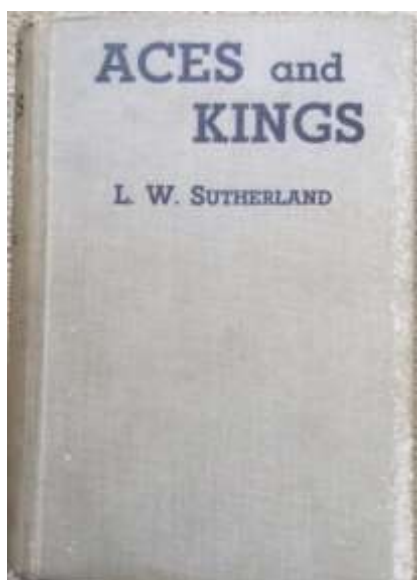


Book Review

The RUSI NSW Ursula Davidson Library is showcasing ninety of its most important books in 2024 as part of the contribution of the RUSI NSW to the 90th-Anniversary of the Anzac Memorial in November. The library is located in the memorial and contains a reference book archive of national significance. This book review is of one of these books, a rare 1935 first edition of a memoir of service in the Australian Flying Corps in the Great War.



'Aces and Kings', L. W. Sutherland MC DCM, written in collaboration with Norman Ellison, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1935. 276 pages with frontispiece and 23 plates of black and white photographs.

This is a highly entertaining read telling stories of service in No. 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps in Palestine and Syria in 1917 to 1918.

The first chapter introduces the reader to the Squadron, its men, and its activities as though the reader is visiting the unit in the field and receiving a guided tour. Further chapters explain the operations and personalities of the only AFC squadron to fly with the British RFC/RAF outside Europe. We learn much about the vocabulary used by the Australians, where for example the Avro aeroplane was nicknamed an 'Aspro', as well as the individual and often idiosyncratic aircraft that were flown and the squadron 'personalities' that served, including a certain 'Agent X', in fact code for the British intelligence bureau in Cairo, 'Charlie' the mongrel dog mascot and the chief snake-catcher of the squadron, the future Sir Ross Smith, and a certain intrepid Australian pilot by the name of Captain Mustard.

No. 1 Squadron AFC flew many types of aircraft in many aerial adventures. The stories are wonderfully told by the authors as they weave together a readable and informative narrative for the reader to enjoy.

There are accounts of salvaging stocks of Champagne from captured enemy camps for the squadron officers' mess, the in-field modification of aircraft fuselages into a ground- and a water-craft, and the dangers of combat flying interspersed with the inevitable periods of lengthy inactivity on the ground.

The chapter "Our Lawrence" describes the squadron's association with Lawrence of Arabia, including the role played by 1 AFC in chauffeuring T. E. Lawrence around the Arabian theatre of operations and supporting his campaign.

One chapter is titled 'Contrary to Regulations' and is devoted to describing a secret and at the time of publication a previously undocumented raid by a single Bristol fighter in which the Australian crewed aircraft landed at a German airfield behind the lines near Damascus and destroyed three enemy aircraft on the ground, damaged a fourth and then burnt-down a hanger, all before taking-off for a safe return to home. The pilot and observer crew is not named, but the authors make the point that 'dear old Hadji' would not mind the telling of this story. The identity of Hadji will be revealed later in this book review.

The author is Leslie William "Woodie" Sutherland (1892-1967), an officer in No. 1 Squadron, who served as an observer in a succession of aircraft - SE5s, RE8s, DH6s, Nieuport Scouts and Bristol Fighters - in the Middle East. Sutherland had served at Gallipoli in 1915 as a Light Horseman where he was wounded and evacuated with another future aviator, Ross Smith. Smith had the nickname 'HADJI' at the time and the book is dedicated by Sutherland to Sir Ross Smith using that moniker.

Sutherland's co-writer is Norman Ellison, a professional author and journalist who served in the First World War as a Gunner in the 117th Howitzer Battery on the Western Front, and wrote several books of his own with an aviation theme.

The book's Foreword is written by F. W. Cutlack, the author of the AFC volume in the Australian Official History series of the First World War.

The book's title is a play on words. The 'aces' are the aircrew and the 'kings' are the outstanding non-flying 'types' who served as notable 'Kings among Men' in the support of No. 1 Squadron in the war.

Paul Simadas

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