

AIRCRAFT WORK AT THE FRONT.

In the descriptive account dated December 21st, issued by the Press Bureau on the 25th, "Eye-witness," in describing the work of the Commander-in-Chief at the General Headquarters, said:—

"He relies entirely on second or third hand evidence of things seen or heard by others over a front of many miles, and communicated back by the agency of electricity or petrol. Messages sent in by telegraph, wireless, telephones, motor cars, motor cycles, and aeroplanes are the daily food of the General Staff, for the handling of this mass of material collected by others, its analysis and its application to the situation for the purpose of framing plans are their work."

Writing of the Divisional Headquarters nearer the firing line, he said:—

"Here in this neighbourhood are to be found the first visible signs that fighting is going on. These do not consist so much in the ruined houses and devastated villages, which are rather proofs of past fighting, and may be in evidence even behind General Headquarters, but consist, paradoxically enough, in the actual absence of any traces of the presence of masses of soldiers, for, though the area from here onwards may contain thousands of troops, all cavalry, artillery, and infantry will alike be so hidden away in villages, in woods, or in folds of the ground that there will be no trace of them in the landscape. This is one result of the all-pervading and all-seeing aeroplane. On the roads, however, at this distance from the firing line the transport will be moving freely."

In another despatch, dated December 24th and issued on the 28th, there were the following references to the work of aircraft:—

"Wednesday, the 23rd, a thick mist militated against air reconnaissance and artillery action. . . .

"Though the weather has been generally unfavourable to aviation, several reconnaissances have been made during the past week, and there have been three encounters in the air between British and German aeroplanes, as a result of which the hostile machine has in each case been forced to go down in the German lines.

"On one occasion our machine chased a Taube, and having attained the favourable position for shooting, the observer emptied his automatic pistol at the enemy, without any visible result, at about 150 ft. range. He then proceeded to take a photograph, and the appearance of the camera seems to have alarmed the German aviator, who at once fled. Upon another occasion a somewhat difficult situation arose when a bomb, which was being dropped, caught in a string, and remained suspended three or four feet below the aeroplane. There was no way of reaching the bomb, and it was impossible to land. Finally the observer kicked a hole through the floor of the fuselage, hooked the string with his foot, and shook it until the bomb fell off."

In an official message from South Africa, published on the 23rd ult., there was the following:—

"A Taube monoplane coming from Aus (German South-West Africa) went as far as Rothkuppe and returned, flying high and wide. It was unable to approach our camps owing to big gun fire. No shells were dropped."

The following announcement was made by the War Office on December 24th:—

"An enemy's aeroplane was seen over Dover this morning about 10.55. It dropped a bomb which fell in

a garden and exploded, but did no damage. The aeroplane was only seen for a few seconds, and left again over sea. British aircraft went up at once, but did not see the enemy again. The weather was foggy and cloudy."

The following was issued by the War Office on Christmas Day:—

"A hostile aeroplane was sighted to-day at 12.35 p.m. flying very high east to west over Sheerness. British aircraft went up in pursuit and engaged the enemy, who, after being hit three or four times, was driven off seaward."

The following announcement was made by the Admiralty on Sunday last:—

"On Thursday last, Squadron-Commander Richard B. Davies, R.N., of the Naval Air Service, visited Brussels in a Maurice Farman biplane for the purpose of dropping twelve bombs on an airship shed reported to contain a German Parseval. Eight of these bombs, of which six are believed to have hit, were discharged at the first attack and the remaining four on the return flight. Owing to the clouds of smoke which arose from the shed the effect could not be distinguished."

The following was issued by the Admiralty on the 27th ult.:—

"On Friday (Christmas Day) German warships lying in Schillig Roads, off Cuxhaven, were attacked by seven naval seaplanes, piloted by the following officers:—

"Flight Commander Douglas A. Oliver, R.N.

"Flight Commander Francis E. T. Hewlett, R.N.

"Flight Commander Robert P. Ross, R.N.

"Flight Commander Cecil F. Kilner, R.N.

"Flight Lieutenant Arnold J. Miley, R.N.

"Flight Lieutenant Charles H. K. Edmonds, R.N.

"Flight Sub-Lieutenant Vivian Gaskell Blackburn, R.N.

"The attack was delivered at daylight, starting from a point in the vicinity of Heligoland. The seaplanes were escorted by a light cruiser and destroyer force, together with submarines. As soon as these ships were seen by the Germans from Heligoland, two Zeppelins, three or four hostile seaplanes, and several hostile submarines attacked them.

"It was necessary for the British ships to remain in the neighbourhood in order to pick up the returning airmen; and a novel combat ensued between the most modern cruisers on the one hand and the enemy's aircraft and submarines on the other. By swift manoeuvring the enemy's submarines were avoided, and the two Zeppelins were easily put to flight by the guns of the 'Undaunted' and 'Arethusa.' The enemy's seaplanes succeeded in dropping their bombs near to our ships, though without hitting any. The British ships remained for three hours off the enemy's coast without being molested by any surface vessel, and safely re-embarked three out of the seven airmen with their machines.

"Three other pilots who returned later were picked up, according to arrangement, by British submarines, which were standing by, their machines being sunk. Six out of the seven pilots, therefore, returned safely. Flight Commander Francis E. T. Hewlett, R.N., is, however, missing. His machine was seen in a wrecked condition about eight miles from Heligoland, and the fate of this daring and skilful pilot is at present unknown. The extent of the damage by the British airmen's bombs cannot be estimated, but all were discharged on points of military significance."