

YOUR VIRTUAL VISIT # 17 to the AUSTRALIAN ARMY MUSEUM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



The Australian Army Museum of Western Australia is temporarily closed for public visits in support of mitigation measures and social distancing during the current COVID-19 pandemic. This does not mean that you will miss out completely on a museum experience. Each week, the Museum will present an object from the collection and tell its story. Included will be links and related material which will allow you, your family or friends to continue a journey of self-discovery. Enjoy the experience and stay well.

Allied Occupation Forces in Germany, 1919 No 4 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps



DESCRIPTION

Prime Minister Billy Hughes insisted that Australian troops be repatriated after the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918. Thus other than No 4 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps and No 3 Australian Casualty Clearing Station (3 ACCS), the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) did not serve as part of the occupation force in Germany.

As part of the Armistice and later the Treaty of Versailles, Allied forces occupied three major bridgeheads across the Rhine River at Cologne, Coblenz and Mainz to ensure German compliance with the Armistice provisions.

No 4 Squadron was stationed in Bickendorf, one of Germany's home defence aerodromes. Bickendorf is a municipality in the district of Bitburg-Prüm, in Rhineland-Palatinate, near Cologne, Germany.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

4 Squadron, established at Point Cook, Victoria in late October 1916, was the last Australian Flying Corp (AFC) Squadron to be formed during World War 1. Fully mobilised by 10 January 1917, the unit embarked for England on 17 January, arriving at Plymouth on 27 March, and was sent for training to Castle Bromwich, near Birmingham.

After familiarisation with a variety of aircraft, the squadron was equipped with Sopwith Camel fighters. In the United Kingdom the squadron was designated 71 (Australian) Squadron, Royal Flying Corps (RFC), and would retain this designation until it reverted to its original title on 19 January 1918. At the end September 1918, 4 Squadron moved to Serny and in early October was re-equipped with Sopwith Snipe fighters; it was only the second unit in France to be equipped with these advanced machines.

No 4 Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps was the only Australian combat unit to serve with the occupation forces in Germany. Members of the squadron had arrived at Bickendorf airfield, outside Cologne by 14 December and its 13 aircraft started to arrive on 17 December. Bickendorf had been one of Germany's home defence aerodromes in the war.

The Australians took over 150 surrendered German aircraft of all types. For No 4 Squadron, duties included running an aerial postal service between Fourth Army Headquarters at Namur and the Australian Flying Corps Headquarters at Ham-sur-Heure, and from the Australian Corps to the divisions in their repatriation assembly areas.

In early February 1919 the Squadron had been ordered to cease flying operations, and by 23 February, all its aircraft had been redistributed to British units. On 27 February, No 4 Squadron began its move to Le Havre for transport to the UK. On 17 March, the unit was given 14 days leave, and on 25 April, two sergeants and 25 other ranks took part in the Anzac Day parade in London. The squadron left for Australia on 7 May 1919 alongside officers and other ranks of the other Australian Flying Corps units stationed in the UK.

LINKS FOR FURTHER ENJOYMENT

Visit the Australian Army Museum of Western Australia web site

<https://armymuseumwa.com.au/>

Learn more about the plane and build and fly your own Sopwith Camel model aircraft

<https://www.vintagemodelcompany.com/sopwith-camel.html>

The current role of No 4 Squadron, Royal Australian Air Force

<https://www.airforce.gov.au/news-and-events/news/no-4-squadron-combat-controllers-commanders-eyes-and-ears-ground>

From Pup to Camel to Snipe

<https://www.fighterworld.com.au/az-of-fighter-aircraft/australian-flying-corps/sopwith-pup>

<https://www.fighterworld.com.au/az-of-fighter-aircraft/australian-flying-corps/sopwith-camel>

<https://www.fighterworld.com.au/az-of-fighter-aircraft/australian-flying-corps/sopwith-snipe>

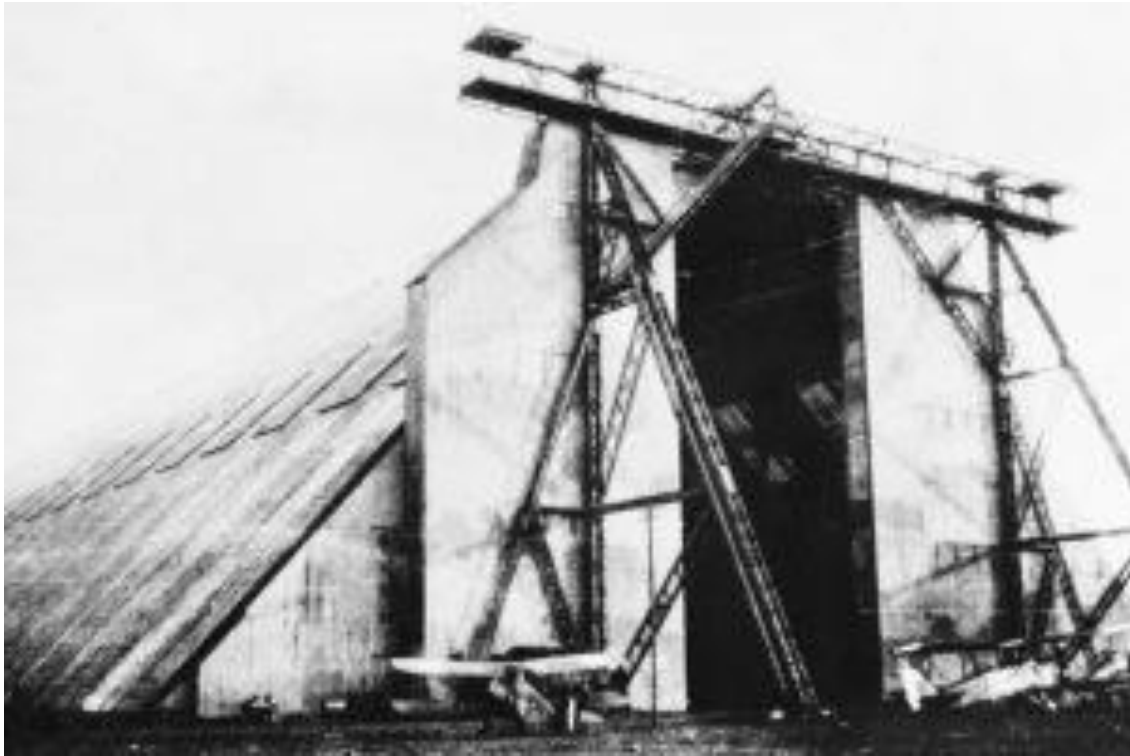
PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE MUSEUM COLLECTION



A Junkers J.I German armoured aircraft made entirely of metal, with corrugated iron wings, at the Bickendorf Aerodrome when the 4th Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps was stationed there.



Group portrait of the Air Mechanics of No. 4 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps at hangars at Clairmarais, Nord Pas de Calais. Clairmarais, near St. Omer and not far from Ypres, was an airfield used by the Royal Flying Corps throughout the First World War. The site was briefly reused by the Germans during the occupation of France in the Second World War.



Bickendorf Aerodrome, Cologne, a Sopwith Snipe of No. 4 Squadron Australian Flying Corps and a De Havilland 9 of No. 206 Squadron, Royal Air Force, parked outside the Zepplin hangar.



Pilots of No 4 Squadron Australian Flying Corps in November 1918

The Black Day for No 4 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps

On 4 November, 1918 one of the last great air battles in the First World War was fought involving Australian pilots. In just a single day, the 4th Squadron lost 5 Sopwith Snipe Aircraft and the death of 3 pilots (including two World War One fighter 'Aces'.) The weather in the lead up to November 1918 had been mostly grim as winter slowly began to set in. But then on 4 November 1918 the skies cleared and visibility was good. The stage was set. Sensing this rare opportunity, enemy activity increased.

In the morning an offensive patrol of 4 Sopwith Snipes from the 4th Squadron was attacked by 7 German Fokker Biplanes. A brief dogfight ensued in which Lieutenant Alexander Cato managed to shoot down one enemy aircraft, however, in the middle of the dog fight two Australian aircraft went missing.

It would later be confirmed that Lieutenants Edward John Goodson and Charles William Rhodes, the two pilots that went missing, were both forced down, where they were taken prisoner. Goodson was captured by German forces on the day he was forced down, while Rhodes was captured on 5 November suffering from several injuries. They remained prisoners of war only for a short time, however, as their repatriation began soon after the Armistice.

In the afternoon of 4 November 1918, 16 Sopwith Snipes of the 4th Squadron were escorting a group of British bombers back to base along with several craft from the 2nd Squadron AFC, when a dozen Fokker aircraft were spotted. These Fokker aircraft belonged to the feared Jagdstaffel 2 (Jasta 2) Squadron. Soon a grand dog fight erupted in the skies over Ath and nearby villages. While the 4th Squadron downed four of the German aircraft three of their own went missing that afternoon. It was later concluded at a Court of Inquiry that all 3 pilots had been shot down and killed. The three aircraft belonged to:

Captain Thomas Charles Richmond Baker DFC, MM & Bar. A South Australian fighter ace, in his career as a fighter pilot on the Western Front he had downed 12 enemy aircraft before himself being claimed on 4 November 1918;

Lieutenant Arthur John Palliser. A Tasmanian fighter ace, he had shot down 7 aircraft in his time with the 4th Squadron, which including downing 3 enemy aircraft on one day (29 October 1918),

Lieutenant Parker Whitley Symons. Another South Australian fighter pilot, he had moderate success in the 4th Squadron, however, he had not yet claimed the prized 5 'kills' and thus was not classed as an 'ace'

Article from <https://vwma.org.au/explore/units/9>

Submitted by Steve Larkins, 5 August 2017