

## CHAPTER XV

### WINTER WORK OVER MESSINES RIDGE

MEANWHILE No. 3 Squadron, on the Messines front, found during November hardly one good day for photography or artillery observation. The weather was constantly either dull or raining, verging on the condition called in airmen's language "dud." Nevertheless the Ypres offensive was still proceeding, though in point of fact that excellent military word (indicating effective movement) is but poorly expressive of the struggle going on in the mud about the Passchendaele Ridge. The British Army fought on through the late autumn in evil conditions of climate which, though well-known of old to armies in Flanders, can surely never before have been defied by a military offensive pressed to exhaustion. No human mind uninformed with actual experience of the mud and beastliness of the Ypres battlefield at the end of 1917 can form adequate conception of the sufferings of the unhappy infantry there on either side. The mud became so deep and continuous that men not only could not fight; they could not even move to run away. At length it came to pass that the men of a battalion ordered to the assault in the battle for Passchendaele regarded that order as sentence of death, and prayed that the end would come soon and quickly.

While this was what the wretched weather at Ypres meant to the men on the ground, the airmen overhead thanked their stars that they belonged to the flying corps and not to the "foot-sloggers." They took the air, whatever the weather was like, so long as there was a chance of working, of seeing anything of the ground, of flash-spotting, or of helping the infantry in any fashion at all. The operations of No. 3 Squadron over the Messines Ridge were immediately south of the main conflict. Day after day its machines coming in from reconnaissance reported: "Patrol unsatisfactory. Visibility bad during entire flight." On every possible evening the R.E.8's would take their own revenge of the enemy in what was called "retaliation and offensive patrol." This meant that a couple of machines would stay out as late as possible, and, dropping low just at dark over the German

front lines with bombs which they carried for the purpose, would release them upon the roof of some concrete fort or other strong-point in the enemy's outpost defence system. The spectacle cheered the heart of many an infantryman, and encouraged him in the belief that the air force was doing its best.

In December the weather grew worse, and visibility was very bad. But more than ever at this time of the year, when observers either on the ground or in stationary balloons could see very little, it was necessary for the corps squadrons, serving as the eyes of the artillery, to go up, find the enemy batteries, and range the guns on them. Colonel Bishop, in his book, says truly: "It is no child's play to circle above a German battery observing for half-an-hour or more, with your machine tossing about in the air, tortured by exploding shells and black shrapnel puff-balls coming nearer and nearer to you like the ever-extending finger tips of some giant hand of death. But it is just a part of the never-ceasing war. In the air service this work is never finished. Everywhere along the line the big guns wait daily for the wireless touch of the aeroplanes to set them booming at targets carefully selected from previous observation. Big shells cannot be wasted. The human effort involved in creating them and placing them beside the well-screened guns at the front is far too great for that." The rain squalls and cold winds which froze the marrow in a man's bones on those Flanders' flats in winter-time made work in the air only a degree less unpleasant.

Considering the danger and the strain, No. 3 Squadron lost astonishingly few men and machines. Captain H. H. Storrer<sup>1</sup> and Lieutenant W. N. E. Scott<sup>2</sup> (observer) were killed near the aerodrome on December 2nd in a sudden squall, which carried them into the brick wall of the Bailleul cemetery as they were starting out on an artillery-patrol. Another machine immediately set off on that duty. Any lull in a storm, any interval of weak sunshine which lifted the haze, was the signal for artillery-observation machines to hum out to the

<sup>1</sup> Capt. H. H. Storrer, No. 3 Sqn. Accountant; of Geelong, Vic.; b. Geelong, 3 Sept., 1888. Killed in action, 2 Dec., 1917

<sup>2</sup> Lieut. W. N. E. Scott; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Electrical engineer; of Elsternwick, Melbourne; b. Elsternwick, 15 Aug., 1894. Killed in action, 2 Dec., 1917

lines, locate some sentenced enemy battery, call up—by wireless buzzing—British heavy artillery detailed for the work, and proceed to pound the German gun-position. Sometimes the bombardment had to be abandoned because of bad weather or other causes, but generally the Australian airmen stuck to their task, until they had seen the German gun-pits blotted out in craters, or the ammunition beside the pieces exploded, or our own guns so well ranged on the target that they could demolish it without further observation.

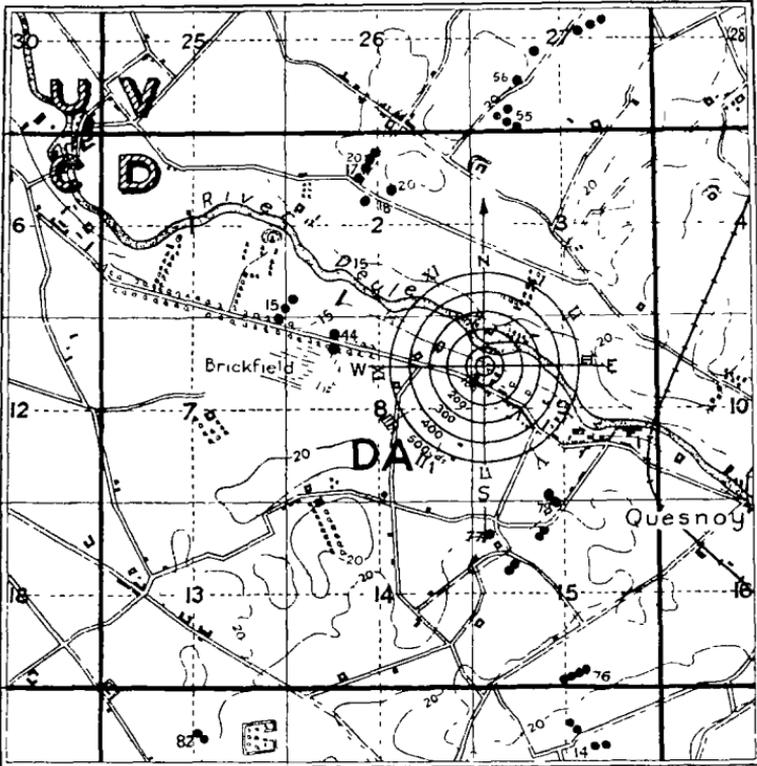
Artillery ranging by aeroplane is work of a high order. An instance from the squadron record book under date of December 6th is a good illustration—

“R.E.8 A3815 Capt. W. H. Anderson, Lt. J. R. Bell (O); Art. Obs. with 155 S.B. 6-inch How.; Pilot. Start, 9.25 a.m.; return, 12.25 p.m. Remarks: S. K'out EB PZ 19. Called up 9.37 a.m. First G sent at 9.55 a.m.; 35 RRO obtg. 2 Ys, 3 Zs, 17 As, 8 Bs, 4 Cs, 1 D. Bty. put out V at 10.50 a.m. Obs. during fire for effect 5 MOKs, 1 MA, 1 MZ. Damage to target uncertain, but one small explosion OK in pit at 11.20 a.m. First half-hour of fire for effect good, after that inclined to be scattered occasionally, especially one gun. CI sent at 12.19 p.m. T out.”

Which report, being interpreted, means: “R.E.8, number of machine, pilot's and observer's names; duty, artillery observation with No. 155 Siege Battery of 6-inch howitzers; pilot observing. Left aerodrome 9.25 a.m., returned 12.25 p.m. Remarks: Satisfactory ‘knock-out.’ Engaged enemy battery numbered PZ 19 (a zone number). Called up our battery at 9.37 a.m. First signal to fire sent at 9.55 a.m. Observed thirty-five rounds obtaining two hits ten yards from centre of target, three twenty-five yards out, seventeen fifty yards out, eight 100 yards out, four 200 yards out, and one 300 yards out.<sup>a</sup> Our battery put out a V ground-strip signifying ranging considered complete at 10.50 a.m. Observed during battery fire for effect five rounds mostly direct hits and two others slightly out. One small explosion in centre of enemy gun-pit at 11.20 a.m. Signal ‘coming in’ sent to

<sup>a</sup> Reckoned by means of “clock-face” diagram upon a map. See Appendix No. 6.

The Squares 1 2 3 etc are 1000 yds



SECTION OF A TYPICAL ARTILLERY MAP, SHOWING METHOD OF RANGING BY REFERENCE TO "CLOCK-FACE." THIS SECTION SHOWS AN AREA IN REGION NORTH-WEST OF LILLE.

● ● ● ENEMY BATTERY POSITIONS

The clock-face diagram is placed, from actual example in the field, with its centre at an enemy battery position. The whole map illustrates the British Army system of placing—or "pin-pointing"—by means of map-squares any position. Military maps were in contiguous sheets, divided into 1,000-yard squares. The main divisions were lettered with capital letters, A, B, C, D, &c, and represented areas measuring 6,000 yards x 6,000 yards, or in some cases for convenience 6,000 x 5,000. The full square D in this example, for instance, contained 36 squares each 1,000 x 1,000, marked from 1 to 36, beginning at the left-hand top corner and ending at the right-hand bottom corner. These 1,000-yard squares, again, were divided into four 500-yard squares, labelled in the same sequence a, b, c, and d. To take an example, the small square farm south-west of the Brickfield is in D7d. To "pin-point" this farm precisely, the method was to imagine each side of the small d square to be divided into ten equal sections. The further calculation by means of these was first horizontally, then vertically—*i.e.*, first east, then north from the left-hand bottom corner of each small square. Thus the farm in the example would be at D7d9. Where it was required to define the point even more precisely these tooth-comb scales were measured to one decimal place: thus the centre of the farm would be set down as D7d2095.

The larger square DA, one quarter of the map square D, was a more general subdivision used by artillery only. One or more British batteries might be allotted the task of dealing with all hostile movement, or guns, in the square DA, that is, in a zone measuring 3,000 yards x 3,000. The targets (enemy batteries) in every such square were numbered as soon as located. Artillery fire could then be called down upon any of them by simply mentioning the letters of the square and the number of the target—*e.g.*, DA76 (which in the map here shown was an enemy battery in the S.E. corner of square DA).

battery at 12.19 p.m. as battery had out T ground-strip signalling 'Go home (no longer requiring aeroplane assistance).'

The above report of the wireless shorthand intelligence sent to the guns is not the end of the pilot's report. He also included times and locations by map-reference of enemy gun-flashes, movement of trains or other things behind the enemy lines, and anything else of interest seen by himself or his observer during the flight. While waiting for his guns to begin the bombardment, the pilot dropped two twenty-pound bombs on an enemy trench strong-point and recorded its location. In the middle of the ranging (at 10.10 a.m.) the said R.E.8 was attacked by a D.F.W. two-seater which appeared on the scene from the direction of Warneton. Bell, the observer, engaged the German machine and put a burst of ninety rounds into it, and the enemy fell steeply without having fired a shot. An artillery officer on the Messines Ridge saw the D.F.W. fall straight into the enemy's lines and crash. This was the first German machine destroyed by No. 3 Squadron.

Occasionally, when a pilot was engaged on such duty, he might observe activity on the part of some enemy battery other than that which he was detailed to engage. Or he might be seriously inconvenienced in his work by the fire of anti-aircraft guns. He then signalled back to artillery headquarters "N.F." (neutralising fire), together with the location of the active battery, which would bring the British guns into action against it. There were other calls pre-arranged to indicate the relative importance of enemy artillery activity observed. When the desired effect had been produced, and the enemy guns silenced, the aeroplane signalled "N.T.," to convey that information. "G.F.," with location, was the call for fire on transport or bodies of troops moving, and "L.L." the call for all available guns to open fire when a serious hostile attack was apparently assembling.

The varied duties of a corps squadron have been explained elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Specially detailed machines would occasionally fly low over the lines for a close inspection of the German defences—as, for instance, when an infantry raid was being

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix No. 6.

prepared. This work also will best be explained by example. Lieutenants W. V. Herbert<sup>6</sup> and F. J. Rae<sup>6</sup> (observer) reconnoitred 2,000 yards of German outposts and trenches for a raid by Australian infantry below the Wyttschaete Ridge on December 6th. Their report reveals both the daring and the value of the work. It read—

“Patrol satisfactory. Visibility over trenches fairly good. German outposts at (map-reference) O17b93 Bang Farm, strongly protected and occupied. Also outposts at O18a24 and at O17d89 occupied and apparently strongly reinforced with concrete and sandbags. At Whiz Farm no barbed-wire visible. Fly Buildings at O23b6095 reinforced with sandbags and earthworks (concrete) and occupied. Bee Farm apparently occupied. All tracks to above-mentioned outposts appear to be well worn. New works not evident. Whiz Farm and Fly Buildings appear to be strongly held. Ridge Farm at O24a6510 strongly reinforced and occupied. *Barbed-wire*: Three rows plainly visible apparently in good order. No openings through wire to outposts visible in front of enemy trenches through (map-squares) O24c, O24a, O24b, O18d, O18b. Enemy trenches appear to be in good order and strongly held. The Twins do not appear to be strongly held. One hundred and fifty rounds fired by observer through the flight into various outposts. Two twenty-pound bombs dropped at Bang Farm, one at O11d9025, and one at Whiz Farm between 12.15 and 12.45 p.m.”

Several machines went out in the afternoon of December 17th in a spell of unusually fine weather. One of them met with perhaps the most extraordinary adventure recorded on the Western Front. Lieutenant J. L. M. Sandy,<sup>7</sup> with Sergeant H. F. Hughes<sup>8</sup> as observer, while ranging an 8-inch howitzer battery, was attacked by six Albatros D.5.a scouts. Sandy was

<sup>6</sup> Capt W. V. Herbert, A.F.C.; No. 3 Sqn (previously Light Horse). Station overseer; of Lorne, Vic.; b. Ocean Grove, Vic., 28 July, 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Lieut. F. J. Rae, No. 3 Sqn. (previously Artillery). School teacher; of Yea, Vic., b. Blackwood, Vic., 20 May, 1883.

<sup>7</sup> Lieut. J. L. M. Sandy; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Company secretary; of Burwood, Sydney; b. Ashfield, Sydney, 4 Feb., 1886. Killed in action, 17 Dec., 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Sgt H. F. Hughes (No. 559; No. 3 Sqn). Civil servant; of South Yarra, Melbourne, b. Prahran, Melbourne, 1890. Killed in action, 17 Dec., 1917.

hard-pressed, but fought vigorously and finally shot down one of the German machines to a forced landing in the lines of the 21st Australian Infantry Battalion, where the wounded pilot was taken prisoner. This was reported by British anti-aircraft gunners, who witnessed the whole action. Sandy fought an unequal fight for several minutes before assistance arrived, and one of the artillery officers watching from the ground described it as the most gallant action he had seen. Then E. J. Jones and Hodgson came up in another R.E.8 and the two fought the five German scouts for nearly ten minutes before the enemy, seeing yet a third R.E.8 approaching, broke off the combat. Jones reported that after the action he flew close to Sandy's machine, still cruising normally on its "beat," recognised it by its number, and then, concluding that its pilot and observer were unhurt and continuing their artillery work, made back to the aerodrome for more ammunition. But Sandy's wireless messages had ceased. By the time Jones had returned to the line, Sandy's machine was not in sight either in the air or on the ground. That night the squadron sent out telephone messages far and wide enquiring for the missing airmen, but not till the following evening was any news received. Then from a stationary hospital near St. Pol came a telegram to the effect that the dead bodies of Sandy and Hughes had been found in a wrecked R.E.8 in a neighbouring field. The report of a subsequent examination by officers of the squadron states: "From a post-mortem on the bodies at the hospital, and an examination of the scene of the crash, it would appear that both pilot and observer were killed in the aerial combat, and that the machine flew itself in wide left-hand circles until the petrol supply ran out. An armour-piercing bullet had passed through the observer's left lung and thence into the base of the pilot's skull. Medical opinion was that the pilot had been killed instantly. It was apparent that the observer had made no attempt to ship the auxiliary joy-stick, and that the throttle was open when the machine crashed. The theory that the machine flew itself in wide circles is supported by the fact that the wind that day was north-east, which would cause a south-west drift. The place where the machine was found is on an air-line distant fifty miles south-west from the scene

of the combat. The bodies of neither pilot nor observer were further injured in the crash." While still missing, Sandy had been recommended for immediate award of the Military Cross in recognition of his gallant fight, and Sergeant Hughes for the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

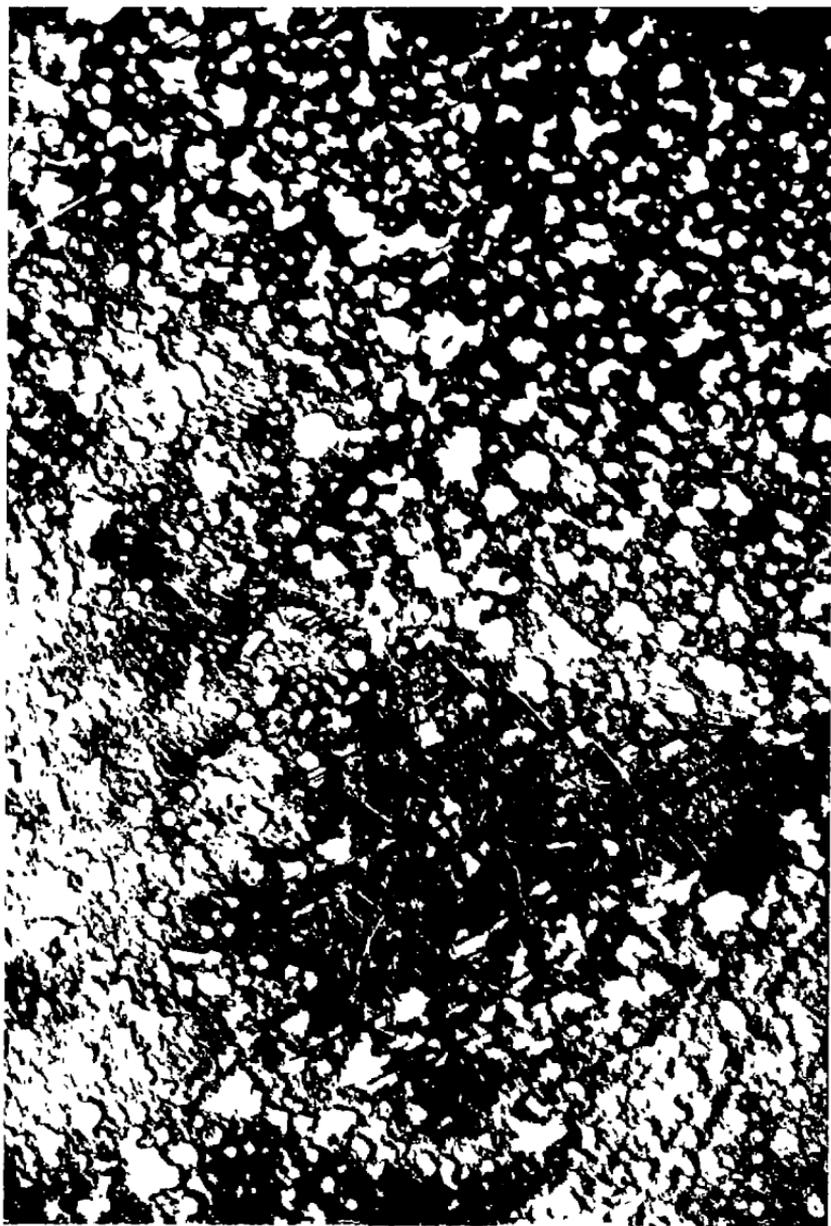
Heavy snow fell at the close of the year, and the first bright interval while snow lay on the ground was a summons to No. 3 Squadron to photograph the enemy lines opposite the corps front. Snow concealed all defence works for so long as the garrisons made no movement. But the first man who went out to walk about in the snow left the plainest of tracks behind him. Tracks to camouflaged gun-pits, tracks to camouflaged battalion headquarters, to ammunition- or other supply-dumps, tracks to and from the line, which revealed a route taken by fatigue parties marching up at night—all these were zealously recorded by the local branches, at division and corps headquarters, of the widespread army intelligence service. A doubtful active battery-position would be made certain by the new-made tracks leading into it. Consequently, with the first sunshine after snowfall, while the snow still lay, the photographing aeroplanes were out to collect this valuable material for the revision of the artillery maps.

Such a day was the 1st January, 1918, and at noon an extensive photography-reconnaissance was carried out in formation by three machines of No. 3 Squadron. Under special arrangements for protection by scouting aeroplanes and for neutralising fire by our artillery upon all known enemy anti-aircraft batteries, the Australian machines covered with their cameras the entire Australian Corps front. The work was highly successful, and the squadron was congratulated next day by the army commander.

Such photography-patrols, it may be necessary to repeat, were not restricted simply to days when snow lay on the ground. The enemy lines were photographed at constant intervals, and the distribution of negative-prints, especially to the infantry, became ever wider and wider. Earlier in the war, before the value of photography-reconnaissance was properly appreciated, the pictures made were but scantily distributed to divisions in the line—in numbers of perhaps two or three or half-a-dozen; if one copy were occasionally

sent on to an infantry battalion in the line, it was an act of grace and goodwill. The value of a constant flow of intelligence from rear to front of the army, as from front to rear, did not easily win recognition. The photographs of German front-line defences were regarded as things which would amuse the general of the division, or even perhaps the brigade-commander, rather than as vitally important information for the fighting men in the line, whose work was to harass the enemy in those defences, or, upon occasion, to turn him out of them. Staff officers would collect aeroplane-photographs as souvenirs of "sections of the front where we have been engaged." Those were the days of half-serious hopelessness at ever "beating the old Boche." The infantry themselves were not much quicker in the beginning to perceive the value of aeroplane-photographs. The science of ferreting out what was called "hostile intelligence" in the front line was not in 1915 and early 1916 the enthusiastic and unending work which it became later. Among the first to perceive the advantages of the new aid were the company-commanders, who used to be held responsible for the regular drawing of little sketch-maps of their own and the enemy's forward positions—thereby recording officially the fact that the battalion knew its muddy area, and facilitating "handing over the line" to relieving units. In those early days, moreover, when infantry raids were only beginning, the line battalions rarely possessed any system for the interrogation of prisoners, or felt any great faith in the value of information so obtained now and then from "higher up." The taking of any prisoners at all was a matter of sheer luck; the raids were designed, not to procure intelligence, but to "buck up the troops," and to take revenge at close quarters upon the hated *minenwerfer*-crews.

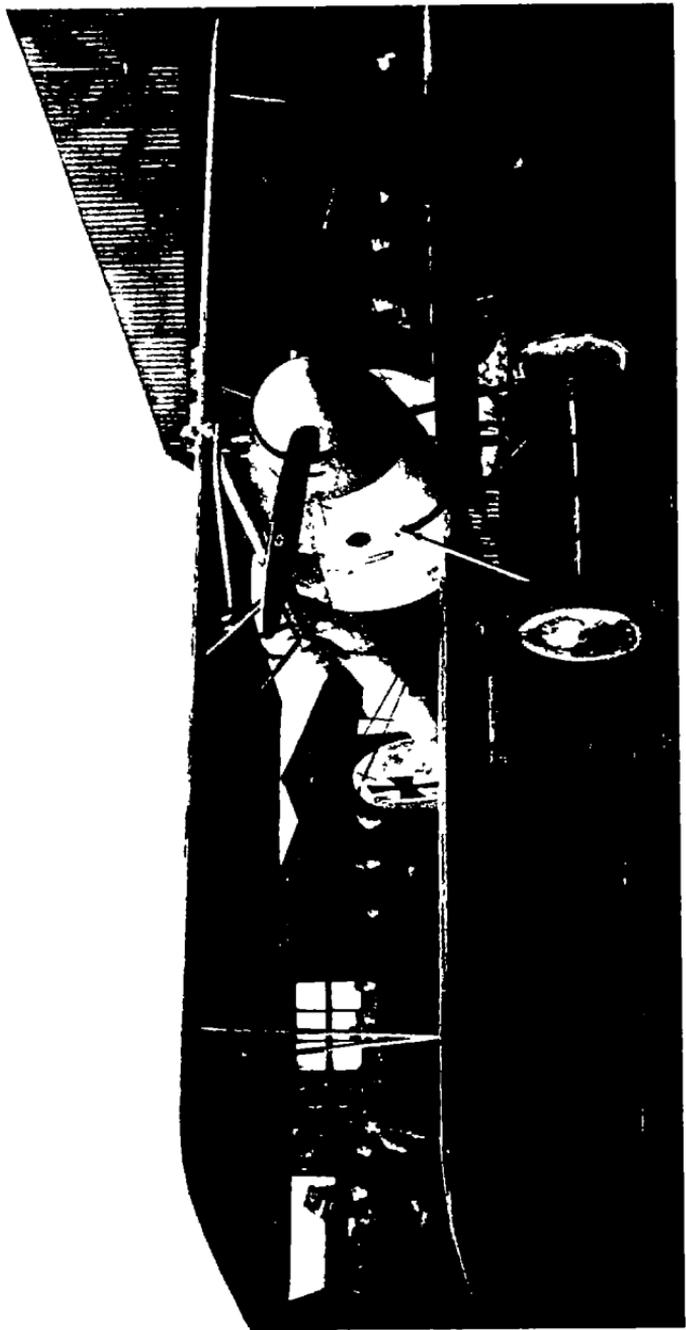
As soon as the army had grown to accept the view that fighting the Germans was a problem as much of science and intelligence as of rude force, these old notions underwent a change. If the date of such a change must be named at all precisely, it would probably be the spring of 1916. Towards the close of that year front-line intelligence of the enemy had become almost a fetish with staffs of army corps, and a new officer had appeared on the staff of the division—the



A CLOSE VIEW OF " AUGUSTUS WOOD, NEAR PASSCHENDAELE RIDGE  
(YPRES), SHOWING THE SHELL-TORN GROUND 17TH OCTOBER, 1917  
German concrete forts ("pillboxes") can be seen on each edge of  
the wood, slightly below its two upper corners

*British Air Force Photograph  
First War Museum Collection No 1388*

*To face p 206.*



THE GERMAN ALBATROS SHOT DOWN BY LIEUTENANT J. L. SANDY AND SERGEANT H. F. HUGHES (OBSERVER) NEAR ARMENTIERES, 17TH DECEMBER, 1917

( This machine is now in the Australian War Museum )

Division Intelligence Officer. Part of his special training was the interpretation of the evidence of aeroplane photographs, and divisions thereupon came to demand these photographs at more and more frequent intervals and in greater numbers for distribution. For a time the map-making sections of corps and army staffs absorbed most of the newly-taken photographs, and the information gleaned was then issued to the line in the form of new editions of trench maps. A strictly limited number of copies of the photographs themselves reached the infantry closest to the scene, and even yet infantry officers seldom read them with full intelligence. The reading of what were called "vertical photographs" was a matter mainly of constant practice guided by a few elementary principles. But by the latter part of 1917 (the date at which No. 3 Australian Squadron began its service career) no doubt remained about the supreme importance of photographs to the infantry in the line. Raids would not be planned without them. For a grand attack copies would be issued for close study, not merely to platoon-officers, but also to non-commissioned officers and men. By their help the attacking force could be made almost as intimate with the main features of enemy country to be captured and fortified as they were with their own lines from which they issued to the attack.

As the winter passed, and as in early 1918 it became clear that a grand German offensive had to be faced at some part of the Western Front. No. 3 Squadron—among others—photographed the enemy's lines on every possible day, with a view to searching out any changes or signs of preparation. The eyes of the scouting squadrons saw the ammunition dumps increasing, new gun-positions being made, and the growing signs of heavy transport in the enemy's rear, and at every opportunity photographic-reconnaissances were made by other squadrons, charged with that duty, to confirm the more fleeting observation of the eye. February and early March were a succession of bad spells of weather lasting several days, with here and there a fine day between. Each of these fine days was a day for photographic-reconnaissance, as well as for artillery-shoots, flash-spotting patrols, and patrols of German trench-defences, bomb-dropping and machine-gunning of

ground targets. Corps squadrons are maids-of-all-work. Frequently they would drop into the German trenches "propaganda" as well as bombs; and sometimes, when the wind would carry a little roll of paper into the British lines instead of those of the enemy, the infantry would pick it up and pore over it and wonder what it meant. Its precise effect on the German soldier was never definitely ascertained, but it was a cunning scheme. Back in some prisoners' cage or prison-labour camp, captured Germans would be asked whether they would like to send a postcard home to say they were in good health and well treated. There was never any dearth of such messages. The prisoners would write their postcard and address it—they were not allowed to write of anything except their health and general treatment—and of these cards multiple copies would be made from a jelly-pad, sorted into bundles of a dozen or so of selected cards, and each bundle wrapped up in a fly-sheet with a notice in German printed on it in bold type. This notice was stereotyped, and read:—

"Soldaten! In dem Schützengraben erfriert man. Heraus aus dem Schützengraben! Hinein ins warme Bett! Täglich drei heisse Mahlzeiten! Wo? Warme Kleidung! Wo? Bezahlte Arbeit! Wo? Bei den Engländern! Darum ergebt Euch ihnen. Die Engländer töten keine Gefangenen. Im Lager der Engländer dürft Ihr Euren Civilberuf aufnehmen. Für Eure Arbeit werdet Ihr gut bezahlt. Im Lager der Engländer dürft Ihr an Eure Freunde und Verwandte schreiben, und Ihr erhaltet sämtliche Briefe und Postpakete welche sie Euch zusenden. Es ist nicht unpatriotisch sich ehrenhaft dem Feind zu ergeben um später in die Heimat zurückkehren zu können. Darum ergebt Euch und erfriert nicht in dem Schützengraben."

["Soldiers! One freezes in the trenches. Come out of them! Come into a warm bed! Three hot meals a day! Where? Warm clothing! Where? Work for which you can receive pay! Where? With the English! Therefore surrender yourselves to them! The English do not kill their prisoners. In the camps of the English you may take up again your civilian employment. You

will be well paid for the work you do. In the camps of the English you may write to your friends and relatives, and you will faithfully receive every letter and parcel which they send to you by post. It is not unpatriotic to give yourselves up honourably to the enemy in order to be able later to return to your own homes. Therefore come over and surrender, and do not go on freezing in the fire-trenches!"]

Not very many Germans came over as deserters in answer to this appeal, but it must have made the mouths of some of them water, even though its composition was not exactly classical.

The squadron's maid-of-all-work duties continued steadily through the winter. Patrols were rarely without incident. As the spring came nearer, the enemy machines—sent out to prevent the constant British reconnaissance—took the air in increasing numbers, and it became almost the daily rule for No. 3 Squadron's patrols to be attacked by scout formations. Escorting British scouts were generally there to defend the slower R.E.8's, but the R.E.8's were quite able to defend themselves on occasion, and Sandy's last fight was a magnificent demonstration of the fact. On January 25th Lieutenants C. C. Matheson<sup>9</sup> and C. T. Brown<sup>10</sup> (observer) on patrol met the attack of two German two-seaters and shot down one of them in flames. The squadron-commander, reporting on this, grimly commented: "It is interesting to note that Lieutenant Brown had just previously been declared the winner of the 2nd Brigade, Royal Air Force, machine-gun competition." The enemy's anti-aircraft action also increased in volume with his efforts to prevent observation of his plans. Lieutenants C. Donahay<sup>11</sup> and J. R. Blair<sup>12</sup> had their machine badly damaged by anti-aircraft fire on January 26th and crashed fatally at Dranoutre on their way home; three weeks later another of No. 3's machines, with Lieutenants H.

<sup>9</sup> Capt. C. C. Matheson; No. 3 Sqn. Motor mechanic; b. Trafalgar, Vic., 1898.

<sup>10</sup> Lieut. C. T. Brown; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Fitter and turner; of Charters Towers, Q'land; b. Charters Towers, 25 Feb., 1896.

<sup>11</sup> Lieut. C. Donahay; No. 3 Sqn. (previously A.A.M.C.). Optician, of Hawthorn, Melbourne; b. Camberwell, Melbourne, 14 Feb., 1892. Killed in action, 26 Jan., 1918.

<sup>12</sup> Lieut. J. R. Blair; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Pastorist; b. Rockhampton, Q'land, 21 Jan., 1894. Killed in action, 26 Jan., 1918.

Streeter<sup>13</sup> and F. J. Tarrant,<sup>14</sup> while ranging a heavy battery, suddenly fell to pieces in the air over the lines near Wyttschaete. There was no anti-aircraft fire at the time, and no hostile aeroplane to be seen, and the presumption was that the R.E.8 was hit by a British shell in flight. But in return for such losses the squadron took heavy toll of the enemy on the ground. Its pilots, besides their other work, assisted the artillery to put out of action sixty-one enemy batteries in January, fifty-one in February, and sixty-seven in March. These figures do not include the batteries upon which bombardment did not lead to some satisfactory result.

In March No. 3 Squadron had to leave its aerodrome at Bailleul. Throughout the winter on favourable nights, especially those about the full moon, the Germans had sent over bombing squadrons of Gothas, their chief target being always Bailleul town and aerodrome. A heavy night raid on December 4th was followed eight days later by a determined attack in the early afternoon from a formation of fifteen Gothas. If the fleet of these giant machines, with their sonorous double-hum, made a spectacle terrifying to the average civilian, the troops did not like them much better. On the day in question they dropped six enormous bombs of about 230 pounds each, but their aim was hampered by the attack of British scouts and their bombs missed the aerodrome, with the exception of one, which fell between two hangars and failed to explode. On the way home one of the monsters was brought down on fire by a British scout and fell in No-Man's Land. Again on February 2nd Gothas attempted two daylight raids upon the aerodrome, but each was driven away by anti-aircraft fire. That night the Gothas returned twice. No. 3 Squadron's habitation was clearly their target, but the raiders still failed to hit it. The full moon of mid-February saw a succession of enemy night air raids: Bailleul railway station was severely damaged, but the aerodrome escaped. In March it became clear that the Germans had marked down Bailleul for destruction. Besides the intermittent night bombing, shelling began on March 12th from

<sup>13</sup> Lieut. H. Streeter; No. 3 Sqn. (previously Infantry) Building contractor of Bunyip, Vic; b Brunswick, Melbourne, 1894. Killed in action, 17 Feb., 1918.

<sup>14</sup> Lieut. F. J. Tarrant; No. 3 Sqn (previously Artillery). Tailor's cutter; of Clifton Hill, Melbourne, b. Carlton, Melbourne, 12 Oct., 1895. Killed in action 17 Feb., 1918.

long-range guns and produced deadly effect. By March 22nd the aerodrome became untenable. Many streets of the town were littered with the débris of broken houses, almost all the civilian population had gone—though these people did not customarily leave their homes while any hope remained—and that day the town was declared out of bounds to all troops. No. 3 Squadron had to leave also—the shelling was too dangerously close to their hangars—and that same day a move was made to Abeele, though without interruption of the squadron's patrols over the line. Next morning the enemy's long-range guns at last hit the abandoned aerodrome huts. The squadron did not entirely escape loss, for the shelling killed an air-mechanic and wounded an officer and a corporal, who had been left behind to clear up the aerodrome and salve remaining stores.

The long-range shelling of Bailleul was accompanied by shelling of other important towns which were road and railway centres—Hazebrouck, Lillers, St. Pol, Doullens—all normally reckoned beyond the danger zone. This proceeding was part of the wide programme of the great German offensive, which began on March 21st against the British line near St. Quentin, and which was preceded by great activity against the whole Allied front in order to mask the actual point of assault. The Allies had accurately forecasted the location, and even the date, of the attack, but warnings were issued that the enemy offensive might also come at more places than one along the line. The area between La Bassée and Ypres was accounted one such danger-place by every division in that area. The awaited offensive did not begin in that quarter, although an important thrust was made there not long afterwards. The issued warnings made No. 3's reconnoitring patrols all the keener, and, for increased preparedness, special counter-attack patrol machines were maintained over the German lines at about dawn and dusk on every day from March 11th onwards. In its work through the winter, and especially during March, the squadron, by record of results achieved, won itself pride of place in the 2nd (Corps) Wing.

Early in April No. 3 Squadron moved again. The Australian Corps had gone south to the Somme to meet the German advance on Amiens, and thither the corps squadron followed

it. By April 8th it was established in the aerodrome at Poulainville, alongside Australian Corps Headquarters at Bertangles. The last notable event in the north before it left Abeele was a brilliant fight about noon on April 1st, when Lieutenants R. G. D. Francis<sup>15</sup> and R. Hainsworth<sup>16</sup> (observer), while ranging a heavy battery, were attacked by a D.F.W. two-seater. The German dived down on them and missed, and the R.E.8 instantly turned to counter-attack. Francis cut the German off from his own side of the lines, and then by skilful manœuvring began driving him steadily westward. He out-flew and out-fought the D.F.W. for several exciting minutes. The enemy could not break back, and every turn he made found the R.E.8 ready for him with another burst of fire. After Francis had fired about 350 rounds, his opponent went down in a steep dive and crashed. The fight was witnessed throughout from Francis's own aerodrome.

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<sup>15</sup> Capt. R. G. D. Francis, D.F.C., No. 3 Sqn. Chemist, of Kew, Melbourne;  
b Corio, Vic., 22 Dec., 1889.

<sup>16</sup> Lieut. R. Hainsworth, No. 3 Sqn. Electrical fitter; of Willoughby, Sydney,  
b Willoughby, 24 Sept., 1895.