



The Old Fliers' Group

Attached to the Royal Aero Club of WA (Inc).

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Last Meeting

It was pleasing to see the large attendance at the last meeting. Catering staff counted 105 heads in attendance.

Mini Speaker

As a prelude to what was to follow, your editor took a step back in time to cover the history of aerial photography. The presentation began with a reproduction of the first ever photograph taken by Joseph Niepce in Paris in 1827. The next image shown was that of a photograph taken by Gaspar Tournachon from a hot air balloon over Paris in 1858. It is the oldest surviving air photo. That was followed by an image of the oldest surviving aerial photograph in USA – a photo of Boston taken from a hot air balloon in 1860.

Aerial photography became a *weapon of war* for the first time in the American Civil War. In 1862 General McLennan of the northern army used photography from a hot air balloon over Richmond to plot the position of the southern forces before planning an attack.

Next image was the first photo from a rocket, taken by Alfred Noble in Sweden in 1897. That was followed by an aerial photograph of the earthquake damage in San Francisco, taken from a gang of kites in 1906.

The first photo taken from an aeroplane was that with Wilbur Wright at the controls in France in 1908. The first movie film from the air was also taken with Wilbur Wright at the controls over Centocelli in Italy in 1913.

During WWI the art of aerial photography was developed to a new level. By 1915 the French and British flyers were taking thousands of exposures each day. Developed and printed overnight, they were in use next morning, they showed the position of new trenches and the new locations of artillery. (Photos were even taken with small cameras attached to homing pigeons).

During the inter-war years aerial photographic techniques advanced in the areas of mapping and intelligence. Sidney Cotton became the master of the art and was responsible for the establishment of the WWII Photographic Reconnaissance Unit (PRU).

Speaker of the Day

The *Speaker of the Day* was Chip Harvey who told of his days as a PRU pilot during WWII. On completion of his basic training in the USA Chip was sent to No. 8 OTU to complete further training on Mk1 Spitfires before being posted to the PRU. He started his photographic work on Mk II Spitfires and later moved on to Mk IV. He told us that the Spitfire was a delight to fly and ideal for the type of high and low level photography.

One of the early vertical air photos that Chip showed was one of hundreds of German barges in a French port, ready for the invasion of England. Luckily it never happened.

There was a constant threat from enemy aircraft so pilots were issued with playing cards that featured the plan and profile of 52 different types of German aircraft. The idea being that as they relaxed over a game of cards they got to know more about the shape of enemy aircraft.

Chip covered the work of Constance Babington Smith who was a pioneer in the craft of photographic and analytic interpretation. One of her most celebrated discoveries was her identification of the pilotless aircraft at Peenemunde – the German rocket research centre on the Baltic coast. Her discovery led to the air campaigns that disrupted plans for the mass launch of V1 and V2 rockets against the England.

After WWII Babington Smith wrote "Air Spy" and "Evidence in Camera", which covered the work of the PRU and the interpretation teams at Medmenham. (Both are well worth a read.)



The Mk VI Spitfire with extended wing tips and extra fuel.

Chip showed high level photography of the German ships, *Bismark*, *Tirpit*, and *Prinz Eugen*, which led to damage or destruction; and low level photography of the beaches of Normandy just before D-Day. On behalf of all – Thank you Chip for a great talk.

Next Meeting

Ken Pittman will be our *Speaker of the Day* for the May meeting. He will tell us about the 2011 Omaka Air Show in New Zealand, and a couple of other side issues to do with aviation.

Friday May 25th is the meeting date and as usual, lunch will get under way at about noon (and a gentle reminder that the cost of the lunch will now be \$17.00). Hope to see you there.

Brian Hernan