

## ACTIVITY SHEET E

**Extract 1** From the diary of **Captain William Allcock** Royal Flying Corps October 1915

Oct 5th

Artillery observation with Lt. Brown. While so doing we were hit at 8,000 ft by shrapnel over Hulluch. My engine gone [sic] dud. I turned for our lines, when just crossing them the machine caught fire at 6,300 feet. I immediately put her nose down; the flames burst out and spread along the fuselage behind the pilot's seat. Brown threw the ammunition overboard and climbed along back nearly into my cockpit as the whole front of the machine was a blazing mass. In the meantime we were speeding to earth at 120 mph. Brown was trying to keep the fire down from burning his clothes while I kept my eye on the pitot tube, the ground and the flames, pushing the joy stick further forward until we were nearly nose diving. Every minute I thought would be the last for I expected the whole machine to collapse from strain as a number of wires were broken. Eventually I saw the ground not far below and found myself going straight at a village so I turned to the right and spying a ploughed field decided to land there, cutting through telephone wires and a tall hedge, missing a horse and plough by inches. A few feet from the ground I levelled out and the machine took the ground at 70 mph. A perfect landing but the undercarriage being burnt, the machine ran a few yards and collapsed, digging her nose into the plough, and turned over. I was thrown right out 10 yards ahead, putting out my hands saved me but I lay dazed a little, in the meantime the tail came down and hit me on the head. Staggering round to find Brown I found him hunting for me. He had fallen under the engine and just managed to crawl out a few seconds before the bearings broke and the engine fell on the spot. Looking on the wreckage we saw a mass of flame with every few seconds shots going off from the revolvers. A huge crowd collected but putting a Sergeant in charge with some men, we left in a tender for our aerodrome and reported to the officer commanding, Major Becke. From the wreckage we got a few souvenirs - revolver, compass and a piece of the engine bed which had been melted by the heat.

**Extract 2** **Albert Ball Letter September 1st 1916**

Dear Dad,

got two Huns out of 12 last night. Was shot down but am not hurt. Have been awarded DSO. Will be on leave soon, love Albert.

Dear Dad,  
Got two Huns  
out of 12 last night.  
~~He~~ Was shot down but  
am not hurt.  
Have been awarded D.S.O.  
Will be on leave soon  
Love  
Albert.

**Extract 3**      **Rev. John H. W. Haswell** enlisted as a private in the Royal Welsh Fusiliers in 1916, and in 1917 commissioned in Royal Flying Corps.

Thoughts of JHW Haswell RFC:

*I was a member of a Royal Air Force unit, nineteen years of age. The infantryman was one in a tiny circle of pals, each circle but one wavelet in a huge sea. His was a hard life - mud and blood and losing chums, and ever conscious of being but a cog in a mighty and soulless machine.*

*We, on the other hand, were neither wavelets nor cogs. We were it. Our squadron was, like a battleship, a unit in itself, and every individual was important.*

*We were a small family of officers living in decent huts, partaking of decent meals, sleeping in clean pyjamas, and generally living in comfort for eighteen hours of the twenty-four. In the remaining six we might plunge into the welter of war in which the infantryman lived, but we did our particular job in a clean atmosphere in a clean way, and when we killed or were killed it was done in that same inevitable and highly respectable manner.*

*The infantryman looked up from his rat hole and said, with his hair on end, that he wouldn't have our risky job for anything, while we looked down on his muddy wastes and said, "Poor devils!" (or words to that effect), and flew home to a hot dinner served on a clean tablecloth while he cut his fingers opening bully-beef tins.*

*The family were, of course, occasionally bereaved, and we talked rather awkwardly at dinner and avoided each other's eyes, and were relieved when, at the end of the meal, the O.C. briefly called us to silent remembrance. But coffee, smokes, and piano quickly saved us from overmuch thought.*

*When these bereavements became frequent, we had to receive others into the family, and every few days there would arrive a number of strangers looking very self-conscious and humble, as well they might before us hardened warriors of two or three months' experience!*

*Only a few hours after their arrival each one was instructed to report to a senior pilot, and the process of initiation began. The observers had revision of the mysteries of maps, machine guns, cameras, and many other strange things with which these poor benighted ones deal, while the pilots, to whose skill (or lack of it) the former entrust their lives, were told to memorise the map of the sector until they knew it better than anything else on earth, and then were taken to "have a look at the War".*

#### **Extract 4**

BBC Magazine Article (last update 2009)

By John Hayes Fisher

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**The air aces of World War I - like the Red Baron - left a rich mythology that persists to the present day. But the man who was, perhaps, Britain's best pilot, remains little known.**

A 90-year-old photo album discovered recently in northern France, reveals possibly the last picture of Britain's "highest scoring" fighter pilot from World War I. It's an innocent photograph. A highly decorated RAF pilot poses for the camera, his arm gently resting on the shoulder of a local French child standing in front of him.

And yet look into the face of the airman and you see the drawn expression of a man haunted by his experience of battle. Within days of this picture being taken the pilot - **Major Edward "Mick" Mannock VC** - would be dead. Photographs of Mannock, Britain's highest scoring fighter pilot from World War I, are surprisingly rare. This new one has come to light when researchers recently stumbled across an old album belonging to a French farmer whose land was being used by the RAF in the summer of 1918. Mannock had just completed an extraordinary run of success shooting down 20 German planes that May - four of them in one day - and winning the Distinguished Service Order (one below the Victoria Cross) not once but three times in little over a month.

But all was not right with this ace. The inspirational hero of both his squadron and the RAF was struggling to control his nerves, nerves which were tearing him apart. From his personal diary held at the RAF Museum in London it's clear that Mannock had been wrestling with his emotions from the moment he first went into action just over a year earlier. "Feeling nervy and ill during the last week. Afraid I'm breaking up." So bad were the terrors that in his early days of flying some of his fellow pilots on the Western Front believed that Mannock was "windy", in other words, a coward. A sympathetic commanding officer gave him a chance and over the following months Mannock was able to suppress his fears and start shooting down enemy aircraft. With the "kills" came the awards for gallantry.

Flying aircraft in World War I was a shockingly dangerous profession. Of the 14,000 airmen killed in that war, well over half lost their lives in training. On an early patrol over France one of the bottom wings of

Mannock's Nieuport bi-plane suddenly broke off in flight. Mannock managed to land the aircraft, extraordinarily lucky to have survived.

But what Mannock - and many other pilots - feared most, was going down in flames, without a parachute, and burning to death. For this reason he carried a revolver in his cockpit, vowing that if his plane did catch fire he would shoot himself, before the flames devoured him. Mannock developed his own macabre way of conquering his nerves. Not dissimilar to the Captain Flashheart character played by Rik Mayall in *Blackadder Goes Forth*, Mannock too could be loud and brash. "Flamerinoes boys! Sizzle sizzle wonk," he would announce as he burst into the mess regaling all of how he had sent some unfortunate "Hun" airman down in flames.

And when in April 1918 various members of his squadron raised their glasses to the recently killed Manfred von Richthofen - the Red Baron - Mannock refused with the words "I hope the bastard burnt all the way down".

And yet behind this brash exterior was a deeply sensitive man. Born into a working class military family Mannock was not the typical young public school airman associated with World War I movies. He was a committed socialist and at 29 he was much older than his fellow pilots. But Mannock was also a man of contradictions. He hated Germans with a vengeance, possibly because he was so badly treated by the Turks - Germany's WWI ally - when he was interned by them earlier in the war. Yet despite this, when he rushed out to inspect the remains of a German plane he had just shot down and found one of the airmen dead inside, he recorded in his diary: "I felt exactly like a murderer."

In little over 12 months Mannock amassed 73 victories, confirming him as Britain's highest scoring pilot of the First World War and yet today, outside aviation circles, virtually no-one has heard of him.

Part of the explanation is that unlike Germany who promoted their air heroes such as the Red Baron, Britain had a policy of keeping their pilots identities firmly under wraps, preferring the idea that it was a team effort and not all about the individual. The effect was that while photos and stories of the Red Baron were splashed over newspapers around the world, in Britain Mannock, or "Captain X" as the press referred to him, was virtually unknown. By the early summer of 1918 the air war had reached its savage climax and Mick Mannock's nerves had returned. A friend witnessed Mannock on leave, sobbing and trembling violently, saliva and tears having soaked his collar and shirt. And despite all this, Mannock's sense of duty meant that he returned to France to face whatever came his way. On the morning of 26 July while out on patrol he downed his last German aircraft, but made the fatal error of flying low to observe the kill and it was then that his aircraft was hit by German ground fire.

Mannock's aircraft was last seen going down in flames. His nightmare had been realised. It is not known if he was able to use the revolver he always carried with him.

Sources: 1 <http://www.wtla.airwar1.org.uk/no%20%20sqn.htm>

2 <http://www.vlib.us/wwi/resources/archives/texts/t050824a/Ball.html>

3 <https://www.firstworldwar.com/diaries/thecasualty.htm>

4 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7952995.stm>