

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ENEMY DRIVEN FROM THE SKY

OF the demoralisation of the enemy's airmen prior to Allenby's offensive, British and Turkish evidence furnishes conclusive proof. That demoralisation contributed as much as any other factor to the Turkish disaster, and it was due entirely to the superb performances of the British and Australian air squadrons. The records of No. 1 Squadron are themselves illuminating documents; they are more than a story, almost a song of triumph. The papers seized in September at the Turkish headquarters at Nazareth offer ample confirmation of the Australian airmen's every claim.

The air supremacy wrested from the enemy in May and June was used to the full throughout the weeks up to the day of the attack. "During one week in June" (records the commander of No. 1 Squadron<sup>1</sup>) "hostile aeroplanes crossed our lines one hundred times—mainly on the tip-and-run principle. They came over at altitudes (16,000 to 18,000 feet) from which accurate observation was impossible." Still, that they came at all showed that they were at least in the air. In the last week in August the number of enemy visitations had dropped to eighteen. During the three following weeks of September it was reduced to four. For several vitally important days immediately before the attack no German machines whatever were seen near the line.

What did the enemy learn, even when his airmen did appear during July and August, of the vast preparations in progress behind the British lines? Nothing. "That the enemy expected an offensive on my part about this date (September 19th)," writes General Allenby, "is probable; that he remained in ignorance of my intention to attack in the coastal plain with overwhelming numbers is certain." Indeed, the Turks were persuaded that the attack was to come across the Jordan. The patrol reports of the German airmen—those who were fought down all through the summer and denied the air altogether in the autumn—are pitiable. Major Addison, in his official summary of the situation, declares

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<sup>1</sup> Major Addison. On 28 June Major Williams, then commanding the squadron, was promoted to command the 40th (Army) Wing, and Captain Addison succeeded him as squadron-commander.

bluntly that they relied upon imagination rather than any other faculty. Between September 1st and 16th, when Allenby was gathering his striking force in the groves of Ramleh, Ludd, and Jaffa, the German airmen could furnish only this sort of intelligence report:—"The total camp capacity of the enemy has remained as before"; "no changes of importance have occurred"; "traffic on roads and railways in the long-distant reconnaissance centre were small"; "only unimportant re-grouping of troops without change of strength."

The truth of the matter is plain, and is set down beyond all doubt in the captured diary of the German flying service. This record states, under date of August 31st, that, owing to the activity of the Bristol Fighters far behind the Turkish lines, the short-distance reconnaissance work of the German machines was rendered "extraordinarily difficult." The Bristol Fighters, it proceeds, were continually over German aerodromes, and on August 27th even the men's tents on the Jenin aerodrome were attacked with machine-gun fire. "The loss of two machines of No. 301 Squadron compelled the suspension of all flying of other machines in front of the Eighth Army. The carrying on of flights on the rest of the front will be attempted occasionally." Further (the diary proceeds), the shortage of machines is soon to be overcome by the arrival of replacements. But pilots were scarce, "owing to sickness and other causes." On September 15th, four days before Allenby's attack, occurs this entry:—"Owing to the extraordinary lack of pilots, limited flying only can be carried out, in spite of the arrival of twenty new D.F.W's." The Australian airmen may well take pride in this confession of German impotence. During the two months prior to the attack all enemy machines destroyed on the whole British front—fifteen absolutely destroyed and twenty-seven driven down—fell to the airmen of No. 1 Australian Squadron. Many of those forced down were so damaged by their assailants' machine-gun fire after landing that they were abandoned.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> From the beginning of July to the date of the Turkish armistice (October 31) No. 1 Squadron's record was—2,862 hours' flying, 157 strategic and 77 photography reconnaissances, 604 square miles of enemy territory photographed, 150 bomb raids, 21 tons of bombs dropped, 241,000 rounds of machine-gun ammunition fired in air combat or against troops on the ground, 17 German machines destroyed in combat and 33 others driven down. "This work," wrote the commander of the Palestine Brigade, R.A.F., "has been carried out with a gallantry and determination beyond all praise."

Before the special work began of blinding the enemy to Allenby's concentration, there were some long flights down the Hejaz railway. Ross Smith and Kirk disturbed El Kutrani camp and aerodrome with machine-gun fire on July 1st. On July 6th Kenny and Sutherland reconnoitred Jauf ed Derwish station, north of Maan, using the old German aerodrome at Beersheba as an advance landing-ground. The garrison at El Kutrani was putting that place in a state of defence; south of it the railway communication was interrupted by the Arabs' destruction of bridges over the Wady es Sultane. Kalat el Hesa and Jauf ed Derwish were surrounded by trench-systems; at the last-named place gangs of men were repairing railway culverts. Arabs in force were seen along the Wady Esal, between the Dead Sea and the railway south of El Kutrani. Two days later Jauf ed Derwish was bombed by a British formation escorted by Lieutenants H. A. Blake<sup>a</sup> and E. A. Mulford<sup>d</sup> (observer) and Adair and Sutherland, who flew over Maan and found it strongly garrisoned. The Turks east of the Dead Sea were distinctly nervous, and with good reason, for the Arab army was appearing in strength. No. 1 Squadron's patrols watched the whole length of the railway assiduously during the first fortnight of July. An interesting operation which provided excitement for several days was the attack on a convoy of about 2,000 camels south of Amman. On July 13th Lieutenants McGinness and Fysh (observer) and G. W. Sheppard<sup>b</sup> and Krieg found the convoy, escorted by 500 cavalry, moving south towards Kissir; they machine-gunned it severely and scattered horses and camels over the plain. That same afternoon three more Bristol Fighters routed the caravan near Kissir. Then Dowling and Mulford found it several days later at Amman, and worried it again. Other camel-transport parties were attacked at El Kutrani on July 15th and 16th by patrols from British squadrons.

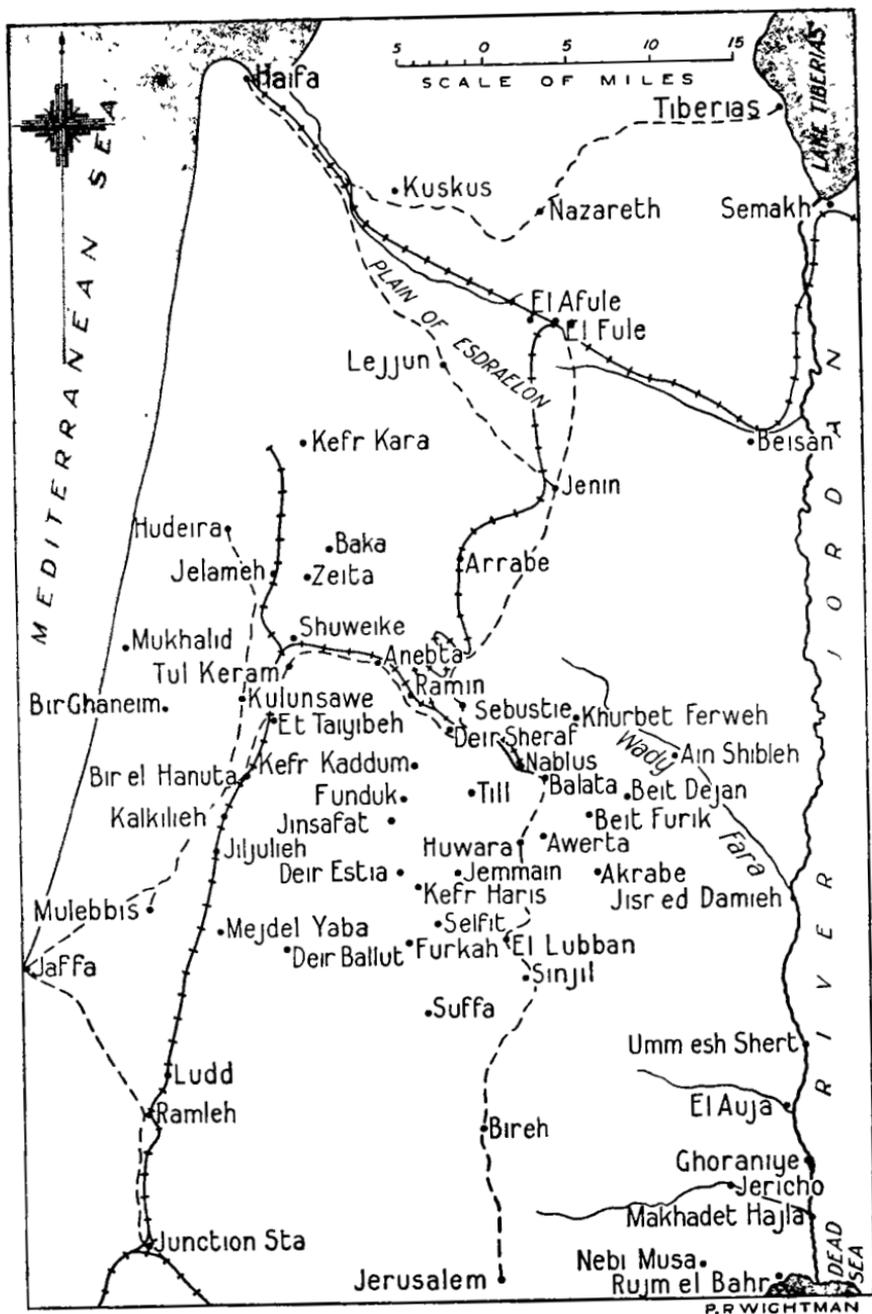
On the main front A. R. Brown and Finlay on July 3rd chased a German two-seater near Lubban, drove it down from 10,000 to 200 feet, and would probably have destroyed it but

<sup>a</sup> Lieut. H. A. Blake, No. 1 Sqn. Electrical engineer, of West Perth, W. Aust.; b. Brisbane, 6 Dec., 1890.

<sup>d</sup> Lieut. E. A. Mulford, DCM; No. 1 Sqn (previously Light Horse). Electrician; of Waverley, Sydney; b. Sydney, 15 Dec., 1890.

<sup>b</sup> Lieut. G. W. Sheppard; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Warehouseman and commercial traveller, of Murrumbena, Melbourne; b. Murrumbena, 25 Oct., 1894.

for heavy machine-gun fire from the Turkish infantry at close range. On July 6th patrols photographed the Et Tire area near the sea for the map-draughtsmen. About mid-July the British Command issued to the air squadrons orders for offensive measures against all hostile reconnaissance, orders which suggested preparations for advance on a grand scale. The airmen construed them in only one light—to attack everything they saw, in the air or on the ground, in any conditions of weather, and no matter what the odds. Sometimes a machine would take a few bombs, but the favourite plan was to carry as much machine-gun and Lewis gun ammunition as possible for ground-shooting. In the airman's eyes no other form of attack quite equalled this for excitement or for challenge of his nerve and skill; the effect was always certain and the damage done unmistakable. Ross Smith and Kirk (observer) and Paul and Weir, the four who had previously "shot up" the Nablus railway, were out on road patrol on July 9th, and flew as far as Jenin to photograph the aerodrome. They noted down the state of its camps and dumps. Then some ground machine-guns opened fire at them. If this was a challenge, it was unwise. The two Bristol Fighters descended to 2,000 feet and circled the aerodrome, Ross Smith taking photographs, and, behind him, the escorting machine blazing off ammunition into the hangars. Then a motor-car appeared at the aerodrome, ran along one line of hangars, and, as though obeying some order, five enemy scouts were suddenly wheeled out with engines running. Kirk fired 100 rounds into them impartially. The motor-car rushed out to them: orders were apparently countermanded; the engines of the machines were stopped. The Australians remained over the place for twenty minutes, waiting for the Germans to rise, and shooting off a short burst at every man who showed himself. Two days later the same four airmen repeated the performance near Nablus. The Balata aerodrome was small and sparsely populated; consequently, after firing only a few hundred rounds at its hangars, "we flew round in circles," reported Ross Smith, "attacking, in turn, transport parked at Balata, and horse-lines and small camps on the east side of Nablus. About fifty men were in the courtyard of barracks at Nablus shooting at us. Kirk fired 100 rounds at them, and



CENTRAL PALESTINE, THE SCENE OF THE BATTLE OF NABLUS

P. R. WIGHTMAN

they all ran inside. Troops in this vicinity appeared panic-stricken, and ran in all directions." The two Bristols then flew home along the Lubban road, stampeding horse-teams and men on motor-lorries, and throwing traffic on the road into the utmost confusion. Nunan and Mulford that same morning found 200 horses and 300 camels on lines in the Wady Fara and many parties of horse-waggons on the road. They flew back and forth over this collection, and fired 600 Lewis gun rounds into it. "Horses on the lines and in the waggons fell; the remainder either bolted or rushed together and were further shot up. Men in the bivouacs rushed about quite demoralised." Nunan took the news home, and two other machines went out and machine-gunned this transport park in the afternoon.

The German airmen must have been exasperated by these contemptuous ravages. Whatever the incentive, they appeared in the air in some numbers on July 16th. The Australians were waiting for them. The first encounter occurred near Tul Keram at 7.30 a.m., when Brown and Finlay (observer) and Peters and Traill engaged four Albatros scouts which were making for home, and forced all of them to land hurriedly. An hour later Lieutenants Tonkin and A. V. McCann<sup>a</sup> fought three more from Bireh to Nablus, drove them all down, and fired into them on the ground. Paul and Weir at about the same time chased a two-seater to Jenin, but were unable to overtake it; baulked of this prey, they flew low and fired heavy fusilades into a column of camels near Arrabe and into a train north of Ramin, and finally attacked three Albatros scouts on the ground at Balata aerodrome. These were probably the same machines which Tonkin and McCann had already engaged. Next morning Dowling and Mulford (observer) and Sheppard and Krieg made an indecisive attack upon two unwilling Rumplers near Amman. They killed the observer in one German machine, but the enemy would not fight, and desired only to land. The Australians turned their machine-guns upon 200 cavalry massed near the aerodrome and 2,000 camels on transport-lines, apparently the same unfortunate beasts which had been harassed along the railway during the preceding days.

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<sup>a</sup> Lieut. A. V. McCann, D.F.C.; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Farmer; of Kyneton district, Vic.; b. Yea, Vic, 4 July, 1893.



AN AUSTRALIAN AIR-RAID ON FL. KUTRANI RAILWAY STATION, 15TH AUGUST 1918.

Now in Museum Official Photo No B3416

To face p 135



JENIN AFRODROME AND TOWN, LOOKING EAST, SHOWING THE TRACKS AROUND THE LANDING  
GROUND AND THE RAILWAY TO NAZARETH (WINDING ACROSS THE PICTURE)

And. H. M. Museum Official Photo No B3386  
Taken 5th July, 1918

While this engagement was taking place over Amman, Ross Smith and Kirk, on dawn hostile-aircraft patrol,<sup>7</sup> destroyed two Albatros scouts after a thrilling fight at 11,000 feet over the Wady el Auja. The enemy turned tail at once and dived straight for earth, with the Bristol after them like a flash. At only 50 feet from the ground Ross Smith fired a short burst into one from over its tail, and that Albatros promptly fell and crashed. Then ensued an exciting chase after the other along a little wady towards the Nablus road. The two machines skimmed the ground, flashed past rocky corners or over tree tops, until at last "over a yellow tent," reported the Australian pilot, "I fired at close range, and the enemy dived into the ground and smashed up on the Nablus road." Kirk photographed both victims, and the Bristol Fighter then resumed patrol. Lukis and Beaton subsequently joined it in pursuit of a Rumpler two-seater over the Jordan, but the German made good his escape.

On July 22nd Tonkin and McCann destroyed a Rumpler after a fight much like that of Ross Smith's. They also were on dawn patrol, south-west of Lubban. At first view the enemy had the advantage of height, but he sought only to escape. Tonkin cut him off from Balata aerodrome, for which he was making, and turned him south-west, both losing height steadily. Every few seconds the Australian fired a burst into the German's tail, the scared enemy pilot meanwhile kicking his rudder<sup>8</sup> from side to side in the effort to shake off his pursuer. At last the Rumpler, apparently hit, flattened out near the ground. With no more than a few feet of clearance, he flitted desperately along a wady, the Bristol Fighter still pursuing him. After a few moments of this course, the German crashed badly, and one wounded man crawled out of the wreckage.

Soon after dawn on July 24th Peters and Traill (observer) and Walker and Letch destroyed a patrolling enemy two-seater north of Mejdal Yaba. This German kept up a hot

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<sup>7</sup> To ensure to air squadrons rapid warning of hostile aircraft over the lines, the system was for special wireless stations in the forward areas to send back warning to the aerodrome. No 1 Squadron had a Klaxon horn fitted in a central position, and this horn bellowed out the wireless warnings to the hangars.

<sup>8</sup> The rudder of an aeroplane connects with a bar in the pilot's cockpit worked by the feet.

duel against odds until his observer was put out of action. Another, a Rumpler, which crossed the lines near Jericho at noon on July 28th, carried two plucky airmen who fought two Bristol Fighters—Brown and Finlay (observer) and Paul and Weir—in determined fashion from near Jerusalem to the upper Wady Fara. In this combat the Australian machines expended over 1,700 rounds—a sufficient indication of the efforts demanded of them. The German observer gave them shot for shot all the way, and the Rumpler landed safely in the wady; but Paul shot down pilot and observer as they ran from it, and both Bristols fired into the abandoned machine on the ground. Kenny and Sutherland drove down another Rumpler in this vicinity in the morning of July 30th and killed the observer.

The situation demanded daily observation of the regions around Nablus on the one side and Amman on the other, and the keenest watch on the enemy's troop movements. The building of an embankment for a railway from Tarbane, on the Afule-Haifa line, south-westward to the Kakon supply railway had been carefully noted for some days, and in mid-July the traffic on the roads over all this district was considerable. Though this denoted increased defensive preparations in the coast sector, on the other hand the trench-system about Kakon was reported to be in a badly neglected state. The Australian pilots brought in photographs of all Turkish activity in this important region as well as their own bird's-eye reports. Special patrols procured the smallest details of roads and tracks immediately opposite the British front and crossings of the important Nahr Iskanderuneh. This river—one of the many geographical features in Asia Minor which owe their names to the renowned Alexander of Macedon—runs west and north-west of Tul Keram, and Allenby's projected cavalry attack would have to cross it. The Australian patrol reports at this time are models of air scouting. No examination of the ground by cavalry scouts could have furnished better intelligence. Kenny and Sutherland on July 23rd flew up the coast to the Esdraelon Plain and over to Nazareth (the Turkish General Headquarters), and confirmed an agent's report of a new aerodrome at Kuskus (between Nazareth and Haifa). One Albatros scout was on the

aerodrome ground, but did not rise; the Australians fired 200 rounds into the hangars, and also at a large new supply camp at Beit Lahm, near by. If, however, the Nablus region showed the enemy to be alert and busy, it was yet too soon to deduce special uneasiness, for the east-Jordan area was no less active. Sheppard and Krieg on July 24th found the Amman camp bigger than ever, and reported particularly massed concentration of tents in one wady, which British and Australian machines bombed twice during the following days.

Another reconnaissance of great value—that of the roads running east and north-east from Nablus and over the rough country from the Wady Fara to Beisan—was made on July 31st by McGinness and Fysh (observer) and Walker and Fletcher. Here the retreating Turks were to suffer disastrous bombing attacks by the Australian airmen after the Battle of Nablus. The reports returned by McGinness and Walker left hardly a detail unrecorded of the main routes across that difficult terrain. After finishing the road reconnaissance they had what they called “a day in the country.” At Beisan they found a train entering from the west; they machine-gunned it and the transport park alongside the station. Leaving panic and confusion there, they next put a force of 200 cavalry into a mad stampede. They flew on north to Semakh, where there was a busy station with six sidings, and a small aerodrome a few hundred yards away from it. With bursts of fire they chased several hundred troops about station yard and aerodrome. Men sprawled on the ground, fired rifles, threw themselves into ditches, and made for any available cover. A dump of flares exploded and started a local fire. Men jumped out of a train; horses bolted in all directions. The Australians had no ammunition left for the sailing vessels on the Tiberian lake, or for two passive German aeroplanes on the floor of Jenin aerodrome, examined in passage on the way home. During the following weeks other pilots, on almost daily patrols, photographed in overlapping series all the roads and tracks from Nablus and the Wady Fara up to Beisan, and from Tul Keram northwards; and from the negatives which they furnished—nearly 1,000 in all—new maps were issued for Allenby’s offensive, covering nearly 400 square miles of country.

The practice of "shooting-up" enemy troops, roads, and traffic-centres became general with all British and Australian machines. Even photography-patrols, when they had finished their assigned duty, would regularly fly low homeward and fire into any target which offered. In this practice the airmen found a new method of countering the enemy's anti-aircraft artillery. Thus during a British bombing raid against Amman on August 8th, Lieutenants Nunan and F. C. Conrick,<sup>9</sup> escorting, flew down and drove off the gun-crews engaging the bombers, and by hovering over the battery kept it silent throughout the raid. Brown and Finlay (observer) and Maughan and Letch performed the same effective service on August 21st, while six Australian machines bombed Amman station and aerodrome, and wrecked several German aeroplanes in the hangars.

With the decline of the German air service the enemy failed to fend off these demoralising attacks. Anti-aircraft artillery and machine-guns seemed unable alone to check the wholesale terrorising of the countryside. Kenny and Sutherland (observer) and McGinness and Fysh, on special reconnaissance on August 2nd, sighted between Kuskus and El Afule four Albatros two-seaters. Kenny chased one down to a landing near Lejjun, and then climbed again to 3,000 feet to attack another; he was himself attacked by a third, but Sutherland fired a burst of 100 rounds into this last at close range, and it fell completely out of control. By this time McGinness had joined the combat. He flew straight at the second Albatros, which had been fighting a clever duel with Kenny, and both he and Fysh fired heavily into it at the top of a wonderful loop which the German machine was performing over the other Bristol Fighter. From this attack the Albatros did not recover; it flew straight to the ground and crashed in a heap. The fourth enemy escaped while opportunity offered. The Australians then fired 700 rounds into the hangars in El Afule aerodrome and at rolling-stock and troops in the railway station.

On August 5th Adair and Mulford (observer) and Nunan and Conrick counted the camps along the Wady Fara and reported small cavalry movement over Ain es Sir, near

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<sup>9</sup> Lieut. F. C. Conrick; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Camel Corps). Grazier; of Nappa Merrie Station, Cooper's Creek, Q'land; b. Nappa Merrie, 28 May, 1891.

Amman. They then fell in with an Albatros scout and chased it down to Amman aerodrome. Returning over the Wady Fara again, they machine-gunned a column of infantry and 200 camels; the men in charge of the camels fled for cover, and the convoy was scattered in bunches. Other machines again harried the camps at this place a few days later. Tonkin and Vyner on August 9th pursued a two-seater for fifty miles, from north of Nablus to far up Lake Tiberias, without being able to overhaul it. Cameron and Fletcher, in a low-flying attack on the same day, threw a large transport park at Nablus into panic. Next morning, McGinness and Fysh (observer) and Lieutenants Headlam and W. H. Lilly<sup>10</sup> found on a road in the hills west of Nablus a column of 200 horses, motor-transport, and infantry; they shot 850 rounds into this mass, blocked the road, and stampeded the horses into a mad gallop northward. Brown and Finlay on August 14th reported a large cavalry camp carefully camouflaged at Mukhalid on the coast. They fired into it with good effect, and at the end of the afternoon returned with Paul and Weir to attack it again. They first shot the horse-lines and men's camps into utter confusion, and then flew to the beach, where at least 300 men and many horses were bathing, and machine-gunned this party from a height of a few hundred feet. Despite much counter-fire from the cliffs, the airmen darted up and down the beach, pursued the bathers into the water or out of it into crevices in the cliff-side, and stampeded the horses along the shore. They fired in all 2,350 rounds in this attack. Paul returned to the aerodrome with twenty-seven bullet-holes in his machine.

The German airmen failed everywhere to meet the challenge offered them. They received new machines—Pfalz scouts—and still were beaten. McGinness and Fysh (observer) and Lieutenants W. C. Thompson<sup>11</sup> and M. D. Lees<sup>12</sup> first encountered these new aircraft over Jenin aerodrome on August 14th. They were a formation of six, having the advantage of height by 2,000 feet. A climbing race promptly

<sup>10</sup> Lieut. W. H. Lilly; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Clerk; of Kalgoorlie, W. Aust.; b. North Melbourne, 12 July, 1892.

<sup>11</sup> Major W. C. Thompson, No. 1 Sqn. Mechanical engineer, of Abbotsford, Melbourne; b. Abbotsford, 9 Oct., 1894.

<sup>12</sup> Lieut. M. D. Lees; No. 1 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Bank clerk; of Goulburn, N.S.W.; b. Goulburn, 3 May, 1895.

began, and when the enemy discovered that they were being outclimbed, they dived in formation at the two Bristols. McGinness deftly avoided, counter-attacked, and split the formation. Clouds interfered with the fight, but all six Pfalzes were engaged and forced to land. The following days were remarkable for German efforts to cross the lines. Paul and Weir, responding to an enemy-aircraft alarm at breakfast-time on August 16th, picked up a Rumpler making homeward at 10,000 feet, and shot it to pieces in the air. Headlam and Lilly on August 21st drove down a Rumpler which had been over the Jordan Valley, and shot its observer. During the action Lilly's Norman compensating fore-sight<sup>13</sup> was shot off by a piece of anti-aircraft shell, and to that mishap, which made further accurate shooting impossible, the Rumpler probably owes its escape. An L.V.G. two-seater was shot down near Ramleh next day by Brown and Finlay, and its occupants taken prisoner, but the fight was marred by the loss of Walker and Letch, who were patrolling with Brown. The enemy crossed the lines at a great height, and the Australians climbed to cut him off. The whole squadron saw the fight from the aerodrome floor. The L.V.G. turned for home, and Walker took the grave risk of attacking from above and behind in full sight of the German's rear gun.<sup>14</sup> In a few seconds Walker's machine was seen to fall and burst into flames. Brown, who had manœuvred in front of the L.V.G., gave Finlay the shooting. Finlay's guns, however, fell out of their mounting, and Brown then attacked the L.V.G. head-on and drove it down to a bad landing near the Ramleh aerodrome.

The determined efforts of the enemy to penetrate the British air screen were well demonstrated in a great fight between Tul Keram and Kalkilieh on August 24th, when two Bristol Fighters defeated eight German machines and destroyed four of them. An early hostile-aircraft alarm that morning brought out Peters and Traill (observer) and McGinness and Fletcher, to whom British anti-aircraft fire indicated an L.V.G. two-seater over Jelil (on the coast) at 9,000 feet. Peters flew towards it, and the German, turning

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<sup>13</sup> See Glossary.

<sup>14</sup> See foot-note 2, page 122.

north, fired several lights. Suddenly six hostile scouts in formation, obviously waiting for the signal, appeared from the north-west, and the L.V.G. turned to pass beneath them. There was no more than an instant for the decision; Peters made it, and dashed after the L.V.G. McGinness just as promptly turned in between him and the scouts and met their attack. The scout-leader, with the other five behind him, dived straight at McGinness, but Fletcher received him with a steady fire. From this the leader sheered off and dived on towards Peters below. Two more scouts followed, attacking McGinness; again Fletcher's fire deflected the attack, and the two passed on, each turning outward. The remaining three scouts dived below McGinness, and, with the last of the upper enemy gone, McGinness, in turn, put his nose down and struck straight for the centre machine of those three. He opened fire behind this scout's tail at fifty-yards' range, and the German went down in a trail of smoke and burst into flames as he hit the ground.

Meanwhile Peters pursued the original two-seater, while Traill, his observer, kept the attacking scout-leader at a distance. Two close, blazing rattles of fire, one from Peters and one from Traill as the enemy turned, shook the two-seater, and then Peters swooped below it, came up again under its belly, and delivered a burst of eighty more rounds into it. The L.V.G. went down like a leaf and crashed near Bir el Hanuta. By this time the last three scouts were coming down under McGinness's attack, and the whole fight was drifting north at a low height. Two of these scouts dropped to attack Peters, but Traill shot both in turn into bad spins. One was lost to sight, manifestly hit; the other Peters turned and pursued, and, after receiving two straight bursts of fire, this second scout plunged into the ground and fell on its back. Peters, now very near the ground, drove straight at a section of anti-aircraft guns and put the crews to flight. McGinness chased north-westward the one Pfalz remaining in sight, drove it down to 200 feet, and a last fusillade from Fletcher sent it crashing into a motor-lorry on the Nablus-Messudie road. As the pilot tried to get out of the wreck Fletcher shot him dead. Peters, flying homeward while this was taking place, saw another L.V.G. two-seater near the lines

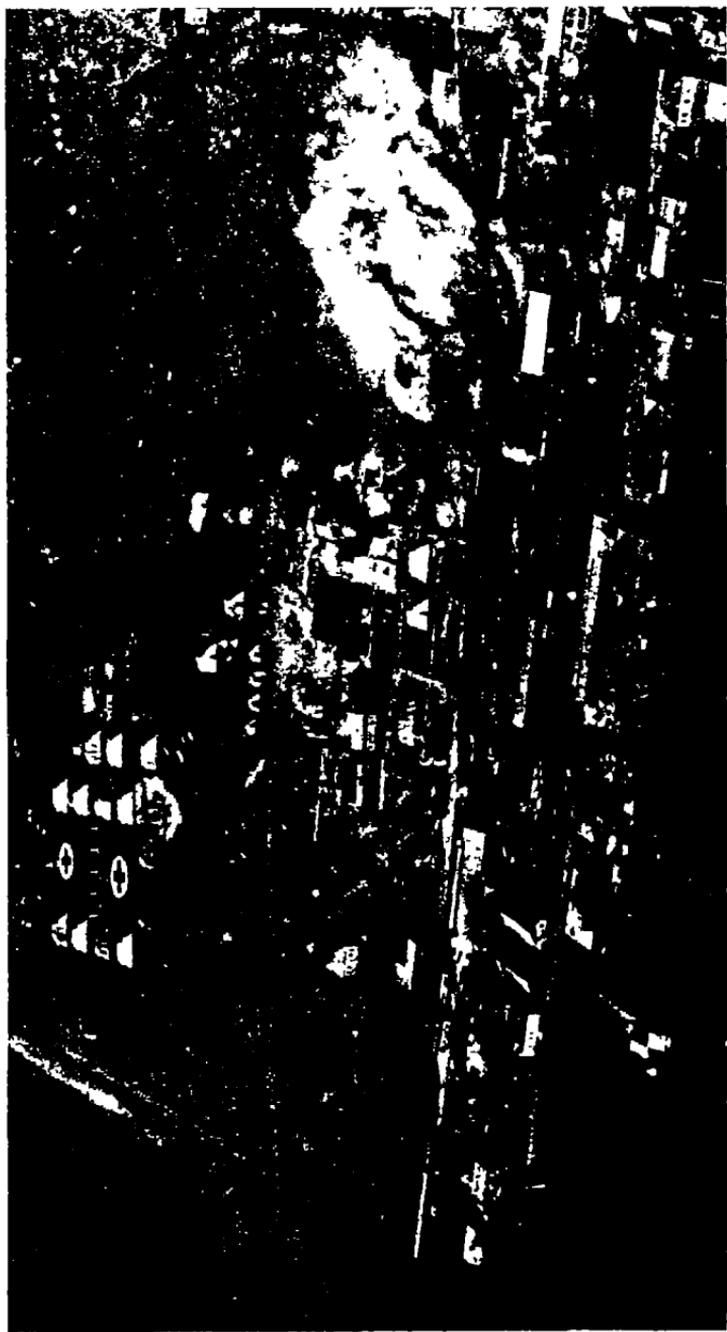
at 10,000 feet, and chased it to Nablus, but then had to give up the pursuit owing to lack of ammunition. Enemy records later showed that of the seven machines engaged in the first combat only one scout got back to its aerodrome. The victorious Australian airmen received personal congratulations from the Middle East Air Force commander and a special telegram from General Allenby.

The compliments which No. 1 Squadron received from the highest quarters on its work during these important weeks<sup>15</sup> were ratified in significant fashion. On August 29th General Borton arrived at Ramleh with a giant new Handley-Page bomber, which he had flown from England. This machine, the only one of its type in the East, was put on the strength of the Australian Squadron.

The enemy's aircraft losses steadily mounted. Nunan and Conrick on August 27th circled over Jenin aerodrome for an hour, challenging seven scouts and a two-seater on the ground there to come up and fight them, but the enemy was not willing. Nunan then flew low, and he and his observer fired 500 rounds into the line of machines and hangars, and drove the mechanics into a wild scurry for cover. Next morning two Bristol Fighters broke off from a photography-patrol north-west of Nablus to attack two L.V.G.'s. These promptly made for the Jenin landing-ground. Dowling and Mulford (observer) and McGinness and Fysh intercepted a patrol of two L.V.G.'s west of Mulebbis in the afternoon of August 31st, and Fysh destroyed both of them; one crashed in the British lines, and one near Kalkilieh. This action was an outstanding example of proper fighting tactics against a two-seater. McGinness laid his machine alongside one of the enemy for close action by putting his observer in position under the L.V.G.'s tail. Dowling engaged the other L.V.G. from above and in front, but (to quote his report) "the

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<sup>15</sup> Major-General Salmond, commanding R.A.F. in the Middle East, inspected No. 1 Australian Squadron at Ramleh in July, 1918, and then declared that it ranked as "one of the best squadrons in the Royal Air Force. Its interior economy, workshops, and discipline are excellent. The turn-out of its mechanical transport, and, above all, of its aeroplanes, are models of their kind. On this squadron has always fallen a large portion of the work which has had to be performed by the Royal Air Force in Palestine since the day that the Egyptian Expeditionary Force left the Canal. The results that have been achieved by the Royal Air Force have been, to a very marked degree, due to the fine work of No. 1 Squadron, Australian Flying Corps. It is a matter of pride to me to have had this squadron under my command since the days of its formation."

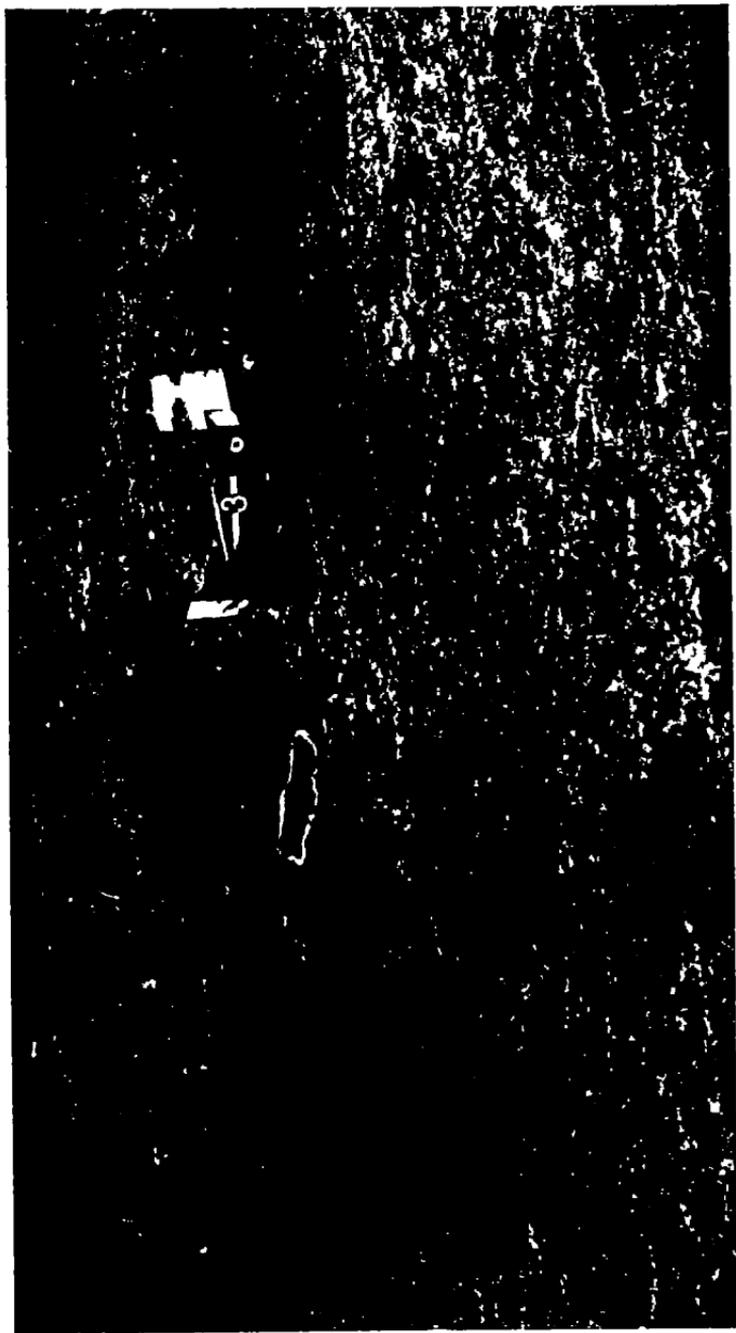


A BRITISH AIR-RAID ON THE RAILWAY AT DERVA, 16TH SEPTEMBER, 1918

The smoke and dust of bombs in the foreground. A hospital can be seen on the far edge of the town

*Awd. H. at Museum Official Photo No. B3551*

*To face F. 146*



A D.H.9 FORGOT TO LAND IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

The incident here shown occurred after the a r-raid on Deraa on 16th September, 1918. The crew of the lost aeroplane have put out strips (of cloth) to indicate to an accompanying machine that the ground is too bad to permit of a successful landing.

Lent by Lieut.-Col. R. Williams, No. 1 Sqn., 4 F.C.  
Inst. Hist. Museum Collection No. A657

enemy aeroplane was so well handled that I found it extremely difficult to maintain position, and so decided to attack from below." Before he could do this his engine failed, and he had to turn away. McGinness, having seen his own opponent destroyed, took up the combat with the second German, and Fysh shot down this also from position below.

The Germans never really took the air again over this part of the front. One or two of their machines were seen in the far distance, and there is record of one German scout who on September 15th flew in quickly from the sea, south of Jaffa, and turned north at once. Nor did the British airmen find much evidence of the enemy's flying even over his own lines. No. III Squadron saw one distant two-seater just before the offensive began, and Dowling and Mulford (observer) and McGinness and Fysh on September 14th destroyed a Rumpler two-seater near Jenin. Otherwise, for the eighteen days prior to Allenby's attack, there were no German airmen seen abroad.

This of itself would be a proud record for an air service charged with preventing the enemy from learning the secret of the planned offensive. But it was by no means all. Reconnaissance machines swept the entire Turkish front and rear areas in daily revision of accumulated scouting intelligence. Photography-patrols produced a new set of pictures of the front-line defences and coastal obstacles in order to bring maps up-to-date in the last available details. All machines punished enemy troops and transport wherever they made a sufficiently good target for machine-gun attack. The Turkish cavalry camp at Mukhalid was frequently disturbed by these airmen's lightning strokes. The cavalry camps between the Wady Fara and Es Salt and at Ain es Sir were also favourite targets. Amman aerodrome and railway station were bombed by five several raids on August 21st—one of them an attack by six Australian machines. The aerodrome and its material were badly damaged, and the enemy was so disheartened by this pounding that he shortly afterwards abandoned it and was not observed to use it again. Three Bristol Fighters, raiding Kissir that same day, fired 1,300 rounds into an armoured train at the station there, and drove troops from it into the shelter of neighbouring wadys.

On September 14th a German camp, discovered at El Howeij on the Es Salt-Nimrin road, was severely bombed and machine-gunned by four Bristol Fighters. Such were the low-flying ground-attacks made in the last two or three weeks of the British preparations. That there were not more of them was due not to want of opportunity, but to the fact that machines of all squadrons had to be nursed for the utmost effort in the grand attack to come.

Before describing the part played by No. 1 Squadron in the battle on the field of Armageddon—officially called the Battle of Nablus—it is necessary to follow shortly those Arab operations in the desert beyond the Amman railway, wherein No. 1 Squadron was intimately concerned. This is not the place to tell the interesting story of the party of British officers under Colonel Lawrence who accompanied the Arab Northern Army from south of Maan across the desert to Azrak, and thence in the attack made upon the Turks at Deraa in conjunction with Allenby's sweep around the sea-flank. No. 1 Squadron first became interested in these operations on May 16th, when Ross Smith flew Colonel Lawrence from Allenby's headquarters to the plains near El Kutrani and there landed him. At Cairo a special air detachment, called "X Flight, R.A.F.," was formed to work in the desert with Lawrence. With this flight were a number of Australian mechanics and two B.E.12.a machines, which, with two or three specially selected British officers, landed at Akaba, at the head of the north-eastern arm of the Red Sea, and thence trekked to the headquarters of the Arab Prince Feisal near Maan. The B.E. machines, when they arrived from Akaba, proved to be of no practical use, though possibly they served to impress the Arabs. On August 12th a Bristol Fighter—Murphy and Hawley (observer)—flew from Ramleh to join Lawrence in the desert.

The Arabs were to operate in two armies—one, the Northern Army, to strike across the desert to Azrak (fifty miles east of Amman and about eighty from Deraa), thence to attack the important Deraa railway centre; the other, the Southern Army, to harass the probable retreat of the Turks from Maan and south of that place. The region between El Kutrani and Maan was frequently reconnoitred

during August by patrols from No. 1 Squadron, the object being to watch for developments among the Bedouin, to worry the Turkish railway garrisons, and to confirm Arab faith in British air supremacy. The Bedouin tribes had learned from the attentions of airmen on both sides at various times a great respect for aeroplanes—"Tiyaras" (*i.e.*, "female flying things") they called them—and the frequent sight of British machines was calculated to encourage the Anglo-Arab *entente*.

An accident to Tonkin and Vyner on August 13th assisted this design. They were reconnoitring about Maan that morning, and were forced by engine-trouble to land near El Shobek. They burned their machine and endeavoured to make their way towards Beersheba. The Bristol Fighter escorting them reported their mishap, and three machines, sent out next day to rescue them, found Tonkin and Vyner in the hands of Arabs who were friendly and much impressed. The two Australians were treated with all hospitality, and were handed over to a British camel-patrol a few days later at a reward-price of fifty sovereigns each.

Lawrence's party and the air-mechanics moved across the desert to Azrak on August 31st and September 1st, and a fortnight later demolition parties—composed of Englishmen, Frenchmen, Indians, and Arabs, in weird assortment—trekked westward towards the railways.<sup>18</sup> The force, called "the Arab Northern Army under Brigadier-General Nuri Said," was not yet fully collected, and the allegiance of Bedouin tribes was nearly upset by several German air raids from Deraa. Murphy and Hawley destroyed one of these hostile machines on September 16th, but had to fly back to the squadron at Ramleh for repair of a slight defect. On September 16th and 17th Lawrence's detachments succeeded in blowing up sections of railway north and south of Deraa, and a special detachment of Gurkhas (serving under Lawrence's orders) temporarily captured and destroyed the station and bridges at Mezerib Junction, north-west of Deraa. This work was an essential part of Allenby's plans. To assist it, No. 144 Squadron, with its large new D.H.9 bombers, raided

<sup>18</sup> Some of these particulars are taken from an interesting account of Lawrence's expedition, written by a British officer who took part in it, and published in *Blackwood's Magazine* of May and June, 1920.

Deraa station on both those days; they dropped a ton and a quarter of explosives on the station, including six bombs of a hundredweight each. One D.H.9 was forced to descend with engine-trouble on the way home from the first raid, and was captured by the enemy. However, Lieutenants Blake and E. Sullivan<sup>17</sup> (observer) and Dowling and Mulford, sent out next day specially for that purpose, found it where it had landed, covered by the enemy with branches of trees. They set it on fire with incendiary bullets.

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*Note.*—With reference to the shooting down of Lieutenant J. M. Walker in flames, and the loss of several German machines in the same fashion, some observation on the use of incendiary bullets will be found in Appendix No. 9.

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<sup>17</sup> Lieut. E. Sullivan; No 1 Sqn (previously A.A.M.C.). Farrer; b. Carlton, Melbourne, 1894.