

A FINE AND RARE GREAT WAR RFC/RAF SOPWITH CAMEL FIGHTER ACES PAIR AWARDED TO A PILOT WHO FLEW WITH 28 AND 66 SQUADRONS, CLAIMING 7 AERIAL VICTORIES ON THE 'ITALIAN FRONT' IN 1918. EXTREMELY UNLUCKY NOT TO HAVE BEEN DECORATED, HE WAS WOUNDED IN THE LEG BY ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE WHILST IN THE PROCESS OF SHOOTING DOWN A BALLOON, 31 AUGUST 1918. FORCED TO CRASH LAND HIS AIRCRAFT, HE WAS TAKEN PRISONER AND INTERNED IN BAVARIA FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE CONFLICT. POST WAR, HE WAS EMPLOYED AS A DEPUTY CONSERVATOR IN THE INDIAN FORESTRY SERVICE - AND IT WAS IN THIS CAPACITY THAT HE WAS MURDERED BY ONE OF HIS RECENTLY DISMISSED STAFF AT MOULMEIN, BURMA IN MAY 1933



BRITISH WAR AND VICTORY MEDALS 'CAPT. J. MACKERETH. R.A.F.'

John Mackereth was born in Norwood, London in October 1898. He was educated at Dulwich College, 1910-17, and joined the Royal Flying Corps as a Second Lieutenant (on probation) straight from school in June 1917. Mackereth advanced to Flying Officer in August 1917, having carried out pilot training at 8 and 67 Training Squadrons.

SOPWITH CAMEL'S WITH 28 SQUADRON

On 27 October 1917, Macckereth was posted for operational flying to 28 Squadron (Sopwith Camels), which had itself just been posted to the Western Front on the 8 October. Another pilot posted to 28 Squadron when it moved to France was Captain William Barker, the to be famed Canadian 50 victory VC ace. An experienced pilot, yet to score an aerial victory but would open his account with 3 by the time MacKereth arrived.

28 Squadrons stay in France was brief for on 29 October the Squadron was ordered to the Italian front where an offensive by Austrian and German forces had pushed the Italians back to the Piave River. Arriving in Milan on 12 November, 28 Squadron would remain on this front for the duration of the war, flying offensive patrols over the front in north-east Italy before the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed.

During the early months of 1918, 28 Squadrons Camels were in the main devoted to routine work; Offensive patrols were carried out, as were escort duties and from February, Camels were fitted with bomb racks for raids against enemy airfields and other ground targets. Mackereth is listed as taking part in numerous operations during the period and on 18 February, on return from a patrol, MacKereth crashed, his Camel overturning on landing. His aircraft was extensively damaged, but MacKereth was remarkably unhurt and the following day he would take part in an attack on Casarsa Aerodrome, dropping his bombs and then attacking infantry and motor transport at Motta.



28 Squadron pilots at Gropa, Italy. Left to right: N.H. Hamley; J. Mackereth; J.E. Hallonquist; P. Wilson (sweater); G.F.M. Apps (66 Sqn); A. Latimer; S. Stanger (front); S. Yates (back); C.G. Constanduros; A.G. Cooper; P.G. Mulholland; T.F. Everett. :J.M. Bruce/G.S. Leslie collection

FIRST AERIAL VICTORY

Mackereth first success came when he shot down a Balloon on 19 May 1918. Such attacks were extremely hazardous to the attacker, not only because balloons were protected by anti-aircraft guns but because the attacker had to get extremely close to the balloon when attacking but not close enough to get caught up in the explosion, something that brought many an attacking aircraft down in flames too :

'On 19 May, Lt. J. Mackereth was leading a three strong Camel patrol over Vittorio at 11,000ft. Below them he saw a kit balloon over Piave di Soligo. Leaving his patrol Mackereth dived to intercept and relying solely on his tracers he made six attacks before the KB burst into flames, its observer taking to his parachute. He rounded off his attack by strafing transport and infantry. It later became a field day for Lt. A. G. Cooper who notched two D.V.'s down in flames and a third out of control.' (Article by D.

Neate that appeared in Cross & Cockade Vol. 31, 2000, refers)

Mackereth's aircraft suffered ant-aircraft fire damage whilst he was carrying out an offensive patrol four days later but on 1 June, he shot down an Albatros DV in flames over Susegana-Sarano;

'Lt MacKereth attacked the D.5, firing about 30 rounds into it. The E.A. immediately burst into flames and crashed at SARANO 3J.71.'

On 15 June, he added another 5km west of Feltre,. The Combat Report gives the following for the latter date:

'While on Offensive Patrol Lt. Mackereth saw 7 Albatross D.5's at 10,000 ft at 7.10am over Fonzaso. The E.A. dived on the formation. Lt. White attacked one and after a short combat the E.A. was shot down, breaking to pieces in the air... Again at 8am the Patrol saw 6 D.5's at 11,000 ft over Feltre. Diving into them Capt. Hallonquist attack one... Lt. Mackereth also attacked one of the others and put him out of control with a good burst of fire...'

Mackereth added to his score with a 4th victory on 30 June 1918:

'The last day of June saw Capt. Hallonquist and Lt. J. Mackereth on patrol, ignoring the fact that there were only two of them, they attacked five D.V.'s escorting an Aviatik between Luciana and the Astico valley. Attacking, Mackereth sent his opponent down vertically (seen crashing by a member of 45 Squadron) and Hallonquist drove his down out of control (witnessed by a 34 Squadron crew).' (Article by D. Neate that appeared in Cross & Cockade Vol. 31, 2000, refers). His combat report noting:

'Lt MacKereth drove the E.A. down , getting a good burst into the fuselage at close range. The E.A. went down vertically towards the Aal d Astice just N of FORNI, and was last seen at 4,500 ft still diving vertically'



SOPWITH CAMEL OF 28 SQUADRON

BECOMES AN ACE AND TRANSFERS TO 66 SQUADRON

Mackereth shot down his fourth Albatross DV over Pederiva, 7 July 1918, officially reaching Ace status. His combat report reporting:

'While on offensive patrol Lt MacKereth sighted 6 E.A. over VALDOBBIADENE at 14,000 ft flying south. The patrol pursued and attacked over MONTEBELLUNA. Lt MacKereth, Capt Hallonquist & a French Nieuport attacked one E.A. and drove it down into a cloud. Lt MacKereth continued to engage

it and forced it to dive vertically. The E.A. crashed near PEDERIVA about 38M.65.75 and burst into flames. The remaining E.A. broke off the combat and escaped.'

6 days later, MacKereth scored his 6th and final victory with 28 Squadron, a Brandenburg 2 seater, shared with Captain J. E. Hallonquist over Pordenone, 13 July 1918.:

'While on long offensive patrol at 14,000 ft at 7.25 am over PORDENONE. Lt Mackereth saw an enemy 2 seater flying at 11,000 ft. Lt Mackereth attacked the E.A. firing about 150 rounds into him and following him down to about 3,000 ft. Lt Strang then fired a burst into him. Capt Houllonquist re-attacked the E.A. and followed him down to 1,000 firing all the time and saw the machine crash near PORDENONE.'

Mackereth advanced to Temporary Captain the following day and transferred to 66 Squadron (also flying Camels on the Italian front) on 21 July, following William Barker, who had himself transferred to 66 Squadron in April. Taking part in numerous operations over the next month, Mackereth scored his 7th and final victory, shooting down a Balloon, near Conegliano, on 31 August 1918. However during the attack, he was wounded in the leg by anti-aircraft fire whilst, crash landing his aircraft and was being taken prisoner of war. The squadron operations book notes there is a combat report for this action/victory but it has as yet not been located.

Captain MacKereth was repatriated on 17 December 1918, being admitted to hospital the same day. Listed at Eaton Square Hospital on 6 May 1919, he was given sick leave on 13 July 1919 and was transferred to the unemployment list on 5 October 1919.



CAPTAIN 'MAC' MACKERETH NEXT TO ONE OF HIS SOPWITH CAMELS

According to his obituary, Mackereth:

'was for a long time a prisoner of war in Bavaria. He resigned his commission in 1920 and went up to Exeter College, Oxford, where he took his degree and the diploma in forestry. He joined the Indian Forest Service on December 31, 1924, and was posted to Burma. He was promoted a deputy conservator in March, 1929, and was stationed at Rangoon. He had been sent to Moulmein to carry out reorganisation... was shot dead at Moulmein last Friday [May 1933] by one of his servants [whom he had just let go from employment] with his own sporting gun.'

NO DECORATION?

Despite Mackereth's fine War service and being officially credited with 7 aerial victories, all destroyed and only one shared, he received no recognition, not even a Mentioned in Despatches. On the face of it, this seems somewhat unfair, especially as for victories with 28 Squadron alone, he was joined 8th highest scoring pilot of the war. However it is not unusual; some squadrons were very liberal in the way decorations and MID's were recommended, others not so; it really depended on the Squadron commander. It must also be remembered that Mackereth gained most of his victories with 28 squadron over a relatively short period of time and then switched squadron. So may simply be a case of out of sight, out of mind. The British War and Victory medals are Mackereth's only entitlement.

AERIAL VICTORIES

1	19 May 1918	1625	28	Sopwith Camel (B7351)	Balloon (DES)	Piave de Soligo
2	01 Jun 1918	0745	28	Sopwith Camel (B7351)	Albatros D.V (DESF)	Susegana-Sarano
3	15 Jun 1918	0805	28	Sopwith Camel (D8111)	Albatros D.V (DESF)	W of Feltre
4	30 Jun 1918	0815	28	Sopwith Camel (D8209)	Albatros D.V (DES)	Campolongo
5	07 Jul 1918	1045	28	Sopwith Camel (D8209)	Albatros D.V (DESF)**	Pederiva
6	13 Jul 1918	0725	28	Sopwith Camel (B6349)	C (DES) *	Pordenone
7	31 Aug 1918	0835	66	Sopwith Camel (E1496)	Balloon (DES)	Coneglian

* Shared with Capt J Hallonquist and Lt A R Strang (D8209)

** Stfwp H. Zeilburger of Flik 30j



Condition EF, mounted for display, Sold with an impressive and extensive amount of copied research, including relevant Squadron Record Books and Combat Reports, an 18 page article on 66 Squadron, a 2000 copy of Cross & Cockade journal, containing a detailed 27 page account of 28 Squadrons war service, which includes photographic images of recipient and RAF service records.

MacKereth is mentioned numerous times in *Sopwith Camels Over Italy, 1917-1918*, by Norman Franks