

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BATTLES IN THE HINDENBURG LINE.

THE battle of Mont St. Quentin differed from all other Australian attacks in the last Somme campaign. It was perhaps largely a gamble. It was certainly a test of sheer morale as between Australian troops and the Germans. The enemy had retreated disconsolately from a series of smashing defeats; his whole line was going back; the Allies were at last plainly on the winning side. When, therefore, the Germans stood at Péronne and Mont St. Quentin, the Australians determined to assault immediately and without detailed preparation, in the attempt to keep the enemy on the run. The approach for the attack was difficult, and consisted solely of the narrow road north of the Somme running into Cléry village. This had to serve three divisions—in itself no light risk.

The Australians were outside Cléry at evening on August 29th with the hill-position of Mont St. Quentin looking down at them along an open gradual incline, cut obliquely by an awkward gully. A second and nearer natural bastion, also in German hands, the Bouchavesnes Spur, overshadowed the immediate left front. To assault this whole position an entire division had to make a crossing of the Somme from south to north in sight of the enemy. Local bridges were blown to pieces and only those some miles in rear could be guaranteed by the engineers. The leading portion of the 2nd Australian Division crossed the river on August 30th and with some difficulty reached Cléry, from which point the attack was to begin at dawn next morning.

During August 29th much attention was directed away from the coming battle area and rather to the south of Péronne, where the enemy was encouraged to believe that the crossing would be made. Visibility made reconnaissance difficult on August 30th, but patrols from No. 3 Squadron persisted devotedly in the location of enemy batteries and machine-gun positions on the hills north of Péronne. One counter-attack machine—Lieutenants J. J. Pengilley¹ and Witcomb (observer)

¹ Lieut. J. J. Pengilley; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Station manager; of Quirindi, N.S.W.; b. Yarraman Park, Quirindi, 31 Oct., 1894.

—flew as low as 300 feet east of the Somme between Brie and Halle with the object of drawing machine-gun fire in order both to locate the enemy's defences and to note down any passable bridge remaining. In the evening Francis and Sturgeon (observer) and Grigson and H. B. James marked down a large number of hostile batteries from flashes behind Mont St. Quentin, Péronne, and Le Mesnil. When the attack of the 5th Australian Infantry Brigade was launched on August 31st, contact- and artillery-patrols, handicapped by wet weather and low clouds, by a deficiency of close reconnaissance beforehand, and by the necessity of distinguishing the infantry with certainty, were obliged to fly very low on their work, and threw themselves valiantly into the gamble of the day. All had narrow escapes, and it is surprising that only one was shot down. The pilot of this machine, Lieutenant G. E. Kilburn,² was unhurt, and the observer, Lieutenant W. P. Moore,³ only slightly wounded. This R.E.8 very gallantly fought thirteen attacking enemy scouts, and pilot and observer fired 200 rounds at them before their engine was hit and the machine was forced to descend—fortunately within the Australian lines.

That first day's fighting ended in the taking, and the losing again, of the coveted central position on Mont St. Quentin. It was, however, a case of *reculer pour mieux sauter* on the following day, and the artillery machines registered many more hostile batteries for the Australian guns against the second attempt. The R.E.8's were unable to accompany that second attack (on September 1st) owing to heavy rain, and no air observation was possible before 8 a.m. About that hour two contact-patrols reported the assaulting line (6th and 14th Brigades) along the western edge of Mont St. Quentin and in the western part of Péronne. The airmen had to fly very low owing to the bad light, and most machines came back riddled with bullet-holes. Other special patrols kept watch on the areas east of Péronne and the Somme and directed silencing fire on batteries south of Le Mesnil. Visibility improved in the afternoon, and, after Mont St. Quentin had been finally

² Lieut. G. E. Kilburn; No. 3 Sqn. (previously A.A.S.C.). Motor mechanic; of Armadale, Melbourne; b. East Melbourne, 11 April, 1890.

³ Lieut. W. P. Moore; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Engineers). Engineer; of Childers, Q'land; b. Mt. Shamrock, Q'land, 4 May, 1890.

taken, two R.E.8's photographed the whole corps front line from St. Christ to Feuillaucourt. A number of enemy batteries behind Péronne were observed and bombarded during the afternoon, and at least three were seen to be damaged and silenced. Every machine, whatever its duty, bombed batteries or dumps, and machine-gunned forward trenches, to assist the heavy fight in which the infantry were engaged.

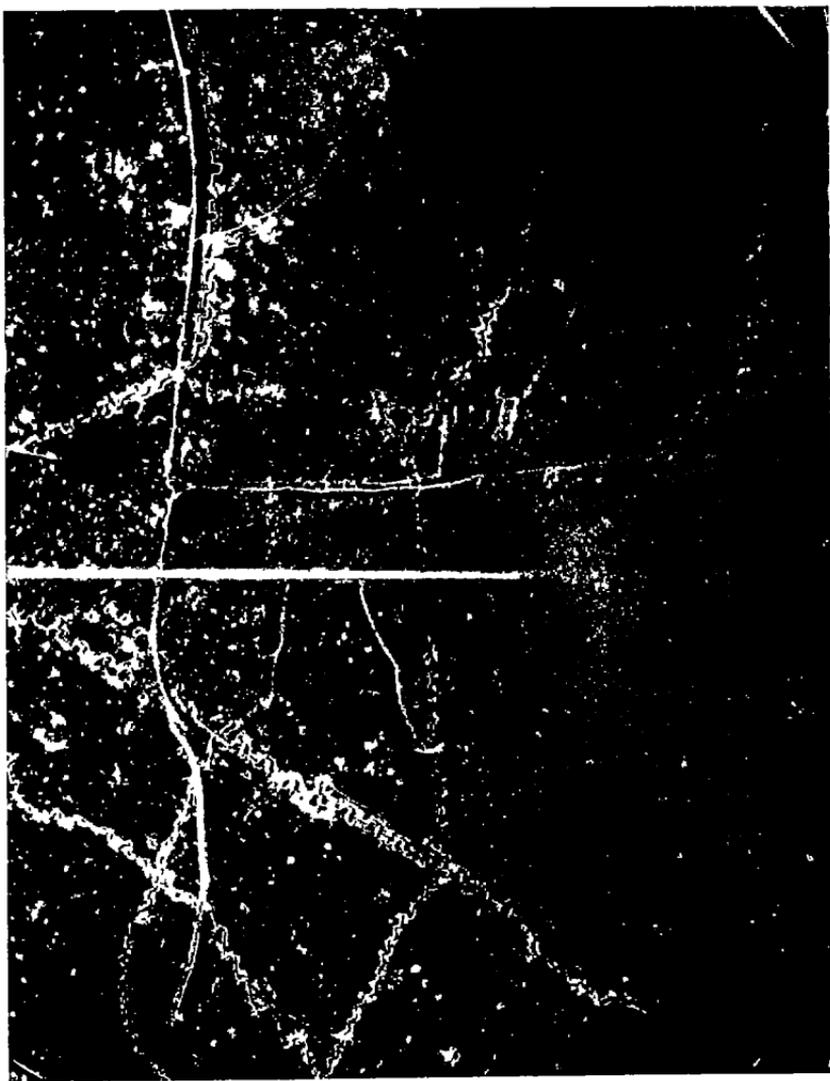
The battle on the north-eastern outskirts of Péronne continued with unabated fury next morning (September 2nd), and German airmen were out in great force. Doubtless their object was to prevent reconnaissance of their rear areas. The enemy was preparing to retreat again, since the loss of his defensive position at Péronne was now only a question of time. The first morning patrol from No. 3 Squadron returned with the report that great activity of the enemy in the air had hindered their work. Such a report deserves to be recorded, for rarely did No. 3 Squadron make such an admission. One large German scout formation hovered over the river-reaches south of Péronne and another east of Péronne over Buire and the Cologne River. Between 7.50 and 11 a.m. McKenna and Heslop, on artillery-patrol, carried on four separate engagements with German two-seaters about Doingt and Courcelles. They drove off one of these opponents twice in successive encounters and shot another down out of control. T. L. Baillieu and Sewell, on contact-patrol at the same time and place, had three fights; in one of them an attacking Fokker scout was hit and forced to land near Tincourt. The wireless calls sent back by these pilots brought out British scout formations, which cleared the air. At 12.30 p.m. Captain S. G. Brearley⁴ and Lieutenant E. A. Devlin Hamilton⁵ (observer) located from flares the Australian infantry line in the northern sector. Several patrols in the afternoon saw the dust of retreating columns along roads behind Roisel and Bussu, and at dusk the Australian infantry line was seen to be occupying enemy trenches well beyond Mont St. Quentin and in the stubbornly contested eastern Péronne ramparts. Francis and Sturgeon called down artillery-fire on eight active enemy batteries along

⁴ Capt. S. G. Brearley, D.F.C.; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Fitter apprentice, of Perth, W. Aust.; b. Geelong, Vic., 9 Jan, 1894.

⁵ Lieut. E. A. Devlin Hamilton, D.F.C.; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Light Horse) Student; b. Oct., 1894.



AN OBSERVATION BALLOON OVER BRITISH HEAVY ARTILLERY, MORCOURT,
25TH AUGUST, 1918

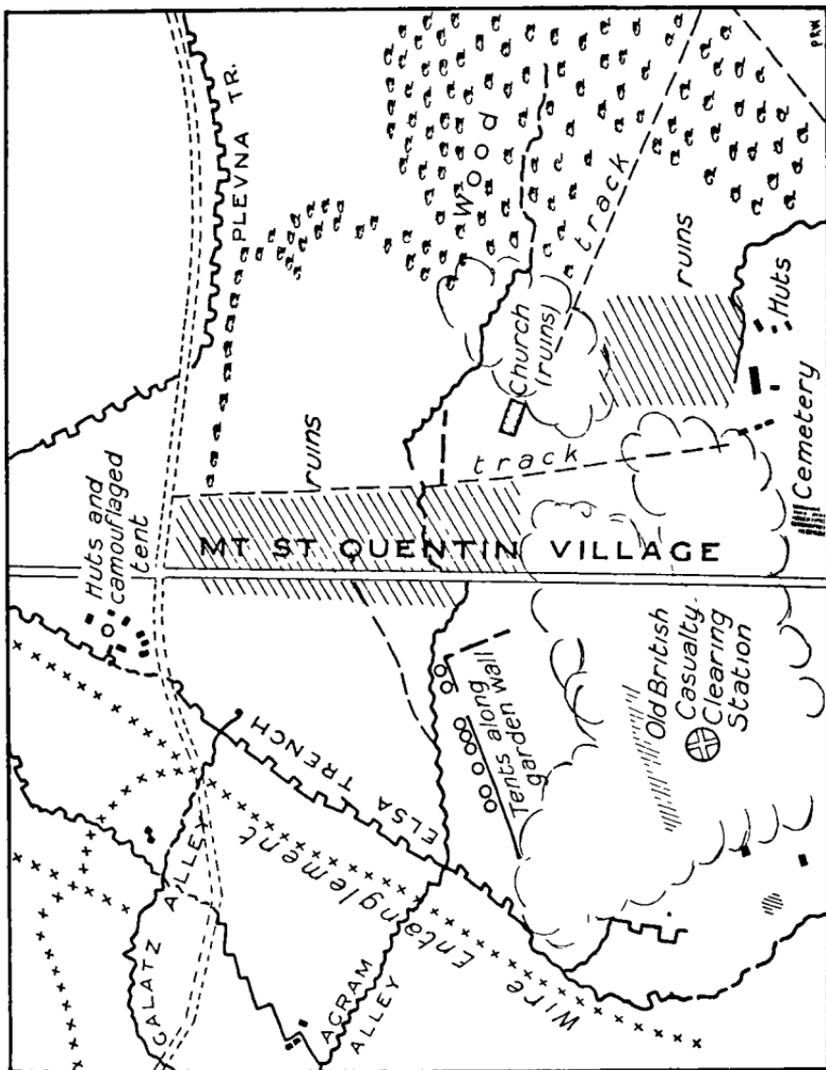


AN AEROPLANE PHOTOGRAPH OF MONT ST QUENTIN, EARLY IN SEPTEMBER, 1918

The view is looking north. The Australian attack came from the west. The village can be seen through the haze to the right of the centre of the picture. The road from Péronne to Bapaume (running straight up the centre of the picture) crosses the mount a little west (i.e., to the left) of its summit

Lent by Lieut J. A. Scambourne, R.A.F. (then of No. 2 Sqdn. A.T.C.)

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the line Tincourt—Mons-en-Chaussée, which were covering the German infantry's retirement from the captured position. One battery at least was seen to be destroyed—explosions occurring in three gun-pits—and another was silenced by eight rounds in fifteen minutes. The evening landscape was pricked out here and there by fires about Cartigny and Le Mesnil, some caused by heavy shelling in emphasis of the victory, some showing where the enemy was firing his stores in preparation for retreat.

That retreat was hastened after further infantry attacks by the Australian Corps east of Mont St. Quentin on September 3rd, and on the 4th and 5th the enemy was plainly retiring towards the Hindenburg Line. During September 5th all air-patrols fired large quantities of machine-gun ammunition into retreating bodies of enemy infantry and transport. German batteries which had no time to fire off their ammunition pulled out their guns and exploded their remaining supplies. Every village was burning between the little Cologne and Omignon Rivers; the airmen no longer troubled to locate and count all the fires they saw. Along every road small "living targets" presented themselves for aeroplane machine-gun fire. The German Army's mainstay in retreat was always its machine-gunnery, and the small rear-guard of this picked corps was often difficult to locate in the abandoned country. Here and there No. 3 Squadron's patrols were able to mark them down for the pursuing infantry's guidance. Otherwise the enemy was making for the Hindenburg Line as fast as he could, though, thanks to his machine-gunnery, in good order. His aeroplanes, too, were active during the retreat, principally upon reconnaissance. They did not attempt to do what the British machines did in the way of heavy "ground-strafting" during the German advance in March.

That so many of the combats fought by No. 3 Squadron were indecisive was due to the want of speed for effective chasing on the part of the R.E.8's and to the reluctance of enemy two-seaters, as a rule, to stay and fight. During the enemy's retreat to the Hindenburg Line his reconnaissance two-seaters were numerous in the sky, but most of the engagements with them were short and distant affairs. On September

5th, however, Lieutenants A. R. Macdonald⁶ and D. Ellis⁷ (observer) fought a long duel with an obstinate Halberstadt over Tincourt, and after the Australian observer had fired 500 rounds the German was forced down to a landing near Roisel. On the following evening Lieutenants G. W. Hope⁸ and G. E. Gamble,⁹ while returning from artillery-reconnaissance, met a two-seater over Roisel, dived at it, and crashed it near that village.

The airmen on September 6th and 7th over the Roisel plains looked down on an inspiring spectacle. The whole army was moving forward in quick pursuit of the German rear-guards—light horse and cyclists in advance; infantry in skirmishing waves and little columns of sections, and vast numbers of other columns in rear; the roads crowded with guns moving up, supply-transport, and engineers' repair-trains. Forward of this array of the pursuit wheeled the airmen, some already examining the Hindenburg Line defences, others flying lower to reconnoitre centres of resistance chosen by enemy rear-guards west of that line. No. 3 Squadron's machines were flying constantly forth and back over the front, and dropping messages regularly to the skirmishing line to acquaint it with the positions of German machine-gun pockets. There was little artillery shooting, for the guns of each side were in motion.

The squadron took advantage of the relief from fighting to move up from its now far-distant aerodrome north of Amiens to Proyart. It had hardly begun to lay out a new aerodrome there when the rapid advance placed Proyart also too far in rear, and a few days later preparations were begun for another forward move to Bouvincourt, south of Roisel. The aerodrome was set up in Proyart on September 6th, and at Bouvincourt on the 21st.

During September 8th and 9th the advance slowed down against the stiffening resistance of the enemy in the old British front-line trenches of March, 1918, and the so-called

⁶ Lieut. A. R. Macdonald; No. 3 Sqn. (previously A.A.S.C.). Accountant; of Brisbane, b. New Farm, Brisbane, 15 June, 1890.

⁷ Lieut. D. Ellis; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Student, of Geelong, Vic., b. Hampdon, Terang, Vic., 3 March, 1894.

⁸ Lieut. G. W. Hope. No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Merchant; of Melbourne; b. Perth, W. Aust., 4 May, 1890.

⁹ Lieut. G. E. Gamble. No. 3 Sqn. (previously Machine Gun Corps). Fitter apprentice; of Trentham, Vic.; b. Trentham, 5 Feb., 1893.

Hindenburg Outpost-Line. The outpost-line lay on that high ground over the St. Quentin Canal which forms the watershed between the Somme and the Scheldt (French l'Escaut). The British soldier always believed that the weather favoured the enemy, and it was curious that, as soon as the retreating Germans reached the ground on which they were to make their last stand, the fine weather changed to rain-storms and high winds. This stormy spell may not have greatly affected the immediate plans of the Allied Command, and the pursuit was in any case slowing down against another defensive position; but mud increased the labours of guns and supplies going up over the roads which the enemy had blown up in places as he left them behind. From September 10th to 13th hardly any flying was possible beyond a few patrols in one or two fairer intervals; on September 12th there was no flying at all. During one such hazardous patrol on September 11th, while flying low, T. L. Baillieu and Sewell were both wounded by ground machine-gun fire, but managed to land their machine near Bouvincourt.

The sun came out again on September 14th, and the R.E.8's resumed the old and ever-renewed business of photographing the corps fronts and locating the gun-positions, tracks, and dumps of the enemy's new defences against further infantry assault. British artillery-fire was directed at heavy traffic on the enemy's roads through Bellicourt and at points of considerable activity (diagnosed as the preparing of gun-positions) behind Le Verguier. Lieutenants H. R. Heathcote¹⁰ and H. B. James (observer), on artillery-patrol at 6 p.m., were attacked by a formation of Fokker scouts over the lines west of Gricourt, but gallantly fought off the enemy and forced one of the attackers to land near St. Quentin. The German front was thickly defended by machine-guns, and the R.E.8's located many of them by flying low. On September 15th artillery machines signalled back to our guns the positions of seventeen hostile batteries. The same work was continued next day, and the heavy artillery was ranged on new German gun-positions, cross-roads, and various selected strong-points. A violent thunder-storm, accompanied by a cyclonic gale, swept over

¹⁰ Lieut. H. R. Heathcote; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Engineers). Electrical engineer; of Parkville, Melbourne; b. West Melbourne, 11 Jan., 1895.

both armies in the dark hours of the morning on September 17th. No. 3 Squadron's hangars were torn to ribbons and many machines were severely damaged. The 18th was the day arranged for the attack on the Hindenburg Outpost-Line, and the squadron mechanics were compelled to work hard all day on the 17th to repair the damage against the morrow. It speaks volumes for the devotion of all hands that not only were all damaged machines repaired in the time allowed, but the squadron was able to maintain at least one machine in constant patrol of the line.¹¹

Rain fell again with the opening of the attack by the 4th and 1st Australian Divisions on September 18th. The attack began at 5.20 a.m., but with the bad weather no air work was possible before 8 o'clock. Then six machines dropped smoke-bombs about the top of the ridge to reinforce the effect of the mist. About 10 a.m., when weather and visibility had improved, Lieutenants Dimsey and R. F. C. Machin¹² (observer) located without difficulty the attacking line near the top of the ridge; but Machin was shot in the back by ground machine-gun fire while on this duty, and died instantly. Half-an-hour later Brearley and Devlin Hamilton confirmed the line as having reached the objective on the crest at all points except on the extreme flanks, and by this hour the day's attack was an assured success. The enemy accepted his defeat without question; every Australian counter-attack patrol during the day reported no signs of hostile concentration to dispute it. The evening reconnaissances located a great number of batteries beyond the canal by their flashes, especially in the Nauroy and Beaufeuoir Lines.¹³

During the late evening of September 18th, infantry of

¹¹ Major Blake comments—"Out of eighteen machines, only three remained serviceable, and these were pegged down in the open during the storm. By nightfall—twelve hours later—fifteen machines were available for duty, a wonderful effort on the part of the squadron's equipment and technical department under Captain Ross, and of the mechanics."

¹² Lieut. R. F. C. Machin; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Locomotive fitter; of Queenstown, Tas.; b. East Malvern, Melbourne, 6 July, 1896. Died of wounds, 18 Sept., 1918.

¹³ The Hindenburg Main Line, Nauroy Line, and Beaufeuoir Line faced the attackers in that order. All were part of the Hindenburg Line system, and their names were those of former prominent villages. The distances separating these lines were roughly—between the first and second 1,500 yards, and between the second and third 3,000 yards. Each was strongly fortified, as were numerous villages, farmhouses, ridges, and valleys between them. The canal line and the Nauroy Line were carried on September 29, 30, and October 1 and 2, and the Beaufeuoir Line on October 3.

the 4th Australian Division made a further attack on the extreme right and secured the crest of the ridge at a point which they had failed to reach during daylight. Next morning, in its systematic fashion, No. 3 Squadron again photographed the ridge to show the line reached by the Australian Corps along its entire front. One of the machines engaged on this work did not return, and its crew, Lieutenants J. C. Peel¹⁴ and Jeffers (observer), were never heard of again. Four machines registered no fewer than sixty-seven active hostile batteries during the afternoon and summoned counter-battery fire upon them. Thirty more gun-positions were located next day (September 20th), and, under close escort of scouts, patrols ranged for over three miles beyond the German lines photographing the Hindenburg defence system. This work completed a picture by air-photographs of both the Hindenburg and Nauroy Lines, a series which was of great value for the battle which followed. Again, on September 21st, Macdonald and Ellis flew over the rear slopes of the ridge, taking oblique photographs. That evening Francis and C. T. Brown located from flashes nineteen enemy batteries, and sent back calls for fire upon them. They repeated this performance in the evening of September 23rd.

In order to establish a required position for the coming grand attack, the British IX Corps made an advance on the right of the Australian front in the morning of September 24th, and in assistance of this operation eight R.E.8's from No. 3 Squadron dropped explosive bombs on an important enemy strong-post north of Gricourt. Lieutenants G. Pickering¹⁵ and Shelley marked down all German bridges still intact along the canal between Bellicourt and Bellenglise. Artillery machines put out of action several German heavy batteries.

About this time No. 3 Squadron received two Bristol Fighters—two-seater fighting scouts—and in the afternoon of September 25th Wackett, with Shelley as observer, and escorted by a strong scouting formation, flew one of these machines nearly six miles beyond the enemy's front line to

¹⁴ Lieut. J. C. Peel; No. 3 Sqn. Student; of Geelong, Vic; b. Tower Hill, Inverleigh, Vic, 17 April, 1894. Killed in action, 19 Sept., 1918.

¹⁵ Lieut. G. Pickering, No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Customs clerk; of Sydney; b. Musgrave Park, South Brisbane, 4 Dec., 1896. Died of illness, 21 Nov., 1918.

take photographs of the Joncourt defences.¹⁶ The performance was particularly venturesome, for the airmen flew at only 1,500 feet over powerful defences and through a hail of anti-aircraft shrapnel and machine-gun fire. The Bristol Fighter came back hit in many places, including the radiator, but with highly important photographs.

Registering of the Australian field batteries was continued on September 26th, together with constant reconnaissance of the Hindenburg Main Line on the canal, the immediate obstacle in the coming attack. The Australian Corps had in the earlier fighting captured documents showing the whole defence system of this fortified zone, and the airmen scanned the ground for any sign of new earthworks. Apparently there were none, and the enemy must have had little time to make any. A great number of gun-flashes were again marked down to be compared with battery-positions shown on these plans. Three more German batteries were bombarded by the heavy artillery under direction from the air. That evening two R.E.8's fought a sharp engagement with several Pfalz scouts over Bellenglise. Lieutenants G. M. Deans¹⁷ and T. H. Prince¹⁸ (observer), on a counter-attack patrol, were first attacked by these scouts, and in a hot duel at eighty-yards' range Prince was wounded. Nevertheless he continued shooting until the arrival of another R.E.8 caused the enemy to break off the fight

Next morning September 27th, the battle began. The Hindenburg Line was deemed to require a preliminary bombardment in the old style of 1917 before the assault should be delivered, and for the next forty-eight hours massed artillery battered the defences of the canal, shot into every village behind it, and barraged every road. As the bombardment began, the 27th American Division, holding the left of the Australian corps front,¹⁹ launched a minor preliminary attack to advance that section of the front over a thousand yards or so of stubbornly-held ground on the crest of the

¹⁶ Part of the third line of the Hindenburg system at this point

¹⁷ Lieut. G. M. Deans; No 3 Sqn. Solicitor; of Nhill, Vic.; b. Amherst, Talbot, Vic, 14 July, 1887.

¹⁸ Lieut. T. H. Prince; No. 3 Sqn (previously Engineers). Civil engineer; of Newcastle District, N.S.W., b. Homebush, N.S.W., 11 Oct., 1891.

¹⁹ The 30th and 27th American Divisions of the II American Corps (temporarily attached to the Australian Corps) were to open the attack on September 29, and the Australian Corps was then to pass through them on the first objective line and pursue the attack.

ridge, in order that the line might be formed up straight for the day of the grand assault. That minor attack was not successful. Lieutenants W. Palstra²⁰ and Devlin Hamilton, on an early contact-patrol to locate and assist the American infantry, could see nothing of the ground owing to the early morning fog and ground haze. The only thing they found was a German scout darting across in front of them soon after they had crossed the lines; the observer emptied a drum from his Lewis gun into this target and saw the enemy dive for the ground emitting much smoke. Later patrols identified some American troops on the desired line, but could get no flares in answer to signals, and German machine-gun fire directed at the airmen from the rear of these troops was not reassuring. The artillery bombardment was very heavy all day. Special bombardment-reconnaissances reported both Bellicourt and Bellenglise burning in a welter of shell-bursts. No. 3 Squadron's patrols contributed their mites to the fund of destruction by dropping bombs on Bony and other strong-points, though in the general din and havoc these 25-lb. bombs could hardly have been distinguished. Towards evening, when it became clear that the American forward troops on the left front were in some places cut off, several machines were sent out to drop ammunition-supplies to them and messages urging them to hold on till reinforced.

The bombardment continued on September 28th with unabated fury. Till 3 p.m. heavy showers of rain fell over the front. As soon as the afternoon light improved, efforts were again made to locate the American left, but this could be done only at great risk in low flying, for the infantry apparently had no signal flares; at all events none were fired. The line was clearly broken and insecure in the left sector, but the general assault was imminent, orders for the artillery barrage programme could not be altered, and the bombardment roared on over the whole front. Beyond the zone of this fierce fire, several more enemy heavy batteries in the Nauroy Line were ranged by the airmen.

The great assault on the Hindenburg Line began at 5.50 a.m. on September 29th. The fighting of the Australian Corps was

²⁰ Flight Lieut. W. Palstra, M.C.; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry; afterwards R.A.A.F.) Accountant; of Surrey Hills, Melbourne; b. Zwolle, Holland, 8 Oct., 1891. Killed in the wreck of the British airship *R.101*, 5 Oct., 1930.

part of an attack which involved practically the whole of the Western Front. No. 3 Squadron was prevented by heavy fog from accompanying the opening advance of the 30th and 27th American Divisions. No machine left the ground before 8 o'clock, and no airman could see anything till well after 10. Those machines which were detailed to drop smoke-bombs in certain places for the purpose of blinding enemy observation duly dropped them, rather out of a well-learned respect for orders than because they were necessary. Later in the forenoon, when the R.E.8's did manage to see something of the ground, the observation was only patchy. The Hindenburg Line was pierced here and there, but Bony village especially was holding out stoutly, and, broadly speaking, though the right front of the attack had driven through, the left was held up almost entirely. The infantry's reports revealed that the American attack had dissolved into lost fragments. The 5th and 3rd Australian Divisions, which were to pass through the American line beyond the canal—such was the scheme—and exploit the attack, found no American line at all, but only bewildered bunches of men, rather lost in the fog and dismayed by hostile machine-gun fire from almost every side. The reconnaissance machines of No. 3 Squadron flew daringly low to do their work as far as it could be done, and were all much shot about by this same ground-fire. By 5 p.m. rain fell again and blotted out their landscape. This air-work in a difficult situation and in abominable weather was very gallantly done, and the information it procured was as accurate as any the Australian staff received on that trying day.

The airmen's observation appears to have been assisted considerably by the ill-luck of another arm, the tanks. Many tanks exploded ground-mines and were wrecked or caught fire. The airmen could see these stranded across roads and trenches—in some places burning, in others providing a rallying point and cover for a collection of men fighting forward through a maze of hostile machine-gun nests. Lieutenants Pengilley and C. R. Fenwicke,²¹ between 2.25 and 4 p.m., saw British transport moving up a road running north-east to Nauroy, tanks passing north-east out of Bellicourt under heavy shell-

²¹ Lieut. C. R. Fenwicke; No. 3 Sqn (previously Light Horse). Station overseer; b. Tamworth, N.S.W., 25 April, 1890.

fire, and fifteen other tanks in a sunken road just east of Bony, some stationary, others crawling north. But Bony was not taken yet, and the enemy were thickly garrisoning the Nauroy Line. The patrol of Palstra and Devlin Hamilton made this fact clear, and reported Bony and adjacent trenches strongly held by the enemy at 4 p.m. They also saw six tanks burning in front of the Hindenburg Line north of Bony. Lieutenants S. H. Deamer²² and P. R. Fullerton²³ met just north of Bellicourt heavy machine-gun fire from a strong German defence position which was not dislodged that day, and Deamer was shot in the leg. Lieutenants K. A. Roberts²⁴ and Sturgeon, between 1.20 and 4.10 p.m., located and called down fire on five active hostile batteries and several small columns of transport, and had an indecisive engagement with a two-seater over Estrées. Shortly after 4 p.m. another contact machine—Lieutenants C. E. Frazer²⁵ and D. Ellis—reported the right front of the attack well out at Joncourt (the 5th Australian Division had pushed through in this region) and the battle-front swinging to face north and north-east. At 4.45, just as the rain began, Lieutenants J. B. Tait²⁶ and A. G. Barrett²⁷ observed a strong German counter-attack deploying south of Joncourt towards Nauroy, and four Halberstadts accompanying it at 2,000 feet. They signalled the news back to the artillery and, with three S.E.5 scouts, dived and drove off the Halberstadts, and then proceeded to fire into the advancing enemy column. The counter-attack was beaten off.

Heavy rain fell during the next day. The noon reconnaissance reported the Australian line in much the same position as on the previous night, but there were signs that pressure from the south was making the enemy in Bony uncomfortable. German flares from that village were so interpreted, and, as subsequently appeared, the interpretation

²² Lieut. S. H. Deamer; No. 3 Sqn. Reporter, b. Hitchin, Herts, Eng, 1892.

²³ Lieut. P. R. Fullerton; No 3 Sqn (previously Light Horse). Grocer, of Rutherglen, Vic; b. Rutherglen, 7 Sept., 1889.

²⁴ Lieut. K. A. Roberts; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Hardware assistant, b. Bendigo, Vic., Nov., 1893.

²⁵ Lieut. C. E. Frazer; No. 3 Sqn. Civil servant; of Kew, Melbourne; b. Kew, 14 March, 1894.

²⁶ Lieut. J. B. Tait; No 3 Sqn. Accountant; of Melbourne; b. Geelong, Vic., 15 Oct., 1890.

²⁷ Lieut. A. G. Barrett; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Malster; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Melbourne, 7 May, 1895.

was correct. The first contact-patrol on October 1st, a bright sunny day, reported Bony in Australian hands and the remainder of the Hindenburg Line clear of the enemy.

The attack stopped not for a moment, and the advance was now general all along the Australian front. The bright weather enabled the R.E.8's to locate a large number of enemy batteries and to photograph the front. German transport was seen retiring on most roads in rear of Beaurevoir and Montbrehain. The Australian machines recorded all such movement in wireless calls which, distributed to air squadrons and artillery, brought down shell-fire on the roads from the heavy guns, and sent low-flying scouts to the attack with bombs and machine-guns. The forward German artillery was moving back to new positions and hostile shell-fire was slight. German airmen though in strength, avoided fight; they were intent only on observing the Australian reserves and estimating the weight behind the thrust. The 5th and 3rd Australian Divisions stormed the whole Nauroy Line at dawn on October 2nd. Then, shortly afterwards, came an enemy counter-attack south of Joncourt. Palstra and Devlin Hamilton just as they had finished taking the flares of the advanced assaulting infantry, saw this movement developing on the right (on the British IX Corps front), and, sailing straight over the centre of it, fired a red light, the pre-arranged signal. The resulting artillery-barrage came down; with it the Australian machine and two British scouts dived upon the German infantry, firing all guns. They created great confusion, and this counter-attack, like the former one, was smothered under the artillery-barrage before it could gather strength. The infantry battle died down towards noon, and the Australian infantry were photographed again as they dug in facing the Beaurevoir Line. Throughout the remainder of the day No. 3 Squadron's machines wirelessed back news of every group of transport on the enemy's rear roads, and kept strict watch on the railway station at Bohain. They fought several indecisive encounters with German scouts, but the British scouts allowed their opponents small chance of attacking the R.E.8's. Every now and then the Australian machines, finding no sign of counter-attack, would swoop down and deliver long bursts of fire into Beaurevoir and Montbrehain villages.

By dawn next day only the 2nd Australian Division was left on the Australian front. The 3rd and 5th Divisions were relieved by British units, and sent back to rest areas, where the 1st and 4th had preceded them; the last obstacle, the Beaurevoir Line, was attacked that morning (October 3rd) by the 2nd Division with the British. Accompanying this assault, five machines from No. 3 Squadron at 6.30 dropped phosphorus smoke-bombs on the high ground at Beaurevoir Mill to screen the infantry from German observation. Among those assisting this attack were Gould-Taylor and Thomson on artillery-patrol; and to the intense regret of the squadron their machine did not return. It was reported that an R.E.8 had been hit by a shell. Three days later news was received that the grave of the two airmen had been found near Estrées.

Between 9.30 and 10 Lock and Barrett located Australian troops in the Beaurevoir Line. Only in the centre, on the main road, was the enemy still in possession, and the 5th Australian Infantry Brigade had to fight hard here all day before they drove him out. One strong counter-attack was seen preparing towards noon behind the Montbrehain rise. but was dispersed by artillery-fire, as before, while still assembling. The infantry pressed on slowly up this high ground between Beaurevoir and Montbrehain, and by the evening of October 4th were at the crest near the main road. That attack was rounded off next day by the capture of Montbrehain.

The duties of the airmen of No. 3 Squadron were considerably lighter on these last two days. The battle was practically won, and the last fighting was chiefly against resolute rear-guards. Great numbers of Fokkers patrolling the lines testified to the enemy's anxiety to safeguard the retreat of his main forces, which was plainly becoming general. The Fokkers showed no great desire to attack, except where reconnaissance machines tried to penetrate to the enemy's rear areas. The fires and explosions in those areas, the dust of retiring transport on all the roads, the dwindling of German gun-fire, all told the same story.

The 2nd Australian Division was relieved in the line on October 5th, and with it the Australian Corps Headquarters was also withdrawn to the rest area. Till October 19th No

3 Squadron remained as corps squadron with the II American Corps, which took the place of the Australians in the pursuit to near Le Cateau. The aerodrome at Bouvincourt was moved on October 7th to better ground at Bernes, south of Roisel, but remained there for only eleven days. So rapidly was the German Army being chased out of France that by October 17th the squadron was required to move again to Prémont, a few miles south-west of Le Cateau.

On October 8th the British and Americans reached a line from Prémont to Fresnoy-le-Grand, and next day took Bohain and Busigny. On the 10th they reached the Selle River. No 3 Squadron's reports of these days were all of fires, explosions, blocks of traffic retreating on every road. In the afternoon of October 9th, four of its machines bombed this traffic at various places on the roads outside Le Cateau. The enemy was abandoning the whole country in front of the Selle River, and blowing up roads and railways and firing villages all over this area. His anti-aircraft batteries had gone. Occasionally there was an air duel. Grigson and Shelley on October 6th, and Robertson and Gray on the 8th, each drove down a Halberstadt two-seater to the ground—in the former instance apparently the enemy was wrecked. As a rule, however, the fighting, so far as No. 3 Squadron was concerned, amounted to little more than distant exchange of shots, for British scouts were out in great force against the enemy.

The squadron participated in the Americans' attack on October 17th around St. Benin and St. Souplet, south of Le Cateau, and photographed the new line next day. The Americans were relieved by British troops on October 19th; the front was shrinking as a result of the advance, and the British IX and XIII Corps now covered the Fourth Army front. This left the squadron, as its commander noted, "without a corps to work with." It was, therefore, ordered to stand by as a reserve squadron and to provide artillery-patrols when required. The squadron was at this time much interested in two improved Bristol Fighters, which were temporarily put on its strength for long-distance reconnaissance and artillery-shoots. With the two (later three) Bristol Fighters was formed temporarily a special flight ("O" Flight), under the command of Captain E. J. Jones.

"O" Flight accompanied the mobile columns which kept touch with the rapidly retreating enemy in the days leading up to the Armistice.

In this semi-attached rôle, the squadron carried out its last fighting service in the war. With artillery- and bombing-patrols, it accompanied the British attack at Le Cateau on October 22nd and 23rd and the greater battle of Landrecies on November 4th. Its participation in the bombing of the retreating enemy after that battle was the squadron's last offensive operation.