

## CHAPTER VIII

### BEGINNING OF THE AIR OFFENSIVE

THE first intention of the British High Command was to prosecute the campaign in Palestine with all vigour and to continue the attack towards Damascus. In view of the threat of the Germans against the Allies' front in France, however, it was decided that no further reinforcements could be sent to Allenby for some time; and Allenby, on his part, was determined not to continue his offensive until he was assured an adequate support. Meanwhile he resolved to seize Jericho and the crossings of the Jordan near Ghoraniye. Study of the map and of the enemy's situation makes clear the reasons for this move. It would interrupt the nearer communications of the Turks between Nablus and the east of Jordan, set free Jerusalem from the close presence of the enemy on the north-east, and improve the British line on that flank; more important still, it would facilitate co-operation with the Arabs under the King of the Hejaz, whose forces were working northward through the desert and were beginning to appear in strength south-east of the Dead Sea. Early in January these Arabs raided and captured Turkish posts north of Maan, and on January 13th they entered Et Tafilé, fifteen miles south-east of the lower end of the Dead Sea. A fortnight later the Turks attacked the Arab advance-guards between Et Tafilé and Kerak (twenty-five miles north of Et Tafilé), but were completely repulsed with the loss of 400 killed and 300 prisoners (including the Turkish commander), together with guns, machine-guns, and other material. Across the desert to the south of the Dead Sea Allenby was without communication with the Hejaz Arabs. It was necessary for him to have command of a passage of the Jordan, looking towards Amman, in order to be able to effect a junction with them as soon as that might become possible.

While preparations for further immediate fighting on the ground were thus limited, the work demanded of the airmen was vastly increased and expanded. With the improved machines regular reconnaissance was possible far in rear of the enemy's lines. The whole disposition of the Turkish armies from the front lines back to Jenin and the Esdraelon

plain, along the valley of the Jordan, across to Es Salt and Amman, and over the desert along the railway to El Kutrani, had to be recorded and watched from day to day, the strength at each important point estimated, and the tactical condition of the country ascertained. Daylight bombing raids were to be made upon selected points, in order that the moral effect of the defeat at Gaza might be maintained. While the general offensive on the ground below had to be postponed, it was to be continued in the air and from the air. Railways, roads, and camps were open to severe punishment under bombing raids and machine-gun attacks. It was calculated that this form of harassing warfare would not only make the enemy himself uneasy, but would also influence against him the inconstant Bedouin. Such was the general scheme of the part which the British and Australian airmen were now called upon to play in opening the final stage of the Palestine campaign. Moreover, a new and vitally important duty became apparent. The air reports showed that all existing army maps, always recognised as deficient in detail, were so inaccurate that they would have to be drawn afresh. The positions of important roads and villages in the enemy's front areas were wrongly given; points of military significance located by aeroplane observers were not shown on the maps at all. It was resolved that most of the front-line region must be re-mapped, and for this purpose a complete overlapping series of air-photographs was required. This entailed the photographing of a strip of country thirty-two miles deep from the Turkish front lines rearwards, comprising an area of about 624 square miles. The task was allotted to No. 1 Australian Squadron, was begun on January 15th, and, despite unfavourable weather on several days, was accomplished in a fortnight.

It was a splendid achievement, and the brunt of the work was borne by five pilots—Lieutenants A. R. Brown,<sup>1</sup> H. L. Fraser,<sup>2</sup> E. P. Kenny,<sup>3</sup> L. T. E. Taplin,<sup>4</sup> and L. W. Rogers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Capt A R Brown, D F C ; No 1 Sqn (previously Artillery). Draper; of Launceston, Tas.; b Launceston, 24 April, 1895

<sup>2</sup> Lieut H L Fraser, M C ; No 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Station overseer, b Rockhampton, Q'land, 1891.

<sup>3</sup> Lieut E P Kenny, D F C , No 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Accountant; b. Trafalgar, Vic., Jan., 1888

<sup>4</sup> Lieut L T E Taplin, D F C ; No 4 Sqn. (previously Engineers). Electrical engineer, of Parramatta, Sydney, b Unley, Adelaide, 16 Dec., 1895

<sup>5</sup> Lieut. L W. Rogers; No 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Station manager; b. 28 Sept., 1886.

The method was for five machines, Martinsydes and B.E.12.a's, to fly in line 1,000 yards apart at a height of 12,000 feet, thus ensuring an overlap of the exposures of each camera. Day after day this patrol worked devotedly, under the escort of three Bristol Fighters—two of them from No. 1 Squadron, manned by Captain S. W. Addison<sup>6</sup> and Lieutenant W. H. Fysh<sup>7</sup> (observer) and Captain Ross Smith and Lieutenant E. A. Mustard<sup>8</sup> (observer), and the other from No. 111 Squadron. One day the work had to be done in a gale, with the wind blowing at sixty-five miles an hour at 5,000 feet. At other times parts of the area would be obscured by clouds; such localities were faithfully revisited by the pilots responsible for them. This work was not performed without interference by the enemy's scouts and anti-aircraft. In the afternoon of January 17th, Fraser, in a Martinsyde, while photographing with the patrol south-east of Jenin was attacked by one of a formation of five Germans, but the escorting Bristol Fighter from No. 111 Squadron, attracted by Very-light signal,<sup>9</sup> drove it down towards Jenin. That same morning Taplin, in a B.E.12.a, was photographing at about 12,000 feet over the Nablus hills, when his camera jammed. Working the flying control-stick with his knees, he dismantled the camera to re-adjust it, and while thus engaged, he was attacked from behind by an Albatros scout. Taplin at once turned to engage it. His Vickers gun, being cold, jammed after the first shot. While Taplin cleared the stoppage, the Albatros dived to get underneath him. The Australian promptly turned upon the enemy's tail, fired a burst of twenty rounds into him at close range, and the Albatros went down in a vertical dive. Taplin then mended his camera and resumed his place in the photographing formation.

Apart from these engagements the chief opposition was from anti-aircraft fire and the weather. The completion of the task in fourteen days was a record for such work in

<sup>6</sup> Maj. S. W. Addison, O.B.E. Commanded No. 1 Sqn, 1918. Journalist; b. Huon, Tas., 31 Jan., 1887.

<sup>7</sup> Lieut. W. H. Fysh, D.F.C.; No. 1 Sqn (previously Light Horse). Wool classer; of St. Leonards, Tas.; b. Launceston, Tas., 7 Jan., 1895.

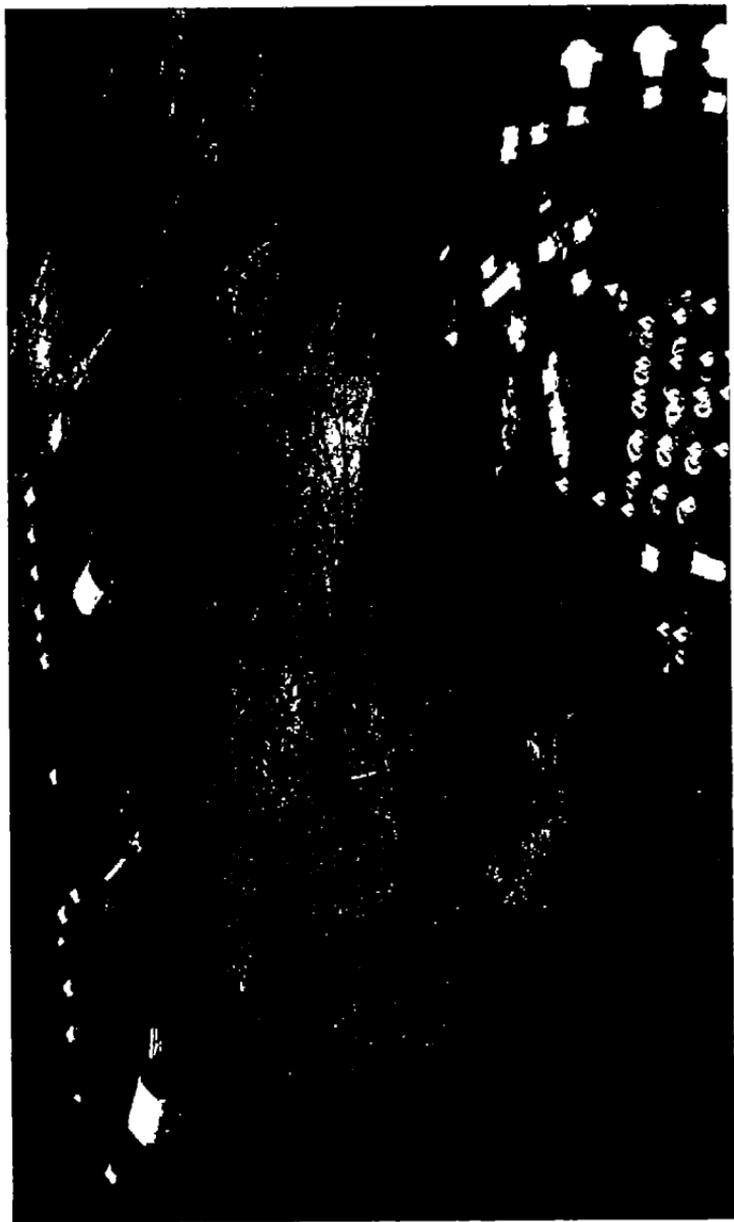
<sup>8</sup> Lieut. E. A. Mustard, D.F.C.; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Signal Services). Vic Govt. Railways employee; of North Fitzroy, Melbourne, b. Oakleigh, Melbourne, 21 Sept., 1893.

<sup>9</sup> An escorting machine leaving course to attack hostile aircraft, or any machine desiring to attract assistance, fired a red Very light as signal to companion machines.



CAPTAIN ROSS SMITH (LEFT) AND LIEUTENANT E. A. MUSTARD IN THEIR BRISTOL FIGHTER 1918

Lent by Lt.-Col. R. H. Williams, No. 1 Squadron, 4 F.F.C.  
Inst. H at Museum Collection No. 4128



AERODROME OF No 1 SQUADRON, A.F.C., AT EL MEJDEL, MARCH, 1918

The trenches beside the tents in the foreground are for protection of the men in camp during bomb raids.

Palestine; it entailed thirty-nine patrols and the exposure of 1,616 plates. From the negatives the Survey Section produced a new series of maps of the whole region, accurate to the smallest detail. Brigadier-General A. E. Borton<sup>10</sup> (commander of the Palestine Brigade, R.A.F.) said in congratulating No. 1 Squadron:—"The photographs are a very fine achievement, and probably mark the highest point which has yet been reached in map-making photography."

Other reconnaissance patrols swept the country well beyond the area which was being photographed, and penetrated as far as sixty miles behind the enemy's lines. From this time onward the airmen continued to report new aerodromes, important railway centres, new railway and road works, dumps, parks of transport, and troop camps. Constant observation enabled several suspected enemy headquarters to be certainly located. The importance to the enemy of the Nablus-Tul Keram road and the road along the Wady Fara<sup>11</sup> to the Jisr ed Damieh ford across Jordan was early perceived. Amman was reconnoitred for the first time on the 31st of December, 1917, and was found to be an active supply centre; the patrol on that day reported 300 rolling-stock, several hundred tents and shelters, much horse- and motor-transport, and over 1,000 troops, besides cavalry. Along the road from Ghoraniye bridge over the Jordan towards Es Salt were other camps comprising several hundreds of tents and long transport lines. On January 3rd Lieutenants A. R. Brown and O. M. Lee<sup>12</sup> (observer) brought in a graphic report of two aerodromes at El Afule, one of nine and the other of six hangars. The larger of them, judging by the absence of machines or "skid-marks," was only newly erected. The other had several machines on the ground and showed every sign of considerable activity. There were also 200 rolling-stock in the station, 200 tents, apart from the aerodromes, and forty-five dumps of ammunition and stores. Both aerodromes were south-east of the station. On the west were fifteen ammunition dumps

<sup>10</sup> Air Vice-Marshal A. E. Borton, CB, C.M.G., D.S.O., A.F.C., R.A.F. (previously Black Watch). Commanded Palestine Bde, R.A.F., 1918, b Beamish Park, Durham, Eng., 20 Sept., 1886.

<sup>11</sup> There are two Wady Faras, both running into the Jordan on the right bank—one, called also the El Kelt, passing through Jericho, and the other flowing from north of Nablus to Jisr ed Damieh. The Wady Fara here mentioned, and frequently referred to later in this narrative, is the more northerly stream.

<sup>12</sup> Lieut O. M. Lee, M.C.; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Storekeeper, of Mole Creek, Tas.; b Mole Creek, 1886.

“three times the size of those at Tul Keram.” At Jenin also they observed two aerodromes, a large camp of tents, forty dumps, and much infantry movement; Jenin was a “good bomb target, as all camps are concentrated.”

The airmen who brought back this information were in an R.E.8, which accompanied a combined raid of sixteen machines (eight of them from No. 1 Squadron) upon El Afule aerodrome. In all 1,200 lbs. of bombs were dropped, with excellent effect, among the hangars; one two-seater in the open was destroyed by a direct hit, and an ammunition store was exploded. It was learned later than forty Turks were killed. On the way home two Albatros scouts attacked the formation, but Lieutenants Austin and L. W. Sutherland,<sup>13</sup> in an escorting Bristol Fighter, climbed above the enemy, attacked, and shot down one, which was seen to crash near the railway between El Afule and Jenin. This was the first enemy destroyed in air combat by No. 1 Squadron. The other Albatros attacked Brown and Lee, in the R.E.8, from behind and above, but that quarter is not one from which to engage a two-seater. Lee met the enemy with sustained and accurate fire,<sup>14</sup> from which the Albatros dropped in a vertical dive and was lost to sight near the ground. Next day, January 4th, No. 1 Squadron sent ten machines in another joint raid, this time against Jenin aerodrome. Again enemy scouts attacked the patrol on the way home. On this occasion the Albatros scouts had the advantage of broken clouds, which permitted a surprise attack. One Albatros suddenly dived from a cloud upon an R.E.8 from No. 113 Squadron, and as this machine span away it collided with an Australian R.E.8 (Lieutenants J. D. S. Potts<sup>15</sup> and V. J. Parkinson<sup>16</sup>), and both machines fell and crashed. Of the Australians, Potts was killed instantly, and Parkinson was injured. The information was conveyed to the squadron by a message dropped from a German aeroplane.

Though bad weather in mid-January prevented long-distance flights, front-line patrols went on as usual. January

<sup>13</sup> Lieut. L. W. Sutherland, M.C., D.C.M.; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Signal Services). Carpenter; of Murrumbidgee, Melbourne; b Murrumbidgee, 17 Dec., 1892.

<sup>14</sup> The direction of fire could generally be distinguished by the trail of the tracer bullets. See Glossary (Incendiary Bullets), and Appendix No 9.

<sup>15</sup> Lieut. J. D. S. Potts; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Jackaroo; of Lane Cove, Sydney, b. New Malden, London, 2 April, 1897. Killed in action, 4 Jan., 1918.

<sup>16</sup> Lieut. V. J. Parkinson; No. 1 Sqn. Wireless operator; of Sydney, b Auckland, N.Z., 8 July, 1892.

17th broke fine, and, while two Australian Bristol Fighters were reconnoitring south of Nablus, at 11,000 feet, they fell in with two hostile formations—one of five Albatros scouts 500 feet below them, and the other of three about 1,000 feet above. The enemy above did not seem anxious to attack. Leaving the escort machine (Lieutenants F. W. Haig<sup>17</sup> and C. J. Vyner<sup>18</sup>) to watch that quarter, Lieutenants L. M. Potts and F. Hancock<sup>19</sup> (observer) dived at the rearmost machine of the lower enemy formation, fired thirty rounds into it, and saw it turn on its back and go down out of control. They were prevented from pursuing it by the presence of other enemy aircraft, which, however, soon broke off the engagement and fled. This incident, otherwise not specially noteworthy, marks the beginning of a new phase; the enemy, even in a position of advantage and with greatly superior numbers, was shy of tackling the Bristol Fighters, and henceforth Australian pilots engaged and defeated the German airmen in whatever strength and circumstances they were encountered. Captain Addison, subsequently commander of No. 1 Squadron, records:—  
“The enemy was not long in realising the futility of relying upon his flying service to drive off our inquisitive machines, and accordingly resorted to other means in an endeavour to obtain some protection against this persistent observation. This took the form of increased anti-aircraft guns. Several new batteries were brought to the front in January and February, 1918, while batteries that were already covering places of importance were noticeably strengthened. In addition, a number of mobile anti-aircraft guns, mounted on motor-lorries, made their appearance. It was their special duty to patrol the main roads. They were meant to protect troops on the move against air attack; but subsequent events showed that the crews of these mobile guns were no better able to withstand the determined onslaught of our machines. Frequently they were observed to abandon their guns and join the other forces attacked in search for cover.”

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<sup>17</sup> Lieut F W Haig, No 1 Sqn Engineer, of Kew, Melbourne. b South Melbourne, 29 July, 1895

<sup>18</sup> Lieut C J Vyner, No 1 Sqn (previously Light Horse) Grazier, of Walcha, N S W.; b Harrogate, Yorks, Eng, 14 Sept, 1888.

<sup>19</sup> Lieut. F. Hancock, No 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Clerk, of Prahran, Melbourne; b. Prahran, 28 May, 1890. Accidentally killed, 13 Oct., 1930.

Nevertheless, the enemy's anti-aircraft crews, mostly German or Austrian, were good gunners, and their shooting was uncomfortably accurate. Their chief nests were among the earliest places marked down by the Australian airmen—Amman, Jericho, Huwara (south of Nablus), Messudie Junction (a hot railway corner in the hills at Sebastie), Tul Keram (the great supply centre and army headquarters), and Kalkilieh (on the railway south from Tul Keram). Tul Keram and Kalkilieh were renowned among the British airmen as the "hottest corner" of all, and many a machine grew wary of its anti-aircraft barrage. Fraser's machine was hit at this place in three successive flights in January, and once it was seriously damaged. A number of others were hit at least once or twice. Lieutenants A. V. Tonkin<sup>20</sup> and Finlay (observer) were heavily shelled here on January 10th. Finlay was wounded by shell-splinters twice on the same patrol. A few days later, on January 20th, Lieutenants A. A. Poole<sup>21</sup> and Hancock (observer), patrolling near the coast, were forced to land. A shell from the Tul Keram or Kalkilieh guns hit their engine. They had to glide down, and failed by only a few hundred yards to reach the British lines. Lieutenants A. R. Brown and Finlay (observer) flew down in the hope of picking them up, but the enemy was too close. Poole and Hancock burned their machine, and were last seen holding up their hands to an approaching party of Turks.

On this flight Brown and Finlay found a number of large transport lines at Huwara holding fully 450 horses. Ross Smith and Mustard (observer) next day observed sixteen lines there, averaging forty horses on each line. Huwara, apparently a refilling point, was deemed too good a target to be left in peace, and shortly before noon on January 25th six Australian machines dropped half-a-ton of bombs upon it. By an unfortunate chance for the enemy, a body of about 2,000 troops in two columns had halted on the road just to the north of Huwara. Of the bombs dropped, twenty made direct hits upon these men; the force was dispersed in panic,

<sup>20</sup> Lieut. A. V. Tonkin, D.F.C.; No. 1 Sqn Grocer; of Glenferrie, Melbourne; b. Avenel, Vic., 16 Dec., 1886.

<sup>21</sup> Flight Lieut. A. A. Poole, M.B.E.; No. 1 Sqn. (afterwards R.A.A.F.). Marine engineer; of Stanmore, Sydney; b. Surry Hills, Sydney, 11 April, 1893.

leaving the road strewn with dead and injured. The airmen then passed on to the horses, and stampeded them with the remainder of their bombs.

The enemy's anti-aircraft nests indicated tender spots in his defence. The Messudie railway corner in the hills was no exception. In the tangle of steep gullies about which the railway winds, there were, within a radius of a mile and a half from one point, at least four railway stations or sidings, and many bridges. Here was the site of dumps, camps, transport parks, and the meeting-place of all the neighbouring roads. No. 1 Squadron raided it on January 18th, 20th, and 22nd. and destroyed a number of the dumps, besides causing other damage.

The attention of the Australian airmen, however, had by no means been confined to the coastal sector of the front. Early in January the reports of Arab operations beyond the Dead Sea, and the activity of the enemy between the Jordan and Amman, attracted special interest. The British Command also was planning operations against Jericho. On January 3rd an Australian air patrol discovered a traffic of small boats, many of them motor-driven, on the Dead Sea between Ghor el Hadite (behind Point Costigan) and Rujm el Bahr, at the northern end of the sea. These boats carried corn and hay from the plains east and south-east of the Dead Sea to Rujm el Bahr, for distribution to the forces at Amman and along the Jordan Valley. Ghor el Hadite was a busy little port, with small sailing-vessels—"like Nile boats," said the observers—and supply-dumps. Motor-lorries were occasionally to be seen on the broad white road to Kerak. A special reconnaissance by Lieutenants Mills (of No. III Squadron) and W. A. Kirk<sup>22</sup> (observer) on January 19th produced an interesting report on the modern land of Moab. "The towns between the Seil el Kerahi (a stream running into the southern end of the Dead Sea) and Kerak are well built, and surrounded by much ploughed land. Kerak appears to be situated in a position of great natural strength. There are several well-built three-storied yellow houses in the town, and a good reservoir with water. The Plateau of Moab is an

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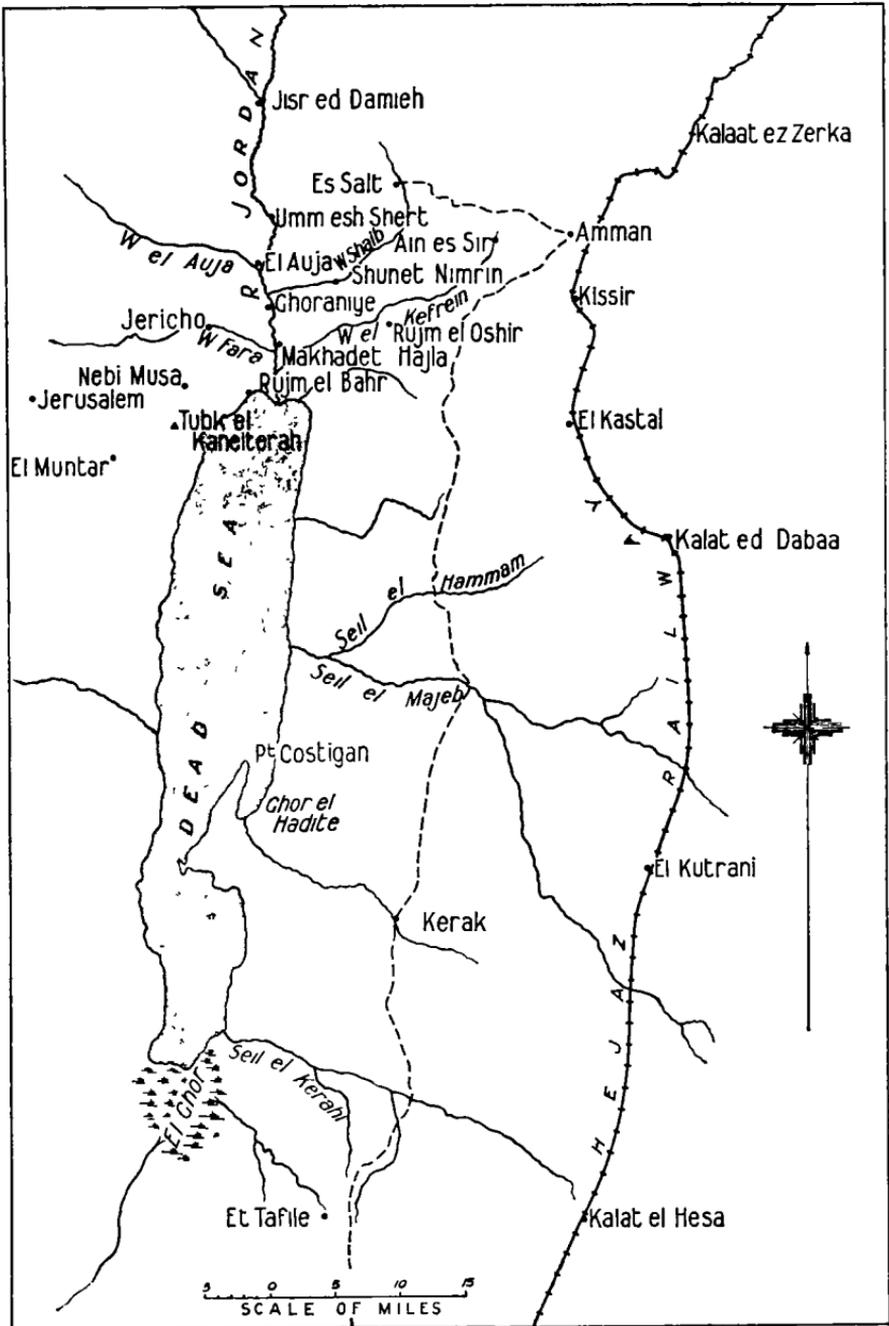
<sup>22</sup> Lieut. W. A. Kirk, D.F.C.; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Engineer; of Lismore, N.S.W.; b. Belfast, Ireland, 6 Aug., 1887.

open tableland, with many cattle grazing and much plough. The road running east to the station at El Kutrani is in good condition, and the northern road also appears excellent. Large flocks and many Bedouin shelters seen on the Seil el Buksase (running through Kerak to the Dead Sea). From the mouth of this stream northward the cliffs run straight into the sea, and the only apparent landing-places are the mouths of the wadys, where there are small beaches. One or two small boats were seen at the mouths of most of these streams along the eastern coast." Such was a modern war-time bird's-eye view of the land through which Moses led his Israelites.

A small raid on January 3rd first disturbed the Dead Sea boat-traffic. A few bombs were dropped, and the two Australian machines concerned caused a panic on board the small craft by swooping down and spraying them with bullets. Air attacks were continued until the boat service was closed down. On each occasion when Australian patrols flew over this region and sighted the little craft moored or in passage, they fired drums of ammunition into them and drove them shorewards in panic.

The next object of No. 1 Squadron's attention was Amman and its railway station, the railhead of the Jordan defences. On January 10th six machines, under Addison, dropped forty-eight bombs on Amman and Kissir (a station six miles south), and made several direct hits on rolling-stock, station buildings, and troops. For the remainder of January, and through early February, in view of coming operations, patrols were directed particularly to the Jordan Valley between Jericho and Shunet Nimrin, and tactical details were registered with the utmost accuracy. The number of tents and shelters at all camps was tallied and checked on each flight, and the state of supply dumps, the movement on the railway at Amman, and the condition of roads and tracks were closely watched. The sectors west and east of Jordan were reconnoitred thus on alternate days.

While plans for the attack on Jericho were being made, a patrol on February 2nd reported a heavy increase in camps at Miske, immediately behind the Turkish lines near the



PR WIGHTMAN

THE COUNTRY EAST OF THE DEAD SEA, SHOWING THE HEJAZ RAILWAY

Mediterranean coast. On that day a compact mass of 400 tents was noticed, and next morning it was raided by five machines from No. 1 Squadron, which dropped sixty bombs on the target and made thirty-two direct hits. The attack was repeated next morning, though nearly half the camp had been moved after the first raid. Another diversion was a double raid on El Kutrani, on the desert railway east of Kerak. Two reconnaissances of this area showed little movement, but light earthworks were being thrown up around El Kutrani station, and fairly large cavalry and infantry camps were noticed there. Judging by the enemy's preparations, the Hejaz Arabs were evidently not far off. Accordingly six machines from No. 1 Squadron bombed the place on February 12th with good results—fourteen direct hits on camps, buildings, and railway. In a second raid, on the following day, only two machines reached the objective—the others dropped out with engine-trouble—but those two again caused panic and damage. On February 25th Kerak also was attacked from the air, Lieutenants Haig and D. R. Dowling<sup>23</sup> bombing it in two Martinsydes. Haig dropped one 112-lb. bomb fairly in the centre of the citadel; numbers of Turks rushed into the big square adjoining, and Dowling then released a shower of 20-lb. bombs upon the crowd. Photographs taken afterwards showed that a pagoda-like tower which had ornamented the middle of the ancient edifice had entirely disappeared, and Arab agents reported that the Turkish casualties were very heavy.

The advance on Jericho was ordered for February 19th. During the week before the attack No. 1 Squadron reconnoitred the Jordan Valley daily, but found no sign of alteration in the enemy's numbers and dispositions. The attack was made by the 60th Division towards Jericho, by the 53rd Division on the left towards the Wady el Auja, and by the Anzac Mounted Division on the right towards Rujm el Bahr. For two days the fighting was against stout defenders in rugged hills, "a surpassingly malignant terrain," as the army commander described it. The enemy held in force a series of precipitous heights from Tubk el Kaneiterah (near the Dead

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<sup>23</sup> Lieut D. R. Dowling, No. 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Engineer; b. Condong, Murwillumbah, N.S.W., 4 May, 1894.

Sea), through Talat ed Dumm (on the Jericho road), to beyond the Wady Fara; deep and sinuous valleys divide these hills, whose rocky faces provided admirable natural facilities for the concealment of bodies of troops. Most tracks ran along the beds of the ravine, passable only by mounted troops, and then only in single file. Sometimes men in the attacking parties had to haul each other in turn over a cliff and fight the enemy hand-to-hand at the top. Cavalry can rarely have fought in more impossible country. Indeed the operations could scarcely have succeeded without the co-operation of the airmen. Throughout the three days' operations No. 1 Squadron's machines followed the attack from above, bombed or machine-gunned Turkish parties to assist the advance, and reported to headquarters both progress made and estimates of the enemy's dispositions and strength. Messages were dropped on troops in the line wherever urgent reports would assist them. In this fashion the advancing line was warned of groups of the enemy lurking on reverse slopes or in the beds of the wadys, and frequently such parties were scattered and disorganised under air attack. That the German airmen made no effort whatever to interfere with this highly effectual support was remarkable. By noon on February 20th, the second day of the attack, the enemy's opposition was broken with the storming of Talat ed Dumm and the heights which look down immediately upon Jericho, and by evening the hills overlooking the Wady Fara were also taken. That afternoon it became clear that considerable Turkish reinforcements had arrived at Shunet Nimrin (east of the Ghoraniye bridge), and a raiding formation from No. 1 Squadron there bombed a large new collection of troop tents, marquees, and supply-dumps. Next morning the Turks had evidently accepted defeat; Jericho was entered early by the Australian Light Horse, and soon afterwards the enemy was in full retreat across the Jordan.

For the next three days low-lying clouds prevented the airmen from harassing the enemy's retreat. On February 25th, however, it was observed that he had removed guns and a pontoon bridge from Ghoraniye, and that there were no Turks left west of the river. Shunet Nimrin was held in strong force, and was being rapidly entrenched.

The description of the fight in the Turkish *communique* of February 21st was satisfactory admission from a quarter which reluctantly admitted any defeat: "The enemy renewed his attacks against our left flank. As we were not able to repulse these attacks everywhere, we withdrew our troops to positions previously prepared."