



MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.

# THE ANGRY SKY

## AUSTRALIA'S AIR WAR OVER EUROPE



MILITARY HISTORY AND  
HERITAGE VICTORIA INC.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE  
HELD AT THE R.A.A.F. MUSEUM, POINT COOK BY  
MILITARY HISTORY AND HERITAGE VICTORIA

11 NOVEMBER 2013

Proudly supported by:



# The Empire Air Training Scheme: Evolution of an Image

Dr Suzanne Evans

I want to begin with this image that indicates the pride, enthusiasm, excitement and sense of adventure with which young Australian men volunteered for the Empire Air Training Scheme. A few years ago I was privileged to interview many of the men who had served under EATS. I also accessed diaries and letters that are held in the Australian War Memorial and here in the SLV. It became obvious that the excitement we see in the faces of these men was to be tempered with the passing of decades as the solidity of their identity was questioned by society and the image of EATS faded from the Australian cultural scene.

This presentation is for those men.

I have divided this presentation into 4 parts

1. to place the Empire Air Training Scheme in context and provide a brief explanation for the overwhelming response of the Australian government and the youth of Australia to the scheme and the aura created around it in 1939.

2. to provide witness that images, and thus recognition of the scheme have diminished in Australian society in the decades that followed.

3. to offer a brief explanation as to why this has occurred

4. to report the responses of some of the veterans to the demise of the image of EATS.

**1. EATS in Context** The institution of the Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) was formed in response to the demands of aerial warfare, with the German aerial aggression and the successful Blitzkrieg campaign against Poland, at the outbreak of WWII.<sup>1</sup> Britain had been caught short. The original idea of Empire co-operation to train a reserve of airmen had first

---

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant Colonel M.M.L Rafter, *The NATO Aircrew Training Program in Canada*.  
[www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/papers/csc/csc34/mds](http://www.cfc.forces.gc.ca/papers/csc/csc34/mds)

surfaced in the imperial conference of 1926 but little was heard again of the suggestion until 1937.<sup>2</sup> At this time, aware of the disparity of the power between the Luftwaffe and the RAF, two of the dominion high commissioners, Vincent Massey representing Canada and Stanley Bruce, representing Australia, advanced the idea of an Empire air training scheme but initial negotiations were plagued with trouble involving money, prestige and concepts of Imperial relations.<sup>3</sup> But the solution to Britain's shortage was to draw heavily on the Dominions in search of air power to provide both men and materials for the British war effort.<sup>4</sup> The Scheme was finalised in Ottawa, Canada in September 1939, and announced to Australians on October 11, 1939 by Prime Minister Menzies who enthused about the allegiance:

I have no hesitation in saying that this great Empire air scheme is not only the most spectacular demonstration of Empire co-operation that the war has produced...It has further significance for us in that our interest in this war is not founded only upon our sentiment as British people; it is founded upon the cold fact that our own existence is at stake. If Great Britain is victorious, as we believe she will be, the security of Australia is preserved...The Australian Government is participating in this Empire air scheme in order to help to attain that air superiority which render the heart of the Empire more secure from air attack; to assist in the protection of Singapore and other vital centres overseas; to strengthen the air forces of the Allies, and to provide a powerful deterrent to aggression against Australia.<sup>5</sup>

'Empire Air Force. Australia Plays Her Part.' announced Menzies in 1939.<sup>6</sup> He further declared, 'I believe, and my belief is pretty well founded, that the cooperation of the Dominions with Great Britain in the provision of trained airmen, and in the case of some Dominions, in the provision of aircraft, will be of growing and vital importance. It may be that in our hours of greatest difficulty—and we are going to have some—the Mother Country will be asking more insistently for help in the air than for help on the land or the sea.'<sup>7</sup> Menzies was not alone, supported by other politicians and the media as they constructed the collective glorification of EATS. James Fairbairn, Australian Minister for Air, eulogised of 'A United

---

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Granatstein, *Canada at War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Toronto: Oxford University Press 1975 43. James S. Corum 'The RAF in imperial defence, 1919-1956' in Greg Kennedy (ed.), *Imperial Defence: The old world order 1856-1956*. London: Routledge, 2008, 160-163.

<sup>3</sup> James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada, vol 2 Appeasement and Rearmament*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1965, 104-105. Douglas Gillison, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945* Series 3- Air, vol. 1, 79. J.L. Granatstein, *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* 43.

<sup>4</sup> In Canada the Scheme was early named the Joint Plan, Joint Air Training Plan and Joint Air Training Scheme before being named the British Commonwealth Air Training Scheme.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Menzies. Broadcast: *Empire Air Training Scheme. Australia Plays Her Part*, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1939.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Menzies, Broadcast, 11 October 1939, Department of Information Melbourne.

<sup>7</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 September 1939, 2.

Empire.’<sup>8</sup> A belief in the unity of the Empire and Australian obligations echoes in his words ‘Australian youths respond to the German menace. They are typical of the British fighting men and determined to face the present situation for the sake of a decent future.’<sup>9</sup> The media proclaimed ‘A League of Empire Eagles’.<sup>10</sup> ‘United Empire Air Plan attracts 56,000 men.’<sup>11</sup> Others announced ‘the Empire Air Armada,’ and the ‘most spectacular demonstration of Empire coordination.’<sup>12</sup>

By March 1940, 11,500 Australian young men had responded and been accepted to the challenge to join the ‘Empire Air Armada.’<sup>13</sup> Once enlisted training would begin in Australia and then continue in Canada, Rhodesia or England. Incorporated into the institution of EATS, the Royal Australian Air Force grew from modest beginnings of one hundred and forty three aircrew in 1939, to one hundred and eighty eight thousand men and women in uniform by 1945.<sup>14</sup> They flew in every major theatre of war: Britain, the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Burma, South East Asia and the South West Pacific area.<sup>15</sup> It is maintained, where there was an aerial operation a member of the RAAF trained under EATS was sure to be a participant.<sup>16</sup>

While the politicians of 1939 reflected the belief of the centrality of Empire to the Australian identity young Australian men believed it was their duty to serve, to serve the

---

<sup>8</sup> J. V. Fairbairn, House of Representatives, 10 May 1940, Canberra Commonwealth Government Printer, 1940.

<sup>9</sup> *The Canberra Times* 18 May 1940, 5.

<sup>10</sup> *Argus*, Melbourne, 12 October 1939, 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Argus*, Melbourne, 9 February 1940, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Argus*, Melbourne, 1940.

<sup>13</sup> The press and politicians used this term to describe the Empire Air Training Scheme forming links with the historical past of Britain and the new concept of air warfare see *The Canberra Times*, 27 December 1939, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Various estimates of the total number given vary according to the criteria used. Air Vice-Marshal George Jones, *War Report of the Chief of the Air Staff, Royal Australian Air Force, 3rd September 1939 to 31 December 1945, To the Minister of Air*, (Melbourne: February 1946).

*"In all, we had trained to the advanced stage in Australia during the currency of the scheme no fewer than 27,387 aircrew, of whom 10,882 were pilots, 6,071 were navigators, and 10,434 were wireless operator air gunners and air gunners. In addition we had sent 4,760 elementary trained pilots, 2,282 navigators and 3,309 wireless operator air gunners for further training in Canada - a total to Canada of 10,351. We also sent 674 trainees from initial training schools for pilot training in Rhodesia."*<sup>21</sup>

Earlier in his report Jones discusses the difference between training personnel for EATS and those for RAAF squadrons for the defence of Australia even though it appears that common training facilities were used for both. He makes a clear distinction between the EATS training aircrew for service with the RAF in Europe - and the training of personnel to serve with the RAAF for the defence of Australia and in the South West Pacific. Dr Alan Stephens confirmed, ‘the entire RAAF training system, regardless of where an individual eventually served, fell within the original concept of EATS. Email reply to my query, 6 February 2008 [alans@webone.com.au](mailto:alans@webone.com.au) Joan Beaumont ed. *Australian History of Defence VI, Sources and Statistics*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001. Gives figures of 215,628 Air Strength 1939-45, 218.

<sup>15</sup> Air Vice Marshall Sir George Jones ‘*When the war ended the total strength of the Royal Australian Air Force serving in the Pacific Theatre was 131,662, including 14,589 officers.*’ *War report of Chief of Air Staff*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Odd Bods information sheet supplied by George Smith, Hon. Secretary Odd Bods, 19 August 2010.

Empire.<sup>17</sup> Without exception every man expressed his loyalty to Britain and many explained that in the 1930s an oath of loyalty was recited in school every morning, ‘I love my country the British Empire. I salute her flag the Union Jack.’ Celebrations of Empire Day expressed unwavering loyalty to the British Crown with speeches claiming, ‘The Empire expects every child this day to do his duty. The Royal family and King George is beloved by his people in all parts of the world.’<sup>18</sup> Childrens’ magazines were from ‘home.’ *Chums* was a manly paper addressed ‘To the Boys of the Empire upon whom the sun never sets’. Surrounded by the cultural centrality of Empire, volunteers to EATS conformed to the expectation of delivering their loyalty. The research behind this paper involved reading hundreds of diaries and letters collected in archives and personal collections, by those men who were volunteers in the Empire Air Training Scheme, I was also privileged to talk to many Australian members and each one spoke of allegiance to Britain,

Belief in allegiance a united British Empire was not the only motivation for the young men to volunteer. The 1930s also witnessed a love affair with flight. Popular culture tapped into the realisation of this long held fascination with new technology and the development of new frontiers of flight. Although technically necessary, air power in the 1930s touched the romantic mind.<sup>19</sup> The adventure of flying, the conquest of speed and space, the technology, the loneliness of the pilot and the conquest of the sky, where the gods lived, had the makings of a myth.<sup>20</sup> It captured the imagination of many young Australian men.

The *Argus* headlined in 1939, ‘How to join the Empire Air Armada.’<sup>21</sup>

This question has been on the lips of thousands of eager young men since hearing the broadcast announcement of the Prime Minister on Wednesday of a plan to create an air armada of unprecedented strength. Thousands were wanted and for the most romantic and adventurous of the fighting services. No wonder that the virile youths in a thousand homes have been agog for information since the stirring news of this new winged force came winging over the air.

Reports in diaries of the first experiences of flight are many

---

<sup>17</sup> Don Charlwood, *Marching as to War* Hawthorn Vic: Hudson Publishing 1990.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 48.

<sup>19</sup> Donald Cowie, *War for Britain. The Inner Story of Empire* London: Chapman and Hall, 1941. 42.

<sup>20</sup> George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990.120.

<sup>21</sup> *Argus*, 14 November 1939, 5.

One read Coming home this morning I got above the broken clouds and played about, dipping one wing into them, doing turns around the knobby bits and occasionally smashing right through one. Flying is great fun. A plane is more to us than a good horse is to many riders. It must answer to more, take a good beating and then grind away for hours and hours. It’s a friend in danger and all we rely on. Heck I still can’t put it into words but a plane is still – well it gets to you.<sup>22</sup>

Such was the aura of the early war years that saw EATS proclaimed as the greatest sign of unity and Empire loyalty, yet in the decades following the end of the war it is difficult to discover any mention of the scheme, and in the twenty-first century it no longer holds a place in Australian collective memory.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. WITNESS TO THE DIMINISHING IMAGE

However the image diminished and decades later I was to listen to these words of Don Charlwood expressing the intense emotional impact felt on his identity after the experiences in the Empire Air Training Scheme

*I did not imagine that all my life I would look back on experiences, questioning myself about it, reading critics’ opinions of it. Nor would I have believed the Empire Air Training Scheme would close its doors forever, much less believed that Australian generations would arise who would scorn our loyalty to the Empire.*<sup>24</sup>

The image he presented was one of a sense of discontinuity, a rupture between past and present, between the collective and individual memories of EATS. The certainty of beliefs of the young recruits to EATS had been shattered, first in their own experiences in combat, then through the changing Australian cultural framework. On May 1 2010, this small group gathered at Somers, site of the No.1 Initial Training School on the Victorian peninsular, to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the beginning of the Empire Air Training Scheme in Australia. There were 18 former Somers trainees present, together with airmen of other Initial Training Schools. The official address was given by Wing Commander Peter Scully whose words encapsulated the fundamental complexity contained in the development of the

---

<sup>22</sup> Ted Dupleix, Private papers held in family collection.

<sup>23</sup> Hank Nelson, *Chased by the Sun*, comments on the ignorance of young Australians on their knowledge of air warfare, 269.

<sup>24</sup> Don Charlwood Interview conducted 18 July 2008. Similar sentiments were expressed in his book *Journeys into Night*, Melbourne: Hudson Publishing 1991, 268. Charlwood served as a navigator, in 103 Squadron, in Bomber Command, flying over 30 operations over Europe.

images around EATS. Scully articulated ‘the Empire Air Training Scheme was so enormous in its scope, that looking back now it seems incredible that such an endeavour was even suggested, let alone that it should achieve the success that it did, yet most of their achievements were not recorded in Australian history.’ ‘Even today,’ he lamented, ‘most Australians do not realise the enormous contribution the RAAF made, nor the associated great sacrifices made of the personnel involved.’<sup>25</sup>

### **3. Demise of the Image**

While reasons for the disappearance of EATS are complex I will offer here only a few that emerged before giving an insight into the response of the men to the disappearance of THE IMAGE OF EATS

**1. Decline of importance of empire** The concepts upon which the Empire Air Training Scheme was founded, loyalty to the Empire and the Australian duty to protect the motherland, belonging to a wider cultural and social scene had been questioned during the war, and in the following years the acceptance of these principles became more attenuated, and then more blurred. Australia had been shocked with the realization that Britain could no longer be relied on to protect Australia.<sup>26</sup> In further decades there has been a changing of the Australian cultural values and society has render Britain and the Empire ‘increasingly marginal.’<sup>27</sup>

**2. The second reason for decline in its recognition were faults within the structure of the scheme that did not allow it to be commemorated as an Australian institution.**

First, Australian airmen were placed directly under Britain.<sup>28</sup> The RAAF was the only service that the Australian government completely surrendered to British control.<sup>29</sup> British

---

<sup>25</sup> Speech by Wing Commander Peter Scully, May 1, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> This began with Curtin’s declaration of ‘betrayal’ Sydney Morning Herald, 9 December 1941.

<sup>27</sup> This term has been used by Joy Damousi in ‘War and Commemoration: The Responsibility of Empire’ in Deryk Schreuder and Stuart Ward, ed. *Oxford History of the British Empire* Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008, 289.

<sup>28</sup> Dominion Government responses to EATS followed a similar pattern. South Africa declined to join but agreed to train pilots and contribute squadrons to the British War effort, thus maintaining complete control over her air force. The Canadian government under Mackenzie King emphasised their freedom and deliberation of choice. Canada’s entry into the war was not an automatic response to some mechanical organisation of Empire. Canada’s entry into the war was the deliberate decision of free people by their own representatives in a free Parliament. Canada agreed to be host for the majority of the training schools, but on her terms Prime Minister MacKenzie King fiercely defended Canadian independence within the Scheme and the Canadians referred to the

expectations on Dominion support were clear and the unquestioned belief in Empire was a cornerstone to the formation of EATS. Aware of the possibility of compromise to Australian identity, Prime Minister Robert Menzies had Article XV inserted in the Ottawa Agreement, assuring that this would as 'far as possible preserve the Australian character and identity of any air force that went abroad.'<sup>30</sup> The vagueness of the term 'as far as possible' became obvious during the course of the war and under the pressure of the speed of technological development and strategic necessity Australians became spread around over 500 RAF squadrons, with practically every combat unit in the force containing one or more Australians at some stage.<sup>31</sup>

This reliance on British technical experience and a belief in administrative superiority was highlighted by the appointment of RAF officer Sir Charles Burnett as Chief of the Australian Air Staff in January 1940. RAAF historian Alan Stephens claimed 'Menzies was typical of many senior Australian officials of that era who seemed to believe that British officers were almost by definition superior to their Australian counterparts...Other public figures who shared Menzies' pretensions as a pseudo-English gentleman and who abetted him in his mismanagement of the RAAF included his minister for Supply and Development, Richard Casey, and the Australian high commissioner in London, Stanley Bruce.'<sup>32</sup>

Discontent with such structure in EATS emerged during the wartime experience in a conflict that festered between the institution of the RAAF and its subservience to senior

---

Scheme as the British Commonwealth Air Training Scheme. King fought furiously for Canadian autonomy and according to Canadian historians Peter Conrad and Fred Hatch, the Prime Minister saw air training as a means of providing assistance to the Mother Country without risking the threat of conscription for overseas service. The air force was a voluntary service, and King imagined that RCAF members would remain on Canadian soil serving as instructors in the new air training schools.<sup>28</sup> The Canadian air force remained responsible for their own crews. New Zealand acted with greater respect for the forms of independent nationhood independently declaring war on Germany, without any sense of automatic involvement. New Zealand also agreed to contribute, but one later New Zealand historian commented they found little fault with the scheme, perhaps identifying strongly with the RAF and being less nationalistic in their approach.

<sup>29</sup> Joan Beaumont has summarised the complex Australian Government arrangement made in consideration to the forces. The commitment to Imperial Defence gave practical aid to Britain with the RAN and AIF but the Australian Government supposedly retained the right to determine where they would serve. The organisation of the RAAF became integrated with the RAF and Senior Officers were all British. Later in the Pacific theatre Australian airmen would work under the U.S air force. Joan Beaumont, ed. *Australia's War 1939-45* St Leonards: Allen and Unwin 1995, 4-6. Also refer to G Herman Gill, *The Royal Australian Navy 1939-42* Canberra: Australian War Memorial 1957, 62-64. Gavin Long, *The AIF* vol. 1 *To Beghazi*, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1961, 36-40.

<sup>30</sup> The terms of Article XV are produced in Alan Stephens, *The Royal Australian Air Force*, 63-64. The Ottawa Agreement was the official agreement signed outlining the contributions that each Dominion would make.

<sup>31</sup> John Robertson, 54.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Stephens *Power Plus Attitude: Ideas, Strategy and Doctrine in the Royal Australian Air Force 1921-1991* Canberra: AGPS Press publication 1992, 83.

officers of the RAF within the Scheme.<sup>33</sup> One veteran reflected, ‘our enemies were Germany, Italy and later Japan which is not entirely true as we had two other enemies at home- the upper echelons of the services and the government which made the decisions to allow ill trained, ill equipped service people to go to war.’<sup>34</sup>

3. **The outbreak of the Pacific war** provided a further decline in acceptance of EATS. In completely surrendering control of the air force to Britain, had resulted in the consequent depletion of sufficient air power for home defence. The 1942 fall of Singapore and bombing of Darwin revealed the misconception that participation in the EATS was based on the belief that Britain would always be there to defend Australia. During the war the inadequacy of home defence was not exposed, but only as records became released did the over-commitment to EATS lead to national humiliation, and with it, a blow to the country’s self-esteem, relegating EATS to one of the events better deleted from the national memory.

The outbreak of the Pacific theatre of war impacted on many Australian airmen who were serving with crews in England and the Middle East. For these men serving in established squadrons, it was impossible for them to return, and many of the letters and diaries expressed anxiety at the threat to Australia. Censorship meant limited access, as one airman remarked, ‘We get news from the papers over here but we don’t get the detail. I hope to be fighting the Jap as soon as possible. It seems a waste of time to us over here to say we are well and safe when what we really want to know is how you people are over there. We have just received word about the bombing of Darwin-but there is no detail.’<sup>35</sup> It was in this situation that the sending of white feathers, reflecting a change in national Australian attitudes. This must have provided a tumult of emotions for the airmen. Many had stories of being accused as *Jap Lovers* and the reaction of the Australian public also included the sending of white feathers. William Weatherly wrote to his parents of the grievance which the men felt in receiving white feathers and letters ‘accusing them of hiding from action against the Japs by staying in the Middle East and not wanting to come home.’<sup>36</sup> He continued, ‘the people who say that should just come over here and see for themselves. Every one wants to go home but it is harder to get from here home than it is to go anywhere else in the world. The answer is

---

<sup>33</sup> Norman Ashworth, *How Not To Run An Air Force!* Canberra: Air Power Studies Centre 2000. Ashworth has written at length over the divisions that occurred in air force command.

<sup>34</sup> Dereck French Personal Papers reflection on war State Library of Victoria PA01/32.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert Thompson, Diary, State Library of Victoria MS12006, Written from London, 19 February 1942.

<sup>36</sup> William Weatherly, Letters, 6 September 1943. State Library of Victoria MSB 76 MS9683.

always “not required at home.” The fellows here have done equally as big or bigger job as that at home and defeating Germany is just as important as defeating Japan.’<sup>37</sup> Another while stationed in England was to record in his diary: ‘The white feather business has reached the papers. The B----ds.’ At the same time, Fewster also recorded his application for repatriation and the ‘hopelessness’ he felt as it was continually ‘squashed’ putting him in the ‘blackest mood.’<sup>38</sup>

A member of 460 Squadron expressed bitterness to the collective response in his poems.<sup>39</sup>

Yet Australia to its lasting shame  
gave these men a mocking scornful name  
‘blue orchids’ they called them as they sailed away  
and said ‘there’s fighting here why don’t you stay’  
Some received white feathers as they left this land  
the mark of a coward you understand and they fretted and wondered the reason why  
as they flew through enemy skies to die.  
and where is Australia’s conscience, that none recall  
this saga of those who gave their all  
who remembers them who will the exploits tell  
of those brave young men who flew through hell.

Accounts of the evidence of white feathers remain one of the least mentioned humiliations of the Australian men who served with EATS in Britain and the Middle East. The confusion in the collective response to the Pacific theatre of war, and the clash with individuals serving within the institutions revealed one of the major flaws within the structure of EATS.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> A. C. Fewster, Diary AWM Private Record 3DRL/7405, 26 March 1944.

<sup>39</sup> Geoff Magee, *Bombs Gone! And other poems*, Sydney: 460 Squadron Association, 1991. Although not published till 1991 this was a collection of poems Magee had written since his repatriation.

<sup>40</sup> This flaw of Australia’s inability to defend itself due to commitments to EATS is discussed in the next section.

Finally contributing to the diminishing image was the **reluctance to talk about events**. The reality of air war had brought disillusionment to the concept of knights of the air. Many decades later as I spoke to veterans of Eats a few were able to confront the darker side of war Charlwood began to read from his latest book.

‘We still saw no crew reach the age of 30. Our flights were the hellish target. We were bringing, terror, destruction by night on combatants and non-combatants alike. Sometimes it chanced weather conditions joined our onslaught and a fire-storm was created. Only on Ruhrtime had we much chance of accuracy. For ourselves, violent death was a probability. Nazism had paved the way for Gotterdammerung beyond Wagner’s imagining.’

Another gave an unrelenting depiction of the horror experienced by the fighter pilot revealing ‘what it is to live for days, weeks, months, and even years with violent death gnawing at your very guts...a mass of spitting, twisting, deadly death. You have seen your comrades die in ones and twos, watched them plummet earth ward, balls of molten fire and mangled bodies.’

#### **4. Response of the Individual**

In this final section I wish to briefly mention the RESPONSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE DIMINISHING IMAGE. The memories of these individuals and the reconstruction of their self-images was a major focus of my study and featured in the stories of the men with whom I spoke.

In interviews, and indeed it can be found in the last pages of diaries, veterans reflected on their attachment to Empire in 1939 and the fast changing position of Empire within the Australian narrative. Here expression of alienation sometimes anger and disillusionment and betrayal, entered their stories. This was expressed mostly against the Australian Government who had so fully committed the control of the Australian airmen to EATS. Many pondered for some time before voicing what concerned them. One admitted

Those who had been in Bomber Command knew more about war than any one. They were experts but when they came back to Australia their talent wasn't recognized. They were treated as if they were just out of training school. It was a wealth of experience that the RAAF just wasted. They had been cut off from Australia. At the end of his tour my navigator went back to England for a specialist navigation course. He became a navigation officer on Fighter Squadron. He was so highly qualified but not recognized in Australia. So he just took his discharge. Australia had no idea. Many

who had been in bomber command, many of the fellows I knew refused to come back to Australia. It was a case of out of sight out of mind.

The first Australian to be awarded the DFC during World War II, Dereck French, was hailed early in the war by the press report for the Department of Air as ‘adding prestige to a young nation already famed for its air heroes and pioneers.’<sup>41</sup> Yet remembering his treatment on his return to Australia, which French described as being ‘like second class citizens,’ distressed French for the rest of his life. On numerous occasions, French mentioned the disgust of the reception in Australia, recalling the fellow Wing Commander who responded by taking his service pistol down to the beach and blowing his brains out.<sup>42</sup> French was acutely aware of the lack of recognition given to EATS. He remarked ‘we were always fighting three enemies, the Germans, the Japanese and those at home.’

This was reflected upon by Max Roberts, I don’t know why EATS has slipped out of people’s memory. There are a lot of books, but nothing in the press. I don’t talk about it very much. But sometimes people bring in some thing about the air force and they are so surprised I was there. It has drifted into oblivion.<sup>43</sup>

I will leave you with an image of the excitement at the concept of adventure and flight that seduced young Australian men to the Empire Air Training Scheme.

---

<sup>41</sup> Found in NAA, A.930 French D. J. Barcode 5254024.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Dereck French, *The Sun* 21 December 1989, 36, *Herald Sun*, 16 April 2001 22.

<sup>43</sup> Max Roberts interview