

Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington

94 Squadron R.F.C., 141 Squadron R.F.C, 214 Squadron R.A.F.

Belgian Croix de Guerre



Believed to be Flight Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington



Front Row middle, believed to be Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington..



ROYANNE DE BELGIQUE

La Ministre de la Defense, Nationale

A l'honneur de faire savoir a Jesse Hetherington, Lieutenant 214 Squadron du "Royal Air Force" que, par Arrete Royal du 20 Janvier 1920, No. 6600, la Croix de Guerre lui a ete decernee, a la date du 21 Mai 1919.

Pour la vaillance et l'audace qu'il deployees au cours de l'offensive des Flandres, sa cooperation avec les aviateurs francais et belges a permis d'obtenir sur l'adversaire une maitrise incontestie et a contribue dans une large mesure au success final.

Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington. Croix de Guerre

Jesse Hetherington was born in Birmingham on 7th January 1898. The family then moved to Bishopstoke in Hampshire. He joined the Royal Flying Corps on 19th September 1916 whilst he was still at school. On 15th February 1917, Jesse Hetherington was instructed to report to the RFC training establishment in Oxford. He was then posted to No. 24 Training School at Netheravon, where he learnt to fly. On 27th October 1917 he went to No. 94 Squadron RFC in Norfolk training to fly Sopwith Camels. After this, he was probably posted to a fighter squadron in France. On 13th November 1917 he was seriously hurt and hospitalised for a time. He was then posted to a home defence squadron in Kent in January 1918.

It appears that flying fighters was not for Flying Officer Hetherington. By 20th May he has been posted to the No.1 School of Aerial Navigation and Bomb Dropping at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. He completed the course on 13th July 1918. He was then posted to France and posted to 214 Squadron by mid-July.

214 Squadron were a night bombing squadron flying Handley Page O/400 bombers from St. Inglevert Aerodrome, just outside Calais. One of Jesse's earliest flying missions with his new squadron was a raid on the 14th August 1918 on the Solway Works at Zeebrugge. A week later, after another raid on the Solway Works, Jesse Hetherington's aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and made a forced landing in the sea. The Observer was drowned, and Lieutenant Hetherington and the rear gunner clung to the floating wreckage of their aircraft for nine hours before being rescued.

Jesse Hetherington was allocated a new aircraft, C9696, which he was to fly until the end of the war. Sergeant Fred Whittaker, a baker in civilian life, became his regular observer, and they flew a number of missions together. Lieutenant Hetherington's last raid of the war was on the night of the 10th November, the target was the Railway junction and station at Louvain. Jesse Hetherington was still only 20 years old when the war ended.

After the war ended, he stayed with 214 Squadron in eastern France for a number of months. In May 1919, Lieutenant Hetherington was awarded the Belgian Croix de Guerre medal. The Squadron was transferred to Egypt in July 1919. Jesse Hetherington was one of the personnel that *'Arrived by Air'*, probably after co-piloting one of the Handley Pages all the way from France, surviving the ordeals of the *'Blazing Trails'* Scandal. During his time in Egypt, he was posted to Malta for several weeks for temporary duties. It is likely that he was demobbed and left the RAF in early February 1920.

After returning from Egypt, Jesse Hetherington became a Catholic priest on the south coast in the Portsmouth Diocese. He was ordained on the 29th March 1926. He was a parish priest in Southbourne, near Bournemouth. He eventually became Canon of the Chapter at Portsmouth Cathedral. He died at the age of 89 on 19th April 1987.

Jesse Hetherington joined the Royal Flying Corps whilst he was still at school. He joined up on 19th September 1916. His service record at the National Archive describes his Occupation in Civil Life as *'student'*. He was attending Beaumont College in Old Windsor, Berkshire. His family home was at Stoke Lodge, Bishopstoke in Hampshire.

On 15th February 1917, Jesse Hetherington was instructed to report to the RFC training establishment in Oxford. After basic training he was sent for flight training. On 21st June 1917 he was promoted, from Officer Cadet, to Temporary Second Lieutenant on Probation. This coincided with his being posted to No. 24 Training School at Netheravon, in Wiltshire. At Netheravon, Jesse learnt to fly on a Maurice Farman Short Horn aircraft. This was a *'pusher'* type with the engine at the rear of the nacelle.

Between July and October, he progressed onto more advanced types of aircraft such as B.E.2cs and Avros. By 28th September, Jesse Hetherington had gained his wings and was promoted to Flying Officer. The 20th October 1917, saw him in Scotland at R.F.C. Turnberry, taking a Vickers machine gun course. On 27th October 1917 he was posted to No. 94 Squadron RFC. This was an advanced training unit teaching pilots to fly Sopwith Camels, based at Harling Road Aerodrome in Norfolk.

After this posting to 94 Squadron, his service history in AIR 76/224/10, is not particularly clear. It is likely that he was posted on active service to a squadron in France. He completed a second gunnery course, on Vickers and Lewis machine guns in France. Something very serious happened to Flying Officer Jesse Hetherington on 13th November 1917. His service history has three different pieces of information for that date. *'Injured in an aero accident in France'..... 'wounded'* and..... *'hospital'*. It is not clear if he was wounded fighting the Germans, was hurt in a flying accident in France or was injured in a flying accident in the UK, (as 94 Squadron was still in England), and there is no mention of another squadron.

Whatever happened, it was serious enough to hospitalise him. He went before a Medical Board sometime in November which decided that he was 'unfit'. By 21st December 1917 the Medical Board decided that he was 'fit' and he was given two weeks leave. For some reason he was then declared 'unfit' a second time on 14th January 1918. On 21st January 1918, Jesse Hetherington was posted to No. 141 Squadron RFC based at Rochford, in Kent. This was a new squadron, that was formed on 1st January 1918. It was a fighter squadron, strengthening the fighter defences around the London area. On 23rd February 1918, a further Medical Board decided that Jesse Hetherington was once again 'fit' to fly.

However it appears that flying fighters was not for Flying Officer Hetherington. By 20th May he had been posted to the No.1 School of Aerial Navigation and Bomb Dropping at Stonehenge on Salisbury Plain. Here, he would have learnt to fly night bombing aircraft like the FE2b and the Handley Page O/400. It is likely that he completed the Stonehenge course on 13th July 1918. He was then posted to 214 Squadron at St. Inglevert outside Calais. Squadron records have him arriving by the 15th July. He was one of 5 new officers to arrive that week.

..... NIGHT BOMBING SQUADRONS.		MONTH JULY 1918						
Week Ending	A NAMES OF PILOTS WHO HAVE JOINED THE COMMAND IN THE PREVIOUS WEEK	B NAMES OF PILOTS WHO ARE MISSING OR KILLED IN THE PREVIOUS WEEK	C NAMES OF PILOTS OFF STRENGTH DUE TO OTHER CAUSES: HOSPITAL, INVALIDED, APPOINTED AWAY, ETC.	D WASTAGE	E NET GAIN OR LOSS	F FLYING OFFICERS	G SQUADRON COMMANDERS	H TOTAL AVAILABLE
7th	Turner. - 38		Darley - 214 to H.E.	1		41	2	44
15th	MacAndrew H. - 38 Hetherington J. - 214 Belton, J.B. - 214 Stewart A.W. - 214 Tait W.M. - 214 Marsell T.W. - 214 Hastin. - 214, U.S.A. Stocker. - 214, U.S.A.		Cosgrave - 214 to H.E. MacGregor - 38, Sick.	1	plus 5	46	2	49 50
23rd	Salaberry. 38. Marsell, T.W. 214.	Trotman, W.L. 38. (missing).	Binokes, R. 214 (died of injuries). (Stocker, } ceased to be (Marsell, } att'd 214. (Frothingham } (Taber } (Sawyerwood. }	7	-5	43	2	45
30th	Burgener - 214.		Stratcliffe - 38 - accident- ally injured. Hastin - U.S.A. - ceased to be attached 214.	2	minus 1	40	2	42

65th Wing Personnel Records from the National Archives showing Jesse Hetherington arriving at 214 Squadron between the 7th and 15th of July 1918

Before joining 214 Squadron and flying Handley Pages, Jesse Hetherington had flown a number of different aircraft types in training, on active service in France and with No. 141 Squadron at Rochford. These included the Maurice Farman Short Horn, probably the aircraft he soloed on at Netheravon. He also flew the B.E.2b, Avro 504, Morane Biplane and BE2c. He flew the Sopwith Scout (Camel) with 94 Squadron and B.E.12s, SE5 and Sopwith Dolphins, probably with 141 Squadron at Rochford.

Jesse Hetherington experienced a number of escapades and lucky escapes as a pilot. Anecdotal evidence from the RAF Museum archive, contained in AC/1997/49/1, suggests that Hetherington was shot down at least once and had six other crashes. It refers to a story that Jesse Hetherington told. 'On one occasion, after being shot down he said they allowed him to take up an unfamiliar type to cheer him up.' He was 6 feet in height and heavily built, his knee,

unwittingly turned off the petrol cap in the cockpit and he had to make a forced landing with (as he thought) engine failure. He said the recovery party were considerably annoyed when they discovered what really happened’.

1	14/08/1918	Solway Works at Zeebrugge	C3492	Lt. Hetherington	Sgt. Dell	Electrician Wright USNAS
2	15/08/1918	Probably Bruges Docks	C3492 O	Lt Hetherington	2/Lt. Fletcher	E1 Sisto ro USNAS
3	21/08/1918	Zeebrugge, Solway Works	C 3492	Lt Hetherington	2/Lt. Fletcher	E1 KENNEDY USNAS
	16/09/1918	Cancelled Raid? Raid Order sheet in Dell Archive Leeds.	D4578	Lt. Hetherington	Sgt Barker DSM	Ensign Benjamin USNAS
4	28/09/1918	Maximum Effort. 11 HPs bomb rail centres at Thorout and Melle. Trip 1	C9696	Lt Hetherington	Sgt. Whittaker	Ensign Benjamin USNAS
5	28/09/1918	Maximum Effort. 11 HPs bomb rail centres at Thorout and Melle. Trip 2	C9696	Lt Hetherington	Sgt. Whittaker	Ensign Benjamin USNAS
	01/10/1918	Cancelled Raid? Raid Order sheet in Dell Archive Leeds. But no log book det	C9696	Lt Hetherington	Sgt. Whittaker	E1 Hultanen USN
	06/10/1918	Valenciennes ? Cancelled Raid? No details in Dell's or Ellison's log book	C9696	Lt Hetherington	Sgt. Whittaker	E1 Johnson USN
6	08/10/1918	Attacks on Deynze, Melle, Ardoye, Thorout and the Ghent-Thielt railway line	9396	Lt Hetherington	Sgt. Whittaker	E1 Crowley USN
7	14/10/1918	Melle in Ghent. Possibly second or third away.	C9696	Lt Hetherington	Sgt. Whittaker	
8	24/10/1918	St. Inglevert to new aerodrome at Quinlen. 55 minutes	C9696	Major Brackley 214 CO	Sgt. Whittaker	Lt Hetherington
9	30/10/1918	Quinlen to new aerodrome at Camphin. 85 minutes.	C9696	Major Brackley 214 CO	Sgt. Whittaker	Lt Hetherington
10	10/11/1918	Louvain Rail Junction and Station	C9696	Lt. Hetherington	Sgt. T.F. Whittaker	2nd. Lt. Tait

Table of Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington's flight's and missions with 214 Squadron RAF where information is available. This table does not show all his flight's with the squadron.

14th August 1918. Target Zeebrugge. 'A very large flare was observed falling over Zeebrugge....this was a Hun machine hit by their own A.A.' Sergeant Dell.

This is the first mission, that I have found, of Jesse Hetherington flying with 214 Squadron. The normal procedure at the squadron was that new pilots would not start flying aircraft on raids until they had gained some mission experience. New pilots first flew as rear gunners on the gun platform behind the wings. Once they had some experience of night bombing raids, they were put into the pilot's seat. As a new pilot, Hetherington was teamed up with the very capable, experienced and reliable Sergeant Dell as his observer. The third crew member, one of the attached American Navy personnel, Electrician Wright, was rear gunner.

The target for the raid on 14th August 1918 was Zeebrugge, but due to very poor weather only two machines went on the raid. Lieutenant Hetherington, Sergeant Dell and Electrician Wright were one of the two crews. They were flying H.P. 3492 and their objective was to bomb the Solway Works. They took off at 9.52pm carrying 16 x 112lb bombs and flew along the coast to Zeebrugge. Dell's logbook described the raid. *'The sky was overcast and visibility poor. It was impossible to see the buildings of the works. We attacked flying S.W. to N.E. and dropped in a steady straddle just south of No. 1 Darse. All bombs were seen to explode in the vicinity of the works but was unable to observe results because of poor visibility and a great number of search lights. We received no gun fire over the objective as hostile aircraft was patrolling Zeebrugge, one machine was seen to fire a red light when caught in the lights. Ghistelless Aerodrome was observed to be active. Great activity on the line south of Ypres. We returned by sea and landed at St Inglevert. The mission had lasted 3 hours 38 minutes.*

Dell noted in his log book after the raid, 'As we returned home at 11:50 a very large flare was observed falling over Zeebrugge' He adds a later note to this entry, 'This flare was Hun machine hit by its own A.A.'



Sergeant Observer Leslie Alexander Dell

15th August 1918 . Target Ostend. An American Caproni Bombs Ostend. First strategic night bombing mission flown by an all American crew.

Nine bombers set out from St. Inglevert. There were eight aircraft from 214 Squadron and one aircraft from the 1st Night Bomber Squadron, United States Navy Northern Bombing Group. Lieutenant Hetherington flew H.P. C3492 on this mission. His observer was a Second Lieutenant Fletcher and the rear gunner was Electrician E1 Sistar. Sistar was one of the American personnel attached to 214 Squadron.

For the Americans, their raid, flying an Italian built Caproni, represented a significant milestone. It was the first, strategic night bombing mission, flown by an all American crew under American Command. The American Caproni bomber was flown by Ensign Taber with Ensign Fahy as his observer and Electrician 1st Class Hale as rear gunner. They are on a mission to bomb the submarine pens at Ostende. They were carrying 1 x 550lb bomb and 2 x 250lb bombs.

21st August 1918. Target Bruges, the Solway Works at Zeebrugge and two Aerodromes. C3492 ditches in the sea 4 miles off Nieuport. Jesse Hetherington and the Rear Gunner rescued after 9 hours in the water. The Observer drowned.

Eight 214 Squadron aircraft started on raids that night. Bruges was attacked by five aircraft, Ghislles Aerodrome by one aircraft, Oostacker Aerodrome by one aircraft and the Solway Works at Zeebrugge was attacked by one aircraft.

There was a full moon which provided the bombers of 214 Squadron with excellent visibility. Unfortunately, it also provided perfect visibility for the defenders too. German night fighters

were out in force and enemy Anti-Aircraft fire was particularly accurate. Major Brackley's Commanding Officer's Report on War Flying' for the raid noted that *'the night was exceptionally bright with a full moon enabling enemy aircraft to pick up our machines without difficulty. Every machine was shot about, either by E.A. or A. A. 1 very badly.'* AIR1/696/21/20/214

The machine that was *'shot about'.... 'very badly'* was probably C9674 flown by Lt Lewtas. Bowyer states that Lewtas had a long running battle with an enemy two seater virtually all the way home from Bruges Docks. Lewtas was lucky to get back, he had two petrol tanks badly holed and 108 bullets in fuselage, wings and tail. Worse was to come. Lt Hetherington's plane C3492, was missing after the raid on the Solway Works at Zeebrugge.

Later the following day, news came in about the missing bomber. Flak had holed the petrol tanks and the aircraft had run out of fuel. Lieutenant Hetherington had been forced to ditch in the sea 4 miles off Nieuport. After crashing into the sea, the observer, Lieutenant Edward Fletcher, unfortunately drowned. The wreckage of the plane stayed afloat for 9 hours. Jesse Hetherington and Rear Gunner Electrician Kennedy USNAS, were rescued the next day by an American seaplane.

Major Brackley's January 1919 *'Rough history of 214 Squadron'* that was *'written in the field'* has a comprehensive account of Hetherington and Kennedy's watery ordeal in the North Sea.

'August 21st 1918. Zeebrugge, Solway Works. After making a successful attack on Solway Works, machine was badly hit by A.A. fire. Pilot made a gallant effort to get back but was forced to land in the sea, on the enemy's side of the Lines. The Observer was drowned. The Pilot and Gunlayer extricated themselves from machine and crawled to the tail, the only part of the machine above water. Soon after dawn a patrol of enemy machines flew over at low altitude, and after circling round, flew back in the direction of Ostende, no doubt to give information. Shortly after, a friendly machine on reconnaissance duly passed, the Pilot of which had had his attention attracted to the Signals made by the two helpless men. The machine (a D.H.4) returned immediately to report. In the meantime, the Handley Page had drifted still further eastwards and after a long wait of ten hours, help arrived in the shape of a flying boat, piloted by Lt. Gates, U.S.N.A.S. The Pilot and Gunlayer of the wrecked machine were taken off and landed safely at Dunkerque.'

The plane ditched off Nieuport, just on the French-Belgium border. But the tides took Fletcher's body north east along the Belgian Coast and it washed ashore in Holland. Second Lieutenant Edward Corston Fletcher was only 18 years old when he died. He was from Blackpool Lancashire. He was buried at Flushing (Vlissingen) Northern Cemetery in the Netherlands. His headstone has the sad dedication, *'Too Fondly Loved to ever be Forgotten by his Sorrowing Parents'*.

On getting back to St Inglevert, Lt. Hetherington completed the Report on Bomb Dropping. Solway Works Zeebrugge. HP 0/400 C3492 Pilot Flt. Lt Hetherington, Observer 2/Lt. Fletcher,

Electrician Kennedy USNAS was rear gunner. HP C3492 carried 16 x 112lb bombs. Bombs dropped at 23:10 and 00:05 from 7,000 feet. *'Effects observed: 1 hit observed on the Works. Remarks: Two runs were made, the first from NNW to SSW. Got held and hit just before bombs were dropped. A second run was made from W to E. Machine was not held by searchlights. One direct hit was observed on Solway Works. Machine headed out to sea but petrol supply gave out and machine came down in sea at 01:05. 2/Lt. Fletcher was drowned and Elect. Kennedy sustained minor injuries. Pilot and gunlayer were picked up at 09:00, 22/08/1918.'*



Officers of 214 Squadron RAF.

Taken after 24th July 1918. Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington, back row second from left.

28th September 1918 Target Railway Junctions. Double Raid. 214 Squadron drops 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ tons of bombs in one night.

After their success at the Battle of Amiens, the Allies continue to pile pressure on the German Army by launching the Fifth Battle of Ypres, The Battle of Flanders. At 05:30 on the morning of 28th September there was a combined Anglo-Belgian attack, along a 23 mile long front from Dixmunde south to Ploegsteert. No. 214 Squadron had a major role in the offensive. The previous day, on the 27th September, Headquarters 82nd Wing RAF issued *Secret Operation Order No. 113*. This allocated the targets for the squadron to attack *'as many times as possible'*, from dusk on the evening of the following day, 28th September, to dawn on the 29th. The first attacks to start *'as soon as darkness sets in'*. The squadron was tasked with attacking

major railway junctions at Cortemarck, Lichtervelde and Thourout. German reinforcements had to pass through these important junctions.

After 214's first raid of the night, they would not return to St. Inglevert to refuel and rearm, but go to their old base at Coudekerque. Their former base at Dunkirk, was 30 minutes closer to the front than St. Inglevert, thus cutting turn-around time after the first raid by at least an hour. The Secret Order specified that one of the machines attacking Thourout will carry a 1650lb bomb.

The squadron rose to the challenge by sending eleven aircraft on the raids. Pilot Lieutenant Hetherington flew H.P. C9696 with his new Observer, Fred Whittaker. According to one source their bomb load was 15 x 112lb bombs and 2 x 40lb phosphorous bombs. *'The main targets of the 5th Group bombers were the railways at Cortemarck, Lichtervelde and Thourout, and in the attacks three trains were set on fire and three ammunition dumps exploded'*. Jones, H.A. *The War in the Air*. The Official History. Volume 6. Imperial War Museum.

Major Brackley was really pleased that the squadron had performed so splendidly in achieving the double raids and dropping a very large tonnage of bombs on the important communications centres. His Squadron Order of the 30th September expressed his thanks to all concerned for their *'Second Double Raid in One Night'* dropping 14 ¼ tons of bombs on the enemy. The Belgian government would express their gratitude for the squadron's contribution to this Flanders Offensive at a later date.



Pilots and Observers of 214 Squadron. Probably taken after the 28th September 1918 'Double' Raid on important railway junctions when the squadron dropped 14 ½ tons of bombs in one night.

Lieutenant Jesse Hetherinton. Front Row second from right. His observer Sergeant Fred Whittaker. Back row third from right.

14/10/1918 Target Melle. Lieutenant Lewtas scores direct hits on an ammunition train with three 550lb bombs causing 'indescribable damage'- Squadron Records

The squadron attacked Melle Railway Junctions and Sidings for the seventh time since the double raid on the night of the 28th/29th September. Seven of the last nine missions were to Melle. A feature of the night was the number of burning towns and villages left by the retreating Germans and rampant bomber crews of the Royal Air Force. Sergeant Wardrop counted fifteen separate fires and Sergeant Dell counted eighteen.

Lieutenant Hetherington and Sergeant Whittaker were involved on the attack on Melle that night, as Sergeant Wardrop's log book describes. *'First machine away went to sea by Wissant and followed coast as far as Nieuport. Followed Ostende-Bruges canal to Ghent. Circled over sidings for some time. Went over N.E. to S.W. first time, only another machine (Flight Lieutenant Hetherington and Sgt. Whittaker were just above us coming in the opposite direction so we turned and waited until they finished. They started two fires.)'*

After the bombs dropped by observers Whittaker, Wardrop and Dell, the sidings at Melle were well alight and clearly visible to the rest of the squadron's bombers now approaching the target. One of these aircraft was being piloted by Lieutenant Lewtas, his observer, Captain H.E. Clarke dropped their three 550lb bombs with pinpoint accuracy and devastating effect. Squadron records state: *'Lt. Lewtas scored direct hits with three 550lb bombs on an ammunition train causing indescribable damage and fires all over the sidings.'*

Major Brackley's January 1919 'Rough History' described what happened. *'Melle Sidings, Ghent. During the early part of the Flanders Battle, Melle Sidings were choked with traffic. The squadron carried out many raids on this objective. On 14th October, Lieut. G.S. Lewtas scored direct hits with 3-550lb bombs on trains loaded with ammunition, causing indescribable damage all over the Sidings. The fires were a help to the other Pilots bombing the same objective.'*

'The important Melle sidings, south-east of Ghent, where activity was seen to be intense in the afternoon of the 14th, were again attacked after dark by No. 214 (Handley Page) Squadron; among the bombs dropped was one of 1650-lbs weight. The visibility was clear and the night-flying crews saw the ground panorama in unusual detail. An ammunition train in the Melle sidings exploded and carried destruction over a wide area.' Jones, H.A. *The War in the Air. The Official History*. Volume 6. Imperial War Museum.



Lieutenant Hetherington's Observer Sergeant Thomas Frederick Whittaker. July 1917. used with the kind permission of his grandson, Graham Whittaker.

24th and 30th October 1918. The Squadron moves east from St. Inglevert to Quinlen on the heels of the retreating Germans. Jesse Hetherington gets flown by the Commanding Officer.

As the enemy retreated, the aerodrome at St. Inglevert was getting further away from the front lines, increasing flight times to and from their targets. The Germans had retreated from Bruges, Ostend and Zeebrugge, so important railway junctions and transport hubs are now 214 Squadron's main priorities. On the 24th October the squadron moves back to the aerodrome at Quilen, a 55 minute flight from St. Inglevert. They are only there one week before they move again to Camphin, one and a half hours from Quilen. On both moves, Major Brackley the Commanding Officer, takes the controls of H.P. 9696 and flies Fred Whittaker and Lieutenant Hetherington to their new aerodrome.

10th November 1918. Target Louvain Railway Junction and Station. 'Nearly 6 tons of bombs dropped, causing fires and explosions' – Major Brackley's 'Rough History of 214 Squadron'

The squadron's last mission of the war was on the night of November 10th/11th 1918 when seven aircraft raided Louvain and other machines went to Namur in appalling weather. The seven aircraft that raided Louvain found the Germans in a rush to get away from the advancing allied troops. The town was well-lit and there was hardly any opposition. The squadron dropped almost six tons of bombs on the railway station and junctions causing fires and explosions. Fred Whittaker was flying on C9696 with Lieutenant Hetherington.

11th November 1918. Armistice. The War is finally over.

13th November. Jesse Hetherington is invited to hang out with the big wigs.

Two days after the Armistice, Major Brackley took a Handley Page on a tour of 214 Squadron's main targets at Bruges, Ostende and Zeebrugge. He takes the Wing Commander, Colonel Kilmer and two of the squadron's non-flying officers, Captains Goldsmith and Tyrer. Jesse Hetherington went along too. I suspect he was a reserve pilot. They were headed for Lille. Three of the squadron's aircraft set off on this Cook's Tour behind the German lines.

However, the aircraft, H.P. 9696, broke an oil pipe in the port engine, which forced the aircraft to return to base after a 41 minute flight.

14th November. More problems

Brackley, Kilmer and Hetherington take a different aircraft, but experience problems for a second day. This time the petrol supply failed at 1,000 feet and they put down at an advanced landing strip. After 45 minutes of laboriously hand pumping petrol up to the top wing tanks there was enough fuel to fly home again.

14th November 1918. Lieutenant Hetherington is hungry.

Clearly Jesse Hetherington had worked up an appetite hand pumping all that fuel. Sergeant Wardrop has an interesting log book entry for 14th November 1918. At 11:45 he was a passenger in H.P. 9696 being flown by Lieutenant Hetherington with Sergeant Whittaker as the observer. *'St. Inglevert and Return. Visited our old aerodrome intending to bring back some food. Fine trip. Stayed for about two hours then returned. Slight engine trouble on return journey.'* It took 1 hour and 5 minutes to reach their old aerodrome on the coast.

After the end of hostilities, 214 Squadron and Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington remained in France. There was little to do. The squadron flew some air mail services around France and Germany. However, these flights were few and irregular. After the stress and excitement of the war, life for the young pilots must have been fairly boring.

13th March 1919. Jesse joins Major Brackley's Farewell Tour

At 11.30 am Major Brackley takes off in HP 9696 headed for Dover. One of his four passengers is Jesse Hetherington. They land at St. Inglevert, 214's old base outside Calais for lunch before flying to Dover. Jesse might have stopped at St Inglevert or possibly gone to Dover on leave.

On 21st May 1919, news came through that members of the squadron are being given the Belgian Croix de Guerre for their exploits during the Flanders Offensive in the last months of the war. One of the medals was for Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington. The medal was awarded for.....

Pour la vaillance et l'audace qu'il déployées au cours de l'offensive des Flandres, sa coopération avec les aviateurs français et belges a permis d'obtenir sur l'adversaire une maîtrise incontestée et a contribué dans une large mesure au succès final.

'For the valour and daring he displayed during the Flanders offensive; his cooperation with French and Belgian airmen enabled the achievement of undisputed air superiority over the adversary and contributed significantly to the final success.'

Jesse Hetherington had to wait a few months as his medal was not to be issued until January 1920. The RAF Museum has his official Belgian medal award certificate in their archives, it is a wonderful document.

During the summer of 1919, three Handley Page squadrons were ordered to Egypt to form the Middle East Training Brigade. However, the real reason was that there was a great deal of civil unrest in Egypt with the way that Arabia had been carved up by the allies at the Treaty of Versailles. Promises of future Arab autonomy and statehood after the war had been reneged upon by the French and British governments. 214 and 216 Squadrons left France on 1st July 1919. The aircrew started their 3,000 mile journey to Egypt in tired and worn-out machines that had been poorly maintained and rarely flown since the war. Crews lacked logistic support and even such basics as maps. Machines crashed and were damaged in storms and on landing at unsuitable emergency landing grounds. A total of 18 aircraft were destroyed and 11 pilots killed, almost two squadrons of aircraft. It was called the Blazing Trails disaster.

Jesse Hetherington flew a tired old bomber from France to Egypt and was probably one of the most experienced pilots that made the journey. On 31st July 1919 he had *'Arrived by Air'* in Egypt. He was lucky to arrive at all. The squadron was at Abu Sueir. He had been in Egypt just over two weeks when he was granted ten days, *'leave of absence'*, returning to the squadron on 25th August 1919. In mid-October he was notified that he was to be posted to Malta and went to Aboukir. On 23rd October he was at the port of Alexandria and embarked for Malta on the *H.T. Teutonic*. Jesse Hetherington was in Malta on *'temporary duties'* for three weeks. He returned to Port Said in Egypt, on the 15th November and rejoined 214 Squadron the following day.

There is an anecdote in the RAF Museum archive which Jesse Hetherington apparently used to tell about his time in Egypt. Some of the guards at Abu Sueir Aerodrome were Gurkhas. Jesse used to take some of these men up on joy-rides. He used to say that he was the first pilot of the airborne Gurkha regiment. By January 1920, Jesse Hetherington was being demobilised. According to his records, *Army Form B103- Casualty Form-Active Service*, on 21st January he was posted *'To Homeward Kantara'*. Kantara was one of the other Egyptian airbases where the Handley Pages of 216 Squadron were based. The previous day, 20th January 1920, the Belgian Government finally got round to awarding him his Croix de Guerre!

214 Squadron was officially disbanded on the 1st February 1920. Remaining personnel and aircraft were transferred to 216 Squadron at Kantara, which was remaining in Egypt. Jesse Hetherington left Egypt from Port Said on the 10th February 1920. He returned to the UK on the *H.T. Teutonic*.

After leaving the Air Force, Jesse probably returned to the family home at Bishopstoke in Hampshire. It was here that his life took an unexpected change of direction. Jesse decided that he had a vocation and offered himself to the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth for the Priesthood. I think that Bishopstoke is in the Portsmouth Diocese. Apparently, Jesse used to say that, *'they were a bit unwilling to take an unruly ex-pilot.'* Lieutenant Jesse Hetherington was ordained as a Catholic priest on 29th May 1926, becoming Father Jesse Hetherington. He became a Parish Priest and in 1934 became the first priest at a new parish in Southbourne near Bournemouth, The Church of Our Lady Queen of Peace and Blessed Magaret Pole. Father Jesse Hetherington was at the Southbourne church for 15 years, until 1949. He rose up the Church ranks and became a Canon of the Chapter of Portsmouth Cathedral... *'a legendary figure in the Portsmouth Diocese who still loved chatting to flying men.'*

Canon Jesse Hetherington died on the 19th April 1987 at the age of 89.

Reference Sources

- RAF Museum Archive AC1997/49/1
- National Archives. AIR 76/224/10