

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE BRITISH OFFENSIVE ON THE SOMME

ON the Somme the front of the Australian Corps remained for five weeks after the battle of Hamel more or less stationary, though in a state of repeated eruption. Till August 8th, when the British Army's grand offensive opened in this sector, there was no attack on a large scale; but the enemy was badly shaken, and his hold began gradually to loosen. The Australian infantry raided the enemy night and day with an audacity which was found to be completely justified by the nervous state of the German garrisons. This is not the place to record the many brilliant exploits of local initiative, particularly the cutting out of whole sections of trenches before Villers-Bretonneux and the recapture of the famous Monument Wood, or what was left of it. Viewed in the light of later events, this five weeks of raiding and harrying the German front-line garrisons was manifestly preparation for the victorious advance on what Ludendorff afterwards called Germany's "black days."

During July No. 3 Squadron photographed and bombarded new gun-positions as usual, and the spirit of the airmen rose with the success of the infantry. During this work the R.E.8's had several exciting encounters with enemy machines. On July 11th, when Francis and Sturgeon (observer) were attacked by a Fokker biplane, both the R.E.8's guns jammed at an early stage, and the Australians thus rendered helpless were compelled to twist and dodge while the German fired all its ammunition at them. Fortunately the enemy failed to shoot straight.<sup>1</sup> The weather at this time was frequently too stormy for flying, and thunder-storms and rain were specially heavy. At every interval of better weather the bombardment, directed by airmen's observation of enemy battery-positions, was resumed. On one such artillery patrol in the evening of July 15th, Lieutenants J. Gould-Taylor<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Francis's machine, No A 4397, made a record in the British air forces on the Western Front by performing 440 hours 35 minutes' service-flying and making 147 trips across the line. The pilot and the squadron were specially congratulated by G.H.Q. The previous best record was 427½ hours' service-flying.

<sup>2</sup> Lieut. J. Gould-Taylor, D.F.C.; No. 3 Sqn (previously Artillery). Student; of Upper Hawthorn, Melbourne; b. Young, N.S.W., 1897. Killed in action, 3 Oct., 1918.

B. G. Thomson<sup>3</sup> (observer) met a German two-seater flying over Méaulte at 4,000 feet, attacked it, and destroyed it in flames with one long burst of machine-gun fire. Thunderstorms more than once nearly caused disaster to the airmen, and the imagination is seized with the dramatic silencing of the guns in the roar of a mightier artillery. Four Australian R.E.8's, directing bombardment against German batteries at the end of a sultry day on July 17th, were caught in the full force of a storm of hail and lightning. They were unable to reach their aerodrome, and were forced to make for the edges of the storm and to land where best they could. This they managed to do inside the British lines, and luckily without injury. Again, on July 21st, another Australian R.E.8 was driven by a sharp thunder-storm to land under the shelter of a wood and narrowly avoided crashing.<sup>4</sup>

Looking backwards upon this time, the student of the campaign will note how the preparations leading up to the grand attack of August 8th overshadowed all minor events after the battle of Hamel on July 4th. The routine work done by No. 3 Squadron during the last two weeks of July was not consciously performed as part of the larger plans, although the daily bombardment of the enemy's batteries and the locating of his gun-positions were all part of the greater scheme. Only in the closing days of the month was the first inkling of the Army's intentions given by Australian Corps Headquarters to commanding officers of the flying squadron, the artillery, and the infantry divisions of the corps. Indeed, during the last week of July the airmen of No. 3 Squadron and the infantry on the Morlancourt Ridge were mainly busied in ensuring the success of another small attack above Sailly Laurette, which was made on the night of July 28th

<sup>3</sup> Lieut. B. G. Thomson; No. 3 Sqn (previously A.A.M.C.). Accountant; of Kapunda, S. Aust.; b. Kapunda, 24 March, 1894. Killed in action, 3 Oct., 1918.

<sup>4</sup> To fly through a thunder-storm has been declared by many airmen to be a severe test of nerve. Richthofen has described how he once survived a terrific storm over the mountains of the Moselle near Metz. On this occasion he could not find the edge of the storm, and had to fly straight through it. He kept at lowest possible altitude in order to retain sight of earth and "was compelled absolutely to leap over houses and trees" with his machine as they came. Black cloud hid everything. "The gale seized the machine as if it had been a piece of paper, and beneath me I saw trees bent down by the wind. I had to jump trees, villages, spires, and steeples," he says, "for I had to keep within five yards of the ground. Otherwise I should have seen nothing at all. The lightning was playing around me. At that time I did not yet know that lightning cannot touch flying-machines. I shall never again fly through a thunder-storm unless the Fatherland should demand this." (*The Red Air Fighter*, p. 66)



AN AIR SQUADRON'S CONTACT-PATROL ACCOMPANYING AN INFANTRY ADVANCE.  
(A composite photograph produced from several negatives in order to illustrate an infantry attack in the Third Battle of Ypres.)



AERIAL VIEW OF THE COUNTRY SOUTH OF THE SOMME OVER WHICH THE AUSTRALIANS AND  
CANADIANS ATTACKED ON 8TH AUGUST, 1918

The photograph was taken from a machine of No. 3 Squadron above Morlaucourt Ridge on  
10th July, 1918

by the 8th and 14th Brigades. As soon as this was over, the impending offensive was disclosed in secret conference. The first steps were the withdrawal of Australian troops from the Morlancourt Ridge and the extension of the right front of the corps down to the north bank of the Luce. The Australian Corps was now in position between the Somme and the Luce, and No. 3 Squadron promptly sent out all pilots and observers to learn the new front opposite the villages of Cachy and Hangard. On the day of this change of area, August 1st, the new front was thoroughly photographed. The squadron further signalled the event by there putting out of action six German batteries.

Some sharp air fighting occurred about 5 p.m. on that day while the artillery work was in progress. Three R.E.8's from No. 3 were at 4,000 feet over the lines observing shoots on three separate batteries, when suddenly a grey Albatros was seen at about 1,500 feet to be attacking a line of British balloons near Blangy-Tronville. It was a neat attack, and the German scout shot four balloons into flames in rapid succession.<sup>5</sup> Three Australian artillery machines successively engaged the Albatros for a few seconds as it flew eastward. The pilot of the third R.E.8, Grigson, maintained fire until his gun jammed; he then turned, and gave his observer, H. B. James, the target. Both machines lost height in this last chase, and were only 200 feet above the ground. After a final burst of fire from James, the Albatros crashed between Hamel and Cerisy just inside the German lines.

The next five days were marred by heavy rains, and reconnaissance was possible only at intervals. Many of the enemy's batteries were changing ground, dummies being left in the old positions for the British to fire at. Most of these moves were noted by the aeroplanes. The Australian Corps, using every stratagem to hide its preparations, ordered spasmodic firing to be continued upon the abandoned German

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<sup>5</sup> The firing of these balloons was witnessed from the racecourse at Allonville, where the 4th Australian Division was holding a race-meeting, by a crowd of many thousands, including the commanders of the Fourth Army and the Australian Corps and most of the divisional and brigade commanders. Major Blake writes—"I think this was the occasion of the first making of a bet from the air. One of the machines on its way to the line dropped a message bag in front of the judge's box in which many of the above-mentioned generals were located. It was addressed to me and handed to me by the army commander, who had visions of some urgent information being received from the line. On opening the bag it contained 150 francs and a message—'Put 150 francs on Major ——'s mare.'"

gun-positions in order to persuade the enemy that his deception was successful. Some machines of No. 3 Squadron were ordered to watch closely the activity of Australian artillery, infantry, and other traffic, in order that the corps staff might judge whether those movements might disclose anything to German observation. The airmen were also required to fly along roads over bodies of Allied troops, practising the rapid identification of units against the days when this identification would be of greatest importance. The excitement of all arms within the Australian area was rising to a high pitch, and, though none doubted of victory in the coming attack, the burden of all instructions was that assurance must be made doubly and trebly sure.

The penultimate day arrived. No work was done by any troops which could be rested, and, though a few machines flew over the lines on patrol, in the main the squadron spent the day in learning the intricate duties for the morrow. "A" Flight was to carry out artillery-patrols, "B" Flight counter-attack patrols, and "C" Flight contact-patrols with the assaulting infantry. Briefly, the artillery machines were to call down fire on every unengaged enemy battery observed to be in action. The counter-attack machines were to signal any and every enemy infantry concentration, and, after wirelessly such signals, to confirm the location by flying straight towards the centre of a threatened counter-attack, discharging a red flare for the guidance of the infantry. All enemy movements were to be recorded as far as possible, and messages were to be dropped at division and corps headquarters and at army report-centres. The contact-patrol airmen were required to memorise a special simple system of letter-code identifying all battalions; to recognise the positions reached by the advancing infantry from flares,<sup>6</sup> metal discs, and rifles laid parallel across tops of trenches—all these signs being given from the ground on the call of Klaxon horns from the pilots above—and to report in messages dropped at nearest brigade headquarters the position of the attacking line. "A" and "B" Flights were to carry phosphorus-bombs and drop them along an appointed line near Cerisy on the left flank of the advance, in order to obscure by the smoke German

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<sup>6</sup> See note at end of chapter.

observation from the Morlancourt Ridge. A forward central wireless station was set up near Aubigny for the reception of any aeroplane-casualty signals, and for the constant testing of the wireless apparatus carried by all machines so fitted. The most careful recognition of the attacking units was demanded, so that, in the event of a "break through," no bombs might be dropped by mistake on Allied troops. The perusal of the battle-orders for the aeroplanes and every other arm engaged in the attack affords a fascinating insight into both the machinery of modern battle and its scientific employment.

In the event the airmen saw little of the opening of the attack. From the moment of "zero" (4.20 a.m.) till nearly 10 o'clock in the forenoon fog assisted the artifice of the smoke-screens on the Somme in hiding all the conflict in the valleys and copses between Cerisy and Warfusée-Abancourt and on the flat plateau of Bayonvillers. The fog was so thick that for a time six R.E.8's were deemed to be lost. They subsequently returned from forced landings at various villages near the aerodrome. The infantry attack, however, met with little or no difficulty. A lifting of the fog enabled contact-patrols to locate the line at 10 a.m. and 11.30. So swift and complete was the advance that the artillery and counter-attack machines had very little of their contemplated work to do. The German batteries were smashed or overrun. The German infantry delivered no counter-attack, for the simple reason that its reserves were rounded up and captured in great masses, while, by the wonderful work of the armoured cars, directing local staffs were either made prisoners or driven in hasty flight from headquarters.

The British air force secured as complete a control of the air over the battle as the infantry secured upon the ground. When the fog cleared, German airmen came out to fight, but were nearly everywhere subdued by British scouts, and few hostile machines attacked the low-flying R.E.8's. There were inevitable exceptions. Gould-Taylor and Thomson near Proyart, carried on three fleeting combats, twice with small scout formations, and once with two Hannoveranner two-seaters. British scouts were at hand, and the enemy attacked with no

heart. Lieutenants H. S. Foale<sup>7</sup> and Sewell, on contact-patrol near La Flaque cross-roads about noon, attacked two enemy scouts seen to be engaging the Australian infantry, and shot down one in flames. Lieutenants McKenna and R. W. Kirkwood<sup>8</sup> shortly afterwards beat off a series of attacks by two Halberstadts at the same place. One contact-patrol machine—Lieutenants E. J. Bice<sup>9</sup> and J. E. Chapman<sup>10</sup> (observer)—was lost; it was attacked by nine Fokker biplanes near Mericourt about noon and shot down, both officers being killed. With the continuation of the attack next day—chiefly on the right flank—many more enemy airmen appeared over the battle area. No. 3 Squadron fought several indecisive combats with Fokker biplane scouts; McKenna and Kirkwood attacked and destroyed a German two-seater at Chipilly.

Every machine engaged the enemy on the ground with bombs and machine-gun fire as opportunity offered. The enemy was in desperate straits to reinforce his broken line south of the Somme, and that this line was spared further immediate smashing was due mainly to the fact that the British advance was arrested on the difficult ridge-position north of the river. From this quarter the Australian left flank—bent back along the river—was much worried by hostile artillery-fire. In the afternoon of August 9th, Gould-Taylor and Thomson specially reconnoitred that front; they located a number of batteries in action around and west of Bray, and directed upon them a fire which had the desired silencing effect. Next day the 4th Australian Division took over a sector on the northern bank of the Somme, thus putting the Australian Corps astride of the river valley, and adding the German artillery area about Bray to the sphere of activity of No. 3 Squadron.

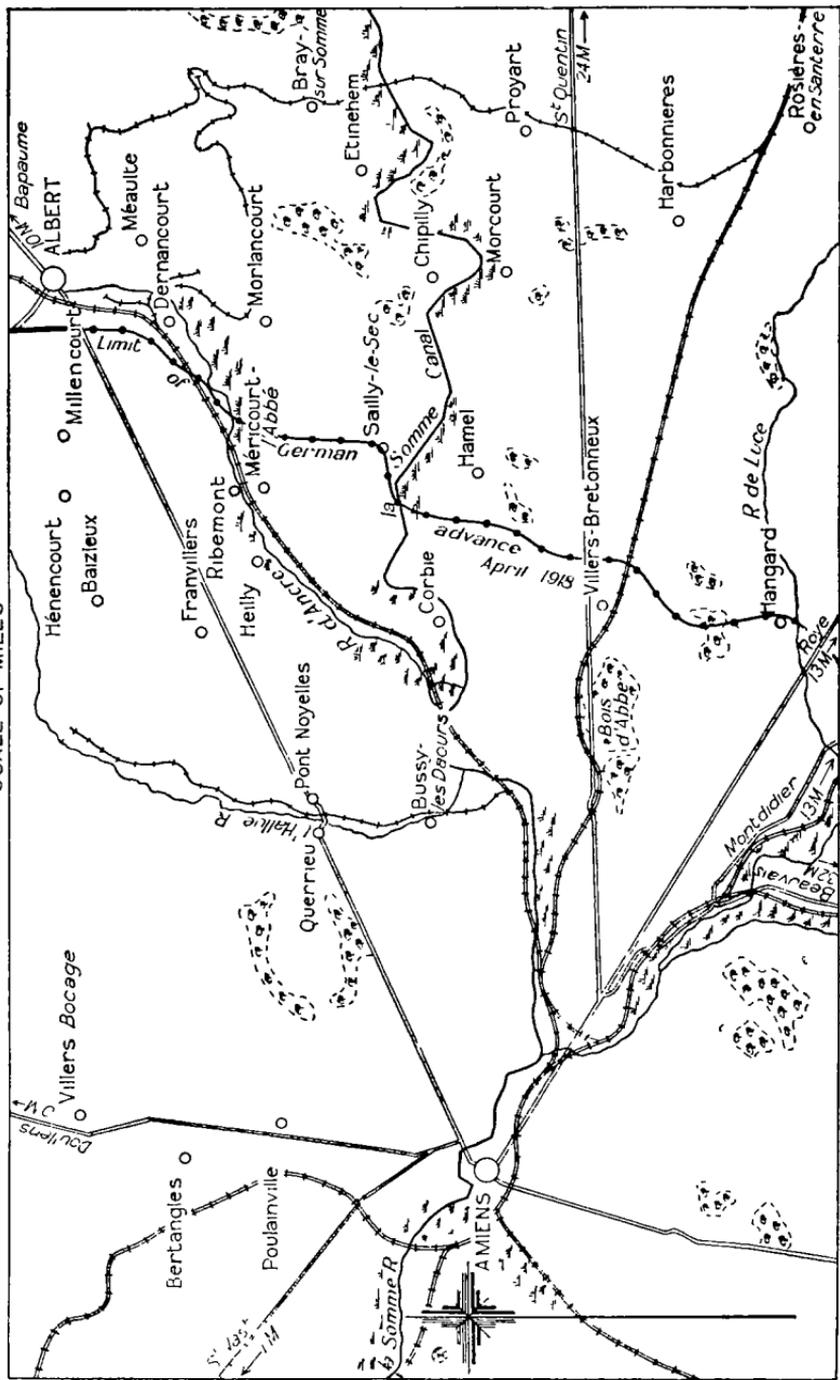
Both flanks of the corps front had now to be cleared of obstinate German resistance, and there occurred some hot

<sup>7</sup> Lieut. H. S. Foale; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Farmer; of Shackleton, W. Aust.; b. Adelaide, 24 Aug., 1898.

<sup>8</sup> Lieut. R. W. Kirkwood; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry and Signal Services). Motor Driver; of Launceston, Tas., b. Launceston, 9 Feb., 1895.

<sup>9</sup> Lieut. E. J. Bice, M.C.; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Marine engineer; of Canterbury, Melbourne; b. East Melbourne, 9 Nov., 1892. Killed in action, 8 Aug., 1918.

<sup>10</sup> Lieut. J. E. Chapman; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Blacksmith and wheelwright; of Bowenvale, Vic.; b. Bairnsdale, Vic., 3 Feb., 1895. Killed in action, 8 Aug., 1918.



VILLIERS-BRETONNEUX REGION, SHOWING AREA OF OPERATIONS OF No. 3 AUSTRALIAN SQUADRON, APRIL-AUGUST, 1918

fighting, particularly about Lihons on the right and in the bends of the river west of Bray on the left. While these flank positions were being secured, the line in general was resting and collecting for a further assault. These days, however, were strenuous enough in the air, and patrols from No. 3 Squadron were constantly on the watch for enemy counter-attacks, or for signs of a general retreat, which was also suspected. While scout formations opposed each other above, the lower-flying reconnaissance machines found ground-fire growing increasingly dangerous. On August 10th Lieutenants J. L. Smith<sup>11</sup> and O. G. Witcomb<sup>12</sup> (observer) were shot down by infantry machine-gun defence; the pilot, though wounded in the foot, made a good landing near Vauvillers. Next day another R.E.8 was damaged by ground-fire, and had to land near Morcourt. The strain on the squadron was very heavy, for, besides the duty of accompanying all advances, its services were required for artillery work before each attack and for photographing the line subsequently reached. Brigades and divisions, as well as corps, were coming to rely more and more upon the airmen for confirmation of all reports. The continuous demands made upon No. 3 Squadron during the first four days of the August offensive exhausted all hands—airmen and mechanics alike. Every threat of hostile counter-attack called forth patrols, carrying bombs, to judge the truth of the rumour and to locate the danger. Every "obscure" part of the line, where doubt of the position of outposts had to be cleared up, demanded a low air reconnaissance of that sector. Batteries moving forward must be registered again on new targets. Fires and explosions behind the German lines might be the prelude to retirement at any moment. Any pronounced bombardment by the hostile guns prompted a fresh demand from the forward infantry for counter-action, and a patrol from No. 3 Squadron had then to go out to locate the enemy batteries concerned. The great part which the airmen played in securing the victory can be fully appreciated only by recognising the demand for their assistance from every unit on the ground below.

<sup>11</sup> Lieut. J. L. Smith, D F C.; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Signal Services). Electrician; of Sydney; b. Darlinghurst, Sydney, 24 Nov., 1893.

<sup>12</sup> Lieut. O. G. Witcomb; No. 3 Sqn. (previously A A. Pay Corps). Bank clerk; of Port Wakefield, S. Aust.; b. Yacka, S. Aust., 28 Dec., 1893.

The important air-work on this front called in temporarily a strong force from the Australian No. 2 and No. 4 Squadrons from the northern front in Flanders to reinforce British fighting-scouts in the Fourth Army. On August 12th twelve machines from each squadron flew to Allonville to operate thence as a base. At 9.30 a.m. Phillipps and Cole (No. 2) and Cobby and King (No. 4) led their full force across the lines. The Camels found no Germans to fight, but the S.E.5's, flying in a circus with two flights of British Camels, encountered at 11 a.m. seven Fokker biplanes 15,000 feet over Licourt (east of Chaulnes). The British Camels attacked five Fokkers and started them downward. Cole's flight, remaining above, engaged the upper two Fokkers, of which Wellwood destroyed one, after chasing it down to 2,000 feet. Phillipps's flight joined the pursuit of the five engaged with the lower formations of the circus; Lieutenant F. C. M. Mills<sup>18</sup> shot down one out of control, and an opponent which Phillipps engaged in combat fell to pieces in the air. The hunting, however, was not so good as had been expected, and the enemy was plainly unwilling to come out and engage the force which the British airmen paraded. Next day the Australian scout squadrons repeated their sweep. The early patrol from No. 4 Squadron again saw no enemy in the sky; that of No. 2 met six Fokkers, of which Mills and Follett each shot down one out of control. In the afternoon the patrols were no luckier. King's flight found a solitary Albatros two-seater west of Péronne, and all six Camels fell on it like a hungry pack and destroyed it. The results obtained, however, were not worth the force expended, and by August 14th the two Australian scout squadrons were again confining their attentions to their allotted area on the Lys.

The advance on the Somme was to be resumed, and on August 16th the whole of the Australian Corps front was again photographed by No. 3 Squadron. The attack began on August 22nd, on the British front north of the Australians. Only the extreme left flank of the Australians participated, but that was enough to demand a heavy day's work from No. 3 Squadron. Contact-patrols were out early and

<sup>18</sup> Lieut F. C. Markham Mills, No. 2 Sqn (previously A.A.S.C.). Engineering student; of Parramatta, Sydney; b Tuena, N.S.W., 20 Oct., 1893. Died of illness, 18 Dec., 1918.

established the new line by 9 o'clock. Matheson and C. T. Brown (observer) located twelve enemy batteries in action behind Bray and sent back zone-calls against all of them.<sup>14</sup> While directing the fire of British heavy guns on one of these positions, Matheson attacked a Halberstadt two-seater below him. The enemy dodged and withdrew, but soon afterwards returned, was again attacked, and was shot down east of Suzanne. Two other R.E.8's located sixteen active German batteries—eight about Maricourt, north of the Bray area, and eight around Dompierre, south of it. These also the British guns bombarded by wireless direction from the air. After the success of the first infantry advance, Grigson and H. B. James, returning from counter-attack patrol, and having seen no signs of hostile infantry concentration, observed another Halberstadt two-seater flying along the British line northward towards Bray and shooting off white rockets. Grigson pursued the German from Chuignolles across the river to "Ceylon Wood." Here a final burst of fire from James appeared to explode the German airman's supply of rockets; the Halberstadt gave forth a lively fireworks-display and then crashed near Ceylon Wood. Three other R.E.8's fought indecisive combats during the day, including a splendid running defence by Lieutenants L. P. Chase<sup>15</sup> and J. P. Jeffers<sup>16</sup> against six enemy two-seaters, from whom they escaped at length near the British balloon-line.

Next morning, August 23rd, the British advance was extended south of the Somme, and at dawn the 1st Australian Division attacked the hilly and wooded position about Chuignes. The Germans were thrown out of strong natural defences on hills across a wide gully, and at the end of the day the enemy had suffered a loss of ground which made his further retreat certain. At the opening of the infantry assault machines from No. 3 Squadron dropped phosphorus-bombs to make a smoke-screen about the rise above Chuignes

<sup>14</sup> These wireless calls were sent back to C.I.B. (Central Information Bureau), a special forward field-station, which passed them on at once to units concerned—corps headquarters, infantry, artillery, flying corps, the tank headquarters, or all of them, as required. It was a nearly perfect parallel to the army's eyes registering to the army's brain

<sup>15</sup> Lieut. L. P. Chase, A.F.C.; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Station manager; of Skipton, Vic.; b. Fitzroy, Melbourne, 3 June, 1889.

<sup>16</sup> Lieut. J. P. Jeffers, No. 3 Sqn. Mechanic; of Brunswick, Melbourne; b. Cosgrove, Vic., 1892. Killed in action, 19 Sept., 1918.

village, and thereafter patrols re-enacted in their specially-defined duties the parts which they had learnt in the Villers-Bretonneux attack. The airmen worked from an advanced landing-ground at Glisy, between Corbie and Amiens. Gould-Taylor and Thomson, on the first artillery-patrol, between 5 and 8.15 a.m., ranged the whole front from Chaulnes on the south to Suzanne on the north, and signalled back the locations of ten active batteries and the presence in the offing of thirty hostile aircraft. Descending upon one German battery behind Ceylon Wood, they dropped six bombs, then continued on a low sweep and fired 900 machine-gun rounds into the enemy's trenches. At 8 a.m. T. L. Baillieu and Sewell, on contact-patrol, sketched the advancing line in the Chuignes valley. Lieutenants F. M. Lock<sup>17</sup> and Mart also reconnoitred the line at that hour, but were shot down by machine-gun fire from the ground and landed near Vauvillers. Meanwhile two British R.E.8's, as before, dropped ammunition-supplies for the attacking line. Matheson and C. T. Brown sent back wireless calls against six enemy batteries, bombed Foucaucourt village, fired 200 rounds into horse-transport on the road near by, and attacked and put to flight two Halberstadt two-seaters after a long fight. Lieutenants J. K. Robertson<sup>18</sup> and C. W. Gray,<sup>19</sup> on counter-attack patrol between 9.20 a.m. and 12.20 p.m., swept the enemy back areas for signs of German infantry reserves, but, finding none, flew back and machine-gunned the front-line garrisons resisting the attack on the right. McKenna and Heslop discovered significant easterly train- and road-transport traffic behind Foucaucourt and Estrées. They dropped bombs and fired 700 rounds into trains and horse-waggons. During the afternoon, while Australian infantry were climbing the Chuignes ridge, No. 3 Squadron sent out a formation of five machines to attack any hostile infantry or artillery retiring or assembling for counter-attack. Patrols in the evening noted burning supply-dumps and other symptoms of a possible

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<sup>17</sup> Lieut. F. M. Lock; No. 3 Sqn. Postal assistant; of Port MacDonnell, S. Aust.; b. Allandale East, S. Aust., 17 March, 1895

<sup>18</sup> Lieut. J. K. Robertson; No. 3 Sqn. Grazier; b. Essendon, Melbourne, 9 Nov. 1889.

<sup>19</sup> Lieut. C. W. Gray; No. 3 Sqn. Of North Carlton, Melbourne; b. Ararat, Vic., 6 June, 1891.

German retirement, and, at 6 o'clock Lieutenants S. K. Lavers<sup>20</sup> and G. S. Bell<sup>21</sup> attacked a German two-seater and shot it down to a forced landing at Soyécourt. During the next two days it seemed clear that the enemy was preparing for a general retreat and was firing off his remaining ammunition before pulling out his batteries. By the morning of August 25th some withdrawal was discovered north of the Somme, and Australian infantry were seen by the airmen to be leaving their trenches and moving forward across the open. Fires and explosions began to mark abandoned villages and dumps. Three machines late that afternoon reconnoitred the German rear areas as far back as the Somme bend at Péronne, and reported all that region apparently deserted and devoid of movement, though machine-gun fire from many places indicated that rear-guards at least were occupying the country. The enemy's retreat was skilfully conducted, and his concealment of it by day was masterly. On August 26th and 27th there was noted stray movement of traffic, all eastward. At 12.30 p.m. on the 27th a large collection of horse-waggons and horses was noticed in a valley north-west of Cléry, and Wackett and Lieutenant M. R. Shelley<sup>22</sup> (observer), who discovered this target, immediately called down artillery-fire on it. In addition a raid of five R.E.8's devastated the horse-lines in that valley under bombs and machine-gun fire. The unhappy fate of this transport park was probably due to disregard of orders for concealment of moving units, and was doubtless emphasised by the German staff as an object-lesson in the results of disobedience to instructions. To the enemy's credit it must be said that the airmen secured few such opportunities during the German retirement to the Hindenburg Line.

In the afternoon of the 27th, although the infantry still found resistance stubborn, the German withdrawal was beyond doubt. Coloured lights in the hostile lines on the right front made the airmen suspicious. Gould-Taylor and Thomson had seen several small bodies of horse-transport on various

<sup>20</sup> Lieut. S. K. Lavers, No 3 Sqn. (previously A.A.M.C.). Audit clerk; of Hunter's Hill, Sydney; b Kogarah, Sydney, 17 May, 1895.

<sup>21</sup> Lieut. G. S. Bell, No 3 Sqn. (previously A.A.M.C.). Clerk; of Melbourne; b Leith, Scotland, 2 July, 1890.

<sup>22</sup> Lieut. M. R. Shelley; No 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Clerk; of Hunter's Hill, Sydney, b. Gladesville, Sydney, 6 Aug., 1895.

roads marching east, and the enemy's aeroplane scouts were out in some numbers to oppose British reconnaissance. Five Fokker biplanes swooped down upon Gould-Taylor's machine near Assevillers, but the Australians, after skilful manœuvring, defeated them and destroyed one, which crashed outside the village.

Of the general work of the squadron's patrols during the subsequent days Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash<sup>23</sup> writes: "Contact-patrols were maintained throughout every hour of daylight. Difficult as it was to identify the positions reached by our leading troops during an organised battle, where their approximate positions and ultimate objective lines were known beforehand, it was doubly so when no guide whatever existed as to the probable extent of each day's advance, or as to the amount of resistance likely to be encountered at different parts of the front. Yet it was under just these circumstances that rapid and reliable information as to the progress of the various elements of our front-line troops was more important than ever, and no means of obtaining such information was so expeditious as the contact aeroplane."<sup>24</sup>

On August 29th the whole Allied line advanced, with the German rear-guards retiring in front of it, and in the evening of that day the van of the Australian pursuit had come up against a stiffened defence of the enemy, standing to fight again, in the strong position at the Somme bend at Péronne and on the high ground about Bouchavesnes and Mont St. Quentin.

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*Note.*—Writing of the flare system, General Monash in his book, *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, says "these flares, on being lit, gave out a dense cloud of coloured smoke, easily distinguishable from a moderate height. The contact aeroplane, which would carry coloured streamers so that the infantry could identify it as flying on that particular duty, would, when ready to observe, blow its horn, and thereupon the foremost infantry would light their flares. It was a method of inter-communication between air and ground, which, after a little practice, came to be well understood and intelligently carried out." (pp. 171-172.)

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<sup>23</sup> General Sir John Monash, G.C.M.G., K.C.B., V.D. Commanded 3rd Aust. Div., 1916/18, Aust. Corps, 1918. Director-General, Repat. and Demob. Dept., London, 1918/19; Chairman of Commissioners and General Manager, State Electricity Commission of Victoria, 1919/31. Of Melbourne; b. Dudley-street, Flagstaff Hill, City of Melbourne, 27 June, 1865. Died, 8 Oct., 1931.

<sup>24</sup> *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*, p. 171.

Major Blake (commanding No. 3 Squadron) comments:—"The flare system, taking it generally, did not work well, and many and various devices were tried both experimentally and in practice as a substitute. The two alternatives mentioned were the most satisfactory. The infantry objected to the flares that the lighting of them disclosed the position not only to our own airmen but to the enemy's also, and that the result was to hasten hostile artillery-fire on the new line. Many infantrymen refused to light flares when called upon to do so, though the Australian infantry were generally better in this respect than others. In the later stages of the great advance, machines generally found it necessary to descend low enough to distinguish the cloth of the Australian uniform from the field-grey of the German. As this was often not possible at a greater height than 200 feet, contact-patrol work was very risky."