




TASMANIAN BORN AIR ACES OF WORLD WAR 1
ERIC DOUGLAS CUMMINGS

Eric Douglas Cummings

Author: W. Dearing, June 2021

Historical Archives of Early Tasmanian Aviators

Tasmanian Born Air Aces of World War 1

 <small>AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL P01422.006</small>	Eric Douglas Cummings	
	Born:	13 April 1896, Franklin, Tasmania
	Joined:	27 October 1914
	Died:	27 October 1979, Aged 83 years East Roseville, Sydney, NSW
	Serial Number:	1026

Cummings was born to Doctor and Mrs. H. L. Cummings in Franklin, Tasmania, on 13 April 1896. He had a brother, Roy, who would also serve in the Australian Flying Corps with him.

Cummings enlisted on 27 October 1914, giving his profession as cart driver and claiming 15 months prior service in C Company, 93rd Regiment of the militia.

He became a member of the Australian Army Service Corps and was promoted to Sergeant before leaving for the Middle East in December. However, on arrival in the Middle East he was hospitalised with influenza and bronchitis before re-joining his unit and embarking for Gallipoli in August 1915.

He was subsequently posted to France in June 1916, before transferring to the Australian Flying Corps (A.F.C.) in September 1917. Cummings was assigned to train at the flying school at RAF Shawbury. He completed all phases of his training in three weeks and was posted to 2 Squadron AFC.



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Although he had yet to score an aerial victory, his rise through the ranks was rapid, and he was appointed Flight Commander on 17 October 1916. He subsequently liaised with the French Ace Rene Fonck in operations against Manfred von Richthofen's Flying Circus.

Details of Cummings' service over the next year and a half are missing but by May 1918, however, he was assigned to 2 Squadron AFC as a Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a pilot. On 3 May 1918, he scored his first aerial victory. His brother Roy mailed home a copy of orders describing the action; this was reprinted in *the (Hobart) Mercury* in the Cummings' native Tasmania. This reprint gives a vivid description of early aerial warfare:

"Lieutenant E. D. Cummings attacked a Triplane and fired a burst from both guns into it. The enemy aircraft immediately went down in a spin, followed by Lieutenant Cummings, still firing. The enemy aircraft then turned on its back, and finally crashed. At this point Lieutenant Cummings was attacked by four Triplanes, who shot away his elevator controls, instrument board, petrol and oil tanks; his machine went down almost out of control, but he managed to keep it out of a spin until it...crashed. His safety-belt broke, and he was thrown clear of the machine into a shell-hole."

Nothing daunted, Cummings went on to score eight more confirmed aerial wins and rise to the rank of Captain. His bravery would win him a Distinguished Flying Cross, which was gazetted on the 8th February 1919:

"This officer has proved himself an able and determined leader of offensive patrols. In carrying out these raids he has met with conspicuous success, heavy damage being inflicted on enemy material and personnel. This has been due in the main to his brilliant leadership and skilful navigation. Capt. Cummings possesses, in a marked degree, courage, combined with cool judgment."



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Royal Aircraft Factory S. E. 5a of Number 2 Squadron Australian Flying Corps (AFC)

Eric Douglas Cummings's Victories					
Date	Time	Aircraft	Opponent	Result	Location
3 May 1918	1130	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	Fokker Triplane	Destroyed	Meteren
1 Jun 1918	0900	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	Pfalz D.III	Destroyed	East of Pozières
31 Jul 1918	1115	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	LVG reconnaissance plane	Set afire; destroyed	East of Laventie
31 Jul 1918	1115	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	LVG reconnaissance plane	Driven down out of control	Merville
15 Sep 1918	1720	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	Albatros reconnaissance plane [1]	Destroyed	West of Macquart
14 Oct 1918	1010	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	Fokker D.VII	Destroyed	West of Cysoing
14 Oct 1918	1015	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	Fokker D.VII	Driven down out of control	East of Gruson
14 Oct 1918	1020	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	Fokker D.VII	Driven down out of control	Hertain
1 Nov 1918	1415	Royal Aircraft Factory S.E.5a	LVG reconnaissance plane [2]	Driven down out of control	Antoing
[1] Victory shared with Ernest Davies					
[2] Victory shared with Ernest Davies					



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Eric Cummings returned to Australia, disembarked in Melbourne on 5 January 1919. His appointment was terminated in Hobart on 11 March 1919.

He flew a Sopwith Pup over downtown Hobart on 28 August 1919, an aerobatic exhibition which included eight loops. The exhibition was a public relations stunt to draw a crowd to subscribe to a Peace Loan of £750,000 to care for military veterans. After his departure from Hobart, he barnstormed locally for the Peace Loan, despite engine trouble after departing Launceston for Longford and Devonport on 9 September 1919.

On 11 February 1920 Cummings was invested with the Distinguished Flying Cross by General William Birdwood in Cummings' home town of Franklin.

On 7 June 1923 Cummings was granted a short service commission in the Royal Air Force as a Flying Officer. On 7 June 1928 he was transferred to Class A Reserve of the Royal Air Force; he would remain in the reserves in various capacities until World War II. While Cummings was a reservist he was promoted to Flight Lieutenant on 4 February 1931.

Cummings died in Sydney on the 27 October 1979, aged 83 years.