

Old Dux Association

Newsletter



Compiled by A. McRae

Summer 2003

May Meeting

A good turnout for the first meeting of 2003 and the weather wasn't bad either. Surprisingly, the existing committee was re-elected for another year! Several new members made stand up introductions and were welcomed by Bob.

The proposal put forward at a previous meeting that we could purchase a seat with a suitably inscribed plaque and present it to the museum was withdrawn. This was mainly due to the museum insisting that a seat be purchased by them from a preferred supplier at a cost that made this prohibitive to us. Although we could actually supply a seat of similar appearance and specification at a lower cost, with plaque, this was still not acceptable to the museum.

Subs- Standing Order

George Poole explained that to ease the burden of remembering when to pay subs it is possible to set up a standing order with your bank so the payment is made automatically each year. More details from George if any one is interested.

Annual Dinner, 2003

We are now taking bookings for our Annual Dinner to be held on Sat 25th October. The cost for the 4 course meal inc wine will be £28. Payment may be made in full, or reserving a place by paying a deposit. Either method can be made either to George Poole or myself.

We need to know the names of the persons attending, (first name and surname), as this is the way the names will appear on the place cards, also any dietary restrictions, and any seating preferences. Any queries regarding the dinner arrangements etc should be directed to me (Allan McRae). It is important to book as soon as possible so that I can gauge the likely attendance.

Book News

Doreen Cross has swapped books with Dick Hewitt who was a pilot with the 82nd Fighter Squadron based at Duxford during 1943/45. Dick flew Thunderbolts & Mustangs and was involved in over 140 missions.

Dick has written a book about his experiences entitled "Target of Opportunity" this is non-fiction and relates some off base tales about what went on in and around the UK. Anyone interested, the book is available from East Anglia Books, the reference is ISBN 0-9705180-0-5.

Useless Information

The standard rail track in America is 4 feet 8½ inches Wide. Why such a precise measurement? Because it

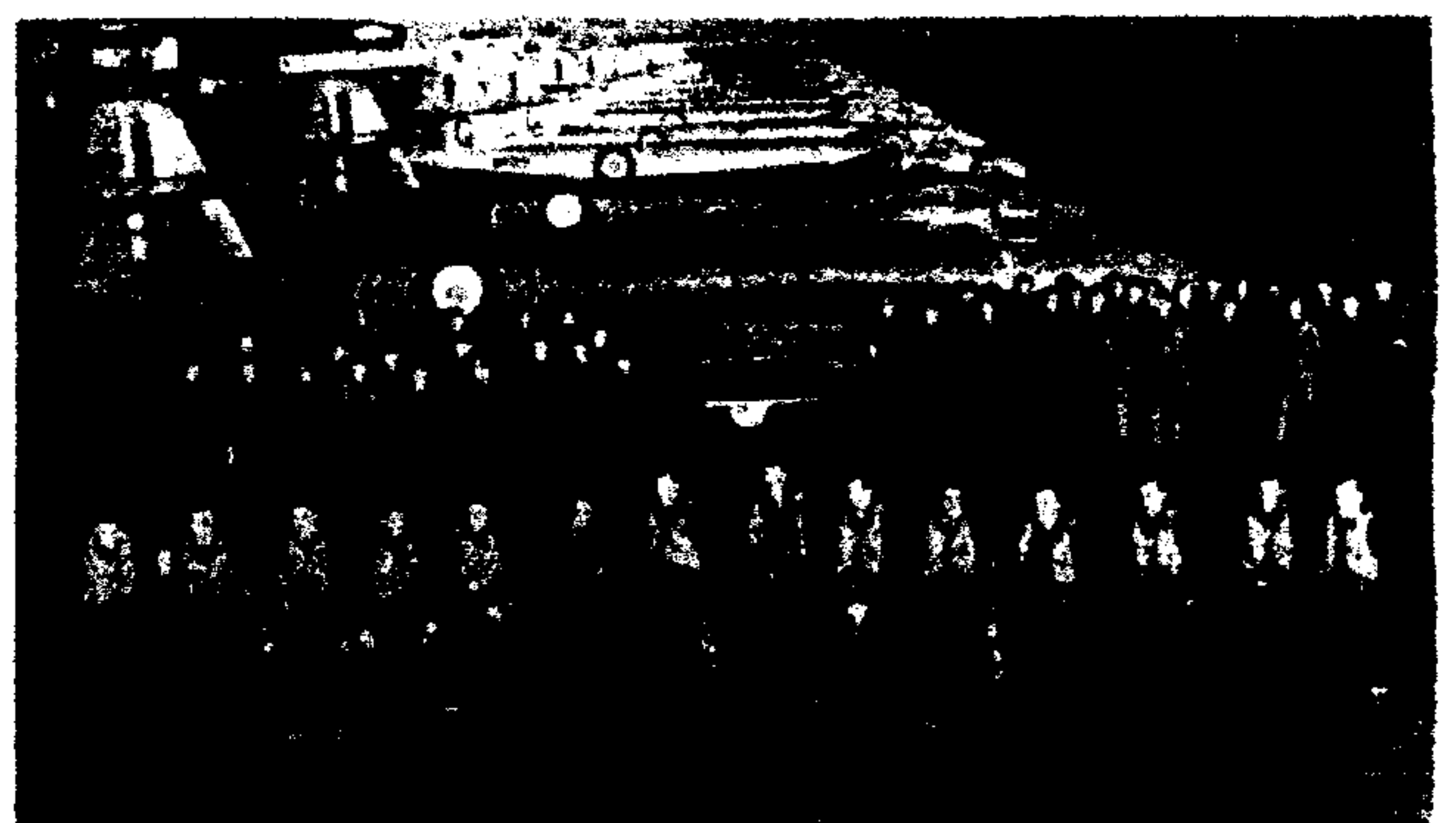
was the English size and ex-pats built the railroad there. Why did we use that size? Because it was the size used for building wagons that were designed for English roads and that was the size of the wheel ruts. So, who built the roads? The Romans, of course, and roman chariots formed the original ruts which everyone had to copy. The chariots were made for Imperial Rome and all had to have the same wheel spacing as Roman chariots were made to accommodate two horses' rear ends.

Back in the States, on the launch pad for a space shuttle are two solid booster rockets known as SRBs, and made by a company in Utah. The engineers would have liked them to be larger but they travel to the launch site by rail and go through a tunnel which is only just wider than the track. As you guessed the track is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So, a major part of space shuttle design is based on a system determined over 2,000 years ago by the width of a horse's backside, and we all thought that being a horse's backside was unimportant!

65 Sqdn Photo.

Peter Gibbard is trying to organise a 'then and now' photo shoot to replicate the photo of the squadron in 1953 as displayed in the Battle of Britain hanger. The intention is to meet in front of the Meteor 12 Noon on Sunday 26th October. Contact Peter for updates.



Joke Corner

Three engineering students were discussing the possible designers of the human body.

One said, "It was a mechanical engineer. Just look at all the joints.

Another said," Actually it was an electrical engineer. The nervous system has many thousands of electrical connections."

The last said," It was a civil engineer. Who else would run a toxic waste pipeline through a recreational area?"

The following is reproduced from the journal of the Society of Genealogists. This gives an account of 64 Sqdn during WW1 and was written by the Squadron C.O. Major B. E. Smythies

A Brief History of No 64 Squadron, R.F.C.

The squadron was initiated on 1st August, 1916. O.C. Major B.E. Smythies, at Sedgeford, Norfolk, and started training pupils on H.F. and F.E. 2b.

No 45 squadron was on the same aerodrome, but proceeded overseas about November 1916, leaving 64 Sqdn. alone, the personnel living in Docking Workhouse.

The output of pupils proceeded on normal lines, the only novelty being some excellent wild-fowl shooting on the marshes with Lewis guns from aeroplanes. This, combined with a raft out at sea, afforded ample scope for machine gun practice.

In June 1917 all the aeroplanes and instructor personnel were transferred to a night training squadron, and Avros, Sopwith Scouts and D.H.5s arrived in lieu. The training of Scout pupils continued, a nucleus gradually being built up for service overseas. Mobilisation orders were received on September 30th 1917, and on October 14th the squadron flew overseas, preceded a few days by its transport, in charge of the Senior Flight Commander.

The personnel on this date consisted of;

Q.C. Major Smythies

R.O. Lieutenant R. Turner

E.O. Lieutenant Miller

A.O. Lieutenant Midlane

Flight Commanders; Captain McClintock, Captain Slater, Captain Tempest and 17 Flying Officers.

The average flying time of the Flying Officers was about 150 hours, the majority having been instructors on H.E. A large proportion had previously served overseas in the infantry or as observers. Fine weather favoured the start, and the complete number of 18 machines left Sedgeford in the morning, landed at Lympne, and all eighteen pilots with machines intact collected at St Omer that same afternoon. Squadron formation led by the O.C. was maintained throughout the flight. It is believed that this was the first occasion during 1917 on which a rotary engine squadron arrived in France complete and together.

On October 15th a move was made to Izel les Hameau where it was afterward proved, we were to remain for 12 months. On October 18th the transport arrived, also intact, bringing our very welcome kit—the luggage capacity of a Scout is somewhat limited.

After some 10 days practice flying and learning the country, offensive patrols were commenced, consisting at this time of flight patrols of 4 machines each. The indifferent performance of a D.H.5 at heights above 10,000 feet, with its single gun, precluded the bagging of Huns at this stage. There were not many of them about on the Third Brigade front, from Arras-Havrincourt Wood.

Life during this period was very pleasant, we formed a large and happy family, all very keen and anxious to make a good name for the squadron. An entente with a Brigade of the 51st Highland Division, lasting over a week, was productive of a better mutual understanding of each others work. This was during the Hush-Hush period, the third week in November, when rumours were rife, and patrols were partially replaced by low flying and bombing exercises.

The morning of the 'Cambrai Show', November 20th saw the squadron at full strength assembled at dawn, and in the semi-darkness the machines went off, flying low of necessity, clouds

varying from 200 to 400 feet. An advanced landing ground had been formed at Bapaume, and here the machines arrived on completion of their mission - filled up with bombs and petrol and went off again. The main objective had been reached, and the battery silenced.

Low flying in formation was carried out, this having been extensively practised in England, and undoubtedly assisted in reaching a given objective in the prevailing mist with several machines simultaneously. Later in the day the fog became worse, but one or two reconnaissance's at 50 to a 100 feet were carried out. Five pilots were shot down, but the three in front of the lines managed to get back, and the remainder were not seriously hurt.

The casualties for November 21st and 23rd included three missing and three wounded, others shot down in No-Mans-Land managed to return intact.

A congratulatory telegram was received from the G.O.C.R.F.C. who also made a personal visit and congratulated the squadron on its work; the effect on the officers and men was very marked.

On November 30th the day of the German counter attack, the squadron was much in evidence round Bourlon Wood, the sky black with German and British machines. Low flying in those days was not what afterwards became, - a flock of machines protecting each other from attack from above, and operating beyond the heavily defended zone. On this particular occasion, indeed, it would not have been possible owing to the low clouds.

December 1917 passed without incident, during the eight weeks subsequent to the Cambrai battle, a dawn reconnaissance was carried out in practically all weathers, only 4 days being missed, when thick fog down to the ground prevailed.

The squadron Concert Party, String band and Cinema (the latter brought out from England) served to keep the men well amused during the evenings. The Cinema, which cost £50, made a clear profit of over a £100 in a year, which sum was naturally spent for the benefit of the men.

January and February 1918 were occupied in routine work, and during this period the DH5's were changed for SE5's, and pilots trained in their use. A very welcome change too, the extra speed and ceiling being readily appreciated. In March the Hun became active again in the air, and so did we, the first 'bag' on the new machines being made early in the month, and continued systematically.

March 21st-24th, operations were carried out on the 5th Brigade front, incessant fighting and low flying. After this date there was more than sufficient activity on the Bapaume front to keep us occupied. On March 28th the squadron packed up in preparation for a move, but luckily this was not necessary.

On April 15th the squadron was transferred to the 1st Brigade and started to learn the country from Merville to Arras, the line during this period changing with startling rapidity. The weather during this month was indifferent, serial operations being hindered by low cloud.

In May 1918 the squadron was at a high level once more, machines and engines being well understood and pilots experienced. The Hun was plentiful with Albatros and Pfalz scouts and Fokker tri-planes. Our casualties were light, written off machines very few, and the weekly average of Huns was good.

During the month 28 E.A. were crashed and 14 shot down out of control. Of these 8 crashed and 40-o.c. on May 31st, were partly due to the institution of flight challenge cup. Points were given for E.A. brought down and so it happened that on May 31st all three flights were very keen.

The mechanics became more excited over it than the Officers,

voluntary work continued on engines and guns till the small hours of the morning so as to get an extra machine on patrol the following day. Cases of pilots returning with engine trouble were few and far between. On May 31st after two 'official' patrols, each flight went off stalking with satisfactory results. Hours flying during May—970 war flying.

The spirit displayed by the three Flight Commanders, Captains Slater, Tempest and Burge was admirable. Captain Atkinson, a Fighting Instructor on a tour from England, joined us for two or three weeks. We guaranteed him a good mount, plenty of birds, & excellent sport in the best English tradition. He got his D.F.C. in a fortnight.

During June and the first half of July we expended much petrol looking for Huns, but they disappeared from our front, apparently they were recalled to learn to fly Fokker bi-planes. These appeared during the latter half of July and some fierce fighting took place. One flight was practically wiped out in a week, three missing (two dead), one died of wounds, one wounded; they got plenty of Fokkers, but it left a gap.

On August 8th the British offensive commenced in front of Amiens, flying down at dawn and returning at dusk, doing two two-hour patrols during the day.

380 hours flying were carried out in these five days, only one machine damaged, a good advertisement for the engines.

It was remarkably hot, the wearing of Sidcot suits on the ground prior to a patrol, at a temperature of 85°F remains in one's memory. Considerable activity and incessant flying ensued during the fine weather of August 1918, large number of bombs being dropped on enemy communications.

On August 19th a combined attack was made on Phalempin aerodrome, in conjunction with 209 and 22 squadrons. This raid was led by 64 Sqdn, it was evidently successful, much damage being done. Total flying time during August—1132 hours.

Average flying time (August 20th) per machine on squadron strength—74 hours.

On August 26th the Battle of Arras commenced, Canadian Corps attack on the Drocourt—Queant switch. Low flying and bomb dropping was carried out incessantly for a fortnight combined with low reconnaissance's. At the end of this period, owing to casualties and sickness the squadron was reduced to three war pilots available, including one Flight Commander.

Owing to the importance of operations, new pilots, 17 of whom joined in a period of 18 days, had to be used very soon after arrival, and though full of energy, lacked fighting experience. In fact it was not till the beginning of November that the previous efficiency was attained. Severe bombing took place almost every night in August, but fortunately casualties were slight, all huts being sandbagged and large dugouts available.

September and October were chiefly occupied in flying reconnaissance, low bombing and shooting up road transport.

Aerodrome raids were carried out on Cantin and Emerchicourt; the former was executed at lunchtime by 64 squadron alone, a troop train in the station being fortunately discovered.

The German squadron was put completely out of action for several days, a captured document giving evidence to this effect. It was conducted in bad weather, no E.A. being observed throughout and very little fire from the ground.

On October 24th the squadron moved to Aniche and early in November came under the 93rd wing. The squadron was now up to full fighting strength and a few E.A. were obtained, but they were very scarce in the patrol areas. On November 11th the squadron made its final patrol finishing over Mons at 11 am. with a salvo of Very's lights.

On November 22nd the squadron moved to Saultain near Valenciennes thence to an aerodrome near Tournai on December

4th. (I do not know of its movements subsequent to Dec 22nd, as I was admitted to hospital suddenly and evacuated.)

One special feature of the squadron might be mentioned, its collection of models of all types of machines, especially German scouts and two-seaters. The idea originated from the O.C. and ably supported by the Technical Sergeant Major and an excellent coppersmith. By May 1918 a complete set of scale models had been made of practically every type, scale about 1/32. These were placed on stands and capable of being placed in any position.

Allied types were for recognition purposes, in any position, at distance corresponding to about a mile. Enemy models were used for judging distance in conjunction with an Aldis sight, and in addition a .22 Winchester was used for firing ahead, from a dummy fuselage, gun and sight operated by control stick and the rudder. Representatives from the French and American Flying Corps came over to inspect them with a view to placing an order.

Squadron sports were held in May 1917 and July 1918, and two football teams were run throughout the winter.

The NCO's and mechanics were throughout remarkably good, they had been carefully selected before proceeding overseas and were initially high class artisans with a strong esprit de corps.

The squadron did not produce any of the great fighting pilots of the R.F.C.; its work was fairly consistent, and at one time quite good.

Extract records of decorations and No of E.A. brought down were left in squadron on my departure. I have not got them available. The former include 7 M.C.'s and 7 D.F.C.'s. The latter about 128 E.A. from March to August 1918 inclusive.

Squadron Locations.

August 1st 1916-Oct. 14th 1917, Sedgeford, Norfolk,	7th Wing
October 15th 1917-April 10th 1918, Izel les Hameau,	13th Wing
April 11th 1918-October 24th 1918, " "	10th Wing
October 24th 1918-November 8th 1918, Aniche	10th Wing
November 9th 1918-November 22nd 1918, "	93rd Wing
November 22nd 1918-December 4th 1918 Saultain	93rd Wing
December 4th 1918-? Nr Tournai	93rd Wing

(Sgd) B.E. Smythies

Sq. Ldr.

21.10.19

Major B.E. Smythies, was remarkable for staying in the same squadron longer than any other pilot in the R.F.C., namely 2 years and 5 Months. He was a regular R.E. officer.