

**THE
AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY
ROLL OF HONOUR
1914-1919**

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WILLIAMS R. G.
WILLIS C. B.
WILLIS H. E.
WILLS E. W.
WILSON J. C.
WOOD H. H.
† WOOD H. V.
WRIGHT H.
YULE R. E.
HARRIS C. G.

† KILLED IN ACTION.

★ DIED ON SERVICE.

"NOT ONCE OR TWICE IN OUR ROUGH ISLAND-STORY
THE PATH OF DUTY WAS THE WAY TO GLORY"

DENTAL SERVICES IN THE AIR FORCE

Military aviation in Australia started at Point Cook in Victoria in 1912 with the establishment of the Central Flying School (CFS). Australia was the first British dominion to develop an aviation corps after this had been recommended by the Imperial Conference in London in 1911. By 1914 it was known as the Australian Flying Corps (AFC). As with the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) in Britain, the AFC was a part of the Army, and dental care for its members was provided initially by the Australian Army Dental Service.¹

The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) was formed in 1921. Six years later a dental clinic was established at the CFS at RAAF Base Point Cook, and a Dental Officer with the rank of Flying Officer was appointed. He was also responsible for treating personnel at the RAAF Base Laverton and at Air Force Headquarters at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. In 1937 there were only three uniformed RAAF Dental Officers, but with the rapid growth of the RAAF in World War II this number increased from five in 1939 to 227 in 1945, with concomitant increases in Dental Orderlies (assistants) and Dental Mechanics (technicians).

The wartime structure of the RAAF Dental Branch was the result of the energy and intellect of one man: Norman Henry Andrews LDS(Vic), BDS(c)(Melb), DDS(c)(Melb). Initially the RAAF Dental Branch was administered by the Director of Medical Services (Air), a position under the control of Army medical staff. In April 1940 the RAAF Medical Service separated from the Army. Andrews, the second uniformed RAAF Dental Officer, had enlisted in 1933 and in 1943 became the RAAF's first Director of Dental Services. He established new dental centres at major bases, created mobile and transportable dental units, and encouraged the professional development of all personnel by starting a journal and arranging lectures by visiting experts. The aim was to make personnel dentally fit in base areas and to keep them fit in forward areas. This required RAAF dental units to be deployed to northern Australia, New Guinea, the United Kingdom, the Middle East and Africa.

Aircraft pilots often sustained maxillofacial injuries due to cramped conditions in the cockpit. Treatment required close cooperation between plastic surgeons and dental surgeons. Restoration techniques from World War I were refined and involved

Cat. 107 *The Australian College of Dentistry roll of honour 1914-1919*, c. 1920, brass, 76.0 × 55.0 cm. HFADM 1705, transferred from the Australian College of Dentistry 1963, Henry Forman Atkinson Dental Museum, University of Melbourne.

reconstruction of both hard and soft tissues: ‘the plastic surgeon and the dental surgeon approached the problem jointly, and the plans thus made together were followed or modified with complete mutual understanding of the difficulties ahead’.² RAAF Dental Officers in England benefited from the teaching of AH McIndoe, consulting plastic surgeon to the Royal Air Force. Two Royal Air Force Dental Officers, Clouston and Walker, developed an elegant and efficient universal joint that facilitated the fixation of facial fractures with external bone pins.³ This technique was used in Australia until the 1980s.

Andrews was no remote administrator. He travelled extensively throughout Australia and overseas to see how dental units and their personnel were performing, and to listen to their concerns. He was promoted to Group Captain in July 1944. At the end of the war there were 227 Dental Officers: one Group Captain, nine Wing Commanders, 60 Squadron Leaders and 157 Flight Lieutenants. With the inevitable reduction in personnel after 1945, the RAAF Dental Branch shrank to 18 Dental Officers in 1947 and only 13 in 1950. The Director of Dental Services post was reduced to Wing Commander rank. Andrews was discharged at age 43 and became director of the Victorian Government School Dental Service. There is no doubt that public dental services in Victoria benefited from his experience as an innovative and energetic administrator who also demonstrated high-level leadership qualities.

Dental Officers have continued to serve in Australia and overseas, as members of the Permanent Air Force and of the Specialist Reserve, until the present day.

Air Commodore Rowan D Story AM, RFD

- 1 Sources for this essay include *History of the RAAF Dental Branch*, www.defence.gov.au/health/about/docs/RAAFDental.pdf (viewed 26 November 2019).
- 2 AS Walker, *Clinical problems of war*, Australia in the War of 1939–1945; Series 5: Medical, vol. 1, Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952, pp. 554–66; 617–18.
- 3 TH Clouston and FA Walker, ‘The Clouston-Walker splint for pin fixation’, *British Dental Journal*, vol. 74 (1943), pp. 147–52.