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First World War: Royal Naval Air Service

Collection Summary

Title:	First World War: Royal Naval Air Service
Call Number:	MS 86-07
Size:	0.25 linear feet
Acquisition:	Purchased from Sotheby's, London Branch, 1985.
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Note:	None
Restrictions:	None

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Restrictions

None

Content Note

The collection consists of a photograph album belonging to Capt. Sydney H. Gaskell of the Royal Air Force, a page from a 1933 publication relating the death of Capt. G. V. Wildman-Lushington in an airplane crash, and twenty-four letters from Major Henry Fawcett of the Royal Naval Air Service to members of his family from late 1913 until after the end of World War I. The letters present considerable data regarding his services in England, Turkey, and Russia.

Detailed Description: Series Listing

Series 1	Box 1 FF 1-17	Correspondence of Major Henry Fawcett of the Royal Naval Air Service to members of his family from late 1913 until after the end of World War I.
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Detailed Description: Box and Folder Listing

Series 1 – Correspondence of Major Henry Fawcett

Box 1	FF 1	Undated, evidently December 1913: Letter from "Hal" (Major Henry Fawcett) to "Aunt Sis." Refers to crash of a Handley-Page biplane on December 2, 1913, in which the pilot, Captain G. V. Wildman-Lushington was killed and Fawcett, a passenger, was injured but not seriously. File includes page 259 from R. Dallas Brett, <i>The History of British Aviation 1908-1914</i> (John Hamilton, 1933). It includes an account of the plane crash in which Captain Wildman-Lushington was killed.
Box 1	FF 2	August 18, 1914: Short note from Hal to Aunt Sis. He is in the British Isles but letters are being censored so he may not state where he is or what he is doing.
Box 1	FF 3	October 20, 1914 (postmark): Postal card from Hal to Mrs. Murray at Sussex, not dated but postmarked. Written from Naval Air Service, Killingholme, soon after arrival there. November 18, 1914: Hal to Aunt Sis. When she does some knitting, he would like a pair of warm mittens for flying. Has a car there but seldom drives it because the approach to the base is only a narrow track across the fields.
Box 1	FF 4	November 23, 1914: Hal to Aunt Sis, from Killingholme. Thanks her for the warm mittens she has knitted for him. Has been involved in a "float sitting episode" and was seasick when rescued. November 28, 1914: Hal to Aunt Sis, from Killingholme. Thanks her for a sweater. They are no longer trying to adhere to strict uniforms. Does not know where the Flying Corps ribbons (re. which she evidently has asked) can be obtained.
Box 1	FF 5	December 21, [1914]: Hal to Aunt Sis, from Killingholme. Has not been flying much but the Germans are expected to bombard the base. January 7, 1915: Hal to Aunt Sis, from Killingholme. Thanks her for the cigarettes. Two new "machines" have been delivered to the base. They are very fast, will travel more than 80 miles per hour, but it will be difficult to land them on the field. There has been considerable rain.
Box 1	FF 6	February 14, 1915: Hal to Aunt Sis, from Naval Air Service, Killingholme. Has not been flying much lately. Some planes have been "indisposed" and the others must be kept ready for use. Has moved from an old aeroplane shed into a "hut" where he and the others are more comfortable. He recently has had an automobile accident on the muddy roads. April 15, 1915: Hal to Aunt Sis, from Naval Air Service, Killingholme. He has gone to see a specialist because of an ear problem and learned that a small bug was "drilling a hole" in his eardrum. The previous evening the pilots had been ordered into the air because an air raid was expected. The first plane to go up crashed and was considerably damaged. A zeppelin was in the air but did not go over the Killingholme base.
Box 1	FF 7	June 1915: Hal to "Uncle" from Naval Air Service, Killingholme. Has been promoted to rank of Major. A zeppelin has done some damage at Hull

recently and had been near Grimsly but did no damage there. No date (probably 1915): Hal to Aunt Sis, from Naval Air Service, Killingholme. Was surprised to be promoted to Squadron Commander and Major. Relates a few details of the zeppelin's bombing Hull and Grimsly.

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| Box 1 | FF 8 | September 8, 1915: Hal to Aunt Sis, from R. N. A. S. Headquarters, British Eastern Mediterranean Expeditionary Force (evidently in Turkey). He has seen his squadron off in a ship at Dover and followed them to Marseilles a few days later. Made the remainder of the trip by special Bo-boat. They have made an aerodrome and begun flying. They are eight miles from the peninsula so are not being disturbed by shells or tanks but are besieged by flies, mosquitoes, and poisonous centipedes. The enemy appear to be unsuccessful with their anti-aircraft guns. Most of the squadron's work at this location has been photographing the trenches. |
| Box 1 | FF 9 | November 17, 1915: Hal to "Pop." Had been waiting for favorable weather in order to undertake a long-distance reconnaissance, a bomb attack on an important railway position fifteen miles from Andrianople. Eighty miles of the two hundred mile flight were over the sea and 120 miles were near enemy country. The objective of the raid was Bulgaria. December 11, 1915: Hal to Aunt Sis, from Royal Naval Air Service Headquarters. Still at the same location from which his letter of September 8, 1915, was written, and expects to do some work there. Has recently spent a two day leave in the trenches and "played" with all the various forms of trench fighter planes. At one time was only fifteen yards from the Turkish trenches. On one occasion, while he was going to drop bombs, the engine of his plane stopped and he made a forced landing into a shallow lake with a soft mud bottom. The plane "nearly turned a somersault and broke its back." |
| Box 1 | FF 10 | December 22, 1915: Hal to Uncle. His squadron has evacuated from the former location. It required considerable flying to insure staying clear of enemy planes. Three of his men were wounded. Continuation of letter, December 23, 1915: He had started on a bombing raid to a Turkish position but the engine of his plane failed. Made a forced landing into a foot of water with soft mud underneath. The plane turned over and was demolished. Eight bombs he had in the plane were not ignited. He has been hunting for ducks, but has to be careful not to use too many cartridges. |
| Box 1 | FF 11 | June 5, 1916: Hal to Aunt Sis. He is happy to have left the Dardanelles and be back in the British Isles again. Is teaching flying to thirty pupils and expects to have forty trainees soon. He has substations at Whitley Bay, Scarborough and Windermere. The days are long because they fly from 5:00 to 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 to 9:00 p.m. Recently the cruiser squadron has fought the entire German sea fleet and suffered severely. |
| Box 1 | FF 12 | September 22, 1916: Hal to Uncle. He is still teaching flying. Has been grouse hunting. Recently he bought a good pair of guns and shoots better with them than he had before. |
| Box 1 | FF 13 | December 28, 1916: Hal, also identifying himself as Squadron Commander H. Fawcett, to Ruby (perhaps a sister or cousin). Accepts responsibility for serving as godfather to her son. Recently a zeppelin, evidently damaged by gunfire, fell into the sea just outside Fawcett's service area. Six bombs have recently been dropped onto the aerodrome without doing serious damage. |
| Box 1 | FF 14 | "11th" (probably early 1917): Hal to Aunt Sis, shortly before he goes to Russia. Expects to sail the following day, probably from Liverpool. April 20, |

1917: (Signature cut away, evidently Hal) to Aunt Sis. He has left England or will leave soon; not sure where he will go. Very tired of the war.

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| Box 1 | FF 15 | November 28, 1917: He is now in Russia and presents an evaluation of the situation there under recently-initiated Bolshevik rule. Five thousand people have been killed in Moscow and many more in Petrograd. He believes the Russians are trying to make a separate peace and have tried to negotiate a five-day armistice with Germany commencing December 2. It appears that, whether or not the Bolsheviks remain in power, Russia will not be able to remain in the war. |
| Box 1 | FF 16 | August 12, [1918]: Still in Russia. He has been reclassified to G. S. O. for intelligence duties. He dreads spending a large amount of time in the office. Recently he went 160 miles south and there collected a band of Serbs and A. I.s who "looked like a brigand's band in a comic opera." He hiked back to his usual place of duty, through swamps and over rocks, carrying a heavy backpack. |
| Box 1 | FF 17 | November 27, 1918: Hal to Aunt Sis. He is still in Russia. It is very cold, perhaps 30 to 40 degrees below zero. He travels by ski and reindeer. Sleeps in the open in a reindeer-skin sleeping bag. He would like to participate more fully in the armistice celebration than will be possible. He does not like the Russian people and does not wish to speak their language. |

Series 2 – Photo Album of Captain Sydney H. Gaskell

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| Box 1 | FF 18 | Contains an album belonging to Captain Sydney H. Gaskell containing 99 photographs of early airplanes (flying machines) and pilots, a photograph of two people standing outside the door of a large house; several clippings, including an account of Captain Gaskell's being decorated by the King of the Hellenes, also decoration of C. G. Chichester and A. C. Barnby by the King of Hellenes; a clipping regarding Lieutenant Colonel W. S. Douglas, youngest Royal Air Force Colonel. The album is bound, and the spine is very weak. |
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