

A.H. Clark

A  
BRIEF  
HISTORY  
OF

No 30 SQUADRON  
ROYAL AIR FORCE

Motto:- Ventre a Terre. ("All out")

BATTLE HONOURS

Egypt	1914/1915.	The Mediterranean	1940/41
Mesopotamia	1915/18	Ceylon	1942
Egypt & Libya	1940/42	Arakan	1944.
Greece	1940/41	Burma	1944/45.



There was a fantastic situation in Mesopotamia early in 1916. The R.F.C. had pilots and no aircraft, the R.N.A.S. had aircraft but no pilots. British forces were besieged at Kut-al-Amara, and the position had become extremely confused. Commonsense eventually prevailed and the two services combined to form an odd assortment of fourteen aircraft based at Ora, some 23 miles from Kut. From amongst these aircraft, which consisted of B.E.2c's, Farmans, a Voisin, and Short seaplanes, nine were modified for supply dropping and, often in the face of enemy fighters, they made a valiant effort to assist the garrison.

In carrying out their resolution they recorded the first air transport support operation in the history of British Service flying, and flew close on 140 sorties between April 15th and the 29th to drop nearly 20,000lb of food. Other supplies included medical comforts, wireless parts, mail, etc., before Kut was forced to surrender, and of the 12,000 men who were forced to march 700 miles into Turkey only 4,000 returned home. Amongst this number were 44 N.C.O's and men from No.30 Squadron, and six survived to tell the story.

Thirty-one years later the squadron was again called on to do valuable relief work. But this time there was a happier ending and their efforts helped to end the blockade of Berlin.

Between these two notable landmarks "30" Squadron flew with distinction in many parts of the world, from the Middle East to the Far East.

The roots of history for No.30 Squadron can be traced back to November 4th, 1914, when Major S.D. Massey, with Capt. Hoare, Lieuts. Newall and Reilly, and 37 N.C.O's and men, sailed for Alexandria from England. Arriving on the 17th they

*Capt Richards*

*2nd Lt. Paddy -*

*Lockwood*



unloaded 3 Maurice Farmans, collected 2 Henri Farmans from Heliopolis, then moved on to Ismailia. Here, in December, they added another 2 M. Farmans and a B.E.2a, without engines, plus a few mechanics, as they arrived from India. From England came 3 pilots, 2 Renaults and some stores.

As the build-up continued landing grounds were prepared at Zohra, Quantara Post, Mabeiuk, Ras-el-Hagg and Qatna, and stocked with petrol and oil to assist pilots engaged on long reconnaissance flights. Settling down to their task the contingent officially became No.30 Squadron under the command of Major Massey on March 24th, 1915, and as they spread their wings Capts. H.L. Reilly, with L.V.A. Royle as his observer, took off in a Henri Farman fitted with an extra large petrol tank and flew 88 miles to El Murra. Lieut. McCrindle joined the squadron at Ismailia in August, 1915, and the principle duty carried out was the patrolling of the Sinai Desert in search of parties of Turks trying to blow up the banks of the Suez Canal. These were dispersed by dropping on them 20lb bombs by hand.

Prior to this it had been decided by the British Government that a campaign must be launched in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) to prevent the Turks from capturing the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's wells in Persia and the refinery at Abadan. This task was allotted to the Indian Army which was commanded by General Kirkpatrick, and one of his first concerns was to provide his force with a flying corps. He had been informed that nothing could be spared from the Home Establishment, but it happened that he had been in Australia for a time as Inspector General and he knew that the Australian Flying Corps was then being formed so, in his emergency, he turned to Australia to supplement what he could get from Egypt.

The Australian contingent consisted of Capt. Henry Petre,



who was in command of the flying school at Point Cook, near Melbourne, and Capt. T.W. White, Lieuts. Treloar and P. Mertz, (all of whom had been instructed at Point Cook), and a party of efficient N.C.O's and air mechanics together with workshop lorries and all necessary tools. Capt. Petre went on ahead to Mesopotamia to make all necessary arrangements and Capt. White followed with the remaining personnel and equipment about two weeks later, arriving in Basrah about the middle of May 1915.

From Egypt came Capt. Reilly with three M. Farmans, and at about the same time Major Broke-Smith arrived from India and took command of the Flight, (it was no more at that time), and Lieut. W.W.A. Burn arrived from New Zealand. A little later Capt. Murray also arrived. All these last three were Army officers who had learned to fly at their own expense, but were not members of any flying corps.

Major Broke-Smith and Capt. Reilly arrived in Mesopotamia in April, 1915, and they established an aerodrome complete with living quarters and workshops at Tanuma on the East bank of the Shat-el-Arab immediately opposite Basrah; so when the bulk of the personnel arrived from Australia in May all was ready for the start of operations.

For No. 30 Squadron the first action it was concerned with was the battle of Qurnah, in the month of May, and some useful reconnaissance work was carried out. In the Spring in Iraq practically the whole of the southern part of the country is submerged by the overflowing of the Tigris, the Euphrates, which joins it at Qurnah, and the Shat-el-Arab, which is the name given to the combined river from that point of the Persian Gulf where it discharges. The battle, therefore, was a water born operation, the British troops concerned being carried in a great number of the local small rowing boats known as "Bellums" which are rather similar in size and shape to the gondola of Venice. It was a completely successful operation



and the Turkish forces which had been holding the small area of dry land at Qurnah retreated up the Tigris.

The next objective was Amarah, the first town of any size on the Tigris above Basrah, and with no opposition in the air the task for the squadron was pretty easy. After the fall of Amarah the G.O.C. decided to secure his left flank by an advance up the Euphrates to capture Nasirya, and for this operation, which took place in July, the reconnaissance flights were carried out by Capt. Reilly and Lieuts. Merz and Burn in two Caudron biplanes which had recently arrived at Basrah. The operation was successful but on the return journey both the aircraft were forced to land in the desert. Capt. Reilly got his engine going again and returned to Basrah but the other two were attacked by Arabs and both were killed. The Army's next objective was now Kut-el-Amara, and for this attack Capt. Reilly made a reconnaissance and a sketch map of the enemy positions which was of great value to the G.O.C. The town fell on 28th September and an aerodrome was established immediately adjoining it on the East side.

In the meantime in August two important things had happened, (1) all officers operating in "30" were "gazetted" to the R.F.C., and (2) four Martinsyde Scouts with 80 h.p. Gnome engines arrived at Basrah from England. Two of the Martinsydes were flown up to Kut as soon as it had been captured and with these Capt. Reilly and Capt. Petre carried out forward reconnaissance. It should be stated here that the squadron's principle or really only means of surface transport was a small steamship known as "T.3" with an Indian Captain and crew which operated up and down the Tigris.

On October 6th the squadron moved 50 miles up the river from Kut to Aziziyah, a very small village on the Tigris, and established an aerodrome from which to operate for the next big advance. Here it should be noted that in Iraq the type of



aircraft used could land on and take off from practically any area that was not under water. To make an aerodrome in its flat desert, with its hard surface, it was only necessary to bring up a supply of petrol and oil in the "T.3" and put down a "T" to show the way the wind was blowing.

About 60 miles up river from Azizyah lay the Army's main objective - Baghdad - and on October 6th Capt. Petre in a Martinsyde Scout carried out the first reconnaissance of this famous city. A few days later Major Massey arrived from Egypt to take over command and, for the first time, the squadron was complete with a Squadron Commander and three Flight Commanders, viz. Capts. Reilly, Murray and Petre. Previously it had operated as a flight under Capt. Reilly, and Major Broke-Smith had taken command of the depot at Basrah.

At Aziziyah the squadron settled down to some really serious work. The Turks were building up a big defensive position at Ctesiphon, about 20 miles south of Baghdad, and this had to be carefully mapped from the air. This task was somewhat complicated by the fact that in this area the official map, which only showed the river Tigris anyhow, was seriously inaccurate.

A scheme was evolved in the squadron whereby a sketch map of the whole area was gradually built up and then the vital points were chosen and the angles which these subtended to each other were carefully measured from the air. For this purpose the Maurice Farman "Shorthorn" was the ideal aircraft, and it is probable that from no modern aircraft could maps of such accuracy be prepared without the aid of mass photography. The battle, starting with a night march on a course provided by the squadron maps, was fought at the end of November and was a complete success.



As the enemy fell back towards Baghdad the squadron suffered two serious losses. Capt. Reilly on a recce' had had an engine failure which necessitated landing behind the enemy lines and he was taken prisoner. Capt. White was sent in a Maurice Farman with an Engineer officer, Capt. Yeates-Brown, to land north of Baghdad and cut the telegraph line from Constantinople. Capt. White landed close to a telegraph pole and Capt. Yeates-Brown proceeded to climb up to cut the wire when a number of Arabs appeared on horses and took them prisoners. A year later Capt. White made an amazing escape from the Turkish prisoner of war camp in Asia Minor and was never recaptured.

General Townsend had been in command of the very successful operations on the river Tigris, but after defeating the Turks at Ctesiphon he received information that they were being heavily reinforced, and decided that it would not be wise to advance further or even stay at Ctesiphon. He accordingly retired to Kut-el-Amarah which was a vital spot because from there the canal runs south to the Euphrates and if the Turks were in command of this canal they could outflank the base at Basrah. Three of the aircraft were flown back to Kut, but after about a week General Townsend decided that they would be of more use to the relieving force which was being formed down river and he ordered them away to Ali-al-Gharbi. Only two were able to get away, flown by Capt. Murray and Petre, as the engine of the third machine was "u/s". This was on December 7th, 1915.

From Kut the Tigris runs due East for about 20 miles and then turns south at a point called Es Sin. To the north of the river, but separated from it by about one mile of land, is a large inundation known as Swakeh Lake, and in due course the Turks proceeded to fortify this gap between the river and



the lake and they also crossed the Tigris below Kut and fortified the south bank as well.

General Aymler V.C. was sent from India to command the force to relieve Kut, and with him came reinforcements. At the same time No. 30 Squadron received extra flying personnel, including Lieuts. McCrindle and Davidson who arrived at the end of December, 1915, with additional B.E.2c's. Constant reconnaissance flights were maintained to map enemy positions, and aerial photography, gun spotting and bombing sorties, were undertaken.

By the beginning of April, 1916, the garrison of Kut were beginning to run short of food and so "30" was called upon to drop supplies. A mill stone was dropped by parachute, and at first this seemed to be the only practical method of operation, but as the chief item required was corn this was dropped free. A full sack of corn was enclosed in a larger sack which received the corn when the smaller sack burst on impact. At first one sack was dropped from the bomb-rack of the B.E.2c, but later two sacks were carried one on each lower wing in easy reach of the pilot who pulled them free at the right moment. All supply dropping was carried out over the area which had been used as the Kut aerodrome. On the first day, the 15th, a total of 3,300lb of food was dropped.

In February, it was reported that the enemy were obtaining aircraft and later the first of these appeared in the sky. They had forward firing guns and one of these aircraft badly wounded Lieut. Davidson while he was flying over Kut on April 24th, but he managed to bring his aircraft back to base. Usually the e/a fled at the sight of our planes which was a good thing for 30 Squadron, because only the B.E.2c's carried a gun, and this could only be fired upwards and backwards by the passenger!

After the capitulation of Kut the air detachment moved



back to Shaikh Sa'ad on May 6th and in June the R.N.A.S. unit was withdrawn. In the lull that followed sickness reduced their strength to one pilot per flight and it was not until July, with the arrival of many new pilots, that life came back to the squadron. At the end of the month Major J.E. Tennant, awarded the M.C. for his many night bombing raids with No. 4 Squadron in France in 1915, took command.

The majority of the new pilots though trained in night flying and fighter tactics had yet to show their skill in actual combat, but any doubts that may have been entertained were **quickly** dispelled when they caught a Fokker monoplane over the Shumran front on August 13th and shot it down. It was the first e/a to be shot down in air combat on this front.

Two nights later they began their bombing programme and on August 17th Capt. J.H. Herring moved forward with "C" Flight to begin a systematic destruction of the Turkish gun positions beyond Saniyat. By September they had a strength of **13** serviceable B.E. 2c's, 7 undergoing overhaul and another 7 were in transit, and their bombing details increased in intensity.

Determined efforts were now made to destroy the Shumran Bridge with 20 lb and 100 lb bombs, and following an attack on the 14th Lieut. the Hon. J.H.B. Rodney and 2nd Lieut. J.S. Windsor took off in B.E.'s on the 23rd to carry out a low level raid against Shumran aerodrome. Going in at less than 100 feet they carried out a successful attack during which one e/a was destroyed and another damaged. These two officers, the former having transferred from the Rifle Brigade to the R.F.C., and the latter from the South Wales Borderers, were to receive frequent mention for their work in the squadron and both, before they were posted from the unit, were awarded the M.C.

With the arrival of additional Martinsyde Scouts the squadron, with the exception of "A" Flight which remained at Shaikh Sa'ad for bombing ops, assembled at Arab Village to



keep the sky clear of the enemy as the bombing attacks were pressed home. Prominent in these many actions was Capt. Hereward de Haviland who, in many fine attacks, once destroyed an Albatros on Shumran 'drome with a direct hit. He was awarded the D.S.O. for his skill and daring. Another outstanding pilot who received the D.S.O. around this time was Capt. Justin Howard Herring. Educated at Clifton College and Cambridge he had served in France before being posted to Mesopotamia where he took over "C" Flight. Out on a roving commission on the night of December 14th/15th he sighted a bridge of boats being built across the Tigris and bombed a steamer towing a section up the river. Twice he returned to base to bomb-up and attack before he was satisfied with the damage he had inflicted.

1917 opened with an attack by three aircraft against a factory in the Citadel at Baghdad on January 20th, two direct hits being scored with 100 lb bombs, and on the same day the command of the squadron passed to Major de Haviland. Three days later Lieut. A.E.L. Skinner returned from an artillery shoot on Dahra Bend with his B.E. damaged after attacks by enemy aircraft.

As the advance progressed on the ground they moved forward to keep up the pressure and, during the attack on Saniyat, blinded the enemy by keeping his aircraft grounded from dawn to dusk. Nine bombing raids were carried out against the Turks as they pulled out on February 24th, and the C.O. obtained 22 direct hits out of 24 bombs dropped on two trips. An excellent bombing average! On the next day they repeated the "beat up" over Bughaila and Aziziya.

Continually moving forward they found, two miles upstream from Bughaila on March 3rd, the old barge the R.F.C. had had in Kut, and in it were two engines still in good condition. But few were left who remembered those bitter days.

On March 7th Lieuts. Windsor and R.K. Morris flew two officers from the Royal Engineers to Sumarka, 40 miles north of Baghdad, to



try and cut the enemies escape route and prevent the withdrawal of guns and stores. A good landing was made near the bridge that was to be blown up but a party of Arabs arrived and they had to make a pretty smart take-off. A few weeks later, on April 23rd, the German pilots Felmy and Falk landed behind our lines and blew up the water conduit. Early in March, during bombing attacks against the enemy aerodrome at Baghdad, Major de Havilland lived up to his reputation when he cut the railway line with a direct hit at Al Kadhimain, north of the city, on the 8th. On the 11th Baghdad fell into our hands, and when the squadron flew into the German base they found more relics of Kut amongst the eleven wrecked Albatros aircraft.

Reconnaissance flights soon found the Turks entrenched at Hassaiwa and Mushahido and, continually on the move, "B" Flight moved to Baquba in March, then to Fort Kermea in April, and "C" pulled out of Kasirin for Kuwar Reach on April 7th to work along the left bank of the Tigris.

By this time the Germans had reacted to the position and early in April Oberlautnant Schutz had returned from a trip to Germany with eight new Fokker and Halberstadt fighters. In one of these he attacked a B.E.2c flown solo by Lieut. Page and, colliding in mid-air, both the aircraft were damaged. Both pilots managed to regain control and land at their respective bases. In this month, too, two Bristol Scouts were imported from Egypt for use by "30" Squadron.

On April 15th the men waited in vain for the return from a 'recce' of the aerodrome at Samarra of Capt. C.L. Pickering and Lieut. H.W. Craig in B.E.2c No. 4500, for these two gallant gentlemen and a battle-scarred warrior had fallen to the guns of a Halberstadt. "4500" a veteran of Ctesiphon in 1915, had flown out of Kut the day the siege began and had seen action over the battlefields beyond Baghdad.

In the middle of the month Lieut. M.L. Maguire gave the troops in the front line a free show as he fought a duel above their heads.



Bristol Scout-v-Halberstadt, but he could not hear their cheers when, after a hard fight, he shot the wings off the e/a and it crashed near Istabulot. Maguire, who had transferred from the Connaught Rangers to the R.F.C., was awarded the M.C. in March for his skill in air combat. But he did not live long to enjoy the honour, for on April 28th he failed to return and was claimed by Hans Schutz as his 8th vic'.

With the return of the summer weather the squadron, with the exception of six B.E's and the two Bristol Scouts based at Sinduja, was pulled into Baghdad for overhaul and repairs and activity was reduced to the odd bombing sortie or reconnaissance flight. In the Autumn the old "Harry Tate" (R.E.8) began to replace the B.E's and moves to Falluja, Shahraba, etc., were recorded as their bombing efforts became concentrated against the enemy air base at Kifri. Over here, on October 16th, one of three attacking Martinsydes was forced to land after going in low to do a "beat-up". It was Lieut. Skinner in "7494", and he set fire to his aircraft before he was picked up by Lieut. J.B. Wellman. In another attack on the 31st, carried out at low level by six aircraft, Lieut. A.P. Adams was forced to land out in the blue and was picked up by Lieut. F. Nuttall. But Lieut. Wellman was wounded and forced to land on Kifri, and Lieut. C. Cox, his engine damaged by "ack-ack", landed 18 miles inside the Turkish lines and walked to safety.

Repeated acts of gallantry were recorded as they went for the enemy in the air or on the ground, and attempts to stop their bombing of the aerodrome at Humr resulted in defeat for the Halberstadts and damage to their base.

Spads were added to their strength by the end of 1917, and at the beginning of 1918 - the last year of the war - D.H.4's arrived. Kifri was still the target and the "ack-ack", with plenty of practise, was pretty accurate. One of the D.H.4's during a raid on January 21st was blown to pieces in mid-air due to a direct hit. It was Kifri again on the night of January 25th/26th, five aircraft taking off at 30 minute intervals, and Capt. Nuttall, with Lieut. R.B.S. Siever as his observer,



ran into trouble when their engine caught fire at 1,000 feet. With great skill Capt. Nuttall managed to make a safe landing in the dark and, after removing the Lewis guns and ammunition from the burning aircraft, set course by the stars for the River Diala and were picked up by an armoured car patrol on the 28th. Both officers were awarded the M.C. for their work, and Capt. Nuttall added the D.F.C. to his before the war came to an end. Lieut. Siever, who transferred from the R.F.A. to the R.F.C., took a commission in the R.A.F.V.R. in time for a second "bash" in 1939. Another pilot who took a commission in the R.A.F. before war came again in 1939, Lieut. Skinner, was also busy around this time, and he and R.K. Morris, flying Spads, shot down an A.E.C. over our lines on January 31st. They, too, were both to be awarded the M.C. before their tours came to an end.

Moving forward as the Turks fell back the offensive spirit of the men of "30" could not be checked. Forcing the German air detachment to move from Hit to Haditha they kept up the good work, and on April 9th their records reached an "all-high" when they dropped 147 bombs and fired 7,000 rounds of ammo' against ground targets. Often escorted by aircraft from No. 72 Squadron they pressed on to inflict as much damage as possible before the hot weather restricted "ops". Under the command of Major T. Everidge they awaited the cooler season to put in a maximum effort, but the Central Powers were in bad shape and by September Bulgaria was asking for peace. In the middle of the month three R.E.8's were ordered to Hamadan, a 300 mile flight across rough and rugged country, to reinforce a detachment of "72". But by this time the shooting was over and the Turks, in October, sued for peace.

The end of the war seemed to be the end for the squadron as its strength was gradually reduced until, by April, 1919, little was left to indicate the power that had once been theirs.

Peace, however, did not come to Mesopotamia, and in February 1920 it was necessary to re-build No. 30 Squadron from its cadre strength. Based at Baghdad it began to re-equip with D.H.9a's and was soon in action



against the Bolshevics in N.W.Persia in 1921, and against their old enemy, the Turk, in 1922. Based at Hinaidi they experienced little rest in the years immediately following the war, in particular from the Turks at Ruwandiz, then the Sulaimaniyah under Shaikh Mahmud, and many famous personalities, including Sir James Robb, A.W. Heath, S.M. Kinhead, etc., served in the squadron at this time. The latter, a well known fighter "ace", later did some good work in the High Speed Flight until he was killed flying the Supermarine "S.5".

In the years between the wars they exchanged the "Nine-ack" for Wapitis before they moved to Mosul in 1931 to continue their task of keeping peace amongst the tribes. Under S/Ldr. A.L. Fiddament they were still at Mosul in 1936, and they had in their ranks T.B. Prickman, A.F. Scroggs, B.D. Nicholas, E.J. Palmer, R.G. Slade, etc.,. Hardys replaced the Wapiti, and in 1937 they were at Dhibban. But ahead the clouds were black and it was becoming obvious that war was just a matter of time.

As the international situation deteriorated the squadron was selected to be the first unit overseas to equip with the Blenheim, and as the pace towards war quickened they moved to Egypt before the Italians decided they could lick us.

Back to their very first base-Ismailia-, and employed in the role of "fighters", they took part in the various defence exercises and provided a section of aircraft to take part in the display of strength on May 22nd, 1940, when 90 aircraft flew in formation over Cairo. But it all meant so very little. On June 10th, 1940, the real thing spread to their area and they moved forward into the desert to fight again over its sandy wastes. Active service had, of course, been "Thirties" lot from the date of its formation, and they soon settled down to the task in hand until events over the water effected their course of action.

Greece, drawn into the war by Italy, required assistance, and



amongst the first to go were the men of "30". Moving to Greece in November, 1940, they moved up to Eleusis to assist in the defence of Athens, and it was soon noticed that their arrival had a satisfactory effect on the enemy. In addition they also worked with No's 84 and 211 Squadrons attacking targets in Albania. In all, this small force, with a detachment of Wellingtons, carried out a total of 255 sorties by the end of the year.

With the dawn of 1941 they began to work in support of the Greek Army, attacking a variety of targets in spite of the bad weather during the first two months of the year. By the middle of February air activity had been greatly stepped up, and continued to increase until the Italian offensive eased off towards the middle of March. Attacks in the battle area and against shipping and ports, especially Valona, had been recorded before the intentions of the Nazis became obvious. In April the hordes were unleashed and crossed into Macedonia by four routes.

Prominent in the fighting in Greece many of the men of "30" acquitted themselves well, and mention must be made of F/Lts. Walker and Bocking, S/Ldr. R.A. Milward, awarded the D.F.C. and the Greek D.F.C. Of Harry Card, a Canadian who died over Valona, and W.S. Ackeroyd who, though wounded in the hand, arm and stomach, remained at his guns to drive off the attacking aircraft. Gallantry which was recognised with the award of the D.F.M.

As the Germans advanced the fighting increased in severity, and in the intensive actions of April 19th and 20th the squadron claimed two Italian bombers destroyed. By this date their Blenheims had left Greece, fourteen of them flying to Crete on April 18th to be followed, on the ~~next~~ day, by the ground crews in Sunderlands. But they were not out of the fight. From Crete they provided air cover for the convoys engaged on the evacuation in the last few days of April, their patrols operating close inshore, and then, when the end came in Crete, the men



of "30" were there. With rifle and bayonet, and it must be remembered that the majority of men in the R.A.F. only used the bayonet for ceremonial parades and were lucky if they managed to fire 25 rounds on the range in a year, the rear party under the leadership of P/O. R.K. Crowther fought it out on the ground alongside the "brown jobs".

Back in Egypt they returned to the Delta to re-equip and build up with Blenheim I's before, as part of No. 204 Group, they moved up into the desert to take part in "Battleaxe". But the blade was not yet sharp enough and the advance was checked. During the lull that followed the re-organisation of the R.A.F. went ahead and the squadron began to convert to Hurricane II's. Postings were frequent as the surplus aircrew left, and they also lost many of their ground staff, but with the arrival of the winter months they were ready for action and O.P's and bomber escort became their main task as air activity increased with the opening of the British offensive in November. Still outclassed in combat with the Me.109f they never lost their old offensive spirit, and as Rommel entered on the first lap of the "Matruh Stakes" the outlook was a little brighter. By the end of the year the Nazis had moved back through Gazala to Derna, then Benghazi to El Agheila, but away in the Far East we were dancing to an old tune.

No 30 Squadron, regaining its breath after being battered and disorganised by a violent sandstorm, was ordered out of the line and moved back to embark on H.M.S. "Indomitable" with No. 261 Squadron en route for Singapore. But Singapore was no longer ours by the time they were underway and the aircraft carrier was diverted to Ceylon. Under orders to move up to the N.W. area of India they disembarked on March 6th, 1942, but ashore they found that the orders had been cancelled and they were switched to form a defence force to cover Ceylon.

Fully experienced in the art of war they quietly prepared for the battle ahead, and with their own lives at stake if they made the



wrong move they were not adverse to picking up the "gen" on the tactics they would meet. And they had so little time to learn.

Easter, 1942, was no holiday for Ceylon as reports filtered through of an intended attack by Japanese forces. The Navy had put to sea at the end of March but it was from the air on the afternoon of April 4th that the first real warning came. S/Ldr. Leonard J. Birchill, of St. Johns, Brunswick, only two days out from England, had taken off in a Catalina of No. 413 Squadron and sighted the Jap carrier force some 350 miles S.E. of Ceylon. He managed to pass back a report before the Japs got him, and through his devotion to duty spent the rest of the war as a P.O.W. Acting on this warning F/Lt. R. Thomas flew out into the night in a second "Cat" and picked up the enemy just before midnight. His message, too, was received, but that was all. These men, just doing their job, had given the warning, and now it was up to the fighter

Brought into immediate readiness in the early hours of Easter Sunday, April 5th, the 36 pilots of No's 30 and 258 Squadrons, and six Fulmars of the F.A.A., awaited the call, and when the mixed force of Japanese fighters and bombers came in over Ratmalana and Ceylon at 07-40 hours they were ready to prevent a repeat of Pearl Harbour. At varied heights they fought their battle amidst the bursts of ground fire, and when it died away the squadron could claim 14 of the 18 e/a destroyed in air combat. But they had had no easy task and their losses were not light. Recording their first casualties in the war against Japan they also entered, around the same time, the award of the D.F.C. to F/O. J.A. Jarvis and P/O. G.R. Rutledge, and the D.F.M. to Sgt. L.A. Ovens, for gallantry in Greece and Egypt. The latter, however, was already dead.

Throughout the summer and the autumn, and it was the hottest in India for many years, the main enemy was the climate - the rain and disease - as in 1916. In fact, as it was in 1916 so it was in 1942, the aircraft were affected and the position was pretty black. Ahead lay a period of reconstruction as we fought to hold on.



Throughout 1943 the task of holding on continued, and with little action to combat the monotony the task was not easy. Fighting was mainly confined to the Arakan, the valleys north of Mandalay, and in North Burma, and training was a poor substitute for a squadron used to action.

The award of the D.F.C. to F/Lt. W.S. Austin, a New Zealander, was announced in April, 1943, for his work in the Middle East, but this, again, was connected with the past, and the long wait continued until February, 1944, when they moved up to Faylpur to carry out low level attacks against the lines of communication in the Arakan. Operations soon produced a change in spirit amongst all ranks as, moving to Comilla in April, and to Yellahanka in June, they continued to give support to the Army, and supply fighter escorts, until the return of the monsoon period. Withdrawn in June to convert to Thunderbolt Mk. II's, they carried out an intensive training programme on their new aircraft before returning to the line of battle in September.

On the ground the Japs had paid for their failure at Imphal, dying by the thousand as they pulled back through long grass covered with leeches and typhus ticks. For there was little medical aid to assist them. By November 1944 the squadron had moved up to Junchar and from here began to take part in operations over the Rangoon area. On November 3rd, for instance, they sent off 12 Thunderbolts from Cox's Bazaar to follow No. 135 in on a low level strafe of Mingaladon. Four returned early with technical troubles, another, with its "undercart" on fire, turned over when it made a forced landing, but the remainder went in low over the target. The next day eight of the twelve aircraft detailed to escort bombers to Rangoon failed to make contact and returned to base, but the other four picked up the bombers and took them to Rangoon where they also destroyed a "Tojo".

Pressing on into 1945 the race to take Rangoon before the



monsoon, and the encirclement of the Japs around Mandalay, kept them busy as the fighting increased in intensity. Anti-flak patrols were flown over Mandalay and Sagaing in January, then came attacks against airfields, loco's and rolling stock. In March they took part in the bombing of the wide walls of Fort Dufferin, and when they had blown gaps in them the troops went in. With the fall of Mandalay they continued their low level attacks as the Japs were pushed back into the Pegu Yomas area, and Rangoon passed into our hands.

In May the award of the D.F.C. to S/Ldr. R.M. Croke, an Australian, was announced in recognition of his leadership and courage during these eventful days, and the good work continued as they took part in many strikes against ground targets. By July they had settled in at Vizagapatam to carry out a training programme in readiness for Operation "Zipper", but the atom bomb cut it short and they were phased out.

At last it was all over and those men who never knew what tomorrow would bring could plan for the years ahead. After moving to Baigachi the squadron eventually settled in India where, recording their last award for gallantry on operations in the Far East - the D.F.C. to F/Lt. H.F. Whidborne - it transpired that "30" was earmarked for disbandment in December, 1945. Saved by a change in policy they began to take on charge Tempest II's and, moving to Bhopal, participated in the annual action against the tribesmen on the N.W. Frontier.

Disbandment, however, had only been delayed, and gradually reduced in strength they were soon on a "number only" basis. By the end of 1946 No. 30 Squadron no longer existed, and with its passing there came to an end the longest period of service spent overseas by a squadron of the Royal Air Force.

With the cessation of hostilities the world still moved in fear. The international situation allowed little relaxation and soon it was



considered necessary to return to the R.A.F. that which had been taken away. Selected for reformation, No. 30 Squadron came back to life at Oakington in 1947. But this time it was not "fighter", nor "bomber", but "transport", and it was equipped with Dakota IV's coded "J.N." Back on the active list it was soon called upon to play a part in Operation "Plain Fare", better known as the Berlin Air Lift, which was designed to break the blockade by the Russians of the German city. Commencing in June, 1948, very few had the time, even if they had the interest, to wander back down the past and recall the first time that British aircraft had carried out a supply mission, for they were too busy. But this time the effort was successful, and as the "lift" reached its peak they carried out 444 flights to Berlin in one month.

The crisis passed they replaced the old Dakota with Valetta C.1's in 1950 to enable their Courier service to be carried out with efficiency in keeping with the times, and with the arrival of 1954 there came yet another honour. In full ceremonial dress they paraded at Dishforth on July 1st to receive their "Standard", the ceremonial flag authorised by King George VI in 1943. The presentation, made by Air Chief Marshall Sir James Robb G.C.B., K.B.E., D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C., brought back a mixed bag of memories to those who attended the ceremony, in particular to those few left who served in the squadron when he had the honour to command it.

Today the men of "30", knowing a little of its past, realise that in their hands may rest the future, and though the design of aircraft changes with the times they are fully aware of the heritage and tradition that is ours. And it has not changed for centuries.