

CHAPTER XXV

FIGHTS OF THE SWEEP FORMATIONS

THE effect of the victorious Allied advance in the south had begun to affect the enemy's hold on Flanders during the latter part of August. First Merville was evacuated, and then, in the last days of August, Bailleul. The German salient in the area of the Lys—flat, wet, and exposed—was a position entirely without compensating strategic advantage to the enemy, save as a forward position for further attack. Since the intended prosecution of the offensive here in April had been abandoned, the retirement of the Germans in this sector had long been expected. That retirement had now begun. By September 6th the Lys salient had disappeared. Estaires, Steenwerck, Neuve Eglise, and Kemmel Hill were abandoned by the enemy, and the new line ran from Givenchy through Neuve Chapelle, Erquinghem, Nieppe, and Ploegsteert. Hitherto it had been no part of the Allied campaign of 1918 to attack in northern Flanders, but merely to harass the enemy's probable retreat. But during September plans were made for a general attack, from the Ypres side, by a British and Belgian army under the command of King Albert, and on September 28th this attack was launched, and overran in one day the whole Passchendaele Ridge and much beyond it. The advance continued steadily on the north, west, and south of Lille through early October. The whole German line fell back from Ostend to Douai. The Belgian coast was cleared by October 20th, Douai fell on October 17th, and early next day British troops had surrounded Lille, which had been evacuated by the enemy. By October 22nd the Allies were along the line of the Scheldt from Valenciennes to Avelghem (between Courtrai and Renaix).

This final period of the war was one of intense air fighting. The only stand made by the German troops after the piercing of the Hindenburg Line at the end of September was entirely temporary, and was designed to guard a general retreat into Germany. In the air the Germans fought hard, though spasmodically, against the Allied airmen's offensive. During the early part of September the enemy's air squadrons, still

being drawn to other fronts, reappeared once or twice in the Armentières sector. The demand from the southern fighting fronts, the general strain, and the serious losses of the summer campaign were overtaxing the German Air Force; the enemy could not attempt to dispute the Allies' pressure in the air in all places at once, and accordingly he concentrated and exerted in big formations the strength in fighting scouts which remained to him. Fierce air battles were fought near Lille on September 5th, 16th, and 24th.

During October, as the retreat of the German Army became general and continuous, the length of the fighting front shrank considerably. This, and the fact that the only practicable line of retreat lay, like the original advance in 1914, through Belgium, drew the German air forces ultimately again to the northern front, and over Tournai and its vicinity the enemy airmen put forth their final effort. These last battles were more than encounters between patrols; they were aeroplane fleet-actions.

While his scouts were absent from the Flanders front in early September, the enemy was compelled to rely for air-observation almost entirely on balloons. King and Taplin in the early morning of September 1st destroyed two balloons on the Aubers Ridge behind Fromelles. While King and Taplin dropped bombs on Don railway station, Lieutenants Trescowthick and T. H. Barkell¹ attacked a "flaming-onion" battery near by, bombed it, raked it with machine-gun fire, and put it out of action. "Flaming-onions" were heartily detested by the airmen at all times, and to cripple an "onion" battery was sweet revenge. No enemy aeroplanes were seen in the sky at this time, but some hours later J. W. Wright's forenoon patrol of five machines from No. 4 Squadron sighted fifteen Fokkers attacking a solitary R.E.8 south-east of Bailleul, and forthwith flew to engage. Wright interrupted the foremost Fokker in the act of diving on the R.E.8, drove it away, and turned against a second Fokker close by. Into this machine he fired fifty rounds at forty-yards' range, and it fell into the clouds upside down. Next day (September 2nd) enemy airmen left the Armentières neighbourhood and concentrated on the Scarpe; the Australian squadrons found

¹ Lieut. T. H. Barkell, D.F.C.; No. 4 Sqn. Motor mechanic; b. Randwick, Sydney, 1892.

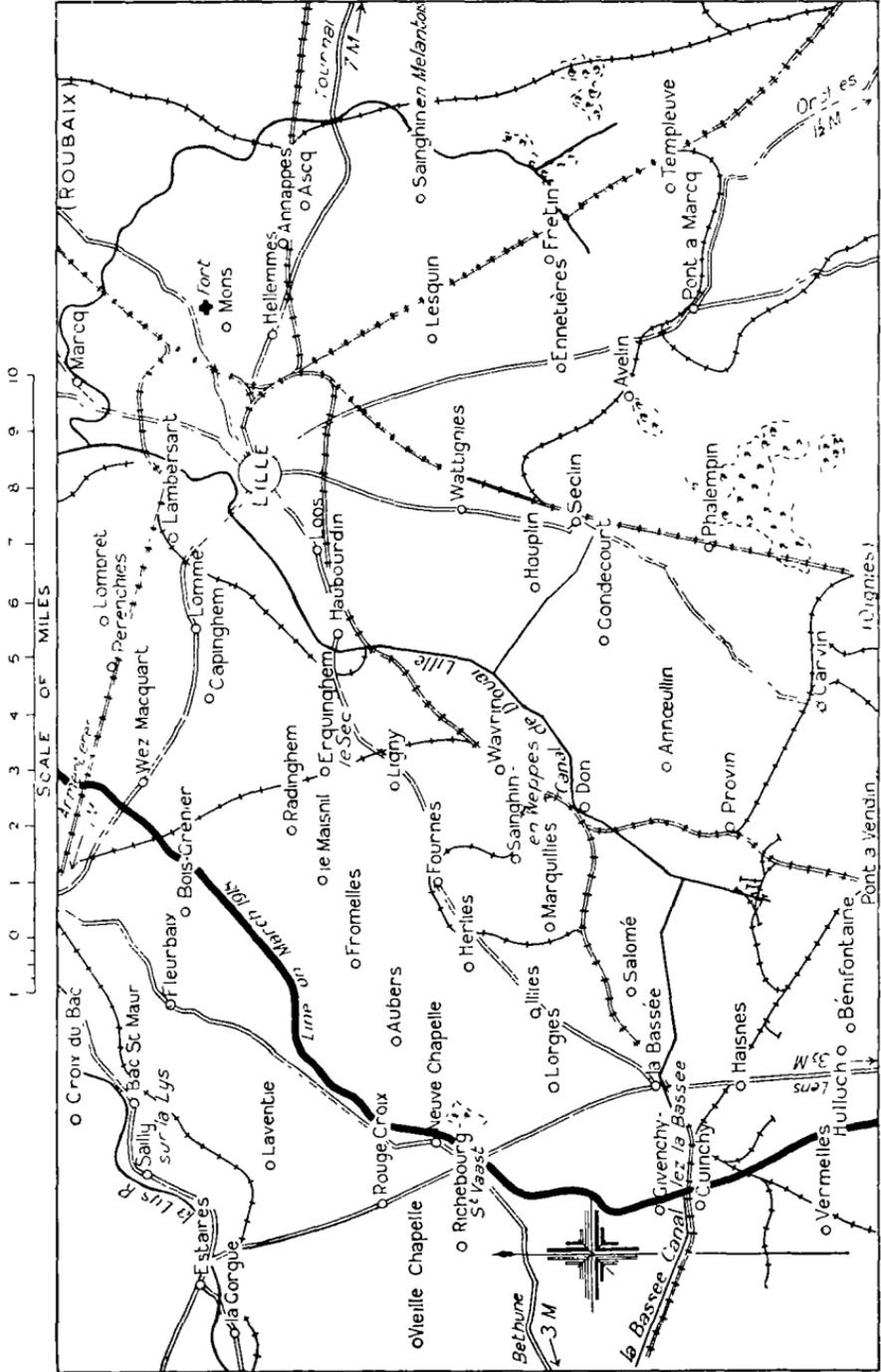
only a few solitary two-seaters on their front, of which Taplin in the evening destroyed one, a Halberstadt, near Aubers. The day passed chiefly in bombing the enemy's roads and transport.

No. 4 Squadron continued its bombing attacks throughout daylight on September 3rd. Patrols, flying in pairs, harried all the area west of Lille. Lieutenants Ramsay and H. W. Ross² bombed a train near Pérenchies; others dropped bombs on billets in Sainghin and Armentières; and Taplin set fire to a balloon behind Aubers. King and Lieutenant V. G. M. Sheppard,³ each leading a patrol of four machines, bombed Don railway station and billets at Wez Macquart. Fournes, Armentières, and Sainghin were bombed by a big formation in the afternoon, and Taplin destroyed another balloon on the Aubers line. In the evening Cummings, leading a formation of thirteen S.E.5's from No. 2 Squadron, met seven Fokkers over Cambrai at 17,500 feet. The Australians manoeuvred to the eastward and attacked. Stone and F. R. Smith each so badly damaged two opponents that these Fokkers fell completely out of control and emitting black smoke. The attack could not, however, be pursued, for the Australians in turn were assailed by a new force of twenty-five Fokkers from above, and had to break off the fight.

On the following morning, September 4th, both squadrons took the air with nearly full force. Two flights of S.E.5's again ranged the air over Cambrai and Douai, flying this time at 10,000 feet. They sighted a Fokker formation far out of reach at about 17,000 feet, but on turning homewards from a wide sweep beyond Douai they came upon eight Bristol Fighters engaged with fourteen Fokkers. The enemy fled before this reinforcement, but Knight caught one of them on the tail of a British machine and shot it down out of control into thick clouds. Meanwhile, beneath the clouds small formations from No. 4 Squadron hovered like hawks over all the Lys flats. Ramsay destroyed a balloon at La Bassée by dropping two bombs upon it from 1,000 feet; this balloon was directly alongside the gas-works, and under bombs from

² Lieut. H. W. Ross, D.F.C.; No. 4 Sqn (previously Artillery). Printer; b. Darlington, Sydney, 1895.

³ Lieut V. G. M. Sheppard; No 4 Sqn. Fruit-grower; of Emu Plains, N.S.W; b. Emu Plains, 3 Sept., 1894.



LILLE REGION, SHOWING AREA OF OPERATIONS OF No. 2 AND No. 4 AUSTRALIAN SQUADRONS. MAY-OCTOBER, 1918

PRAETEMAN

him and Lieutenant A. E. James,⁴ who was patrolling with him, the gas chamber exploded as well as the balloon. While a third patrol of four bombed Sainghin railway station, Cobby and King attacked a train just south of Lille from 600 feet. They hit it with four bombs, blew a covered van off the rails, and raked the whole train with machine-gun fire. Returning home, King saw an L.V.G. two-seater at 2,000 feet making westward towards La Bassée. He shot two deadly bursts of fire into it; the two-seater toppled into a spin, its observer fell out, and the machine drifted down to a crash near Erquinghem-le-Sec, west of Haubourdin. Three Fokkers appeared and dived at King while thus engaged, but Cobby was waiting above, intercepted them, and at point-blank range shot their leader down out of control. He could not follow it, for he had to dodge the remaining two Fokkers, which finally left him at 700 feet. Another patrol under Trescowthick bombed Don station. By noon the weather threatened to break, and just before the rain fell James and Lockley set fire to two balloons, one south of Armentières and one at La Bassée. During the bombing attacks, repeated on the following morning, Taplin destroyed another balloon at Pérenchies. The complete absence of German machines from the vicinity of the balloon-lines, or indeed anywhere on the Armentières-La Bassée front, was sure evidence of the straits in which the Germans found themselves.

The afternoon of September 5th was marked by a very gallant fight by a patrol from No. 4 Squadron, which was defeated and almost destroyed. Five machines, under Trescowthick, had been ordered to co-operate with two formations from other squadrons in a sweep of the Douai area. Through some unfortunate misunderstanding the intended co-operation did not take place, and Trescowthick's patrol was attacked by three formations of Fokkers at 11,000 feet over Brebières, south-west of Douai. Trescowthick, leading his force in the orthodox "V"-formation, was flying, therefore, ahead of and below the others. The enemy vastly outnumbered and also had the height of the Australians, and attacked from two sides at once. Trescowthick, seeing no support at hand, and realising that to accept combat was

⁴ Lieut. A. E. James; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Cyclist Corps). Bank clerk; b. Perth, W. Aust., 25 Jan., 1895.

hopeless, gave the signal to avoid action and dived away, expecting his formation to follow suit. It did not. The four remaining—Taplin, Eddie, Carter, and Lockley—either did not see any signal to break off, or found themselves unable to do so. At any rate they stayed and met an attack of overwhelming numbers. Lockley was seen by Trescowthick to stall and meet his first oncoming opponent, fire into it from underneath, and send it down out of control. That was the last clear view of the engagement; the four were fighting at a hopeless disadvantage of position, and none of them returned. Subsequently news was received that all four were shot down, Taplin wounded and taken prisoner, the other three killed. The feelings of the leader, who had to return alone to report this disaster, may be easily imagined. The result was a clear proof of the soundness of his judgment; the Australians were denied from the outset any hope of success; and, after he had dived away, expecting his signal to be followed, to climb back again was beyond the range of possibility. Fighting airmen had always to make decisions on the instant, and such decisions at critical moments are quite beyond recall.

The best account of this fight is in the words of the only survivor of those Australians who took part in it, Lieutenant Taplin. His story of it runs thus:—"We *had* to fight. No signal to avoid action could have had any effect. The escape of one machine (Trescowthick) was due to the Germans' attention being centred upon us four. However, that is neither here nor there. The formation went over the line in "V"-formation—Trescowthick leading, Eddie and Carter above and behind him, and Lockley and myself above and behind them again. When a few miles over we turned north. We were flying at about 14,000 feet and our escort could not be seen; I did not like the situation, and climbed another 1,000 feet above the patrol. Soon after this, when in the region of Douai, we were attacked. There were three formations in the attacking enemy, all Fokker biplanes. Two formations of about twelve to fifteen machines attacked almost simultaneously, one from high up in the west, and one from the north. Later a very much larger formation came in from the east, which I at first thought was our escort coming to our rescue.

“Trescowthick dived away under the formation coming from the direction of our own lines, but the others were cut off. No German attempted to follow Trescowthick, so evidently he was unobserved. Meanwhile I was gaining all the height I could, and, as the formation from the north closed in, I dived into the middle of them. Apparently, by reason of my height, I had not been seen. The leader, a red-and-white-tailed Fokker, pulled up, and we went at it head-on. I got a good burst into his radiator, and he went down on a glide—not out of control, just engine out of action. Next moment I was right in the middle of them, and before I could do anything a German below me pulled his nose up and put a burst right through the bottom of my machine. One bullet went through my right hand, smashing it up and breaking the wrist. My Camel immediately stalled and half-rolled itself, and, to conform with poetic justice, came out of the stall right on the tail of my attacker, who was recovering from his own stall. I was now under control with my left hand and easily shot this German down. Just then I saw Lockley dropping past me completely out of control. I also saw during the fight two machines in flames, which I now suppose were Eddie and Carter.

“I was getting shot about and was firing at anything I saw, when a Fokker from somewhere (the sky seemed full of them) again got a burst into me. One bullet, an explosive, smashed the breech and crank-handle of one of my guns and sent a splinter through my nose. This dazed me and I fell out of control in an engine-spin. I spun down to about 1,000 feet and then recovered, to find two Fokkers had followed me down. I again had to fight, and luckily shot down one German easily; the other then left me alone. After this fight I was down to about 100 feet and started off towards home. My engine was just about done, from being shot about and from running full throttle through everything. I had only one hand and could not properly control the engine to gain height, so just staggered along. After running the gauntlet of ground-fire for several miles I was shot down from the ground when within a few hundred yards of the German front-line, and taken prisoner. I found out from the Germans that

Lockley was buried in Henin Liétard cemetery, but could get no news of the others."

The Australian squadrons avenged this defeat on the following evening at almost the same time and place. They were engaged in a circus sweep—this time in good cohesion—Bristol Fighters from No. 88 Squadron, R.A.F., in the top formation, six S.E.5's under Murray Jones below them, and six Camels below them again. At 14,000 feet seven Fokkers were sighted to the east over Douai, and the Camels flew on slightly below the enemy to decoy them. The Fokkers, evidently not having observed the upper escort, manœuvred to attack. The watching S.E.5's judged the moment well and fell on the Germans in irresistible fashion. F. R. Smith shot one down almost at once and it fell into the wood north-east of Douai. Wellwood drove down another, and followed it, as it tumbled like a leaf for 8,000 feet, firing furiously at every opportunity. The remaining Fokkers span away to escape. In doing so they dropped past the level of the Camels, which instantly fastened on to as many as possible. V. G. M. Sheppard, Wright, and G. Jones each shot down one out of control into the mist covering the ground.

Thereafter for some days air fighting in Flanders died down. There were simply no enemy machines to fight except occasional solitary two-seaters. The bombing of the enemy's discomfited ground-troops on the Aubers Ridge proceeded as usual, but a succession of stormy days checked air operations for nearly a week. The first sign of the return of the enemy's scouts to the Lille area was discerned on September 16th. At dawn that morning Watson and King—one of a number of raiding couples—encountered three black Fokker biplanes north-west of Lille at 4,000 feet. King destroyed one with two close-range bursts of fire; Watson shot down another, but, in the excitement of chasing after the third, did not stay to watch its fate. These machines appear to have been driven into the air by a bomb-attack by Ramsay and A. E. James a quarter of an hour earlier on the now nearly deserted Lomme aerodrome.

Meanwhile an offensive-patrol of eleven S.E.5's under Manuel and F. R. Smith, flying far above the flitting bombing couples of No. 4 Squadron, fell in with a fleet of fifteen Fokker

biplanes and triplanes over Lille. The enemy were flying westward toward the lines. Smith led his flight to the east and dived at the enemy from behind; Manuel attacked from the south. Smith dived at the Fokkers' leader, who eluded him with a half-roll; up flew Smith again in a zoom, dived at another Fokker below him, and shot sixty rounds into it from over its tail at point-blank range. This Fokker fell completely out of control and badly damaged. The fight was now general. Smith sent down another Fokker, hit and spinning, from a close-range burst. Lieutenant G. E. Holroyde,⁵ somewhere near him, attacked another enemy machine twice without result, but in his third dive separated it from the pack and followed it down, firing at every opportunity, to 8,000 feet. He was then compelled to abandon that combat because another Fokker was firing into him. Manuel, after repeatedly attacking without result, fastened on to a Fokker chasing either Holroyde or another (nothing could be certain in the *mêlée*) and shot it down, whirling and spinning, with a burst of 100 rounds. This Fokker also was followed down for 9,000 feet, still helpless, and then Manuel, too, was forced to turn and engage an enemy machine on his tail. Alberry, who attacked with Manuel's flight, cut out a Fokker early in the fight, and sent it down in flames. Then Alberry in turn was drawn into a fight with two Fokkers descending on him from behind. Copp, also in Manuel's flight, shot down his first opponent, which fell on its back and in this crippled fashion dropped through the air past Smith, lower down. After a few minutes of this savage mix-up, with five of the enemy shot down, one burning, the combatants were spread over a vast area of the sky, and, as they flew to regain formation, the fight ended. Manuel was leading his patrol home at 8 a.m. when he saw British anti-aircraft bursts over La Bassée at 9,000 feet. He made out a Fokker biplane crossing the lines, pursued it to St. Omer, and finally drove it down to a crash north-east of that town.

The defeated Fokker formation had not yet finished its adventures. Lieutenants Barkell, G. Jones, and A. J. Palliser,⁶ from No. 4 Squadron, were on offensive-patrol at 7,000 feet

⁵ Lieut. G. E. Holroyde; No. 2 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Station hand; b. New Farm, Brisbane, 3 Aug., 1894.

⁶ Lieut. A. J. Palliser; No. 4 Sqn (previously A.A.S.C.). Motor mechanic; of Launceston, Tas; b. Launceston, 2 March, 1890. Killed in action, 4 Nov. 1918.

near Armentières shortly after 8 a.m., and, when over Frélinghien, were attacked from above by this same mixed Fokker fleet, now consisting of eleven or twelve machines. Three of them dived at Barkell, four at Palliser, and two at Jones. Barkell and Palliser each rolled smartly and got the upper hand with an Immelmann turn; each then fired a devastating burst at a selected enemy from close range. These two Fokkers fell at once and crashed east of Armentières near the Lys. Jones was attacked a few seconds later than his comrades and just as he had seen a biplane—which had missed Palliser in its dive—swirl away below him. Dropping nose down to escape the enemy machines on his own tail, Jones caught up this lower Fokker, shot it into a spin, and saw it fall on its back to the ground south of Armentières. This enemy formation had by now lost interest in the morning's operations, and flew home.

From this time onward Lille again became a hunting-ground for seekers after hostile aircraft. The German airmen returned to the vicinity in great numbers, but always operated cautiously and at a great height. On September 16th five Fokkers were over Lille as high as 22,000 feet. The enemy, it was judged, was suspicious of preparations now being made for an attack by British and Belgians on this front. He had shortened and strengthened his Flanders front by abandoning the Lys salient; but he had withdrawn so many divisions from this sector in the endeavour to stop breaches in his defences farther south, that his garrisons from Ypres to Lens were still weak in numbers and doubtless shaken in morale. The consequent anxiety was sufficient to account for the renewed local activity of the enemy's airmen. The German machines as a rule avoided combat, thereby indicating that reconnaissance was their chief design; in this they were certainly persistent. For several days the battle-patrols of No. 2 Squadron sought the enemy unsuccessfully. During an otherwise uneventful sweep on September 21st, G. Cox's machine developed engine-defect and was forced to land near Armentières. He was later reported a prisoner of war.

Meanwhile No. 4 Squadron had been constantly and systematically bombing German billets and railway stations between Armentières and La Bassée, and for many days

without any interference from enemy airmen. Lieutenants Barkell, P. J. Sims,⁷ and T. C. Cox⁸ were, however, surprised and nearly overwhelmed on one of these bombing-patrols in the morning of September 22nd. They were about to attack Armentières station, when, at 6,000 feet, thirteen Fokker biplanes came down upon them through the clouds. It was a desperate situation, and each pilot had to look after himself. Sims eluded the enemy and flew home; Cox escaped and landed near Sailly; but Barkell came within an ace of being lost. Four Fokkers attacked him from above; the first and nearest Barkell avoided with a half-roll and then a turn over his opponent's tail. He shot that Fokker down out of control with a hot burst from his machine-guns at twenty-five yards' range. Immediately, however, the three others were upon him; Barkell turned again quickly and shot another down with a short burst into its side, but then a bullet pierced his own engine and he had to make for land. He succeeded in reaching the British lines near Neuve Eglise. One Fokker, still firing, followed him down to within 100 feet of the ground. Barkell luckily escaped personal injury.

Early in the morning of September 24th a German two-seater was reported as reconnoitring British rear areas behind Ypres. The Fifth Army operations staff considered that preparations for the coming Anglo-Belgian attack must have been observed, and requested that this machine should, if possible, be intercepted and destroyed. Two pairs of scouts from No. 4 Squadron took off immediately. Lieutenants G. Jones and V. H. Thornton⁹ overhauled the enemy, a Halberstadt, near Lens at 3,000 feet. Jones cut it off from the east, attacked from underneath, chased the enemy to near the ground, and shot the observer, whose body fell hanging over the side of the machine. He then attacked again from above, both being then only 800 feet above the ground, and fired a final burst into the Halberstadt at point-blank range. The two-seater went vertically to the ground and crashed east of Lens. The other pair—E. J. K. McCloughry and Youdale

⁷ Lieut. P. J. Sims; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Electrical engineering student; of Springhurst, Vic., b. Springhurst, 1 Jan., 1896. Killed in action, 29 Oct., 1918.

⁸ Lieut. T. C. Cox; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Station manager; of Singleton, N.S.W.; b. Quirindi, N.S.W., 4 June, 1895.

⁹ Lieut. V. H. Thornton, No. 4 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Farmer; of Rochester, Vic.; b. Valparaiso, South America, 11 Dec., 1893. Killed in aeroplane accident, 21 April, 1927.

—finding at first no enemy in the air, bombed a train near Lille and wrecked the rear part of it. McCloughry came in wounded in the foot and with his machine damaged, and landed in a half-conscious state near St. Venant.

After several days of long and fruitless patrols over the German lines in large formations at 12,000 feet, No. 2 Squadron met and severely defeated the enemy in force in the evening of September 24th. The S.E.5 formation was fifteen strong and was ranging west of Lille at 17,000 feet in three flights, the whole under the leadership of Cole. Over Haubourdin at 6.20 p.m. they encountered eleven Fokkers—five at their own level, and six 1,000 feet lower. Simonson's flight of four attacked the upper Fokkers, while the remainder dived on the six below. After a wild engagement of several minutes, Simonson manœuvred on to the tail of one Fokker, delivered a crushing fire, and the enemy fell and was wrecked. Mills also sank one, believed to have met the same fate. Meanwhile, below this combat, Lieutenant F. L. Roberts,¹⁰ of Manuel's flight, shot one of the second Fokker formation down out of control; then suddenly F. R. Smith's flight dived from behind headlong into the whirling fray. Smith, leading, destroyed the nearest Fokker, which fell into a field south of Capinghem. Lieutenant L. Franks¹¹ followed another down through a long dive to 7,000 feet and saw it crash near Sequedin. At this juncture, just as both formations of Fokkers were more or less dispersed and demoralised, Simonson's formation (still flying higher than the others) was interrupted by the attack of three Pfalz scouts from above. The S.E.5's swirled away to join their comrades below. The Pfalzes, following, came down on Manuel's flight, and Simonson, turning, got on the tail of one and shot into it till it fell on its back and dropped. Smith's, following, had also rallied to the new engagement, and Smith himself dived on to this Pfalz just as Simonson zoomed up from it. He fired further bursts into it, and at 3,000 feet left it, still going down vertically. The other two Pfalz scouts were both destroyed; Wellwood set one in flames and saw it smash into the ground

¹⁰ Lieut F. L. Roberts No. 2 Sqn. Engineer, of Bendigo, Vic.; b. Bendigo, 18 Aug., 1896

¹¹ Lieut L. Franks; No. 2 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Member of Aust Permanent Forces; of Queenscliff, Vic.; b. Apollo Bay, Vic., 16 Sept., 1887.

near Haubourdin aerodrome; Cole crashed the other near Pérenchies.

In co-operation with the British, French, and Belgian attack on September 28th, No. 4 Squadron bombed villages and railway stations outside Lille. The Australian airmen were prepared for heavy air fighting, but the enemy attempted no such challenge. Six Camels chased nine Fokkers near Lille in the evening, and J. W. Wright caught up the rearmost Fokker and destroyed it, but the others escaped. The bombing was highly effective, and there were abundant signs from this day onwards of the enemy's preparations to evacuate Lille. The city was steadily becoming a salient in the German lines, and further Allied advance north and south would threaten to envelop it. In the afternoon of September 29th two patrols of three machines each from No. 4 Squadron bombed a small column of horse-transport near Aubers, and fired over 4,000 machines from No. 4 Squadron dropped thirty-four bombs on village billets. Two others bombed and blew up a dump of ammunition and wrecked a light railway train at Fromelles. The change in the enemy's situation on this northern front led to a revival of low-bombing operations by No. 2 Squadron also, and in the events which led up to the capture of Lille the bombing of both squadrons played an important part.¹²

With the earliest light of dawn on October 1st the entire strength of each squadron was sent out to scour the Lille region, the Camels hunting in pairs low over the Aubers Ridge and the S.E.5's flying in a protecting cloud above them. The low-flying destroyers dropped bombs on railway stations, trains, anti-aircraft batteries, and moving troops and transport, and fired many thousands of rounds into them from a low height. Throughout that day and several days following small patrols were ceaselessly coming and going over the Wavrin-Armentières area, always bombing and shooting every ground target that offered. No German scouts were seen, and the enemy's whole northern front was crumbling away. Balloons were the Germans' chief resource for observation; these were attacked, and often set on fire, whenever they appeared. The Australian low-flying destroyer-patrols harassed and worried everything they saw—trains, motor-lorries, aerodromes, camps,

¹² See note at end of chapter

here and there a battery in action or a barge on a canal; railway stations resounded with the clatter of bomb explosions; from villages invaded and occupied since 1914, the airmen now sped the departing enemy with a scourge like that of avenging angels. In a few days the whole country around Lille began burning. Armentières was re-occupied by British infantry, which swarmed across the Lys in a general advance.

The bombing of the railway stations around Lille became increasingly important during the preparations made by the Germans to evacuate the city, and between October 3rd and 5th the pilots of No. 4 Squadron devoted special attention to the stations on the south-west and south-east. A roving attack by Ramsay and A. E. James at dawn on October 4th began near Pérenchies, where they drove down a badly damaged Rumpler two-seater. They then made a tour of railway stations and aerodromes on the southern outskirts of Lille—Gondecourt, Phalempin, Seclin, Avelin, Merchin, and Houplin—and machine-gunned trains or hangars at all these places after their bombs were exhausted. A 40-lb. phosphorus bomb set fire to hangars at Merchin; two other bombs hit a train at Phalempin. In the early morning of October 5th nine machines from No. 4 Squadron dropped thirty-four bombs on collected railway and transport traffic at Avelin station, and fired over 3,000 rounds into the crowded confusion of the station yard. These were merely instances of the work in which all available British and Australian machines were engaged. The few solitary German two-seaters encountered were chased and shot down. The effect of these attacks on the demoralised enemy was enormous. He simply gave up attempting to save transport and stores in many scattered dépôts and either abandoned them or set them on fire. Scout formations of No. 2 Squadron roamed well beyond Lille into Belgium. Manuel's patrol in the morning of October 4th brought twelve Fokkers to action at 10,000 feet, and Blaxland shot down one. These distant reconnaissance-patrols brought in reports from Tournai and beyond, all confirming the enemy's rearward movement.

Elated with the success of the squadrons' operations on the western side of Lille, the 80th Wing organised for October 7th a grand combined raid on all roads and railway

stations on the perimeter of the city. While patrols from No. 4 Australian Squadron ravaged the communications on the west and north of Lille, No. 2 Australian Squadron and No. 103 British Squadron (D.H.9's), protected above by No. 88 Squadron (Bristol Fighters), bore the utmost possible load of bombs for an attack on the entraining centres on the eastern side. That area was divided for the attack into three sections, each bounded by main railway lines. Cummings's flight of No. 2 Squadron was to range the section between the Roubaix and Tournai railways, F. R. Smith's flight that between the Tournai and Orchies lines, and Manuel's flight that between the lines to Orchies and Douai. The Australian formation crossed the lines at 7,000 feet in a tornado of anti-aircraft fire, and over Lille descended to 2,000 feet. Cole, leading, then fired a white light, and on this signal each flight turned off towards its allotted area. The arranged task of No. 2 Squadron was to search those areas for road-transport, while the D.H.9's bombed the big railway stations at Fives and Annappes. Just before the opening of the operations a German two-seater appeared out of the haze before the full array of the bombing fleet and flew for the ground in panic; without a shot fired at it, this German machine hit the earth nose first near Ennetières and was wrecked.

The S.E.5's spread out under flight-commanders' leadership to range the country towards Tournai, but found on the roads there none of the expected traffic. The only activity to be seen was at Annappes and Fives, where a number of trains were being loaded with troops and stores. Fives was especially busy, and a long troop-train was steaming into the station. Accordingly the Australian raiders joined the D.H.9's in attacking these centres. The flights under Cummings and Manuel made for Annappes, and Smith's flight for Fives. At Fives the D.H.9's dropped twenty bombs of a hundred-weight each, and in their wake each machine of Smith's formation swept along the lines of trains with a shower of smaller bombs. Each pilot, having released his explosives, turned and again flew the length of the station, spraying the trains and buildings with machine-gun fire. The airmen flew in this attack so low that in several cases pilots' machines were damaged by fragments of their own bombs. A piece of one

of Lieutenant A. L. Long's¹³ bombs pierced his petrol tank. Long now had only his reserve tank, about ten minutes' supply. He flew straight for the British lines and just managed to reach them as he was forced to land. The losses of the enemy both at Fives and Annappes must have been considerable, for many bombs fell fairly among massed transport and on crowded railway carriages and buildings where troops from the trains fled for shelter. Near Annappes several machines attacked a farmhouse courtyard packed with motor cars and horse-transport, and the bombs hurtled into the midst of this collection.

The 80th Wing similarly raided Tournai on October 18th, the day on which Lille fell into British hands. No. 4 Squadron patrolled the area immediately east of Lille with a large formation of their new Sopwith Snipe¹⁴ machines. while this raid was in progress. The Germans were falling back from Lille as fast as they could, and Tournai and the villages in its vicinity were found crowded with the impedimenta of the retreat. Just north-west of the town, at Froyennes, was an aerodrome still in active use. This and the railway station at Allain, on the south-eastern outskirts of Tournai, and the villages of Hertain and Marquain on the west, were the chief objectives of the raid. Cummings, leading the squadron formation, descended over Hertain on a train mounting an anti-aircraft battery and on much transport collected alongside it. One of his bombs fell directly upon one gun of this battery and another exploded a dump near by. Cole, Stone, Franks, and Davies all bombed Froyennes aerodrome and burned at least two hangars. Other pilots were attracted by trains at either Blandain or Allain. Simonson, Roberts, and Dibbs hit the train which Cummings had attacked, or the transport alongside it. Some of the escorting Bristol Fighters did the same. Transport was overturned, many horses fell, the locomotive was hit twice by bombs, trucks and carriages began to burn, and men scattered and dropped in all directions. Lieutenants Blaxland, Copp,

¹³ Lieut. A. L. Long; No. 2 Sqn. (previously A.A.M.C.). Commercial traveller, of Hobart; b. Ringwood, Forcett, Tas., 15 Aug., 1896.

¹⁴ See Chapter XXVI.

N. M. Heath,¹⁵ J. A. Egan,¹⁶ and Alberry attacked Allain and the siding at the main station north-east of Tournai. Their bombs wrecked trucks and set railway buildings on fire, and they had begun to pelt the confusion with machine-gun bullets, when a formation of Fokkers dived at them. The escort overhead promptly engaged them, but near Allain Blaxland and Alberry had to meet the attack of three Fokkers. Blaxland crashed one of them south-east of Tournai; Alberry chased down another, firing at it till his guns jammed, and left it in a spin only 800 feet above the ground. Lieutenants F. Howard¹⁷ and Long bombed a château and military huts near Froyennes aerodrome; two bombs hit the château and others set the huts on fire. The only casualty suffered was that Davies had his oil-tank shot through by machine-gun fire, and owing to loss of oil, the pilot crashed, unhurt, within the British lines on the way home.

Note.—Extracts from operation orders of Major Murray Jones, commanding No. 2 Squadron, for the days of September 24th and 30th show the system of combined air operations at this time:—

(September 23rd.) "The following operations will be carried out to-morrow, the 24th instant. . . . Offensive Patrols: All offensive-patrols will work in the area bounded by the line Armentières-Pérenchies-Haubourdin-Provin-Pont-a-Vendin. (a) 0900-1100. 'A' Flight, 10,000 feet; 'B' Flight, 9,000 feet. Rendezvous with No. 4 Squadron and No. 88 Squadron over E. edge of Forêt de Nieppe at above heights, 0935. When rendezvous is complete leader of No. 4 Squadron will fire a RED light which will be returned by the leader of our patrol and the formation will then move off. Care is to be taken that our patrols keep within striking distance of any enemy E.A. attacking the lower formation."

(September 29th.) "1. Situation: Local Offensive Operations will be undertaken on the Fifth Army front to-morrow, 30th instant. All machines not actually working on offensive-patrols will stand by for bombing, and shooting-up favourable ground targets, and for low line work.

"2. Low Line Patrols: The following pilots will, if necessary, carry out low line patrols:—Captains A. T. Cole, R. L. Manuel, E. D. Cummings, Lieutenants F. R. Smith, E. E. Davies, J. J. Wellwood. These patrols will work at 2,000 feet over the battle-front, paying extra attention to low-flying E.A. No bombs will be carried. Machines will work in pairs. It must be thoroughly understood that the responsibility of preventing the enemy from using low-bombing or

¹⁵ Lieut. N. M. Heath; No. 2 Sqn. (previously Light Horse). Grazier; of Narromine, N S W; b. Malvern, Melbourne, 16 May, 1895.

¹⁶ Lieut. J. A. Egan; No. 2 Sqn. Bank clerk; b. Bendigo, Vic., Aug., 1891.

¹⁷ Lieut. F. Howard; No. 2 Sqn (previously Engineers). Railway engineering assistant; of Maryborough, Vic.; b. Clunes, Vic.; 17 April, 1894. Killed in action, 27 Oct., 1918.

shooting-up aircraft will rest on them; great damage can be done by the enemy in dispersing our reserves by use of his aircraft at low altitudes. This must be prevented at all costs.

"3. Low-bombing and Shooting-up Patrols: Machines will carry four 20-lb. bombs, and will shoot-up and bomb the enemy's convoys, troops, M.T., &c. No bombing or shooting-up will take place within 3,000 yards of our advanced troops and extending back to 15,000 yards. The chief rôle of these patrols is to disturb enemy in the back areas by dispersing troops, attacking M.T. convoys, &c., and harassing continually all active targets, of which many are bound to present themselves. Machines will fly low enough to distinguish between grey, blue, and khaki uniforms.

"4. Offensive Patrols: Offensive patrols will work in area bounded by Armentières-Pérenchies-Haubourdin-Provin-Pont-a-Vendin. They will on no account fly above 10,000 feet, and if all ammunition is not expended in combats machines will attack ground targets before leaving area.

0600-0800	..	'C' Flight	..	10,000 feet.
		'A' Flight	..	8,000 feet.
0800-1000	..	'B' Flight	..	10,000 feet.
1500-1700	..	'A' Flight	..	10,000 feet.
	..	'C' Flight	..	8,000 feet."