-known to RAAF members today despite his prominence in the force just 50 years ago.

CHAPTER ONE

Obscure origins

The story of Frank McNamara begins in the country town of Rushworth, situated in the very heart of Victoria about 160 kilometres north of Melbourne but still 75 kilometres short of the New South Wales border at Echuca. Not on any main highway, it is a sleepy, widely-spreadout village hidden away in a slight hollow between the largest ironbark forest in the State and the Waranga reservoir, roughly mid-way between the major rural centres of Shepparton and Bendigo.

Like many other such towns, Rushworth has been slowly dying for much of the twentieth century, with a population steadily falling from some 1250 at the end of the Second World War to only 950 by 1986. In recent years there has been a revival of interest in living in small towns surrounding centres like Bendigo and Shepparton while commuting to work in these places,[1] and the number of people in Rushworth has stabilised at about 1000.

For all this, the place is not without historical significance, with a past dating back to the goldrush days of the 1850s when the undulating hills which surround it were awash with the precious mineral. Known as the Wet Diggings after the first discoveries were made in 1853, the township reputedly acquired its more euphonious name when Richard Horne (an erratic goldfields official better known as a poet)[2] notified superiors that in his opinion the deposits there made for 'a rush worthwhile coming to'.[3]

While not one of the bigger fields, Rushworth nonetheless prospered nicely. By 1858 the southern end of the present main street comprised a large police camp and a wooden courthouse, five hotels, two breweries, twenty tradesmen's shops and seven large stores, gold brokers and two banks. By the 1880s the town boasted fourteen substantial buildings, some of which were two-storey - all constructed from locally-kilned red bricks and regarded as architectural gems of their day. In recognition of the town's special character, still very much in evidence, in 1983 its central precinct was designated an urban conservation area by the National Trust.

As mining activity in the district declined in profitability, a thriving industry developed based on harvesting timber from the Moormbool Forest (or the Rushworth State Forest as it is now known) which stretches away to the south of the town. The

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1 *Age*, 10 January 1994.
2 *ADB*, vol 4, p 424.
3 J.G. Hammond, *The Golden Years of Rushworth and Whroo*, J.G. Hammond, Rushworth, 1978, p 6.

coming of the railway in 1890, apart from shifting the centre of business from the southern to the northern end of the main street, meant that the extensive stands of black ironbark eucalypt - a tree type ideally suited to the low rainfall and hot dry summers which are characteristic of the climate - became valuable as a source of durable termite-proof sleepers, along with fencing poles and firewood. At one time there were no fewer than seven sawmills in the town, one of which is still in operation. A tanning industry using wattle-bark also sprang up, and a distillery was begun in 1892 to process the strippings from mallee eucalypts.[4]

Early farmers found the soil poor and better suited to open grazing than agriculture. In 1908, however, the construction of a seven kilometre retaining wall turned the nearby Waranga Swamp into a large water basin covering fifty-nine square kilometres. Irrigation from this enabled mixed farming - dairies and orchards mostly - to be productively carried on in part of the district, while the reservoir has also come to serve as a popular focus for water sports and other recreational activities. Apart from these attractions, Rushworth still remains popular with prospectors and fossickers who keep alive a link with the town's golden past.

It was gold which brought the McNamaras to Victoria and the Bendigo region, and forestry which eventually linked them to Rushworth. Rich finds of alluvial gold at Mount Buninyong (Ballarat) in September 1851 were followed by even more fabulous discoveries at Mount Alexander (Castlemaine), Sandhurst (Bendigo) and half a dozen lesser fields. The arrival in Britain during April and May 1852 of six ships carrying an astonishing eight tons of gold put Australia's name on everyone's lips in Europe and America. Before that year was out, gold to the value of nearly twenty million pounds Sterling - a sum worth well over a billion dollars at today's values - had been exported from the Australian colonies, eighty-five per cent of it from Victoria alone.[5]

The effect overseas was immediate, bringing a wave of immigration which broke onto Melbourne in September 1852. In the space of a single decade, the population of the colony of Victoria multiplied sevenfold and Melbourne became both Australia's largest city and financial centre. Most of the new arrivals initially came from the British Isles. Ireland in particular had already been providing a steady supply of immigrants for some years, as a consequence of the disastrous famine experienced there. For eight successive seasons from 1845 the potato crop, the food staple of the ordinary population, failed to some degree or other because of blight. One million deaths resulted, but no less momentous was the departure of more than another million of Ireland's people during these years. Few families escaped the pressure for 'surplus' members to emigrate. The famine was an event which shattered Irish society, breaking national morale and reducing what remained to 'a rag of a nation'.

Nowhere were the effects of famine felt worse than in Ireland's southern province of Munster. The depressed counties of Tipperary, Clare, Limerick, Kerry, Cork and Waterford supplied both America and Australia with more emigrants than any other region. In Clare, for example - the picturesque area on the south-west coast sandwiched between Galway Bay and the Shannon estuary - there were more than 50,000 famine-related deaths over five years, and half as many departures had reduced the population to 212,000 by 1851.[6] Between 1851 and 1855, another 37,000

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[4] H.W. Forster, *Waranga 1865-1965*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1965, p 85.

[5] Gordon Greenwood (ed.), *Australia: a social and political history*, Angus & Robertson, 1974, p 99.

[6] James G. Ryan, *Irish Records: Sources for Family & Local History*, Ancestry Publishing, Salt Lake City, 1988, p 60.

emigrated from this one county alone - mostly people of peasant stock with little money, education or skill, forced off their land by poverty and starvation.

Among those from County Clare who reached Victoria in 1852 was John McNamara. The following year he gave his age on his marriage certificate as 25, but later statements he made on this point suggest that he may have been younger - perhaps only 20 when he landed in the colony. While many of his countrymen arriving at this time were 'working-class and penniless', it cannot be stated with certainty that the straitened circumstances of his homeland - rather than the lure of gold - was what brought him to Australia's shores, although this seems most likely. Apart from the fact that he came from Clare where his parents William and Bridget (nee Mulqueeny) were farmers, little is known of his origins. Unfortunately, the state of Irish records and the relative commonness of the McNamara surname make it difficult to establish very much about the family background.

Clare is the traditional homeland of the McNamaras, who are among the old Dalcassian families prominent in Gaelic times when the county was part of the kingdom of Thomond. According to tradition, the McNamaras possessed no less than fifty-seven castles and fortresses but were largely dispossessed in the 1640s after the Catholic rebellion against English rule was ruthlessly crushed by Cromwell. The family was undoubtedly once the most important and powerful sept or clan after the O'Briens, to whom they were hereditary marshals and whose chief - often the King of Thomond - they had the privilege of inaugurating. Because of this long history, Clare's past is richly populated with persons of the McNamara name.[7]

After the 1850s, the component of Victoria's population made up of Irish Catholic immigrants was boosted to between one-fifth and a quarter. Ballarat and Sandhurst were the chosen destinations of thousands of new arrivals to the goldfields, so it is no surprise that one Bendigo historian noted the high proportion of that town's early population which was made up of Irish diggers.[8] Since John McNamara's first two children - daughters named Bridget and Ellen - were born here in 1854 and 1855, he was apparently among those who witnessed the phenomenal growth of Sandhurst in its first years, watching as the landscape was quickly transformed by the exertions of 20,000 gold-hungry diggers. This is not to say, however, that he was simply one among all these hopefuls; indeed, the evidence suggests that his story was a great deal more involved, and interesting.

When he married, on 24 November 1853, John McNamara stated that his usual residence was in Melbourne. The wedding itself was celebrated in the Church of St. Francis, Melbourne's first Catholic church standing at the corner of Elizabeth and Lonsdale Streets. His bride was Johanna McGrath (although in later years she went by the name of Jane), who lived in the Melbourne suburb of St. Kilda and was employed as a domestic servant. She was the daughter of Anthony McGrath - another Clare farmer - and his wife Ellen (nee McNamara), and at age twenty-two may have been a year or two older than her new husband despite what the records show.[9]

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7 According to E. MacLysaght, *Irish Families: Their Names, Arms and Origins,* Allen Figgis, Dublin, 1972, p 239, McNamara has second place in the numerical list of surnames in Clare, while *Burke's Irish Family Records,* Burke's Peerage Ltd, London, 1976, p 760, states that in 1890 it was the 94th commonest surname in all of Ireland.

8 F. Cusack, *Bendigo: a history,* Heinemann, Melbourne, 1973, p 56.

9 Marriage certificate No. 854 of 1853: Victorian registry of Births, Deaths & Marriages (Vic BD&M).

At this juncture - a year after his arrival in the colony - John McNamara declared his occupation to be that of 'carter'. So although he may have tried his luck on the diggings for a short time, as many did, it is clear that he was not engaged in the lottery of making a fortune from finding gold. In this he was displaying a shrewd realism, since few of those in the camps ever made more than ordinary wages - especially after the surface gold was quickly exhausted and activity moved into 'deep lead' mining.

Supplying the goldfields with food and other essential items was a much more profitable enterprise than digging itself. Driving the slow bullock drays which freighted goods over the unmade tracks connecting Melbourne with the bustling new settlements paid high wages, since prices charged to miners were exorbitant. Transport costs in October 1852 rocketed to one hundred and sixty pounds per ton, resulting in water often being sold for up to five shillings a bucket, flour for twenty pounds a hundredweight. Being part of this lucrative trade ensured that John McNamara was, within a couple of years, well on the way to making a decent life for himself in Victoria.

Although the picture which emerges is far from clear, it seems highly likely that young McNamara did not come to Australia on his own. Nor indeed did his wife, who arrived - apparently in 1852 - with two sisters, Susan and Bridget, and an elder brother Patrick, who was unmarried though aged thirty-three. There are indications that they may have first disembarked in Sydney before moving on to Victoria a year later,[10] in which case John McNamara's movements might have followed a similar path. The coincidence that the maiden name of Jane McGrath's mother was McNamara suggests that she and her brother and sisters may actually have been cousins of John McNamara, and that all of them perhaps came from the same part of County Clare. Vague family information points to a connection with Killadysert, an area overlooking the Shannon. Certainly what followed leaves no doubt that they were merely the vanguard of a large-scale and probably well-planned exodus from Ireland by members of both families, something which represented a pattern repeated many times around Australia in this period.

Within two years John McGrath, another brother of Jane who was aged thirty and single, also reached Victoria.[11] A year later came John McNamara's brother Denis, aged about four years older than John, arriving with his new wife Mary (nee Quealy) whom he married shortly before embarkation.[12] These additions immediately made their way to the Bendigo district, following the trail blazed by their kinsfolk. By this stage a new phase in the history of the two clans' transplantation was about to begin.

In February 1856 John McNamara was among the large number of Irish immigrants who took up farms on the flat, open plains along the Campaspe River when this area was opened up for settlement. He became the owner of a seventy-seven acre block south of the McIvor Road (or Highway as it is now called) which heads towards Melbourne, about 13 kilometres east of the centre of Bendigo. Since the early 1900s this district has been known as Longlea, but at that time took its name from either of the two main watercourses dissecting it: Axe Creek or its tributary Sweeny's Creek. The original holding he occupied was a short distance south of the railway station, a bit

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10 Death certificate No. 102 of 1875: Vic BD&M.

11 *Bendigo Advertiser*, 22 April 1914.

12 Death certificate No. 10390 of 1890: Vic BD&M.

over a kilometre from the highway, on a side road originally known as Spain's Lane but marked on modern maps as Bowles Road. Here a brick house was constructed on a site still marked by a mulberry tree and a peppercorn tree.

In July 1864 Patrick McGrath followed John onto the land out here, purchasing an adjoining sixty-eight acre block. In March 1868 Denis McNamara came too, acquiring an eighty acre block, and in March 1873 John McGrath put down roots by selecting a fifty-eight acre block a few miles away to the east. Also joining them on nearby farms were the McGrath sisters, Bridget (who became Mrs O'Grady) and Susan (Mrs Doherty). Each arrived in the area within a few years of marrying, and raised families here.

In the seventeen years after John and Jane McNamara moved to Axe Creek, they also added another eight children to their family, including four boys - the second of whom, born on 9 October 1863, was called William Francis. As the number of children grew, John expanded the size of his land holdings in the district, so that within a few years five more parcels totalling about one hundred and fifty acres were recorded in the name of 'J. McNamara'. The others in this family enclave did the same, with Denis McNamara acquiring another two hundred and fifty-six acres, Patrick McGrath and his wife Catherine a further one hundred and seventy acres between them, and John McGrath over four hundred and seventy acres.

The country along the Campaspe was a far cry from County Clare, with hot dusty summers on the plains replacing wild and chilly Arctic storms blowing in from the Atlantic against a spectacular coastline. Although making a livelihood off the land was harsh and unpredictable amid bushfires, droughts and floods, the little Irish community generally flourished. The women acted as midwives at each other's confinements and supported one another in many other ways, the menfolk also banded together whenever there were tasks requiring joint effort. In such an atmosphere there appears to have been little lingering resentment of the circumstances which had compelled the abandonment of homes in Clare, especially in comparison to the burning anger directed at Ireland's British rulers among many who fled the famine to America. The Australian-born generation of McNamaras seem to have known few details of their parents' former lives in their native land.[13]

Occasionally, though, there were still reminders of how precarious existence could be in Australia. On 18 October 1858 John and Jane McNamara suffered the loss of their first-born, Bridget, who died of convulsions before she could be taken to a doctor,[14] followed by another daughter named Kate who died of an intestinal disorder on 30 November 1869 at the age of nine.[15] Denis and Mary McNamara similarly lost at least two sons in infancy.[16]

In February 1875 Patrick McGrath died from cancer of the ear which he had suffered for the previous two years. After more than 25 years as a farmer in the district, John McNamara's life also came to a tragic end in 1886. He had become involved in a legal dispute with James Duff, licensee of the Royal Oak Hotel on the McIvor Road, over the hire of a horse and tray - a matter scheduled to be heard in the Bendigo City Police Court on 25 August. The evening before their court appearance, McNamara called at Duff's premises to discuss their differences. A row ensued, during

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13 When John McNamara died, his children could not even recall his mother's name for the death certificate.

14 Death certificate No. 8870 of 1858: Vic BD&M.

15 Death certificate No. 8244 of 1869: Vic BD&M.

16 One named John was born and died in 1859, and the other named Thomas died in 1864 aged 1.

which the latter was alleged to have punched McNamara in the face, knocked him onto a woodpile and then kicked him in the ribs.[17]

In court the following day McNamara was a sorry-looking sight, sporting a cut nose and obviously in considerable pain. After the case was adjourned for a week to enable witnesses to be produced, he instructed his attorney to initiate proceedings against Duff for unlawful assault and also asked to be taken to his doctor. It was found that this man was out of Bendigo at the time, however, so he was taken home and put to bed. As his condition was plainly serious, another doctor was called in and found that he was suffering three broken ribs and other injuries.

When he failed to respond to treatment, McNamara's regular physician was finally summoned on 29 August. Only then was it realised that he was beyond recovery. The broken ribs had punctured his lungs, pleurisy had set in, and the general shock to his system had affected his heart. The following day a Justice of the Peace was called to take his dying depositions, and that afternoon he lapsed into unconsciousness. At 1 pm the next day, 31 August, he died.[18]

It was John's twenty-three year-old son, William, who took the matter to the police and caused a warrant to be issued for the arrest of Duff. The latter had taken himself off to Melbourne, and it was on the platform of Spencer Street railway station that he was taken into custody on the evening of 31 August. Brought before the Metropolitan Police Court the next day, he was remanded to appear before an inquest convened at Bendigo by the district coroner and returned there by train that same evening.

At the inquest's first session on the afternoon of 1 September, a post mortem was conducted in the McNamara home at Axe Creek and a fourteen-man jury empanelled at the quaintly named Perseverance Hotel a kilometre away. The hearing took only such medical evidence, however, as enabled the coroner to instruct the burial of McNamara's remains in the Roman Catholic cemetery at nearby Axedale the next day.[19] Following several adjournments, the inquest was eventually concluded on 15 October. After deliberating for about forty-five minutes the jury decided that, while it was clear the victim had died from pleurisy and pneumonia which was accelerated by the fracturing of his ribs, there was insufficient evidence to establish what caused his injuries. The case against Duff was, accordingly, not expected to proceed further.[20]

The pattern of life which had prevailed until John McNamara's sad demise seemingly remained unchanged for quite some time. Denis McNamara also passed on in July 1890, a victim of Bright's disease - a degenerative kidney ailment - aged sixty-one,[21] but John McGrath did not die until April 1914 at the advanced age of ninety. The land holdings which had been accumulated around Longlea remained with descendants well into the twentieth century, and some at least are still in family hands.[22]

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17 *Bendigo Advertiser*, 1 September 1886.
18 Death certificate No. 11493 of 1886: Vic BD&M.
19 *Bendigo Advertiser*, 2 September 1886.
20 *Bendigo Advertiser*, 4, 17, 18 September, 15, 16 October 1886.
21 *Bendigo Advertiser*, 14 July 1890.
22 Information of Mr A.D. McGrath, January 1996.

For the family which John McNamara left behind in 1886, however, his death at the relatively young age of fifty-three signalled some important changes, even though all except three of his eight surviving children had reached their adulthood and the youngest was aged thirteen. Management of the farm most likely devolved on 30-year-old son John, who also would have assumed responsibility for the widowed Jane during the remaining twenty-seven years of her life.

William meanwhile, as the second son, took employment with the Victorian civil service in December 1887, initially as an assistant letter-carrier in the Postmaster-General's Department.[23] Transferring to the Department of Lands and Survey, in October 1889 he was appointed Forester and Crown Lands bailiff for the Shire of Rodney, based at Rushworth,[24] where his duties included controlling activity within the Moormbool Forest. Before any timber was cut permission had to be obtained from him,[25] and he was also responsible for collecting fees payable on each tree felled.

On 9 November 1892 William McNamara was married in Bendigo to Rosanna Josephine O'Meara, the third daughter of an Irish couple originally from Tipperary who were then living at Heathcote, a town about thirty kilometres further along the McIvor Highway from Axedale. Taking up residence at Rushworth, the couple initially lived in Horne Street - a short section of road running off behind the Waranga Shire Hall at the southern end of the main street. This contained only half a dozen weatherboard cottages, and the town's original fire brigade hall built during the 1890s. It was here that Rosanna gave birth to their first child, a son named Francis Hubert, on 4 April 1894.[26]

Later, the McNamaras moved to another home on the Murchison Road beside the railway line, just opposite the gates to the town's saleyards. This was a large, solid brick house of six or seven rooms, situated in an elevated position with a paddock sloping down to the road leading to Tatura. Before the family moved from here, another eight children (six boys and two girls) followed, however not all these survived childhood. On 11 October 1902 the fourth child - a boy named William Augustine, but known as 'Gus' - died of blood poisoning, aged just four.[27]

What is known of Frank McNamara's childhood is indicative of a spirited boy with a considerable love of adventure, and something of a leader's talent for creating mischief. Coming from a devout Irish Catholic family, for instance, attendance at Mass was an invariable part of Sunday routine, even if for children the service seemed boring and longwinded. On one occasion young Frank contrived to liven up proceedings, priming his fellow occupants in the front pew to respond loudly in unison with 'Amen' several seconds before the rest of the congregation, or even before the priest had finished speaking. This at least attained the desired objective of being sent outside early to play, although less welcome was the chastisement by embarrassed parents which followed.[28]

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23 *Victorian Government Gazette*, 1888, p 343.
24 *Victorian Government Gazette*, 1890, p 465, 1894, p 477.
25 Forster, *Waranga 1865-1965*, pp 85-6.
26 *ADB*, vol. 10, p 348, and information on file at the *ADB* office, ANU, Canberra.
27 Death certificate No. 15590 of 1902: Vic BD&M.
28 Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 4 January 1996.

The McNamara home at Rushworth, as it was in the 1970s. When the family left the town in 1908, Frank was the eldest of eight children (one having already died) and two more were yet to come.

On another Sunday in winter, Frank and his brother Leo (who was just fifteen months younger) were ill with measles or colds, or a similar ailment which caused them to be left home alone while their parents went to Mass. It was William and Rosanna McNamara's custom to invite friends home after the service for a glass of port and arrowroot biscuits, and before they set off they laid out the decanters, glasses and plates for this entertainment on small tables. The dismay of parents and guests can be imagined when they returned home to find the contents of the tables already partially consumed and several wall pictures, statues and ornaments broken about the room. Initial thoughts turned to burglary, until both boys were found 'passed out' on the floor holding broomsticks.[29]

A form of weekend distraction adopted by Frank and Leo was the roasting of potatoes over an open fire lit furtively out of the sight of adults - a necessary precaution since they were not supposed to have matches. A preferred site for such activity was the town's railyards, where there was an abundant supply of wood available. On one occasion the 'spuds' were almost ready for eating when the yard foreman discovered them, and chased them off in a threatening manner with a piece of timber in his hand. After the boys were sure he had gone, they decided to exact revenge for the spoiling of their innocent afternoon's lark. They removed the brake chocks on several loaded timber wagons that were sitting on a sloping sidetrack

[29] Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 4 January 1996.

waiting to be hauled away, allowing these to roll back down to the buffer stop at the end of the line where a few logs were shed but no other damage caused. For several weeks afterwards it was matter of avoiding the foreman whenever he was encountered about town and, although he never caught them and eventually gave up interest, they opted for more secure spots for their bake-outs in future.[30]

Plans for activity of this kind may have been behind another incident which, according to a younger sister, occurred in about 1905 when Frank was aged ten or eleven. A Sunday afternoon which he and Leo spent bushwalking with other boys in the abandoned Whroo mining area just south of Rushworth resulted in the party becoming lost. After they failed to return home by 9 pm, the town's firebell sounded the alarm and search parties were assembled. When found about midnight, it was discovered that Frank had taken charge of the group and organised its members:

> Some were instructed to gather light sticks to start a fire - Frank had matches (something forbidden) - others were sent to find water and the rest had to clear an area where the fire could be safely lit. By some incredible luck a small rabbit was caught. This was skinned, cleaned and hung up to be cooked in the morning. The evening allowance was a division of the contents of a bag of lollies and some crumbly biscuits that one boy had provided. The fire helped their morale and Frank detailed who would sleep and who would be on watch. As it grew dark he told them all to kneel down and say prayers (somewhat out of character).[31]

Perhaps Frank's proclivity for landing in trouble encouraged his parents to try finding means of channelling his youthful zest. Recognised from early on as a clever child with great curiosity, his mother was prompted - 'in desperation', it is said - to allow him the use of the family's very large Webster's Dictionary from the age of seven. Parental exasperation may also explain the holidays which he and Leo spent at the Longlea Vale farm of their father's sister, Mary (known as May), who was married to William Doak - some of these stays being long enough to justify Frank attending the local state school.

With such a boy, early enrolment in school must have seemed an attractive option and may explain later claims that he gained his merit certificate from the Rushworth State School (which he normally attended) 'at a very early age'. By all accounts, he was a gifted student who topped his classes and won several outside competitions. Also a pupil at Rushworth in this period - though a couple of years his junior - was a frail boy named George Jones, who would eventually become head of the Royal Australian Air Force in which McNamara was himself to make his mark. Another student - in this case two years older than him - was Roy Hodgson, the headmaster's son, who initially pursued a career as an army officer before becoming head of the Department of External Affairs in the late 1930s and, later, Australia's diplomatic representative successively to France, Japan and South Africa.[32]

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[30] Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 4 January 1996.

[31] Information of Mrs Mary McGregor, 1988, held by Rushworth Secondary College.

[32] G. Jones, *From Private to Air Marshal: the autobiography of Air Marshal Sir George Jones KBE, CB, DFC,* Greenhouse Publications, Richmond Vic, 1988, p 5.

Dating from 1872, the Rushworth State School - now Rushworth Secondary College - was attended by McNamara until 1908.

As a person holding a responsible position within the local community, Frank's father was active in public affairs apart from in his official capacity. In 1898, for instance, he joined the Rushworth branch of the Australian Natives' Association, and two years later became its president.[33] Although originally created as a friendly society with objectives akin to a medical benefits fund of today, at the time the ANA was a powerful voice on issues of national policy and played a prominent role in shaping public opinion.

In 1908 William McNamara was transferred to Shepparton, already a sizeable and growing town situated beside the Goulburn River forty kilometres north-west of Rushworth, where his duties involved supervising the opening up of blocks of land for fruitgrowing and closer settlement through the introduction of irrigation. Residence was taken up in the centre of town, in Nixon Street which also contained the town hall and council chambers, and during the family's stay another daughter was added to its already large size. During the several years spent here, William was elected to the state board of directors of the ANA and became known as a keen advocate of afforestation, water conservation, underground water research and irrigation. Meanwhile Frank continued his studies at the local state school before winning a scholarship to the Shepparton Agricultural High School, opened only in 1909.

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[33] J.E. Menadue, *A Centenary History of the Australian Natives' Association 1871-1971*, Horticultural Press, Melbourne, 1971, p 356.

Again, Frank's sister records his success as a student and the special talents he displayed in science, mathematics and languages:

> His keen desire for knowledge led later to his attempting to invent all sorts of strange electrical gadgets, setting up of electric bells and electric shocks (fortunately, all battery charged), and an elementary telephone system between our place and a neighbouring friend's house. Apparently he always had the qualities of a leader, and our place at Shepparton seemed to be a meeting place for groups of boys viewing his strange collection of 'inventions'. His bedroom was a weird place where batteries, wires and gadgets had pride of place.

Interest in scientific gadgetry still frequently combined with a mischievous nature to produce some startling results. Having mastered the principle behind the carbide lamps used on early cars and buggies, he used this knowledge to manufacture a device with which he booby-trapped the family 'out-house' (or separate outside toilet). When someone using the facility sat down, they risked being surprised by the loud bang of an exploding gas bottle and an unpleasant stench. On another occasion, a disturbance in the henhouse of the Doak farm at Longlea about 3 am created fears of a marauding fox having got in amongst the chickens - until wires were discovered around the perches which led back to Frank's room, where it was found that he had rigged an alarm clock to batteries and an ignition coil under his bed.[34]

About 1910 William McNamara gained promotion to his Department's head office in Melbourne, and the family moved again.[35] In October the next year he was made deputy to the chief land valuer in the department, and as a very senior officer was now able to afford to buy a house in Royal Parade, South Caulfield. The residence was called 'Moondyne', although whether this was the choice of the previous owners is unknown. If the name was given by the McNamaras, this may be an indication that the family still retained some broad identification with Irish nationalist sentiments.[36]

In August 1912 still another child (a son named Maurice James) was born into the family, and that same year William McNamara was elected as Chief President of the ANA organisation. Although only serving a one-year term, he remained on the board until 1917, and in the meantime he also became chief inspector of the Victorian Wheat Commission about 1915.[37]

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34 Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 4 January 1996.

35 *Victorian Government Gazette*, 1912, p 405.

36 Moondyne is the Aboriginal name for a region of Western Australia north of the Avon River, some sixty kilometres north-east of Perth, these days more commonly called Lower Chittering. Since the family had no known connection with this district, it can only be assumed that use of the name alluded to the bushranger who once roamed here as 'Moondyne Joe'. Although this man was Welsh, not Irish, he served as the model for the colourful hero of a popular novel by J.B. O'Reilly published in 1879 under the title *Moondyne*. O'Reilly, a Fenian revolutionary transported to Western Australia for sedition, had escaped from his convict chains in 1869 in an American whaler and settled in Boston, from where he added to his reputation by helping to organise the escape of a further six Irish political prisoners from Fremantle gaol in 1876 aboard another American whaler called *Catalpa* (see *ADB*, vol. 5, pp. 371-2).

37 *Age*, 7 February 1918.

The Board of Directors of the Australian Natives Association elected in 1912, with W.F. McNamara (Chief President) seated in the front row, fourth from left.

As a consequence of the family's move to Melbourne, Frank completed his education at the Melbourne Continuation (High) School during 1910. Armed with his Senior Public School Certificate, the next year he launched himself on a teaching career. On 1 March 1911, still a month off his seventeenth birthday, he joined the State Education Department as a junior teacher.[38] He spent the next twelve months back in Shepparton, at the town's only primary school, but in March 1912 he was transferred to the inner Melbourne suburb of Princes Hill.[39]

On 1 February 1913 Frank was admitted to the two-year course leading to award of a Trained Teacher's Certificate. This entailed a year of study at Melbourne University, taking first-year Science subjects (Natural Philosophy and Chemistry), along with Mathematics and French,[40] followed by a further year's attendance at the Teachers Training College at Carlton. After graduating with his certificate at the end of 1914, from January the next year he found himself rotated through a number of schools in rapid succession as a relief teacher.

Until 10 April McNamara was assigned to the primary school at Red Bluff (about ten kilometres west of the present location of Tallangatta, on the shores of the Hume Reservoir outside Albury-Wodonga). His position here was described as 'temporary head teacher', a designation which meant little since he was actually the

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38 L.J. Blake (ed.), *Vision and Realisation: Centenary History of State Education in Victoria,* vol. 1, Education Department of Victoria, Melbourne, 1973, p 1291.

39 Information supplied by School Personnel Services Support Unit, Directorate of School Education, Victoria, 2 January 1996.

40 *University of Melbourne War Record 1914-18,* p 205.

sole teacher on the staff.[41] For the next six weeks he was at Mordialloc, a bayside suburb of Melbourne, before being sent to Boolarra in Gippsland, about thirty kilometres south-west of Morwell - again as temporary head (only) teacher. After teaching here throughout June, for a further month he was transferred in the same capacity to North Koo-wee-rup (a small town on the northern fringe of Westernport Bay).

While McNamara was still completing his training at the Teachers College, the First World War had begun in August 1914. Events associated with that distant conflict were now to intervene and change both the shape and direction of his life, which so far seemed to be pointing towards a worthy but relatively unremarkable future in the state school system. The fact was, however, that from the moment on embarking on his teaching career he had also been following a dual path as a part-time soldier.

Initially he had no choice in this, as the introduction of compulsory military training across Australia from 1 July 1911 affected all men of his age group and required that he enrol in the Senior Cadets. Under the new system, as soon as he attained the age of 18 he would be transferred across to the militia forces which comprised the mainstay of the Australian Army. Accordingly, on 1 June 1912 he was allotted to the 46th Infantry Battalion (Brighton Rifles) which was the unit drawing its members from the area that included the suburb of Caulfield where he lived with his parents.

McNamara evidently took his military duties seriously and was rewarded a year later when, on 1 July 1913, he received a commission as Second Lieutenant and reportedly assumed duties as the unit's adjutant.[42] He was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant two years later, on 1 July 1915. By that stage, he was actively embarked on his teaching career. No doubt the turbulence involved in frequent changes of schools during the first half of 1915 reflected the Education Department's need to find replacements at short notice for teachers who enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), as one historian records that the Department employed 1500 men aged 18-45 when the war began and half of them volunteered for overseas war service.[43]

Although not initially swept up in the mobilisation for war, McNamara still found that the obligations of his part-time military career greatly increased. The period immediately following his graduation from Teachers College became doubly hectic for him, because he also spent considerable time in uniform. In December 1914, for example, he attended a course at the Officers Training School at Broadmeadows, the huge makeshift Army camp on the north-west outskirts of Melbourne, and during May 1915 also carried out instructional duty at the AIF Training Depot in the camp.[44] By one account he also spent some time during the latter month in the forts at Queenscliff and Point Nepean, which protected the sea approaches to Melbourne.[45]

Finally, in August, the juggling of multiple demands on his energies and attention came to an end. Having applied on 17 July to attend a course in military aeronautics, he was selected and ordered to report to Point Cook, some thirty kilometres south-west of Melbourne, where the Army-run Central Flying School (CFS) was located. He now went on leave from the Education Department and was able to

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41 Information on *ADB* file.
42 Wigmore, *They Dared Mightily*, p 73.
43 Blake, *Vision and Realisation.*
44 AA (Canb), CRS A2023, item A38/7/95.
45 Wigmore, *They Dared Mightily.*

devote himself wholly to military pursuits. What had hitherto been a quite unremarkable life, one headed for a future which held promise of little out of the ordinary, was about to take a dramatic turn.

McNamara pictured about 1913, when aged 19. In that year he was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the Brighton Rifles.

CHAPTER TWO

On active service

Precisely what it was that prompted McNamara to apply for flying training can now only be surmised. One possibility which exists is that his interest was fuelled by the example of an officer friend in his militia unit, Lieutenant A. Murray Jones, who earlier completed a pilot's course in June 1915.[1] In much the same way yet a third officer of the 46th Battalion, Harry Cobby, was later to claim that the previous examples of Jones and McNamara had inspired him to embark on the famous career which saw him become the top fighter ace of the Australian Flying Corps (AFC).[2]

Perhaps the urge to enlist stemmed from pressures placed on young males of military age by public 'flagwavers', or more likely just pure patriotism within the McNamara family itself. On 3 April 1916 Frank's brother Leo also applied to join the AIF, with his parents' consent since he was still two months short of turning twenty-one. He was not formally attested until 8 May, and during this interval Irish separatists had staged the Easter uprising in Dublin which was quickly and brutally suppressed by British troops. Any reservations which he or other family members subsequently had regarding Australia's part in the war are not recorded. In October Leo embarked for England as a gunner with other reinforcements destined for the 8th Field Artillery Brigade.[3]

Whatever reason might account for Frank's keenness to get away to the war, it does not explain his choice of the AFC as his means of doing so. Although he lacked any demonstrated prior interest in aviation, the factor which attracted the army's interest in his potential as a pilot apparently was the fact that he was already familiar with motorcycles and cars, as well as electrical appliances, and had a working knowledge of workshop tools - all important prerequisites for a new technical service.[4]

Entering Point Cook at this time, McNamara became associated with a remarkable group of people at a pioneering stage in the story of aviation in Australia. The course which he joined on its commencement on 2 August 1915 was only the third conducted by the Central Flying School. He was one of nine students, all of lieutenant rank; eight were from various militia regiments and corps, while one (L.J. Wackett) was a member of the permanent forces who had been specially graduated early from

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1 *ADB*, vol. 9, pp 506-7.

2 A.H. Cobby, *High Adventure*, Robertson & Mullens, Melbourne, 1942, p 16.

3 AIF service record of 27517 Pte L.P. McNamara: AA (Canb), series B2455.

4 Annotations on McNamara's application to attend a flying course: AA (Canb), A2023, item A38/7/95.

the Royal Military College, Duntroon, to proceed on war service. One of the militia officers did not complete the training, after illness forced his deferment to a later course, but the remainder all continued and qualified as pilots.

Flying instruction was carried out in Bristol Boxkite aircraft, an elementary biplane type of which the school had two in use. These machines did not have dual controls, so that all teaching was done with the instructor sitting on a moveable seat at the leading edge of the lower wing behind a rudder bar and control stick, all exposed to the open air. The procedure followed was that:

> The pupil sat as close as he could behind the instructor, one leg on each side of his body, and stretched forward to place his hand on that of the instructor on the control stick. He had no contact with or feel of the rudder; he could only watch the instructor's feet. When the instructor thought it might be done, positions were changed, and when the instructor was satisfied that it was safe to do so, the pupil was allowed to fly alone.[5]

McNamara was one of the first two students given the opportunity to ride in the pilot's seat on 30 August, but not until 18 September were he and four others allowed to make a first solo flight - which lasted all of two minutes - by which stage another two had already done so. From then on proficiency was built up by almost daily flights, usually within proximity to the aerodrome.[6]

On 8 October McNamara experienced a forced landing, which in itself was not remarkable with the Boxkite. Twelve days later, however, he had a close brush with disaster while practising for a height test. Eric Roberts, one of McNamara's fellow students, recalled that he 'came down and complained that his aeroplane was not climbing properly':

> His mechanic examined it and found that it was only functioning correctly on five of its seven cylinders; the other two were not giving normal power because of over-heating. It was fortunate, he discovered, that he landed when he did because one more attempt to climb would have resulted in a further stall too near the ground and he would have crashed.[7]

Two days after this, McNamara passed the brevet test to qualify for his Royal Aero Club pilot's certificate (No. 2254), and a week later the course officially ended. To this point he had logged ten hours and thirteen minutes in the air, just over half of which had been solo flying in Boxkites.[8] According to the official report submitted on the course, 'bad weather' experienced on all but four days of the previous three months - which referred to anything stronger than a mild breeze - had meant that the new aviators were judged 'not sufficiently competent to fly the faster machines'

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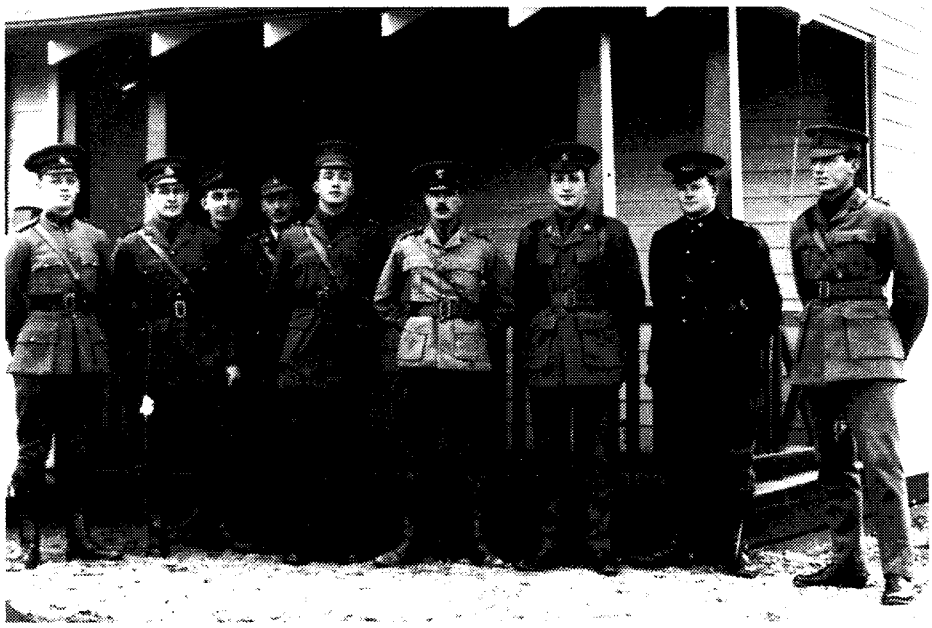
5 R. Williams, *These are facts: the autobiography of Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, KBE, CB, DSO*, Australian War Memorial and Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra, 1977, p 25.

6 CFS flight records, 18 August 1914-4 August 1916: copy supplied by Mr C.A. Owers.

7 E.G. Roberts, *Box Kites and Beyond*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1976, p 5.

8 McNamara's logbook, RAF Museum, microfilm 10089, item 13: copy supplied by WgCdr M.R. Lax.

operated at the school, the BE types, and their instruction was accordingly restricted solely to the slower Bristol machines.[9]



Members of the 3rd CFS course at Point Cook in 1915: (from left) A.W.L. Ellis, E.G. Roberts, C.D. Merrett, E.R. Moseley, F.H. McNamara, C.J. Brooks, A.L. MacNaughton, R. Ross, L.J. Wackett.

Not until 26 October - that is, until after his qualifying tests - did McNamara receive exposure to any aircraft type other than a Boxkite. On that day he flew as passenger in a BE2a (with Lieutenant Richard Williams at the controls) on a flight above the clouds over nearby Lara and Werribee, lasting nearly an hour and reaching an altitude of 7000 feet.[10]

Now a qualified pilot, McNamara subsequently underwent what was officially described as an 'advanced officers course'. What this evidently meant was that he stayed at Point Cook and did further flying. CFS records show him back in the air on 11 November and 8, 10, 12, 16 and 18 December - still in a Boxkite.[11] On 4 January 1916 the opportunity finally arrived for him to make his first solo flight in a BE2a, and for the next month he flew exclusively on this type. By this time he knew he would soon be going on active service.

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9 AA (Canb), CRS A2023, item A38/7/339.

10 CFS flight records and McNamara's logbook.

11 CFS flight records and McNamara's logbook. Interestingly, these two sets of records list flights on different dates.

Staff and students watch flying in progress: from the right are: Lieutenants D.T.W. Manwell, Les Ellis, Eric Roberts and McNamara. Lawrence Wackett is third from the left.

During the period in which he had been receiving his training, the only element of the Australian Flying Corps on war operations had been a 'half flight' sent to Mesopotamia at the request of the Indian government. There had been a clear expectation of further batches of pilots being despatched to this area. In fact, Williams (a graduate of the first flying course held in 1914) owed his presence at Point Cook to the fact that he had been selected to take command of the next detachment to go.[12]

In December 1915, however, the Australian government announced plans to raise and dispatch a complete air unit of over two hundred officers and men, to be called No. 1 Squadron, AFC. This was to be organised along the same lines as a Royal Flying Corps (RFC) unit, comprising a headquarters and three flights each of four two-seater aircraft which would be supplied from British stocks once its overseas destination was reached. It was to this unit that McNamara was posted on 5 January 1916, and explains the preparation he began receiving on what initially was the only operational aircraft type available at the CFS.

On 7 March - a little over a week before the squadron left Australia - McNamara managed to put in two flights in a Caudron G.III, a highly manoeuvrable sesquiplane which the Defence Department purchased from its private owner early in 1916 and put to use at Point Cook to provide pilots with advanced training in cross-country flying. The ninety minutes gained on this type brought his total flying hours to twenty-one hours, of which only sixteen had been solo and just over eight were on anything more advanced than a Boxkite.[13]

Initially joining No. 1 Squadron as adjutant,[14] McNamara was subsequently allotted as a pilot in 'C' Flight commanded by Williams (now promoted captain); with him were his former classmates Wackett and Roberts.[15] When the squadron duly sailed

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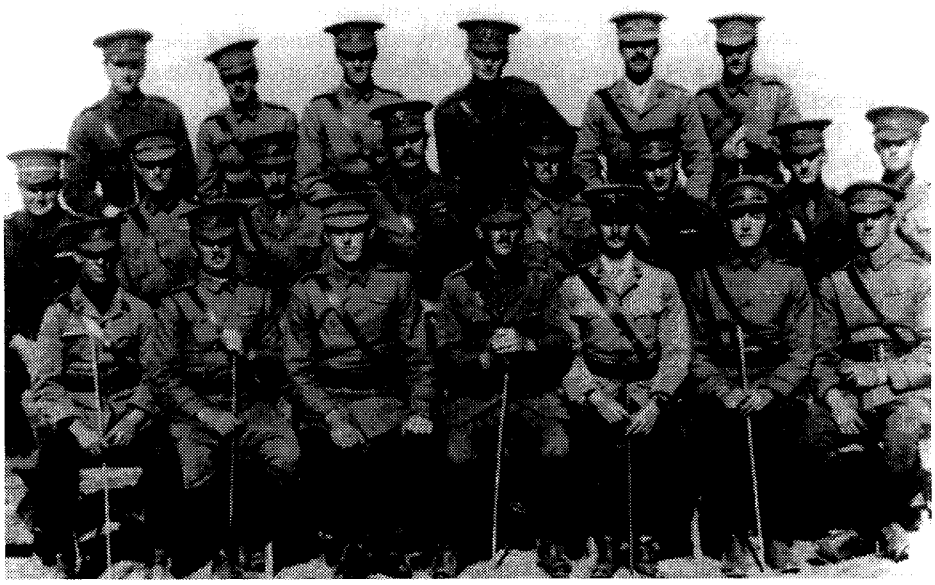
12 Williams, *These are facts*, pp 38-9.
13 CFS flight records and McNamara's logbook.
14 Wigmore, *They Dared Mightily*, p 74.
15 Williams, *These are facts*, p 41.

from Melbourne in the liner *Orsova* on 16 March, bound for Egypt, he was still more than a fortnight off his twenty-first birthday.



Officers of No. 1 Squadron, AFC, are pictured prior to leaving for overseas. Third and fourth from the right in the centre row are Lieutenant Eric Roberts and Captain Richard Williams; in the front row, Lieutenant A. Murray Jones is seated first on the right, with McNamara beside him, while Lawrence Wackett is third from the left

Shortly after reaching Suez on 14 April, the Australians learnt that their unit was to be attached to the 5th Wing of the RFC already stationed in Egypt. The British authorities had also taken the liberty of re-designating it as No. 67 (Australian) Squadron, RFC, although unit members continued to regard it as No. 1 Squadron. They were initially sent to Heliopolis, nine kilometres north-east of central Cairo, where one of the two British squadrons comprising the 5th Wing was based. At the aerodrome located here on the outskirts of the suburb the Australians were given instruction on Avro 504A biplanes.[16] This evidently convinced the local RFC command that many of the new arrivals were not yet ready for operational flying and needed further training. McNamara was, accordingly, among a number of less-experienced pilots sent on to England after less than a fortnight in Egypt.

This was no reflection on him personally, since the whole of the Australian squadron was patently unfit to engage in operations just yet. This was a major concern to RFC authorities at this juncture, as it had just become known that airmen on the British side would not have unchallenged use of the skies in this theatre. A reconnaissance mission deep into enemy-held Sinai early in March had revealed the presence of a sizeable airfield at Beersheba, and in mid-April the first enemy aircraft were actually seen in the air.

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16 L.J. Wackett, *Aircraft Pioneer: an autobiography,* Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1972, p 45.

In fact, the aviation corps supporting the Turkish forces on this front was a German unit, the 300th Squadron (*Flieger Abteilung 300*), known as the '1st Paschas' - Pascha denoting a detachment specially raised for service in the Middle East. This was commanded by a Captain Felmy and comprised seasoned pilots with experience in Macedonia and Mesopotamia, equipped with Rumpler C.1 two-seater aircraft which were considerably faster and superior all-round machines than the British types available. Shortly after its arrival, the German detachment also received a small number of even better Fokker single-seat fighters.[17]

The Australian unit was quite unprepared to meet a foe of this calibre in virtually every respect. All categories of personnel were inadequately trained, and the squadron in any event was without aircraft or technical equipment of any kind. Towards overcoming this deficiency, those elements of the unit retained in Egypt were split up into small groups and distributed among various stations to acquire experience alongside the RFC.[18]

Re-embarking in the ship *Northland* at Alexandria on 28 April, McNamara proceeded to England where he arrived at Devonport on 16 May. Attached to the RFC's No. 42 Squadron, based at Filton (outside Bristol) from 28 May, he also underwent advanced tuition at Reading, sixty kilometres west of London, and Netheravon on the Salisbury Plain.[19] In later years he recalled one training flight which he made that was cut short by a storm, forcing him to make a messy landing in semi-darkness in what turned out to be a field of potatoes and tomatoes. Only the next morning did he learn that he had come down near the birthplace of William Shakespeare - Stratford-on-Avon.[20]

Having finished his course on 4 July, McNamara went to London to report for instructions for his onward move to Egypt. By coincidence he encountered here his fellow squadron member, Eric Roberts, who had just completed a similar attachment elsewhere in England and was also looking for his movement orders. As the latter recalled:

> But as our papers could not be found we had to keep on reporting every few days, which gave us time, meanwhile, to go sightseeing in London and dig up friends from Australia in the services who were either going to or coming from France. After about a fortnight McNamara's papers turned up and he went off.[21]

The transport on which McNamara sailed from Devonport on 23 July turned out to be a mule ship, in which he and other officers had been required to clean stables. Objecting to this, when Malta was reached a week later the aggrieved officers had complained to the military commandant of the island and refused to travel further on that vessel. Roberts records that he again met up with his friend when his own transport spent three days in port at Malta, and that when he last saw McNamara 'he

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17 H.A. Jones, *The War in the Air*, vol. 5, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1935, p 179; E.W. von Hoeppner, *Germany's War in the Air*, Battery Press, Nashville, Tenn., 1994, p 48.

18 Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, pp 33, 42.

19 Bowyer, *For Valour: The Air VCs*, p 87.

20 *Argus*, 28 September 1917.

21 Roberts, *Box Kites and Beyond*, p 13.

and his fellow officers were comfortably installed on the *Megantic*, a former Atlantic liner'.[22]

Finally arriving at Alexandria on 24 August, four days later he rejoined No. 1 Squadron at Heliopolis and was brought up to date with the unit's progress during his absence. The squadron had since been equipped with the BE2c, a two-seater reconnaissance aircraft made by Britain's Royal Aircraft Factory. These machines - slow, underpowered for desert conditions, unmanoeuvrable and poorly-armed - were known less-than-affectionately to the crews required to fly them as 'Quirks'. To the Germans who enjoyed great success in shooting them down in large numbers on the Western Front they were referred to as 'Fokker fodder'.[23]

Once functional, the Australian unit had been ordered in June to take over the stations manned by the 17th Squadron, RFC, when the latter was transferred to Salonica. As a consequence, No. 1 Squadron now had its headquarters element at Heliopolis but its flights were widely dispersed - 'A' stationed at Sherika in Upper Egypt, 'B' at Suez, and 'C' - still under Williams - at Port Said. On 20 September the squadron headquarters moved to Kantara, where 'C' Flight joined it a week later and 'A' Flight on 8 November. For the first time the unit was operating in the same general area of the Canal, though not for another month would all elements be brought together on one aerodrome.

McNamara was not immediately caught up in these developments, because he had been unfortunate enough to develop orchitis which caused his hospitalisation on 8 September for nearly a month. Although admitted to 3rd Australian General Hospital - the facility established at Abbassia (a suburb near Heliopolis) specifically to deal with cases of venereal disease - there is no reason to think that he had been among those Australians who unwisely sampled the carnal pleasures available to the troops in Egypt, rather than simply fallen victim to one of the range of mysterious ailments which were endemic to such an unhygienic place.

His misfortune at this time at least had some compensations, since during his convalescence he found himself in receipt of social invitations from members of the local European community. Heliopolis was a modern district, having been founded by a Belgian development company only in 1906, connected by electric trams which ran into the city every twenty minutes. Its bright streets boasted many fine residences as well as fashionable shops, hotels and restaurants, in marked contrast to the squalor of Cairo's native quarter.

Among the privileged residents of Heliopolis was Baron Rodolph Alexander Bluntschli, a Swiss from Zurich, who was the official receiver of regular revenues payable to the Khedive of Egypt by the Suez Canal Company. Like most of the wealthy members of the expatriate community, the baron lived in Cairo during the cooler months of the Egyptian winter but fled the worst of the summer heat by holidaying in Europe. To show their appreciation of the stability and security which the British military presence brought to Egypt, he and his Belgian wife, Jeanne, opened their large home to entertain the officers from the nearby airbase, assisted by their two daughters - the elder of whom, Helene, was only aged fifteen.

Opportunities to enjoy the hospitality of the Bluntschli family were shortlived for McNamara, because when finally discharged from hospital on 6 October he was sent on light duty with No. 22 Reserve Squadron at Aboukir, near Alexandria. The

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[22] *ibid.*, p 14.
[23] Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p 416.

RFC in Egypt had established here its own flying training organisation where selected candidates - including some airmen from No. 1 Squadron - were put through a school of military aeronautics using the dual-control Avro 504K, and it was McNamara's job to temporarily teach these potential new pilots. At Aboukir at the same time was Roberts, also there to enjoy something of a break while instructing.

Although the base enjoyed an idyllic location right on the seafront, there was little else that was restful about the time spent here. In Roberts' words, 'the work of instructing, McNamara and I decided, was more dangerous than operational flying against the enemy':

> A case in point was a very ham-fisted and heavy-footed pupil whom McNamara had to take up for his first flight. The normal procedure was to explain all the controls and instruments on the ground and then put the prospective flyer in the pilot's seat in the rear cockpit with the instructor in front. McNamara went through the procedure and told the pupil not to touch anything until instructed to when they got to about two thousand feet.
>
> At this height he would show the pupil how the controls worked in the air and then let the pupil feel them with him. When the time came for the pupil to feel the controls, for some unknown reason, possibly fear, the pupil froze on the controls. McNamara, after trying to talk him into releasing them, had to give him a hard crack on the head before he could gain control. This was the end of this potential aviator's flying career.[24]

By late October McNamara was back with his flight of the Australian unit, now stationed at Kantara with squadron headquarters. Here he undertook his first operational sortie on the morning of the 24th, taking off in a BE with Lieutenant P. Ainsworth as observer to carry out a reconnaissance over the Sinai. The mission itself was unremarkable, but on landing the Flight Commander, Captain Williams, looked the aircraft over and commented, 'You both must have the luck of a Chinaman'. Although neither crewman had noticed at the time, the machine had been hit by groundfire in the front gear casing. Practically all the lubricating oil had leaked out, and only by good fortune had the engine and airscrew continued to function throughout the remainder of their time in the air.[25]

As McNamara was to find, his return to the Australian squadron had come at an especially interesting juncture. Until then the level of operational activity and been low and largely without incident, involving frequent reconnaissance and photographic missions out over the Sinai desert for distances up to fifty kilometres east of the Canal, with the dropping of an occasional bomb 'to impress Arab parties'.[26]

On the 13th of the next month, however, the German airmen working with the Turks blatantly demonstrated their capability to make air attacks with impunity by sending a Rumpler to make a bold daylight bombing raid on Cairo's railway station. Although just one aircraft from Beersheba took part, and could only attain the range

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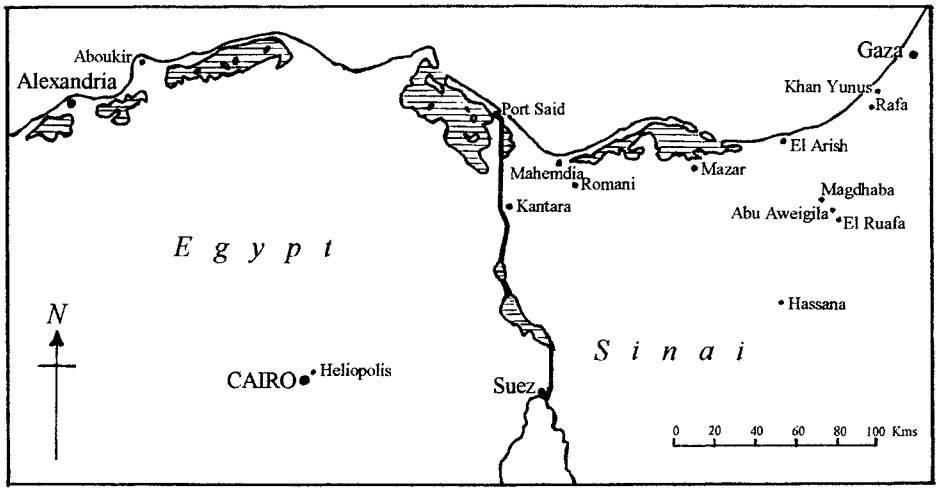
[24] Roberts, *Box Kites and Beyond*, pp 20-1.
[25] Notes left by AVM F.H. McNamara, in possession of his son, Mr R.E. McNamara.
[26] Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p 36.

involved by using an intermediate base, the mission came as a complete surprise to Egypt's air defences and was unopposed.[27]

If nothing else, this air raid added impetus to allied efforts to expel Turkish forces from Sinai and move the enemy's presence well away from where they could threaten the vital waterway of the Suez Canal. British, Australian and New Zealand mounted troops of what was called Eastern Frontier Force (under Lieutenant-General Sir Charles Dobell) were already engaged in a campaign to achieve this, supplied by a narrow-gauge railway which was being pushed eastwards from the Canal with all speed utilising Egyptian labour. By mid-November the mounted troops had reached some one hundred kilometres beyond the Canal and supporting aircraft were able to use a dry saltpan at Sabkhet el Mustabig (just west of the Bir el Mazar oasis) as an advanced landing ground.[28]

The next month No. 1 Squadron moved up from Kantara onto the airfield at Mustabig, joined on 17 December by 'B' Flight from Mahemdia (east of Port Said) so that at last the unit was brought together. Two days later McNamara had another nasty experience, while carrying out a reconnaissance to Bir el Hassana (75 kilometres away to the south-east) with Lieutenant Ross Smith as his observer. While over this place the enemy had attempted to engage them with shells from a Howitzer, with little apparent effect, it was thought, until they were crossing a steep escarpment in the area. Both men were suddenly startled by 'a loud crashing staccato noise', and - immediately imagining that the enemy fire had actually found its mark - began casting about for a suitable place to make an emergency landing.



Lower Egypt and Sinai

Noticing that the engine had not lost power, however, and the aircraft was still responding to the controls normally, they looked further for the cause. They then discovered that the starboard side of the engine exhaust manifold had come adrift from

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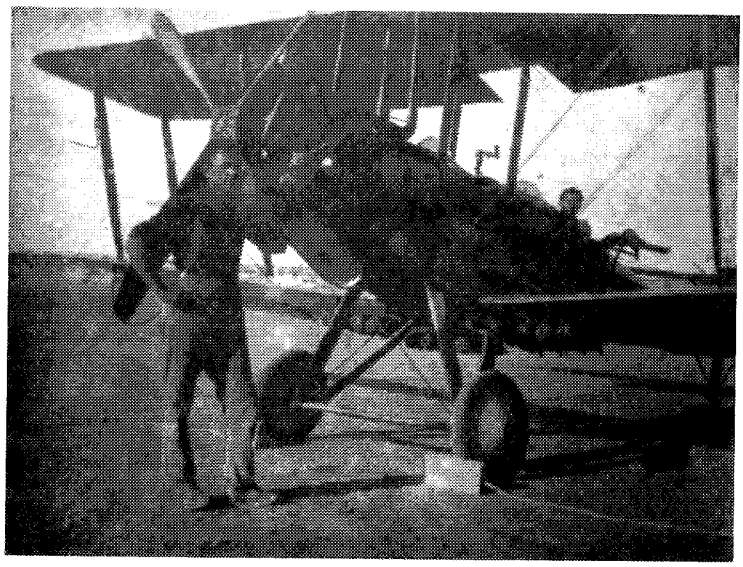
[27] G.P. Neumann, *The German Air Force in the Great War*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1921, pp 248-9.

[28] Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p 45.

the exhaust valve ports in the cylinder heads, leaving the exhaust chimney on that side to wave about in the slipstream. The actual effect of this was minimal, apart from the dramatic change in the level of engine noise from the normal easy purring sound. Until base was finally reached, they were obliged to endure a racket of explosions everytime each exhaust valve on the starboard side opened up.[29]

While at Mustabig, the squadron also began receiving the first BE2e aircraft to begin replacing its existing BE2cs. Also delivered at this time were a lesser number of Martinsyde G100 single-seater scouts, known to British airmen as 'Baby Elephants' on account of the type's long nose[30] but more usually called 'Tinsydes' by the AFC men. These newer machines conferred no real improvement in performance, nor reduced the substantial margin of superiority enjoyed by the Germans whenever the two sides met in aerial combat.

El Arish, the last big town before the border with Palestine, was reached and occupied on 20 December by advanced elements of Dobell's force known as the Desert Column. Within days the column's commander, Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Chetwode, prepared to drive the Turks out of Magdhaba, located inland about forty kilometres to the south-east. On 22 December McNamara took his place in a thirteen aircraft formation (eleven from No. 1 Squadron, including himself) which made a bombing raid on the enemy's redoubts and trenches defending that town.



McNamara in the cockpit of his 'bombed-up' BE2, ready to start up for a mission against Magdhaba in December 1916.

The next day McNamara's BE2c and an RFC machine of the same type, each covered by an escorting Martinsyde, returned to the attack. Passing over Magdhaba, they observed that the ground assault there had developed and enemy positions were being shelled. At El Auja all four aircraft dropped bombs against the town's railway facilities, targeting a bridge, the station at which a train was standing, shelters,

[29] Notes left by AVM F.H. McNamara.
[30] Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p 47.

buildings etc. They then moved on to reconnoitre El Kossaima, taking time out to machinegun a vehicle spotted on the road to Moweila, before photographing El Ruafa and Abu Aweigila.[31] By mid-afternoon the aircraft were back on the ground, and within a few hours word was received that Magdhaba had fallen.

With El Arish in British hands, aircraft were able to make use of an aerodrome near there as an advanced landing ground. This was known as Kilo 143 - its distance from the Canal - and was located just west of Masaid (a large splendid *hod* or oasis, and itself only eight kilometres west of El Arish). Apparently it was while operating from here on 29 December that McNamara had the misfortune to suffer a broken propeller on his machine. Eric Roberts, his Point Cook colleague with whom he shared a tent at Mustabig, undertook a difficult flight through rainstorms to bring up a spare along with a mechanic to make the necessary repairs. Roberts had to land on the sodden airstrip and assist with the change-over before flying back in company with McNamara, arriving at base in the dark.[32]

As the troops continued to press forward, No. 1 Squadron again moved up along Sinai's maritime plain to Kilo 143. It was from here that McNamara took off at dawn on 9 January 1917 - again with Ross Smith as observer - to provide aerial support for the next allied ground attack against Rafa, which lay on the Turko-Egyptian border. This place was an advanced position in the main Turkish defensive line running from Gaza to Beersheba, with other major enemy outposts at El Kossaima and El Auja. After flying in support of the artillery, shortly after 9 am he landed at Sheikh Zowaiid which was the assembly point for the assault on Rafa.[33]

Taking off again forty minutes later, McNamara and Smith were employed for the next ninety minutes keeping the staff of the attacking formations abreast of the tactical situation as it developed. They reported that Australian light horsemen had got across the Khan Yunus road in the rear of Rafa, thereby completing the encirclement of the Turkish defenders. While next on the ground, a German aircraft which had just carried out a bombing raid on El Arish passed overhead on its way back to Beersheba, but - fortunately for the airmen and their vulnerable machine - the enemy pilot had no more bombs on board and left them unmolested.

Getting airborne once more soon after 2 pm, the BE2c continued to assist with directing the fire of the artillery. In performing this task the aircraft inevitably drew considerable attention from the Turks onto itself, with McNamara recording that the wings of his aircraft were holed by ground-fire coming from the enemy redoubts. After more than two hours aloft the airmen were startled to observe several bombs explode near the battery of guns for which they were spotting, and looking up were alarmed to see another enemy plane almost directly over the top of them. Fortunately again, this machine also did not attack but headed off for Beersheba.

Rafa was over-run late that day, despite the approach of considerable numbers of Turkish reinforcements from Shellal and Khan Yunus shortly before the final assault. Finding themselves now exposed and extended, the attackers promptly withdrew to their starting-off point at Sheikh Zowaiid where water and supplies awaited them. The Turks however, did not attempt to reoccupy their former position, so over the next

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31 Excerpts from McNamara's logbook cited in Paul Leaman, 'Frank McNamara VC', *Cross and Cockade*, Vol. 2, No. 3, p 88.

32 Roberts, *Box Kites and Beyond*, p 25.

33 McNamara's logbook excerpts in *Cross and Cockade*, p 89.

few days the British forces were able to consolidate their gains and contemplate their next move.

McNamara (right) poses with Lieutenant Dave Manwell during a break from operations, at either Mustabig or Kilo 143, to visit the nearby beach for a swim in the Mediterranean.

In addition to marking the Turko-Egyptian frontier, Rafa also effectively marked the end of Sinai's sandy desert and the start of the undulating plains of Palestine which were lush with grass and wildflowers. Here, much of the area was under cultivation, although fences as well as trees were few - all of which made for ideal cavalry country. Conditions were therefore perfect for the British forces to continue their eastwards thrust and turn what had been begun essentially as a campaign to expel the Turks from Egypt into an invasion of the enemy's own territory.

On 11 January McNamara was sent on a photo reconnaissance of Weli Sheikh Nuran, one of the defended points on the high ground covering Shellal. This was a mission chiefly notable for almost seeing his aircraft shot down over enemy-held territory. McNamara noted in his logbook that an Austrian anti-aircraft battery formerly at El Auja had been relocated at this place, although it is not clear whether he knew this before take-off or discovered it by his own observation. In any event it was not to these weapons that he almost fell victim, but a prowling enemy biplane.

The cumbersome aerial camera then in use had to be operated from the pilot's cockpit, and it was while McNamara concentrated on photographing the new trenches and redoubts being constructed below that the hostile aircraft was able to approach unnoticed by his inattentive observer. Fortunately the diving fighter was spotted by the pilot of an accompanying Martinsyde, who had been down machine-gunning Turkish troops at Shellal. This escort zoomed up and chased off the enemy intruder towards Beersheba.[34]

Weli Sheikh Nuran became a particular area of interest to the British side, who initially could only watch while the Turks put in an astonishing amount of effort to develop elaborate defensive works. These were later found to comprise consecutive lines of trenches, in front of which rows of deep pits had been dug close together and lined with barbed-wire at their bottom for the purpose of trapping attacking infantry. The spoil from these excavations had been removed so that their position could not be clearly seen from ground-level except at close range, and they were also so well camouflaged that their detection from the air was most difficult. The Turks had prepared protective cover for even the horses of their cavalry, in the form of boxes dug into the side of the Wadi Ghuzze.[35]

On 12 February, a month after his initial foray to Weli Sheikh Nuran, McNamara was back over this place on another reconnaissance which was no less eventful than the first. His own observer again proved the problem, although it was a different one - on this occasion being Captain T.C. Macaulay, a staff officer from the headquarters of 5th Wing. This officer's movements in the front cockpit somehow managed to jam the dual control socket fitted there and throw the aircraft into a flat spin. Struggling with the controls, McNamara succeeded in levelling-out with no more harm done than Macaulay receiving a scratched nose and forehead from hitting his face on the gun mounting.[36]

Resuming their mission, McNamara watched with some amusement as his companion got on with the business of sketching the scene below. He later recorded that:

> Macaulay had numerous coloured pencils, maps, various instruments, note books and a pocket altimeter, etc. strapped across his knees and chest so that he looked like a Christmas tree.

It evidently appealed less to McNamara's sense of humour that, throughout the half-hour that the captain attended to his task, he was forced to dodge anti-aircraft shells - 'archies' as they were popularly known - which were fired up at the BE. Eventually he persuaded Macaulay that the job had been 'nobly finished' and it was time to be getting back to base. After taxying into the hangar at Kilo 143 the two men got out of the aircraft, just as someone exiting the CO's office noticed the minor damage to Macaulay's face. Driplets of blood had been sprayed into a pattern before

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34 McNamara's logbook excerpts in *Cross and Cockade*, p 89.

35 T.H. Darley, *With the Ninth Light Horse in the Great War*, Hassell Press, Adelaide, 1924, p 76; A.C.N. Olden, *Westralian Cavalry in the War*, Alexander McCubbin, Melbourne, 1921, p 114.

36 McNamara's logbook excerpts in *Cross and Cockade*, p 89

congealing, prompting the comment: 'My God, Macaulay! You look like a Raemaekers cartoon on Belgian atrocities'.[37]

Three days later, eleven aircraft were despatched on a bombing raid against the enemy base at Beersheba. Flying a Martinsyde this time, McNamara acted as escort to four of the machines detailed to attack airfield hangars and the railway station. Two violent rainstorms were encountered on this mission, and the target was only visible through breaks in the heavy cloud-cover.[38] He nonetheless braved the weather and intense anti-aircraft fire to deliver the two one hundred pound bombs he carried on his aircraft.

On 18 February he participated in another raid at Ramleh, to where the Germans had moved their main airfield in late January after Beersheba had been subjected to persistent air attacks. The enemy had gone to the trouble of constructing a dummy airfield outside the town, a deception which was only discovered after several attempts had been made to put it out of commission. To add insult to the injury of this raid, McNamara dropped a note in French suggesting that the Germans shift to a more concealed location.[39]

By this stage the Turks had decided to shorten and consolidate their defensive positions. Having slowly fallen back from El Kossaima (evacuated in late January) and El Auja (found to be abandoned on 27 February), the enemy had been expected to continue holding the forward posts he had established and so extensively developed on the approaches to his main Gaza-Beersheba line. Instead, on 4 March, it was discovered that Weli Sheikh Nuran and Shellal were both being abandoned too - it apparently having been belatedly realised, after the experiences of Magdhaba and Rafa, how easily isolated strongpoints like these could be outflanked by a highly mobile adversary.

In the words of the official historian, Cutlack, 'The Turkish retirement from Weli Sheikh Nuran enlivened the whole front' and unleashed a stream of air operations which was continuous for the next three weeks.[40] This statement was not strictly true, as sandstorms made flying impossible for part of this time and forced operations to be carried out on an intermittent basis only until the middle of the month, when attacks could be resumed in earnest. The campaign of bombing assumed heightened importance after General Murray decided that the way was now clear for an assault on Gaza itself, which he scheduled to take place on 26 March. Disruption of the Turks' rear areas, and cutting his lines of supply and reinforcement using the railway system, was a key objective to be achieved before the British blow was delivered.

On 6 March McNamara flew as escort to another aircraft reconnoitring traffic along the busy stretch of Turkish railway between Arak el Menshiye and Tel el Sheria, taking the opportunity to put a one hundred pound bomb onto the station at the former and another onto a train near the latter. Late the following afternoon he again took off in a Martinsyde to raid Arak el Menshiye, but found that one of his two one hundred pounders would not release from its rack and he had to bring it back on what turned out to be a landing in the dark. Although by this stage he was no longer a raw rookie

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37 Notes left by AVM F.H. McNamara. Louis Raemaekers was a Dutch cartoonist whose anti-German drawings during World War I were very popular in England, France and the United States.

38 *Argus*, 28 September 1917.

39 McNamara's logbook excerpts in *Cross and Cockade*, p 89

40 Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p 57.

pilot, one can well understand the sense of relief encapsulated in the laconic note 'All OK' which he made in his logbook.

Emphasising that the air operations preceding the First Battle of Gaza only slowly gathered pace and intensity, shortly after this mission McNamara found himself in receipt of a six-day leave pass. He spent the time in Cairo in the company of a West Australian pilot with No. 1 Squadron, Lieutenant R.M. Drummond, who was always known as 'Peter' rather than his real name of Roy.[41] Opportunity was taken to renew acquaintance with the Bluntschli family, and photographs which survive show the two pilots in uniform squiring the Baron's two daughters - Helene and Gisele - on an excursion to the Cairo Zoo on 15 March. After this, McNamara recorded, 'Drummond and self flew back to the war'. He was about to undergo an experience which would make all his previous exposure to combat pale in comparison.

Lieutenant 'Peter' Drummond (left) and McNamara, with the Bluntschli sisters Helene and Gisele (right) on leave during an outing to the Cairo Zoo on 15 March 1917. Five days later, both pilots found themselves involved in one of the most dramatic moments of the air war in the Middle East Theatre.

[41] Eventually, when created KCB in 1943, he formally took his nickname as an additional Christian name, becoming Sir Peter Drummond.

CHAPTER THREE

One glorious moment

During the lead-up to the Gaza battle, the character of the air war altered in a number of significant ways. One change which quickly affected airmen on the British side was a further upgrading in the quality of their opposition. Over a period of three weeks the Germans transported from Constantinople to Damascus eight new Rumpler machines which were fitted with fixed machine-guns synchronised to fire forward through the aircraft's propeller. A lesser number of Halberstadt fighters were also received at this time.[1]

No less important was a changeover of personnel which occurred within the German unit during March. Along with Captain Felmy many of the old 'lions of the desert' (as they were known) returned to Germany, their places taken by pilots with experience on the Russian and Western fronts. The result of this injection of new blood was felt by allied airmen in a fresh spirit of aggressiveness now encountered whenever combat was joined with the enemy. Although little was seen initially of the recently-arrived Rumplers, due to an apparent desire to conserve them as much as possible, the impact of the Halberstadts was fairly quickly felt even though only a couple of these were available at any one time.

Ironically, one of the original 'Pascha' squadron's members who remained was Oberleutnant G. Felmy - the former commander's younger brother - who soon became an almost legendary figure, not least for the daring he showed in two attempts to blow up the rail and water supply line maintaining the allied thrust across the Sinai. He became equally well-known to the Australians of No. 1 Squadron for the remarkable chivalry he showed to downed allied pilots. Contrary to reports of his death at Damascus in August 1918, he apparently survived the aircraft accident thought to have claimed his life and served as a civil airline pilot after the war before rejoining the German air force in 1939.[2]

No less remarkable than the gallantry displayed by airmen of both sides towards their opponents was the standards observed in respect of assisting one's own fellow pilots. It was during March that the first instance arose in the Middle East theatre of British airmen performing the aerial equivalent of a cavalryman or mounted

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1 H.A. Jones, *The War in the Air*, p 214; Neumann, *The German Air Force in the Great War*, pp 250-1.,

2 Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p 65n; Keith Isaacs, *Military Aircraft of Australia 1909-1918*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, pp 70-1.

infantryman stopping or turning back to rescue an unhorsed comrade who otherwise faced capture by the enemy, or worse.

During a mission on the 7th of March, a Martinsyde was damaged over Tel el Sheria and the pilot finally forced to land near Rafa, in territory roamed by Arabs more sympathetic to the Turks than the British - and minds more interested in loot than the politics of the war. He was already exhausted from walking when spotted by a No. 1 Squadron BE2 which was out on a reconnaissance. This landed to pick him up, and returned to base with him clutching onto the top of the aircraft since the two-man machine was already full.

A similar incident arose a few days later, during a raid by eight aircraft against the vital enemy supply point at Junction Station, north of Arak el Menshiye. One of the machines was forced down by engine-trouble in sand dunes north of Gaza, and although a fellow member of No. 1 Squadron searched for a suitable place to attempt a landing, none was found. It was subsequently established that this unfortunate pilot was captured by the Turks.[3]

On 18 March the German airfield at Ramleh was again the target for a bombing raid in which McNamara flew as one of four escorts. After seeing the two BEs safely carry out the main attack and make their way back to the coast, the Martinsydes returned and circled above the airfield for half an hour, braving anti-aircraft fire while waiting to see whether any enemy aircraft were prepared to come up to take them on in combat. None did, however, although one was seen to fly off towards Jaffa.

The next day a further instance arose of a downed pilot being rescued by another crew. In this case a Martinsyde from No. 14 Squadron, RFC, was shot down during attacks against the Junction Station - Tel el Sheria railway and forced to land in close proximity to enemy troops. An Australian BE2 flown by Lieutenant Reg Baillieu went to this pilot's aid and picked him up, after he had set fire to his machine to prevent its capture. During this rescue the BE2's observer, Ross Smith - soon to become No. 1 Squadron's most famous pilot - kept the enemy at bay with fire from his revolver. Both Baillieu and Smith were awarded the Military Cross for this exploit.[4]

It was in the context of all the various events just described that the very next day, 20 March, McNamara himself was involved in a similar episode which became a defining moment in his career. Four aircraft from No. 1 Squadron were detailed to attack a section of the railway line - in McNamara's words - 'just across the Wadi Hesse'.[5] By this he presumably meant Wadi el Hesi, which would place the target in the vicinity of Tel el Hesi, north of Tel el Sheria. Many accounts appearing in print over the years have stated that this raid was directed at Junction Station,[6] but it is clear that the correct site was some thirty kilometres south of that place. According to one squadron member writing many years later, the stretch of track selected was at a point where the line passed through a cutting on a curve, because Intelligence had reported

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3 Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps*, p 58, gives the date of this incident as 9 March, however McNamara's logbook seems to suggest that it actually happened following the attack against Ramleh in which he took part on 18 March.

4 Commonwealth of Australia *Gazette*, No. 140, 27 August 1917, pp 1827-8.

5 McNamara's logbook, in *Cross and Cockade*, p 91.

6 See, for example, Greg Copley, *Australians in the Air*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1976, p 24, and Alec Hepburn, *True Australian War Tales*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1983, p 58. The latter also mistakenly claims that nine aircraft took part in the mission.

that the Turkish railway system was suffering a shortage of curved rails and any damage done would be hard to repair.[7]

The machines taking part in this mission were two Martinsydes, to be flown by McNamara and Lieutenant A.W.L. Ellis, and two BE2cs flown without observers (to save on weight) by Drummond and Captain D.W. Rutherford. Les Ellis was well-known to McNamara, being a fellow Victorian who had been a colleague since pilot training at Point Cook.[8] Peter Drummond, too, was a colleague of long standing, having been with No. 1 Squadron since July 1916.[9] It was Doug Rutherford - the officer McNamara was expressly assigned to escort - who was the odd man out on this mission.

Not only was Rutherford somewhat older than them and senior in rank, but he was also the least experienced - not just operationally, but as a pilot. A Queenslander, he had previously served at Gallipoli (and been wounded) with the 5th Light Horse Regiment, before qualifying as an observer with B Flight of No. 1 Squadron in August 1916. He remained with the unit until December, when he went to the 20th Reserve Wing's flying school at Aboukir to undergo pilot training. Graduating at the end of February 1917, he had only rejoined the Australian squadron at Kilo 143 at the beginning of the next month and taken part in his first mission, a two-hour sortie against Beersheba, on 16 March. Another flight the previous day, carried out over Hebron with Ross Smith as his observer, represented the sum total of his operational experience.[10]

Because of the high rate of operational activity underway, supplies of normal aerial bombs had been exhausted and the Australian squadron was making do with dropping 4.5-inch howitzer shells set for forty seconds delay by means of a pin inserted in the nose-fuse. It had been found that by attaching them to an underwing bomb-rack, and tying the pin to the rack so that it was withdrawn when the shell was released and fell away, these projectiles performed quite well. Another squadron member remarked that they actually 'went off with a better crack than our twenty pound bombs',[11] which was hardly surprising since each shell (weighing thirty-five pounds) contained

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7 A.T. Cole, *Merry Old Souls*, unpublished manuscript.

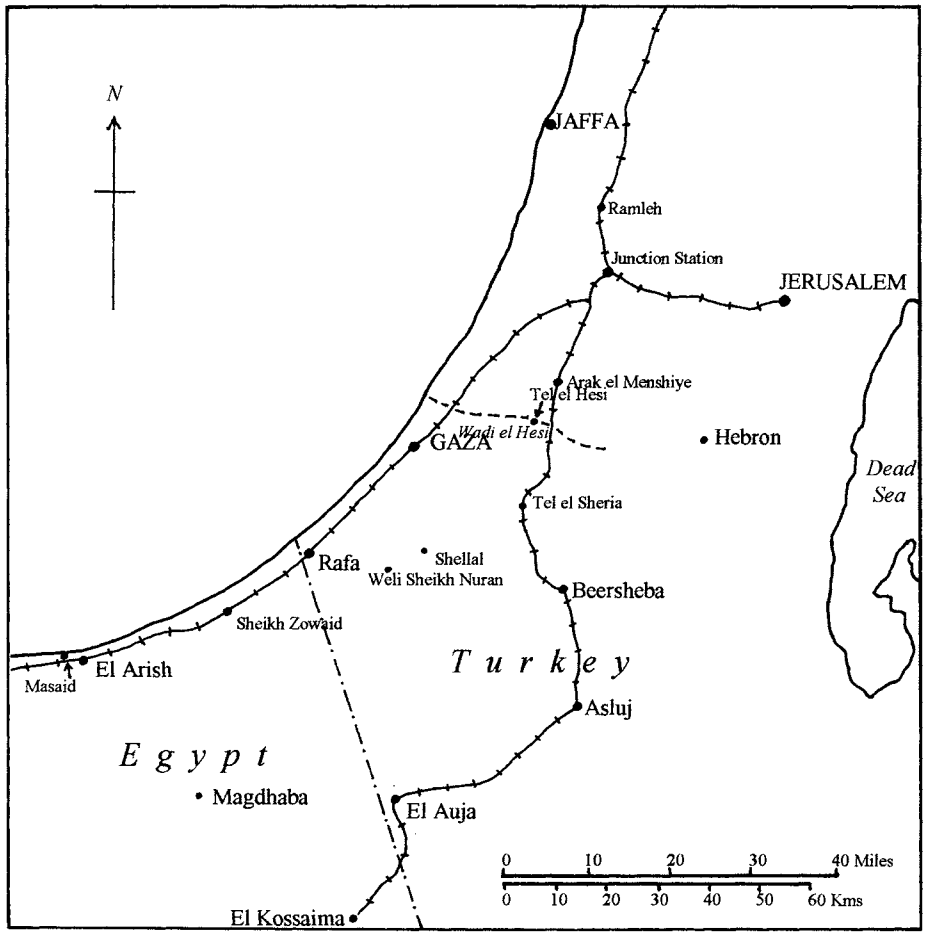
8 Alfred William Leslie Ellis was born at the old goldmining town of Steiglitz (now a ghost-town), forty-two kilometres north-west of Geelong, on 14 October 1894. As a major, he commanded the AFC's No. 8 (Training) Squadron in England from November 1917, and a year later took over command of No. 4 Squadron in France until its disbandment in 1919. After the war he became a company director, but in December 1936 came onto the RAAF Reserve as a squadron leader. Called up for full-time duty on the start of the Second World War he was promoted to the rank of wing commander in January 1941. The next year he was made acting group captain and became OC RAAF Station at Bradfield Park, Sydney. Leaving the air force in 1945, he died on 22 January 1948. See Isaacs, *Military Aircraft of Australia 1909-1918*, p 158; *Who's Who in Australia*, 1947, p 316, 1950, p 813.

9 Roy Maxwell Drummond was born to Australian parents at Perth on 2 June 1894. At the end of the First World War he accepted a permanent commission in the RAF and served in the Air Ministry directly under Sir Hugh Trenchard. The years 1925-29 were spent on exchange with the RAAF, but following his return to England his career progressed rapidly. In 1942-43, while he was deputy to the AOC-in-C Middle East (Sir A.W. Tedder), it was proposed appointing him CAS or AOC-in-C of the RAAF, but the British government was reluctant to release him. He instead became Air Member for Training on the Air Council in London as an air marshal. See *DNB, 1941-1950*, pp 220-21.

10 Douglas Wallace Rutherford was born at Rockhampton on 29 September 1890. See R.E. Harris, 'An Australian in the Desert War', *Australian Flying*, August 1972, pp. 4-7.

11 Williams, *These are facts*, p 61.

considerably more explosive. Their use was, however, not without some anxiety to crews, since sand blown up on take-off had - in the words of one pilot - 'a nasty way of gluing up the release rack' and the usual practice was to count to twelve as each was dropped, it being impossible to breathe freely until the shell had fallen far enough to pose little risk to the aircraft in the event of a premature detonation.[12]



Sinai and Southern Palestine

Taking off from Kilo 143 at 9 am with each aircraft carrying six modified shells as improvised bombs, the four attacking machines took about eighty minutes to travel the one hundred and ten odd kilometres to the target area. Once this had been reached, Ellis began the action by dropping down to deliver his bombs onto the railway line. McNamara was preparing to follow his lead when a Turkish construction train was seen approaching along the track, and the attention of all the airmen shifted to it.

12 Cole, 'Merry Old Souls'.

Making a series of passes, McNamara dropped three of his shells on the train and a fourth onto the track. Lining up a fifth against the track also, it appears that this device became hung up momentarily after he pulled the release toggle. A fellow squadron member recounted McNamara's later recollection of having counted to eleven and then doing 'everything I could to shake that last one off'.[13] If accurately quoted, McNamara was plainly aware that he was in trouble moments before the shell went off about thirty feet below the aircraft. The blast sent fragments upwards, ripping the mainframe and perforating part of the fuselage but luckily missing the engine. McNamara himself was hit in several places in his legs, and a larger piece of shrapnel came through the unarmoured seat to tear a jagged hole in his right buttock. As he later told a medical officer who treated him, it felt as if he had been 'hit with a sledge hammer'.[14]

Dazed and in pain from his profusely bleeding wound, McNamara recovered his senses and realised he had to make for base immediately. After dropping two smoke bombs to signal the others that he was in distress, he turned southwards and looked back towards the railway curve. It was then that he spotted one of the aircraft on the ground not far from the railway, the pilot having got out of his machine to set off a smoke bomb as a distress signal. He could also see what the helpless pilot probably could not - that a body of Turkish cavalry had observed the aircraft come down and was approaching its location at the gallop.[15]

Despite his injury, McNamara acted in the way which had by now become customary and went to his colleague's rescue. Diving steeply through enemy groundfire, he switched off his engine as usual for a landing before touching down on firm soil and taxying to within two hundred yards of what turned out to be BE2c No. 4479 - the one flown by Rutherford. As he later told a journalist back in Australia:

> I do not know that I had any particular feeling when I went to Captain Rutherford's assistance. It appeared obvious that if he remained where he was he would be either shot or captured, so I simply turned back to meet a situation that had arisen, without at all considering what it might mean to myself.[16]

According to some accounts of the air war in Sinai-Palestine, it was a standing order that downed airmen should destroy their machine if faced with imminent capture, in preference to letting it fall into enemy hands.[17] Rutherford was attempting to comply with this instruction by setting fire to the BE's fuselage, until he saw that McNamara had come to his aid. When his rescuer did not get out of his machine (McNamara reportedly tried to, but could not because of his injury), Rutherford sprinted across to the Martinsyde and called for assistance with re-starting his

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13 *ibid.*

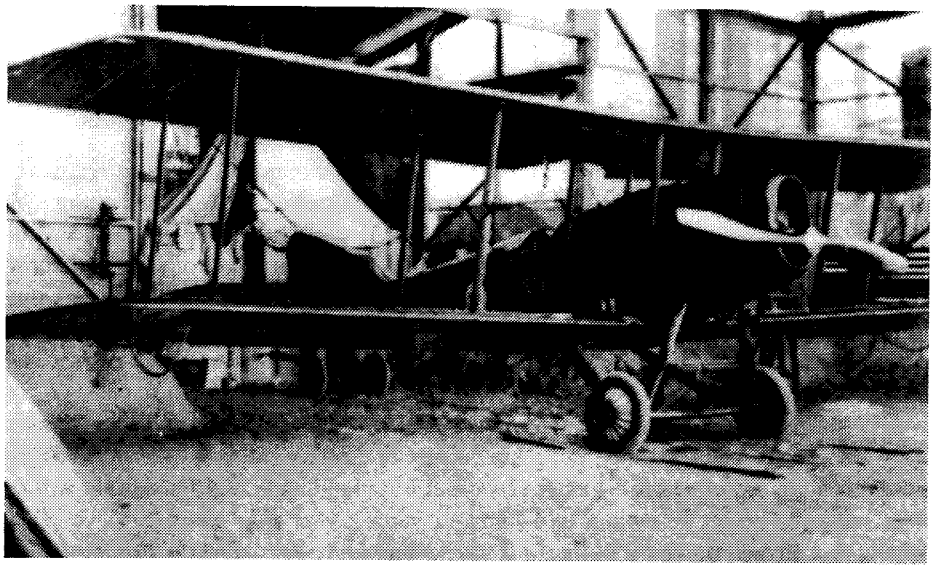
14 *Daily Telegraph*, 22 June 1917.

15 The main source for the description given here and in the following paragraphs recounting Rutherford's rescue is - except where otherwise indicated - the account which McNamara himself recorded in his logbook; see *Cross and Cockade*, p 91.

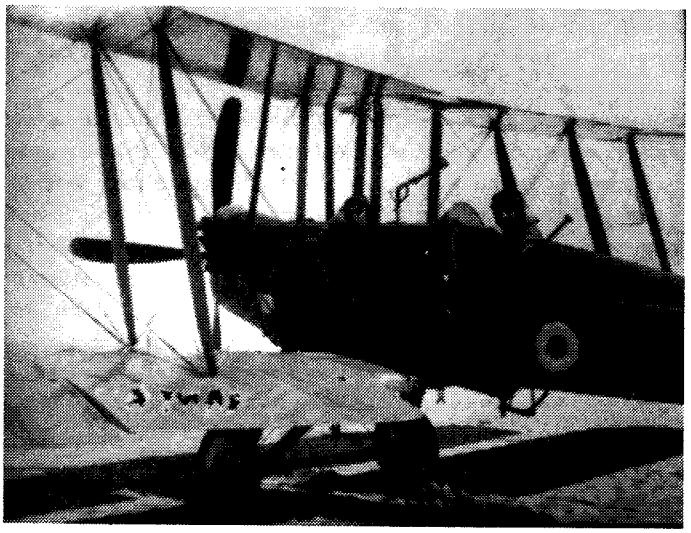
16 *Herald*, 28 September 1917.

17 L.W. Sutherland, *Aces and Kings*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1935, p 29.

engine.[18] McNamara yelled back that there was no time with Turkish cavalry closing on them, whereupon Rutherford climbed up onto the Martinsyde. Since this was a single-seat type, there was nowhere for him inside the aircraft. He therefore had to stand on one wing, and lean his body across the engine cowl while grasping the struts forming the centre bay of the mainframe.



A Martinsyde G100 Scout, nicknamed 'Elephant' because of its long nose. This machine was actually No. 7486 - the one flown by McNamara when he went to Rutherford's rescue on 20 March 1917. The BE2c pictured below (No. 4479) was the aircraft in which the two airmen escaped capture by the Turks.



18 Narrative accompanying recommendation for award of VC to McNamara, made by GOC Middle East Brigade, RFC (Major-General W.G.H. Salmond), on 26 March 1917: AWM 28, collection 2: AFC 1 Sqn.

With his passenger thus precariously positioned, McNamara opened up the engine to full power and turned upwind in preparation for take-off. The Martinsyde began gathering speed, bumping and bouncing across the uneven ground which was also sodden from recent rain. The additional weight of Rutherford made the aircraft lop-sided and his presence in the airstream added extra drag, with the result that as flying speed of about thirty-five miles an hour was reached McNamara found the machine veering to the left. Without full feeling in his wounded right leg, he was unable to counter this swing using the rudder controls to straighten up. Continuing its sideways lurch, the Martinsyde nosed into a gully, shearing off the undercarriage and breaking the lower left wing and the airscrew.

Fortunately uninjured in this mishap, the two airmen extricated themselves from the wreckage. A bullet fired into the petrol tank followed by a round from the Very pistol on board quickly ignited the aircraft's remains. By this stage the approaching Turks were within rifle range and, having dismounted, were firing at them. The two turned to Rutherford's aircraft, which despite the latter's hurried efforts had not caught fire. A tyre had been ripped off this machine during its forced-landing, and it also sported some broken centre section wires, but otherwise it still appeared to be flyable. No less importantly, according to one account, McNamara noticed that the BE's Lewis gun was still intact, which at least offered some means of returning fire and keeping the Turks at bay.[19]

Unable to stand unaided, with Rutherford's help McNamara hobbled over the intervening ground towards the other machine. As they were still making their way across, the last shell McNamara had been carrying on his aircraft suddenly went off and blew the burning Martinsyde to pieces. The remaining distance was covered under volleys of rifle fire from the Turks, who were still steadily advancing after being momentarily deterred by the explosion. Bullets began flicking up sand around them, but the further progress of the enemy was slowed by the actions of the other airmen, Drummond and Ellis, who now showed up on the scene.

One source claims that Ellis had broken off immediately after finishing his bombing, having spotted an enemy aircraft which he attempted to pursue.[20] Other accounts do not mention this, but in a letter Drummond wrote to his family a week after the incident he recounted that at one point during the attack he had thought that Ellis was experiencing engine trouble, and he followed him out of the action in readiness for making a landing to pick him up:

> My pilot's engine did not let him down after all, so we both went back to find the other two had landed, and the good machine was picking up the other pilot, with Turks galloping up on all sides and firing at them. All we could do was to get down low and keep off the Turks, which was accomplished without any casualties.[21]

The role of the two airmen still aloft in helping the pair on the ground make their getaway is attested to in other accounts. A war diary cited in the RFC official history, for example, recorded that 'the pilots of the two other aeroplanes, realising the

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19 Geoffrey Norris, *The Royal Flying Corps: a history*, Frederick Muller Ltd, London, 1965, p 190.
20 Bowyer, *For Valour: The Air VCs*, p 85.
21 Peter Firkins, *The Golden Eagles*, St. George Books, Perth, 1980, p 72.

situation, attacked and held off the cavalry with bursts of machine-gun fire'.[22] Statements collected 'in the field' from Drummond and Ellis on 4 April confirm that they were well aware of the perilous position of McNamara and Rutherford. Both described seeing groups of enemy troops advancing from all sides to surround the machine while keeping up a heavy fire, and bullets striking all round the BE.

In the case of Ellis, the support he gave continued even after he had run out of ammunition - it being recorded that he 'repeatedly dived to within a few feet of the ground and dispersed the oncoming enemy, in spite of heavy rifle fire'. Ellis was later recommended for the Military Cross 'for consistent gallantry throughout twelve months of operations', with the incident of 20 March being among those specifically cited.[23]

Given the limited mobility of his injured leg, McNamara was helped by Rutherford into the pilot's seat of the BE. He found that an ammunition drum for the Lewis gun which Rutherford had dropped while in the air had become wedged under the rudder bar, and precious moments were needed to prise this free. Some accounts describe him also attempting to train the Lewis gun on the approaching Turks - and even letting off a 'few short bursts' to make them 'think twice about an easy capture' - until he found this weapon's arc of fire was too restricted, whereupon he drew his revolver instead and emptied off its chamber at the enemy soldiers.[24] The authority for such claims is not known, but it is probably significant that McNamara did not mention this as among his actions when recording the incident in his logbook.

Meanwhile Rutherford remained outside on the ground, awaiting McNamara's word to swing the heavy four-bladed propeller. When the moment came to start up, the engine miraculously kicked into life on the first attempt. Rutherford would later explain that he had not been forced down through any enemy-caused damage to his machine, but simply because of his engine having cut out. This, he stated, had been due to him being below and behind McNamara at the moment that the latter's fifth shell exploded in mid-air, between the two aircraft. The blast that injured McNamara had also 'snuffed out' the engine on his BE (always very sensitive, he said), and he had been unable to restart it in flight.[25]

Rutherford made a wild scramble onto the lower wing and climbed into the observer's seat, while McNamara turned the machine and opened up the throttle for take-off. With the tyreless wheel catching three times in soft patches as they lumbered forward, the ground itself seemed almost to be trying to prevent their escape. The BE finally broke free and staggered into the air, by which time the Turks were practically upon them. From above, Drummond recounted seeing enemy troops running 'within one hundred yards' and 'firing point blank at the machine'[26] - or as another account put it, the Turks were 'almost near enough to throw stones at the aeroplane'.[27] Remarkably, neither occupant of the aircraft was hit, although McNamara later

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22 H.A. Jones, *The War in the Air*, vol. 5, pp 206-7.

23 Recommendations for honours and awards (with supporting statements), AWM 28, collection 2: AFC 1 Sqn.

24 Copley, *Australians in the Air*, p 25, and Hepburn, *True Australian War Tales*, pp 63-4. The latter is obviously the source for articles which appeared in *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 April 1983, and *Daily Mirror*, 20 October 1983.

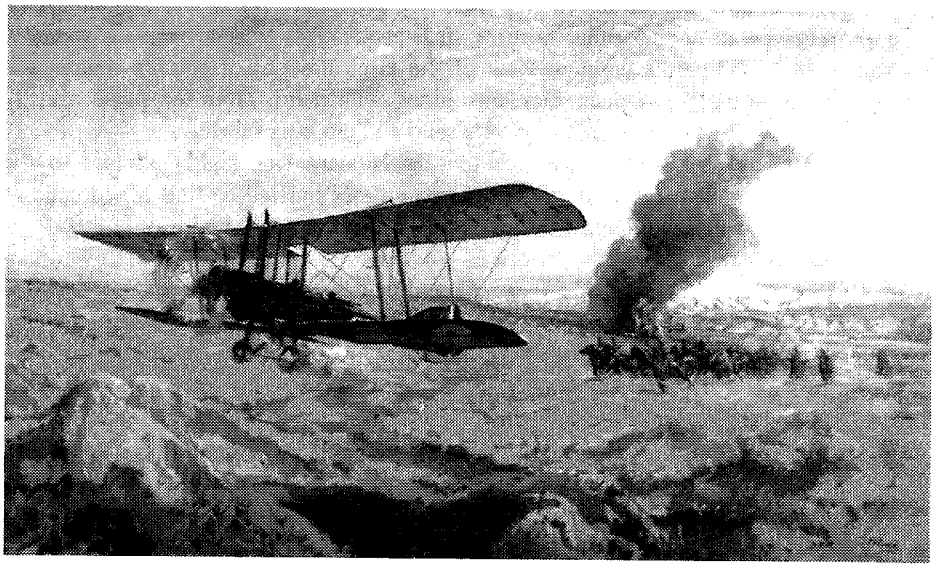
25 Harris, 'An Australian in the Desert War', *Australian Flying*, Vol. 10, No. 8, August 1972, p 6.

26 Drummond's statement of 4 April 1917, in AWM 28.

27 Norris, *The Royal Flying Corps: a history*, p 191.

remembered that 'some of the shots got pretty close to us - holes were made in the planes in several places'.[28]

Leaving this scene of pandemonium behind them, McNamara and Rutherford faced a new peril in trying to traverse the distance back to base. McNamara was in serious difficulty with his wound, several times nearly passing out with the pain and loss of blood which, as he later noted, really 'put the wind up' Rutherford. To revive himself whenever he was about to faint, McNamara kept putting his head over the side into the cool air of the slipstream.



This 1924 painting by H. Septimus Power captures the drama of the moment when McNamara and Rutherford escaped capture by Turkish cavalry in the incident which won McNamara the VC. When shown this rendition the following year, McNamara found it incorrect in a number of details.

The aircraft was not in much better shape than its pilot, although it does not seem to have warranted the claim made by one writer that it was 'all but falling apart'.[29] Only after the BE safely put down at Kilo 143 about twenty minutes after midday did inspection reveal how fortunate the two airmen had been. Not only was there three unexploded shell/bombs still attached to the aircraft's wings, but the fuselage was sporting a badly cracked longeron (one of the main girders supporting its weight) and this had been lucky to survive the stresses of landing.

Once the BE came to a stop on the ground, Rutherford was quickly out of his seat and gesturing frantically to watching ground staff to hurry to his assistance. As these reached the machine, they found McNamara slumped in the cockpit sitting in a pool of blood. He was subsequently reportedly to have 'made a classically pungent remark (not for printing)' before lapsing into unconsciousness.[30]

Having survived the ordeal of the mission against the Turks, McNamara now was nearly not so lucky in the hands of his own side's medical system. He was promptly sent back down the line from El Arish, being placed onto a hospital train at

28 *Herald*, 28 September 1917.
29 Isaacs, *Military Aircraft of Australia 1908-1918*, p 59.
30 *Reveille*, 1 June 1966, p. 11.

7.15 pm that same night. Arriving at Kantara at 5 am on 21 March, he was admitted to the 24th Stationary Hospital, a thousand-bed British facility, where he came under the care of Captain W.J. Macdonald of the Royal Army Medical Corps. By coincidence, though, this man was an Australian from Sydney, and on 22 March he wrote home to tell his father the exciting news about McNamara's feat and his subsequent misadventure.[31]

According to the account left by Macdonald, following McNamara's arrival his wound was dressed and at 10 am he was also X-rayed. At 11.30 am Macdonald also administered an anti-tetanus injection, a standard procedure for 'every single case of wounds received in action either here or in France'. This was a measure certainly warranted in McNamara's case, in view of the large amount of foreign matter still present in the wound - shrapnel fragments, along with debris from the plane (mostly wood, leather and horsehair from the pilot's seat) and clothing fabric.

What was not then known was that McNamara was highly allergic to the injection, a fact only realised when an alarmed orderly hurried to find Macdonald in another canvas-floored ward and tell him that his patient was in a bad way:

> I tore up like mad, and was there greeted by the sergeant with the news that he was dead. You could have knocked me over with a feather. But I rushed in. He was absolutely blue and cold, no pulse at all, and not breathing. Anyhow, it was up to me to try and do something, so I started on artificial respiration. After half an hour he gave a tiny breath. Meanwhile I gave him ether and adrenation with the hypothermic needle. We had his mouth held open with a gag and worked the tongue to and fro. About an hour later all the blue had vanished, and he was breathing slowly. Two hours later he had almost recovered and was breathing quietly and even talking. We left off the oxygen... Last night at seven he was eating a plate of chicken and drinking champagne. You are probably wondering why he got so bad. Well, it is easy to explain. About one man in a thousand has what is called an idiosyncrasy towards certain drugs. Anti-toxin is made from the blood serum of the horse. It is harmless to most people, but to McNamara it was deadly poison ... I have told him never to take serum from any doctor or he will very likely die the next time. He would have this time only that we wasted no time.

What Macdonald's account failed to record was that while his patient was unconscious, and desperate measures being taken to resuscitate him, instructions were given for metal hot water 'bottles' to be placed around McNamara's inert body. One of these vessels - filled with boiling water by an over-zealous attendant - was placed under his right heel, where it proceeded to inflict a horrifying injury. Before the situation was discovered, the skin had been burned off down to the bone.

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31 The letter, addressed to Mr Neil Macdonald of Neutral Bay, was published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 22 June 1917. Extracts from this letter also appeared in the Melbourne *Herald*, 26 June 1917, and were subsequently repeated - although erroneously attributed to the *SMH* - in the *Sun- Herald*, 12 November 1961. Macdonald - whose niece married the brother of 'Paddy' Finucane, the Irish air ace serving in the World War II RAF - subsequently became a dermatologist at Boston in the US, and in 1961 recontacted McNamara to remind him of this shared episode and show him an overblown article which he had written with a view to publication. McNamara made abundantly clear that he did not approve of the piece and did his best to discourage the author from proceeding with it.

The next day McNamara was evacuated to Cairo and sent to 14th Australian General Hospital at Abbassia, where he now had two serious injuries requiring attention. The wound to his buttock soon healed, but that to his heel proved more difficult and required a long hospital stay and several skin grafts. In the event he was left with a permanent limp, and in later years experienced other problems in the form of skin breakage on his heel which necessitated having boots specially made using soft leather.[32]

In this photograph is captured the full horror of the injury inadvertently caused to McNamara's right heel by medical staff during his anaphylactic collapse, after he was admitted to hospital at Kantara following the VC episode.

McNamara was still convalescing when, on 20 April, he was struck off the strength of No. 67 Squadron and appointed a flight commander in No. 71 (Australian) Squadron - No. 4 Squadron, AFC - with promotion to the rank of captain. This unit had been raised at Point Cook in October 1916 and was then based in England, at Castle Bromwich near Birmingham, but McNamara's posting to it was one which he would never actually take up. In view of continuing problems with his injuries he was returned to Australia first.

On 8 June 1917 it was announced in London that the incident of 20 March had resulted in McNamara being awarded the Victoria Cross. When the news reached No. 1 Squadron two days later it was greeted with delight, and marked with a half-day holiday. One airman in the unit recorded:

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32 Information of Mrs M. McGregor.

He is very popular and we were glad to hear of his good fortune. Although he was recommended at the time, we scarcely expected that he would receive the V.C.[33]

McNamara with Lieutenant Reg Baillieu, another No. 1 Squadron pilot who was evacuated sick to the 14th Australian General Hospital at Abbassia, Cairo, on 19 July 1917 for a month. The day before McNamara's VC incident, Ballieu had rescued a downed comrade under enemy fire and was awarded the Military Cross.

The shared pleasure felt for someone regarded as a genial, 'cheery, unruffled soul', unassuming and perennially courteous,[34] was no doubt genuine. There was, though, a hint of dismay in the later assessment of one of his fellow officers that: 'Quiet, scholarly, loyal and beloved by all, McNamara was the last officer for whom that high honour would have been predicted.'[35]

The real cause for surprise, though, was the fact that the considerable courage and coolness displayed by Rutherford in the awkward situation of 20 March went totally unrecognised. There was remarkably little sympathy or concern for him, either at the time or in subsequent years, although this may perhaps be attributable to later events. Barely a week after his rescue by McNamara, on 28 March, Rutherford was pilot of a BE machine which was surprised by an enemy fighter while engaged on an artillery spotting mission. He was wounded in the thigh, and his observer, Lieutenant

33 Mark Lax (ed.), *One Airman's War: Aircraft Mechanic Joe Bull's Personal Diaries 1916-1919*, unpublished manuscript, p 59.
34 *ADB*, vol. 10, p. 349.
35 Cole, 'Merry Old Souls'.

W.R. Hyam (an attached Light Horse officer), suffered more serious injury before the attacking aircraft was driven off by another Australian machine.[36] Hyam succumbed to his wounds two days later and thus became No. 1 Squadron's first combat casualty.

McNamara resting in a hospital wheelchair in Cairo following the announcement in June 1917 of his VC award. His thigh wound does not seem to be troubling him, unlike the damage done to his heel.

There are suggestions that Rutherford was deeply unsettled by his twin experiences, and within the unit he also began to be viewed as a bad risk for anyone flying with him. Certainly there seems to have been a feeling current that he had been somehow blameworthy for the situation in which McNamara had been called upon to act. In some quarters there even appears to have been quite scurrilous claims - based on the ease with which the engine of his BE had restarted - that Rutherford had actually been attempting to have himself taken out of the war by becoming a Turkish prisoner, a plan spoiled by McNamara's misguided decision to come to his rescue![37]

The ultimate irony came on 1 May 1918, when the Bristol Fighter which Rutherford was piloting on a early morning reconnaissance patrol around Amman was hit by groundfire and both its petrol tanks were punctured. As he was rapidly losing

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36 Charles Schaedel, *Men & Machines of the Australian Flying Corps, 1914-19*, Kookaburra Technical Publications, Dandenong, Vic, 1972, p 16.

37 Discussion with a former 1 Sqn officer recounted to author by Mr N. Clifford in telephone conversation, 24 October 1993.

fuel, he was forced to make an emergency landing - remembering to set fire to his aircraft as he and his observer, Lieutenant J. McElligott, left it. Another Bristol crewed by Lieutenants F.W. Haig and R.T. Challinor touched down nearby in an attempt to rescue them - much the same as McNamara had done the previous year. This brave effort came to grief when one wheel collapsed under the extra weight during take-off, with the result that all four were captured by the Turks and subsequently delivered into German hands.

Freed from his internment in Constantinople six months later, following the signing of an Armistice between Turkey and the Allies, Rutherford returned to Queensland where his AIF appointment was terminated in January 1919.[38] Resuming with his local militia regiment, the 5th (Central Queensland) Light Horse, a year later Rutherford was transferred to the army's reserve list of officers and ended his formal association with the services.[39] Although he lived on into his eighties, residing in the Brisbane suburb of Ascot, very little was ever heard in public of him or the part he had played in one of the singular episodes of war.

Only at the Amberley airbase near Ipswich, which Rutherford visited as guest of honour during the RAAF's 50th anniversary celebrations in 1971, would his name have had much meaning. The base was (and is still) home to No. 1 Squadron, RAAF, whose unit badge recalls the moment in the history of its AFC's namesake created by McNamara and Rutherford. Its crest features the ancient arms of Jerusalem surmounted by a diving kookaburra, and a motto in Latin which translates as 'We see, let us act'.

[38] Military Order No. 77 dated 8 February 1919 (p. 255): AWM
[39] Military Order No. 83 dated 21 February 1920 (p. 261): AWM

Captain D.W. Rutherford (the man rescued by McNamara) photographed by his observer on a subsequent mission over Palestine, within sight of the Dead Sea and having just passed beyond the range of enemy anti-aircraft guns.

CHAPTER FOUR

Homecoming hero

Embarking at Suez in the hospital transport *Boorara* on 23 August 1917, McNamara returned to Australia the next month to a hero's reception. He received a taste of what lay in store as he stepped ashore at Victoria Dock, Melbourne, on 27 September. Walking with the aid of two sticks to support his one hundred and seventy-eight centimetre-tall (five feet ten inches) frame, the slightly-built, boyish-looking twenty-three year-old was recognised by a naval officer who called for three cheers for the VC hero. These were readily given by the other disembarking soldiers, the ship's crew and the waiting crowd, and McNamara responded in a 'calm, self-contained, yet unassuming, manner'.[1]

Immediately on leaving the ship, McNamara was invited to a reunion at the Teachers' Training College where he had himself been a pupil less than three years earlier. Press accounts state that his appearance in the assembly room there 'was made the occasion of a stirring demonstration', with cheering continuing for several minutes. Invited by the principal, Dr J. Smyth, to recount some of his experiences on active service, he duly obliged but without referring to his VC exploit. This omission was promptly rectified by Smyth and 'elicited another outburst of applause'.[2]

McNamara must have quickly realised that he was now a celebrity, and that his every move would be the focus of enormous public attention. Although Australia had other heroes on which to shower praise and adulation, the fact was that he was, up to that point in the war, its sole airman to gain the highest award for gallantry - a distinction which, in the event, he was to retain. For that reason alone he stood out in the group of recipients already numbering nearly thirty; the total from the First World War would eventually reach sixty-three.

In succeeding months his time was heavily taken up with public engagements. On 6 November, for instance, he travelled by train to his hometown of Rushworth, accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel J.M. Semmens, a local identity who had commanded an AIF battalion early in the war. That evening he was guest of honour at a banquet arranged in the Criterion Hotel (just around the corner from the house in which he was born) attended by some forty people.[3] The next day he visited his old school for a ceremony at which a portrait photograph of him was unveiled by Colonel Semmens. Just a day later a concert was held in McNamara's honour in the Caulfield

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[1] Jane Barnaby (ed.), *Australians at War*, Cassell, Melbourne, 1974, p 26; *Herald*, 28 September 1917.

[2] *Argus*, 28 September 1917.

[3] *Argus*, 8 November 1917; *Rushworth Chronicle*, 9 November 1917.

Town Hall,[4] and the next month he was welcomed as a member of the Victorian Naval and Military Club.[5] July of the following year found him giving an address to members of the United Service Institution.[6]

As it happened, however, McNamara's homecoming was also heavily touched by tragedy. While he was away his mother had been diagnosed as having pulmonary tuberculosis, and in April 1917 the family moved to the country town of Castlemaine on her doctor's advice that they find a different climate. While living here William McNamara suddenly suffered a massive stroke, just a month before his son's return, which left him with severe paralysis and loss of speech. It was this fact which caused Frank to be met off his ship by friends of the family, who purposely did not tell him straight away of the dangerous state of his father's health.[7]

According to a family tradition, William McNamara's stroke was brought on by receipt of a telegram from Egypt stating that Frank had died of wounds received in combat. From the chronology of events as presently known, this seems unlikely - especially by August, when Frank was about to board ship for Australia and news of his safe homecoming would have been a source of excitement rather than anxiety. News more likely to distress the old man at this time would have been advice that son Leo had been sent to France in June 1917, and from August was facing the perils of frontline service as a driver with the 3rd Divisional Ammunition Column.[8]

Whatever the immediate trigger for the collapse of William McNamara's health, the situation now was that, as one family member later remarked, instead of 'the great happiness of a reunion' which everyone had been expecting, the family 'faced great anxiety and sadness'.[9] After five months in the Castlemaine hospital he died (of Bright's Disease, like his uncle) on 5 February 1918, his remains being taken to Axedale for burial in the family grave.[10]

In the midst of these worries, Captain McNamara was told he was no longer fit for active service and discharged from the AIF in January 1918. He was now returned to the militia, on secondment from the Brighton Rifles while employed as an assistant instructor on the Aviation Instructional Staff. This was not a decision he wanted or accepted, and he decided to fight it. Once able to dispense with the walking sticks and move about more easily, he sought to be reinstated. Fortunately for his campaign, events came to his assistance at this stage when some unexpected war developments meant that the Defence Department suddenly had need of his services.

In July 1917 a coastal freighter SS *Cumberland* had been sunk after apparently striking a mine ten miles off Gabo Island, near the Victorian-New South Wales border. The source of the mine which caused this vessel's loss was a mystery at the time, although the presence of a minefield in the area was subsequently confirmed. Not until news of the activities of a raider, *Wolf,* broke in March 1918 - after the ship returned in triumph to Germany - was it realised that Australian waters had earlier received an enemy visitor.

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4 Program of 'At Home' tendered by the Mayor of Caufield, copy held by Rushworth Secondary College.

5 Warren Perry, *The Naval and Military Club, Melbourne, Lothian Publishing, Melbourne, 1981,* p 334n.

6 *Argus*, 4 July 1918.

7 *Herald*, 28 September 1917.

8 AIF service record of Pte L.P. McNamara.

9 Information of Mrs M. McGregor.

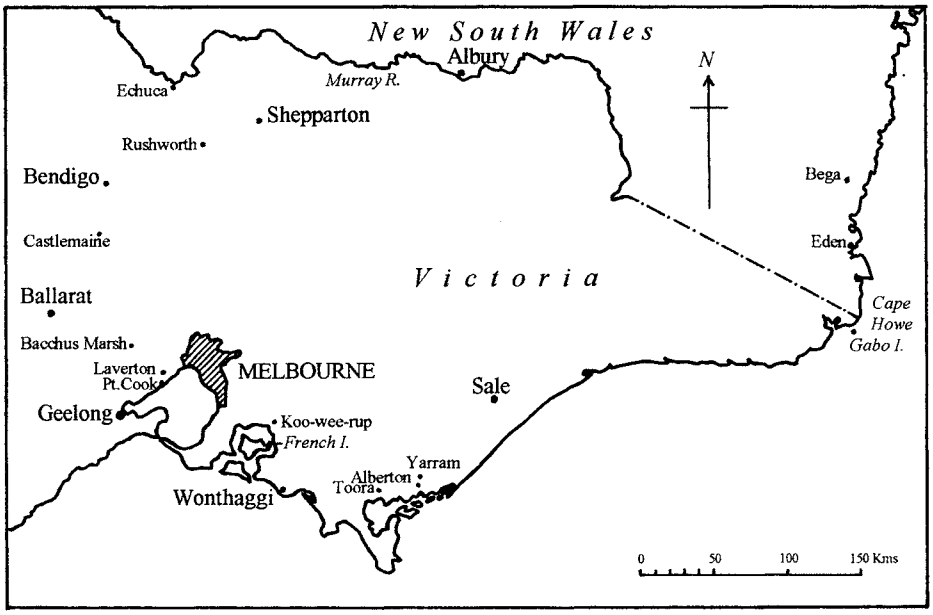
10 Death certificate No. 813 of 1918: Vic BD&M; *Argus*, 7 February 1918.

On 7 November 1917 McNamara paid a visit to the Rushworth State School, where this portrait of him was unveiled by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Semmens.

Accounts of the *Wolf*'s voyage included the revelation that the raider carried its own aircraft, a Friedrichshafen FF33e dubbed 'Wolfchen' (wolf cub), which the captain - doubtless for propaganda purposes - claimed had been used at one stage to fly over Sydney. Prisoners from some of the raider's earlier victims who were on board at the time were later to state that this was impossible, since the aircraft was crated below decks during the vessel's period in eastern Australian waters. Nonetheless, publicity given to the story produced a great deal of excitement in Australia which manifested itself in numerous reported sightings of further enemy aircraft at points around the coastline.

To calm the sense of alarm bordering on hysteria which the local press succeeded in evoking, in April Defence authorities decided to institute a program of aerial reconnaissance over south-eastern sealanes. To this end, two separate detachments - each comprising an aircraft and crew, with supporting ground party - were despatched from Point Cook, one to Wilson's Promontory in Victoria and the other to Twofold Bay (Eden) in New South Wales, to carry out sea searches against the possibility that another German raider was indeed lurking in the vicinity.

The first of these detachments was directed to establish its flight base at either Toora or Alberton, in Gippsland, using an FE2b aircraft. This machine was regarded as an operational type, although the single Lewis gun which it carried hardly fitted it to take on a heavily armed ship. As a pilot with the most recent war experience, McNamara was appointed as 'Officer Commanding, Air Reconnaissance, South Gippsland' and departed on 20 April to take charge of his twenty strong party. This included seven radio operators supplied by the RAN and a seven-man guard provided by the army.



South-Eastern Victoria

Finding only very poor landing grounds at both the places originally chosen, McNamara decided that an area at Yarram was more suitable as an aerodrome and made this his base from 21 April. Operations had barely begun when the FE2b was temporarily put out of action two days later in a landing accident. The aircraft was returning with McNamara at the controls when it struck a drainage ditch concealed in weeds. Neither pilot nor observer were injured beyond receiving a shaking, but the machine suffered damage to its undercarriage.

Since no spare chassis was available, steel tubing had to be obtained from Melbourne and repairs effected on the spot. By 30 April the aircraft was again serviceable and, after moving to a larger and safer field near the butter factory on the north-west edge of the town, sea patrols were resumed. From that date a reconnaissance sortie eastward along the Ninety Mile Beach was carried out each afternoon for about a week, until - in the face of increasing mechanical problems with the aircraft - the search program was abandoned on 10 May.[11]

Before this stage was reached, McNamara had recognised the need for the FE2b to carry something more potent that its one machinegun. His initial request for a supply of 20-pound Hales bombs and bomb-racks was met with a curt demand from the Defence Department as to why he wanted them. Pleading the need for the aircraft to be able to take some effective action in the event it did come across anything, he pointed out the obvious in suggesting that 'it is futile to wait until ... an enemy target is actually seen or wait until some information is given about its existence and then send for bombs and racks!'[12] He got his bombs, which were stored at Yarram station.

The detachment's inability to maintain its search program while the FE2b had been out of action apparently prompted McNamara on 3 May to request the dispatch of a second aircraft from Point Cook, to serve both as a 'spare' machine and in case it became necessary to undertake a night flight; although the FE was suitable for such a task, it was - he noted - the only aircraft of this type in Australia. As a result of this representation, a Maurice Farman Shorthorn was also flown to Yarram on 7 May by Lieutenant J.C.C. Marduel (another instructor at the CFS) with Air Cadet J. Paterson as observer.[13] By this stage, however, the Defence department was within a few days of recognising the search program to be pointless and calling off the effort.

When not engaged in sea-patrols, McNamara's party assisted a civilian police detachment in following up reports of espionage in the area. On one occasion he reportedly led a raid on the 'Silver Lake' flour mill at Sale, some seventy kilometres distant, whose owners - a family of German origins named Eckhardt - were believed by locals to have installed a wireless aerial in the mill's smokestack for the purpose of communicating with enemy vessels. Not surprisingly, the search revealed no evidence of this.[14]

On another occasion, the Newberry family living in the centre of Yarram also found itself the focus of unexpected attention. They were seated at their dining table enjoying their midday meal when the aircraft of the locally-based air detachment was heard above the town. As the Newberrys' son Albert, then aged seven, later recalled:

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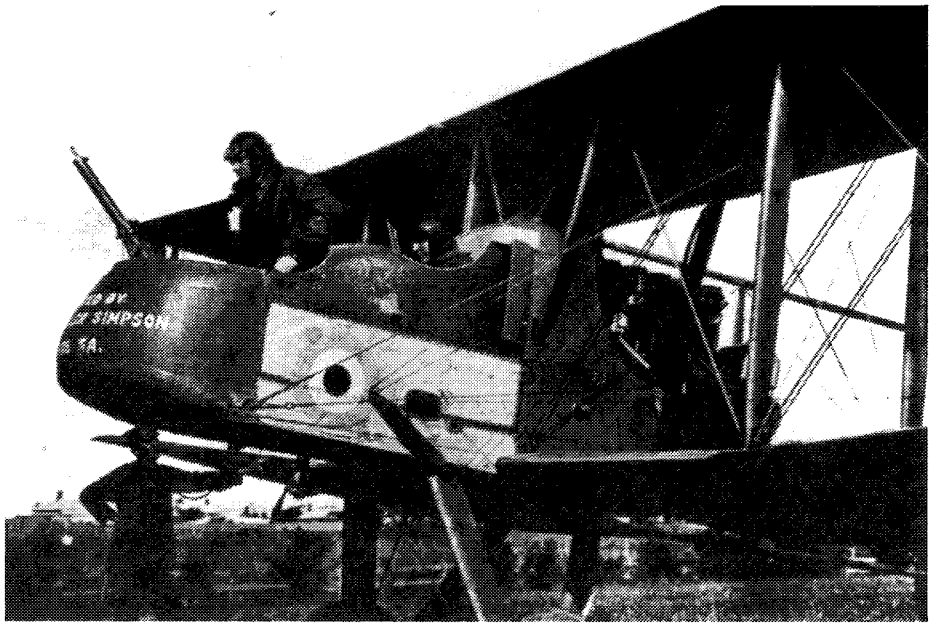
11 AA (Vic), B187, item 2021/1/168.

12 Fred Morton, *Aussie Air Stories II*, self published, Clifton Hill, Vic, 1987, p 22.

13 AA (Vic), B187, item 2021/1/126; see also T.W. Boughton, 'The F.E. 2b in Australia', *Man and Aerial Machines*, July-August 1991, p 39.

14 Morton, *Aussie Air Stories II*, p 23, although the name of the mill-owning family is misstated as Englebert.



The FE2b preparing to depart from Yarram on a patrol searching for enemy raiders or submarines in waters of Gippsland in April-May 1918, with McNamara in the pilot's cockpit at rear. After one mission it was found that a bullet fired by a local gun club member had holed one wing of the aircraft.

The FE2b awaiting repairs after McNamara crashed it on landing at the makeshift airstrip at Yarram on 23 April. Navy wireless operators with the detachment assist the mechanical staff sent from Point Cook.

> Of course, we all went outside to look at the aeroplane, which flew down very low and circled our home a couple of times (so it seemed to us) before it flew away and we returned inside. Some while later there was a knock at the door, and to my delight as a boy it was a visit by some men in uniform with a motor lorry parked right in front of our house. It appears that the observer in the plane had noticed something strange in our backyard, and these men had been sent to investigate. The strange object was a rotary clothes line. They were extremely rare in those days, and Dad had this one specially made. To the men in the air, though, it was a mysterious-looking affair worthy of investigation. Mother was pleased to demonstrate how it worked. The men seemed highly amused as well as quite interested, and one of them raised and lowered it just to see how simple it was. Then they drove away and we resumed our meal.[15]

The day after operational flying ceased, McNamara departed for Point Cook. The return flight was itself not uneventful, after a leaking radiator over French Island in Western Port Bay necessitated a forced landing at Powlett River, five kilometres north of Wonthaggi. By working until midnight the aircraft was ready to resume its flight on 12 May, but rain storms delayed take-off until after 2 pm. The weather did not discourage hundreds of local people who converged on the bush landing ground to see the unfamiliar sight of an aircraft. McNamara reportedly used the opportunity to good public relations effect by explaining the art of flying to the crowd.[16]

Once finally airborne again, the FE2b then encountered a strong westerly wind which made only slow headway possible and caused the last half of the passage of Port Phillip Bay to be made in the dark. Although now recognised as unnecessary and futile, the deployment of this detachment - and the other which operated out of the Bega racecourse from 29 April until 8 May - was still remarkable for involving some of the few active warlike operations conducted within Australia during the First World War.

Having proved that he was still capable of active service flying, in September McNamara was reappointed to the AIF and restored as lieutenant (honorary captain) in the AFC, being posted to Point Cook as a flying instructor.[17] The Central Flying School at this time had a staff of some one hundred, mostly ground personnel but including about a dozen officer pilots. The majority of the latter had - like McNamara - seen active service, and the work there seemed humdrum and boring by comparison. One later complained that they 'never performed any relevant duties' and that, in the absence of 'any real training program', their time was filled 'with all sorts of unimportant odd jobs'.[18]

If the life was quiet, at least it was sociable. As only two of the officers on the staff of the School were married men with their own quarters, the remainder lived in single rooms in army huts alongside the Mess building. The Mess was, accordingly, the focus for the little community for whom it was home, with plenty of activity and self-made fun. One account mentions the existence of an Hawaiian quartette, of which McNamara was a member, as being one of the bright features of the place.[19] He was,

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15 Letter by Mr A.H. Newberry dated 18 September 1979, quoted in part in Morton, *Aussie Air Stories II*, p 23.

16 *ibid.*, p 22.

17 AA (Vic), MP 367, item 600/4/69.

18 Written recollections of Lieut-Colonel R.F. Oakes, 1983; letter, Oakes to Sir R. Williams, 24 November 1964, Williams papers, NLA MS6525, box 6.

19 H.C. Miller, *Early Birds,* Rigby, Adelaide, 1968, p 70.

as family members attest, a self-taught musician who could play the piano, banjo, guitar and ukulele.

At times matters in the Mess got a little out of hand, largely in consequence of the peculiar habits of Lieutenant J.V. Tunbridge. Although regarded as 'a cheerful and likeable chap', always good company at Mess parties, he had sustained disfiguring burns when he was shot down in 1917. Suffering insomnia and seeking companionship during his lonely hours awake, he often woke others in the early morning with an invitation to join him for a meal of corned beef fritters washed down with cocoa. His chopping of wood to cook a meal not infrequently disturbed sleepers at two or three in the morning, as did his habit of switching on lights to perform his duty as mess secretary by presenting them with a mess bill. As one of Tunbridge's fellow officers later recounted:

> If we were tired or did not favour such a supper party, and locked our door against his visit, he would set down an old gramophone he had outside the door and play 'Let's have a basin of soup' by Billy Williams over and over again until we could stand the thing no longer and let him in.[20]

The solution to this particular one of Tunbridge's excesses came when a colleague emptied his revolver into the record player and blew it to pieces. The score was further settled by a prank which was reportedly played at McNamara's suggestion. Tunbridge's family owned a furnishing store in Ballarat and, accordingly, his room was tastefully done out with items from this source. This prompted the idea of shutting one of the base's draft horses in Tunbridge's quarters while he was away on day-leave.[21]

There was at least some flying to be done, even though the pace of operational training was diminishing. On 12 June 1919 seven aircraft set off for Ballarat in two formations (one of three Sopwith Pup scouts, the other comprising four Avro 504Ks) on the first of a series of reconnaissances for the purpose of surveying air routes across Victoria. Although the distance involved was only ninety kilometres, the mission was dogged by a strong northerly headwind - with the result that dropping fuel levels forced all but one of the fliers to either turn back or make unscheduled landings short of their destination.

As it happened, McNamara had been in charge of the Avro formation which got a little beyond Bacchus Marsh before being forced to land in a paddock near Ballan. Another of the pilots in this group recalled of McNamara's action on this occasion that:

> He was a very persistent chap in his ideas, and once engaged in a mission would carry it out if it was possible to do so. When it was obviously impossible to reach our objective on this flight, let alone return home, 'Dilb' - as we called him - called it off.[22]

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20 Oakes' recollections.

21 Miller, *Early Birds*, p 70.

22 Oakes' recollections. The origins of the nickname 'Dilb' are unknown but it is perhaps short for 'dilberry', in which case it probably carried the same colloquial Australian connotation as 'dag' (referring to the soiled wool around a sheep's tail) of an amusing or eccentric person.

One of the four Avro machines damaged its undercarriage and had to be transported back to Point Cook by train, while extra fuel was brought up the next day to enable the remaining aircraft to make the return flight to base.

Some mildly critical references duly appeared in the *Argus*, one of Melbourne's leading newspapers, pointing out that the failure to carry out what was a relatively simple task was an 'inauspicious beginning' to the reconnaissance program.[23] A few days later the defence pilots received another 'serve' over their failure to mount a publicised aerial display to mark the return from the war of a large party of AFC personnel:

> Disappointment was the lot of those who visited Port Melbourne yesterday in the expectation of witnessing a display of fancy flying by aviators from the Point Cook school. It had been announced that a squadron of aeroplanes would intercept the s.s. *Kaiser-i-Hind* some distance down the bay, and escort the vessel to Port Melbourne; but evidently the weather conditions were not considered 'ideal', for the flight did not take place. The home-coming airmen on the vessel were frankly disappointed. Most of them had spent many months on active service in France, where it was not always possible - or politic - to wait for ideal weather before undertaking a scouting expedition.

The newspaper went on to report that those responsible for abandoning the welcoming flight were further 'put to shame' by the fact that two privately-operated 'Handley Page' aircraft (actually Maurice Farman Shorthorns), recently sold off by the Defence Department as surplus, were not deterred by considerations such as weather. Flown by their new civilian owners, R.G. Carey and A. Fenton, these machines 'swooped unexpectedly across the bay as the *Kaiser-i-Hind* approached, and encircled the vessel several times before they again disappeared. Each carried a lady passenger!'[24]

McNamara was reportedly highly incensed at what he regarded as unwarranted and uninformed criticism from this source. His response was reputedly to arrange for two or three of his colleagues to join him in a mock strafe of central Melbourne, flying at building height over Bourke, Collins and Flinders Streets and giving pedestrians and traffic quite a fright. As later noted by Lieutenant Roland Oakes, one of those taking part: 'We could get away with that sort of thing in those days, with no disciplinary action being taken'.[25]

The details of this alleged incident may well refer to the aerial demonstration mounted in conjunction with the parade to mark Peace Day on the morning of Saturday, 19 July 1919. On this occasion five Avros and Sopwiths from Point Cook carried out thrilling stunts over the city, after first photographing the scene taking place in the streets below. The first spiral dive performed by one of the pilots reportedly startled many in the crowd, who expected the aircraft to 'crash itself to pieces on the housetops of Richmond'. By the time the last machine flew over the saluting base 'at a height which barely lifted it above the roof of Parliament House', however, this seemed 'quite a commonplace occurrence'.[26]

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[23] *Argus*, 13, 14 June 1919.
[24] *Argus*, 17 June 1919.
[25] Oakes' recollections.
[26] *Age*, 21 July 1919.

The purpose of this display had apparently become confused in Oakes' memory, though not the belief which plainly existed among the CFS pilots that advantage was being taken of an opportunity to answer their critics. Not just the airmen took this to be the case, as one newspaper pointedly referred to them as those 'recent disappointments of the public' before proceeding to recount the part they played on the day.[27]

Oakes also recounted a subsequent incident in which McNamara is claimed to have taken a public stand against 'a high up dignitary in the Catholic Church' over the question of loyalty to Britain. Presumably this referred to notices which appeared in the Melbourne press in mid-March 1920, announcing that during the forthcoming St. Patrick's Day procession the car carrying the Irish-born Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr. Daniel Mannix, would be escorted through the city streets by fifteen Catholic VC winners of Irish descent, in uniform, mounted on grey chargers. One of those billed as comprising the escort party was McNamara.[28]

In fact, McNamara had not been contacted prior to this publicity, and flatly refused to take part. It was not as though the annual parade was purely a celebration of Hibernicism, since Mannix had established himself during the two referendums in 1916 and 1917 over the introduction of conscription as a staunch critic of both Australia's Nationalist government led by W.M. Hughes and British policy towards Ireland. During the 1918 St. Patrick's Day parade Mannix's pointed action in doffing his biretta when patriotic Irish airs were played but not the National Anthem had caused a storm of protest, with calls for his deportation and a mass demonstration. As even Melbourne's weekly Catholic newspaper made clear, the significance of including the VCs in the 1920 march 'cannot be mistaken':

> The men who fought and bled for small nations have not forgotten the one small nation of Europe still in bondage. It would be strange indeed had they forgotten the land of their fathers. Hence it is that on Saturday, before Australia and the whole world, they make their protest against the treatment now being meted out to Ireland. Has anyone more right to protest?[29]

As a serving officer of the defence forces, McNamara was adamant that it was quite improper for him to become involved in such a blatantly political demonstration - even if he had been consulted beforehand. The family version of events is that he contacted the archbishop's staff but received no satisfaction over having been taken for granted in this fashion, whereupon he stated his position in a signed statement delivered to the editors of all Melbourne's leading newspapers.[30] Research does not show that any such complaint was picked up by the press, despite the *Argus* being amongst Mannix's severest critics, but it is unmistakable that all accounts of the St. Patrick's Day parade and subsequent appearances by the archbishop's VC escort that the figure of only fourteen members is mentioned.[31]

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[27] *Argus*, 21 July 1919.
[28] *Herald*, 17 March 1920; *Age*, 18 March 1920.
[29] *Advocate*, 18 March 1920.
[30] Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 1 January 1996.
[31] Frank Murphy, *Daniel Mannix: Archbishop of Melbourne 1917-1963*, Polding Press, 1974, p 72; Michael Gilchrist, *Daniel Mannix: Priest & Patriot*, Dove Communications, Blackburn, Vic, 1982, pp 82-3.

In the circumstances it seems more likely that McNamara would have attended an alternative event which took place at the Melbourne Cricket Ground at the same time as the St. Patrick's Day parade, during which General Sir William Birdwood - the wartime commander of the AIF - presented decorations and medals to three hundred former members of his command. Although at least one VC winner who had been expected to attend the MCG chose to join Mannix, there was a special AFC flavour to this ceremony, with Birdwood paying a particular tribute to the airmen's role and singling out the fighter ace Captain A.H. Cobby (who was present) for special mention.[32] Considering McNamara's own deep feelings of patriotism at this juncture - perhaps best typified when he was formally presented with his VC medal by the visiting Prince of Wales during an investiture ceremony at Federal Government House, Melbourne, just two months later[33] - it is inconceivable that he would have willingly lent his name to any event which might have called his motives into question.

There were many other ways in which McNamara's highly-developed sense of public duty was demonstrated. One of these was his enthusiastic participation in the Commonwealth government's peace loans. The first of these attempts to raise funds for the post-war economy through public subscription was launched in August 1919. To assist in promoting it, aircraft (mostly from the CFS) were sent - with well-known pilots selected by the Defence Department - on tours of several weeks to all States. Visiting major towns and country districts, the pilots used their aircraft to take passengers on flights and drop leaflets urging the public to support the peace loan cause.

McNamara's involvement in such an undertaking was practically inevitable. He was one of six officers assigned to carry out the program of aerial activities around Victoria. Leaving Point Cook on 5 September in an Avro 504K, he covered more than 1100 kilometres before arriving back at the base nine days later. The route he covered had taken him on a wide north-westerly loop, calling at centres along the Murray River as far as Mildura then back through towns in the Mallee region further south.[34]

When it became apparent late in the month that the level of funds raised were below the targets hoped for, McNamara was among VC winners in Victoria who signed an appeal to the public issued in their name by the Central Peace Loan Committee:

> We ask Australians to realise that the big task this country undertook when she went into the war is not yet finished. When every 'digger' is back at work, when every man who has suffered is adequately provided for, the job will be finished, but not till then... We appeal to them to finish the job by voluntarily subscribing to the Peace Loan.[35]

Ultimately the First Peace Loan would succeed in raising 25 million pounds, with the result that when a second such loan was opened the next year there was a resort to similar promotional efforts. McNamara was again chosen to take part, this time traversing South Australia with two mechanics assigned to keep his machine flyable.[36] To assist him to achieve an effective coverage of the State, he was

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32 *Herald*, 20 March 1920.
33 *SMH*, 28 May 1920.
34 *SLA*, November 1919, p. 521.
35 *Argus*, 27 September 1919.
36 AAC Routine Orders No. 66 dated 6 August 1920, held by RAAF Museum, Point Cook.

authorised to engage additional civilian pilots. The two he chose were both ex-servicemen: Captain Harry Butler (flying his own Bristol M.1c) and Lieutenant Horrie Miller in another Defence Department Avro.

The pilots who carried out publicity flights across Victoria for the First Peace Loan in 1919, pictured at Point Cook: (from left) Captains A.H. Cobby, W.V. Herbert, A.T. Cole, and McNamara, with Lieutenant F.G. Huxley.

The latter was lucky to be selected, as he was still nursing a broken arm from an earlier aircraft mishap, but spent his meeting with McNamara at the South Australian hotel in Adelaide 'dexterously avoiding shaking hands to keep his injury secret'. He subsequently carried out the program of promotional flying with his arm discreetly splinted.[37]

McNamara's presence in South Australia enabled a Peace Loan Aerial Derby to be staged on 8 September, billed as Australia's first post-war air race. This saw competitors - of which there were only three: McNamara in his Avro trainer, Butler in his Bristol, and Lieutenant F.S. Briggs in a privately-owned DH9a - flying a course

37 Frank Dunn, *Speck in the Sky: a history of Airlines of Western Australia,* Airlines of Western Australia, WA, 1984, pp 25-6.

from Adelaide city to the port, thence to Henley and back to the city. The race ended with McNamara coming a distant second to Butler.[38]

By this time Point Cook had become the home of the Australian Air Corps, formed on 1 January 1920. This was an interim establishment still within the military forces, which was expected to form the basis of a new and permanent defence air service. The AAC's formation, though, had seen virtually all the officers on the former staff either reposted or dispensed with. McNamara himself was not immediately given membership of the new organisation after his AIF appointment was finally terminated at the end of 1919, a fact which caused quite a public stir.

When Captain E.R. King, a former member of the AFC, was contacted about joining the AAC he wrote back to say that:

> In view of the fact that public opinion is so very bitter against the discharge of several officers who held appointments at Point Cook for a considerable period, I feel I cannot accept the appointment offered to me. There is a particularly bitter feeling around owing to Captain McNamara, VC, not being given an appointment in the new Corps, and I feel I must forfeit my place in favour of this very good and gallant officer.[39]

What King and others may have overlooked was the likelihood that McNamara had indeed been offered a position in the AAC, but had his own reasons for declining or hesitating to accept it. His personal circumstances at this juncture were undergoing great strain, with his mother suffering the terminal stages of tuberculosis. On 17 May 1920 she finally succumbed to her illness at the home to which the family had subsequently moved in Moonee Ponds, in Melbourne's western suburbs, and was buried at Brighton the next day.[40]

From his father's death early in 1918, Frank had effectively been the family's main breadwinner - at least until brother Leo returned safely from the war in June 1919 and resumed his pre-war job as a bank clerk. The eldest daughter, twenty-two-year-old Rose, had stayed unmarried and at home, running the house for the seven other children (who then ranged in age from seventeen down to five) and nursing their mother. Although by 1920 there were others able to share the family's burden, much remained requiring Frank's attention and there were many expenses to be met. Whether he agonised over where his best prospects lay - with the new air service or in a return to teaching - is unknown; what was certain was that he needed a permanent job and secure income. Not until the first months of 1920, however, had the situation

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[38] N.M. Parnell & T.W. Boughton, *Flypast: a record of aviation in Australia*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1988, p 36; S. Brogden, *The History of Australian Aviation*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1960, p 81.

[39] Letter by King dated 30 January 1920, AA (Canb), CRS A1952, item A559/28/679.

[40] Death certificate No. 5635 of 1920; Vic BD&M.

on the domestic front reached a sufficiently settled or predictable state for him to make a decision regarding his future. On 1 April he was appointed to the AAC.[41]

[41] AAC Routine Orders No. 47 dated 30 April 1920.

CHAPTER FIVE

Living with fame

In anticipation of the formation of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) on 31 March 1921, McNamara finally took the step of resigning from the Education Department on 28 February.[1] He was among the twenty-one officers originally named to the new organisation, being appointed with the rank of flying officer (honorary flight lieutenant).[2] As with all of those so appointed, he was granted only a temporary commission - his suitability and seniority being determined by his performance in a later competitive examination. It was on the basis of the score he achieved in this exam (77.4 per cent), that his probationary appointment was confirmed early in 1923.[3]

Initially he was posted as adjutant at Point Cook, the title of which was changed from Central Flying School to No. 1 Flying Training School. While here it seems likely that he took part in a program to survey air routes, it being reported in June that he was preparing to fly to Perth with Flight Lieutenant F.W.F. Lukis to carry out some work of this nature in Western Australia.[4]

Promoted flight lieutenant in September, in November he was transferred to Air Force Headquarters located within Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, as the Staff Officer (Operations and Intelligence). His tenure of this post was fairly brief, however, as in July of 1922 he was replaced by Flight Lieutenant H.N. Wrigley and went back to the FTS at Point Cook. The base here was now known as No. 1 RAAF Station, under the command of Squadron Leader A. Murray Jones with whom McNamara had also formerly served during the war.

From January 1923 McNamara was made commanding officer of 1FTS, still in the rank of flight lieutenant although in March 1924 he was granted honorary rank as squadron leader.[5] The primary task which fell to him in this post was to prepare for the commencement of *ab initio* instruction - that is, flying courses for new pilots - instead of the purely refresher training of already-qualified pilots which had been the School's

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1 Information held by *ADB* office.

2 D.N. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1962, p 16n.

3 Others who did less well in the examination - such as AM Sir George Jones - were subsequently to complain that Williams, as the new service's senior officer, had given favoured treatment to former colleagues from No. 1 Squadron, AFC, which included McNamara; author's interview with Jones, 21 January 1988.

4 *SLA*, 1 June 1921, p. 215. It is not clear whether McNamara eventually took part in this mission, though Lukis certainly did.

5 Air Board agendum No. 489 of 1924.

main purpose until then. The first of these new courses began at the end of his first month in command, with fourteen students drawn from the Army, Navy and civil aviation, as well as two RAAF airmen who hoped to gain their 'wings'.

During 1923-25 McNamara was Commanding Officer of No. 1 Flying Training School at Point Cook, and oversaw the first post-war courses to train new pilots for the RAAF. He is shown here (at right, back to the camera) with two students and an instructor in front of one of the school's Avro 504K basic trainers.

This being the first such course run by the post-war air force, McNamara decreed that each of the students had to have completed ten hours of dual instruction before being allowed to fly solo. One of the Army pupils later commented that 'Most of us were ready long before that period elapsed ...', thereby offering the implicit criticism that the CO was being unduly cautious.[6] An explanation for McNamara's approach in this case was, odd to say, that he was himself a not a particularly proficient pilot.

Charles Gates (a non-commissioned officer in the radio section at Point Cook during the 1920s) declares that McNamara was notorious throughout the air force as an 'awful pilot', perhaps a legacy of his wartime heel injury or a lack of constant practice. Whereas airmen were normally keen to be taken up with any pilot willing to carry a passenger, 'When he [McNamara] appeared on the tarmac with a set of flying goggles, mechanics disappeared like snowflakes in the Sahara'.[7]

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6 F.M. Bladin, unpublished manuscript held by AWM.
7 Author's interview with Wing Commander C.F. Gates, 1 March 1988.

Gates has particular cause to remember the occasion in March 1923 when the base was required to mount a mock air raid on Melbourne as a public demonstration of the RAAF's air defence capabilities:

> For some reason or other, higher authorities wouldn't trust McNamara in the formation and wanted him to go sight-seeing. I was shanghaied into the business as passenger and told to go out to one of the aircraft, which was indicated to me. Stan Brearley [one of the instructors] was in the pilot's seat, running up the engine, and I assumed that he would be flying it. But at the last moment he got out and McNamara got in - I had been set up. Well, we kept clear of the formation throughout the exercise, but on landing we bounced, bounced, bounced. We finally stopped, and he turned and said to me, 'Quite a nice flight, wasn't it, Gates?'[8]

On other occasions, when the service was involved in some major public event, RAAF authorities could not afford to be so selective about which pilots they utilised. In 1924, for example, Melbourne prepared to play host to a squadron of Royal Navy warships visiting the port while on a world tour. On 17 March the squadron, led by the giant battlecruiser *Hood,* arrived to a tumultuous welcome. The RAAF put more than twenty aircraft into the skies as part of the reception accorded the visitors - just about all that were available at Point Cook - and this time it was glad to have McNamara on hand to pilot an SE5a single-seat fighter.[9]

For all that he lacked skill in the air, McNamara was nonetheless recognised as a very human and likeable figure. Even Gates could forgive the flight he was forced to endure with him at the controls, describing him as 'a gentleman, very mild, very pleasant ...' Others agree, painting a picture of an easy-going and likeable personality, though not one who was especially strong or memorable. Another airman in the RAAF's ranks at Point Cook in the 1920s later remarked:

> There was nothing extraordinary about McNamara. His VC was the most remarkable thing about him, and he lived off it - though this was a situation pushed on him, not one of his choosing.[10]

The glare of the spotlight in which McNamara had to live was doubtless as tedious and irritating for him at times as it was for others who felt that his public profile was not entirely warranted.

Reminders of his wartime exploit seemed endless. In 1923, for example, the Australian War Memorial commissioned former official war artist Septimus Power to produce a painting of the incident for which McNamara received his VC. Completed the following year, the canvas was executed from photographs of the nature of the terrain and type of aircraft involved, but apparently without other input from any of the Australian airmen present. When he first saw the painting in 1925 McNamara pointed out that it was incorrect in a number of details, principally in showing 'the ground

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8 Author's interview with Gates, 1 March 1988.
9 *Argus*, 15, 17 March 1924.
10 Information of Squadron Leader J.R. Curtain, 5 November 1993.

rougher than it actually was and the cavalry more massed and closer to the machine than the Turks got'.[11]

Even McNamara's personal life attracted an unusual degree of public interest, never moreso than in 1924 when he took the important step of marrying. His new wife was Helene Marcelle Bluntschli, whom he had first met while stationed at Heliopolis in September 1916 and was now aged 22. Following her father's death shortly after the war, she had accompanied her mother and younger sister when the latter came out to Australia to marry a Sydney man. It was during the sixteen months Helene spent in Sydney before returning to Belgium that she and McNamara met again during 1923. In her words, she saw 'a good deal' of him and the two became engaged.[12]

The marriage took place in Melbourne's St. Patrick's Cathedral on 29 April 1924, just a few weeks after McNamara's 30th birthday. Helene and Madame Bluntschli returned to Australia a week earlier, staying as guests of Brigadier-General F.G. Hughes and his wife in their home at St. Kilda. The wedding itself was something of a social highlight of the year, perhaps not least because of its colourful military flavour. The groom, best man (Lukis) and groomsman (Murray Jones) were all in uniform, as were many others present - including the fellow officers from Point Cook who formed a guard of honour with drawn swords forming 'an arch of steel'.[13] The crowd of onlookers which turned up was reportedly so large that neither the bridal party nor guests could leave the cathedral for a considerable time.[14]

Details of not just the wedding ceremony were published, but also the reception held afterwards at St. Kilda. Much was made of the fact that the ballroom had been decorated in the AFC colours of pale blue, dark blue and red, and in particular that guests were met on arrival beneath 'a real aeroplane' (actually a specially-constructed replica) which was suspended from the ceiling. The air force theme had been carried through to include four miniature aircraft which decorated the cake, and another larger model which hung above the bridal table during the wedding tea.[15]

McNamara and his new wife were allocated one of the weatherboard Federation-style cottages at Point Cook as their married quarters,[16] and here they settled into the life of the small community on the RAAF station. Mrs McNamara - described in the press as a 'tall, slim girl with dark bobbed hair, black eyes and a vivacious manner' - was a special hit with the young airmen. As one remembered with a sigh more than half a century later:

> She really was a beautiful lady. I'd go up to their quarters to clean up the yard for her, and she always brought out coffee and cake.[17]

The single officers and cadets on base also enjoyed the ritual of 'calling' and leaving a card at the McNamara quarters. One recalls that:

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11 Letter, J.L. Treloar (Director, AWM) to H. Septimus Power, 26 June 1925, quoted in Gavin Fry & Anne Gray, *Masterpieces of the Australian War Memorial*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1982, p 51.

12 *Herald*, 28 April 1924.

13 *Table Talk*, 8 May 1924.

14 *Herald*, 29 April 1924; *Australasian*, 10 May 1924.

15 *Herald*, 29 April 1924.

16 Their house from 1924 until 1930 was MQ 12 (No. 8 Cole Street), facing the parade ground from the eastern corner of Ross Smith Road.

17 Information of Air Commodore C.R. Taylor, 5 November 1993.

Afternoon tea was always delightful, as she was quiet - a bit aloof - but very charming.[18]

The scene outside St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, after the wedding of McNamara and Helene Bluntschli on 29 April 1924. By this stage McNamara knew what it meant to be a public celebrity.

A regular feature on the social calendar of the Officers' Mess was the dining-in night, involving formality over the dinner table but thereafter much frivolity and hilarity often lasting into the small hours of the next morning. Ulex Ewart, a junior officer in this period, later recalled one such occasion when:

> Frank McNamara invited the hardies to the kitchen of his married quarters. Here he produced bacon and eggs from the larder and someone volunteered to cook them. Frank was an amiable man with a habit of blinking his eyes from time to time. Our cook, looking around for something on which to crack the eggs, spied Mac's bald pate and decided he had found the very place. As each egg was cracked on top of Mac's head he blinked, and what with his natural sequence of blinking, the blinks followed one another in rapid succession. Mac sat through it all quietly, unprotesting. Whether or not Mac's good wife remained asleep in the front bedroom, she certainly must have been no little dismayed at the state of her kitchen when she entered it later, with frying pan and sundry plates in a greasy state on the kitchen sink. Perhaps she left the wash-up for Mac to do at the end of his air force duties that day. I hope not, as

18 Information of Air Commodore W.H. Garing, 24 October 1995.

most of us - including Mac - were suffering badly from sore heads for most of the day.[19]

McNamara's promotion to the substantive rank of squadron leader from 1 July coincided with the resignation of Murray Jones from the RAAF on 30 June 1924 to become an orchardist. This created a vacancy for a new station commander at Point Cook, which he might reasonably have expected to fill. It was customary for an officer with flying experience to hold command of any station where flying operations formed a major part of its activities. As it happened, he was the senior such officer available - principally because of the temporary absence in England of three officers who were senior to him on the General List.

The Air Board, however, contemplated departing from previous practice and appointing the non-flying commanding officer of No. 1 Aircraft Depot based at Point Cook. The logic to this case was that this officer, Squadron Leader T.R. Marsden, was senior to McNamara as well as much older, had wider experience of command (having been a wartime lieutenant-colonel in the army) and greater administrative ability as well. Not only had Marsden frequently acted as CO during Jones' absences, but the one hundred and seventy airmen belonging or attached to his unit outnumbered the seventy which McNamara commanded in the FTS. As a consequence of all these factors the Board gave temporary command to Marsden, 'with the reservation that all matters of flying training or flying operations will be dealt with by the OC No. 1 FTS.'[20]

Despite any disappointment which he felt at this outcome, McNamara continued to take an active part in the life of his service. At the end of the year, when the RAAF staged its first aerial pageant at Melbourne's Flemington racecourse on 13 December, he took a leading role in the committee of officers which handled the administrative and flying arrangements for this event.[21]

In 1925 McNamara was selected for a two-year posting of duty in Britain in exchange for a Royal Air Force (RAF) officer, who happened to be - ironically enough - Squadron Leader R.M. Drummond.[22] Sailing for London on 9 June, he was accompanied by his wife and an infant son, Robert, born on 7 March. On arrival the next month he apparently underwent a brief course at No. 2 FTS at Shotwick, near Digby,[23] before taking up duty in August with No. 5 FTS at Sealand, near Chester. Here he acted as squadron leader in charge of administration and the unit's second-in-command until December 1926, when he was posted to the Air Ministry in London for a further six months of special duty in the Directorate of Training.[24]

This period in England provided a welcome opportunity to get to know his wife's relatives for the first time during periods of leave taken on the continent. On one such trip to Belgium, he was introduced to members of his mother-in-law's family, the Poels, who were prominent in Brussels as vintners and restaurateurs. A reception given for Frank by one of his wife's uncles, Oscar, was hilariously upstaged by another uncle named Edmond, a clever engineer, businessman and painter, who first took the guest

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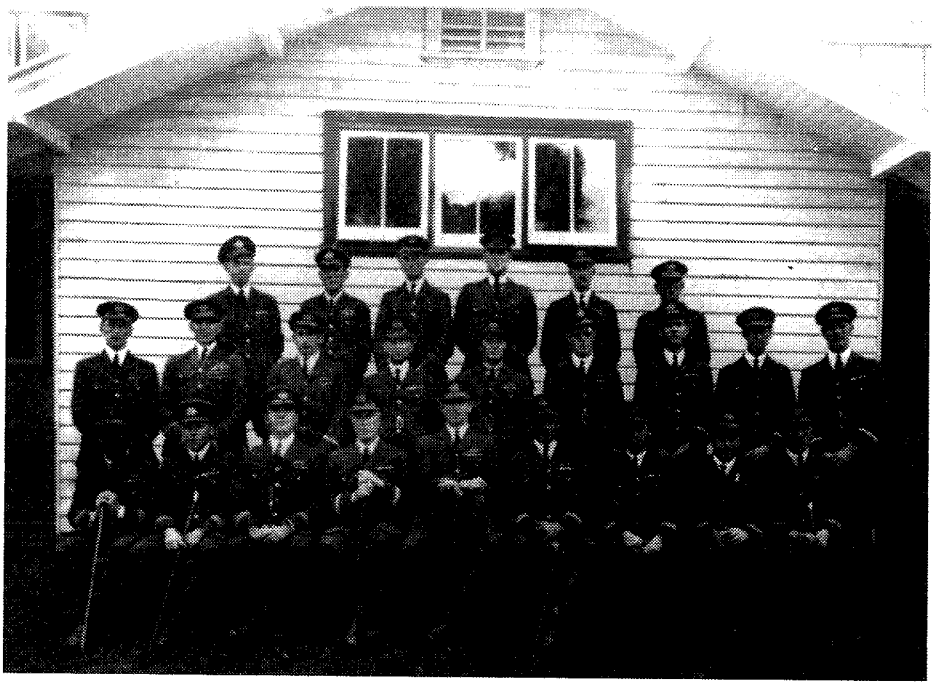
19 Air Commodore U.E. Ewart's written recollections to author, June 1988.
20 Air Board agendum No. 505 of 1924.
21 Pageant program, copy held by RAAF Historical Section, Canberra.
22 Air Board agendum No. 898 of 1927.
23 *SMH*, 23 July 1925, and *RAAF List*, August 1925.
24 McNamara's RAAF personal file; *Who's Who in Australia*, 1935, and *RAAF List*, February, August 1927.

of honour on a tour of all his favourite bars and clubs. This excursion was undertaken in costume - Edmond dressed as Napoleon Bonaparte, Frank as his Empress Josephine. According to family tradition, Oscar was not amused but McNamara was 'much admired'.[25]



Officers of No. 1 FTS, Point Cook, pictured in 1924. McNamara is in the front row, third from left, while seated to his left are: T.R. Marsden, A. Murray Jones, and F.W.F. Lukis; on the right-hand end of the front row is G. Jones (later Air Marshal Sir George Jones).

One legacy of McNamara's contact with his in-laws was his introduction of a more refined note to mess life back at Point Cook, following his return. A young officer remembers in the early 1930s that:

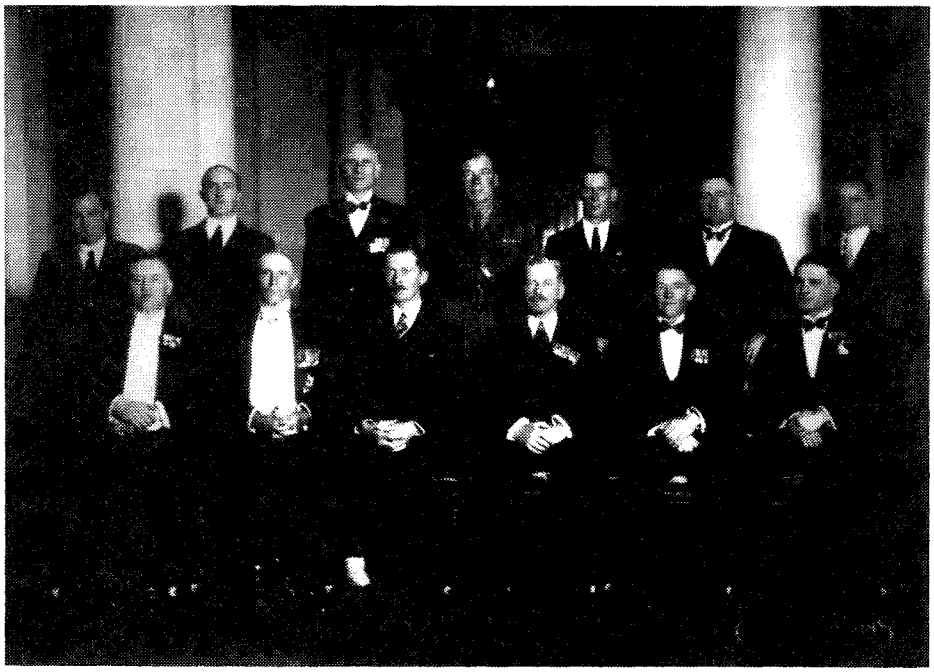
> It was McNamara who introduced the mess to wines at functions, instead of just the usual beer. As mess secretary I had the job of going into Melbourne every Saturday to make a selection, which he then had to approve.[26]

Reaching Melbourne by ship in October 1927, the next month he resumed back at No. 1 FTS - only now as second-in-command with special responsibility for

25 Letter, Mr R.E. McNamara to author, 5 January 1996.
26 Information of Air Commodore Garing.

administrative matters. The next year an important point in his career was reached, when he made a bid to qualify for admission to the RAF Staff College at Andover. Despite having only just returned from England, he readily appreciated that having the initials 'psa' after his name was a useful step towards further advancement.

In fact, McNamara had already sat the entrance examination, while in England during 1926, but had not been successful. In 1928, therefore, he tried a second time, sitting the three-day series of test papers with two other RAAF officers, F.W.F. Lukis and G. Jones. According to the latter, when the results of the exam came through it was found that only he (Jones) had passed; the CAS, Williams, 'thought there had been a mistake, and sent to London to have the results rechecked'.[27] Unfortunately for McNamara, there was no mistake - he had missed out on one subject - and the next year, when he tried yet again, he missed out on several more.



In November 1927 VC winners were invited to a reunion dinner in Melbourne with Lord Somers, Governor of Victoria (third from left, in front), and the Governor-General, Lord Stonehaven (third from right, in front). Others shown are (standing at rear) W.D. Joynt, McNamara, J. Rogers, G.M. Ingram, W. Peeler, L.D. McCarthy, and R.V. Moon; (in front, from left) A. Jacka, Sir Neville Smyth, W. Ruthven, and Issy Smith (formerly of the Manchester Regiment).

Recognising that his failure to get to staff college was a damaging blow to his ambitions, and perhaps that his problem was that he had got out of the habit of

27 Jones, *From Private to Air Marshal*, p 42.

studying, McNamara took the step of seeking to acquire other recognised high-level educational qualifications. In 1928 he went back to the University of Melbourne to pick up the course he had begun before the First World War. Despite the struggle which part-time study entailed, he stuck with the work regime for five long years - despite a move to the nearby airbase at Laverton. His son, a small boy through this period, remembers the effort involved:

> I well recall him working away in the sun-room built onto the house at Laverton, evenings and weekends - with his pet magpie 'Cordie' perched on his shoulder, watching every word he wrote in between 'bombing' the floor. We went up to the University every Saturday for years. He would park the old car alongside the lake while Mum and I went shopping at Myers, Buckley and Nunns, or Fletcher Chester and Franz. He picked us up afterwards and we would picnic along the Yarra and watch the rowing, or push off to Black Rock for a swim.[28]

Finally, a few days before Christmas of 1933, he was able to stand before the university's chancellor, Sir John MacFarland, at a graduation ceremony where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree (with Honours Class II) in International Relations.[29]

Meanwhile, in October 1930, the opportunity unexpectedly arose for him to step back into the command of Point Cook, when the CO (Wing Commander R.S. Brown) was suddenly compelled to retire. Initially, he was only acting in this capacity during Brown's absence on leave, but following the latter's formal departure in January 1931 the decision was taken to have McNamara continue in the post. He did so, however, without promotion or being replaced in his normal position - thus effectively combining the two posts as an economy measure.[30] In October 1931 he was given temporary rank of wing commander, with his substantive promotion to this rank being announced in September the following year.[31]

During this, his second stint at Point Cook, McNamara increasingly made administration his main field of activity and interest. Records of his flying hours certainly show that he spent little time in the air as a pilot from 1928, and none at all from 1931 until 1937. One story which dates from this period confirms the impression that he was less and less keen on maintaining his flying skills. According to a former junior officer at the base:

> All station commanders were supposed to fire two hundred rounds a year in aerial practice against sand targets, and it was duly organised for 'Pansy' McNamara to have his go. When someone rang him up to let him know he was expected, they got the reply 'As a matter of fact, I'm very busy today'. The truth was you couldn't get him in an aeroplane...[32]

As an administrator McNamara reportedly left his mark in some highly distinctive ways. Another story dating from the same period - admitted by its source as

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28 Information of Mr R.E. McNamara, compiled 1 January 1996.
29 *Sun News-Pictorial*, 26 December 1933.
30 *Herald*, 24 January 1931.
31 *Herald*, 8 September 1932.
32 Author's interview with Air Commodore P. G. Heffernan, 20 January 1989.

possibly apocryphal - concerns his alleged adoption of the practice of signing all official correspondence to Air Force Headquarters in red ink, in the belief that this was a privilege accorded VC holders in the British services. Reportedly, he was quickly told by the Air Board to cease the habit.[33]

McNamara's unique status plainly did not 'cut much ice' with everyone in the RAAF. The claim has been made that, following the onset of the Depression and the commencement of a period of retrenchment in Australia's armed services, suggestions were heard that he might be among the number of serving officers about to be made redundant. A spate of articles recounting his VC exploit promptly appeared in the press, thus making it politically inexpedient for his services to be terminated.[34]

If stories such as this need to be treated with some caution, it remains true nonetheless that the crimson ribbon McNamara wore on his chest was at times a crucial factor in preserving, if not actually advancing, his career. At a minimum, it opened a variety of doors to him which no other serving officer could normally expect, and brought him into contact with a range of powerful and influential people. As a VC winner, he was feted at venues as diverse as Melbourne Government House and the Constitution Club.[35]

McNamara's prominent image also meant that other people often wished to invoke his name in support of their claims. James Gearing-Thomas, whose family lived in the Melbourne suburb of Eaglemont during the early 1930s, recalls that his youthful interest in flying was actively encouraged by a neighbour named Harold Treloar, who had been a lieutenant with the AFC in Mesopotamia in 1915. When the man running the local lending library also turned out to be a former AFC officer, Captain D.T.W. Manwell, he found himself being urged from both sides to apply for the RAAF:

> They said 'We have a personal friend, Frank McNamara, who will recommend you and endorse your application form if we ask him and tell him that you are the right type'. He wrote back and said he would like to see me first, and a meeting was arranged at the Australia Hotel. We met and I was very impressed as a young man who had read all about him, although he didn't talk much about himself. He met me on two subsequent occasions at Victoria Barracks, where he introduced me to various people whom he thought might help my application - one of these being S.J. Goble, who later headed my interview board. Regrettably, after all this I was failed on my eyesight.[36]

In January 1933 McNamara took over from Wing Commander A.T. ('King') Cole as Commanding Officer of No. 1 Aircraft Depot, now located at the Laverton airbase a few miles from Point Cook. This was a large and diverse unit, serving not only as the RAAF's principal stores supply and equipment repair facility, but also home to the section handling the training of new recruits to the service. Owing to the general expansion taking place within the RAAF during this period, the number of personnel coming under McNamara's command had grown to nearly four hundred by mid-1935 from around two hundred and seventy a few years earlier, and the position had increased commensurately in importance.[37]

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[33] Taped recollections of Wing Commander C.F. Gates, 1988.
[34] Information of Squadron Leader J.R. Curtain, 5 November 1993.
[35] *Reveille*, 31 December 1929, p. 9; *Argus*, 27 April 1932.
[36] Letter, J. Gearing-Thomas to author, 20 February 1993.
[37] Unit diary of No. 1AD, microfilm roll 209, RAAF Historical Section.

The undoubted highlight of his time here was the air race from Mildenhall (England) to Melbourne, organised to mark the 1934 centenary of the State of Victoria, which was to culminate in a huge public air display at Laverton on 10 November. This event gave rise to an incident which was later cited as an illustration of his gentlemanly nature, but which also suggest he had by this time developed considerable skill in dealing with the press.

During the final stages of the air race, as competitors transited Australia on their way south from Charleville in Queensland, a Dutch entry - the KLM DC2 airliner named *Uiver* - became lost in a severe duststorm on 23 October. Eventually it would be forced to make an emergency midnight landing at Albury, New South Wales, but only after RAAF radiomen had spent frantic hours trying to locate and guide it to Laverton. The winning aircraft in the race - a little scarlet-painted De Havilland Comet flown by C.W.A. Scott and T. Campbell-Black - had already reached Laverton by this stage, attracting hundreds of civilian sightseers to the base at the very time that the DC2 drama was unfolding.

As the sightseeing crowd surged around the hangar trying to view the Comet parked inside, RAAF officers on duty ordered the doors closed because of fears that in the excitement damage might be done to the aircraft. To clear the hangar, sentries linked arms across the entrance and began pushing the crowd back outside. In the course of this action several journalists were 'rather brusquely treated', leading to vociferous complaints that they had been hampered in their work. As one later press account recounted, McNamara moved quickly as the senior officer at Laverton to defuse the situation:

> Next day he visited the Melbourne newspaper offices and apologised for the 'unintentional rudeness' of an RAAF officer. That was typical of McNamara. He has a winning personality. Like Franklyn D. Roosevelt, he has a way with journalists that has made him tremendously popular in all newspaper offices.[38]

McNamara watches the air display presented at Laverton on 10 November for the Melbourne Centenary celebrations in company with C.W.A. Scott, winner of the Centenary Air Race from England to Australia. As commanding officer of No. 1 Aircraft Depot, McNamara was at the time also the senior officer on the RAAF's Laverton base.

[38] *Argus*, 10 August 1940.

McNamara's popularity extended into wider circles too, and brought him an array of influential connections. An illustration of this survives in the form of a note he sent to the federal attorney-general and deputy prime minister, J.G. Latham, on the occasion of his appointment as GCMG in 1935 - the tone of which provides clear evidence that he and his wife were well-known socially to the Lathams.[39]

In October 1936 McNamara handed over command of RAAF Station Laverton to Group Captain H.N. Wrigley (left), prior to departing for England. This was the second time that Wrigley succeeded him in a post, and would occur a third time in London six years later.

39 Letter, McNamara to Sir John Latham, 7 June 1935, Latham papers, NLA MS1009, item 1/3951.

In 1936 Laverton became the home of a new flying Citizen Air Force unit, No. 21 (Cadre) Squadron, in addition to No. 1 (Fighter Bomber) Squadron which had operated from there since 1928. With more than one unit on base, Laverton was upgraded to the status of a station and McNamara was appointed to take command of the new station headquarters from 20 April, handing over command of 1AD to Wing Commander F.W.F. Lukis.[40] In his new role he was responsible for directing and supervising all operations, training, administration and discipline carried out on the base, in recognition of which he was given acting rank of group captain in July. Five months later, however, in October, he was required to hand over to Group Captain H.N. Wrigley before proceeding on a new posting.[41]

In November 1936 McNamara made what would prove to be his final departure from his homeland, when he left to attend the Imperial Defence College in London - then the premier institution in the British Empire for advanced study of defence organisation and problems of high strategy. Accompanied by his wife and son Robert, now an eleven-year-old formerly attending Geelong Grammar School, he expected to be away for two years - it being normal for the RAAF officer attending the year-long IDC course to remain a further year in England as Air Liaison Officer. The student body at the IDC comprised no more than thirty hand-picked officers of about the rank of group captain or its equivalent. Having been made acting group captain earlier in the year, McNamara was promoted substantively to this rank on 1 January 1937 before starting the course.[42]

Occupying the four floors and basement of an old house at Buckingham Gate, just yards from the royal palace, the College already enjoyed high repute despite having been in existence for only a decade. Its staff then included Air Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore (himself Australian-born) as commandant, and three directing officers of brigadier or equivalent rank - one from each service - who assisted him. For the first half of 1937 the air force assistant was Air Commodore Charles Portal, who within three years would become Britain's Chief of the Air Staff.

The select quality of the instructors was matched by that of the students, who were drawn from each of the three British services and the civil service, the Indian Army, Canada, Australia (normally two each year) and New Zealand. Among the members of the 1937 course were such names as W.J. Slim,[43] A.G. Cunningham,[44] A.R. Selby,[45] G.R. Pearkes,[46] E.W. Puttick,[47] B.W. Warburton-Lee, RN,[48] G.H.E. Russell, RN,[49] and K.R. Park[50] - all of whom would achieve high distinction during

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40 Unit diary of Station Headquarters, RAAF Station Laverton, microfilm roll 152, RAAF Historical Section.

41 *Argus*, 30 October 1936.

42 *RAAF List*, February 1937.

43 Later Field Marshal Viscount Slim and Governor-General of Australia, 1953-60.

44 General Sir Alan Cunningham enjoyed great success against the Italians in East Africa, 1940-41.

45 A 1914 graduate of Australia's military college who transferred to the British Army in 1930 and rose to major-general.

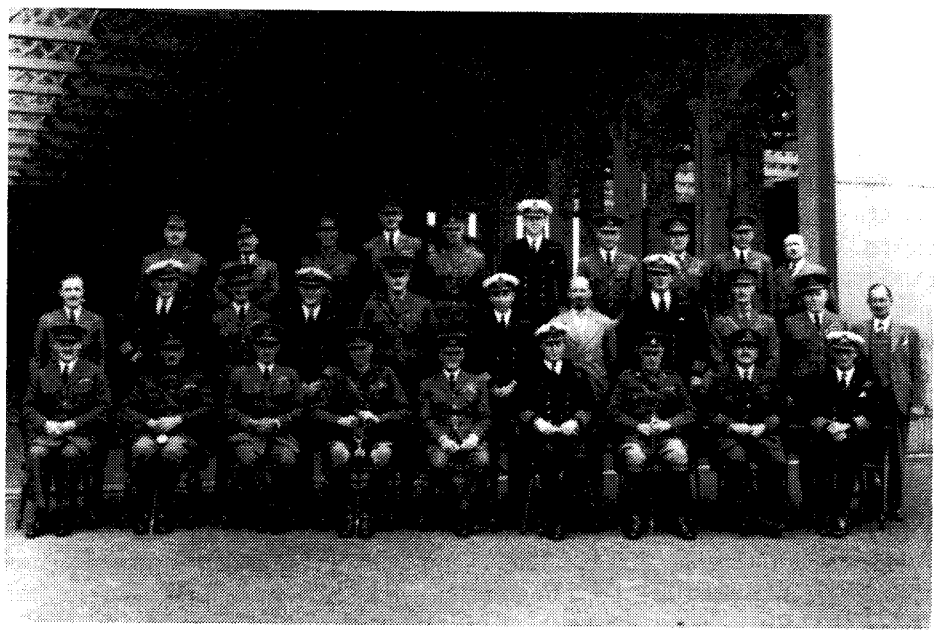
46 A Canadian, Pearkes won the VC at Passchendaele in 1918 and became a major-general during the Second World War; he subsequently became his country's Minister for National Defence.

47 A New Zealander, he served during the Greek and Crete campaigns of 1941 and as Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Puttick later became his country's CGS.

48 Awarded first VC of the Second World War, posthumously after 1940 battle of Narvik, Norway.

49 Later Admiral Sir Guy Russell.

the Second World War. The other Australian there in 1937 was Lieutenant-Colonel S.F. Rowell, later to become a lieutenant-general during the war and Chief of the General Staff in 1950-54.



Staff members and students of the Imperial Defence College, 1937; (from left, back row) Lt-Col C.M.P. Durnford, GpCapt J.O. Andrews, Lt-Col A.G. Cunningham, GpCapt K.R. Park, Lt-Col S.F. Rowell, Capt B.A.W. Warburton-Lee, WgCdr A.L. Fiddament, Lt-Col W.C. Holden, WgCdr A.B. Ellwood, Mr F.E.A Manning; (centre row) Mr J. Balfour, Capt D.B. Fisher, GpCapt A.H. Orlebar, Capt R.C. O'Connor, Lt-Col A.R. Selby, Capt A.C. Collonson, Mr C.G. Hope-Gill, Capt Hon. G.H.E. Russell, Lt-Col R. Mack Scobie, GpCapt G.O. Johnson, Maj L.A. Clemens; (front row) GpCapt R.P. Willock, Col G.I. Gartlan, AirCdre C.F.A. Portal, Brig A.G.C. Dawnay, AM Sir A.M. Longmore, Capt H.E. Horan, Col G.R. Pearkes, GpCapt F.H. McNamara, Capt C.S. Holland.
(Note: For some unknown reason three students from the course are missing from this photo: Col E. Puttick, and Lt-Cols H.G. Eady and W.J. Slim.)

Despite the promise which the College undoubtedly represented, in reality this was rarely achieved during the late 1930s. One of the civilian students of the previous course to McNamara's complained of the 'pretty old-fashioned ideas' which he found being preached,[51] and other voices confirm that the IDC in this period failed to reflect a level of thinking consistent with its hallowed status. In the words of one later writer:

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50 A New Zealander serving in the RAF, he played a major role in winning the Battle for Britain and became Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park.

51 V. Orange, *Sir Keith Park,* Methuen, London, 1984, p 67.

> No student of the British Army in the latter thirties, and particularly of its upper echelons, is unaware that this was a phase when strategical thinking was at its nadir ... The theatre where Grand Strategy should hold the stage was short of a cast. What was offered to the [IDC] students tended to be tepid, conventional, archaic.[52]

Rowell later recalled the leisurely pace of the course, involving three terms working from 10 am to 5 pm and with a month-long break at Easter and two months during the summer.[53] The program for the summer term also included a week-long coach tour of First World War battlefields in France and Belgium. Although claimed to provide 'a useful break in the middle of a strenuous term', the commandant was probably closer to the truth in likening this excursion to 'a schoolmaster taking his boys out for a holiday'.[54] Given the gentlemanly lifestyle involved, the students lived outside the College and commuted daily. McNamara installed his family in rented accommodation about four miles away at Maida Vale, not far from the north-eastern edge of Hyde Park, and - as might have been expected of him - took up memberships of the United Service and RAF Clubs.[55]

Much of the course was taken up with group exercises, such as producing appreciations for hypothetical wars between the British Empire and various other powers (Japan, Russia, Italy and Germany), culminating with the strategic problems of a world war. In addition to a debate on Germany's colonial demands, the students were exposed to major current events in such places as Spain and Italy through lectures.[56] A particular feature of the course was the use made of eminent speakers from outside the College who gave the students the benefit of their knowledge of the fields in which they were expert.

Among the visitors during 1937 were Sir John Reith, the Director-General of the BBC who spoke on broadcasting, and the General Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, Walter Citrine, who gave an inaugural address on manpower problems in wartime. Sir Alexander Cadogan spoke on foreign policy, Clement Attlee on the higher direction of war, and Air Vice-Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding (Commander-in-Chief of RAF Fighter Command) on air defence. When the Secretary of State for Air, Viscount Swinton, came to lecture, he was 'grilled' by some of the RAF students about the respective positions of their service and the German Luftwaffe.[57]

Perhaps the most important lecturer heard by McNamara - in terms of his own future - was the Australian High Commissioner, S.M. Bruce. It is recalled of him that he 'came to talk about Australia and instead delivered a rousing address the title of which could well have been 'Wake up, England'.[58] When the course ended in December, McNamara duly joined Bruce's staff at Australia House as the air liaison officer (ALO) to the Air Ministry. Appointed CBE in the New Year's honours list for 1938, in recognition of the 'excellent service' rendered in the various senior

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52 R. Lewin, *Slim the Standardbearer,* Leo Cooper, London, 1976, p 59.
53 S.F. Rowell, *Full Circle,* p. 35.
54 A.M. Longmore, *From Sea to Sky, 1910-1945,* Bles, London, 1946, p 180.
55 *Who's Who in Australia,* 1938.
56 Orange, *Sir Keith Park,* p 67; Rowell, *Full Circle,* p 35; T.I.G. Grey, *The Imperial Defence College and the Royal College of Defence Studies 1927-1977,* HMSO, Edingburgh, 1977, p 9.
57 Orange, *Sir Keith Park,* p 67, and Rowell, *Full Circle,* p 36.
58 Rowell, *Full Circle,* p 36.

appointments he had previously held with the RAAF, he took up his new post at the end of January.[59]

McNamara's duties as ALO were wide-ranging and immensely important to the service back in Australia, embracing issues touching on personnel, training, equipment, tactics, organisation and other air staff aspects. Apart from acting as air adviser to the high commissioner, he needed to remain in constant personal and written communication with all branches of the Air Ministry, the Ministry of Aircraft Production, RAF Commands and various aircraft manufacturing companies.

London undoubtedly provided outstanding opportunities to enjoy the special distinction associated with being a VC winner. For example, his time at the IDC coincided with the coronation of King George VI in May 1937, a period of great excitement throughout the empire following the drama surrounding the abdication of Edward VIII the previous December. A military contingent had been sent from Australia to take part in the ceremony, and when one of its members - Gunner Arthur Sullivan, VC - suddenly died as a result of a street accident on 9 April, the Australian press was quick to report suggestions by 'several Australians resident in London' that advantage should be taken of McNamara's presence in England to fill the vacancy thus created in the Australian ranks.[60] The government declined to adopt the suggestion, however, and McNamara accordingly viewed the pageantry of the occasion with his fellow IDC students from a stand in Whitehall Gardens.

During April 1939 it also fell to him to propose the toast by three hundred guests at an Anzac reunion dinner of the Diggers' Abroad Association, held at the Grosvenor Hotel with the Duke of Kent (Australia's Governor-General Designate) and other distinguished figures such as Field Marshals Lord Birdwood and Sir Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd in attendance.[61] In the circumstances it can have been no disappointment to learn in September 1938 that he was to stay in London an extra year, the Minister for Defence in Australia having just approved fixing two years as the normal tour for the ALO. On this basis he would not be heading home until December 1939.

Although far removed from the day-to-day happenings in his service back in Australia, McNamara quickly came to appreciate that the position as ALO afforded a unique view of major events influencing or affecting the RAAF and Australian aviation generally. For example, in London he was also the representative of the Civil Aviation Board (at that time still part of the Defence Department) and in that capacity attended several international aviation conferences as Australian delegate.[62]

Before 1938 was out, McNamara found himself cast as a bit player in one of the most sensational political dramas so far experienced by the young RAAF. Following a review of Australia's air service carried out in June and July by Marshal of the RAF Sir Edward Ellington, with particular reference to the service's record of aircraft accidents, the government of Prime Minister J.A. Lyons had announced the removal of Air Vice-Marshal 'Dicky' Williams from his post as CAS and his posting to England on exchange duty for two years.

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59 CBE citation on McNamara's personal file, held by RAAF Discharged Personnel Records Section, Queanbeyan, NSW; *RAAF List*, May 1938.

60 *Argus*, 17, 21 April 1937; *SMH*, 17 April 1937.

61 *SMH*, 27 March 1939; *Reveille*, 1 June 1939, p. 22.

62 These were conferences on private aerial law (Brussels, 1938) and air navigation (Copenhagen, 1939).

King George and Queen Elizabeth at the unveiling of the Australian War Memorial at Villers-Bretonneux in France on 22 July 1938. McNamara (saluting beside cenotaph at right, wearing the RAAF's new 'full dress' uniform) attended as Australia's air liaison officer in London.

This was a decision which Williams did not take kindly, regarding it as a form of public censure which was undeserved, and he accordingly was determined to fight back. McNamara found himself embroiled in the controversy only behind the scenes, with Williams using him as his eyes and ears in London. At the CAS's direct bidding he obtained several interviews with Ellington to check various details, as information of what was going on emerged. In response to Williams' private requests from Melbourne, he also used his contacts in the Air Ministry to try to establish which RAF officer would be sent to Australia as the replacement CAS.[63]

Although his role was purely behind the scenes and not central to the way the situation developed, McNamara's support of Williams carried clear dangers to himself and his future career prospects through identifying him closely with a now discredited figure. The truth of this was pointed out by George Mills, an ex-AFC colleague of Williams whose Light Aircraft Company had begun making parachutes for the RAAF,

63 For a full account of the affair, see my article "'A Damnable Thing": The 1938 Ellington Report and the Sacking of Australia's Chief of the Air Staff', *The Journal of Military History*, July 1990, pp 307-23. This makes clear that McNamara was undoubtedly the unnamed 'friend in London' who Williams cited in his autobiography, *These are facts*, (pp 242, 244) as his informant during the controversy.

when he wrote the following year to describe the recriminatory climate which prevailed within the service:

> Anyone who is a 'Dicky man' as they are called is more or less in the gun. To wit King Cole and there is no love for McNamara.[64]

64 Letter, G.N. Mills to Williams, 25 July 1939, Williams papers, NLA MS 6525, box 3.

CHAPTER SIX

Wartime commands

McNamara's 'window' from the Air Ministry onto the wider world became even more important to the RAAF and Australia following the start of the Second World War in September 1939. He had been due to be replaced within a few months, but in October he was told that the Minister for Defence had extended his stay in England 'for a further year, or until other suitable arrangement can be made' for his relief.[1] In recognition of the greater demands and responsibilities which were suddenly thrust upon him, however, he was granted temporary rank of air commodore on 1 December. For the next two years he handled a wide range of matters which required negotiation, attention or action in London, becoming an important figure in shaping Australia's contribution to the war effort in the air.

The calls on McNamara's time and attention were multifarious. In October 1939, for example, he was instructed to give every assistance to the Minister for Supply and Development, R.G. Casey, when he visited for discussions on a unified empire response to the war situation.[2] When the Minister for Air, J.V. Fairbairn, similarly arrived two months later, McNamara was again called upon to smooth his access to important figures in the British capital. As ALO he also accompanied Fairbairn on a tour of RAF units in France, during which the minister met some of the many Australians in British uniform, as well as inspected a party of two hundred reinforcements passing through the south of France on their way to join No. 10 Squadron, RAAF, in England.[3]

Other duties which came his way entailed assisting the Australian Army's official war correspondent Kenneth Slessor in collecting material during October 1940 for a story on RAAF and RAN volunteers then serving in Britain. This involved making all necessary arrangements for Slessor's visit to the Mount Batten seaplane base at Plymouth where No. 10 Squadron was operating Sunderland flying boats, and Oban in Scotland where a detachment of the Australian unit was operating with the RAF's No. 54 Squadron, as well as his subsequent travel on to the Middle East by air.[4]

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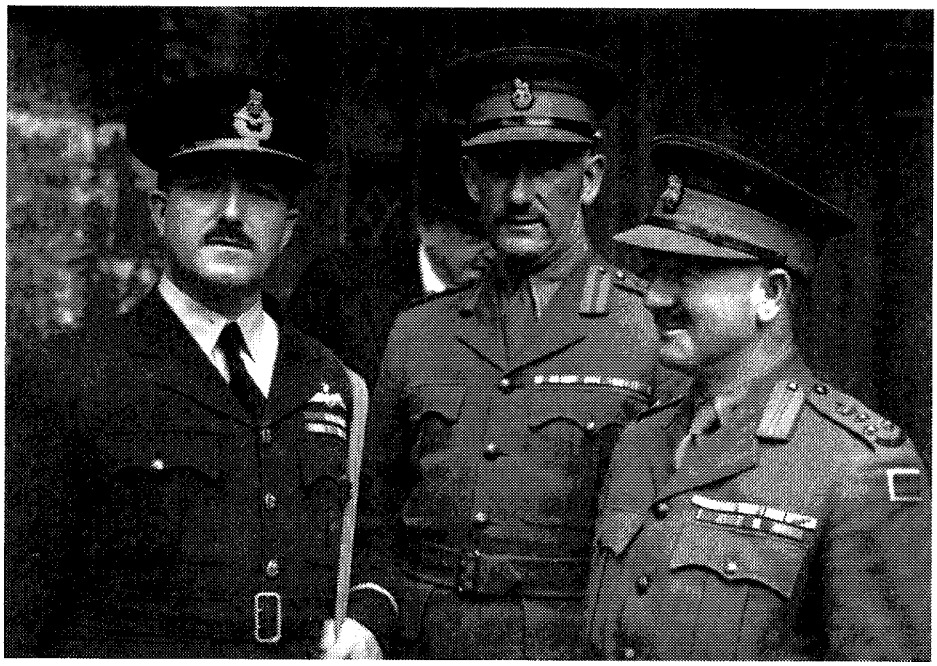
1 Cablegram from Prime Minister's Department dated 13 October 1939, cited in letter, McNamara to A.S. Drakeford (Minister for Air), 3 June 1946: file on McNamara held by RAAF Historical Section, Canb.

2 R.G. Neale (ed.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49*, vol. 2, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1976, pp 341-4.

3 *SMH*, 20 December 1939; *Argus*, 27 December 1939.

4 Clement Semmler (ed.), *The War Diaries of Kenneth Slessor: Official Australian Correspondent 1940-1944*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 1985, pp 135, 148, 154, 158, 160, 173.



McNamara with his army counterpart at Australia House, Colonel W. Bridgeford, and Brigadier L.J. Morsehead, commander of the 2nd AIF's 18th Infantry Brigade which arrived in England in June 1940.

By late 1940 London was not a particularly pleasant or safe place to be, on account of the nightly air raids conducted with growing ferocity by the Germans. Apart from loss of sleep during the attacks, the city's residents had to contend with a 'blackout' and frequent delays on an increasingly unreliable public transport system. Like many other servicemen, for whom the war meant greatly increased workloads and longer hours, McNamara found it progressively difficult to keep himself in peak form amid the endless rounds of meetings and paperwork.

In an attempt to prevent himself becoming over-tired from the air raids, McNamara obtained accommodation outside London at a farm called 'Newgrounds' near Tring, on the western edge of Hertfordshire. Adopting the routine of driving down to the family house in Maida Vale and then on to his office early each morning, he used this as a haven on and off until 1942. In a further effort to keep his 'batteries charged', on Sundays he made it a practice of taking a long walk whenever time allowed, although this presented hazards of its own.

On one occasion when such an opportunity arose, he donned grey baggy pants, a sportscoat, and a green felt hat tipped with a small red feather which he had bought in Munich in 1937, and set off in a north-easterly direction towards Dunstable in neighbouring Bedfordshire. After happily strolling the countryside for several hours, he stopped for a beer and sandwiches at a village pub which turned out to be full of Home Guard warriors who were busy quenching their thirst after weekly manoeuvres. On finishing his meal he asked the landlord where he was, since with all roadsigns across

Britain removed he needed some guidance to find his way back to Newgrounds, but was refused this assistance. As some of those present pointed out, he was a stranger to them - the clear implication being that he might even be an enemy spy.

Feeling somewhat provoked at this, he stated his identity while producing his Air Ministry pass and an RAF map, and repeated his request. This did not improve matters, as one young corporal who looked at the pass merely observed that this could have been forged and suggested he 'push off'. Presented with little alternative McNamara left, after commenting to those assembled: 'God help us if we have an invasion and it's in your area'. He had not gone very far along a lane when he heard the sound of boots behind him, and turned in time to see the corporal from the pub had been following him and was in the act of loading a round into the chamber of his .303 rifle.

Now recognising the seriousness of his position, McNamara readily agreed to accompany the NCO while insisting that he cease waving around a loaded weapon. Soon joined by a police constable who had been summoned, he convinced them to take him to the RAF aerodrome nearby at Long Marston where his identity was duly established to everyone's satisfaction and he eventually made his way back to Newgrounds by taxi. While no doubt he had been very unwise to wander around in civilian attire (especially with the hat) in an unfamiliar area, his handling of the situation demonstrated an ability to talk his way out of trouble which said a lot about him - as did his willingness to recount the tale as a story against himself.[5]

Other occurrences involving him from this period are equally revealing, such as one recalled by his son who was with him on a cold winter's night while they waited on the railway platform at Tring for a train which was running late:

> Frank was wearing a RAAF raincoat and dark blue Air Officer's cap, standing in the very small circle of light coming from one of the wartime station lamps. A little WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force member] walked up to him and, mistaking him for the Station Master, dug him firmly in the ribs and demanded to know when the b----y train was going to arrive since it was two hours overdue already. Lowering his head, he replied, 'My dear, I wish I b----y well knew'. Spotting his air rank cap badge, she burst into tears and stepped backwards so fast that she almost fell off the platform - and would have done if we had not both hauled her back. She became quite inconsolable until we took her to a bench and sat her down, where Frank opened his cigarette case and lit up for both of them. Patting her gently on the back of the shoulder he added, 'Now, come on my dear girl. You are not the first to mistake me for a railwayman - often I am a bus conductor or a Salvation Army officer - so cheer up'. She recognised his generosity and started laughing, remarking that she could hardly wait to tell her WAAF friends how she'd struck an air marshal in the mid-riff and hadn't been put on a charge. We chatted on for a while, and she left us with a big broad smile when the train finally pulled in ... but got into a compartment a bit further along!

The effects of the German aerial bombardment of Britain were inescapable and indelibly imprinted on the minds of those who lived through it. Someone in a position like McNamara's arguably saw a lot more of the scale of the devastation because of

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[5] Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 6 January 1996.

their ability to move around the country on official duty. When Lyons' successor R.G. Menzies, spent from February to May 1941 in London, for example, McNamara was involved in accompanying him on a tour of Britain's bomb-ravaged cities during late March which took in Coventry, Bristol, Plymouth and Portsmouth. Arrival at Plymouth on 22 March (for a visit to No. 10 Squadron) happened to follow two days of the heaviest and most destructive air-raids experienced there since such attacks had begun nine months before.[6] In his diary Menzies recorded finding Australians at the base 'clearing up broken glass but [otherwise] OK', unlike the city from which smoke was still rising.[7]

McNamara accompanies Australian prime minister R.G. Menzies (with cine-camera) on an inspection of bomb-damage at Coventry on 20 March 1941.

Dealing with politicians could make some unusual demands on his reserve of tact and diplomacy, as he evidently found out during another of the periodic visits he made to No. 10 Squadron - which again took place after the Luftwaffe had paid a visit the night before. He was heading for the Mount Batten base when his car was waved down by Lady Astor, the flamboyant American-born Conservative MP for Plymouth, who requested a lift to an air-raid shelter nearby which had suffered a bomb-hit. On their way they passed an anti-aircraft position, beside which two very weary gunners were sitting and singing 'Sweet Adeline' while each beating time on an empty beer bottle.

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6 Unit diary of No. 10 Sqn, microfilm roll 11, RAAF Historical Section.

7 A.W. Martin & P. Hardy (eds.), *Dark and Hurrying Days: Menzies' 1941 Diary,* National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1993, p 94.

Lady Astor, well-known for her work with the temperance movement, was aghast at this display by men in uniform. She ordered the car be stopped and insisted that McNamara have both men arrested, refusing to accept that they had been through a hectic night and deserved some relaxation. To placate her, McNamara spoke to the gunners' sergeant and urged him to get the two out of sight, before driving on. Reaching the lady's destination, he agreed to collect her on his way back - a decision he doubtless regretted when they neared the same gun position and he saw that the two gunners were just as before.

Forced to do some quick thinking, he later recounted how he abruptly pointed out to sea to direct his passenger's attention away from the roadside, remarking:

> My lady, have you ever noticed the beauty of the coastline over *there* to the *right* shore, where the cliffs rising in the sun contrast so magnificently with the sheen on the water. Such a peaceful scene after last night, hmm?

It was probably too much to expect that she was deceived by this ploy, but at least she allowed herself to be diverted and another awkward scene avoided.[8]

Many matters which required his attention were connected with the organisation and equipment needs of additional air units being dispatched from Australia. In 1940, for example, the decision was taken to send the RAAF's No. 3 Squadron for army cooperation duties with I Australian Corps in North Africa, and McNamara played a vital role in monitoring the many rapid developments, determining command arrangements and personnel establishment of this and other Australian air units subsequently arriving in this theatre.[9]

Also late in 1940 McNamara found himself designated as the Australian air delegate to take part in talks held in London with British, American and Netherlands service representatives. These staff discussions (referred to as 'conversations') were a preliminary to secret meetings held in Washington between January and March 1941, at which more senior delegations developed a grand strategic plan for the conduct of the war - including in the event of Japan's entry into the conflict.[10]

As a result of discussions between British and Dominion officials at Ottawa, Canada in November 1939, Australia had agreed to join a joint plan to provide trained aircrew for active service in the European theatre. Known as the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS), this required Australia to provide every month seven hundred and eighty-four pilots, air observers and wireless operators/air gunners - all trained to advanced flying standard - along with another one hundred and ninety-four who would receive their final training in Canada. Under these arrangements the first Australian EATS aircrews reached Britain from Canada in December 1940, to be welcomed on arrival by McNamara on Bruce's behalf.[11] By April the following year, the first of a projected total of eighteen Australian-manned squadrons was formed within the RAF.

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8 Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 6 January 1996.

9 J. Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943,* Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1963, pp 57n, 99n.

10 W.J. Hudson & H.J.W. Stokes (eds.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49,* vol. 4, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1980, pp 219-20; Lionel Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1957, p 53.

11 *SMH,* 28 December 1940.

A contingent of Australian and Canadian airmen trained in Canada are met on arrival at an RAF base in England by McNamara (second from left) and the RAF station commander

The arrival of large numbers of Australians in England posed important questions regarding the sort of supporting organisation required for their administration. As early as November 1939 McNamara had foreseen the probable need for a base to be established in England, 'generally to watch the interests of Australian personnel including questions of promotion'.[12] The Air Board in Melbourne was receptive to this idea, but the government preferred suggestions as to what was required to come from the RAF.[13] For its part, the Air Ministry proved unenthusiastic about anything that might interfere with its flexibility in dealing with Dominion personnel as it pleased, and accordingly sought to restrict an Australian base to a small records staff of junior officers and clerks.

Recognising that to proceed with the proposal for a full base organisation at this juncture could be detrimental to Australian interests when the British authorities were so strongly opposed to it, Bruce and McNamara duly recommended going along with the scaled-down level suggested. The government accepted this advice, despite the Air Board's preference for going ahead with planning a headquarters and personnel

12 Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943*, p 4.
13 *ibid.*, p. 108.

depot, and approved only the dispatch of the more limited number of personnel suggested by London.[14]

By the first half of 1941 the need for an overseas air headquarters had become pressing, and in May the Australian government was convinced of the need to establish this straight away. The officer chosen to head the organisation as Air Officer Commanding (AOC) was Williams, now holding acting rank as an air marshal and back in Melbourne as the member of the Air Board handling organisation and equipment issues. Anticipating where events were heading in the meantime, the high commissioner in London had been attempting to ensure that any such headquarters set up remained firmly within his jurisdiction.

McNamara with Air Marshal R. Williams during a visit to No. 452 Squadron at RAF Station Redhill on 27 November 1941, just three days before Williams officially became AOC RAAF Overseas Headquarters in London with McNamara as his deputy. At right Flight Lieutenant K.W. Truscott is pointing out features of the Spitfire armed with 20mm cannon to Sir Earle Page, a former prime minister who was Australia's accredited representative to the British War Council until illness forced his return to Australia in June 1942. At rear is P.E. Coleman, assistant secretary of the Department of Air in Melbourne who acted as secretary to Page's committee of military advisers.

14 D.N. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*, p 113; Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943*, pp 108-9; see also Williams, *These are facts*, p 269.

In a message to Australia which arrived while the cable advising him of the War Cabinet's decision was still in draft form, Bruce spoke strongly in support of unifying the coordination of EATS aspects and the duties of the ALO in one senior officer. He stressed that the need was to ensure the best possible advice to himself as Australia's local representative, and the closest and most intimate contact with the Air Ministry and RAF staff, as well as the most efficient organisation able to look after the interests of RAAF units and personnel in Britain. Praising McNamara, he expressed a keen desire to retain him in such an upgraded post if this would not prejudice his career.[15]

When Bruce learnt who Melbourne planned to have head the new headquarters, he was not pleased. Plainly not relishing the prospect of having Air Marshal Williams back in England, he did his best to obstruct the appointment by cabling personally to Menzies and stating that:

> I gather that during his tour of duty over here [in 1939-40] he hardly paved the way for a successful occupation of position. I believe we would get the best results if McNamara were left in charge and promoted to Air Vice-Marshal.[16]

McNamara with Australia's high commissioner in London, Stanley (later Lord) Bruce, and an unidentified RAF officer. As Air Liaison Officer at Australia House, McNamara was the RAAF's contact with the British Air Ministry as well as Bruce's adviser on air matters.

Despite Bruce's action, in August the Minister for Air, J. McEwen, publicly announced that Williams was being sent to London to take charge of looking after the welfare of the thousands of Australian EATS personnel in England.[17] The next month Williams flew to England via America, arriving at Bristol on 5 October where he was met by McNamara.[18] What the latter thought of finding himself thus in a diminished

15 Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*, p 115.
16 Cablegram, Bruce to Menzies, 17 July 1941, Australian Archives, CRS A5954, item 236/5.
17 *Air Force News*, 16 August 1941.
18 Williams, *These are facts*, p 276.

role under such a dominant figure as the former CAS can only be guessed, despite the fact that Williams had often been his mentor in the past. Certainly Williams' autobiography makes clear that he was not uncritical of the way McNamara had previously managed some aspects of RAAF affairs at the London end.[19]

One clue to McNamara's feelings might exist in a proposal which was floated soon afterwards, in January 1942, for him to be made available on loan to the RAF to take over the command of No. 23 Group when Air Vice-Marshal Park was suddenly required for an appointment in the Middle East. In view of the network of contacts he had built up within the Air Ministry by this time, one might justifiably speculate that McNamara had a hand in initiating this request himself; for reasons which will be explained shortly, however, the Australian government declined to release him.[20]

By 1 December 1941, the liaison office within the high commission was closed, and the RAAF Overseas Headquarters was formally established in London, occupying the office building of the Kodak Company in Kingsway, close to both the Air Ministry and Australia House. McNamara was absorbed into the new organisation as Deputy AOC to Williams and Senior Administrative Staff Officer. Staff had also arrived under Wing Commander T.W. White, a former government minister, for a Personnel Reception Centre which was set up at Bournemouth, a resort town on the Dorset coast.

McNamara as AOC RAAF Overseas Headquarters, London, 1942, with members of his staff including Wing Commander F.B. Phillips, CBE (standing, centre) - in civilian life chief judge of the Supreme Court in New Guinea, and after the war first Chief Justice of Papua New Guinea.

19 *ibid.*, pp. 269, 281.
20 Correspondence on McNamara's personal file.

It was in these circumstances that McNamara would, understandably, have judged that he was redundant in London and might have been prompted to seek employment elsewhere. Instead of releasing him to the RAF, the Minister for Air in the new Labor government, A.S. Drakeford, advised that Williams was required urgently in Australia for 'consultation' on the emerging situation in the Pacific following Japan's entry into the war. As McNamara was the only suitable officer available to fill in for him in London, on 24 January 1942 he was ordered to take over command of the Overseas Headquarters with acting rank of air vice-marshal.[21]

In the event, Williams never would return to the post in Britain; on 6 May it was announced that he was to go to America as Australian air representative in Washington. The government announcement of this change indicated that Williams might resume his London command later, but in the meantime McNamara would continue to act as AOC.[22] At least as a result of this arrangement, he remained in a key position for monitoring the RAAF's wartime activities in the European theatre and liaising in the new joint effort required against the Japanese.

Fairly predictably, the changed situation in the Pacific had a dramatic effect on virtually all RAF plans, as McNamara quickly discovered. Throughout this period units were changing their location and destination, and often even their function, with almost bewildering speed. Many of these adjustments took place entirely without the knowledge of the Australian government, even when its nationals were affected, so that McNamara faced a near impossible task ensuring that Australian interests were being adequately safeguarded. When he learnt in February, for example, that No. 458 Squadron - a 'RAAF' EATS unit scheduled to go to the Middle East - was about to be diverted to India for service in Burma, he saw a need to promptly alert Bruce. The high commissioner duly spoke to the British CAS to point out that, as Australians were not fighting in Burma, the squadron concerned could not be sent there without Australian government consent.[23]

In April 1942 McNamara received a letter from Squadron Leader R.B. Burrage, who had just been designated as temporary commander of a new RAAF EATS unit, No. 461 Squadron, to be formed out of the existing No. 10 Squadron. Initially raised at Mount Batten, the new unit was also to operate Sunderland flying boats. Its members were, however, unhappy when informed of plans to base the squadron at Poole, and even more alarmed by rumours that 'the powers that be' were intent on making No. 461 a transport unit. Burrage's letter complained that Australians had not come some 13,000 miles to cart people and freight about. McNamara was evidently able to set to rest doubts on this score, as within days a signal was received at the unit's group headquarters from the Commander-in-Chief of Coastal Command stating that No. 461 would definitely not be a transport squadron.[24]

Another incident of this kind arose in September, when it was discovered that a different Australian EATS squadron (No. 454) was being described by the RAF as a bomber unit. Writing to the Director-General of Organisation at the Air Ministry, McNamara pointed out that he had previously been given to understand that this squadron was a transport unit, and he could find no evidence of advice having been

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21 See McNamara's personal file; also Williams, *These are facts*, pp 282-3.

22 Extract from Digest of Decisions and Announcements and Important Speeches by the Prime Minister, No. 28, copy in Williams papers, NLA MS 6525, box 3; *SMH*, 8 May 1942.

23 Cecil Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne: Man of Two Worlds*, Heinemann, London, 1965, p 336.

24 Norman Ashworth, *The Anzac Squadron: a history of No. 461 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force, 1942-1945*, Hesperian Press, Carlisle, WA, 1994, pp 16-18.

received in his office that its function had been changed.[25] In fact, though, 454 Squadron had been organised and equipped for the naval cooperation role of convoy escort and sea reconnaissance!

During May 1942 London also received a visit from Dr H.V. Evatt, Australia's Minister for External Affairs, and McNamara was required to spend time meeting his needs in addition to filling the normal demands of the AOC post. The minister arrived via the United States, where he had gained a reputation for creating 'a tempest wherever he came' and 'dressing down everybody he came in contact with'.[26] By all accounts his visit to London was no less memorable, and made for a most unpleasant experience for McNamara.

The purpose of Evatt's trip was to attempt to influence allied strategy to focus more favourably on Australia's position and needs in dealing with the threat posed by Japan, and in particular to obtain larger allocations of war materials such as aircraft for use in the South-West Pacific Area. Efforts by Australia's representatives in the major allied capitals, London and Washington, had borne little fruit so far, and Evatt arrived fully prepared to 'bang on closed doors' to have his way. In such a frame of mind, however, he was also inclined to believe that the need for him to undertake such a mission in the first place was necessary because Australian staffs in those places had not done all that was in their power - or enough anyway - to wring the required concessions.

Evatt regarded Bruce as the leading figure among those who had failed 'to protect Australia's interests', and went so far as to express the view that W.S. Robinson, the influential businessman travelling with him as adviser, might make a better high commissioner.[27] McNamara found himself among a list of senior officers at Australia House who were also obliged to satisfy Evatt that they had not been subordinating Australian interests by 'going over to the English'. Brigadier A.W. Wardell (the senior army adviser) was accorded this treatment during an encounter on 29 May, as was Alfred Stirling (the External Affairs officer in London).[28] According to family accounts, during McNamara's meeting with the minister he was subjected to a tirade of abuse, accused of incompetence and with having been in London too long anyway.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of this incident is that McNamara did not respond to Evatt in kind. Certainly he was known to possess a temper which could be fierce when he was provoked or under stress, becoming 'implacably belligerent' and capable of throwing things about. Such displays were confined to the privacy of his own home, however, and he always kept such impulses firmly in check in outside situations. Although he retained his self-control on this occasion also, that he was deeply distressed by the affair and wounded by his treatment was fully apparent to his family afterwards.[29]

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[25] John McCarthy, *A Last Call of Empire: Australian aircrew, Britain and the Empire Air Training Scheme,* Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1988, p 28.

[26] D.M. Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, Australian War Memorial and Allen & Unwin, Canberra, p 198.

[27] *ibid.*, p 202.

[28] A.T. Stirling, *Lord Bruce: The London Years,* Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1974, p 266.

[29] Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 7 January 1996.

The visit to England by H.V. Evatt, Australia's Minister for External Relations, shown here (centre) during a visit to No. 452 Squadron, RAAF, in May 1942 was miserable for just about everyone concerned, but doubly so for McNamara (at right) who felt that it had effectively ended his career with the RAAF.

For Evatt, the harsh judgement he had made of McNamara may have appeared justified by his own success in winning from the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, agreement to send to Australia an emergency air reinforcement. This was to comprise a special detachment of three squadrons (two RAAF under EATS, and one RAF) equipped with the latest Spitfire fighters, initially just forty-eight machines but leading to a flow of one hundred and eighty of these aircraft a year. Reporting the details of his triumph to Prime Minister John Curtin on 28 May, Evatt was perhaps a trifle smug in commenting that:

> McNamara is aware of the movement and is cooperating with Air Chief Marshal Portal [the British CAS] who is determined to make a big success of the scheme.[30]

In fact, Portal was anything but enthusiastic about this outcome, having advised Churchill against it in anticipation (rightly as it turned out) that the move would be

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[30] Hudson & Stokes (eds.), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy 1937-49,* vol. 5, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1982, p 793.

resented by the Americans.[31] And in the event, the shipment was delayed and did not reach Australia until early the following year.

Exposure to Evatt may have prompted McNamara to redouble his efforts to ensure that the EATS ran smoothly and in accordance with the Australian government's wishes. This proved to be no easy role to fulfil satisfactorily, especially in the face of a continuing tendency on the part of British authorities to keep the Dominions in the dark regarding the employment of their personnel. McNamara realised that the RAF would have to be pushed into organising the large numbers of Australian aircrew within Bomber Command into distinctive 'RAAF' squadrons, as provided for under the EATS agreement. Instances also arose where Australian personnel were subjected to RAF policies which he considered grossly unfair and flatly refused to apply to RAAF members.[32]

The particular desire of the Australian government to see its air personnel formed into an identifiable national contingent in the European theatre, rather than simply dispersed throughout the RAF as was mainly the case, ultimately led to it taking steps to amend the original EATS agreement to require the creation of a more compact Australian force. In September 1942 it decided to send Wrigley from Australia to take over in London also with acting rank of air vice-marshal - the third time he would be succeeding McNamara during their careers. The instructions the new AOC received directed him to give attention to finalising details of the amended agreement and ensuring its implementation as quickly as possible without disrupting the war effort.[33]

After completing handover arrangements with Wrigley, McNamara was instructed to return to Australia by the most 'expeditious means' and was to revert to his substantive rank of air commodore on embarking from the United Kingdom.[34] Understandably he felt more than a little aggrieved by this order, believing it to have been the outcome of his brush with Evatt. It especially concerned him that he could learn nothing about the posting waiting for him on his return, although it appears that privately he heard he had been earmarked to take over the air commodore's post at Darwin.[35]

In a long message to Melbourne he pointed out to the Air Board that being recalled without prior warning and required to relinquish acting air vice-marshal rank was 'not only a hardship and serious setback' to his career, but could not help but be interpreted as a reflection on his reputation, work and ability 'and further leaves me with a keen sense of discouragement and disappointment'. He therefore asked to be allowed to retain his acting rank, unpaid if necessary, until allotted to another post at air vice-marshal level.[36] While this matter was still with the Air Board, other action was taken on his behalf by Bruce to raise with Portal the possibility of the RAF finding more suitable employment.[37]

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31 Horner, *High Command*, p 202.

32 McCarthy, *A Last Call of Empire*, pp 27-8, 94.

33 Video interview with AVM H.N. Wrigley, 2 February 1982, held by Defence Public Relations.

34 Signal dated 10 September 1942, held on McNamara's personal file.

35 Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 7 January 1996.

36 Rather suspiciously, an account of McNamara's recall entirely favourable to him appeared in one Melbourne newspaper (*Sun News-Pictorial*, 24 September 1942), raising the possibility that he had called on press contacts for support in opposing his relegation.

37 Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 7 January 1996.

A volunteer welcomes Australian servicemen to the Kangaroo Club at Australia House in 1942. Next to her is Mrs McNamara and Mrs Ethel Bruce (standing), wife of the high commissioner.

On 30 September Bruce cabled Melbourne to advise that he had received an approach from the Air Ministry requesting whether, if McNamara was no longer required to command the RAAF's London headquarters, he could now be made available to the RAF to take up an appointment as AOC of British Forces at Aden. In a second message Bruce strongly appealed personally to Prime Minister John Curtin, urging that 'we should not a second time stand in the way' of McNamara receiving worthwhile employment with the British service:

> I urge that unless it is contemplated to employ McNamara in the RAAF in a responsible position that will give him an opportunity to show what is in him, he should be allowed his chance of doing so in the responsible command now offered to him in the RAF.[38]

Curtin - in his capacity as Minister for Defence - consulted the Minister for Air (Drakeford) on 8 October, and after the latter discussed it with the CAS (Air Vice-Marshal Jones) McNamara's loan for a period expected to be two years was agreed to. News of this decision arrived as he was on the verge of embarking for Australia.

Since Aden was an operational post, McNamara would have to leave his family behind in London. This was perhaps just as well, as his wife had her own activities and interests; in addition to acting as a French interpreter for the War Office, she was a member of the Australian Women's Voluntary Service and worked in the Boomerang Club (the recreation facility for Australian servicemen operating in the exhibition hall at the high commission building) and with the Land Army. Moreover, his son was in his last years of secondary schooling. In addition, the climate of Aden - situated on a

38 Signals on McNamara's personal file.

barren rocky promontory of volcanic origin - was notorious as one of the most trying and depressing in the world.

At RAF headquarters Middle East, Cairo, April 1943: (from left) AM Sir Peter Drummond, AVM W.A. Coryton, AVM R. Saul, McNamara, ACM Sholto Douglas.

McNamara arrived on 9 January 1943 and three days later took up his new command.[39] He thus became only the second RAAF officer to attain an AOC's appointment with the RAF during the Second World War - the first being Air Commodore (acting Air Vice-Marshal) A.T. Cole who served as AOC Northern Ireland from October 1942 until May 1943 while recuperating from injuries received while taking part in the raid on Dieppe, France, in August 1942.[40]

The defence of the colony of Aden had been the special responsibility of the Air Ministry since 1928, an arrangement which placed McNamara not only at the head of RAF formations but all units of the other services present, excepting the Royal Navy. With British Army, Indian Army and local Arab levies, he had a total of about eight thousand personnel under him, including perhaps a score of Australians with No. 8 Squadron, RAF. Because of the joint service nature of the post, his headquarters was also a mixed one comprising over two hundred officers, airmen, soldiers and civilians.

In addition to being the fortress commander of fixed coastal defences at the port of Aden - the only harbour of importance on the whole Arabian south coast - his military jurisdiction extended from the southern portion of the Red Sea (including the islands of Kamaran and Perim) to Ethiopia and the territories of British, French and Italian Somaliland (the latter nearly as far south as Mogadishu); the Gulf of Aden, including the island of Socotra; the southern Arabian littoral adjoining the colony of Aden, including the group of sheikhdoms under British protection occupying the region known as the Hadhramaut, and extending eastwards from Salalah to Muscat and the Gulf of Oman, including the island of Masirah; and a large area of the Indian Ocean.

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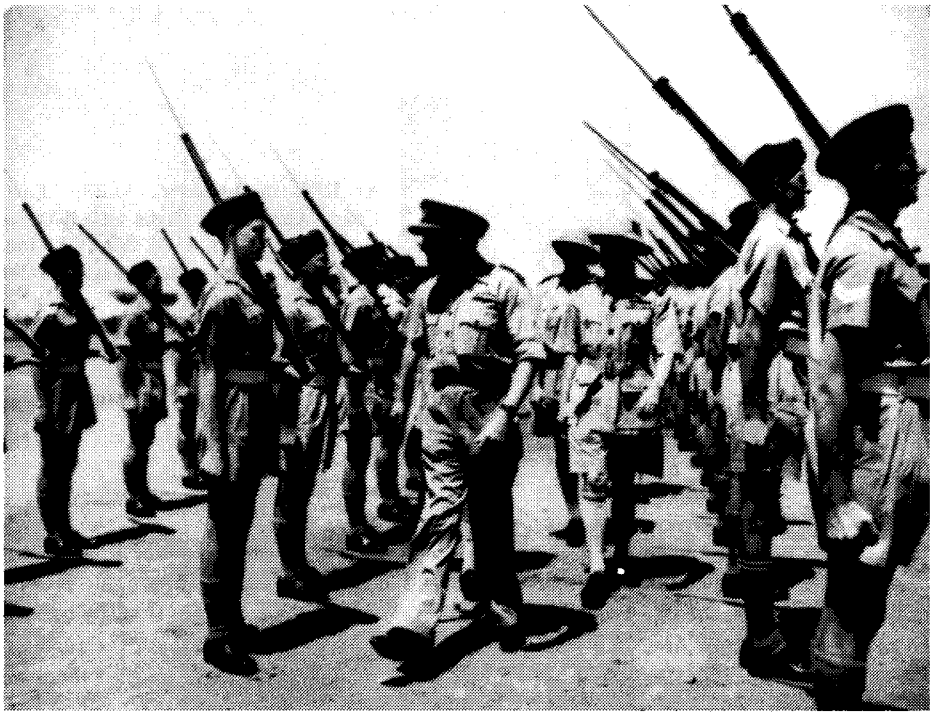
[39] Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943*, p 391.
[40] *ADB*, vol. 13, p. 459.



Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, Commander-in-Chief RAF Mediterranean and Middle East, inspects - with McNamara following behind - a guard of honour at Khormaksar (the RAF base at Aden) on 17 October 1944.

Moreover, as AOC McNamara enjoyed official precedence locally which was immediately following only the governor of the Aden Colony and Protectorate. In this capacity he was constantly required to meet and deal with visiting British ministers, diplomats and other representatives (civilian and service), as well as officials from Saudi Arabia and other countries adjacent to the Aden command. He was also expected to offer hospitality to these, along with members of the local community and an almost constant flow of personnel passing through Aden on their way to or from Britain, Egypt, other African countries, India, China, the United States and British dominions in the Pacific and Far East.

Despite the nominal importance of the Aden post, in reality it - like Northern Ireland - was an operational backwater. The only duties of significance occurring there were convoy-escort and anti-submarine patrols, and although these succeeded in notching up sinkings of one German U-boat in 1943 and another on 2 May the following year off Cape Gardafui the rate of activity was hardly high. Greater effort was involved in mounting internal security actions in the British Protectorate, where there was a serious revolt by the Sultan of Mukalla's slaves in 1943 and an incursion by the Iman of the Yemen's forces the following year. The Hadhramaut proved a particular focus of activity, with famine relief having to be undertaken there in 1944, followed by an operation in the first three months of 1945 to bring to heel a defiant

sheikh who had made a nuisance of himself by imposing heavy tolls on traffic using the main highway passing through the district.

Reception held on 26 February 1944 at McNamara's residence in Aden for AM Keith Park, seated in centre, flanked by McNamara and Prince Ali (Sultan of Lahej). Standing at rear are members of McNamara's staff and the Prince's entourage.

During September 1943 McNamara also found himself engaged in planning and controlling the use of one of his bomber squadrons in support of Ethiopia's emperor Haile Selassie, who was faced with a serious rebellion in his northern province of Tigre. In connection with this operation McNamara accompanied the GOC-in-C East Africa, General Sir William Platt, on a visit to Addis Ababa for a conference with the emperor. Following the successful conclusion of operations in October, Platt paid glowing tribute to the effective and timely support rendered by the RAF at Aden and in particular to the willing cooperation shown by McNamara personally.

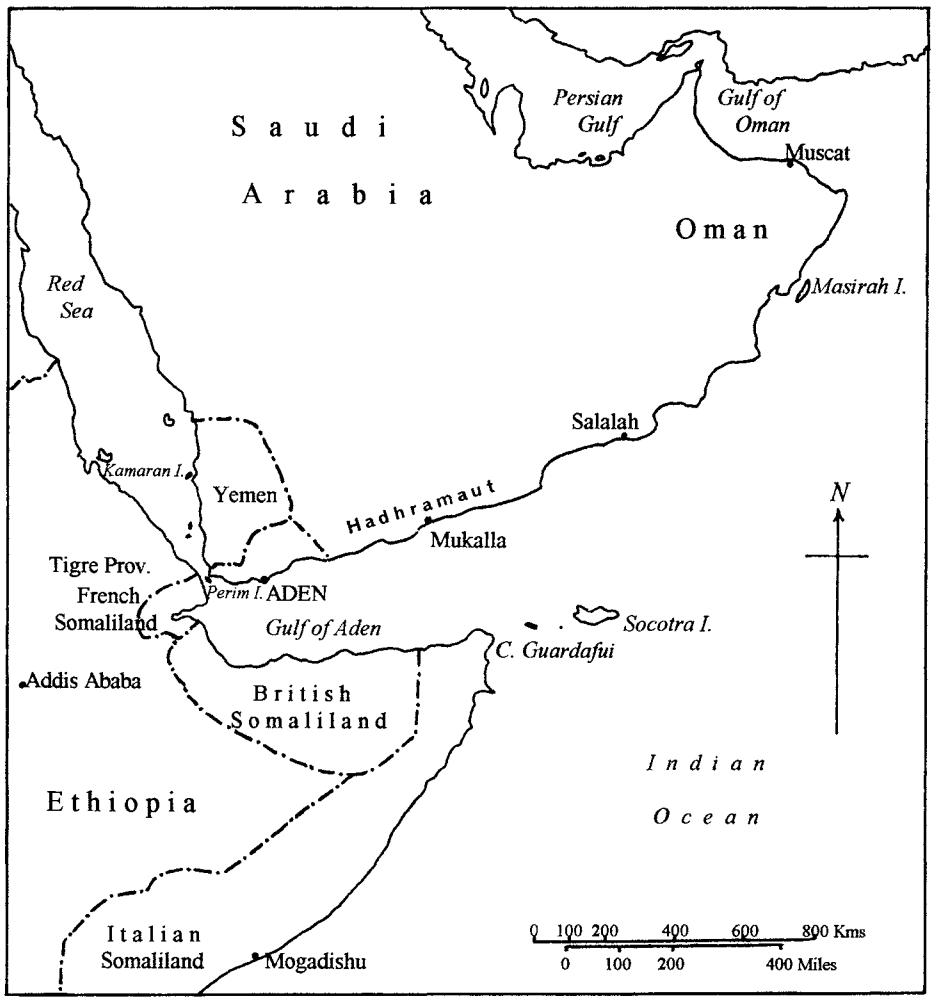
Although the opportunities to make a mark or name for himself were in short supply, McNamara was not inclined to treat his post purely as an armchair command. In later years he mentioned running his share of risks by taking part in operational flights (often in single-engine aircraft types) 'over desolate and inhospitable areas of the interior ... and across shark-infested waters of the Indian Ocean to distant bases such as Socotra and Masirah'.[41] During March 1943 he flew as observer in Bisley aircraft (the close-support variant of the Blenheim V bomber) operating over British and Italian Somaliland.

One area where he did make a distinct impact was in attending to the welfare of the men under his command. A retired RAF officer who served at Aden in this period

[41] Letter, McNamara to Drakeford, 15 May 1946, McNamara file held by RAAF Historical Section.

later told the story of McNamara's concern at discovering shortly after arrival that airmen at Khormaksar airfield were not receiving their authorised ration of milk, and had not done so for many months. Since this was regarded as an essential requirement to reduce the risk of contracting lung cancer for men exposed to dope-spraying of aircraft fuselages, he was determined to rectify the deficiency.

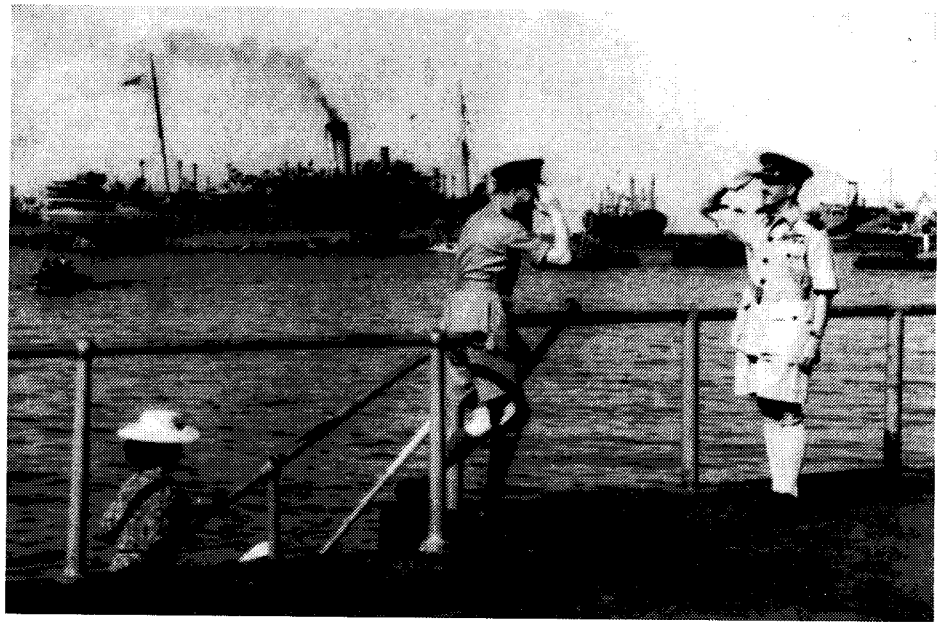
After his enquiries established that repeated requests to RAF Headquarters Middle East in Cairo had proved fruitless, and that supplies of local goat-milk were inadequate and unpalatable in any case, McNamara sent a further appeal to Cairo - with an information copy for the CAS in London. This suggested arranging for chilled or tinned milk being put on board any aircraft bound for or passing through Aden - whether belonging to Transport, Bomber or Coastal Command. The idea was accepted, and a system of 'milk-runs' was promptly established. Word of his action duly got around the whole Middle East Command and earned him the affectionate nickname of 'Mac the Milk'.[42]



Area encompassed by Aden Command

[42] Recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 23 January 1996.

After more than two years in this difficult post, McNamara's service there was recognised in January 1945 when he was made CB. Ordinarily he might have felt thoroughly delighted with this honour, except that he knew that the RAF had actually recommended him - as with all his predecessors at Aden - for a knighthood in the Order of the Bath.[43] The policy of Australia's Labor government regarding the award of knighthoods, however, denied this honour to him and a great many other senior Australian officers who had given distinguished war service.[44] Had the recommendation not been blocked he would have become the first member of the RAAF to be knighted, since not until 1954 were two former chiefs of air staff to receive this recognition.



On 3 January 1945 McNamara welcomed ashore at Aden the Duke of Gloucester, who was on his way to Australia to become Governor-General.

43 Taped recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 11 January 1996.

44 See, for example, John Hetherington, *Blamey: controversial soldier*, Australian War Memorial and Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1973, pp 379-80.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Soured departure

McNamara arrived in England on 26 March 1945 so changed in appearance that even his family barely recognised him. He had gone to Aden a fairly portly figure of perhaps fifteen stone but came back having shed more than two stone, his son describing him 'as thin as a rake, quite spry but a bit gaunt'. The appearance was not deceptive, as his health had suffered badly - particularly as a result of the fine airborne dust which brought on 'Aden asthma'. While only a two-week period of hospitalisation at Aden in December 1943 is recorded in his RAAF file, family members recall that he had several spells at Asmara (the elevated capital of the Ethiopian province of Eritrea) to help overcome breathing difficulties. By the time he was due to leave Aden, his condition had become so serious that fears were held for his survival, prompting Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, the Commander-in-Chief RAF Mediterranean and Middle East, to arrange for him to undergo a period of reclimatisation in Lebanon.[1]

Adding to his problems at this juncture was uncertainty over the fate of his brother, Maurice, a flight sergeant in the RAAF who had gone missing in action over Germany two months earlier, in January. It was not simply that Maurice was the youngest of his brothers and sisters, but Frank had been unusually close in counselling him as he was growing up and deciding his future. Following the death of their parents Maurice had been raised by his aunt, May Doak, who encouraged him to join the Catholic priesthood. This Frank strenuously opposed, knowing that Maurice was a particularly gifted person who would suffocate in such an environment. Under considerable pressure from Longlea, Maurice nonetheless entered the Ballarat monastery as a theological student. By 1939, though, he decided that Frank had been right and left to join the Education Department.

Enlisting in the RAAF under the EATS in October 1942, Maurice underwent various training courses in Victoria until sent to England a year later. He was serving with 9 Squadron, RAF, when the Lancaster bomber in which he was a crew member was shot down on a mission against the Leunawerke chemical plants near Leipzig.[2] This area subsequently passed under the control of the advancing Soviet troops, who refused to cooperate with the Red Cross in determining the fate of the missing

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1 Taped recollections of Mr R.E. McNamara, 11 January 1996, and letter to author, 17 January 1996.

2 *Sun News-Pictorial,* 24 January 1945; Letter, Mr R.E. McNamara to author, 13 July 1993.

bomber's crew, so that it was not until December 1946 that confirmation was obtained of Maurice's death.[3]

The toll of more than two years at Aden plainly shows in this photograph of McNamara, taken following his return to London in March 1945.

Additionally taking the shine off his homecoming was the receipt of grim news regarding the disappearance into the Atlantic near the Azores of an aircraft carrying his great friend, Air Marshal Sir Peter Drummond, on 27 March. As Air Member for Training, Drummond had been despatched to Canada with several senior Air Ministry officials to express Britain's thanks for Ottawa's vital cooperation in the EATS. The aircraft they boarded at Prestwick, Scotland, was an LB-30 version of the Liberator bomber christened *Commando* which had been originally used as the personal transport of Prime Minister Churchill. Subsequently it was modified and transferred to freighter duties with RAF Transport Command's No. 45 Group, based at Quebec, Canada.

Although nothing was ever proved regarding the circumstances of the *Commando's* loss - searchers found only oil slicks and a small amount of wreckage - McNamara was deeply shaken by his personal knowledge of the history of the

3 Information of Mrs M. McGregor.

particular machine involved. On 23 February 1945 this same Liberator had turned up at Aden, a month before his departure, on its way to Britain. At that stage it had flown across the Pacific from the west coast of America to Australia and New Zealand, and crossed the Indian Ocean via Colombo and Delhi; from Aden, it was due to travel via Kenya, Rhodesia, South Africa, Ascension island in the South Atlantic, Brazil, Trinidad and Canada before finally reaching London. As it happened, the aircraft had just previously completed a similar world-wide journey, so that by the time it arrived at Aden it was already overdue on normal maintenance and overhaul.

This fact was brought to attention by the flight sergeant who was *Commando's* flight engineer. On landing at Aden he declared that the aircraft should be grounded, and if it was to proceed further he wanted to be stood down from the crew. As AOC, McNamara promptly ordered his chief transport officer to make a detailed inspection with appropriate specialists and give their verdict. The report of this team agreed that the Liberator was not in particularly good shape but considered it to be still capable of safely making the distance back to Britain. In receipt of this expert opinion, McNamara had no alternative but to counsel the NCO that he faced disciplinary action if he refused to carry on.

Even confronted with such a stark choice, the flight sergeant held his ground. He told McNamara that he appreciated the sympathetic hearing given to him, but he was convinced the aircraft was a deathtrap and as a married man he wished to live to see his family. The Liberator accordingly continued its way the following day, and the flight sergeant faced a court-martial. All these events came flooding back to McNamara as the circumstances of Drummond's death became known. Making matters worse was the fact that the Drummond family lived in the same road at Claygate, Esher, as McNamara's own, and had been very close over the years. As his son Robert noted in his diary on 29 March, Peter Drummond had acted like an 'adopted uncle in Dad's absence ... these last three years'. It became McNamara's sad duty to break the news to Drummond's widow, Lala. But he also made a point of contacting the CAS to tell him of his Aden experience with *Commando*. Portal reportedly undertook to enquire into the fate of the flight sergeant, although family members these days have no knowledge of the outcome.[4]

The month after his return to London, McNamara was attached to the Air Ministry for temporary duty. Initially he was employed for a period of four months, making a special study of the organisation and administration of the Air Training Corps in the UK, and preparing a report on this for the Australian government.[5] In September he became RAAF representative on the resident Australian minister's staff in the offices of the British Cabinet located in Great George Street, Westminster, in which capacity he was also accredited to the Ministry of Defence at Whitehall. This was a significant post, entailing the daily handling of highly secret documents and frequent attendance at high-level meetings. At this point, though, he was required to finally give up his acting rank and revert to Air Commodore.

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4 Information of Mr R.E. McNamara, January 1996. I am indebted to Mr McNamara for researching this matter with the Royal Aeronautical Society, the Historical Records Branch of the UK Air Ministry, the RAF Museum at Hendon, and the Public Record Office in London.

5 Record of McNamara's educational qualifications and experience, in possession of Mr R.E. McNamara.

Flight Sergeant M.J. McNamara (standing, second from right) with fellow members of the Lancaster bomber crew lost during a mission over Germany in January 1945.

It was while still performing the duties of this post that McNamara was invited to be the reviewing officer for the graduation parade at the RAF College at Cranwell early in 1946. There was special significance to this invitation, since his son Robert was among those receiving pilot's 'wings' from him. Having joined the Cambridge University Air Squadron in 1943, Robert had enlisted in 1944 to complete a condensed course at Cranwell. He subsequently served on 'special duties' with the RAF Volunteer Reserve until 1947, when he left with the rank of flight lieutenant to focus on his civil engineering career.[6]

In February 1946 McNamara received - out of the blue - notification from Melbourne that a decision had been taken by the Minister for Air to effect his retirement from the RAAF 'in the near future'.[7] The reason given for this action was that it was anticipated that the post-war air force would be a much smaller organisation, with diminished requirements for the number of officers it presently had:

> ...unless retirements of higher ranking officers in the older age groups be effected there will be very restricted scope to provide opportunities for the advancement of, and the acceptance of greater responsibilities by, younger officers possessing the necessary qualifications and experience.

6 Letter, Mr R.E. McNamara to author, 13 January 1996.
7 Letter, Drakeford to McNamara, 21 February 1946, copy on RAAF personal file.

Following in his father's footsteps: Robert McNamara as a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF Volunteer Reserve, pictured at Feltwell, Norfolk, in 1947.

Though taken by surprise, McNamara's response to this news was a restrained inquiry back to Air Force Headquarters regarding the date it was intended his retirement would become effective. As the full import of what was in train began to sink in, however, he became extremely concerned and more than a little angry. Others in the group of officers also affected undoubtedly felt this way too, but McNamara's reaction would have been much stronger had he known the full details of how his forced early retirement was determined.

Shortly after the war ended in August 1945, the Air Board had carried out a review of the performance of all senior officers holding permanent commissions in the context of an expected need to restructure the RAAF to meet peacetime requirements. It was as a result of this exercise that the decision was taken to dispense with the services of no fewer than twelve officers of air rank: one air marshal, three air vice-marshals and eight air commodores - only three of whom had reached their prescribed age for retirement.[8] Following this purge, the number of RAAF's senior officers possessing experience of both the world wars was reduced to just two.[9]

The process leading to this outcome was, unfortunately, riven with inconsistencies which would give rise to much bitterness and bad feelings among those affected. While possibly justified in cases where officers had reached or were close to retiring age, the argument that positions needed to be opened up for younger officers with potential seemed flimsy and implausible when judged against the valuable

[8] *SMH*, 10 April 1945.
[9] Jones, pp. 120-1.

experience which was being jettisoned. Williams, another of those faced with early termination of his career, understandably characterised the whole business as 'the meanest piece of service administration' he had witnessed.[10]

The reason for including McNamara in the group to go was probably the shoddiest of all. He and Cole had been damned in the Air Board's eyes for not having taken 'a lead in the RAAF during the war commensurate with their seniority in the Permanent Air Force'.[11] This was preposterous, considering that they were the only two RAAF commanders to have held AOC posts in the European theatre. It became an even more threadbare pretext when judged in the context of the extent to which any RAAF officer was enabled to play a leading role in war operations had been circumscribed by the policies of the Australian government itself, not to mention the obstacles twice placed in McNamara's way when offered senior active service appointments with the RAF. Evidently, these officers having done everything that was asked of them was judged not to be good enough.

What particularly upset McNamara, though, was the scale of compensation which had been specially approved by the government for those being retired. This offered him a lump sum plus accumulated deferred pay, half pay and pay in lieu of service leave for a maximum of two years until his actual date of retirement. The catch to all this was that the amounts applying in all instances were calculated on an individual's substantive rank - which in McNamara's case was only group captain.

It seemed ludicrous to him that a Labour government in Britain had accepted that long periods of acting or temporary rank should qualify retiring officers for higher pay benefits, yet a government of similar political complexion in Australia ignored the same principle. As he complained to Melbourne:

> Surely, this is parsimony and injustice of the most scandalous kind ... In other words, I am being treated no better than if I had continued throughout the whole war as a Group Captain and had never carried the higher responsibilities and ranks of an Air Commodore for over six years and an Air Vice-Marshal for nearly four years... I submit that a sum of 4,726 pounds (of which 3,825 pounds is my own accrued permanent force deferred pay to which the Government adds only about nine hundred pounds in compensation) plus an indeterminate amount of half-pay for less than one year on Group Captain basis is a disgracefully inadequate and unfair financial provision upon which to throw me out of the RAAF at the age of fifty-two.[12]

To his outrage on this score was added a list of other grievances arising from some of the peculiarities of the situation in which he was placed. It especially rankled with him that he was being expected to work out his future while absent from Australia, and having been so for nearly ten years. He had no idea of what conditions were like back home after so long away, and few current contacts for finding some form of suitable employment which he would definitely need to maintain himself and his family.

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10 Williams, *These are facts*, p 329.

11 Alan Stephens, *Power Plus Attitude: ideas, strategy and doctrine in the Royal Australian Air Force 1921-1991*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1992, pp 92-3.

12 Letter, McNamara to Drakeford, 15 May 1946.

The RAAF offered him the choice of taking his discharge in Britain or returning to Australia first, but in the circumstances his prospects were better by opting for the former course. In that case, though, he was faced with the expense of shipping the furniture and household effects which he and his wife had placed into storage in Melbourne back in 1936, the costs of which he had been bearing for nearly ten years instead of the two which they had been originally led to expect.

Thoroughly incensed by the lack of consideration he felt he was receiving from the RAAF, McNamara took the opportunity of bringing his plight to the personal attention of the Prime Minister, J.B. Chifley, while the latter was in London on an official visit. The interview he obtained on 2 May was followed up by a lengthy and detailed submission forwarded to Drakeford two weeks later. The next month he sent the Minister a further letter containing information which he felt strengthened the argument that his case was 'one for special consideration by you ... and the Treasury and for the authorisation of a special amount to recoup me'.[13] While waiting for a decision on these various representations, McNamara also took the time to write personally to Sir Frederick Shedden, the secretary of the Department of Defence.[14]

It was not simply that the issues raised were important ones of principle. The reality for McNamara was that whether he and his family were to have any sort of financially-secure future hinged directly on the outcome. Not only was he faced with the expense of maintaining his twenty-one year-old son, Robert - then studying civil engineering and industrial administration at Trinity College, Cambridge - but he now had the upbringing of a further dependent to consider. On 22 December 1945 his wife had presented him with a late baby, a daughter they named Anne.

The reply which eventually came from the Department of Air in September 1946 was a bitter disappointment to McNamara. Apart from some minor adjustments, such as a refund of superannuation contributions and an increased level of allowance while filling posts in London from 1941, the only other concession he received was approval to ship his private effects to England at public expense.[15] Interestingly, in advising the Minister on the basis for the reply which was duly sent, the Air Member for Personnel at RAAF Headquarters (Air Commodore J.E. Hewitt) had argued that McNamara's claim to have been retained overseas on the government's wishes for ten years was 'not a bona fide one', maintaining that McNamara himself had resisted attempts to secure his return to Australia in 1942.[16]

Undoubtedly rubbing salt into what he perceived as wounds of injustice was the practice which RAAF Headquarters adopted in its correspondence with him of addressing him as 'Air Commodore'. As he testily wrote to inform the secretary of the Air Board the following month, he had received formal notification from Melbourne that, as a courtesy, he still had the right to be addressed by the title of 'Air Vice-Marshal':

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13 Letter, McNamara to Drakeford, 3 June 1946, file on McNamara held by RAAF Historical Section.

14 Letter, Shedden to Major M.C. Langslow (secretary of Department of Air), 13 September 1946, file on McNamara held by RAAF Historical Section.

15 Letter, Drakeford to McNamara, 24 September 1946, file on McNamara held by RAAF Historical Section.

16 Minute, Hewitt to Secretary of Department of Air, 8 August 1946, file on McNamara held by RAAF Historical Section.

I should therefore be grateful if your records may be adjusted accordingly, so that any future communications etc. concerning myself will address me by the rank title to which I am entitled (ie. Air Vice-Marshal).[17]

By this time McNamara was again absent from England on official duty - though not as a member of the RAAF, his appointment in the Australian service having been terminated from 11 July 1946. The previous May he had been appointed to the staff of the victorious Allies' Control Commission for Germany, taking up a post as Senior Educational Control Officer for the province of Westphalia in the British zone of occupation. This position reportedly came his way through personal contacts who recommended him to the German Section of the Foreign Office for employment. These were Marshal of the RAF Sir Sholto Douglas, who was both commander-in-chief of British forces in Germany and military governor of the British zone, and Sir Arthur Street, the wartime civil service permanent head of the Air Ministry who had taken charge of the office supervising the British control commissions in both Germany and Austria.

With his base at Munster, McNamara was engaged in re-establishing the German school system throughout the province. This was a daunting task amid the extensive devastation of Germany's towns and cities, and with an economy in total collapse, since there were shortages experienced in almost every commodity - suitable teachers, buildings, equipment, books and other basic supplies such as ink, pencils and paper.

In November he moved to Bunde and took up the post of Deputy Director of Education, with responsibilities extending to the entire British zone of occupation. The task confronting him and his one hundred and sixty officers[18] was not made any easier by the inferior status accorded the Education Branch within the military administration. Whereas manpower and finance were dealt with by staffs of full 'divisions', education remained merely a branch of the Internal Affairs Division and was subject to the advice and audit of an independent 'educational adviser' in the person of Mr Robert Birley, the headmaster of Charterhouse school in England.[19]

Despite the immense difficulties, and the loneliness of being separated yet again from his family, great things were achieved under McNamara's direction. At the end of August 1946 there were nearly 14,000 primary, secondary and technical schools open in the British zone, along with six universities and eight colleges of university rank.[20] It is claimed that by the end of September that same year all but 20,000 of the total student population of over 3.1 million coming within McNamara's sphere were receiving education to some extent.[21]

By the first half of 1947 the stage was reached where the day-to-day running of the education system could be handed over to local German authorities. With the role of his officers thus reduced to being advisers instead of administrators,[22] McNamara decided in October 1947 that the time had arrived to move on - despite having a contract with the Foreign Office which guaranteed him employment for another five years. Although offered the position of Gauleiter (governor) of Hamburg on resigning

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17 Letter, McNamara to Secretary of Air Board, 30 October 1946, McNamara's RAAF personal file.
18 *The Times*, 5 April 1947.
19 *The Times*, 13 February 1947.
20 *The Times*, 26 September 1946.
21 *The Times*, 4 February 1947.
22 *The Times*, 5 April, 24 December 1947.

from the Control Commission, he chose instead to return to England before the well of suitable positions at his level dried up.

In late 1947 he accepted a position with the National Coal Board, the body created by the Labour government elected in July 1945 to nationalise the country's coal industry. Again, this opportunity came his way through the good offices of Sir Arthur Street, who had been made deputy chairman of the new organisation. The assets of over eight hundred companies affected by the change - including a thousand collieries - were managed from the Board's Hobart House headquarters, at Victoria in central London, where about eight hundred and fifty clerical, administrative and professional staff were employed.[23]

Initially McNamara took up duty as administrative officer in the Department of the Scientific Adviser, but in January 1948 he was appointed an assistant secretary in the Production Department, in the sub-department responsible for management matters. This post involved him not only in staffing and personnel issues, but meant providing secretarial services to various standing and ad hoc committees.

After eighteen months here, in June 1949 McNamara was promoted to departmental secretary of the Coal Board's Manpower and Welfare Department. This more senior post entailed responsibility for controlling staff and services, preparing budget statements and handling of parliamentary questions, as well as arranging for conferences on educational, training, manpower and welfare matters. In January 1953 he became secretary of the Coal Industry Housing Association, the body authorised by the government to undertake the building of 20,000 houses for miners, in which position he remained until he retired from the National Coal Board early in 1959.[24]

Though undoubtedly glad to find something worthwhile to turn his hand to, McNamara would have found that the National Coal Board job had its drawbacks. Not the least of these was the fact that he had bought a large house called 'Brackendale' sitting in more than an acre of gardens at North Park, Gerrards Cross, in Buckinghamshire - the rich grazing and agricultural county on the western boundary of Greater London. Working in the city meant rising early and catching trains to and from Victoria, each leg of the day's journeying entailing a mile-long walk between his house and the railway station, regardless of the weather. By this stage his health was not good, having experienced a return of bronchial asthma and problems with his legs.

Shortly after his time with the NCB had come to an end, he received a request for his services which gave him considerable pleasure. This involved an invitation to be a guest lecturer to senior American air force officers at the 8th US Air Force headquarters at Ruislip, Middlesex. An external faculty of military history had been established here as part of the University of Maryland, and he was asked to speak on international relations between the US and Britain. Since the base was not far from McNamara's home, this was a convenient arrangement - the moreso since many of his students were quartered in Gerrards Cross (some renting the furnished flat into which he had transformed part of Brackendale) and thus able to pick him up and deliver him to his front door. From this period sprang a close relationship with several officers who went on to become generals in the United States Air Force.[25]

By residing in Britain, at least McNamara felt that he was in a community which valued and honoured the contribution which he had made through two wars in a

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23 The *Times*, 2 May 1947.

24 *Herald* , 28 March 1959.

25 Letters, Mr R.E. McNamara to author, 26 November 1995, 17 January 1996.

way he did not believe was the case back in Australia. Certainly as a VC winner he received invitations to important state and social occasions, including the coronation in 1953 of the new queen, Elizabeth II. Each holder of the VC was invited, with his wife, to witness the spectacular crowning ceremony in Westminster Abbey, and was reserved two seats in the front row of an area beside Hyde Park to view the state procession. A family member recounts that McNamara gave his seat in the Abbey to his son, taking his daughter - then aged just seven - to watch the procession:

> They had a wonderful day - sandwiches and coffee, all the pomp and excitement, and when Anne got a bit weary of the long hours, Frank, in full ceremonial uniform, took her over to Hyde Park and played 'hide and seek' around the trees. That was typical; until his death he was her companion.[26]

Although he settled into his new lifestyle, McNamara harboured considerable resentment at the way in which his RAAF career had ended. One illustration of this was his desire to put anything to do with his air force past behind him, as when a journalist approached him in 1949 for his thoughts concerning Britain's latest flying achievements. Responding that he no longer had 'time anymore to be interested', he said that since he had gone from the service it would be 'presumptuous' to begin giving views on developments in the field. Declaring that he did not 'even know whether the latest British planes fly backwards or forwards', he went on to add:

> It takes all my time to read the papers. If you are retired you must keep up with flying exclusively, or you are no use at all ...The only thing I have to do with the air these days is flying coal out of the ground.[27]

Other indications exist in his seeking further recognition of his war service by claiming various medals to which he believed he was entitled. In 1953 he lodged an application for the 1939-45 Star and the Africa Star, the latter on the basis of having flown sorties while AOC at Aden. A previous claim he had made for the Africa Star had not been approved by the Air Ministry, however, and his bid for the 1939-45 Star was also rejected, on Air Ministry advice, on the grounds that he did not serve in an Army operational command.[28]

While such setbacks were probably personally galling, at least one source of grievance was removed when he had the satisfaction of being formally granted honorary RAAF rank of air vice-marshal in 1956.[29] This concession came in conjunction with ceremonies which took place in London the previous month to commemorate the centenary of the establishment of the Victoria Cross. The highlight of the celebrations was a Thanksgiving Service in Westminster Abbey on 25 June, followed the next day by a review by Queen Elizabeth of all 299 then-living VC holders in Hyde Park.[30]

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26 Information of Mrs M. McGregor.

27 Herald Cable Service item dated 7 September 1949, held on *ADB* file.

28 Signal from RAAF Overseas HQ London to RAAF HQ Melbourne dated 30 March 1953, held on McNamara's RAAF personal file.

29 *CAG*, No. 40, 26 July 1956, p. 2275.

30 Sir John Smyth, *The Story of the Victoria Cross 1856-1963*, Muller, London, 1963, pp 442-3.

Frank and Helene McNamara arriving at Westminster Hall, Houses of Parliament, for the VC Centenary reception on 26 June 1956.

Even the concession over honorary rank did little to mollify McNamara's resentment. He accordingly determined that his VC medal was not to be returned to Australia on his death, a wish which his family ultimately respected by donating it in 1991 to the RAF Museum at Hendon, in London's northern suburbs. In his son's words:

> Had he received his full recognition for his RAAF career, he would probably have had a longer life and been less inclined to recall with bitterness the tragic circumstances of Albert Jacka VC's untimely death after World War I.[31]

While enjoying retirement at Gerrards Cross, McNamara found himself battling considerable financial hardship in addition to his health problems with asthma and hypertension. In September 1961 he applied to the Australian Repatriation Department to have his medical disabilities recognised as attributable to his AIF and RAAF service. Supporting representations were made on his behalf by a number of individuals and groups, including Justin O'Byrne (an EATS fighter pilot and POW during the war who was now a Labor senator from Tasmania, and would later become President of the Senate in 1974) and the RAAF itself.

Responding to advice from the Department of Air in Melbourne, the RAAF staff at Australia House in London began exploring avenues for rendering 'the old gentleman' assistance. At the particular urging of the head of the Joint Services Staff at the high commission, Air Vice-Marshal A.M. Murdoch, attempts were made to hasten a review of McNamara's repatriation entitlement, with the object of having his pension increased.[32] The validity of the claim he had lodged had still to be determined when - on 2 November - he suddenly collapsed in the garden of Brackendale, falling at his wife's feet. Despite her efforts to revive him, he died later that same evening of hypertensive heart failure, aged 67.

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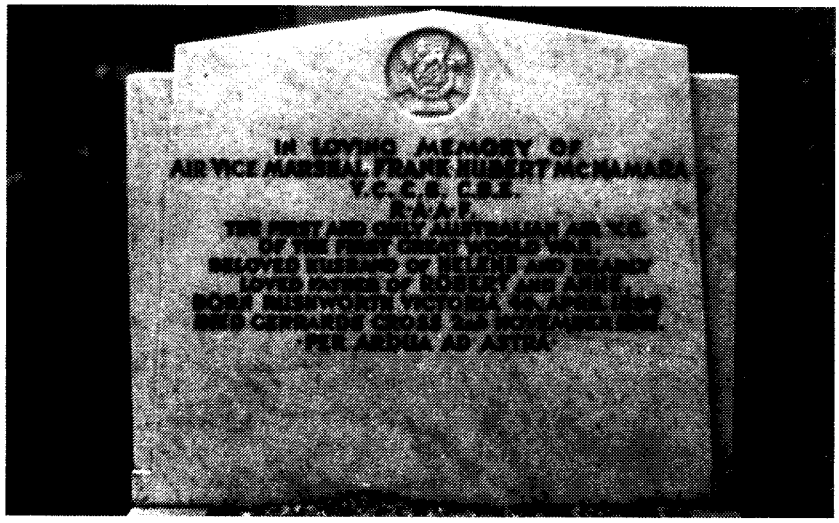
31 Letter, Mr R.E. McNamara to author, 26 November 1995.

32 Letter, Group Captain W.N. Lampe (Australia House) to Group Captain W.L. Brill (Department of Air) dated 27 September 1961, McNamara's RAAF personal file.

McNamara's funeral took place four days later, preceded by a solemn requiem mass in St. Joseph's Priory, at Gerrards Cross. The service was well attended, with representatives of the British Air Council and the National Coal Board, and the US Air Force, all present. Another notable among the crowd was Air Vice-Marshal D.C.T. Bennett, an Australian who had made his name in the wartime RAF. There was also a strong RAAF presence, in the person of Air Vice-Marshal Murdoch and two wing commanders on his staff, L.G. Marshall and N.P. McNamara (no relation). An Australian ensign draped the coffin, on which lay McNamara's dress cap, sword and insignia.[33]



The headstone on McNamara's grave in the Priory Churchyard at Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire, proudly proclaimed him as the 'first and only Australian air VC' of the Great War. The circumstances of his retirement from the RAAF in 1946, however, gave a slightly ironic edge to that distinction.

McNamara's passing removed from the scene one of the early RAAF's legendary figures. Although he had not been a member of the service for fifteen years before his death, nor lived in Australia for more than two decades, his name had continued to be associated with one of the celebrated moments in the nation's aviation history and an air service still only forty years old. Though two more VCs were won by RAAF members during the Second World War, he alone had survived that conflict to remain as a living emblem of the service's proud and courageous record.

By any objective measure, the incident which resulted in his own award had been a truly amazing episode fully deserving of the recognition it received. McNamara may have been an essentially ordinary man, yet his actions in 1917 clearly did not merit

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33 *The Times*, 7 November 1961; *SMH*, 8 November 1961; *RAAF News*, December 1961; *Chin Up*, December 1961, p. 19; *Mufti*, January 1962.

the sneers of some later detractors who - perhaps through envy - attempted to characterise it as 'an easy VC'. His personality, style and achievements may not have perfectly fitted other people's expectations of someone enjoying the status of hero, but this underlined the dilemma which he was obliged to endure for most of his life.

The small bronze cross suspended on a deep crimson ribbon which McNamara wore on his chest on formal occasions was, in reality, an enormous burden for anyone to carry. He was not, of course, alone in this. Many private soldiers - of no less unremarkable backgrounds than himself - were similarly plucked from obscurity and propelled into the glare of public attention. For them, too, it was quite impossible to return thereafter to an entirely ordinary existence.

But McNamara did achieve much more than might have been predicted for him on the basis of his early years as a small-town schoolteacher. While the extent to which he actually owed this success to the new public status he had acquired rather than personal ability may be an issue open to debate, in fairness it should be noted that few other VC winners went on to achieve high rank in the defence forces. In the Australian context only one other person in the same position enjoyed a comparable career - that being N.R. Howse, who won the VC as a young army medico in South Africa and subsequently rose to become a knighted major-general as well as parliamentarian and government minister. Judged on this standard, McNamara's achievement was all the more remarkable.

APPENDIX

Citation for the Victoria Cross

(*London Gazette*, 8 June 1917)

For most conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty during an aerial bomb attack upon a hostile construction train, when one of our pilots was forced to land behind the enemy's lines. Lieutenant McNamara, observing the pilot's predicament and the fact that hostile cavalry were approaching, descended to his rescue. He did this under heavy rifle fire and in spite of the fact that he himself had been severely wounded in the thigh. He landed about two hundred yards from the damaged machine, the pilot of which climbed on to Lieutenant McNamara's machine, and an attempt was made to rise. Owing, however, to his disabled leg, Lieutenant McNamara was unable to keep his machine straight, and it turned over. The two officers, having extricated themselves, immediately set fire to the machine and made their way across to the damaged machine, which they succeeded in starting. Finally, Lieutenant McNamara, although weak from loss of blood, flew this machine back to the aerodrome, a distance of seventy miles, and thus completed his comrade's rescue.

Author's Note: The extraordinary aspect of this account is the apparently inexplicable failure of the enemy to intervene while all this was going on, especially as the Turkish cavalry was close enough to fire upon them. The factor which totally fails to receive a mention here is the role of the pilots of the other two aircraft in the allied bombing force, who repeatedly swooped at low-level to keep the advancing Turks at bay with their machine guns and continued to do so even after they had expended all their ammunition. Without this intervention, there could have been very little chance of the two airmen on the ground getting away.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Australian Archives
AAC	Australian Air Corps
AD	Aircraft Depot
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AFC	Australian Flying Corps
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ALO	Air Liaison Officer
ANA	Australian Natives' Association
ANU	Australian National University
AOC	Air Officer Commanding
AVM	Air Vice-Marshal
AWM	Australian War Memorial, Canberra
BD&M	Births, Deaths & Marriages
CAG	Commonwealth of Australia Gazette
CAS	Chief of the Air Staff
CB	Companion of the Order of the Bath
CBE	Commander of the Order of the British Empire
CFS	Central Flying School, Point Cook, Victoria
CO	Commanding Officer
DNB	Dictionary of National Biography
EATS	Empire Air Training Scheme
FTS	Flying Training School
GCMG	Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St. Michael and St. George
GOC	General Officer Commanding
IDC	Imperial Defence College, London
MP	Member of Parliament
MQ	Married Quarter
NCB	National Coal Board
NLA	National Library of Australia, Canberra
OC	Officer Commanding
POW	Prisoner of War
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAN	Royal Australian Navy
RFC	Royal Flying Corps
SLA	Sea, Land and Air
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald
US	United States
VC	Victoria Cross

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It was this exploit, described by the official war history as 'a brilliant escape in the very nick of time and under hot fire', which won McNamara —a country town schoolteacher in civilian life— the first and only Victoria Cross awarded to an Australian airman during the First World War. To colleagues in his unit, though, he was 'the last Officer for whom that high honour would have been predicted'.

Joining the post-war Royal Australian Air Force, McNamara went on to attain the rank of air vice-marshal and serve in senior commands with both the RAAF and the Royal Air Force during the Second World War. But his career was a classic illustration of the dilemma of a basically ordinary man plucked from obscurity and accorded the status of national hero.

Here is recounted the difficulties of living with the expectations placed on someone in his unenviable position, being both constantly lauded by admirers or belittled by jealous detractors. Ungratiously retired in 1946, the only non-posthumous VC winner ever to serve in the RAAF lived out the rest of his years as an angry exile in England.

Chris Coulthard-Clark was formerly CAS Historian (1987-90) and Historical Fellow at the RAAF Air Power Studies Centre (1990-93). He has written a number of books on RAAF history, most notably *The Third Brother* (1991) and *The RAAF in Vietnam* (1995). He received a Ph.D degree from the Australian Defence Force Academy in 1991 and that same year won the RAAF Heritage Award for Literature with his book *Edge of Centre*.

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