

OPERATIONS OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AGAINST AFGHANISTAN 4th to 31st MAY, 1919

The information that the Afghans were about to declare Jihad was received from the North West Frontier on the 3rd May, 1919, and on the following day No. 31 Squadron was ordered to have two aircraft in readiness to take part in suppressing any aggressive movement on the part of the Afghans. When hostilities were formally declared on the 6th May, Lt. Col. F.F. Minchin, DSO, MC, who was commanding the 52nd Wing located at Murree, proceeded to Peshawar to confer with the Commander of the North West Frontier Force. Major E.L. Millar, MBE, Commanding Officer of No. 31 Squadron was temporarily attached as Liaison Officer to this force.

The Afghan forces attacked on three fronts, at Dakka, Khost and Quetta. The 52nd Wing operated in the Dakka and Khost areas, and a flight of No. 114 Squadron was engaged on the Quetta front. On the 6th May, three aircraft carried out a reconnaissance on the Afghan side of the border, and returned with several bullet holes; the height of the hills over which aircraft flew bringing them within easy range of the snipers of the Afridi tribes. The outstanding feature of the early days of hostilities was a very thorough and effective raid on Loe Dakka, apparently the advanced base of the Afghan troops in the hills about the west mouth of the Khyber Pass. In this raid 1¼ tons of bombs were dropped and 1151 rounds of ammunition were fired. Enemy casualties numbered about 600 men, the C. in C. being wounded and his brother a Mullah and the Nalik being among the killed.

On the 17th May all aircraft capable of being flown from Risalpur to Jalalabad were employed in a bombing raid. 332 bombs were dropped, mainly on enemy troops in the ridge and the rest on Jalalabad, which was heavily bombed again on the 20th and 24th May. Reports of the destruction of Jalalabad are believed to have induced large enemy forces to retire from the Dakka front without taking any offensive action. Captain Halley, with a crew of four, made a successful flight to Kabul, on the 24th May, in the Handley Page aircraft which had been flown from England to India. 20 bombs were dropped, 4 of which scored hits on the Amir's Palace. A fresh development occurred involving most of the southern tribes of the Buffer States, on the 26th May, and aircraft had to be despatched from Risalpur to Kohat. The pilots carried out their tasks so effectively, that the Afghan General was soon deprived of the support of the tribes, who live in dread of aircraft, and was driven off. Our troops attacked Spin Baldak Fort, which had to be bombarded for about 6 hours before it was captured. Aircraft operating from Chaman, near Quetta, observed this and dropped 20 bombs and fired several drums of S.A.A. into the fort.

Aircraft carrying out raids in the vicinity of Thal on the 28th and 29th to shake the morale of the enemy, found many targets and inflicted considerable casualties. The following day reconnaissance reported that the camps were apparently deserted. On the 1st June, four aircraft successfully co-operated with the Thal relieving column, and by 10 A.M. Thal was relieved. The G.O.C. later expressed his appreciation of the work performed by the R.A.F.

As a result of this co-operation the Amir Amanulla finally made a request to the Viceroy for an Armistice.

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONS.

Total number of hours flown	693 hours.
Weight of bombs dropped	20868 lbs.
Total number of rounds of S.A.A. fired	9315
Artillery co-operation flights	4
Contact patrols	2

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