

# Days of Atonement

**2Lt/Capt. Austin Lloyd  
Fleming, MC  
46 Squadron RFC and  
111 Squadron RFC/RAF**

*by Stewart K. Taylor*

In addition to managing the Toronto Street Railway, the father of Austin Lloyd Fleming, for a period in his young life was the youngest son of Toronto's mayor. The Fleming family owned a very large parcel of land on the north-east corner of St Clair Avenue and Bathurst Street, which the author remembers in the 1980s as home to a catholic convent, a car wash and a Loblaws grocery store.

Educated at the Toronto Model School on College Street and then UTS, not much inclined academically, but daring, pragmatic, dashing and debonair, Austin chose to serve in the Mechanical Transport School of Instruction at Ottawa, joining them April 1916, right out of school. As the likelihood of being sent overseas was at best remote, Austin decided, without giving it much thought, to give the RFC a try. The Innes Ker recruiting campaign was in full stride. He passed the medical and the RFC accepted him as a viable candidate. Austin sailed on 7 November 1916. from Montreal on the Missanabie. He was appointed a probationary Second Lieutenant as a supplement to the Regular Corps on 17 November 1916 and received his Ground School indoctrination at Oxford. He learned to fly with 17 RS at Croydon and from 23 March to 15 May 1917 flew MFSHs, BE2cs, BE2ds and BE2es, all 20hr 30min worth. He moved on with a 'Recommendation for Fast Tractors', which turned out to be BE12s and BE12as. 13 RS, Dover, would be the

6th Wing, Training Brigade's choice, where he graduated on 16 May 1917. All told 2Lt Fleming amassed 20hr 30min of solo time before a move to the 21st Wing as a trainee Pup pilot with 40 RS at Port Meadow (Oxford).

## To France with 46 Squadron

The Sopwith Pups were more his style. The cherubic faced Fleming could impress the gals and add to his 'dashing, debonair' reputation. He made a couple of 'visitation' landings, loved to draw a crowd and already gave notice he wanted to be recognized. The 40 RS CO and senior instructors appeared to recognize such 'traits' and gave 2Lt Fleming a 'fast track' to the Front. 46 Squadron would be his Western Front posting. The squadron was stationed at La Gorgue and in June 1917, while the former two-seater Nieuport pilots were getting into their stride flying the Pups, a fresh supply of Pup trained pilots were pounding out the final roster. Arthur Gould Lee, writing his 1968 published classic 'No Parachute', made an account of this under the date Tuesday 12 June. He wrote: *Another new man, Fleming, has arrived who makes the fifth since I joined the squadron (22 May 1917).*

Since completing his inaugural flight in 46 Squadron, a 12 June, 1hr 25min practice fling, a premature OP, Laventie to the La Bassée Canal, the four Pups shadowed by some five Albatros D.Vs, a close encounter with an EA two-seater on 23 June, a second chance to prove his marksmanship, this one thwarted by height with the two EA refusing combat and, in a 27 June 1917 forced landing during a gun test, Pup A6200 ended up with a bent axle: another combat refusal by six Albatros, the C Flight Pup formation equal in strength, 2Lt Fleming had already made eleven operational patrols when he was asked to take along Lt Algernon Frederick 'Algy' Bird on a hunt for EA. This young English interrupted a college course in engineering to volunteer for a commissioned rank with the 215 Battalion Norfolk Regiment. His family operated Downham Mills Ltd, flour mills and merchants in Norfolk and in some respects each lad had business-oriented parents.

On 3 July 1917, while a typical early summer day, had plenty of clouds and aerial fighting above them. Had a cross feed not prevented one of 46 Squadron's pilots from following down a two-seater he met over La Bassée in the early morning, 46 Squadron might have had a legitimate claim for an EA considering what happened later that morning.

Flying A6200, a Pup taken on strength of 46 Squadron on 28 May 1917, 2Lt Fleming teamed with Pup B1701, another May addition and flown by Lt A.F. Bird. The only flight in 46 Squadron was off the ground at 10.50 and back by 12.00. 2Lt

*A 46 Sqn Pup photographed during the late spring/early summer of 1917. Other than national markings, the unit's Pups carried individual letters (A & C Flights) or numbers (B Flight), marked in white on the rear fuselage and usually repeated on the upper mainplanes' :CCI Archive*

