

## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN AVIATION MUSEUM

### SIGNIFICANT AVIATOR PROFILES

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**Horn, Kelham Kirk**

**Horn, Marmaduke Langdale**

**Horn, Spencer Bertram “Nigger”**

To continue the theme of South Australian-born brothers (other than the very well-known Ross and Keith Smith) who served as airmen during the Great War of 1914-1918, three brothers from the Horn family served with the Royal Flying Corps (RFC).

#### **HORN, K. K.**

Kelham Kirk Horn was born on 18 September 1886 at Walkerville in Adelaide, South Australia, and educated at Wilderness School. In 1895 his family moved to England and he continued his education at Haylesbury to gain his MA at Christ Church, Oxford University and became noted in the field of motor racing.



*Kelham Kirk Horn, Royal Flying Corps.*

When war was declared on 4 August 1914 he was returning from a journey to Brazil, and he enlisted in September as a trooper in the 2<sup>nd</sup> King Edward's Horse. He was then invited to join the Royal Marine Brigade Motor Corps as a temporary 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant (2Lt) from 1 October, providing his own car and khaki field service kit, and on 7 October 1914 he joined the Royal Naval Division (RND) at Dunkirk, where he took part with several cars in a foray led by some

Belgians seeking German Uhlán patrols. Their only encounter brought no results and after a few weeks the RND returned to England. There was a shortage of cars and drivers on the Continent, so Horn resigned his Royal Marine commission on 27 October 1914 and drove for the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division without rank or pay, just free petrol and oil, until March 1915.

Horn then returned to England and learnt to fly at Brooklands, where he gained Royal Aero Club (RAeC) Certificate 1171 on 15 April 1915 on a Maurice Farman Biplane and was appointed 2Lt RFC. Shortly afterwards he and another newly qualified pilot, 2Lt Godwin, were nominated by Major Hugh Dowding to take part in wireless experiments being conducted by Captain C. E. Prince with No.9 RFC at Brooklands, and these duties and further training gave him a useful flying hours total of 96 hours 25 minutes before he received a posting overseas to No.7 RFC on 27 September 1915.

Horn had his first flight in France when he picked up BE2c 2680 *Malaya No.2 "The Kinta"* from St Omer on 1 October, and the very next day he was sent on reconnaissance over the lines, where a piece of anti-aircraft shell smashed a rib in the tailplane and another piece tore his leather coat. Thereafter his patrols alternated between photography, bombing and reconnaissance, and when engaged on the latter on 11 November he attempted to intercept a German machine that outran him and left him with a slow flight home against the wind.

On 19 December Horn and Lt Moffatt were on reconnaissance over Dixmude in BE2c 2680, Horn's regular aircraft, when they attacked and drove off an enemy machine and were then attacked themselves by two others. They drove those off and then near Cortemarck came under anti-aircraft fire, the bursts of which probably attracted the Albatros, Aviatik and Fokker that tried to box them in, and Horn and Moffatt fought them without result until their ammunition ran low and they broke off the combat. During the fight the engine of the BE2c cut out once, but the only significant damage was a hole in an undercarriage strut.

Apart from normal patrols Horn also went searching for enemy aircraft on a number of occasions, the last one recorded on 8 April 1916 as looking for a British machine being flown by the Germans. He was appointed Temporary Captain and Flight Commander (Flt Cdr) on 23 January 1916 and returned to England on 24 May 1916 on leave, on completion of which he was posted to Castle Bromwich on 7 June to form No.54 RFC and prepare it for overseas service. When he reported there he found that Captain E. E. Clarke had mistakenly received the same instructions, so they each granted themselves a week's leave to give the Castle Bromwich Station Commander time to sort out the problem.

Horn returned from his leave to find that Clarke had already gone to his proper appointment at Bristol, leaving him to form No.54, in the course of which he was made acting CO from 15 August 1916 with promotion to Temporary Major on 1 November.



*BE2e A1881, donated by Mr H. Teesdale-Smith of Adelaide SA, at a Training Base in England.*

Initially the squadron had a few BE2cs and BE12s and was expected to operate as a Home Defence unit to protect Birmingham against Zeppelin attacks, despite having no offensive armament such as machine guns, bombs or grenades. Then some Avros and Sopwith 1½ Strutters were added, but personnel became a problem as trained pilots were posted away to satisfy the requirements of the squadrons in France (at that time men with eight or ten hours were being considered sufficiently trained

to fill the gaps). Finally in November they received the Sopwith Pups that they were to take overseas as the first RFC unit to use the type operationally, although the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) had already achieved a good deal of success with them in action. Horn took the transport and personnel sections across the Channel to France in December, and the squadron flew to its base at Bertangles on Christmas Day 1916.

Among the early pilots of No.54 were a number who went on to achieve distinction during the war and in later years. One of those was 2Lt J. V. Fairbairn who later became the Australian Minister for Air, and another was 2Lt R. M. Foster, who in 1968 when he was Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Foster, KCB, CBE, DFC, wrote to Major Horn with his personal recollections of the squadron:

*"I would describe 54 when it was first formed with Sopwith Pups in 1916 and*

*when I was with you in France in '16/17' as a rather select club, rather than a military unit. We were very much of a close-knit society, every one firm friends, no hot air, everyone keen to get on with the job with a minimum of fuss; no one had any ambition to leave the squadron for promotion; we all wanted to stay with our friends and be left to run our own war in our own way.*

*So esprit de corps was always extremely high. It was a rigid rule that no doubtful claims for*

*the destruction of enemy aircraft were ever to be put forward, only absolute certainties were ever claimed. This we in the squadron thought was absolutely right, and we would not have it otherwise. But it did perhaps give the Powers above us the impression that we were not so aggressively successful as some of the other fighter squadrons who were more optimistic and discursive in their claims. I am very sure that we did a good deal more damage to the Huns than we ever claimed. The other point which one ought to mention is the reputation which 54 had amongst the bomber and reconnaissance squadrons whom we had to escort on numerous occasions. Those squadrons were very happy in our company when they were operating over enemy territory; they generally showed their gratitude for the way in which we looked after them on their raids by asking us to dinner and overloading us with drinks. That we had such a happy outfit was, of course, largely due to the CO, yourself. What perhaps was what we liked most was your firm refusal for the squadron to be sent on useless and impracticable missions by over-enthusiastic staff officers at Wing and Brigade Headquarters. We knew we would be well protected by you, and would not be expected to do the impossible. Lastly, thanks to you we always had the most comfortable Mess, the best food and the best drinks - and what is more important, the men's comforts were equally well looked after".*



*Pilot and ground crew of No.54 RFC with Sopwith Pup in France.*

Sir Robert Foster also outlined his impressions of the Sopwith Pup with which the squadron commenced operations, and described it as:

*"...beautiful to handle, and with only 80 horsepower in its Le Rhone engine, of outstanding performance. We attained 18,000 feet with regularity, and could get even higher. In operations our best chances came from climbing above the*

*height obtainable by the German fighters and then hope to make a surprise attack. The Germans were always superior in level speed and in the dive, but the Pup was much more manoeuvrable and we could turn inside any German fighter of the day. The winter of 1916/17 was bitter in Northern France, and at 18,000 feet everything froze, the engine throttle, the gun and the pilot. With open cockpits, no oxygen, indifferent flying clothing, a number of us were frostbitten, an experience which one found extremely painful.*

*The aircraft itself always behaved in a most gentlemanly way, but it needed careful handling. A dive of 160 mph was fast enough, and at 180 mph the wings were definitely flapping and a gentle recovery was essential. To lose a wing when one had no parachute offered no future. The Pup's one disadvantage was its extreme lightness. When operating in strong winds our squadron's practice was to call out all available personnel when a patrol was landing back. The men would be spread out in two lines on the airfield, between which the aircraft would land and have their wingtips seized before a gust could blow them over."*

In this connection there was an occasion when Foster's patrol returned and the wind was gusting very strongly, the men on the ground were out in their two lines, and he was the last to land. After a number of unsuccessful efforts he eventually sat his machine on the ground, but although one mechanic caught a wingtip the man on the other side failed to do so, and the Pup gracefully turned over on its back in front of the whole squadron. Foster was unhurt except in his pride, especially when his squadron commander said very nicely and jokingly *"I knew you would make a balls of it. But why waste the squadron's time making thirteen shots to land? Why not crash the first time?"*

With only a recording officer and no adjutant, Horn was busy for the first few weeks getting the squadron settled and organising its operations, and had no chance to fly. Before he



*Pilots of No.54 Sqdn RFC with a Sopwith Pup.*

could, he was visiting No.22 Squadron at Chipilly one night when he badly damaged his leg while taking shelter in a trench during a sudden bomb raid. His knee was left with a tendency to lock suddenly, which made flying too hazardous. He carried on with various forms of treatment for another six months before going into the Army Hospital at Boulogne, then he had further treatment but was finally forced to hand over command of the squadron to Major R. S. Maxwell in November 1917. He returned to England for an operation,

which was not completely successful, and in 1918 went to Croydon as CO and later to London Colney before being demobilised in 1919, his services during the war having earned him the Military Cross (MC) and the Belgian Croix de Guerre (CdeG).

After the war Horn travelled widely overseas in connection with the family business, and just prior to the Second World War was appointed Pilot Officer on probation RAF Volunteer Reserve in the Administration & Special Duties Branch on 28 February 1939 and presumably served as a controller at Duxford. On 24 May 1963 he had the unique distinction as its original Commanding Officer of presenting the Squadron Standard to No.54 RAF at Waterbeach, and on 9 August 1967 a painting portraying him as CO in 1917 was presented to the squadron during its jubilee year.

Major K. K. Horn, MC, CdeG(Belg), MA, died on 17 November 1977 in England at the age of 91.

### **HORN, M. L.**

Marmaduke Langdale Horn was born on 23 November 1889 at the family home "Holmwood" at Walkerville in SA, and was one of three brothers who served in the RFC. His elder brother was Major K. K. Horn who flew with No.7 and commanded No.54, while his younger brother Capt S. B. Horn scored 13 victories with No.60 and No.85 RFC. Marmaduke himself served in the RFC in the QM Section Administration in a non-flying capacity, and was awarded the Croix de Guerre (CdeG) with bronze star for his services.

After the war Marmaduke became a director of Horn Trust and Investments and Kuala Selanger Rubber Co Ltd and settled in England at Stoke Charity, where he had spent many of his younger years at Old Stoke. During the Second World War Marmaduke acted as Churchwarden for Stoke Charity and later contributed much of his work and generosity to the restoration of the church of St Mary and St Michael, which contained paintings at least as far back as the 16<sup>th</sup> century. He established himself as a fine art collector, and also built up an extensive and unique collection of cigarette cards and related material, which along with other items from his collection formed bequests to various organisations. He died at Stoke Charity on 18 August 1953 at the age of 64.

### **HORN, S. B.**

Spencer Bertram "Nigger" Horn was conceived in Australia and born in England on 18 April 1895 within a day or so of the arrival there of his parents from Adelaide in South Australia. He thus failed to be classified as SA-born like his brothers Kelham and Marmaduke.

The Horn family took up residence in England, and when war came in 1914 Spencer was commissioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dragoon Guards in September and saw service in France before he transferred to the RFC and graduated as a pilot.

Horn received a posting in April 1917 to No.60 RFC



*Spencer Horn with a Sopwith Dolphin*

in France to fly the Nieuport Scout and scored two victories during May while flying Nieuport 17 B1539. The squadron was re-equipped with the SE5a in July and he flew A8930 to claim an Albatros DIII in flames on 5 August. Two more victories and an appointment to "C" Flt Cdr came his way in August, and an Albatros DV out of control on 5 September brought his score to six and an award of the Military Cross (MC) before he was posted back to Home Establishment (HE) in October 1917. The citation for his MC said that it was *"for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He has destroyed several hostile machines and driven down others out of control. On one occasion he attacked alone four enemy aircraft, shooting one down completely out of control. He has twice co-operated with an infantry attack, diving to a very low altitude. He has shown great skill and gallantry on all occasions"*.

After a spell of instructing at Ayr, in January 1918 he was at No.56 Training Depot Station RFC at London Colney as a Flt Cdr when he was invited to join No.85 RFC by Major W. A. Bishop, VC, who had been Horn's Flt Cdr in No.60. The new squadron was being formed to go to France, and when it flew there on 21 May 1918 Horn went as a Flt Cdr and had in his flight his former London Colney American pupils Elliott White Springs, Callaghan and Grider who figured much in the classic book *"War Birds"*.

Horn's first victory on his return to combat came on 30 May, when flying SE5a D6027 he sent a Pfalz DIII down out of control. He destroyed another of the same type on 16 June, and flew C1904 to claim two Fokker DVIIIs on 7 July and one each on 14 and 22 August. His last victory came on 17 September 1918 when he destroyed a two-seater to bring his total to 13.

After the war Horn returned to the Dragoon Guards to serve in Europe, India and Scotland, and throughout the Second World War. In 1945 he was in command of the Military Disarmament Unit in the Tromso Zone of Norway and was awarded the King Haakon VII Liberty Cross as Lt Col, MC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Carabiniers (Prince of Wales Dragoon Guards) Royal Armoured Corps. He died at Aldbourne, Wiltshire in England on 18 October 1969 aged 74.

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