

The Australian Flying Corps in the Great War 1914-1918

Authors: Norman Clifford and Lance Halvorson

Soft cover: 233 pages, with many B&W photos and maps

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General readers, aviation enthusiasts and WWI history buffs will all find much to like in this attractively presented and well-written book. It has two authors: Norman Clifford who did many years of research and Lance Halvorson who reduced the veritable mountain of information Norman gathered into a unique book that makes full use of material from veterans, many previously unpublished photographs and the years of thorough research.

The result is a comprehensive account of the AFC's formation in Australia, the formation and deployment of the four operational squadrons, the creation and operation of four training squadrons, work with the Royal Flying Corps and, finally, demobilization and repatriation.

The focus is on the AFC's creation, operations and key people, not on the big strategic picture well covered elsewhere. This did not limit the authors, who still had much of interest to write about. By any measure, the AFC was a remarkable achievement for Australia in those times, situated as it was on the other side of the world, with a small population and limited industrial capacity.

Although tiny at first, as numbers and experience grew, the AFC became a very effective small air force in just two years. By 1917 it was routinely doing reconnaissance, photography, bombing and air control missions, many in the Middle East, the majority in France. Such work was now fundamental to army operations, and support for Australian troops on the Western Front involved before and after battle reconnaissance and parachute delivery of ammunition to troops on the battlefield.

The book gives a good feel for these times, covering topics ranging from mundane but vital administration up to famous events like the shooting down of the Red Baron, Manfred Von Richthofen. His funeral, conducted with military honours by squadrons of the RFC and AFC and flowers supplied by nearby French villagers, is portrayed in detail in a photograph of Norman Clifford's oil painting of the event.

Numerous photos, many published for the first time, clear maps and excellent line drawings of aircraft support very readable text throughout, along with descriptions and performance details of all aircraft flown by the AFC in WWI.

Seven appendixes complete the book: Royal Flying Corps Squadrons; 3rd Squadron Information; Camel and Snipe Armament; Fighting Tactics 1917; Description of the DH5; Description of the SE5/SE5A; and German Adversaries.

In all, this is a unique book in terms of detail, historical significance and overall presentation and readability. But thanks to a good deal of hard, volunteer work and publication by the Air Force Association, the price in no way reflects the mountain of effort behind it.

Doug Hurst