

Yarram & District Historical Society Inc.

MEMORY LANE

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Model of the F.E.2b constructed by the students of Yarram Secondary College to commemorate the Centenary of Flight

Welcome to our second newsletter.

We are still in our building in the short to medium term thanks to Saputo and will be receiving more information when they have resolved their future intentions.

The site of the old factory buildings has nearly been cleared and there are now beautiful vistas across to the Strzelecki's.

Our Museum building once the Murray Goulburn offices and laboratories and the old South Gippsland Creamery buildings are all that remain

We now have a new display in our rooms called Centenary of Flight.

It was donated to us following the successful event Centenary of Flight which took place in April at the Yarram Aerodrome. The event celebrated an Aerial Reconnaissance Mission to South Gippsland in 1918 following the reporting of German warships off the Gippsland coast. It caused quite a lot of excitement in the district but was not reported in the papers of the time.

Our current exhibition of Yarram Centenary of Flight will be on display till further notice.

We have been quite busy in the past six months hosting various groups visiting our museum.

In March we held a Heritage Forum with speakers from the National Trust and the Wellington Shire giving us information and advice as to how to deal with heritage issues.

We launched the reprint of 'From These Beginnings' - The History of the Shire of Alberton by John Adams and the book Historic Hotels of South Gippsland by Beverley Weir, from the research of the late Peter Bland, at our March meeting.

The reprint which was helped with a grant from Wellington Shire has a foreward from Caroline Crossley the current Mayor of Wellington Shire.

We had representatives of the 'Old Shire' in attendance and Gary Stephens, ex Shire of Alberton Secretary and Wellington Shire Councillor, gave a short talk about the book and how the first printing was commissioned by the Shire of Alberton.

Councillor Gayle Maher, another local representative, was also in attendance

Beverley Weir who collated the research of the late Peter Bland talked of her experience in putting together a book from the copious notes and photographs of all the hotels and 'refreshment' places that Peter had discovered over the years.

She decided to limit her book to some of the better known hotels in South Gippsland, and gave us some amusement with readings of goings on in these said hotels.

We hope that she will be able to write up another book on the more obscure places that opened then shut, and put them on the historic map.

In May we had Mike McCarthy give an informative talk on Toora and its founding father Stanley Sheppard. In 1874 Stanley Sheppard was looking to invest and move to Gippsland. He had plans to build a regional city equivalent to Warrnambool and hopefully bring the railway through Toora to Port Albert developing Toora into a possible port for Gippsland.

In June we had a most interesting talk given by Kathlyn Gibson on Anastasia Thornley who was to own the biggest hotel in Foster.

Anastasia migrated as a 27year old from Callan in Ireland to Adelaide where she stayed for ten years. She then joined the gold rush to Stockyard Creek where she was a successful business woman who owned several gold mines and blocks of land. She is buried under the largest monument in the Foster cemetery.

WHEN WORLD WAR ONE CAME TO YARRAM!!

In July 1917 the coastal freighter SS Cumberland was sunk by a mine off Gabo Island. Nobody knew the origins of the mine until the reports of the triumphant return to Germany, many months later of the German raider 'Wolf'. Only then did Australia realise the source of the mine. At the same time it was disclosed that the ship also carried a sea plane, the 'Wolfchen' (or Wolf Cub) which was supposed to have flown over Sydney during the 'Wolf's return to Germany up the east coast of Australia.

The ship had earlier laid mines around New Zealand before coming on to Australia and several ships were sunk.

To calm the Australian public's sense of alarm over events which had occurred nearly a year earlier, defence authorities instituted aerial reconnaissance over south eastern waters. There was a public belief that 'Wolf' or another raider was somewhere in Bass Strait and there were numerous reports of suspicious aircraft all around the coastline. Two separate search parties were sent to the chosen sites of Corner Inlet and Twofold Bay(Eden N.S.W.), commencing about April 20th 1918 for the Corner Inlet site.

An FE2 B aircraft armed with a Lewis machinegun was chosen (not really enough armaments to take on a heavily armed raider). The commander was Captain Frank McNamara V.C. who argued successfully for some bombs for dropping on the supposed raider. He was supported by Air Force personnel plus seven navy radio operators and a seven man Army guard.

After a survey of possible landing grounds at Toora and Alberton Captain McNamara chose a site at Yarram, just west of the Yarram Butter Factory. The aircraft was damaged in a landing accident at an earlier site, which forced a delay while repair materials were sent from Melbourne. A second aircraft, a 'Maurice Forman Shorthorn' was sent as support for the FE2B, carrying out sorties over Bass Strait.

When engaged in patrolling at sea, McNamara and his party assisted the civilian police in investigating reports of espionage in the area. One such was a raid on the 'Silver Lake' flour mill at Sale which was owned by a family with a German name. Local residents believed that an aerial was installed in the mill's chimney- no such thing was found on inspection.

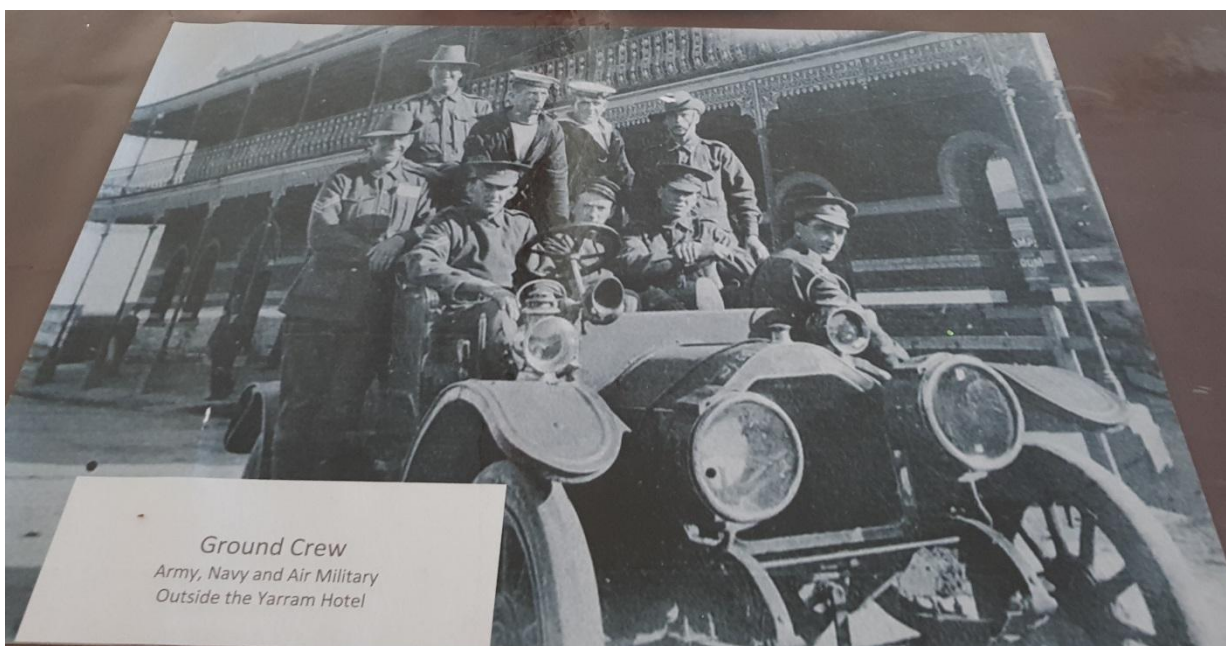
Another such event occurred in Yarram at the Newberry family's home during their mid-day meal. They heard the local air detachment circling overhead. Albert Newberry, who was seven at this time later recalled,

'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. Sometime 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'.

The whole operation only lasted about three weeks until the 10th of May 1918 when the program was called off with the sightings. Interestingly the local press did not appear to report any of the activities. May be everything was an 'official secret'.

The eventual return to base of the detachment was almost as eventful as the arrival- or the period of surveillance. However, Yarram had at least some small experience of war on its soil!!



These two photos are part of the Centenary of Flight exhibit and were taken when the WW1 mission was in Yarram.

CAPTAIN McNAMARA'S V.C

On March 20th 1917 a week before the planned attack on Gaza, Australian airmen of the AFC No1 Squadron were conducting a bombing mission against the railway near Tel El Hesi deep inside Turkish Territory.

Captain Douglas Rutherford, a 27 year old bank clerk from Rockhampton in Qld, and Lieutenant Roy Drummond a 23 year old bank clerk from Cottesloe W.A were both flying aged B.E.2 Cs (top speed 115 km/h). They were accompanied by Lieutenant Alfred Ellis a 23 year old engineer from Melbourne and Lieutenant Frank McNamara, a 24 year old public servant from Caulfield Vic, each of who was flying the slightly more advanced Martinsyde G.100 single- seat scout (top speed 150 km/h).

The outdated B.E 2 Cs dropped their bombs, followed by Ellis dropping his. The last to approach was McNamara, who was then wounded by shrapnel from his own exploding bomb as he descended steeply in targeting the station. As he turned for home he spotted one of his B.E.2Cs on the ground, not far away was an advancing party of Turkish cavalry, keen to capture the airman, who turned out to be Captain Rutherford.

Even though he was wounded and losing blood McNamara landed his aircraft and picked up the stranded pilot. Just after they took off, the loss of blood caused McNamara to flinch unwittingly and he banked his aircraft, causing the undercarriage to be caught on low lying scrub, forcing it to the ground. Both airmen managed to crawl out of the wreckage before setting it ablaze and withdrawing to the downed B.E.C2.

By now the Turkish Cavalry were closing in rapidly. McNamara scrambled into the cockpit while Rutherford successfully started the troublesome engine. With McNamara at the controls and Rutherford in the observer cockpit, the wounded airman managed to get the damaged aircraft airborne just as the Turks dashed towards them and ran alongside the aircraft, firing.

It finally took to the skies. During the 70 K Flight back McNamara continued to lose blood and stopped himself from fainting by sticking his head out in the slipstream.

Somehow he managed to avoid losing consciousness and successfully landed at their airfields where he immediately collapsed. For his actions McNamara received the first Victoria Cross of the Palestine Campaign and later recovered from his wounds.

Photo: Courtesy of Gillies Collection- National War Museum Canberra

Reference: Aviation Heritage Vol 25 The Charge by David W Cameron
Researched for this newsletter by Bill Bodman.