In The Tradition
(A personal tribute to the RAAF)
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"Imagination is more important than knowledge." Albert Einstein

"You look pleased. What's the occasion?" asked the OC.
Somewhat embarrassed as I had not been studying Engineering or Accounting, those "practicaI" subjects perceived more appropriate by most of those who saw the RAAF as their career, I answered:

"I passed my Philosophy exam, Sir".

"A noble endeavour, Pilot Officer. What areas?"

" Ethics, logic and metaphysics, Sir".

"Well done," said Air Commodore G.A. Cooper, OC, RAAF Base Williamtown and, in his gentle way, smiled approvingly.

I guessed then that my OC was clearly "in the tradition".

And what tradition is that?

The pre-eminent example is the Battle of Agincourt, 25th October, 1415, in which c6000 English soldiers fought and defeated c30,000 French soldiers. The longbow, brilliant leadership, and the fact that the English soldiers were professionals, not, as with the French, local knights and peasants, meant that the smaller English army prevailed in a spectacular victory. This victory is celebrated in one of Shakespeare's great plays, Henry V. Consider these words:

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England, now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day. (4.3.43)"

Besides the strategy and tactics of the English, their longbows, and the fact the King himself led the army into battle, the war, not just the battle, was effectively won. The notion that two countries could each send their best military to a field to battle and the outcome would decide the war could be considered a highly civilised method of determining a conflict. Additionally, the idea of the few, the happy few, who repre-

sented the peoples of their respective countries, would be honoured appropriately, as standard bearers and experts in the use of the tools of war to defend their civilisation against the barbarians. But it was also the idea of Henry V himself for he represented the ideal warrior.

As the character created by Shakespeare, Henry is very resolute with a very forceful personality intent on getting his way. He has a highly developed, even poetic, way with language and is able to rouse his followers with inspirational rhetoric, intimidate his enemies in his "diplomacy" and persuade others to act in his interests. He gives the impression of speaking honestly whilst manipulating his audience. He is passionate about fulfilling duty to the rank conferred upon him and he places his responsibilities of his office way above his personal feelings.

From the 15th Century then was born in writing the idea of the dutiful, passionate, honourable and brave poet defending his country. Parallel with this, was the development of the King James' version of the Bible, which committee of 47 began its task in 1604 and completed it in 1611. Stories such as those of David inflamed the imagination of subsequent generations of boys and girls.

But it wasn't until the 20th century and the advent of flying machines, that the idea reached its apogee with the fighter pilot and the ideas associated with that. And as the great 20th century Englishman, Maynard Keynes wrote, it is ideas which are dangerous for good or evil.

The first great writer on the fighter pilot experience was Antoine Marie Jean-Baptiste Roger, comte de Saint-Exupéry, who was born in 1900. Following his education with the Jesuits in France and Switzerland and the School Of Fine Arts, Paris, where he studied architecture, in April, 1921, Saint Exupéry began his required two years of French military service. He went to Strasbourg, in southeastern France, for training as a pilot. In June, he took his first flying lesson in a Farman aircraft. One month later, he soloed in a Sopwith plane. In December of 1921, he obtained his military pilot's license and then served briefly in North Africa. Throughout the 1920s he pioneered airmail deliveries through France, Spain, and northern Africa. In memorable prose he wrote of 1927, he started spending much of his time in Dakar, Senegal, and began learning about the Sahara desert and its people. Alone, at night contemplating, he wrote about the desert, the stars, and being: ***A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral; True happiness comes from the joy of deeds well done, the zest of creating things new; I know but one freedom, and that is the freedom of the mind; If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea***; were some of the thoughts he penned as well as the great story The Little Prince about a pilot stranded in the desert who meets a young prince fallen to Earth from a tiny asteroid. The story is philosophical and includes societal criticism, remarking on the strangeness of the adult world.

Saint-Exupéry at the outbreak of war, joined the French Air Force (Armée de l'Air), flying reconnaissance missions until France's armistice with Germany in 1940. After being demobilised from the French Air Force, he travelled to the United States to persuade its government to enter the war against Nazi Germany. He joined the Free French Air Force in North Africa, although he was far past the maximum age for such pilots and in declining health.

In July of 1944, he was scheduled for one of his last flights. On July 31, he took off from an Allied airbase in Borgo, Corsica, headed for the Grenoble region in southern France to take reconnaissance photos. His plane, a Lockheed P-38 Lightning, disappeared that same day. His squadron declared him officially missing on September 8.

Wind Sand and Stars by Antoine de Saint-Exupery is one of the best on the flying experience.

Saint-Exupéry in his Lockheed P-38 Lightning.

Contemporaneously with Saint-Exupéry was Flying Officer W.E. Johns who was commissioned into the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in September 1917 and posted back to England for flight training. He was an Ex-apprentice surveyor, and sanitary inspector whose father had died at 47 when he was aged 17.

Johns undertook his initial flying training at the short-lived airfield at Coley Park in Reading, flying the Farman MF.11 Shorthorn aircraft. He was then posted to No.25 Flying Training School at Thetford in Norfolk, closer to where his wife Maude, and son Jack lived. After leaving the RAF, Johns became a newspaper air correspondent,

as well as editing and illustrating books about flying. At the request of John Hamilton Ltd, he created the magazine Popular Flying which first appeared in March 1932. It was in the pages of Popular Flying that Biggles, first appeared.

The first Biggle's book of the 100 Flying Officer Johns (his correct rank) wrote, was The Camels Are Coming, published in 1932.

These books proved popular reading for boys. I recall how enthralled I was by Sergeant Bigglesworth CID and his many manifestations and when I was given a Christmas gift of Two Pounds I promptly bought, at 6 shillings and 8 pence each, Biggles Takes a Holiday, Biggles in the Baltic and Biggles' Second Case. Bigglesworth achieved at least 32 kills and was shot down or crash-landed eight times. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the Military Cross and bar. His comrades, Algernon Montgomery Lacey, "Algy"; "Ginger" Hebblethwaite; Flight Sergeant Smyth; and Lord Bertie (who flew with a hunting horn and a monocle) were memorable and well drawn characters.

But it was the nature of Biggles' character, which was in the tradition, that was most appealing to young readers. Under the stress of combat Biggles develops from a slightly hysterical youth prone to practical jokes to a calm, confident, competent

leader. He combined professionalism with a gentlemanly air which served as a model for we aspiring air force youth.

The next significant literary event in the tradition, I believe, was The Big Show by Pierre Clostermann, DFC. Here is an extract from the chapter Fight in the Fog, 29th June 1944, when he was attached to the RAF, airborne in his Spitfire with his cockpit having been steamed over, close to the coast of France:

'As I turned round a cloud, I suddenly discovered a dozen black spots coming towards me at full speed - at such speed that they were on top of me before I could make the slightest move. They passed on my right. Jesus! Focke-Wulfs!

They had spotted me too, and broke off in perfect formation, two by two, to cut off my retreat. I was just cruising along, they were doing about 350 m.p.h. - no hope of getting away by climbing; in any case two of them were immediately above me, waggling their wings. My only hope was to reach the clouds and throw them off by I.F. For one fraction of a second I found myself spiralling down with one pair of Folke-Wulfs above, another turning into me from in front, another one below me and a last one preparing to cut off my retreat. The bomb rack hanging between my two radiators was an unnecessary drag and reduced my speed. I must get rid of it. I pulled desperately on the emergency handle but it wouldn't shift - probably iced up. Sweating, I braced myself and tugged desperately - the handle came away in my hand with part of the cable. I avoided a lateral attack by a quick skid and before another section had time to attack, putting my whole weight on the stick I reversed my turn. Damn! My safety-catch was still on, so although I instinctively pressed the button the Focke-Wulf in my sights slipped by ten yards away. Christ! What about all those other Huns? I couldn't see more than four. Indistinctly, I remembered the vital rule. Look out for the Hun you don't see; that's the one that will shoot you down.

I pulled so hard on the stick that I partially blacked out. I couldn't even turn my head, but I felt that those who had disappeared were up there, just waiting for the moment to pounce.

I just avoided a stream of tracer by breaking sharply upwards - unfortunately this manoeuvre put me back just as far from my cloud as I had been at the start. I was in a lather. A nervous tremor in my left leg made it useless. I crouched down in my cockpit with my elbows by my side and keeping my head down so as to be better protected by my back plate. My oxygen mask, pulled down by the g, had slipped over my nose, and I couldn't get it up again, as I had both hands on the controls. I tried breathing through my mouth and felt saliva running down my chin into my scarf.'

pp 141/2 The Big Show, Pierre Clostermann, Trans. Oliver Berthoud, 1951, Chatto and Windus. Notwithstanding The Big Sky by Air Marshall "Johnny" Johnston and other fine writers of WW11, many consider Clostermann's book the standout - how

much this conclusion is fuelled by nostalgia and the deep impressions made during adolescence when it was first encountered, who knows?

Significantly, though, to my adolescent mind, the so called Battle of Britain was not a battle like WW1 between different nations, inflamed with bizarre and unnatural patriotism, fuelled by greed, or geo-politics, or the whims of ambitions of demented Kings out for revenge or plunder, this was a battle of humanity against evil . The essence of that evil was Nationalism gone mad, where the only great and pure nation Germany, was intent on domination. And despite biological, or other evidence, asserted that a true German was "pure", a member of a Super "Race" where there was no place for the black, the disabled, the mentally ill, the Semite, and the "other", so to speak. And certainly no place for me and Helen my friend who lived in Innes Road, Manly Vale who had polio, or the Chinese boys the sons of the market gardeners at the bottom of Quirk Road, Manly Vale, or Mrs Nicholls No 10 Parkes Street, Manly Vale, the Aboriginal wife of our neighbour, Gordon, para-medic of Manly Ambulance Station, who had been incarcerated for five years in Changi Prison under the Japanese.

So among other things, Pierre Clostermann's writing drew me to realise that the Battle of Britain was a convenient geographical shorthand that involved 2,353 Brits, 145 Poles, 135 Kiwis, 112 Canucks, 88 Czechs, 30 Belgium pilots, 32 Aussies, 32 South Africans, 14 French, 10 Irish, 10 Yanks, as well as 4 pilots from Southern Rhodesia, 1 Jamaican, 1 from Barbados, 1 from Newfoundland, and 1 from Northern Rhodesia. Thus it was the quality of the character of the individual that defined his or her worth, not the particular national flag he or she was born under. Some elements of Biggles then receded into the background especially the inflated Nationalism and the attitude to other cultures.

From the Korean War one of the finest writers of all, is James Salter (nee James A. Horowitz) and his book based on his experiences as a F86 fighter pilot, originally titled The Hunters. He was posted to D Flight in the 335th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron, which became one of the leading MiG-killing units in Korea while he was a member, scoring 28 victories. Salter joined his flight before its members had registered any MiG claims,flew as a wingman and not as leader until nearly the end of his tour. He acted as flight lead on July 4, 1952, however, his 89th mission, when he achieved his sole MiG kill. This occurred ten days after the attack on the Sui-ho Dam which provided the framework for the climax of The Hunters, although in the historical mission no MiG combat actually took place.

F86s in Formation over Korea

Salter's book is more concerned with the internal feelings and thoughts of the protagonist, the journey "through the soul" of Captain Cleve Connell, than it is with the actual combat details from the perspective of the cockpit as was the case with Clostermann. Nevertheless what combat details there are, are brilliantly captured in prose. The competitiveness of the pilots, the fear that some are "past it" and avoiding combat; there are those who cajole wingmen to confirm a kill that did not occur; those flying off and leaving one's leader vulnerable; the ambition to become an ace above all else; undermining a fellow pilot's authority, are all aspects of the novel. The characters include the career pilot, the reserve pilot, the brand new artless Texan, the poor pilot, the patronizing, newly minted ace, the old ace and hero from WW11, the older staff officer newly returned to flying, all bring a rich and biting human drama to the operational aspects of the overall mission - to shoot down MiGs.

Here is an extract, taken at random, from The Hunters,, in which Captain Cleve Connell agonises in the crew room over the fact that he has been on 24 missions, seen no action, but has not yet bagged a MiG:

'He knew what was happening. Even as an ordinary flight leader he was expected to get kills; but he had to live up to more than that. Everybody was watching him, many of them cynically. Everybody was waiting for proof of his ability, and somehow he had not been able to give it. He could sense the ebbing respect . It was showing up more frequently as the days passed.

He was overcome by a lonely, hopeless feeling. He did not want to talk to anybody, only to be by himself. Later, he might have a drink if the club was not too overcrowded, or perhaps even see a movie. Slowly the mood would abate, leaving finally only its invisible scar. Years ago, losing a football game away from home, he had walked like this, slowly, off the hard field, away from the crowd and the noise. The cleated shoes sounded hollow as they scraped down the long hallway to the locker room, and there were very few words that did not seem hollow, too. The ride home in the chartered bus seemed endless. Nobody talked, but only slept fitfully or stared out the cold, misting windows.

Perhaps it was true that through defeat men were made, and that victors actually lost, with every triumph, the vital strength that found exercise in recovering strength. Perhaps the spirit grew greater in achieving the understanding that was first confused and then exquisitely clear after having lost. But that was, Cleve thought, like saying it was strengthening to be poor. It wasn't he was sure. It was sapping. It was like having a leech's mouth on your breast, forever draining, so that everything had to be sacrificed for nothing more than sustaining the burden of flesh. There were very few men who ever surmounted poverty; and there were very few losers, he felt, who realised anything but tears from their defeats.

He wondered how this had happened to him, how despite himself he had been imprisoned by this inflexible choice of winning or losing; for there seemed to be no compromise between the two in this bare place where there was a single definition of excellence. If only there were some ground in between, some neutral stretch separating attainment and failure. He yearned for that. He felt emptied by desire.

Suddenly he found himself wanting to be honourable relieved from the struggle, to have no part of it. Interminably, he saw it stretching out ahead of him, and he faced it with a sense of helplessness that he hated more than anything else. He had lost a moral independence. He had never lived without it before, and he did not know what to expect.

Whatever it was that had denied him the enemy, he wanted to meet and demolish. If it was only bad fortune, he could outwait that; but he was increasingly tortured by the thought that it might be something more insidious, he was afraid to identify what. If it was something unacknowledged within himself, then he was lost. The torment of that possibility tore at his heart.

He sat in the dark room, thinking. The clamor of Nolan and his flight returning to their room next door, shouting happily to each other and to those who came by to hear what had happened, streamed by him abstractly. At one point he was aware of Hunter's voice in there, but the actual words flood by him.

For a long time he sat quietly, in a solitude that gave only vast discomfort instead of peace, pushing his thoughts before him as if through a jungle of spears, He was miserable. It could not go on. He had never been beaten, and it could not happen now; yet there was before him which seemed to endanger everything he had fought for within himself. The mystic tissue that joined the soul of man together, it felt it dissolving. He had to succeed. If he could only find them. He needed just a fragment of triumph, only that, to remove his doubts.

He did not know how many minutes or hours passed like that, but slowly his despair was washed away by visions, and could see, as if it were reality, the enemy falling before him, hung on lengths of sailing tracers. He wanted only his chance, nothing more. Gradually he left the room, travelling with his dreams, heading as he always

did to the same place, to the north with its silent seas of air, in which, if he lived, his victory had to be gained.'

pp 71-73 The Hunters by James Salter,Vintage International Edition, August 1999 (first published 1956) Salter died on June 19, 2015 in Sag Harbor, New York.

It seems to me Salter ably captures the thoughts and feelings of the fighter pilot on duty, waiting, thinking, doubting, and may be in some ways if not all, common to many in those circumstances.

My first encounter with those in the tradition, two relatives in the RAAF - 1941 Manly NSW (In the right background is the l/f wheel,and part of the front radiator of a Stanley Steamer Motor Car).

In 1939,at some two months, I was abandoned by my mother who had been abandoned by her husband, and was taken in by my mother's mother Ethel May Wilson (nee Bruce) and her husband William Granville (Jim) Wilson. I couldn't believe my luck as Wilson had served in No 4 Squadron AFC and was firmly in the tradition - he was a gentleman who never gambled, smoked, consumed alcohol, or swore. He was so dedicated to duty that, much to the chagrin of his wife, he supported his sister Nancy, until she married, which she did not do until after her 50th birthday. He could properly claim to be the holder of what might be termed "Victorian" attributes and attitudes, that famous British era. It was with some measure of disappointment that he saw me, on my first leave after joining the RAAF, smoke. I explained that in the RAAF they had a break in the morning and in the afternoon called "Smoko" and I needed to "fit in". He did not see my explanation as a strength.

Jim Wilson joined No 4 Squadron AFC in 1917. His serial number was 956. His rank, private, his trade, mechanic.

4 Squadron, the last Australian Flying Corp (AFC) Squadron to be formed during the First World War, was established at Point Cook, Victoria, in late October 1916. 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.

The squadron arrived in France on 18 December 1917 and established itself at Bruay. It was assigned to the 10th Wing of the Royal Flying Corps, and operated in support of the British 1st Army, undertaking offensive patrols and escorting reconnaissance machines. The unit's first patrol over German lines took place on 9 January 1918, and its first air combat action occurred on 13 January 1918.

Intrigued by my Grandad's service in WW1, I came across a series of photos featuring a boy in a bag which my Grandad told me was the Squadron mascot, an orphan adopted by the Squadron. Here is a brief resume of that mascot.

On Christmas Day 1918, as No. 4 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps were mopping

up in Belgium, a small French orphan attached himself to them as their mascot. They estimated his age at 7 years but he could have been younger than that.

The time came for the Squadron to be demobbed and, although they made extensive enquiries in a war-torn France, they could find no relatives to care for him. Both his parents were dead, his mother killed by bombing and his father in the early days of the war trying to protect his country.

Tim Tovell and his brother, Ted, both mechanics, from Jandowae, Queensland decided that Henri would have to go with them back to Australia. Tim was older than most of the Squadron, married with a family at home in Queensland. Sadly, his letter to his wife telling her of the problem and asking her for permission to bring the boy home crossed with one from her to say that his own son of three had died of polio. She later wrote again, eager to meet Henri and have him in their family, so the brothers' plans took shape.

It was not going to be easy as neither the military nor the French authorities would have allowed them to do such a thing. With the help of some of the men they devised a scheme which entailed Henri curling up in a sack, disguised with a wooden frame, which Tim carried on his back. The journey took several hours but Henri remained as quiet as a mouse until they at last could open the sack on the train from Southampton to Salisbury, then on to Hurdcott Camp at Fovant.

The Flying Corps spoilt him dreadfully, buying him toys and a small replica of the uniform he had grown to love. Unfortunately, they also taught him less admirable things such as playing 'Two Up' which he loved. One day he was called before the CO and reprimanded. He was much too young for gambling. He continued to join the men at the games but in the capacity of mascot and 'good luck charm', the men rewarding him with pennies when they won. He accumulated such an amount that Tim had to open a Post Office Savings account for him!

Then, at long last the news came of their repatriation to Australia. By now everyone knew about the 'sack escapade' so that could not be used again. It was one of the young officers who suggested a sports equipment hamper partially filled with cricket bats and entertainment costumes. The officer boarded the ship first and threw his cabin key down to the waiting soldiers who marched aboard saying that they had to deliver the important hamper to the entertainment officer's cabin. Again it worked and, when the ship was well out to sea they let the little boy out of his cramped concealment. Of course, it was not long before the lower decks knew what had happened and eventually the story spread to the upper decks as well.

It so happened that the Governor of Queensland was also returning with his family. He enjoyed the story and admired the men's ingenuity. From Perth he wired his government in Queensland to have the necessary papers ready for their arrival in Sydney where Henri finally landed to a hero's welcome.

Tim adopted him and, after his schooling was over, Henri opted to join the R.A.A.F. (as it had become). He started as a civilian employee because he could not join the armed forces as an alien and could not be naturalised as an Australian citizen until he was 21 years old. He began training as an aeroplane mechanic, following Tim's war-time occupation.

A few weeks before his 21st birthday Henri was killed in a motorbike accident. No. 4 Squadron made a collection and erected a fine memorial stone crowned with a bronze figure of the small, lost waif they had first known.

The whole story of Henri can be read in 'Young Digger' by Anthony Hill.
Pictures by kind permission of the Australian War Memorial Museum, Canberra, Australia.

During my service I flew with the following pilots either as a ground crew member or passenger. They represent the finest examples of those in the tradition of the RAAF:
1960 Wg Cdr Geoff Newstead, Pearce-Amberley, Canberra Bomber, as ground crew, in what was rumoured to be then a new record time of 3hrs 36m.
1962 Arthur Barnes, Butterworth - Kowloon, Canberra Bomber, ground crew
1968 Ron Magrath, Mirage, hesitation roll over Penang Island, as passenger
1968 Geoff Warrener, Mirage, smoothest landing in aeronautical history, as passenger
1969 Wing Commander E.J.Myers, Mirage, Butterworth-RAF Tengah as co-pilot (unoffical) I was unable to keep the aircraft straight and level.
1974 Wing Commander Allan Woolley (Civil Engineer) CO, 5ACS, Glider over Cape Range, National Park, North West Cape, WA.Passenger.

L-R Dave Robson, Pete Condon, Ian Muldoon (Adj), Brian Sweeney, Pete Spurgin, Geoff Colman, A.J.Holden (S Eng O)(partly obscured), Brian Fooks, Geoff Warrener,E.J. (Johnny) Myers, Dick Moore, Bill Monaghan, Al Taylor. The occasion was the CO Wing Commander E.J. Myers, DFM, congratulating Flying Officer B.H.Fooks on the award of the DFC.

Needless to say, the great and the good of the tradition come in all shapes and sizes. The late Reg Meissner was a fighter pilot extraordinaire who I found had all those qualities one would wish one's wing man or leader would have when faced with real trouble at the pointy end of conflict. Mice either pissed you off with his energy and confidence, or you loved him - I fell very solidly into the latter camp.

I recall a Wing Commander at HQOC impugned the honour of Mice one night in the bar of the Officers' Mess and Mice promptly decked him with a left to the jaw, whilst not spilling the beer clutched in his right. Again I remember a boggy pilot from Williamtown had flown under the power lines over the Hawkesbury River and was under "review", a review that came under the bailiwick of Mice at HQOC. Mice felt the boggy would probably make a fine pilot and just needed to be drawn in a tad, but not too much.

Below is a photo of Mice and Muldy, 2nd March 1979, RAAF Base Williamtown, my second last working day in the RAAF. He did a hammer head stall over my late granddad's Dungog property.

In so many ways, that photo sums up so many aspects of how great the RAAF is, and was to me, and to many like me.