

PLAQUE ERECTED IN YARRAM MEMORIAL PARK IN 2018 TO ACCOMPANY THE F.E.2.b AIRCRAFT MODEL

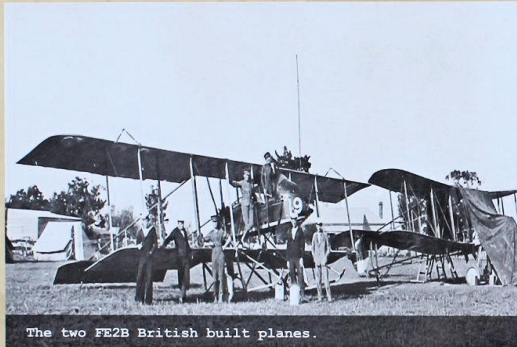
Based out of Yarram

April 20 1918 - May 11 1918

April 20 1918: and the first military air mission over Australia soil was deployed from Point Cook to Yarram to calm the sense of alarm which was bordering on hysteria by the locals after reports that a German Raider had spent 15 months travelling along the New Zealand and Australian coast line laying mines. This raider had returned to its base in Germany however, "The Wolf" was responsible for the loss of 25 Allied vessels. In July 1917 a coast freighter SS Cumberland struck one of these mines ten miles off Gabo Island and was sunk.



Cpt. Frank McNamara



The two FE2B British built planes.

Two aerial reconnaissance missions were planned over south eastern sea lanes. The first deployment headed to Gippsland while the other was later deployed to Two Fold Bay, Eden. The Gippsland deployment was directed to fly to Toora or Alberton in the FE2B, a British built biplane. This aircraft was regarded as an operational type, although the single Lewis gun which it carried, hardly equipped it to take on a heavily armed ship. Captain Frank McNamara was recalled to service after being wounded in the Middle East towards the end of 1916 when he heroically risked his own life to save a fellow pilot. His actions saw him presented with the Victoria Cross. The only VC awarded to an Air Corp pilot during WW1. He was appointed as Officer Commanding, Air Reconnaissance, South Gippsland.

April 21 1918: McNamara and his 20 ground crew which included seven radio operators supplied by the RAN and a seven man guard provided by the army, arrived in Yarram after they found no suitable landing ground in either Toora or Alberton. Operations had barely begun when the FE2B was temporarily put out of action on April 23 after striking a ditch while trying to land. Neither McNamara nor his observer was injured but the plane suffered considerable undercarriage damage.

Stainless steel tubing was sent from Melbourne and repairs were carried out on the spot. April 30 and the FE2B was again serviceable. By this time the base for the operation had moved to a safer spot, near the Yarram Butter Factory. Reconnaissance flights were now being conducted eastward each afternoon along the ninety mile beach.

McNamara pleaded with the Defence Department to supply 20 pound Hales bombs and bomb racks. His initial request was met with a curt reply but McNamara reasoned that "it is futile to wait until an enemy target is actually seen or wait until some information is gen about its existence and then send for bombs and racks!" McNamara got his bombs, which were stored at the Yarram station.

The mission was plagued with many challenges. The FE2B incurred many mechanical problems. On May 3 McNamara requested a second plane be flown to the site to serve both as a 'spare' machine and in case it became necessary to undertake a night flight. Although the FE was suitable for such a task it was, McNamara noted, it was the only aircraft of this type in Australia. The second aircraft arrived in Yarram on May 7 a Maurice Farman Shorthorn with Lieutenant J.C.C Marduel at the controls and air cadet J Paterson as observer. By this stage, however the Defence Department was within days of recognising the search program to be pointless and calling off the effort.

On May 10: the operation ceases.

On May 11 1918: McNamara and his crew left Yarram for Point Cook.

Photos courtesy of the National War Memorial Canberra and the Gillies Collection

This plane was constructed by students of Yarram Secondary College under the supervision of Bob Wenger and Mark Dows. The project was funded by the Federal Government's Saluting Their Service programme and took three years to complete. This plane is dedicated to the memory of all those who served in World War One.