

CHAPTER XXI

HARASSING THE ENEMY ON THE LYS

By mid-July the fortunes of the enemy, having reached high-water mark, began to recede. July also found both of the Australian scouting squadrons located at the same aerodrome at Reclinghem (south-west of Aire), and during the summer both sides seemed to concentrate air fighting strength on the Flanders front. This flank of the battle-line was a tender spot for the enemy. He had to withdraw from about Lille more and more divisions to stay the central Allied attack south of Arras; if his right flank were turned, disaster might ensue to his whole army. Hence, as the main battle swelled, the increasing importance of the northern operations, the essential need for good air-reconnaissance, and therefore the accumulating strength of the air forces on both sides. July and August were months of poor weather for flying, attended, as summer months in the Low Countries frequently are, by rain storms and bad visibility. Nevertheless each side kept the air in great force, and August and September, when the critical fighting came, were remarkable for great battles in the skies over the area around Lille.

No. 2 and No. 4 Squadrons were by now frankly engaged in a keen, though friendly, competition for the largest number of enemy aircraft destroyed. The fact of their sharing the same aerodrome naturally increased this rivalry. The first fight from the new aerodrome was that of a patrol under Captain E. J. K. McCloughry, of No. 4 Squadron, in the afternoon of July 1st. He was one of a formation of ten which dropped 400 lbs. of bombs on Estaires. Three Pfalz scouts dived out of the upper air upon him, but almost at once two of them collided, and one, losing a wing torn off, fell to the ground. The third Pfalz opened fire on him, but was out-mancœuvred, and flew away east. McCloughry then attacked the second Pfalz of the colliding pair, fired 100 rounds into it, and it fell in flames.

Next morning No. 4 Squadron again bombed Estaires with two successive formations, while accompanying patrols from No. 2 roamed the sky at 18,000 feet. Many triplanes and Fokker biplanes were seen south-east of Merville and

west of Armentières, but too far off to engage. In the early afternoon three machines from No. 4 Squadron were out on special missions after German airmen engaged in reconnaissance. Cobby, in one of them, flew to the Lys balloon-line in quest of prey, attacked a balloon from directly above, and set it on fire. While regaining height from this effort, he perceived four Fokker triplanes flying towards Merville from La Bassée. Three of them were at 10,000 feet; the fourth was about 1,500 feet lower. Cobby was one of the most daring spirits in the Australian air service. He made straight for the four Fokkers, flying under clouds in order to get east of them unseen. With nice judgment he at length emerged from the clouds in position slightly above the lower and under the three upper machines, and at the same moment another friendly cloud cut him off from the sight of those three. He fell like a hawk on the lower triplane, and fired 150 rounds into it at about fifty-feet range. The triplane fell into a carpet of cloud completely out of control. Cobby went down after it to observe its fate, despite the fact that the other three had seen him, and were coming down to attack. They chased him back across the lines, but, after they had turned away again, Cobby flew back to La Bassée and there saw his victim lying in a heap on the ground.

Two flights from No. 4 Squadron again bombed Estaires and Merville in the afternoon of July 4th. Between 5 and 5.30 p.m. one of them flew low and machine-gunned balloon-grounds, roads, and billets, and, arriving at the town-square of Estaires, found two companies drilling there. They shot down a number of these men and pursued the others with a hot fire into surrounding houses. In the same evening six S.E.5's from No. 2 Squadron fell in with five Fokker biplanes flying at 18,000 feet just east of Armentières. Five of the Australians had a slight advantage of height over the enemy; one, F. R. Smith, was flying below. The top S.E.5's dived at the Fokkers and sent them down in a whirl past Smith; Smith picked out one, tumbled about in the air with it, firing several long bursts, and finally fired fifty rounds into it at close range. It fell and crashed to pieces on the main Lille road near Capinghem.

Both squadrons continued their bombing operations against troops and railways on July 5th and 6th. Lieutenants A. T.

Heller,¹ J. W. Milner,² O. B. Ramsay,³ and Nelson, from No. 4 Squadron, flew in the early morning at very low heights—sometimes at no more than twenty feet—along a line of trenches and shell-holes from Merville to La Bassée and fired over 2,000 rounds into German infantry. This, in a thick morning haze, was remarkably clever work, and the exposed troops were for the time utterly demoralized. The four Camels returned safely, though full of bullet-holes. A following patrol of six Camels at 9.45 a.m., under E. J. K. McCloughry, dropped 300 lbs. of bombs on Estaires, sank a barge at that place, and then flew along the German trenches between Merville and La Bassée and repeated the previous attack on the infantry garrisons. On July 6th both squadrons bombed dumps at Merville, Estaires, and Bac St. Maur, and also the railways around La Bassée and Steenwerck. These were all important points in the Germans' supply-system in the Lys salient.

"Train-strafting" was always high sport for airmen, and the constant visits to Lille suggested great possibilities in this way. No. 2 Squadron resolved to exploit them, and planned an early morning visit in the mist to Lille on July 7th. Ten machines, under the squadron-commander (Major Murray Jones), left the aerodrome at 4 a.m. on this adventure. Thick clouds at 2,000 feet made visibility very bad, and one pilot, having lost his way, took no part in the raid. The formation flew east towards Bethune by compass-bearing; there the clouds gave place to a white mist, through which sight of the ground was possible. The patrol picked up the La Bassée-Haubourdin Canal and flew along it to Haubourdin, where at 5.15 a.m. Murray Jones gave the signal to descend. The first target seen was a train leaving the station westward. Jones dropped two bombs close beside it from fifty feet, and set the train burning on each side. Cole lashed the same train with machine-gun fire and dropped his bombs in the goods-shed beside the railway. Copp followed Cole, and released two bombs clean into a stationary train at the station; he then

¹ Lieut. A. T. Heller; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Jackeroo; of Hay, N S W., b Warrnambool, Vic., 19 July, 1896.

² Lieut. J. W. Milner; R.A.F. Attached No 4 Sqn, 26 May to July, 1918.

³ Lieut. O. B. Ramsay; No 4 Sqn (previously 1st Pioneer Bn). Licensed surveyor, b Tumberumba, N S W., 12 Feb., 1892

turned away and fired 200 rounds into a dump at Herlies, farther west. Lieutenant C. O. Stone⁴ bombed Haubourdin station and silenced an anti-aircraft battery near by with his machine-guns. Forrest dived at the station at Wavrin, three miles south-west of Haubourdin, dropped two bombs in the middle of the railway track, flew on to meet a train coming from La Bassée, and fired 100 rounds into its windows. Lieutenant A. C. G. Cameron⁵ bombed the railway behind Forrest and left more craters in the permanent way. Lieutenants F. Alberry,⁶ J. J. Wellwood,⁷ and Cox remained aloft to guard the raiders against any air-attack, but none came. Such was the matter-of-fact report of a raid which, made in a shrouding mist, blocked a main railway supply-line for some hours, and brought the camps of a whole countryside out like angry ants. So thick was the fog that most of the machines were unable to find their aerodrome on their return, and there were five forced landings away from home.

The bombing and machine-gunning of the enemy's forward trenches and villages in the Lys flats between Merville and La Bassée proceeded as a daily routine on the part of No. 4 Squadron. The enemy was beginning to take the air in stronger formations, and in the days after the bombing of Haubourdin great numbers of them were seen over Lille. In the evening of July 7th a flight from No. 4 Squadron, under Lieutenant N. C. Trescowthick,⁸ escorting a bombing-patrol of D.H.9's, was suddenly attacked from above by fourteen Fokkers between La Bassée and Nieppe Forest. The Australians beat off the enemy after narrowly escaping disaster, several of the Camels being badly damaged. In marked distinction from the practice of the British airmen, the Germans, though numerous and active, seldom ventured across the lines except at great height. On such rare occasions they were prompt to turn away for home as soon as they were challenged.

⁴ Lieut. C. O. Stone; No. 2 Sqn. Chauffeur; b. Chingford, Essex, Eng., Sept., 1893.

⁵ Lieut. A. C. G. Cameron; No. 2 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Chemist; b. Maryborough, Q'land, Jan., 1898.

⁶ Lieut. F. Alberry, D.C.M.; No. 2 Sqn. Sleeper hewer; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 29 Sept., 1892. (He had lost a leg while serving in the infantry, but was none the less a daring and capable pilot.)

⁷ Lieut. J. J. Wellwood, D.F.C.; No. 2 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Motor engineer; of Drouin, Vic.; b. Diouin, 15 Oct., 1892.

⁸ Lieut. N. C. Trescowthick, D.F.C.; No. 4 Sqn. Boot manufacturer; of Alphington, Melbourne; b. Clifton Hill, Melbourne, 14 July, 1895.

The enemy infantry activity around Merville and Estaires was pronounced, and Australian airmen made daily practice on transport, trenches, and gun-positions in this region, where the country had been so blasted by artillery bombardment that movement was almost impossible to hide. On one such patrol, in the morning of July 10th, Lieutenant R. Moore⁹ was hit by a shell and crashed near Robecq, but escaped with his life; and Nelson, one of a bombing-patrol on July 14th, was shot down by ground-fire while machine-gunning transport near Estaires. He landed unhurt, and was taken prisoner.

That local defence measures in this flat, shell-torn country were easily discerned from the air has been stated above. For the same reason observation from the ground by the German gunners was almost impossible. Every house or other observer's vantage-point had been pounded to pieces by gun-fire. Hence German two-seater artillery aeroplanes became very busy in this region. Cobby destroyed one of them near La Bassée in the evening of July 9th; he caught it in a neat double burst of fire, first in a dive from above and behind, and then in a stalling attack from underneath its tail. E. J. K. McCloughry, out with Jones-Evans on a dawn hunt over Laventie on July 11th, crashed a Rumpler two-seater, and five minutes later, being attacked by several Pfalz scouts, shot down one out of control. Two more two-seaters were destroyed near Estaires, one by McCloughry in the afternoon of July 13th and one by Trescowthick next morning. Accompanying Trescowthick was Cobby. The sight of these machines in the vicinity had put the Estaires balloon-line into hasty motion earthward, and while Trescowthick chased the guardian two-seater, Cobby dashed at the nearest balloon and set it on fire.

A sharp fight in the afternoon of July 15th was an example of the daring of Cobby and another first-rate fighting pilot in No. 4 Squadron, Watson. They were flying in company over La Bassée at 6,000 feet, when they noticed five Pfalz scouts coming from Bailleul towards Armentières. The two immediately climbed over the clouds and flew towards the enemy. Diving through the clouds again with nice judgment, they found themselves just above and east of the Germans.

⁹ Lieut. R. Moore; R.A.F. Attached No. 4 Sqn, 15 May to July, 1918.

Despite the presence of a formation of triplanes in the offing, the two Australians immediately attacked. Cobby shot one of the rearmost of the Pfalz formation into flames with his first burst at twenty-five yards' range. Simultaneously another fell from Watson's fire completely out of control. Cobby dived again at a third Pfalz, fought a sharp duel with it, and after the two machines had tumbled and rolled over each other for a minute or more, both wings of the Pfalz collapsed and the machine broke into pieces. By this time four triplanes had descended and were attacking the two Camels. Cobby and Watson escaped by diving away through clouds almost to the ground.

No. 4 Squadron was meeting with remarkable success from early-morning patrols. These were usually of six or eight machines, which would load up with bombs and leave the aerodrome before sunrise, timing their arrival over the Lys line of communications for the first light after dawn. On July 16th E. J. K. McCloughry and Jones-Evans, starting out ahead of six others, flew in the half-light straight for balloon-positions which they had marked down carefully by daylight. Arriving near the Lys, they dropped their bombs on Bac St. Maur and La Gorgue respectively, then stopped their engines and glided down on the unsuspecting balloons. Each shot down one of these in flames, and by the time they had zoomed up again and rejoined company, the other machines of the formation, under Trescowthick, had come up. These proceeded to deposit their loads of explosives on Laventie railway station, and then machine-gunned the enemy's trenches near Le Cornet Malo, between Bethune and Merville.

Next morning (July 17th), while three Camels bombed Armentières railway station at 4 o'clock, Lieutenants Smallwood and C. S. Scobie¹⁰ attacked the Estaires end of the Lys line of supply, and Smallwood destroyed another balloon. Shortly afterwards Taplin, while roaming over the Pacaut area (north of Bethune) looking for his comrades, was attacked by four Pfalz scouts. Having the speed of these, he outclimbed them, counter-attacked at 17,000 feet, and put them to flight. Then near Merville he saw two Albatros two-seaters at 3,000 feet and dived on them. One

¹⁰ Lieut C S Scobie; R A F Attached No 4 Sqn, 12 May to July, 1918. Civil servant; of Edinburgh, b Edinburgh, 21 Feb, 1895.

made immediately towards the ground, but the other stayed to fight. Taplin shot the observer, and then fired into the machine, till it fell and crashed south-west of Estaires. In the afternoon Cole, leading a formation of five from No. 2 Squadron, outmanœuvred near Armentières six Fokker triplanes which had refused combat, put his patrol in position east of them and slightly above, and himself dived on the leader. This triplane fell away on its back; Stone, following close behind Cole, took up the attack upon it, and, after another hundred rounds from him, the Fokker caught fire and dropped like a torch from 17,000 feet.

July 22nd broke a fine flying day, and British and German machines were alike out early over the Lys flats. No. 4 Squadron's dawn destroyer-patrol left in three sections—Moore and Ramsay at 3.30, Taplin and Lieutenant A. H. Lockley¹¹ at 4.30, and E. J. K. McCloughry, Lieutenants R. H. Youdale¹² and J. C. F. Wilkinson¹³ at 5. They all flew straight for the region of Estaires. At 4 a.m. F. R. Smith led four S.E.5's from No. 2 Squadron into the higher air to cruise over Bethune and Lens, and at 6 a.m. Phillipps took out six more. Several German machines were flying low over the Lys. Moore sighted the first of them, a two-seater, near Pacaut Wood, at 1,500 feet, about 4.15 a.m. He had the height of this German by 500 feet, dived upon it, turned towards the ground, and pursued it earthward, firing heavily at close range. The German observer or his armament must have been crippled, for the enemy did not return the shooting. After Moore had fired some 500 rounds into it, the two-seater plunged into the earth in hopeless wreck. Ramsay amused himself meanwhile by firing into the Germans in Pacaut Wood trenches who were watching the incident. He and Moore then flew down the Lys, dropped their bombs on Bac St. Maur, and went home. The second section of the patrol, Taplin and Lockley, arrived soon afterwards, found no enemy over Pacaut Wood, and flew on to Estaires. Here they joined E. J. K. McCloughry, Youdale, and Wilkinson, who had

¹¹ Lieut A. H. Lockley; No 4 Sqn. Motor engineer; of Woolloomooloo, Sydney, b. Marrickville, Sydney, 8 May, 1898. Killed in action, 5 Sept., 1918.

¹² Lieut R. H. Youdale, No 4 Sqn (previously A A S C) Clerk; of Burwood, Sydney; b. Burwood, 7 Sept., 1890.

¹³ Lieut J. C. F. Wilkinson M.C.; R.A.F. (previously 6th London Regt.). Attached to No 4 Sqn, A.F.C. 12 June to Aug., 1918. Dental student; of Harrogate, Yorks, Eng; b. Kirkby Overblow, Yorks, 10 Jan., 1898.

dropped bombs on Bac St. Maur, and attacked the balloon-line near Sailly. Against the balloons Youdale alone was successful. Wilkinson missed his intended victim, and McCloughry had just opened fire when he was attacked from behind by a Fokker biplane. This McCloughry dodged with a climbing turn, and counter-attacked side-on at point-blank range. The Fokker heeled over and crashed near Sailly. Meanwhile the first two offensive-patrols of No. 2 Squadron met no Germans, but a third formation of four machines under Manuel, cruising later in the morning east of Lens at 16,500 feet, came upon three Fokker biplanes about to attack a lower flight of S.E.5's. Manuel wheeled in a wide circle, dived on the Fokkers from behind, and shot down one in a slow wide spin. The S.E.5's then turned east and climbed to 17,000 feet over a scattered collection of fifteen Fokkers, triplanes, and Pfalz scouts. Manuel singled out the rearmost scout of a Pfalz formation, which fell away from the attack completely out of control. The remainder of the enemy prepared to fight, but the Australians, being short of petrol, avoided engagement.

Bad weather spoiled flying until three days later. The dawn of July 25th was marked by a heavy air attack on Armentières and the Lys by both Australian squadrons. Of a formation of seven from No. 4 Squadron, three pilots dropped their bombs on Bac St. Maur, two others heavily machine-gunned a train at Armentières station, and the remaining two, King and Watson, raided the river valley north-east of Armentières. Watson's objective was a balloon near Comines, whose position he had previously marked down. He found this balloon just leaving the ground to ascend, darted at it, and set it on fire from a range of 200 feet. Turning back, he and King sighted an L.V.G. two-seater north of Armentières. Watson, being the nearer, attacked it first, but without apparent effect; King then chased it from 3,000 feet to near the ground, firing into it repeatedly, and the German went straight into the earth nose-first. The two Australians then searched over Armentières for infantry billets, found and bombed several, and flew on up the Lys. They sprayed with their machine-guns a party of men at the Bac St. Maur dumps, and at Estaires shot a "flaming-onion" battery into panic with several hundred rounds. They had hardly left

this much-harassed scene, when five more Camels under Trescowthick bombed Bac St. Maur. The next two patrols from No. 4 Squadron—one of four machines (6.20 a.m.) and one of six (6.45 a.m.)—flew along the Lys from Merville, and aimed their bombs at reserve billets in Lestrem. At 8.15 four more machines, under King, bombed Bac St. Maur. This visitation coincided with the attack of fourteen S.E.5's from No. 2 Squadron on the Lille forts east of Armentières. No. 2's formation flew over in impressive array and dropped twenty-eight bombs at Le Corbeau, Fort Carnot, and Houplines. The bombs which fell into Houplines were not intended for that mark, but it happened that as Phillipps, with the escort section of the formation, was passing over the place at 17,000 feet, he saw seven Fokker biplanes some 2,000 feet below him. He and Cummings at once released their bombs to lighten weight for the attack. Phillipps selected what he believed to be the highest of the Fokkers, a red-tailed machine, and dived at it, but when half-way towards it he suddenly saw a green Fokker flitting from immediately underneath him. Phillipps put his machine straight on its nose in a dive at the green Fokker, and with one short burst from his double machine-guns shot its left wing away. The other Germans took alarm and flew eastward.

The dawn bombing-patrol of July 26th was chiefly remarkable for an accident on the Reclinghem aerodrome which the Australian pilots remember more readily than many flights. Taplin and Ramsay started at 4.20, each carrying a 40-lb. phosphorus and a 25-lb. high explosive bomb. The light was dim, and as Taplin rose under gathering speed, his under-carriage struck a bump on the ground, and the axle snapped. The pilot heard the snap and switched off his engine, in order to land again. His presence of mind in releasing his safety-belt at the same moment saved his life. As his machine touched earth again the under-carriage folded up, interfered with the bomb-release lever, and almost immediately the phosphorus-bomb exploded. The explosion threw Taplin clear of the wreckage and at the same instant set the machine on fire. There followed what the onlookers described as a first-class firework-display. The other bomb exploded, the

tracer-bullets of the machine-gun belts spat out of the flames, and the Very lights soared up from the burning mass or fizzled furiously on the ground. Taplin ran for his life, and escaped, scorched and shaken. Meanwhile his comrade, Ramsay, had made height over the aerodrome, and seeing in the dim light the rockets, flares, the tracer-bullets, and the explosions, he believed that a German raid had arrived. For half-an-hour he circled over the aerodrome looking for the enemy. Thereafter he went off alone and dropped his bombs on a railway siding near La Bassée.

The enemy's hold of the Flanders front was gradually weakening, and from the end of July onward his position on the Lys flats grew steadily worse. The relentless bombing and machine-gunning of his forward areas contributed notably to his general demoralisation, and the time was in sight when a steady offensive would smash through his line at this point. Scottish infantry re-took Meteren village on July 19th. Ten days later two Australian companies advanced and captured with ease the battered ruins of Merris. The whole British front was waiting and ready for a spring; at last the German was at bay.

The design of the British High Command, in the air operations during the early summer so far described, was the breaking of the enemy's morale, while the army on the ground was being prepared for the final blow to come. What the Australian scout squadrons were doing in the Lys salient, other British squadrons were doing elsewhere. The long series of air-fights and bombing raids becomes meaningless if the object of these tactics is forgotten. On the other hand, to suppress the details of the daily effort of the airmen during this period would be to obscure the picture of their splendid endurance in the accomplishment of a great task. If the credit for the final defeat of the German belongs—as in the main it does—to the Allied infantry, the way was paved for that infantry all through the spring and early summer by the Allied airmen.

The dawn bombing raids had been thoroughly justified by the results, and on the principle that nothing succeeds like success, No. 4 Squadron continued them with increasing energy. On July 28th Ramsay, E. J. K. McCloughry, and

Jones-Evans left the aerodrome at 3.30 and made straight for the hunting-ground of the Lys. Ramsay dived on a train in Estaires station and hit it with a 25-lb. bomb from 500 feet. McCloughry hovered over the Estaires balloon-line at 6,000 feet until the light improved, dropped silently on a rising balloon, and set it on fire after following it down to within fifty feet of the ground. With the light of the burning fabric around the balloon-windlass in his eyes, the pilot climbed and flew northward along the Lys, and near Saillely he found eight horse-waggon on the march. He dropped two bombs in front of the leading waggon, which bolted immediately into the fields; then, diving a few hundred feet lower, he fired 300 rounds into the other seven. One capsized on the road. The drivers of the others jumped from the waggons and sprawled in the wayside ditches, and the maddened horses careered away over the surrounding fields. "This sort of stunt," as one Australian pilot had said of an earlier performance, "gives you a first-class appetite for breakfast and tones you up for the day." Jones-Evans dropped his bombs into a train leaving Armentières. A yellow L.V.G. two-seater interfered with him; he dived under its tail, zoomed up again, firing full into it at close range, and saw it crash into the ground. He then turned to come home; and being then attacked by a second L.V.G., he fought it by the same methods, and destroyed it also. By this time he had to climb to escape heavy ground-fire from all sides. He was hit in one foot by a bullet; but, though faint from loss of blood, he managed to steer his machine on a westerly course, and made St. Pol. There he crashed in trying to land. He had to crawl for a mile before he found assistance.

Meanwhile five more Camels under Weingarh, starting at 4 a.m., flew towards Bac St. Maur, and four of them bombed that place. The fifth pilot, Lieutenant A. F. G. McCulloch,¹⁴ separated from the formation and dropped his bombs on the Estaires train which Ramsay had previously hit. Several enemy scouts and two-seaters, however, seized the advantage offered by the isolated Camel; McCulloch was attacked by superior numbers, forced to land near the Lys, and was taken prisoner.

¹⁴ Lieut. A. F. G. McCulloch; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Farm hand; b. Portsmouth, Eng., Sept., 1894.

Shortly after 5 a.m. Heller led a third patrol of five Camels in a raid on the Estaires dumps. They chased four German two-seaters east without decisive combat. Heller, flying home, passed five more machines going out from No. 4 Squadron under Trescowthick. Ahead of Trescowthick, Major W. A. McCloughry, the squadron-commander, scoured the Lys area at 7,000 feet, until he saw a grey L.V.G. two-seater, apparently unsuspecting, over Erquinghem, at 3,000. He flew east of this enemy, dived at it, and destroyed it with seventy rounds delivered from close under its tail. Trescowthick's patrol arrived about this time, and, passing Estaires, still smoking from Heller's visitation, dropped its load of bombs among the billets at Laventie. As Trescowthick's formation landed home again, Lieutenant M. T. G. Cottam¹⁵ took off with another five to bomb Lestrem. Returning, his formation flew over Pacaut Wood and fired 1,400 rounds into the trenches there.

During this low-bombing by the Camels smaller patrols of two or three machines each from No. 2 Squadron were ranging the higher sky. They left the aerodrome at intervals of an hour or less. When in the forenoon heavy clouds obscured the ground at 2,000 feet, the S.E.5's also flew low and dropped bombs along the Lys villages. No enemy aeroplanes were seen over this region after 8 a.m., and the cloudy weather grew worse during the afternoon. Next morning, July 29th, it was still bad, but six machines from each of the Australian squadrons were out over the Lys flats between 4 and 6 a.m. Lieutenant R. F. McRae¹⁶ in King's patrol at 5 o'clock met an L.V.G. in a thick mist near Armentières at 3,000 feet and saw it go down out of control after a protracted and half-blind duel. Cole's patrol, accompanied by Major Murray Jones (No. 2 squadron-commander), fought a duel with a Hannoveranner two-seater near Nieppe Forest, and shot its observer. While the Camels bombed the Lys villages, the S.E.5's scattered bombs along the Estaires-Le Bassée road.

Either this constant bombing had stung the enemy's air forces to action, or he was beginning important retiring

¹⁵ Lieut. M. T. G. Cottam; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Infantry). Licensed surveyor; b. Alexandria, Sydney, 12 Oct., 1894.

¹⁶ Lieut. R. F. McRae; R.A.F. Attached No. 4 Sqn., 26 May to July, 1918. Student, of Orillia, Ontario, Canada; b. Beaverton, Ontario, 5 Dec., 1895.

movements on the Lys flats, for about this time his battle-formations appeared on the Flanders front in great force especially at daylight and dusk. On the British side also heavy bombing raids began in the evenings, at that hour of half-light when night movements of troops and transport would begin to get under way. About 7 p.m. King led six machines from No. 4 Squadron in escort of a raid by British D.H.9's on Armentières. This operation was a good example of cool and skilful air fighting. The escorting Camels picked up the bombers over Nieppe Forest at 12,000 feet and followed them towards Armentières, flying behind and slightly below them. As the formation approached the town, ten Fokker biplanes appeared and promptly dived to attack the D.H.9's. King, with the escort, at once gave the signal to engage. It was a trying situation, for the Australian scouts were below the Fokkers, and one of these attacked King from ahead. On the answering burst, the German half-rolled and fell away, followed immediately by Taplin, who engaged it till it fell on its back and then dropped like a stone into the lap of the mist below. King dived at another Fokker and fired 100 rounds into it at about thirty-foot range. This Fokker also went down completely out of control. Trescowthick defeated another after dodging its attack, by shooting it in the belly from underneath. The other Fokkers dispersed discomfited, and though in all nineteen of them were seen about this region, all the raiders, bombers, and escort were brought back without loss. The D.H.9's bombed Armentières during this fight, without hostile interference.

Enemy airmen were seen in numbers over the Aubers Ridge on July 31st. At 10 a.m. battle-patrols under Phillipps and King left the Reclinghem aerodrome. The Camels under King flew at about 8,000 feet, the S.E.5's under Phillipps at 19,000. Phillipps's formation, first on the scene, sighted, three miles east of Laventie, eight L.V.G. two-seaters escorted by nine Fokker scouts, flying at 18,000 feet. Phillipps and three others at once attacked the scouts, which dived away and left the two-seaters. Lieutenant F. W. Follett,¹⁷ who had singled out the rearmost Fokker, fired sixty rounds into it at almost touching

¹⁷ Lieut. F. W. Follett; No. 2 Sqn. (previously Engineers) Civil engineer; of Sydney; b. Marrickville, Sydney, 27 March, 1892.

distance and sent it down in a cloud of black smoke. Meanwhile Cummings made three successive attacks on a two-seater which had strayed from the formation, and at the third attempt the L.V.G. fell over on its side burning at the cockpit. The remaining L.V.G.'s fought off Cummings. Flying homewards near Merville, Cummings at 15,000 feet fell in with four more L.V.G.'s and began another fight. He dived at one German, so steeply that he nearly rammed it headlong; both machines fell out of control, the German plainly hit and the Australian from a too impetuous manœuvre. From the attentions of the remaining two-seaters Cummings again escaped.

Just as this fighting subsided seven Camels under Taplin and six S.E.5's under Cole crossed the lines near Nieppe Forest. Taplin's formation almost immediately met seven Fokker biplanes at 8,000 feet south-west of Estaires. The Australians secured a slight advantage in height, and the whole patrol dived at the Fokkers. Taplin, leading, fell on the nearest German like a fury, and from his fire the Fokker dropped disabled, and crashed at Lestrem. A few moments later a second Fokker, attacked by Lieutenant T. R. Edols,¹⁸ fell in a heap close to the first. Taplin dived at another Fokker, which was manœuvring to escape the fire of some machine higher up, and that also fell out of control. Lieutenant T. C. R. Baker¹⁹ pursued a fourth to near the ground. The patrols under Cole and King had meanwhile arrived, as also had some Bristol Fighters from a British squadron, and all were engaged with German scout formations east of Estaires. Cole had arrived just too late to join the Bristols in a combat south of Armentières, but flew on over Lille in chase of nine Fokkers. Of Cole's formation Stone fought a short indecisive combat with several triplanes north-east of Lille, and Wellwood at 19,000 feet chased a Rumpler two-seater all the way from Armentières to Lille; he shot the Rumpler's observer, but his guns jammed and he had to break off the pursuit. For the remainder of the day the British and Australian air-patrols were left in undisputed possession of the sky over the Aubers Ridge.

¹⁸ Lieut. T. R. Edols; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Of Burrawang, N.S.W., b. Forbes, N.S.W., 4 Nov., 1897.

¹⁹ Capt. T. C. R. Baker, D.F.C., M.M.; No. 4 Sqn. (previously Artillery). Bank clerk; of Adelaide; b. Smithfield, S. Aust., 25 April, 1897. Killed in action, 4 Nov., 1918.