

SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

LT ALAN D'ARCY SUTHERLAND

Trainee Pilot (RFC), World War I

Minlaton father perishes in training accident before reaching the front.



Alan D'Arcy Sutherland was born on 14 April 1889 in Adelaide. He attended St Peter's College from 1899 to 1906. He was reportedly a fine student who passed the Senior Public University Examination. While at school, he served in a cadet unit, attaining the rank of Sergeant. He was a good sportsman and was particularly adept at cricket and football.

After leaving school Alan Sutherland joined his uncle, Mr. R. A. Ford, of Yorke Peninsula, a well-known stock and general auctioneer. Learning the trade, Sutherland became himself an excellent auctioneer and a good businessman, entering a partnership with a Mr. D. Davies of Minlaton. Sutherland was equally adept on the sporting field for local sporting clubs on the Yorke Peninsula.

Alan Sutherland married Elsie Letitia Trehearn on 28th April, 1913, at All Saints Church, St Peters, Norwood, South Australia. Their first son, Hamilton D'Arcy Sutherland, was born at Minlaton in December 1913 and their second son, Lancelot Robert Sutherland, was born in 1915.

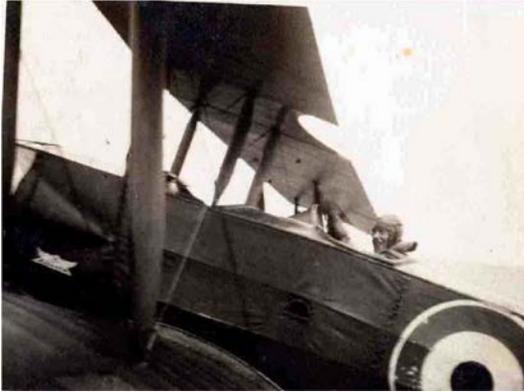
Living at Minlaton with his wife and two young children, Alan Sutherland soon answered the call to go to war. On 12 August 1915, he enlisted in the AIF at Keswick Barracks and initially completed recruit training as a Private. He completed a Non-Commissioned Officer course in September at the Infantry Base Depot, Mitcham, and was subsequently posted as a Sergeant to 12th Reinforcements of 10th Battalion on 1st October. He then completed Officer training during October 1915, before being posted to 8th Reinforcements of 27th Battalion on 1 November 1915. He then transferred to A Company on 1 December 1915.

After applying for a commission on 8 December, Alan Sutherland was commissioned on 16 December 1915, as a Second Lieutenant with 2nd Reinforcements of 48th Battalion. He embarked with the 48th Infantry Battalion on HMAT Aeneas on 11 April 1916 and served in Egypt for about two months in non-combat positions before embarking again to arrive in England on 16 June 1916.

After serving as Adjutant for an AIF Training Battalion, Sutherland transferred to the Royal Flying Corps on 22 October 1916 and was posted to No. 2 Flying Corps School of Instruction at Oxford; later No. 2 School of Military Aviation. Sutherland completed his Ground School examinations and then commenced his flying training after being transferred to Central Flying School, Upavon, Wiltshire, on 26 February, 1917.

Three days later, on 28 February 1917, Alan Sutherland was killed when his Sopwith 1½ Strutter (aircraft number 7810) crashed when the wings failed as he pulled out of a dive too quickly. Like many young aviators, Sutherland became one of the tragic casualties where the life expectancy of a new pilot could be

measured in weeks in the Spring of 1917. Some sources suggest over fifty percent of the 14,000 Royal Flying Corps aircrew casualties during World War I met their deaths in England under training.



LT Alan D'Arcy Sutherland in a Sopwith Strutter 1½ before being killed three days into his flying course.

Tragically, Alan Sutherland's youngest son, Pilot Officer Lancelot Sutherland, adjutant of No 2 Squadron RAAF at Laverton, was killed on 22 April 1938 when the Bristol Bulldog (A12-2) he was flying crashed at RAAF Richmond, New South Wales, while rehearsing for an air display to be held the next day. Lancelot Sutherland had only graduated as a pilot four months before the accident.

One hundred years after Alan Sutherland's death, research by the South Australian Aviation Museum for the Centenary of ANZAC, found that Alan D'Arcy Sutherland was one of 12 South Australian airmen to have died in WWI, whose names were not on the South Australian State War Memorial on North Terrace, Adelaide. After much lobbying by the South Australian Aviation Museum and the Air Force Association (South Australia), on Sunday 18 November 2018, the twelve names, including Lieutenant Alan D'Arcy Sutherland, were added to the War Memorial. Family descendants of Alan D'Arcy Sutherland were present to witness the special occasion.



LT Alan D'Arcy Sutherland (left), alongside renowned fellow South Australian aviator Harry Butler (AFC) who was also from Minlaton.

The story of Lieutenant Alan D'Arcy Sutherland provides one of the more sobering accounts of South Australian airmen. In a tragic irony, having enlisted in the AIF on August 1915, completed basic and NCO training and received a commission, he never actually saw combat or even served operationally, and he perished only several days into learning to fly an aircraft in his quest to serve for his country. There are many South Australians like Alan Sutherland whose war time experience are not as noted as other South Australian's and thus, have become somewhat forgotten. However, while their exploits may not have been great, many made the ultimate sacrifice and thus, warrant remembrance. Lest we forget.

Greg Weller
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