LOYALTY

The 33 Squadron RAF Association Newsletter Issue 10 Summer 2019

Jan Linzel

7 December 1915 - 5 May 2019

Rest In Peace

Rust In Vrede

World War Two pilot dies in west Cork aged 103

The Irish Times - 7 May 2019

One of the oldest survivors of the Second World War and the last surviving member of the Royal Dutch Air Force who attacked and fought the Luftwaffe when Germany invaded the Netherlands in 1940 has died in west Cork.

Major Jan Linzel, who lived in Glengarriff for over 30 years with his wife Marianne, died at St Joseph's Community Hospital in Castletownbere on Sunday at the age of 103 and was buried locally in Glengarriff following a funeral service on Thursday.

Born in the town of Stadskanaal in the province of Groningen, Mr Linzel was always interested in flying and, after joining the Royal Dutch Air Force in May 1938, was attached to a fighter squadron at Ypenburg when Germany declared war on the Netherlands on 10 May 1940.

Three years ago, on the occasion of his 100th birthday, Major Linzel spoke to The Irish Times and recalled how aged just 24, he and the five other members of his squadron were scrambled and took to the air in their Fokker DXX1 single seat fighters to try and defend the Hague against German bombers.

Fokker DXXI

"I saw the silhouette of an aircraft that I had never seen before... I then saw the German markings and gave a short burst - a very bright violent flame came out of its right engine and then black smoke - it went down straight away," he recalled.

"I climbed up again and saw a large formation of Heinkels in the direction of the Hague - I dived down to on the hindmost right aircraft and fired everything I had at close range - I am sure I hit it but I did not have time to see the result.

"When I pulled away, a bullet came through the floor and exploded in my thigh - there was a lot of blood and I started to feel faint. I threw off the hood and bailed out - you have no idea how quiet it is when you are hanging in the air."

Landing in a field of cows, Major Linzel lay there wounded for almost two hours as the local farmer thought he was a German paratrooper but when the farmer finally approached, Major Linzel told him that he was "as Dutch as your cows over there".

Taken with both Dutch and German wounded to Delft, Major Linzel spent almost six weeks in hospital before he was discharged and after joining the Dutch underground, he managed on his second attempt to make his way via Switzerland, France, Spain and Portugal to Britain where he joined the RAF.

After the war, Major Linzel returned to the Netherlands where he served in the Royal Netherlands Air Force and it was while he was still serving in the air force that he met his future wife, Marianne Nowak while visiting Essen in the Ruhr in June 1958 and three months later they married.

Marianne had grown up hearing stories about Ireland from her grandfather who had worked on the Ardnacrusha Dam in the 1920s and the couple and their teenage son, Otto started coming on holidays to Glengarriff in 1973 and five years later they moved there permanently.

In 2015, the Royal Netherlands Air Force honoured Major Linzel by chartering a plane to fly him back to the Netherlands for a ceremony to mark the 75th anniversary of the German invasion while later in 2015, the local community in Glengarriff marked his 100th birthday with a party.

Major Linzel is survived by his wife, Marianne, son Otto and his wider family.

Top: Left - Jan at Ypenburg , May 1940, standing centre back row; Right - Jan's 101st birthday, Glengariff, 2016 .
Centre: Some of the 'The Mixed Pickles' at Merville 1944, Jan standing second left on back row.
Inset: Andy Baron (OC 33), Jan, Dave Stewart (Chair, 33 Squadron Assocation, 7 December 2016) .
Bottom: Left - Jan and his Spitfire, Merville, 1944; Right - Jan and his Tempest, Quackenbruck, 1945.

Dutch Air Force pay tribute to former World War Two fighter pilot in Cork

The Irish Times—Thursday 9 May 2019

Members of the Royal Netherlands Air Force gathered in a quiet country graveyard in West Cork on Thursday to honour one of the last of their famous May Fliers who defended their country against the Nazis.

They came from the Netherlands to scenic Glengarriff on the ruggedly beautiful Beara Peninsula to pay a final tribute to Major Jan Linzel. The former pilot died on Sunday at the age of 103, almost 80 years after he took to the air to fight the Luftwaffe in the skies over Holland in May 1940.

Major Linzel's wife of over 60 years, Marianne and his son, Otto and his wife, Josie and their daughters, Emma and Mary Ellen listened in the local Sacred Heart Church as the Commander of the Royal Netherlands Air Force, Lt General Dennis Luyt recalled Major Linzel's heroism.

Lt General Luyt recalled how the late Major Linzel used to say one always needed some luck in life and while he had indeed enjoyed luck on many occasions, he had also displayed great courage, including on that day in May 1940 when Germany attacked the Netherlands.

He recalled how Major Linzel, aged just 24, was attached to a fighter squadron at Ypenburg when Germany declared war on the Netherlands and how he took off in his Fokker DXX1 single seat fighter to attack the Luftwaffe. He said Major Linzel shot down a much faster German Messerschmitt 110 in a dogfight before he himself was shot down. Undeterred, he joined the Dutch Resistance before making his way to Britain in 1943 where he joined the RAF with whom he flew almost 100 sorties.

"People like Jan Linzel are the people who make a difference for our countries and today we pay tribute to his life and his legacy," said Lt General Luyt who recalled how Major Linzel returned after the war to the Netherlands where he helped rebuild the Dutch air-force.

Major Linzel's granddaughter, Emma recalled how when she was born, her grandfather said his dearest wish was that he would live long enough for her to remember him and she was so glad that he was granted his wish and she had many years with which to form so many fond memories.

"I was so proud to call you my Opa (grandfather) – a man whose stories will not only stay with me but will go down in history – spending our holidays with him in Friesland made for the happiest memories for myself and my sister, Mary Ellen," she recalled.

Thanking all those who had come to pay tribute to his father, including Methodist minister Rev Greg Alexander and Catholic priest, Fr Michael Moynihan, Otto Linzel recalled how his father had come to love Glengarriff from visits before the family moved there in 1978.

He used to enjoy meeting friends, engaging in conversations and sipping whiskey and he learned a few Irish phrases including one toast, "Sláinte and Saol Fada Agat - Here's to Health and a Long Life", which he used up until his last days, said Mr Linzel.

Later in the graveyard, coronet player Sgt Major Pieter Bergsma played the Last Post and Lt General Luyt presented the Dutch flag from Major Linzel's coffin to Marianne before the Dutch airforce gave their final salute and Major Linzel was laid to rest in the rocky hillside cemetery.

Among those to attend the funeral service were the Dutch Ambassador to Ireland, Adriaan Palm, the Chief of Staff of the Defence Forces, Vice Admiral Mark Mellett and Chair of the Cork Branch of the Royal British Legion, Gerry Donovan.

Sergeant pilots at Ypenburg May 1940 (L-R): Jaap Eden, Guus Kiel, Jan Linzel, Chris Ottes (coll.P.J. Aarts)

Inside this issue…

Front Cover: The pictures were taken from the Irish Times, who covered Jan Linzel's funeral on Thursday 9 May 2019. Lieutenant General Dennis Luyt, Commander of the RNLAF and shown talking with Jan at his 102nd birthday party, spoke about Jan during the service in Glengariff.

(Photographs: Michael Mac Sweeney/Provision)

From the Chairman / Editor..

As we approach the 2019 AGM this is a special editorial for me. It is the last one that I will write as the Chairman of the Association as my two year tenure comes to a close, and it is where I will pay my respects to a very special individual who I was lucky enough to meet three years ago - Jan Linzel - who died earlier this month. The front cover of this edition was changed at short notice following the sad news of the death of 33 Squadron's oldest surviving veteran from the Second World War, and a man who was the 'Last of the Few' back in the Netherlands, having fought against the Luftwaffe in 1940, then escaped to England to start fighting the Germans again in 1944.

Jan passed away peacefully on 5 May, the day that the Dutch nation celebrates its Liberation Day during World War Two. The reverence shown towards Major Linzel as he was laid to rest, carried by men of the RNLAF with their CAS in attendance, showed just how important Jan was to them. I look forward to raising a glass to Jan's memory with you at the AGM this weekend.

On a lighter note, it has been a very busy two years for the Association and I feel that we can look back with great pride at what we have achieved in that time. I am particularly pleased knowing that we have reached out around the world and reforged bonds with former members and their families, letting them know that we have not forgotten their relatives and what they did while serving with 33, many of whom paid the ultimate price.

There is still much to do though. Considering the amount of people that have served on 33 over the years, our membership is still small, and active participation from the majority of the members is bordering on negligible. If only we could harness the effort to attend the annual Puma Reunion and the enthusiasm shown towards joining the Association once a couple of beers have been downed! Perhaps Dick Brewster has a few techniques up his sleeve to persuade the doubters and the hesitant?! At the end of the day, the Committee needs your feedback, suggestions and active participation to keep the Association moving forward. If we on the Committee are not meeting your needs and expectations, then you should let us know. The old adage that we do not have the monopoly on good ideas still rings true.

Historically, May means Crete in 33's calendar, and this edition contains a short article about Tom Cullen, who died on 24 March aged 102. Tom was an RAF medical officer with 30 Squadron who displayed the utmost loyalty at Maleme in May 1941, and helped to save Squadron Leader Edward Howell's life, Howell being OC 33 Squadron at the time. This is followed by an extract from Edward Howell's book, 'Escape to Live', which gives an interesting insight into the period at Maleme before the German assault on 20 May. The Squadron reformed in June 1941, and I am very pleased to begin the four part serialisation of Don Edy's book, 'Goon In The Block', which will give the reader an idea of what happened to 33 Squadron back in North Africa after the Greece campaign. Don's daughter, Jane Hughes, has sent over some of her father's photographs to add to his interesting and detailed story.

The 1942 ORB led to us finding some rare footage at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) just before Christmas - wartime footage of 33 Squadron in the Western Desert in 1942. We are going to show the film at the AGM, along with the Ministry of Information film 'Desert Victory' about the Allied success at El Alamein, which used some of the footage we watched at the IWM.

Thank you all for your support over the last two years. Good luck Dick!

'Proud to be ...33'

Dave Stewart

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From the Hart - OC 33 Squadron

"It has been a busy period on the Squadron, with a lot of changes to the personnel…" says the Boss, but wasn't the fighting 33rd always like that?

Well, the pace of life on 33 Squadron shows no sign of abating anytime soon!

In the 7 months since I last wrote, we have seen both A and B Flts complete Operational Tours of Afghanistan in support of Op TORAL, we have conducted two incredibly successful Aviation Short Term Training Team (Avn STTT) Deployments to Lebanon in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces Air Force (LAF AF) - which included the setting up of an enduring Squadron to Squadron Affiliation between 33 Squadron and 9 Squadron of the LAF AF. I have passed the article written for the RAF Benson 'Lion's Roar' about the trip to Lebanon to the Editor for inclusion in this edition of 'Loyalty'. We have also held National Standby and R2 Contingency Commitments, deployed individuals to the Qualified Helicopter Tactics Instructor (QHTI) course at RAF Leeming and the NATO Tactics Meet in France, conducted a Squadron Skiing Expedition to St Anton in Austria and, finally, we have just bid farewell to the STANEVAL Team from R&S Wing, which thankfully proved to be a very different experience to that which some of you may remember from times gone by!

But we've also seen a significant churn of individuals throughout the Squadron, both Engineers and Aircrew. Squadron Leader Lex Colyer moves from the 33 Sqn SEngO appointment into the Puma Force HQ, she is replaced by Squadron Leader Damian Weir who joins us from the Puma DT, the task of improving aircraft availability for the Frontline rests with Damian, a formidable challenge but one that he is undoubtedly up for! Flight Lieutenants Kilday and Richards are due to depart the Squadron to attend the Qualified helicopter Instructor (QHI) course at Shawbury imminently; Flight Lieutenant Richards will return to instruct on the Puma OCU whilst Flight Lieutenant Kilday will remain at Shawbury for a well-earned break from the frontline.

Flight Sergeant Bevan and Flight Lieutenant Masterton have departed to take up positions within the Force Commander's Air Safety Team, Sergeant Bateson has moved on to a tour with 84 Squadron in Cyprus, Sergeant Quilter has moved across to RWOETU, and Flight Lieutenant Mackay has retired from the Service at the ripe old age of 38!

Joining us from the OCU instructional staff are Flight Sergeants Cassidy and Upton, and they bring with them a wealth of experience that will undoubtedly be key to enhancing the operational capability of the Squadron. In addition, Flight Lieutenants Knight and Wallis (AFC), and Sergeant Fellows are recent graduates of the Puma Long Course. To those moving on to pastures new, a fond farewell and thank you for your commitment, dedication and professionalism; to those joining us, welcome to the 33 Squadron Family.

We are fortunate enough to be hosting a number of Aircrew Holding Officers at present on the Sqn. Many of you will have seen the TV documentary about the issues with the Flying Training Pipeline in the RAF, and the significant numbers of 'would be' pilots waiting to commence Elementary Flying Training (EFT). Flight Lieutenants McSevich, Randle and Gray are a welcome addition to the fabric of 33 and they add real value, not only in terms of their contribution to the day-to-day running of the Squadron, but also by donating a substantial contribution to the Officers' Mess at the end of each month through their Bar Books….. ! Needless to say the Crewmen Leader, Flight Lieutenant Niall Davidson, is relishing having the additional manpower at his disposal!

Finally, once again, thanks to Dave Stewart and the members of the 33 Squadron Association, your continued efforts to support and recognise those past members of our Squadron is truly humbling, and for that I thank you. It is with great regret that I am unable to attend the Association's AGM in person at the Hart's Head this coming Saturday. Unfortunately (or fortunately I suppose!) it is my 10th Wedding Anniversary. However, our new Aircrew Rep to the Association, Flight Lieutenant Davidson, will be there to host you and assist where required. I hope you have a good AGM and I look forward to meeting some of you at the Benson Families Day later this year.

Chris Royston-Airey

Wing Commander

OC 33

LOYALTY

Tactical Activity for Strategic Effect - 12 Days in the Lebanon

by Flight Lieutenant Mike Reynolds

Six personnel from RAF Benson's Puma Force, consisting of both 33 and 230 Squadron Aircrew, deployed to Lebanon on 23 January as part of an Aviation Short Term Training Team (Avn STTT). This 12-day deployment was the first of what is, hopefully, an enduring affiliation between 9 Squadron of the Lebanese Armed Forces Air Force (LAF AF) and 33 Squadron of the RAF.

This first iteration of Defence Engagement activity with the LAF AF saw the Benson team visit the British Embassy in Beirut, Hamat Airbase, Rayak Air Force School (less than 5 miles from the Syrian border), the LAF Defence Academy as well as meetings with the LAF AF CAS.

The key deliverables of the visit focused primarily on discussion and mentoring in three core areas:

- Training for, and safe conduct of, air testing activities.
- Recruitment, selection and training of rotary wing rear crew.
- Flight Safety, CRM and Human Factors.

These took the format of briefs, classroom discussions as well as less formal chats in the crew-room and bar, with the genuine enthusiasm and appetite to learn shown by the LAF AF personnel being a highlight of the visit.

The team also had the opportunity to observe a number of training sorties, encompassing emergency handling, flight testing, winching and mountain flying, including a landing on the highest mountain in the Middle East at 10 200 ft. The wealth of training areas within 10 minutes flying time of Hamat Airbase was truly exceptional, with access to a gunnery/bombing range, fast-rope training area, mountain flying, low level and maritime SAR ops (it somewhat beats LFA1!!).

The LAF AF have proven themselves to be an exceedingly adept and capable force in the fight against Daesh on their own country's borders. A remarkable modification to their Puma helicopters enabled the fitment of 30mm Aden cannons, SNEB Rockets and 1000lb bombs. This upgrade was brought into service in an exceedingly short space of time, thus allowing them the capability to successfully carry out offensive air operations to counter and defeat the threat of a Daesh invasion. These Pumas, along with other units of the LAF AF play an essential role in the internal security,

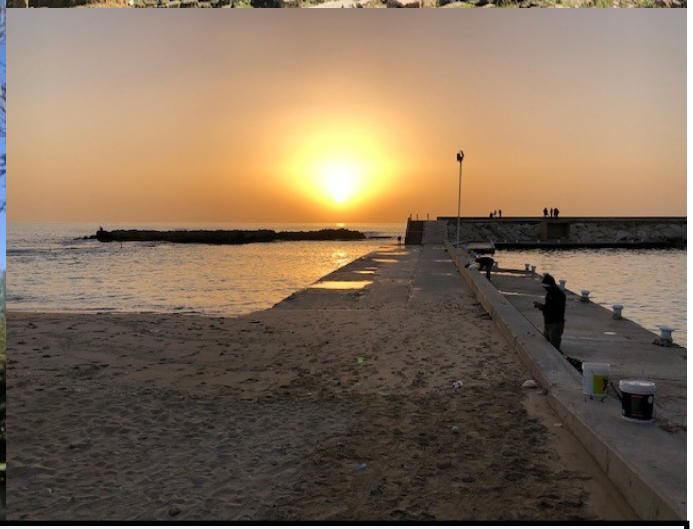
stability and Counter-Terrorism (CT) resilience of Lebanon.

One of the many take-aways from the visit, was the importance of fostering and nurturing personal relationships between the two Squadrons that will in time grow, develop and add a tangible value to both parties. By broadening the mutual understanding of not only the platform itself, but every aspect of what makes up a front-line helicopter Squadron; courseware/training/planning/operating will aid and assist in building trust, rapport and a thirst to share knowledge, ensuring a mutually beneficial relationship.

To a man, the team noted from the outset that all the members of the LAF AF that we interacted with, be it senior officers, junior pilots or engineers showed a genuine enthusiasm for, and were highly receptive to, the proposition of learning from and being mentored by members of the RAF.

During the weekend the team took the opportunity to visit the famous Lebanese vineyard of Zsara, the Jeita Grottos, the Roman port of Byblos and, thanks to OC33, a 10 mile walk around downtown Beirut!

Above: OC 33 and the RAF's Avn STTT, with members of 9 Sqn LAF AF.
Below: What the Puma 2 Life Extension Programme / upgrade could have looked like <u>OR</u> an old [redacted] Flt XW223 mod?



Top Left: Armand Fernandez's ten storey, 5 000 tonne 'Hope for Peace' in Yarse, near Beirut.
Top Right: The Mohammed Al-Amin Mosque, a Sunni Muslim mosque in downtown Beirut, also known as the Blue Mosque.
Below: the boys on tour!

IN MEMORIAM

Flight Lieutenant Thomas Henry Cullen RAFVR MBE MRCS LRCP
Medical Officer at Maleme in May 1941

It was with great sadness at the beginning of April that that we heard the news from OC 33 Squadron of the death of Thomas Henry Cullen, who died on 24 March 2019 aged 102. Tom was probably one of the last known surviving veterans of Operation Mercury, the German invasion of Crete in May 1941. At Maleme, although Flying Officer Cullen was officially listed as 30 Squadron's Medical Officer, he must have worked closely with the 33 Squadron personnel there, who were living and working with their 30 Squadron colleagues in the tented RAF camp on the bank of the Tavronitis river at the foot of Kavkazia Hill.

On the morning of 20 May 1941, the first German parachute and glider assault to capture Maleme airfield commenced, As the assault gathered momentum and confusion in the RAF camp grew, Squadron Leader Edward Howell, 33's commanding officer, Flight Lieutenant Vernon Woodward, Pilot Officer Dunscombe and Commander Beale, CO 805 FAA, ran down the slopes of the hill to look for airmen in the camp. In his book 'Operation Mercury' Marcel Comeau describes what happened:

"...There was a good deal of small arms fire on all sides as the Germans fanned through the camp and Commander Beale, who was leading, collapsed suddenly, hit in the stomach. Squadron Leader Howell bent over him when another burst of firing at close quarters shattered both his arms… Commander Beale and the airmen, seeing the blood gushing from the CO, made a rough tourniquet around one of his arms and attempted to move him across the bullet-swept open ground to the shelter of the gulley. Beale, in agony himself, set off to organize a rescue party…."

Meanwhile Tom, who although weak from dysentery, had managed to crawl out of his bed and reach his First Aid post to start looking after the casualties. As the battle raged, Tom set out with Norman Darch to move to the 22nd New Zealand Regimental Aid Post (RAP) , manned by Medical officer Captain Longmore, on the eastern slope of the hill. On their way they came across a small group of wounded, and Tom stayed to assist while sending Darch forward to find the New Zealand lines. Unfortunately, Tom and the wounded were soon surrounded by German paratroopers and captured. Tom and the group remained there for some time until the Germans thought it was safe to move them, taking them across the Tavronitis river to a house in the village. The Germans provided some medical supplies and instruments and Tom coped with the wounded as

best he could. He was joined there later by LAC Darch, who had been wounded in the back and captured as he tried to reach the New Zealand RAP. Captain Longmore also joined them, as the 22nd NZ Bn RAP, the M.O. and the wounded there were all captured on 21 May. Together they worked on the British, German and Cretan casualties who flooded into Tavronitis village.

One of the seriously wounded British casualties brought in to Tom Cullen two days later was Squadron Leader Howell, who had been discovered, barely alive, by German paratroopers. In his book 'Escape to Live' Squadron Leader Edward Howell recalls his journey off the hill to Tom's medical post in the village, and you can read his detailed account of his arrival on, and departure from, Crete in the next article.

When the battle for Maleme was over the wounded were flown from Crete to Greece. Tom Cullen and Norman Darch flew in a Junkers Ju-52 to Eleusis on 3 June and were taken to the POW hospital camp at Kokinia, near Athens, which was run by staff from the 5th Australian General Hospital. Norman worked there for four months and Tom ended up in charge of one of the wards. Edward Howell was already there and wrote that "...my Maleme doctor, Flying Officer Cullen, was a regular visitor."

Towards the end of the year Tom was sent by Italian hospital ship to a transit camp in Salonika and from there on a 19-day journey to Stalag XXA at Torun in Poland. It was while he was in captivity that he was awarded the MBE. The Association's website article contains the citation and the Daily Mirror interview which details Tom's incredible escape with QMS John Greig on 29 February 1944. Tom made it back to England, via Sweden, by 19 March, apparently one of the fastest escapes in World War Two.

After the war Tom continued his medical career, first as a registrar and then as a senior registrar in surgery. In 1951 he was appointed Consultant Surgeon at Kettering General Hospital, a post he held until retirement.

Tom's family held a memorial service at St Mary The Virgin Church in Kelvedon, Essex on Thursday 25 April; condolence cards and donations were sent to the family by 30 Squadron Association, 33 Squadron and the 33 Squadron Association.

IN BRIEF...

You may recall that after the 2018 Remembrance Day Parade the RBL took action to stop the company making the lapel badges that had a 33 Squadron crest using a 2 petal poppy background, despite having received a substantial sum of money from their sales.

This year the company is looking to produce a lapel badge using a five petal poppy, but there will be no production run started until 50 people have registered interest in buying one. To date, just eight of us have registered for a badge. Please log on to 'www.militaryremembrancepins.com' and register by using the NOTIFY ME button. The company has agreed to donate a percentage of their takings on these lapel badges to SSAFA. The lapel badge costs £9.

It was good to see an 'SH mate' , Squadron Leader Nick Monahan from 230 Squadron, carrying a picture of former 33 Squadron sergeant pilot, 'Rusty' Kierath, at the 76th anniversary commemoration event at Stalag Luft III in Zagan, Poland, in March. Nick was one of fifty serving RAF personnel who carried pictures of the 50 escapees who were shot by the Germans after capture. Nick has presented the picture to OC 33 and it now sits on a table in the wing commander's office, next to 'Goon In The Block'. Don Edy and Rusty Kierath flew together in the desert, and both men ended up in Stalag Luft III.

‘Escape to Live’

by Edward Howells

The majority of the members will recall seeing the painting on page 16 in the Squadron of a Hawker Hurricane taking off from a coastal landing strip, pursued by German Me 109s, and heard the story that it depicts Squadron Leader Edward Howell at Maleme in Crete, the new commanding officer posted in to replace Pat Pattle, on his first ever flight in a Hurricane. Some of you may have heard that he was very badly wounded during the opening phase of the assault and became a POW. You may even have seen the TV documentary ‘Deliverance’, in which he retraced his escape route from Greece to Turkey. In 1947 Longman’s published his book, ‘Escape to Live’ and as we approach the 78th anniversary of a period that changed his life so dramatically, I have reproduced some of the first two chapters of his book below and I am sure that you will look at the picture hanging in the Squadron stairwell with a new understanding after you have read them:

Crete—Prelude

I

It was cold in the early morning as the first glimmer of light announced another day. The world seemed to be wondering whether it was worth waking up at all; the birds and the trees and even the mountains seemed to be holding their breath, listening. Only the whisper of the ripples on the nearby beach broke the stillness.

But if you held your breath and listened too, you could hear other sounds. Men were moving about in the distance, their footsteps and voices muffled as if by the darkness. I moved away from my tent in the olive grove, down the hillside and on to the road that flanked the landing strip. At the end of the strip three Hurricanes were lined up, ready to take off at a moment’s notice; one of them was mine.

The strip was Maleme airfield in Crete and it was the 14th of May 1941.

I clambered awkwardly into the unfamiliar cockpit. I had never flown a Hurricane before, but I did not want anyone to know that. I had managed to conceal the fact from the Commander-in-Chief when he had given me the squadron. The truth was that I had flown Spitfires in England and nearly every other type of aircraft then in use, but somehow a Hurricane had never come my way.

I was specially anxious to conceal my inexperience from the squadron—it was bad enough being new to the job and I had the further disadvantage of taking over from Pat Pattle.

Pat was one of the very great air fighters of all time. His exceptional skill had already made him an almost legendary figure. His pre-war record scores against towed targets were the foundation for a deadly accuracy in combat and his perfect flying placed him at an advantage over every opponent. Yet skill and judgement alone do not create either a fighter or a leader—Pat was both. He had the guts of the great warrior with the graciousness which is the hallmark of outstanding leadership. The boys would go anywhere with him and his loss weighed heavily on all ranks.

Succeeding Pat would have been difficult for anyone, even under normal circumstances, and my task was even harder. I had come to take over the remnants of a famous fighter squadron which had been cut to pieces in Greece. 33 Squadron had been decimated. Even with the remains of 80 Squadron—our great rivals—we could now only muster some five Hurricanes of which we were lucky to have three serviceable. We had lost al our equipment and spares during the evacuation of Greece a few weeks earlier.

Pat had been killed in a last immortal air battle over Athens as he led a combined force from 33 and 80 Squadrons into action against ten times their number of Germans. He had gone in to shoot a Messerschmitt of the tail of another Hurricane—a typical act. He succeeded too, but the inevitable happened, and a horde pounced on him from behind. It was the only way they could have caught him out—the victor of countless engagements against hopeless odds.

A few days later the squadron had moved to Crete—what was left of it—still fighting. Half the personnel had gone straight back to Egypt where I had the task of reorganising them. The other half had to carry on in Crete. They had done wonders too—eighteen enemy bombers shot down in two short weeks without loss, but it could not go on indefinitely. Pilots and ground crews were exhausted, going from day to day without even a change of clothes , constantly harried by enemy air-raids and operating from dawn to dusk without relief.

I had come over from Egypt with some rested pilots to relieve the hard-pressed garrison who returned in the flying boat which brought us for some well-earned leave. I found that we were lodgers at Maleme—the little airstrip belonged to the Fleet Air Arm and was

commanded by a naval officer—tall, lean Commander George Beale, O.B.E. The remains of a Fleet fighter squadron were also there commanded by Alan Black. They had two or three old Gladiators and a couple of Fulmars. We also had the remains of 30 Squadron with us for a few days– two or three clapped out old Blenheims which could only just get off the short strip.

With this motley array we had to defend the west of Crete including the great natural harbour of Suda Bay. With improvised radar warning and fighter control equipment we had little hope of seriously reducing the scale of enemy attack. We could only nibble at them. The Blenheims and Gladiators were useless against more modern aircraft and the Fulmars would not stand a chance against an Me 109. So the defence of Crete fell to the few Hurricanes of 33 Squadron at Maleme with a few more belonging to 112 Squadron at Heraklion, some seventy miles to the east.

On the ground, the island was full of soldiers. There were more than 30 000 of them, New Zealanders, Australians, British and Greek, but they had very little equipment and most of them were tired and dispirited after the retreat from Greece. Nevertheless, they were a formidable force of magnificent human material and commanded by the famous General Freyburg, V.C. He was reported to be confident repelling any attempt at invasion even though the enemy did have command of the air.

Meanwhile, in Greece the enemy's plans for invasion were going forward at an increasing pace. They were mustering 1 500 aircraft to blast us out of existence. A new airfield was coming into commission in the Peloponnese—it would bring us within range of the Me 109. General Freyburg was expecting the airborne attack in about a week. My plans for reorganising the squadron did not look too hopeful, but, as ever, we planned for success. There was no alternative. The few were to fight and go on fighting for time. In time we should have the aircraft we needed, but time was vital. It was a commodity to be bought with all we had. We bought it.

II

I called over one of my newly joined sergeant-pilots and he went over the cockpit with me, showing me the positions of the various controls. I could not make the radio work, and we spent some time turning the different knobs in vain. In the grey dawn, I noticed that the other two pilots were in their places, sitting quietly in the aircraft, waiting. We were at 'standby'—ready to take off at a moment's notice.

Suddenly there was a roar of engines starting up. I saw the other two Hurricanes taking off in cloud of dust. I waved the sergeant away and prepared to start the engine. As soon as it kicked, I noticed the fitter pull the starter battery to one side and run; I thought "this is efficiency—the boys run about their business!" Then I looked up. Through he subsiding dust I saw the others twisting and turning among a cloud of Messerschmitt 109s. Even as I watched an enemy aircraft dived into the ground in flames.

I opened the throttle and saw a string of five Messerschmitts coming in over the hil firing at me. It seemd an age before my wheels came off the strip; I went straight into a turn towards the approaching 109s, my wing tip within inches of the ground. The faithful old 'Hurrybus' took it without a murmur; the enemy flashed past and I went over instinctively into a steep turn the other way.

My mind was set on practical things. How to get my undercarriage up, the hood closed, the gunsight switched on, the prop into coarse pitch, the firing button on, the engine temperature down. All the time I kept the nose up, straining to gain height to manoeuvre. I found many difficulties. My rear view mirror was not adjusted so that I could see over my tail. This meant that I had to do continuous steep turns with my head back to see what was coming after me. Every time I put my head back, my helmet, which I had borrowed and was much too big for me, slipped over my eyes. Then I could not find the switch to turn on my gunsight. I had to look about inside the cockpit for it. Eventually I found it and saw the familiar red graticule glow ready to aim.

Enemy aircraft kept diving in on me in threes or fives. They were travelling fast and did not stay to fight. They just ad a squirt at me and climbed away out of range again. It kept me fully occupied with evasive action. Out of the corner of my eye I saw two aircraft diving earthwards in flames. One was a Hurricane. There was no sign of the other. I was alone in a skyful of Jerries.

All of a sudden, the sky seemed empty of aircraft. There was nobody in my immediate vicinity. I found myself at 4 000 feet over the sea. Five miles to the south was the airfield. Streams of tracer and red Bofors shells were coming up focused on small black specks which were enemy fighters still strafing it fiercely. Four pillars of black smoke indicated the position of the burning wrecks on the ground.

Just level with me and about a mile away two 109s were turning in wide line astern formation. I headed in their direction. I cut across their turning circle and was soon closing in on them from astern at full throttle. They made no alteration but continued to turn, evidently unaware of my approach. I drew in closer and closer with an eye on my own tail to make sure that I was not jumped. I restrained myself with difficulty. It is only the novice who opens at long range. My own teaching!

I realised my mistake and pulled quickly up into a turn to port. I flick-rolled over into a steep turn the other wat and found myself coming in on the enemy's quarter. I opened up to full throttle and gave him a burst. He dived away to port and I followed, this time with an eye open behind me. The sky was clear. For once the odds were even. He had the faster aircraft and could have pulled steadily away from me. But I kept him turning by firing a short burst every time he went straight.

We screamed down together to water-level. There, he drew very slowly away from me. I was able to judge his range perfectly from the splash of my bursts in the water. I kept him dodging in a cloud of bullets and spray till I ran out of ammunition. He would have difficulty getting home as we had by this time covered many miles of water to the west, and he was certainly full of holes.

I pulled up and climbed gently to 6 000 feet on my way home. I was apprehensive of running into more enemy aircraft as I was now without ammunition. As I approached Maleme the Bofors gun started firing and strings of red balls floated gently up towards me. I turned and reduced height keeping a watchful eye on the tracers. It was still unhealthy around there.

I headed along the coast. In Suda Bay a tanker was ablaze. The bombers had been in again. A huge pall of black smoke drifted away to the west. I skirted the bay to keep clear of our own anti-aircraft batteries. Down the coast I knew there was a landing ground at Retimo. I began to wonder whether I could put the Hurricane down safely in a small field. But I was at home in it. I felt part of it after what we had been through together.

Below, on a level stretch by the beach, I saw the landing strip. I flew once across it, low down to look for ditches, and came straight in to land. Undercarriage lights gleamed green, flaps checked firmly and I touched lightly down to a nice short landing. A maintenance party refuelled and rearmed the aircraft, and I took off again soon afterwards for an uneventful trip back to Maleme.

A crowd gathered round me as I taxied in to the refuelling pens. Everyone had assumed that I had been shot down. They had seen my 109 come down and they were delighted that I had opened my score. We had accounted for six Me 109s and had lost the other two Hurricanes, shot down in flames. Sergeant Ripsher had been shot down near the airfield and was credited with two enemy aircraft destroyed. We buried him the next day in a little cemetery by Galatos a few miles down the road. Sergeant Reynish had also accounted for a couple and had baled out of his flaming Hurricane over the sea. We had given him up when he walked in late that evening. He had been two hours in the water and had been picked up by a small Greek fishing boat. We had also lost one Hurricane on the ground. It had been unserviceable, but could have been flying again within a few hours. Now it was a mass of charred wreckage. We had only one aircraft left. The Fleet Air Arm Squadron had lost their Fulmars, burnt out on the ground, as well as a couple of Gladiators. The prelude to invasion had entered upon its last phase.

(In Part III of the prelude, Edwards Howells explains that Group Captain George Beamish, commander of the Air Forces in Crete, visited him at Maleme and reviewed the situation. The appearance of Me109s meant that the Luftwaffe's airfields in the Peloponnese were up and running, and the bombers would be able to fly to Crete with a fighter escort. Long range RAF Beaufighters could attack the Luftwaffe bases from Egypt, but there were insufficient resources in the Middle East to make any significant reduction to the enemy air effort over Crete. The Allied air assets on Crete were a token force which would fight to the end.

Great efforts were made to protect against losses on the ground, with pits dug into the hillside to protect the aircraft. Frequent air raids interrupted the work, and another Hurricane was lost after a direct hit. The ground crew managed to rob from the wrecks and produce two serviceable Hurricanes, which were flown by RAF and Fleet Air Arm pilots as they attempted to intercept enemy reconnaissance aircraft. One morning two more Hurricanes arrived from Egypt, bringing the Hurriforce strength up to four. The Fleet Air Arm Gladiator left for Egypt, but the engine failed over the sea and the pilot went down with his aircraft.

Howells flew off on a reconnaissance task over the island of Milo one morning, and on his way back to Crete he shot down a Ju-52 transport aircraft and watched it crash into the sea. Closer to the island he saw that the sky was full of Me 109s, Me 110s and Ju 88 Stukas, in formations of nine and twelve heading north, and he describes how he shot down a Stuka. When he landed at Maleme he was told that the large formation he had seen had delivered a heavy bombing attack along the coast. The Fleet Air Arm pilots had scrambled against ten times their number of Me109s, had knocked down at least six but none of them had come back. One aircraft did arrive back later at Maleme, full of holes, having made a landing at Retimo.

With just one serviceable Hurricane at Maleme, the Luftwaffe's bombing and ground strafing attacks intensified. Beamish sent the 30 Squadron Blenheims back to Egypt, leaving the groundcrew behind, while a large group of 33 and Fleet Air Arm personnel were sent back in a Sunderland rand for rest and rekitting. The air situation in the Middle East was dire at this point, and the decision was taken by the HQ in Cairo to

withdraw all remaining aircraft and attempt to operate from Egyptian bases. Howell decided that his one remaining Hurricane would be flown back by the sergeant pilot from 80 Squadron who had been left behind when his squadron left Greece. The remaining RAF personnel then became a reserve force for 22 Battalion, New Zealand Infantry, who were responsible for the ground defence of Maleme. Howell discussed the plan to defend Point 107, the hill overlooking the airfield, with 22 Bn's CO, Colonel Leslie Andrew V.C., and carried out a rehearsal of the defensive plan, whereby he would gather all of the men together at an assembly point, meet up with a New Zealander officer and be taken to positions wherever the situation at that time demanded. Howell ends the chapter with the sentence: "We rehearsed this simple plan without a hitch on the day my last Hurricane left for Egypt. It was the 19th of May 1941. The sands were running out.")

Crete-Invasion

I

It was still dark when I woke. I heard voices and movement in nearby tents. The camp was stirring. It was 0530 hours on the 20th of May 1941.

I was very tired. The strain of carrying the Squadron through the past 10 days had been heavy. I could have slept for hours. I stretched and grunted and turned out of bed. Myhill, my adjutant, had woken too and we hurriedly pulled on our clothes by torchlight. It was very chilly in the early morning air, and we wore our heavy fur-lined leather flying jackets and our warm flying boots.

Outside, men were moving through the darkness towards the gully between two small hills which was our rendezvous and assembly point. As I stumbled through the olive groves and along the side of the hill the silence was profound. The stars twinkled in the immensity of the sky. I wondered at the apparent folly of this early morning activity..

In the gully, men were huddled together in little groups, talking in subdued voices. We checked the numbers and settled down to wait. The routine was to stand by till half a hour after dawn. I chatted to the New Zealand officer who was to show us where to go if anything happened. We had no sense of impending events. If the enemy tried a landing we were ready for him. We were almost regretful that our role was to be 'in reserve'. Like General Freyberg, we were confident of our ability to hold the island against all comers. We had still to learn our last costly lesson in air power….

At seven o'clock the standby period was over. Just one more routine completed We were free to go about the business of the day. I dismissed my men and they hurried off to breakfast. I strolled back to my tent wondering if I could snatch some more sleep. The sun was coming up and it was already getting warm. I stripped to the waist and washed and shaved in the basin outside my tent. The cookhouse down the hill was as active as a beehive. Among the trees around me I could see Beale and the others also shaving.

For the heat of the day we wore only shirt and shorts. I was pulling on my shirt when the alarm bell went. "The usual morning blitz," I thought. Is trapped on my revolver and took my tin hat and started off for the ops room to find out what was on. Someone came running to meet me. "A hundred plus," he reported.

The men were grousing at having their breakfast interrupted. But they were making for the slit trenches which were dispersed throughout the olive grove. We had too much experience of air attacks to take them lightly. I headed for my usual vantage point, a trench out on the side of the hill overlooking the landing strip where I could watch the camp and the airfield simultaneously. I found Vernon Woodward and young Dunscombe already there. The trench could hold three at a pinch. It was a good one, deep and narrow.

The air reverberated with the noise of many engines. As yet we could not see them. But slowly it became apparent to me that this was bigger than the usual blitz. Nevertheless I could not believe that it would be more than a blitz. It seemed so suicidal for jerry to try dropping paratroops in broad daylight on to prepared positions. It was suicidal for many, but I underestimated the determination of our enemies.

In nay event our orders were clear. We were not to move till it was apparent that invasion was occurring. So we watched the skies as interested spectators watching the teams come out on the field for a rugger match. The first formation of bombers– Junkers 88s— were in sight now and wheeling in to run up over us. We watched them closely with a more personal and apprehensive interest now. They were clearly going to pass straight overhead. That meant that we were the target. We waited till we heard the whistle and whine of several score of heavy bombs on their way down, and then we went flat in the bottom of our trench. The bombs struck in twelves, earth spouted to the heavens, the crump and shock of impact crept closer up the hill. The noise was indescribable. The ground shuddered and shook under us as the bomb pattern passed over and beyond.

The whole area was shrouded in thick choking dust, and earth and stones were falling everywhere. We could not see more than a few yards. Bur we heard the whistle of more bombs on their way down and we kept below ground. The concussion of the bombs bursting close to us shook in the sides of the trench. We were

covered in earth. Our eyes and mouths were full of grit, And still it went on. We were shaken by the earth shock till our teeth felt loose and we could hardly see. Debris continued to crash around us and the sides of the trench crumbled. We lost count of time.

There remained the continuous roar of aircraft overhead and the apparent continuous whine of bombs descending. Later these sounds were punctuated by long bursts of cannon and machine gun fire as low flying fighters came in to attack the anti—aircraft gunpits. These were already silent under the terrific weight of attack with the exception of one Bofors gun down by the beach. This went on firing for some time till a host of Stukas and Me 109s fastened on to it and shot and blasted it out of existence. I remember the sense of admiration for that determined British gun crew.

It seemed a long time later that I noticed there were no more bombs coming. It was eight o'clock precisely. We could still see nothing beyond a few yards due to the dust. But looking straight up you could see the blue sky. And there, only a few hundred feet above us, were passing packed formations of Ju 52s. Gliders towed behind were casting off and circling down towards the west. They were to land in a dried river bed about three hundred yards away, a very rough landing, but most of them survived it. Everywhere silhouetted against the blue were parachutes, strings and strings of them, all colours, floating rapidly down among us.

I watched, as if in a dream, as a formation of Ju 52s disgorged their paratroops. My brain seemed numb and unable to appreciate the significance of the scene. The other two with me seemed to be in the same state. Suddenly a gaunt and grimy figure stood on the edge of our trench. It was Beale. Pointing up, he said, "Hadn't you better get your boys moving? I am off to the Battalion headquarters to see what I can do for the Colonel." Memory sprang to life with his words. I realised that the long awaited signal had been given. We jumped out of the trench and I sent Woodward and Dunscombe running to collect the men for whom they were responsible. I went also at the run to round up the others. Soon I had a number with me, collected from the slit trenches in the middle of the camp. Aircraft were still roaring overhead only a few feet up and they were firing at every sign of movement around us. We kept close to the ground and crept in single file round to the gully.

We were first there and lay in cover waiting for the others to arrive. There was no sign of our New Zealand guide. The trees and tents in the camp had been blown to bits. Great craters gaped everywhere. Dust was still in the air and it lay thick on everything. Our mouths were dry and full of grit and we were covered in dirt. My ears and head were still singing and I was unable to think clearly. I was very frightened, but shame was stronger than fear, and I chatted about trivialities to the men. They too were badly shaken and automatically shrank down as every aircraft went over.

Soon the imperturbable Woody appeared with a few men behind him. He had found difficulty in collecting them as some slit trench areas were cut off by pockets of enemy paratroops. Dunscombe was not long behind him and reported the same thing. We decided to move without waiting further. It was clear that the New Zealanders were fully occupied where they were. At their request, I sent Woody and Dunscombe with some men to prospect to the south. It was the last I saw of them. I led the rest up the hill to the east and found some New Zealanders behind a stone wall. They did not know what was happening elsewhere, so I decided that we should hold this ground against possible attacks from the west.

I tried to remember tactical exercises I had done on Salisbury Plain. I made a quick survey of the ground and posted the men behind good natural cover to command the best field of fire. Others now arrived with Myhill in charge and I appointed him to command one sector, while Sergeant Pilot Butterick took over the other sector. Both men were cool and capable and ready for anything. I walked from one end of our line to the other, gratified to find my brain working clearly again and the sense of fear gone. Aircraft roared overhead and bullets kicked up the dirt, but I was too busy to worry about them.

Through the lifting haze, gliders could still be seen coming down in the river bed in the valley below. Figures ran from them into nearby cover. To the north, a huge formation of Ju 52s was dropping more paratroops. Everywhere, the sky was busy with aircraft. I decided it was time to contact the Colonel and report my action to him. I left Myhill in charge and walked round the hillside to the headquarters. More paratroops were being dropped to the east round Galatos. Bullets from various sources still whined past and there was still the occasional crump of a bomb. But the blitz had lifted and the land battle was on.

The Colonel's headquarters seemed to have stayed outside the heavily bombed area. The leaves were still on the trees and the dust was less thick. I found Beale there with the Colonel. My mouth was still full of grit so I asked for water. The Colonel was sorry, there was no water handy, but there was beer in the mess. The 'Mess' was a circle of sandbags with an upturned crate as a table. We strolled over to it as I told him what I had done with my men. He approved of my action. He himself had still no word from his forward platoons and we did not know how the attack was developing.

We sat and opened a couple of bottles. They must gave been the last on the island. As we drank thankfully, there was a crack from the bank behind us and the dirt flew where a bullet had struck. A few moments later there was the same whine and crack. Someone was trying to pick us off where we sat. I became apprehensive. But the Colonel said: “Let us finish our beer,” so we sat on. I hurriedly finished mine off and waited for him. He rose leisurely and we strolled back into the headquarters dugout. I was glad to be inside.

I found Beale wondering about the safety of our respective orderly rooms. They had instructions to burn documents in the event of an attack, but it looked as though the paratroops might have dropped there too soon. The cypher books were in the charge of two officers of 30 Squadron. Ours had been burned in the retreat from Greece. We hoped that they would be safe and there was nothing to be done about them. But we decided to try to reach the orderly room at the airfield headquarters just to make sure of the destruction of the files and records. Also I hoped to be able to pick up some of our men who had been cut off in that area.

II

Three of us set off from the Battalion headquarters. Colonel Andrew had decided to come with Beale and me to see how his own forward elements ere faring. We walked up over the crest of the hill together. On the far side, we found a little group round a badly wounded soldier. He had been hit in the lungs and was coughing blood. He was pretty far gone. Three of his pals were round him holding his hand as he prepared to make his last journey. We left them and went on down the hill into the olive grove. At the end of the gully there should have been an advanced post of New Zealand infantry. Their trenches were empty. The Colonel decided to go back to his headquarters and await runners from his companies.

Beale and I walked on, keeping in cover as far as we could. There was intermittent fire coming from down on our left where the glider troops were forming up after landing in the river bed. We kept out of sight of them as we moved across the face of the hill. We came to a coloured parachute. There was nothing tied to it and there was no one in sight. But I had a hunch the place was unhealthy and we went back a few yards. Here we found a slit trench with two airmen in it. They had rifles. We took them with us and went forward again. Beale was in the lead. I followed with my revolver ready. Then came the two airmen. We crept quietly forward.

All of a sudden Beale pitched forward about five paces with a cough and a grunt. Heh ad been hit in the stomach. Fortunately the bullet came out between his ribs without damaging his vitals. But he and we were not to know that. I leant over him, speechless in stupid concern. There was nothing I could say, so I said, “Are you all right?” - a ridiculous question under the circumstances. The idea was in my mind that he had been hit by a stray bullet from an aircraft, so I was not taking any special precautions myself.

As I uttered the words, however, I felt a tremendous blow on my left shoulder. It picked me up off my feet and spun me in the air. My right arm flung out and was also struck violently. I found myself on the ground. My left shoulder was quite numb and blood was spouting from my right forearm where the artery had been cut. I had been hit by two tommy gun slugs from a nearby paratrooper. He had also hit one of the airmen a glancing blow on the ribs with another slug.

We were all flat on the ground now and in cover from further fire for the moment. My arm was a nasty sight. Part of my forearm had been carried away as the slug spread on the bone and tore it out. I found it difficult to move myself as neither arm could be of any help. Beale struggled over to me. One airman came with him. Together they took out a field dressing and tied it on my arm by the elbow. They started to tighten it up with the help of a stick to make the tourniquet effective. As they tightened it, however, the stick broke.

In the meantime, bullets were whining past us again. We were in an unhealthy position. There was no time to do more. So my tourniquet was left as it was. An extraordinary thing was that it was just tight enough to slow up the blood flow from my artery enough to let it clot and so stop, without being so tight as to stop the blood supply to the rest of my arm. As the tourniquet remained on for three days that fact saved me from losing either my life or my arm.

The others decided to crawl back to the gully, where thy would be under cover again to wlak back to our lines. I was unable to crawl as both my ars were broken. So they helped me to my feet and I started to run back across an open stretch to hwere there would be cover to wlak. It was abput a hundred yards. I set my teeth and ran. The bones ground together with a sickening nosie as my helpless arms flapped about. The pain was excruciating. When I had only bout five paces to go, I relaxed the attention which had been focused completely on my objective. The result was a balcko ut. I fainted and fell, just short of cover, in the open, exposed to fire from two enemy positions.

I was oblivious to the passage of time. The next thing knew was that Beale and the airmen were beside me. They lifted me up. I made a supreme effort of concentration and tried to walk. I was half carried to a place a few yards away where a tent had stood before

the blitz. It was dug into the hillside and afforded good cover. I watched a stick grenade or explosive shell pitch five yards ahead of us. The dirt flew and the explosion cracked on us, but miraculously no one was touched by splinters.

They laid me down on my back in the pit and sat close in to review the position. Beale's face was white and haggard. His wound kept him bent almost double with pain. Only his amazing spirit kept him going. He was determined to reach our lines. He promised to send a rescue party to bring me in and set off on his own. He got back all right only to be taken prisoner later when the aid post where he was being attended to was overrun. A rescue party, led by one of my own officers and made up of airmen, counterattacked and reached me. But they found me unconscious in a pool of blood. My right arm lay across my stomach from which the blood appeared to have come. I was covered in flies and without sign of life. They left me for dead and later reported to Cairo that I had been hit in the stomach.

In fact, I was far from dead . I was conscious much too frequently for pleasure. Shortly after Beale left I had sent one of the airmen back by an alternative route. The other had sat by me as I reviewed the situation. I was very weak and blood was still welling from my shoulder and arm. It could only be a matter of time. I had an acute thrirst from the loss of blood., aggravated by the hot Mediterranean sun which blazed down from a cloudless sky. I had no water. I decided to hasten the end, I ad no thought for the future. Death for me was an end of everything. Above all it was an end to my present extreme discomfiture. The airman had my revolver. I told hm to give it to me. He put it into my left hand which was lying helpless on my chest. I made a terrific ffort of concentration and got the muzzle under my chin. But the strength to pull back the hammer had left my fingers. The airman was shocked and took the gun from me. I asked him to shoot me but he was clearly horrified at the idea. So I gave up and sent him to try to get back to our lines. He and the other man were captured on their way.

The sun beat down from the blazing sky. My thirst was extreme. I was so weak that I could not twitch a finger. The flies crawled over my face undisturbed. Clouds of them gathered around me, attracted by the pool of blood in which I lay. Big shiny black flies. They saved my life. They laid eggs in my wounds. Later I was crawling with maggots. The maggots ate the decaying flesh and prevented gangrene. But at the time the flies were the last torment. Tortured with pain and thirst I lay in the sun with a deep desire for death.

Time passed slowly. I was intermittently conscious. Sometimes conscious of noise as machine guns rattled nearby. Always acutely conscious of thirst. I crave for water as I had never before craved for anything. Some say that, faced with death, the past comes before the fading gaze in shifting scenes. I had no such experience. I was alone and dying from loss of blood and thirst. It was a race to de which won. I only desired the race to end.

Night came and it was cold. Bitterly cold. But thirst was still the primary consideration. I was crazy with thirst. There was nothing in my power that I would not have done for a drink of water. But there was nothing I could do. I just lay.

Sometime that night (or was it the next night?) I heard machine gun fire close to me. I could hear men talking in German. Then there was the sound of men running past me. And the gun started to fire again—this time on my other side. Another pause, and it opened up still further away. Then it came closer and past me again. It was an old ruse. One gun crew giving the impression of many. Later I heard that the Germans had only twenty-seven men that night and were reinforced at dawn. A platoon might have saved Crete if they had known.

The sun blazed down again. I had lost all sense of time. I must have been unconscious for most of that day and the following night. On the third day I had a spell of consciousness again. There were men passing by me. I tried to croak at them. They saw that I was alive and came round me. Six young German paratroops. My tongue was dry and swollen. They saw my need and produced their water bottles. The first drops to pass my throat were more precious to me than life. I drank and drank. I seem to remember draining many water bottles. Someone had cold tea with brandy in his. Another gave me some dried fruit from a cellophane packet. I was sick. And drank again."Water" was the only word I could whisper through my cracked lips. Someone pulled a blanket over me and I was alone again. Only the craving for water remained.

I remember being carried in on a stretcher. We were passing the old headquarters. Every lurch of the stretcher was agony. I passed out again into merciful oblivion. Then I was lying among a crowd of other wounded and dying men in the village street. There was someone close by me on either side. One was silent. He was dead. The other was one of my own airmen. I was delirious. I heard afterwards that I kept saying, "It's all right, chaps. You will be all right. Just stay where you are and do what I tell you." I was reliving the battle on the hillside. Soon I was carried into a little shop on the village street. Here, Flying Officer Tom Cullen was doing the work of ten men. He had dysentery when the blitz came and crawled out of bed to attend to the wounded. He was the only medical officer at Maleme. Having established an aid post on the hillside he worked there under fire while the battle raged round them. Then they were overrun by the enemy and he was taken prisoner together with his wounded men and

transferred to the village.

Now he was attending to all the wounded as they were brought in. He had been on his feet for three days and nights. And his helpers were untrained men. My fitter sergeant from 33 Squadron was helping in the 'operating theatre'. The Intelligence officer from 30 Squadron was his anaesthetist. I was put on a table, only half conscious. A piece of parachute fabric was laid across my face and ether poured on it until I passed right out. Cullen then operated on my shoulder and cleaned up and bandaged both wounds.

I came to in the street again. I had one idea still predominant in my mind—water. Someone filled a water bottle and laid it on my chest. By moving two fingers I could tip it up so that it poured into my mouth. The water was like wine. I gulped greedily.

Later I was carried into another little house on the side of the street.. I remember an earth floor, one small window, and an open door. I was placed on a wooden bench inside, still with a water bottle on my chest. I kept on calling for it to be refilled. There was a constant stream of wounded through the little door. Soon they were everywhere inside. There was no room to walk between the bodies on the floor.

Night came and darkness added horror to the scene. Men were groaning and crying out. Men were dying. Men were bleeding and being sick over each other. The sounds and smells were indescribable. But one thing remained priority-water. Someone refilled my water bottle at intervals.

Soon we had run out of good water. The water became impossible to drink due to the chlorine in it. It was acid and made you immediately sick. Someone found a barrel of sweet Samos wine and broached it. Thereafter we drank Samos and water mixed. It was just possible to get it down. But the result was that everyone became intoxicated. The last vestiges of control vanished.

In the morning they came and carried out the dead. Someone came up to me and said, "How do you feel?" I heard but was too weak to answer. Later there was a stab in the arm as I was given a huge shot of dope. I was carried out into the open. Strapped on my stretcher to a motorcycle sidecar I was driven to the airfield.

I remember nothing of the drive. The next time I was conscious I was lying on my stretcher on the airfield. There was the familiar smell of petrol and exhaust fumes , with the peculiar odour of aircraft paint. A Junkers 52 was standing close by. Others were scattered about. The place was packed with planes.

I was picked up and carried to the Ju 52. As the stretcher was being manoeuvred through the door, my left arm was caught by the side. The shock pierced through my semi-conscious mind. I cried out with the pain.

They laid me in the cabin. The engines started and we took off without delay as our own guns were shelling the airfield and it was clearly unhealthy to linger. There were only two others in the plane with me apart from the crew. One was a New Zealand officer who had half his arm blown off. The other was a corporal whose face was missing. Bloodstained bandages covered what was left of him.

Our wheels left the ground and I felt the aircraft turn immediately out to sea. Otherwise it would have run into our own machine gun fire. We headed away north low over the water. The lower half of the German gunner as he sat at his post was all that I could see.

Later the incongruity of it all struck me. One day shooting down a Junkers 52 and a few days later travelling in one as a passenger. One day being shot at by Jerries, the next being carried by them. One day eager to live, the next anxious to die. Life was full of apparent contradictions. Although I was too far gone to realise it, there had been an interesting series of coincidences; my being sole survivor in air combat twice running; the amazing coincidence of the tourniquet being adjusted to a nicety; these were links in a chain of evidence that was to have a profound influence upon my future.

Also, although again I did not realise it, I was on the first plane to evacuate British wounded from Crete. My early evacuation meant that I reached hospital in time to save my life. It was touch and go, but I should live again. The fact that I was a prisoner had hardly crossed my mind. I was already a prisoner to myself. My mind was imprisoned in my own affairs. I thought only of myself and immediate surroundings. The Junkers was carrying me total captivity.

III

The engines shut off to a tick over. There was the familiar bump and rattle as we hit the ground and tore across the rough surface to a standstill. We had landed at an airfield outside Athens. It seemed as though my wounds were red hot. Every movement of the aircraft as it taxied across the field was agony. I fainted.

Then there was the lorry with its flapping canvas hood closed down at the back. There was a cloud of dust as we rattled off down the bumpy Greek roads to the city. It was stiflingly hot. The corporal with the bloodstained bandages on his face was groaning. He was nearly gone and his passing was painful.

The New Zealander was also beside me. I remember the sight of his face, grimy and white at the lips, with teeth set hard. Every lurch of the lorry moved my arms.

The vibration shook the shattered flesh and bones. I cried out. Mercifully I was only partially conscious.

I remember sunny streets through a slit in the canvas. Then I was lying on a paved stone floor in the entrance of the prisoner-of-war hospital. Someone asked in English for my name. As I was speechless, they looked at my bloodstained identity discs. I was carried away. Weeks later, I was to discover that my desert boots which had been tied to my stretcher had been stolen with my stockings and wallet. I was left wearing a pair of blood-soaked shorts, and my identity discs.

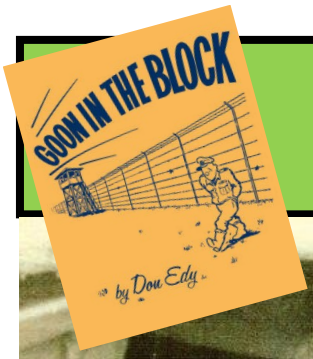
When I regained consciousness, I found myself in a bed between sheets. They felt smooth and cool on my skin. It was quiet in the ward. People were talking in low voices nearby. There was no sudden rush and roar of aircraft overhead. Or stutter of machine gun fire. The crump of high explosive seemed far away.

My wounds were burning and I was still craving for water. Someone put a glass to my lips and cold water trickled deliciously over my parched tongue. I asked for more. And more. I disposed of a huge glass jug full every few hours for the next three weeks.

A doctor was attending my neighbour. Son it was my turn. He glanced at my wounds and asked some questions. I was unaware of question or answer. I had no sense of being a prisoner. My doctor was an Australian and the people round me were British. There were no Germans in sight. The world was bounded by the limits of my bed. It was a painful world to live in, and I would much rather have died. I was in pain and thirsty and tired, and only intermittently conscious. I slept and drank, and slept again. Life was pain and water. And death was sleep. And sleep was good.

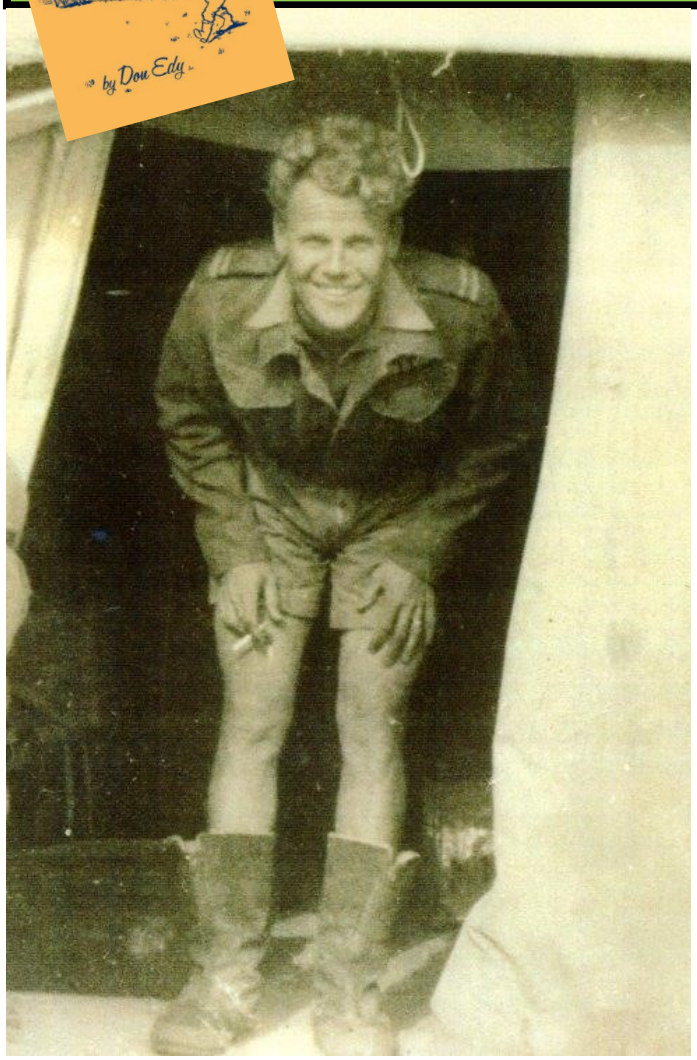
Wing Commander Edward a Howell OBE DFC
22 March 1912 - 4 August 2000

After his escape from Greece and his eventual return to the UK, Edward Howell was appointed to the Air Staff in Whitehall as a wing commander in 1943, working closely with the inventor Barnes Wallis in the development of the new bombs to attack hard targets. He later served on the planning staff of D-Day and ended the war on the Joint Staff Mission at the Pentagon in Washington. In 1948 he was invalided to the retired list of the RAF as a wing commander.



Goon In the Block

A four part serialisation of Don Edy's memoirs with 33 Squadron 1941-1942



Biography

Don Edy, a young Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) pilot born on 26 July 1917, lived an adventure many young men had hoped for, piloting his beloved Hawker Hurricane with RAF No. 33 Fighter Squadron in the Western Desert. In his book he chronicled not only their missions, including Operation CRUSADER, but a spirit of life, camaraderie and loss at the North Africa Landing Grounds used by the Allies. Don was born on July 26, 1917. His many interesting adventures during the war, such as taking off from the deck of the aircraft carrier, the Ark Royal, to ferry planes to Africa, strafing enemy convoys in the desert, being shot down, having the prisoner of war ship being torpedoed and ending up clinging to a plank in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, being rescued and taken to Italy before ending up in the famous Stalag Luft III in Germany's Black Forest are all detailed in his book, 'Goon In The Block'. The Edy family have kindly given their permission to serialise their father's book up to the point that he was shot down and captured. For those readers interested in knowing what happened after his capture, the family have also very kindly provided 33 Squadron with a second copy of their father's book, and are offering members who would like to purchase the book a very favourable deal. Ask the editor how much his wife paid for his copy of the book from a dealer for Christmas to realise what a good deal it is! It is a fascinating read. (Source: Jane (Edy) Hughes)

Chapter 1

One morning early in August of 1941, sixty Pilot Officers and sergeants of the RCAF and the RAF gathered in a room at Greenock, Scotland, to hear about their destination. I was one of the Pilot Officers. It was more than a month since we had finished our Operational Flying Training on Hurricane fighters and had been ready to join a Squadron. The week before we had picked up sixty brand new Hurricanes of the latest model and had flown them from an airfield in Southern England up to Abbotscinch, an airfield close to Greenock. Now, at long last, we were to be posted.

What we heard sounded interesting. The new planes had been dismantled, crated, and stored in the lower hangar of the aircraft carrier '*Furious*'. The following morning we would board the carrier and sail for Gibraltar, then on through the Mediterranean, and eventually end up in Egypt and the Western desert. The battle had been going badly there and reinforcements were needed in a hurry. That evening the party in the mess was a gay one now that the suspense was over and we were really on our way.

It had taken a full year to reach this point. In August of 1940 I had joined the Air Force in London, Ontario and been sent to the Manning depot at the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto. This was a period of drilling, filling in pages and pages of reports, examinations, needles, roll calls, and getting used to the strangeness of a rough uniform.

The next step was guard duty at Jarvis Bombing and Gunnery School. Nine weeks of mud, poor food, boring hours day and night marching up and down with a rifle on the shoulder, and plenty of fun with all the new friends I made there. Stu Buchanan and I were in London almost every day. We worked twenty-four hours on duty and twenty-four hours off, starting at noon. We could hitch-hike home in the afternoon, spend the night with our families, and then hitch-hike back in the morning in time for duty at noon. It was here that I had my first flight in an aircraft. It was an old Fairey Battle, single engine and heavy but I loved it.

From Jarvis we went to the Initial Training School in the old Hunt Club in Toronto and there our schooling began in earnest. Discipline was strict, neatness almost a fetish, and we drilled until we were ready to drop. This was also a waiting period for us until older classes graduated from the various Training Schools.

We were lucky. Orders had come through earlier that air gunners were at a premium in the RAF. As a result the entire class ahead of us had been shipped straight to a gunners school in Montreal. It didn't matter whether they had enlisted as Pilots, Navigators, or what. They all went as gunners. When our turn came most of us got our choice and I was sent to St. Catherines for my Elementary Flying Training. As you can imagine this was nothing but pure fun. We had lots of schooling and plenty of drill, but the flying made up for everything else.

Stu and I had our hearts set on Fighters right from the beginning. His brother Bert had been killed in the battle of Britain and Stu felt that he had a personal score to settle. I liked the idea of being alone and commanding my own affairs. Now we found that all classes from this school went to Brantford for further training on the old twin engine Ansons. I'm afraid Stu used some pull here as his Dad was a wing commander in Ottawa. One day just before our training was finished our CO called us in and said that we two were posted to the Secondary Flying School at Uplands, Ottawa. They trained on single engines Harvards there. We were sorry to leave our old friends in Ansons, but our hearts were light as we took the train for Ottawa.

The Harvard was a beautiful little aircraft and I loved it. I can still here the sharp sound of its engine warming up in the crisp cold winter air. All too soon, early in April, the flying was over and we were ready to head for England and the war. We were all given twenty-one days leave and told to report back to Debert, Nova Scotia, the marshalling point for overseas drafts. I'll never forget the picture of my family, and my girlfriend Millie, standing on the station platform as the train pulled away from London early one morning in May. It was to be four years before I saw them again but they were all waiting for me then.

Debert was a mud hole and I hated it. Here the overseas drafts waited while preparations were made in Halifax for the ships to gather and form a convoy. Eventually we moved to Halifax and at last boarded a ship, the passenger liner '*Californian*', and set sail. Never having been on the Ocean before I was thrilled with the trip across. We had a bad storm that lasted for days but we also had some lovely calm weather. This was the period when the '*Bismarck*' was out and we

June 1941, sailing from Halifax to Britain on the 'Californian' (Back Row L-R): Bill Swindon, Montreal, Quebec; Wally Conrad, Montreal, Quebec; Creighton (Crabby) Lowther, Amherst, Nova Scotia; Don Edy, London, Ontario; Roy Ahult, Nova Scotia; Frank "Stuffy" Sutton, N. Carolina, USA; Joe Creighton, N. Ontario; Tommy Patterson, Windsor, Ontario.
(Front Row l-R): Bert Houle, N. Ontario; George Keefer, Prince Edward Island; Don Lush, Toronto, Ontario; "Johnny" Gain, Montreal, Quebec; Harry Cleary, Cornwall, Ontario; Ian Ormston, Montreal, Quebec.

followed the battle keenly. She would have been in her glory to find our seventy ship convoy, but we arrived safely on June the eleventh.

Now we began the final phase of our training. I was posted to an Operational Training Unit at Crosby-on-Eden, just below the Scottish border, and got my first glimpse of the famous Hurricane fighter. It looked beautiful. All our instructors were pilots from the RAF who were on a 'rest' from their Squadrons. It was fascinating to hear them talk of the battles against the ME 109s and the German bombers, then to fly with them in Squadron and Flight formations to practice the tactics they had told us about.

The Hawker Hurricane was a lovely aircraft with clean lines and sturdy appearance. I enjoyed the feeling of power when I opened up the throttle and the Rolls Royce Merlin engine wound up for the take-off. It took no time at all to climb high up in the sky where I could play with the clouds, then down to the deck and the thrill of flying just above the treetops. My Flight Commander was 'Hawkeye' Lee, so named because of the peculiar droop of one eyelid which gave him a most sinister look. He had nine German aircraft to his credit.

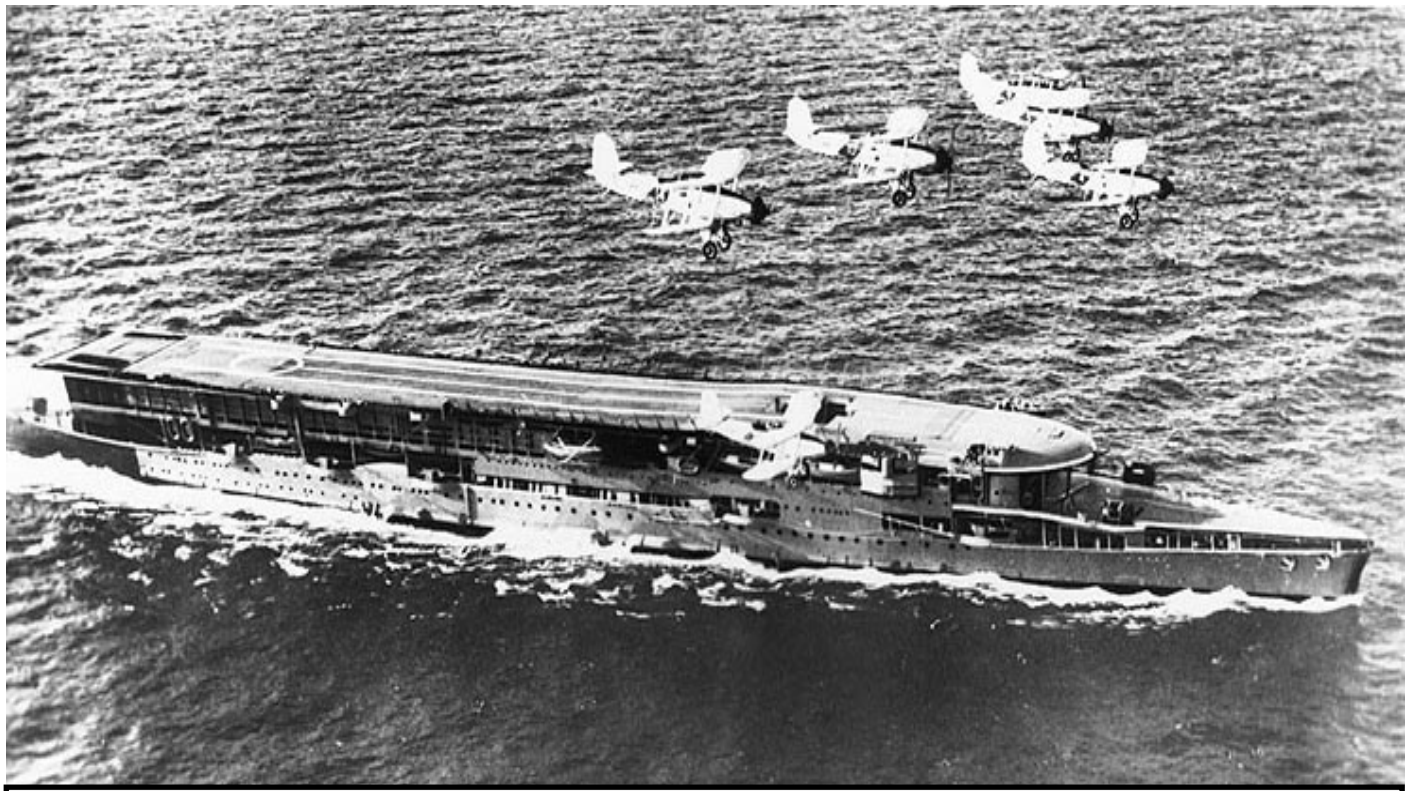
By midsummer we were through our training and ready to join an active Squadron. This was the period we spent on leave and then ended up in Scotland, ready to board the '*Furious*' for the Middle East. My story really begins here.

Chapter 2

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, we climbed aboard a lighter and headed across the Firth of Clyde towards the ugly grey shape of the carrier. The '*Furious*' had at one time been a light cruiser and the transformation to a carrier did absolutely nothing for its appearance. It looked top heavy as it sat very high in the water and the flight deck jutted far out on both sides and extended well over the prow and the stern. We were no sooner inside the hull than the anchor was hauled aboard and we started down the Firth towards the Atlantic. Operation SCARLET, the codename for this expedition, was under way.

Each pilot was allowed to carry only one kit bag full of equipment. The rest of the stuff would be forwarded to us and might eventually arrive in the desert. As a matter of fact it never did arrive, being sunk on the way, and I lost a new steamer trunk full of gear. The one kit bag we had could be strapped inside the fuselage of the Hurricane and carried with us. It took only a few minutes to stow this bit of gear, and then we were off to explore the ship.

Most of my friends from the training days at Uplands were still with me. There was Don Lush, 'Crabby' Lowther, Tommy Paterson, Wally Conrad, George Keefer, Johnny Gain, Bill Swinden, 'Stuffy' Sutton, who had an airfield named after him in North Carolina when he was killed, Bert Houle, and Heath Hunter. Stu lost



HMS Furious underway, circa 1935-36, with a flight of Blackburn Baffin torpedo planes overhead. In the late 1930s, she received an island superstructure on the starboard side and her small forward aircraft flying-off deck was converted to an anti-aircraft gun platform.
(USN Naval History and Heritage Command NH85717)

out after all. His Dad pulled more strings, having lost one boy already, and Stu ended up a year later on Coastal Command. We were all Pilot officers as were six Americans in the RAF, and there were three of four English officers too. The rest of the group was made up of Canadian sergeants but they had been in a training group ahead of us and I didn't get to know them very well. One of the Americans was Lance Wade, from Arizona, and we became fast friends later.

The first day out was one for exploring the ship. We piled all over the old hulk, examining everything and asking a million questions. Most of the interior was taken up by two huge hangars, one above the other, and big lifts, or elevators, supplied the means forgetting the aircraft up to the fight deck and down again. The lifts of the '*Furious*' were the only ones on a carrier wide enough to take the wing spread of a Hurricane and that is why this ship was used for the job.

Our aircraft were stored in the lower hangar and when the time came, they would be assembled below decks first. In the hangar above were the Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm (FAA) and a half a dozen old Hurricanes specially equipped with landing hooks for carrier landings. The Swordfish, or 'Stringbags' as they were nicknamed, were old biplanes and looked very obsolete but they did a good job for the Navy. They could take off quickly, with a short run, carrying an amazingly heavy load and they could land at a fairly low stalling speed. This made them most suitable for the smaller carriers.

The flight deck of the '*Furious*' really bothered us. Apparently when the old cruiser was being redesigned, it was impossible to avoid having a rise just forward of the island bridge, and about three feet higher than the rest of the deck. In taking off the aircraft would come to this rise, run up it, and be thrown into the air. If it had not already attained its airspeed it would come down with a bang on the forward part of the deck and then stagger off the prow of the ship into the air. The Swordfish could usually manage this alright as they were airborne by the time they came to the rise, but we figured the heavier Hurricane with its greater take-off speed would have a lot of trouble. The pilots of the Sea Hurricanes let down a bit of flap to assist the take-off but we had the add hazard of extra, long-range gas tanks, slung under each wing.

Landing back on the '*Furious*' was almost worse than taking off. The ship's funnel was just aft of the flight deck, and below it, so that an aircraft coming in to land had to fly over the hot air before coming to the deck. This blast of air bumped the plane up and then it had to come down again quickly. During each landing an officer, specially trained for the job, stood at one side of the deck and guided the pilot in. He held two paddles, like table tennis bats, and showed the pilot what to do. If the aircraft was approaching just right he extended both arms straight out from the shoulders. If the aircraft was too low he lowered his arms to show the pilot his position and if it was too high he raised both arms to indicate that the pilot should let down a bit. In this way he could also indicate whether one wing was high or low, and when he was dead level. The pilots used to trust almost entirely to this officer for their actual landing and his job was very important and exacting.

Once down on the deck the aircraft was caught by its landing hook on restraining cable stretched across the deck at about twenty foot intervals. As the cables were attached to hydraulic springs, the aircraft was brought to a fairly smooth stop. The hooks are let down from the fuselage of the plane just before landing and woe betide the pilot who forgot. It was very exciting when the hook bounced on the deck and missed the first or second cable. Usually it was safer for the pilot to gun the engine and go around again but this could not always be done and we had some mighty exciting moments before the hooks finally caught the cables and brought the plane down.

All during the voyage the Swordfish flew patrols day and night, searching for enemy submarines and ships, and we came to admire the pilots a great deal. It took courage and knowledge to fly the Atlantic, far out at sea, sometimes out of sight of land and ship. For security reasons they could not use their radios to send out an SOS even if they became lost, as it was better to lose one aircraft and its crew than not endanger the whole ship, especially later on when we joined a convoy. It also took courage to leave that ship at night and to be guided back by the flashes from an Aldis lamp. The only indications used for landing were very dim lights along the deck and these could not been seen until the aircraft was very close.

I came to know two of the FAA pilots quite well. They were fighter pilots and were flying the Sea Hurricanes against any enemy aircraft that might try to get too curious about our fleet. The pilots' names were Cork and fellows and they were inseparable. One day Corky had a rough time bringing a Hurricane in for a landing. The air was very still so that, even though the '*Furious*' was travelling along at about twenty-five knots, the landing speed was fairly high. Corky tried to get down three times but each time the plane would not drop quickly enough after passing over the blast from the funnel.

Finally he banged it down hard but the hook bounced and missed first two or three cables so he pulled the undercarriage lever, the wheels came up, and the aircraft slid along the deck on its belly. It tipped sideways in a ground loop and swung around, striking the gun emplacement on which I was standing, This in turn swung around and nearly threw a bunch of us into

the sea. Corky ended up by crashing into the island bridge right under the Skipper's nose. He was furious with himself because he really was an excellent pilot and now had crashed in front of sixty new boys. His chum Fellows drew a cartoon of the incident for me and I've kept it ever since.

On the second day out of Scotland we were joined by two destroyers, one of which was famous for its part in the sinking of the '*Graf Spee*'. Gunnery practice was the order of the day and my ears rang for days from the racket those guns made. The '*Furious*' had quite a large complement of five-inch anti-aircraft guns and 20mm multiple Pom-Poms. The five-inchers gave off an ear-splitting crack when fired and the Pom-Poms chattered like oversized machine guns which, in fact, they were. They consisted of two banks of four cannons each, firing in rotation so they put up a very heavy cone of fire in a few seconds. It was quite a sight to see the tracers climbing lazily into the sky and disappearing in little back puffs. The only results we could see from the big guns were small white powder puffs of smoke high in the sky. Corky and one of his mates took off in their Hurricanes and gave us a real show of air to air gunnery against red balloons sent up from the bridge.

For two days the '*Furious*' steamed at full speed straight out into the Atlantic. Her only protection then was the destroyer escort of two, and her speed, which made her comparatively safe from attack by submarines. On the third morning we awakened to find our carrier squatting placidly in the middle of a large convoy of about thirty ships. A great battleship, the 'Rodney', was in charge and two sleek cruisers plus a bevy of destroyers seemed to offer ample protection.

Luckily for us nothing happened to mar the smooth sailing of that convoy. Twice it was reported that Focke Wulf Condor planes were shadowing us and the Hurricanes took off to intercept them, but each time our planes came back with nothing to report. Once we had a submarine scare and the destroyers raced around like hounds on the scent. Although they dropped some depth charges again we were lucky and the convoy sailed on. The transports were headed for the Middle East as we were. But it would be many weeks before they could arrive there. They had to go all the way down around the Cape of Good Hope, then back up the east coast of Africa, through the Suez Canal, and then on to Egypt. That must have been a hot tedious trip for the troops, especially in the tropical zone.

The '*Furious*' stayed with the convoy for several days for mutual protection. Twenty-four hours from Gibraltar she struck out on her own again. This was the real submarine zone and tension was high, very much so amongst we inexperienced landlubbers. It is a horrible feeling to be far below decks with the thought that a torpedo might strike at any minute.

This day the mechanics started assembling our Hurricanes in the lower hangar and we pilots were advised to watch the work being done on them. In this way we could learn exactly how the new long-range tanks worked and be reasonably sure that everything was in running order. Although the aircraft were Mark II B's and very powerful, the tanks slung under the wings made them sluggish and unwieldy. My thoughts were very much on that hump in the deck. All that day and most of the night the mechanics worked away and by the time the Rock of Gibraltar was raised on the horizon the next morning, more than twenty Hurricanes were lined up on the deck.

The arrival at Gibraltar was marked with a ceremony traditional in the Navy for a ship of the Fleet arriving from the Motherland. The entire available crew, including we Air Force men, was lined up on the flight deck in parade. As the '*Furious*' glided in between the anti-submarine booms and the breakwater our Navy band played martial music. The crews of the other ships in the harbour were drawn up on parade too and it was a very pretty sight. There lay the '*Nelson*', Flagship of the Navy in the Mediterranean, several cruisers were tied to the docks or anchored in the bay, and there were destroyers galore. The '*Ark Royal*', latest and best of the British aircraft carriers, was also tied up near the '*Nelson'*. The whole scene was dominated by the great Rock itself. Towering high above the harbour and dwarfing everything else within sight.

The '*Furious*' tied up behind the '*Ark Royal*' and the two carriers were brought together stern to stern. This ended the first lap of Operation SCARLET and everyone breathed more easily. We had come through the hazards of the Atlantic without mishap but there had been periods when real danger had threatened and we now knew the tension of imminent attack and the way experienced men handled themselves. A valuable training for our future.

Chapter 3

Time was a valuable asset in those days and very little was wasted in this operation. No sooner had the '*Furious*' tied up than huge planks were lowered into place stretching from her flight deck to that of the '*Ark Royal*' and immediately the crews started wheeling the Hurricanes from one carrier to the other. This was a very ticklish job as you can imagine. One slip might toppled a valuable aircraft into the sea, but everything went off smoothly. The lifts on the '*Ark Royal*' were not wide enough to take the Hurricanes below so they had to be securely lashed down on the flight deck.

While all this was going on we pilots split up. Twenty-six were to accompany their aircraft to the *Ark* and as mine was in the group transferred I was among them. This was a break. Compared to the '*Furious*', the '*Ark Royal*'

HMS Ark Royal

was a lovely ship on which to live. Here we had a big cabin for quarters, with cots for beds, but on the other ship we had slept on hammocks slung between posts deep down below the water line. The wardroom on the Ark was big and cheery and the mess hall considerably better than that of the '*Furious*'. Apart from the living conditions, the *Ark* had been built specifically as an aircraft carrier and its flight deck was long, wide and flat. Believe me, that rise on the '*Furious*' had had me worried.

After stowing our gear we left the ship to explore Gibraltar. It is a very picturesque place and we wandered all over the town on the cobbled streets. High above us the Rock was always in sight and the roads and streets zig-zagged back and forth up its sides. We climbed quite a way up, through rock gardens and flowered lanes, and eventually came to a hotel. Sitting on the wide verandah we had beer and lunch and looked out over a most beautiful panorama of the harbour, the shipping and the distant sea. Far off to the right we could see the Spanish coast, and the waiter told us that on really clear days the coast of Africa could be seen.

Shortly after lunch some of us wandered down to the sea and as it was sweltering hot in our blue uniforms we stripped and went swimming. This was my first attempt at swimming in salt water. I didn't like it at first but gradually became used to it and enjoyed the buoyancy that made it much easier for swimming than fresh water. All too soon the '*Ark Royal*' blew a blast on its horn as a recall and we had to hurry back on board.

All the immediate work had been completed, our aircraft were lashed down against the roll of the ship and the wind, and we were ready to sail. Apparently we were to go without the '*Furious'* this time, release the twenty-six aircraft, and then the *Ark* was to return for more. While we were away the mechanics would be assembling the rest of the Hurricanes.

At ten o'clock that night the *Ark* and the battleship '*Nelson*' slipped quietly from the harbour of Gibraltar and headed into the Mediterranean Sea. We were joined by several destroyers, and lookout planes of Coastal Command circled ahead. Being tired out by a strenuous day of sight-seeing that practically amounted to mountain climbing we pilots all went to bed early. The heat was terrific and made sleep almost impossible. When morning came at last we found most of the Naval officers sleeping in the open on the afterdeck. From then on we lugged our mattresses and bedding out into the open and slept under the stars. All the time I was on the '*Ark Royal*' the sea was calm as could be and the gentle roll of the ship really rocked me to sleep.

Nothing at all happened that day to mar its perfection. We inspected the aircraft and tested the engines, then just lay around enjoying our Mediterranean cruise. By nightfall everyone was keyed up for the flight the following day. The squadron leader in charge gave us a short briefing on how to fly this particular trip, and what to do if we became separated from the main group. If that happened we were to fly due east for the prescribed time of the flight, then turn north. With luck we should spot Sicily and then Mount Etna would be easy to find. From Etna, Malta would be exactly 222 degrees on our compasses. Service revolvers and maps were issued and we were advised to go to bed early and get some rest. Reveille was set for 3.30 am and we wre to be dressed, fed and ready to go by 4.30. I didn't sleep much that night. My thoughts were all on the

flight tomorrow and what it would be like taking off for the first time from the deck of a carrier.

The ship's klaxon awakened us to the darkness and tension of three-thirty a.m. and we started to dress in an air of excitement. Breakfast was a quiet but substantial meal and soon we were all assembled on the flight deck by the island bridge. It was quite dark. The sky and sea blended together in one vast expanse and we were shivering, partly from the coolness of the air and partly from excitement. As we were discussing the take-off amongst ourselves, Admiral Cunningham of the Mediterranean Fleet came down from the bridge and gave us a short talk. He shook hands with each pilot and then dismissed us to our planes.

Now a faint streak of light in the east divided the sea from the sky and the Mediterranean began to take on a lovely deep green shade. I went back to my Hurricane, eighteenth in the line, to check with the mechanics. Everything seemed to be in order so I strapped on the parachute, with a built in dinghy of yellow rubber, and climbed into the cockpit. Ahead of me some of the boys already had the engines turning over, warming them up. I went through the cockpit drill carefully to satisfy myself that everything was well, and gave the mechanics the signal to stand clear. The engine started smoothly with the first kick of the starter and then warmed up slowly as I checked each instrument, and especially the long-range tanks. Around me the other twenty-five Hurricanes were also running and the noise from those powerful engines was deafening. Finally everyone was checked and we sat there with the props just turning over, waiting for the signal. It was bright clear daylight now and the sea had taken on its famous blue colour.

Two Blenheim aircraft had left Gibraltar just before dawn and were to rendezvous with the Ark at first light, then guide us to Malta like a mother hen with its brood of chicks. We sat there waiting impatiently for a sight of them. Nothing appeared in the sky as rendezvous time came, and for fifteen long minutes after that there was the greatest air of suspense over everything. Finally one Blenheim came winging towards us, a tiny black speck in all that vast expanse of sky, and shortly the Ark contacted it by means of Aldis lamp. As the guide flew around the carrier in a great circle the first fourteen Hurricanes were given the signal to take-off.

This was what we had all been waiting for and we watched breathlessly. Our carrier was travelling at about twenty-five knots, or roughly thirty miles per hour, and there was a light breeze of about fifteen miles per hour. This meant that we only had to get up to about fifty miles on the deck as the Hurricane can normally get off around eighty-five airspeed.

The first aircraft taxied into position exactly in the middle of that huge deck and just a few feet aft of the bridge. He had almost half the length of the deck for his run. The pilot applied the brakes, opened the throttle fully and then, as the plane strained forward, he released the brakes and went skimming forward.

Everyone of us heaved a sigh of relief when his wheels left the deck well before the end and he soared up into the sky. Quickly the rest taxied into position and took off. All did not go perfectly but there were no accidents. One chap left his brakes on too long and took off with the tail up, the nose down, and the props just ticking the deck bolts. Another took off too slowly and his plane dropped sickeningly out of sight over the prow. Luckily he attained flying speed before hitting the water and was able to climb up and join the formation.

As the fourteenth aircraft taxied into position the rest of us were signalled to stop our engines. We did so, wondering what on earth could be the trouble. When we gathered around the bridge it turned out that the first guide plane had missed the rendezvous and then used up so much gas looking for us that it could no longer make it to Malta. It had to turn back and the second Blenheim was the one that took our first fourteen aircraft with it. It would have been unwise for all the planes to go together as that would mean too many aircraft in the air over Malta at one time. It would take a good many minutes to land twenty-six Hurricanes and the German fighters would have a sporting time if they happened along. The Hurricanes were unwieldy with their extra tanks and the gasoline e supply would be dangerously low. With our lack of experience we couldn't put up much of a show against the 109s. With two guides we could land at different airports and at different times.

There was nothing for us to do now but go back to Gib with the Ark and its escort. This was a break for us in a way as we had a three or four day cruise on the lovely Mediterranean under the blue, blue skies and we took full advantage of it. It was fun to lie in the sun all day and to sleep in the open at night. When the carrier slipped into Gibraltar harbour again it tied up behind the 'Furious' as before. By now all the Hurricanes were assembled. Plans had to be slightly rearranged because of the twelve planes still on the deck of the *Ark*. Sixteen more were rolled across the planks to our deck, leaving eighteen still on the '*Furious*'. Very little time was wasted here, and again we steamed out of the harbour. This time the fleet consisted of the *Ark*, the '*Furious*', the '*Nelson*', two cruisers and seven destroyers. I believe that air and submarine attacks were the only worries of the Admiral as the Italian fleet would never come out against such a force as this.

There could be no slip-ups this time. The Navy had risked great deal to get these Hurricanes into the battle zone in a hurry. Once before they had sent aircraft off

HMS Nelson

from a carrier in the Mediterranean but the Navigator had miscalculated and they were sent off too soon. None of them, including the two Fairey Fulmar guide planes, had enough gas to reach Malta, and one by one they plunged into the sea. Another time a Hurricane had dipped a wing on take-off, crashed into the navigating bridge, and killed a good many Naval and Air Force men in the resulting explosion.

Early the first morning out a Vichy French aircraft came out to have a look at us. It was high up and kept well away but our Commander sent two Fulmars up to chase it home. The Fulmars had been placed in front of the Hurricanes and, although they didn't have too much room, they got off alright and gave chase. As soon as the enemy saw that two planes were missing from our deck it put its nose down and headed for home in a long fast dive.

Now the Commander had a problem on his hands. All hands available were summoned and in no time at all we had all the Hurricanes untied and rolled up to the front of the deck. Crash nets were then strung across behind for protection and the Fulmars came in to land. Their wings were then folded and they were taken down below on the lifts. Once again we untied all the Hurricanes and rolled them back again.

The rest of the day passed without incident and that night we were again briefed for the flight to Malta. It was comforting to see the great bulk of the '*Nelson*' riding beside us and the '*Furious*' just beyond it. The cruisers and destroyers kept a never ending vigil for aircraft and submarines. Three-thirty a.m. once more found us all up and dressed. I didn't have the same feeling of tension this time. Watching the others take off had relieved many worries on that score and this time we were reasonably certain that there would be no hitches in the proceedings.

We all followed the same procedure of carefully warming up the engines and checking all the instruments and controls. Then began the long wait, sitting in the cockpit with the propeller just turning over. Far off to starboard we could see the '*Furious*' and in the first light of day. On the horizon, we could see the propellers of the Hurricanes on her deck twinkling like sparklers.

At last the first guide plane appeared and started to circle the fleet. This time it was a Wellington bomber. Apparently the authorities were taking no chances of having a smaller aircraft run out of gasoline again. Immediately our first fourteen planes took off and climbed to meet their guide. Without a pause the second guide came into the circle and we were away.

I was amazed with the ease with which my Hurricane became airborne, as I was well up in the air by the time I passed the island bridge. In fact, Admiral Cunningham was standing in the open on the bridge and he was just about level with me. For the next few minutes I was busy in the cockpit checking all the instruments, pitch, throttle, flaps, undercarriage etc. I hadn't flown for over a month and everything seemed strange again. By the time I was organised and looked out to see what was going on in the air I was completely alone and my heart sank. Not an aircraft was in sight anywhere and the '*Ark Royal*' looked like a tiny splinter of wood floating there. For a few seconds I didn't know what to do.

To fly to Malta all alone seemed impossible as I never had been much good at navigating, and the prospect of finding a small island in all that expanse of water was not inviting. To land back on the *Ark* seemed equally impossible and if I remembered correctly we were ordered not to attempt to land if anything went wrong. The thing to do was to get in front of the convoy, then bail out and be picked up by a destroyer. It would be much cheaper to lose one aircraft than to risk a crash on the deck of the carrier.

The Navy had a very slick way of picking a man out of the sea. It was dangerous to stop a ship in order to let down a boat as it would then be a sitting duck for submarines. Instead they let down a big net affair arranged like a scoop. The net went several feet under water and as the captain guided the destroyer close, the nest would pick him up very neatly.

Just as I was wondering what on earth to do I spotted an aircraft ahead, then another, and another, and soon I had pulled up comfortably in the formation. It is very difficult when you are up in the air to pick put another plane. I had lost sight of the others at first and climbed a bit above them before looking out.

Our take off from the *Ark* had been without incident but we found out later that things had not gone so well on the '*Furious*'. The third Hurricane to leave hadn't attained flying speed by the time it hit the dreaded rise in the deck and it threw him up in the air. The plane stalled, dipped a wing, and plunged straight into the sea. Destroyers hurried to the spot to rescue the pilot but apparently he didn't have a chance to undo his harness and he went down with the aircraft. This tragedy couldn't stop the operation, however, but the rest of the boys had their hearts in their mouths as they opened the throttle wide and prayed. As each aircraft took off it left just that much more deck for the next one and things didn't go too badly after the accident. If anything had gone wrong with a plane while still on deck they would merely have shoved it overboard. The operation could not be delayed in any way for more than a minute or two.

Once in the air and grouped, we relaxed and let the guide do the work of navigating. Slowly the formations climbed up to ten thousand feet and it was beautiful up there. The Mediterranean is just as blue as all the stories you are told about it, but there are thousands of variations to the shade and depth of its colouring. Where the water is deep the blue is deep and brilliant. Where the water is shallow the colour is sky blue or emerald green. Wherever the depth varied the least bit the colour varied with it, running through all the brilliant blues and greens in the spectrum. To add to the effect, fleecy clouds, white as snow, were scattered below us and here and there a breeze riffled the surface of the clam water.

We flew at this height for over two hours and I enjoyed every minute of it. Never had flying shown me a lovelier panorama of scenery. Slowly the guide aircraft started to descend and soon we were right down on the 'deck', skimming the water at about a hundred feet. We were passing Cape Bon and the Germans had guns there and a few fighter squadrons. Before, we had spotted the African coast from time to time but now was the time to hide.

Suddenly little spouts of water started to appear below us and for a few minutes they had me baffled. It turned out that the Germans were firing their heavy guns from the Cape and the shells were exploding in the water below. Some of them must have whistled right through the formation but luckily no one was hit. Now we were approaching Pantelleria, the German-held island between Malta and Africa. There were good fighter squadrons based there. We were very lucky and no fighters came out to interfere with us. At last, after nearly four hours of flying, a spot appeared on the horizon and quickly grew until we could see that it was an island.

Malta is certainly a funny looking place from the air. Its coasts are almost vertical, rising straight out of the sea, and practically the whole surface of the island is divided into tiny little farms by low stone walls. This gives it a checkerboard appearance and the greater part of the island is of reddish stone and sand. At that time there were three airports on Malta and our Wellington led us right up to Takali, the most northern one. All aircraft landed safely and we climbed out, tired, stiff and sore but we were here at last. Station wagons met each Hurricane as it landed and instructed the pilots to taxi to certain dispersal areas, then drove the pilot to the Mess and a good lunch.

In the Mess the RAF boys who had been defending Malta for months welcomed us warmly and treated us to drinks and smokes before going in to eat. The talk was very interesting. This tiny island had been subjected to bombing and strafing continually and our fighters were up every day. The story of the RAF in malate will be written someday by someone who was there during the worst of it so I'll not try to do so now. We were not bombed or attacked during the short time we were there.

Our stay in Malta was very short. Replacement aircraft were needed there so twenty-four of ours were to stay. As mine was one to be left, I went along with the group who were to go on to the desert. We were taken to Valletta, the RAF base for sea operations and bombers. There the truck dropped us off at the Mess. The group I was now with consisted of twenty-four pilots only, eight officers and sixteen sergeants. The ride over from Takali had been very pleasant and had allowed us to see something of the countryside. As I said before, all the little farms were divided by low stone walls and this must have made it very difficult for an aircraft trying to make a forced landing. Time seemed to have stood still on this island for the peasants were still tilling the soil exactly as their ancestors had done a thousand years before.

Once at the Mess we were all taken inside for a cool drink and a rest. The trip to Egypt would not take place until the darkness of night could hide us, so most of the

group went for a swim in the nearby lagoon. The water was lovely and we stayed in it , fooling around for more than an hour. As the sun set, a bell was rung for dinner and once again our RAF hosts did us well with food and drink and stories. These boys had the job of protecting the famous Malta convoys and bombing the enemy in Africa and Italy.

A Sunderland flying boat was to be our transport to Egypt and shortly after dark we were taken out to it in a small boat. This was my first experience with a four-engined aircraft and I was an interested passenger. In order to watch the take-off I crawled forward over the luggage to the gun turret right in the nose of the plane. It was open so I could stand there and watch the whole procedure. First the Sunderland taxied far down the lagoon, testing each of its four engines on the way. Then we swung around into wind and a long line of buoys was lighted to show us the flight path. As the pilot revved up and we began to move I looked back at the red hot cowlings of the engines. They turned white hot and glowed brightly and as the water splashed right over them several times I couldn't see why they didn't crack, or at least get swamped.

The Sunderland made nearly a two mile run before it became airborne but once in the air the engines cooled down and blackened. They still showed blue exhaust flames from each engine and I could imagine that this would make a good target for any stray night fighter. The pilot circled over Malta to gain height, then set course for Egypt.

Actually this trip was long and boring. At ten thousand feet it was very cold and we huddled together for warmth. During the small hours of the morning one of the crew brought us some coffee, and we took turns exploring the ship and watching the pilot and navigator. The poor gunners were at open ports and nearly froze stiff from the cold despite the warm clothing they were wearing.

Sunrise from that height was a beautiful thing to see. We were still at ten thousand feet and, although the water below was still in darkness, the clouds around were bathed in lovely pastel colours. By the time the sun's rays were striking the water we could see a broken line on the horizon and presently the whole coast of Egypt was in sight. It was very pretty to see the soft brown and green land through the haze and soon we were flying over a headland and then circling a beautiful bay for the landing. The pilot brought the huge plane down so gently that I didn't even know when we first touched the water. He taxied in to a small boat and in a few minutes we stepped out onto the sandy beach of Africa. My part in Operation SCARLET was now complete. The rest of the boys flew their planes from Malta to Egypt the next day and all in all it had been a most interesting adventure.

Chapter 4

The sun had not been up very long when we landed at Abousuir (Abu Sueir) and we were tired and hungry. Station wagons took us to the Victoria Hotel through narrow, crumbling streets, and there we ate an enormous breakfast before turning in to sleep for a while. Our rooms were obviously the best in the place, being situated on top of the roof, one on each corner and they caught any small breezes there were. The heavy netting over the openings unfortunately nullified the advantage.

By noon we were up again and eager to see the sights. Don Lush, Crabby Lowther, Tommy Paterson and I decided to head for Alexandria. We managed to borrow a few pounds from young Mackenzie, (he had been smart and had nipped in to see the paymaster first thing) and boarded the street railway. This was a real Toonerville Trolley but it bounced along at a good rate.

The scenery was immensely interesting. At last we were seeing all the many things we had read about and heard about so often. The palm trees were just as they should be, the people too lived up to our expectations, being dressed in the traditional coloured robes and turbans. Even the great brutes of water oxen were there, dumbly plodding around in a circle, drawing water from the wells for the irrigation ditches. I was badly disillusioned, however, as in all the travelogues and picture books I had seen the natives and the scenery were very picturesque, but, in reality, they were also very dirty and such squalor and dirt. True, the business district and the residential sections showed lots of well-dressed people and good buildings but mixed up with them were ragged beggars and filthy little urchins with so many flies on their festering faces and eyes that they no longer bothered to brush them away. Some of the market places we passed were indescribable at close quarters and smelled to high Heaven. Even the water buffalo we had seen on the way were blind, festered, covered with a million flies and utterly apathetic.

After a time we got used to these sights and more or less ignored them but at first they were terrible to see. Once we passed along a canal and saw a most elaborate barge that must have belonged to Royalty. I could almost picture Cleopatra on just such a barge. Probably floating down that very same canal, There were lots of these barges and they made a pretty sight, but on closer inspection they too were dirty and smelled.

Eventually our trolley brought us to a square that seemed to be more or less the centre of things so we jumped off. There was a sidewalk café nearby and we sat down at one of the tables to take stock and watch the colourful parade. The street cars and their

passengers were the most interesting. For whistles the conductors used a rubber contraption that gave off a sound for all the world like the good old American razzberry. They seemed to pay little or no attention to the passengers and the cars rarely stopped. People jumped on or off whenever they felt like it and how the tickets were taken, or sold, I'll never know. The streets were full of horse drawn gharries, or cabs, and rickety old taxicabs dashed madly all over the place. They nearly clipped a half dozen people just as watched but the pedestrians paid no attention to them and walked on the road as much as they walked on the sidewalk.

We soon left the café and strolled around the streets to look in all the store windows and examine the various market places. None of us had had any time in England to buy tropical kit as we had not known whether our destination was Norway or the desert. Now we bought some shorts, shirts, socks etc in preparation for the desert.

Towards evening we made our way to the Grand Trianon Bar where a gentleman by the name of Nick the Greek presided. He made a point of being friendly with the Air Force and had a fantastic memory for names. Any of us could come in after weeks in the desert and Nick would greet us with a big hello, call us by name, and enquire about the other fellows. After we had been there for a while one of the 'Gilli Gilli' boys came in. These fellows are past masters at the art of sleight of hand and I have never see anything to match them. They wander around from bar to bar calling "Gilli gilli gilli" and at the first hint of interest they open up their old carpet bag and begin their tricks. After a short demonstration the hat is passed around and if the take is good then the boy will perform a few more tricks. As long as the money keeps dropping in to the hat the show goes on. One time one of them put a tiny little chick inside my shirt. I could feel the soft little thing in there against my skin but so help me when he pulled it out later it was a foot long garter snake.

Later we visited a small night club but by that time we were pretty tired and had had several drinks so we all piled into an old taxi and headed back for the hotel. We had seen too many sights and done too much for one day so we all slept till noon the next day.

Apart from a Ladies' afternoon bridge club there is no place in the world like the Services for rumours. Less than an hour after pour arrival word had spread that the new pilots would most likely be going to Palestine to join the squadrons at rest and to complete their training. This story was quickly squelched the minute we stepped into the Orderly Room after lunch that day. 33 Squadron in the Western Desert had been hit hard recently and just a few days before our arrival they had been caught on the ground at Sidi Barrani and thoroughly strafed by ME 109s. Four aircraft from 33 and several from other squadrons had been destroyed and two pilots seriously wounded. They had been sitting n the cockpits waiting for the signal to take off. Replacements were badly needed so we were ordered to get our kit together and assemble in the Orderly Room within the hour. Don Lush, Creighton Lowther, Tommy Paterson and I wasted no time in getting ready and we were joined by Lance Wade, the American, and young Mac Mackenzie.

Quickly our kit was thrown into a truck, we piled in after it, and were on our way through the streets of Alexandria. None of us was particularly sorry to leave the place so soon. Later we were to look on Alex as a wonderful place to go after a sojourn in the desert but right now we had had enough of it. The truck rocked

through the outskirts of the city and we turned into Amriya airport. The driver headed straight across the field, not giving us a chance to inspect the many interesting types of aircraft we could see, and pulled up beside an old Bombay transport plane. Within five minutes we were taxiing across the tarmac and out on to the field.

The flight was short and the pilot didn't even bother to climb up more than a few hundred feet. We could see the coast line and the flat scrubby desert but little else. In less than half an hour we were put down at a maintenance depot called Berg El Arab. The only thing about this place of any note was that it was here that the picture 'Desert Song' had been filmed.

Once again the faithful station wagons met us and took us to lunch in a large tent. We got our first 'taste' of the desert in the food there. Pretty soon the wagons picked us up with our kit and took us out to a row of old Hurricanes standing in the desert. Two mechanics, standing by, explained that these were re-conditioned planes from the Battle of Britain and they had been re-equipped with long range gas tanks built into the wings. This would make them suitable for much longer missions than the regular Hurricanes.

The aircraft had been sitting out in the sun all the time and when I opened the cockpit I was met with a blast of hot air and a swarm of flies. Climbing in I raised a veritable storm of sand and accumulated dust and in seconds I was hot and sticky and just about as uncomfortable as a man can be. After checking the cockpit and controls I started up the engine and got another blast of sand from the cockpit floor that blinded me and got into my mouth and nose. The prop blew up a cloud of sand behind but the wind was from that direction and in seconds I was in the middle of a small sand storm. Trusting to luck I opened the throttle and taxied out into the clear.

Lance was already out on the landing ground with Tommy, and the others were on the way so I pulled into line abreast with them and sat there waiting until all six planes were in formation. How we all got into the air safely I don't know. We started to do a formation take off but the lead plane smothered us in sand first thing. By this time I was well under way and didn't know whether to risk stopping and have the others run into me, or to go on and take off blind. I kept going but water streamed form my eyes and I couldn't see a thing. We all got off more by the seat of our pants than anything else. Once we were up in the air the cockpit cleared and I could see but it had scared me badly.

After straightening up and levelling off I pulled up beside Tommy and settled down to enjoy the sights. It was so interesting below that I decided to leave the navigating to Lance and just follow him. This was our first real view of this strange land and we eyed it a bit warily. It looked harmless enough but we had heard many stories of its treacherous sandstorms and of the boys who had been lost in it for days without water. Below us the land was flat and sandy with small scrubby bushes dotted here and there. On our right the monotony was broken by the blue of the sea and on our left there was a high escarpment that stretched westwards as far as the eye could see. To the south of that lay the real sand sea of shifting fine white sand.

Our flight led us over places with name like Alamein, El Daba, Fuka, and Bagush. Mostly we followed the coast road, that long narrow highway that was the only road from Alexandria to Tripoli. Thousands of vehicles scurried along its black surface. Reinforcements of men, food, supplies, guns, ammunition, tanks, trucks and all the paraphernalia of war heading for the front. Other thousands were making their way back from the front on their many duties.

On either side of the road and far back into the desert we could see army camps and landing grounds. As the land was so flat there was very little to choose from in picking a camp site or in laying out a landing field for the Air Force squadrons. The preferred area, of course, was along the coast because of the breezes and the swimming. Elsewhere they just drove their vehicles to a spot in the sandy waste, parked them, pitched their tents, and that was home.

After flying for about an hour we began looking for the landing ground at Gerwala where 33 Squadron was stationed. It was getting a bit dusky now and soon there would be no light. The sun is the fastest thing in the desert. In the evening it will be practically daylight one minute and night the next. The same held true in the morning when the sun came up over the horizon like a meteor. Looking around I could count no less than eight landing grounds, easily identifiable by the blown sand and he tracks. Which one was Gerwala? I for one had no idea at all and decided to go down and ask. Choosing the likeliest looking landing strip I headed into th wind and went down, followed by Tommy and Lance. We taxied up to a group of men, stopped the engines and climbed out.

The men proved to be Australians, and they were pilots of No.1 Fighter Squadron of the RAAF. Having watched our aimless wanderings from the ground they knew we were new boys, and lost, so they kidded u a lot but in the end we learned that Gerwala was just a few miles further along the coast. After exchanging pleasantries for a while we climbed back into our planes and prepared to take off. Lance started his up alright and was soon climbing into the sky but Tommy's and mine wouldn't start. The boosters, or starting carts, were away over on the other side of the field so the Aussies suggested that it would be better if we if we spent the

night with them. We accepted readily as the sun was low on the horizon and it would soon be dark.

One of the young pilots, Robby Roberts by name, took us in hand and drove back to his tent. There we met his chums, Fred Ecclestone and Bobby Jones. While we washed up they pumped us for news from England and the help that was coming and we asked them all about this strange new desert. After a time we went over to their Mess for supper and met the rest of the squadron,. The CO phoned to Gerwala to let them know where the two missing Hurricanes were. The Aussies were good hosts and Tommy and I spent a very pleasant evening with the. It was good to settle down in a cot for our first night in the desert.

(To be continued…)

CAN'T WAIT FOR THE NEXT INSTALMENT?
WANT YOUR OWN COPY OF 'GOON IN THE BLOCK'?

Don Edy's daughter, Jane Hughes, is waiting to take your order via her father's website:

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Make sure to say that you are a member of the 33 Squadron Association and have seen the serialisation in 'Loyalty'.

Bristol Type 130A Bombay Mark I, L5838, on a test flight from Aldergrove, County Antrim, before joining No. 216 Squadron.

Bristol Bombays served mainly in the Middle East, particularly with 216 Squadron. When the war with Italy began in June 1940, in the absence of more modern aircraft, 216 Squadron's Bombays were used as night bombers as well as in their principal role as transport aircraft. The design bomb load of 250 lb bombs under the fuselage was supplemented by improvised bombs thrown out of the cargo door by hand. The aircraft flew bombing sorties against targets in the Western Desert, including Benghazi and Tobruk, and against Italian Somaliland, until the build up of Wellington bombers in Egypt allowed the Bombays to concentrate on transport operations.

In the transport role, they ferried supplies and evacuated the wounded during the siege of Tobruk, while on 2 May 1941, Bombays of 216 Squadron evacuated the Greek Royal Family from Crete to Egypt. Five Bombays were used by the fledgling SAS in their first official operation, a raid on five forward German aerodromes on 17 November 1941.

Bombays evacuated over 2 000 wounded during the Sicily campaign in 1943 and one crew was credited with evacuating over 6 000 wounded from Sicily and Italy before the type was withdrawn from service in 1944. Around fifty aircraft were built and there are no known survivors on display anywhere in the world.

DETAILS FROM HMS ARK ROYAL LOG - SEPTEMBER 1941

1st to 6th – The ARK ROYAL was at Gibraltar.

7th - The ARK ROYAL was at Gibraltar.

[At 1500/7/9/41 the aircraft carrier FURIOUS and the destroyers COSSACK, LEGION, ZULU and LIVELY arrived at Gibraltar from the UK. The FURIOUS had embarked 49 RAF Hurricane IIs, that were to be flown off ARK ROYAL and FURIOUS to Malta.

Before entering Gibraltar harbour FURIOUS flew off nine Swordfish of 812 Sqd to North Front]

The FURIOUS moored stern to stern with ARK ROYAL and transferred 26 Hurricanes to ARK ROYAL.

8th – At around 0100 ARK ROYAL (Flag CINC Force H) with 26 Hurricanes embarked for Malta, and the destroyers GURKHA, FORESTER, LIVELY and LANCE departed Gibraltar on Operation STATUS.

[Operation STATUS was another 'club run' to fly off Hurricanes to Malta. Because ARK ROYALs deck was full of the Hurricanes the aerial A/S patrols were carried out by RAF Catalinas, possibly of 209 Sqd, from Gibraltar]

At around 0300 the light cruiser HERMOINE joined the force.

9th – At around 0330 north of Galite Island ARK ROYAL commenced flying off the first of the 26 Hurricanes for Malta. After flying off 14 Hurricanes the operation was aborted.

[The Hurricanes were to be guided to Malta by Bristol Blenheim IVs of 107 Sqd but only two Blenheims arrived from Gibraltar. So after flying off 14 Hurricanes the operation was aborted and ARK ROYAL, with 12 Hurricanes still embarked, set course to return to Gibraltar]

10th – At around 0700 ARK ROYAL commenced flying on the nine Swordfish of 812 Squadron from North Front.

At 0900 ARK ROYAL, light cruiser HERMOINE and the destroyers GURKHA, FORESTER, LIVELY and LANCE arrived back at Gibraltar.

ARK ROYAL tied up alongside FURIOUS and transferred the nine Swordfish of 810 Squadron to FURIOUS.

[At 1900/10/9/41the FURIOUS and the destroyers LEGION, FORESIGHT and FORESTER sailed from Gibraltar]

At 2100 Force H comprising NELSON (Flag CINC Force H), ARK ROYAL, HERMIONE, and destroyers ZULU, GURKHA, LANCE and LIVELY sailed from Gibraltar on Operation STATUS II.

[Operation STATUS II was a 'club run' to fly off RAF Hurricanes from the carriers ARK ROYAL and FURIOUS; these were the balance of the aircraft that FURIOUS had brought from the UK, the first tranche of which had been flown off during Operation STATUS]

At sea Force H was joined by FURIOUS and the destroyers LEGION, FORESIGHT and FORESTER.

11th – Force H steering easterly towards flying off position.

12th - By 0800 ARK ROYAL had flown off twelve Hurricanes and FURIOUS a further nineteen Hurricanes. One Hurricane crashed as it was taking off from FURIOUS, caught fire and catapulted into the sea, the pilot was killed. Force H then turned for Gibraltar steaming at 20 knots, FURIOUS's best speed.

[The Hurricanes were guided to Malta by seven Bristol Blenheim IVs of 107 Sqd from Gibraltar]

14th - At 0400 all forces arrived back at Gibraltar.

https://www.naval-history.net/xGM-Chrono-04CV-Ark%20Royal.htm

Thirty Three's Brothers In Arms

Eric Joseph Woods (33 Squadron: 1 June 1939 - 17 June 1941)

Harry Stephen Woods (33 Squadron: late 1941 - 14 December 1942)

Eric Joseph Woods was born in Sydenham, South London in 1921. He joined the RAF on a short service commission in August 1938, and 33 Squadron's ORB shows him arriving from UK as an Acting Pilot Officer (APO) on 1 June 1939, along with Pilot Officer DM Illsley, APO RCF Finch and APO VC Woodward. At the time, HQ, A and B Flt were based at Ismailia, while C Flight was in Haifa. Eric was confirmed in the rank of Pilot Officer on 27 June 1939.

Eric Joseph Woods

Nine months later, in June 1940, 33 Squadron was based at Mersa Matruh, commanded by Squadron Leader D V Johnson and equipped with 21 Gladiators, mainly Mk.IIs, and six Gloster Gauntlets Mk.IIs kept in reserve. It had 22 pilots in three flights. Records show that 33 Squadron included the following aircrew:

'A' Flight included:
Flight Lieutenant G. E. Hawkins
Flying Officer Monk
Pilot Officer Brown
Pilot Officer Preston
Pilot Officer Perry St. Quintin
Pilot Officer Eric Woods
Flight Sergeant Leonard Cottingham
Sergeant Roy Leslie Green

'B' Flight included:
Flying Officer Couchman
Flying Officer Ernest Dean
Flying Officer John Littler
Pilot Officer Alfred Costello
Pilot Officer Vernon Woodward
Sergeant J. Craig
Sergeant Shaw

'C' Flight included:
Flight Lieutenant Bolingbrooke
Flying Officer Henry Starrett
Pilot Officer Boulton
Pilot Officer E. K. Leveille
Flight Sergeant Harry Goodchild
Sergeant William Vale

Eric cut his teeth as a fighter pilot against the *Regia Aeronautica* in the skies over North Africa in 1940, bagging two Italian CR42 fighters in the process. He was promoted to Flying Officer on 3 September 1940 and was picked to deploy with the squadron from North Africa to Greece in January 1941, the 16-strong air party landing at Eleusis on 19 February 1941.

During the fighting in Greece, Eric bagged a Fiat G.50 over Berat airfield in Albania on 5 April, the day before Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece. In the well-known IWM photograph of 33 Squadron at Larissa in Greece (shown overleaf) Eric stands out as the fresh faced young man standing seventh from the left in his Sidcot suit, with Pat Pattle three to his left. It is somewhat irritating to see Eric mistakenly referred to as 'E F 'Timber' Woods' in the photograph, a nickname that was given to William Joseph Woods, flying with 80 Squadron in Greece in 1941, and Eric Norman Woods, who made his name with 72 Squadron in Malta in 1942. I have written to the IWM, highlighting the errors and asking to have them corrected. According to the family, and Marcel Comeau, Eric was known as 'Chico'.

By the end of April 1941 Eric was in Crete, part of the Hurricane Force on the island, but in May he was evacuated back to Egypt. The remnants of 33 Squadron reformed in June and was quickly back in action, supporting the unsuccessful Operation 'BATTLEAXE'. At 16:45 on 17 June 1941, 204 Group ordered the despatch of a dozen Hurricanes to carry out ground strafing sorties along enemy lines of communication and to attack dumps, camps and M/T in the Sidi Omar area. Six of the aircraft were drawn from the 33 Squadron detachment, led by Flight Lieutenant Woodward, and two from 229 Squadron detachment, plus one from 73 Squadron, with Flight Lieutenant Dudley Honor leading the 274 Squadron section.

Shortly into the flight a large number of enemy aircraft were sighted - Ju 87s from II./StG2 and 239[a]

33 Squadron at Larissa, Greece, 1941: ' Eric stands out as the fresh faced young man standing seventh from the left in his Sidcot suit, with Pat Pattle three to his left'.

Squadriglia, with escort provided by Bf 109s of 3./JG27 and G.50bis from 150[a] Squadriglia (take-off at 15:30). Three of the pilots managed to successfully engage the Stukas, of which 229 Squadron's Pilot Officer Douglas Edghill (Z4366) claimed two shot down, while 33 Squadron's Pilot Officer R. R. Mitchell (Z4630) and Flying Officer D. T. Moir (Z4175) both claimed one.

Meanwhile, the other Hurricanes soon became embroiled in a series of dogfights with the escort, Flight Lieutenant Vernon Woodward (Z4377) shooting down a G.50bis before he engaged and damaged a second. Sergeant Eric 'Jumbo' Genders (Z4174), also of 33 Squadron, claimed two more. Gender's claims were initially claimed only as damaged but were later confirmed by the Army. Flight Lieutenant Honor (Z4614) claimed a Messerschmitt damaged and Lieutenant Dudley Dove SAAF (W9298), who was attached to 33 Squadron, reported that he had shot down another, but four Hurricanes failed to return, including one (Z4509) flown by 33 Squadron's Flying Officer Woods, who was killed. He was 20 years old. This was 33 Squadron's first encounter with the enemy since Crete. At the time of his death Eric Woods was credited with 2 biplane victories and a total of 4.

Eric Joseph Woods RAF (41091)
(Photo: courtesy of Gill Heighway)

The name of Flying Officer Eric Joseph Woods RAF 41091 is engraved on Column 241 of the Alamein Memorial, located at the entrance to the El Alamein War Cemetery 130 kms west of Alexandria on the road to Mersa Matruh. Sadly, Eric has no known grave, yet his family were able to see his final resting place near Tobruk, thanks to the efforts of his brother, Steve, who followed him out to the Middle East and asked to join 33 Squadron.

Eric's grave, with wreckage from his Hurricane around the base of the cross.
(Photo: courtesy of Gill Heighway)

My Operational Tour with No. 145 Squadron
by Steve Woods (26 Dec 1921 - 15 Jun 2016)

Prior to joining the squadron I was trained as a pilot in Southern Rhodesia in 1941, followed by a period with an OTU at Khartoum, after being bombed out of Ishmalia, and then posted to Cairo to join a squadron.

Steve Woods – in training .
(Photo: courtesy of Gill Heighway)

I chose to go to 33 Squadron, as this was where my brother had served from 1939 to 1941. He was with the squadron in Greece and Crete, finally escaping from Crete in a Sunderland flying boat. Sadly he was shot down soon after returning to the Desert near Gambut. He bailed out, but his parachute failed to open. I later found his grave in the desert, near Tobruk.

Steve Woods – in the desert.
(Photo: courtesy of Gill Heighway)

I completed a tour of operation on Hurricanes with 33 Squadron, where I had the privilege of flying with Lance Wade who was my flight commander. I later took over his flight on 5th August 1942, until I was relieved for a 'rest' as an OTU instructor at El Ballah and Abu Sueir on Spitfires, Tomahawks and Kittyhawks. (Editor's Note: Flight Lieutenant Woods was posted out from 33 Squadron to H.Q.R.A.F.M.E. on 14 December 1942.)

After four months 'rest' Squadron Leader Wade, who was now in charge of 145 Squadron in Tunisia, had requested my posting to take over 'A' Flight, to relieve Flight Lieutenant Hesketh, who was due for his 'rest'. The Tunisian campaign was nearly over but the enemy was making great efforts to reinforce the ports around Tunis. Our squadron was involved in escorting Kittyhawk squadrons in strafing and bombing the shipping and ground forces around Tunis in a major effort to clear the enemy from North Africa. The final push was made on 6th May and the war in North Africa ceased 12 May 1943.

The squadron then moved to Hergla and then to Ben Gaden, by the coast of Tunisia. Here we were issued with 'G' suits to test. After being fitted into our suits they were filled with water to counteract the pressure on our bodies, so that we could take up to 7G in tight turns. It was very strange to see these Spitfires diving down to earth and then pulling out very sharply near the ground. The idea being that if we were being chased we would pull out of the dive and Jerry would crash!!!

Lance Wade

I recall during October a historic event took place. 145 Squadron under the command of Squadron Leader Lance Wade was to receive the Squadron Crest in the middle of a battle zone. In preparation for this great event, the CO arranged transport for the whole squadron to be taken to the nearest town for everyone to have a haircut and shoe shine, and in our best uniforms practice marching and saluting etc.

On the day a very smart squadron turned out, with flag pole and saluting base, and led by our American CO we paraded for inspection by Air Chief Marshal Sir Harry Broadhurst with Group Captain Brian Kingcome. The inspection was followed by the presentation of the 145 Squadron Crest to Lance Wade and we then marched past the flag and ACM Broadhurst took the salute. It was a memorable day.

In October Squadron Leader Wade completed his third tour of operation and Squadron Leader Kallio took over command of the squadron. He and I had previously served together in 33 Squadron as Flight Commanders. In February Squadron Leader Kallio was returning from a sortie and on landing he was caught in a crosswind and decided to go around again, but realised he would not be able to clear some trees. He tried to get down again but crashed and suffered a broken leg and had to leave the squadron.

Oliver 'Sandy' Kallio

As my tour of operations had finished I acted as caretaker (acting Commanding Officer) of 145 Squadron until Squadron Leader Neville Duke was appointed to take command on the 3rd March 1944.

I was interested when reading Neville Duke's War Diaries of an event which I had forgotten:

"Led early morning patrol of Cassino, but cloud lowering and nothing doing. Just as well after last night, some party. Lunch in Naples with Wing Commander Morris, Jock Wooler and Steve Woods.

To the opera in the afternoon and good to terrific opera house. On to the Orange Grove for food and drink then an extraordinary impromptu party with Squadron Leader Cox and CO at a RAF transit camp and some RAF nurses. Drink and Dance – grand fun. Got back with 12 glasses from the Orange Grove, a coffee pot and a chair from the transit camp."

What a way to finish a tour of ops!! I was offered a post in training Command in Italy, with promotion, but felt I wanted to see England again after 3 years overseas so … back to Blighty and the Central Gunnery School.

Neville Duke

Steve Woods died on 15 June 2016 and a service to celebrate 'a life well lived' was held on Wednesday 29 June 2016 at the South Oxfordshire Crematorium.

The Editor would like to thank Gill Heighway - yes, Simon's wife! - for allowing him access to personal family correspondence and letting him publish the personal family photographs.

No.145 Squadron – Lance Wade second from the right. I am still looking for Steve!

Steve with his medals during a BBMF visit -
DFC, 1939-1945 Star, Africa Star, Italy Star, Defence Medal

ACTION! 33 Squadron arrives at Benina.

Unseen RAFFPU footage recorded in November 1942 ,
then locked away for 77 years!

Last November, the week of the Puma Reunion, I was busy typing up the 33 Squadron ORB for 1942 when two entries caught my attention:

29 Nov 1942: 'Rising before the local poultry at 03.00 hrs 'B' Party, by this time accustomed to early rises, pulled out at 03.30 hrs, arriving in Benina at 08.00 hrs, completing a journey of 318 miles in 47 hours. The convoy was met by the C.O. and its arrival and dispersal filmed by No.1 R.A.F. Film Production Unit for their film "The move of Squadrons forward", in the present campaign….'

17 Dec 1942: 'Escort to a convoy was maintained from 08.40 hours to 17.25 by five sections of two aircraft. No. 1 Film Production Unit finished the work of filming the Squadron and left...'

Those two comments were the triggers for me to try and track down the actual footage of 33's arrival at the former Italian airfield at Benina, 21 km NE of Benghazi, as the Allies continued their post-El Alamein successes against Rommel's Afrika Korps and steadily pushed them out of Egypt, Libya and Cyrenaica. My hope was to find that the footage had been made into a film that Pathé News or the Ministry of Information had released to the general public during World War Two, a film that would now be available for viewing on You Tube and therefore could be uploaded to the Association website and copied for the History Room.

My first email went to the Curator of Film and Sound at the RAF Museum in London, who wrote back the following day to let me know that they did not have a copy, and suggested that I should contact the Imperial War Museum Film and Video Archive for help. I knew that Chris Perkins was planning to do some research at the IWM before the Reunion, so I asked him if he could enquire with the staff while I continued sorting through the online archives. At the Reunion Chris said that he been able to arrange an appointment with the IWM Film and Video Archive staff for 18 December.

At 11.39 on the 18th, I received an email from Chris while I was at work which started with the words: 'First find of the day' . After a quick demo by one of the IWM Film and Video archivists, Helen Upcraft, Chris had managed to crack the IWM filing system and was starting to reap the results! He had sent me a photograph of a RAF Film Production Unit (RAF FPU) Daily Progress Report sheet which had 'AME 34,' stamped on it, and was dated 7 December 1942. The report had a neatly typed description of the footage on that reel; Scene 3 read as follows:

'The squadron (No.33) arriving at the evacuated Italian aerodrome at Benina led by the Adjutant reports to the C.O. who signals them to dispersal.'

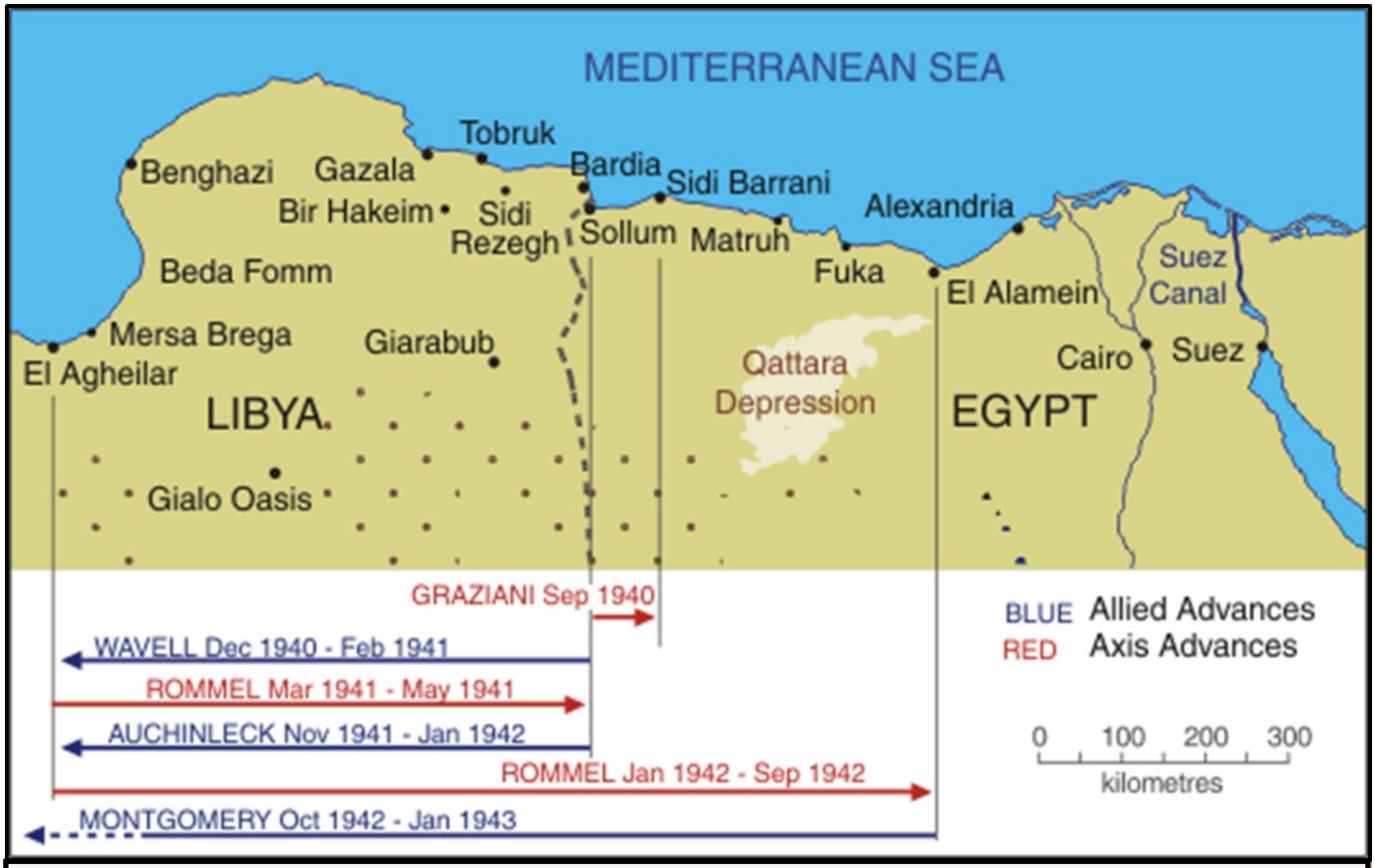
A little later his next message had the encouraging header, 'Results from Aladdin's Cave' and contained nine copies of RAF FPU Daily Progress Report sheets. On most of the sheets the words '33 Squadron' were visible. Bingo! The footage had been found. Having given his finds to Helen she was able to confirm that the film should be in good enough condition to view and download. Helen explained to Chris that the film reels were held at IWM Duxford and she would need seven days notice to get them down to London for viewing.

Excited by the prospect of seeing the films we hoped to visit the IWM in January but the group's unavailability issues muddied the water and we did not manage to get into London and see them at the IWM until Friday 29 March. The wait was worth it though as the quality, the clarity and the steadiness of the films, which had not been out of their film cans for viewing for 77 years, was incredible.

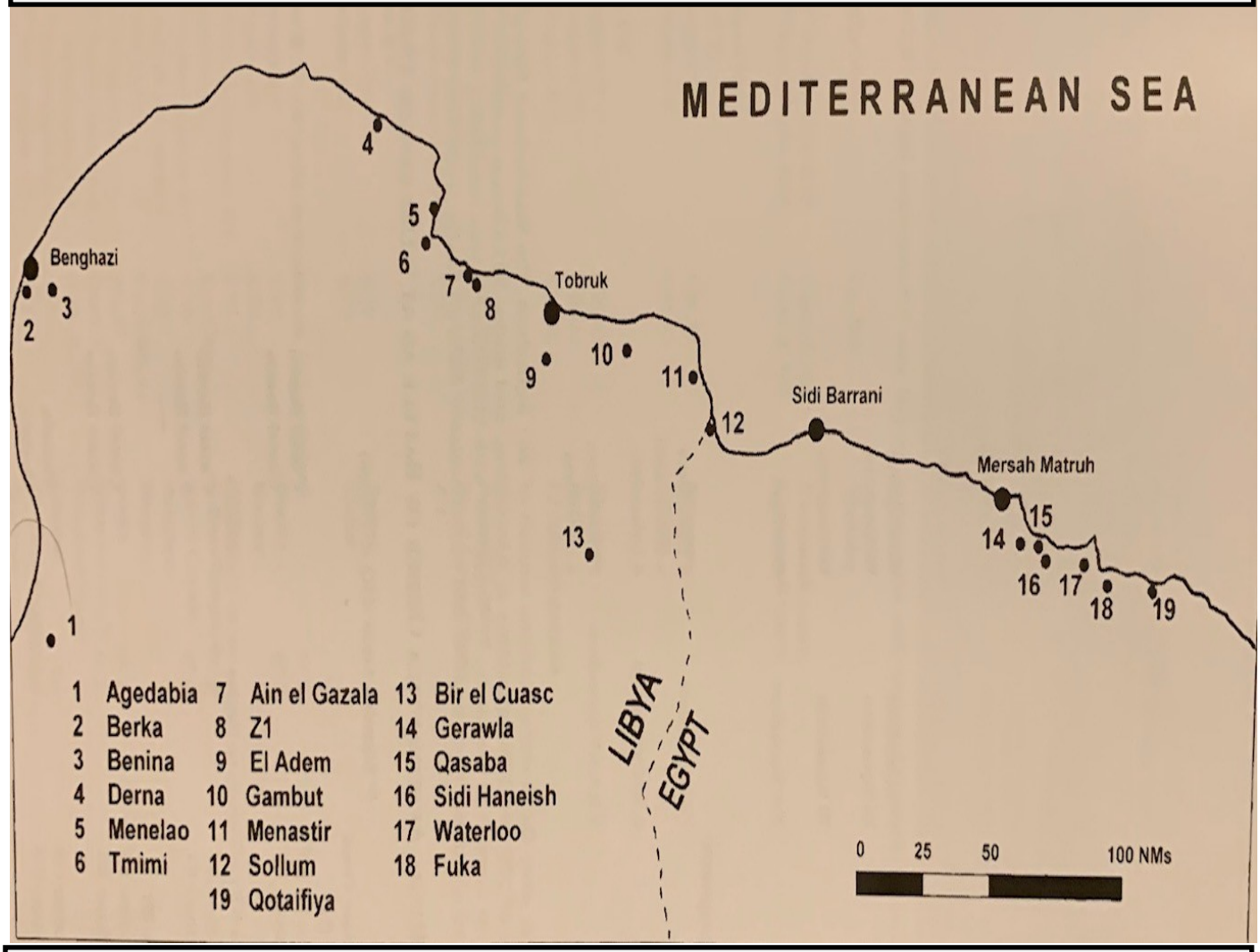
History

Before the start of the Second World War the Central Office of Information controlled publicity related to all military and civil actions, with the Director of Public Relations in the War Office being responsible for the affairs of the British Armed Forces. When the War broke out in September 1939, just one Army photographer, Geoffrey Keating and one film cameraman, Harry Rignold, accompanied the British Expeditionary Force to France. Two experienced pressmen, Ted Malindine and Len Puttnam, were among the photographers called up to record the British Expeditionary force in 1940. They both recorded the Dunkirk evacuation and were themselves evacuated twice from the French beaches.

It was quickly realised that the front line would be a dangerous place for untrained photographers as well as the possibility of them endangering not only themselves but the people in the battles they would have to photograph. On 24 October 1941, the Army agreed to form a corps of trained photographers and cameramen. The unit was called the Army Film and



Allied and Axis Advances in the Western Desert _ December 1940 to January 1943



Advanced Landing Grounds in Libya and Egypt 1941-1942

Photographic Unit (AFPU) and, under the leadership of Lt. Colonel Hugh St. Claire Stewart, Pinewood Studios was selected as their headquarters – as well as the RAF Film Unit and the Crown Film Unit, who produced propaganda films for the Ministry of Information.

There were many professional film and press photographers who had already been called up for service so they were quickly located and brought together in Pinewood Studios, which served both as a headquarters and training centre for the Units. Number 1 Unit was based in Cairo, which was to come into its own when retreat changed to offensive at Alamein, opening with the launching of the barrage skilfully and uniquely filmed by Sgt Billy Jordan, MM – who continued as a cinematographer, working in news, features and shorts for Associated-British Pathé, Alfred Hitchcock and The Children's Film Foundation.

The AFPU was deployed in all theatres of Allied action, often alongside special forces such as the Commandos, the Chindits, the Airborne, the SAS, the Special Boat Squadron and the Long Range Desert Group. All the major campaigns were filmed and photographed – and the footage from the Desert and North Africa Campaigns was used to produce 'Desert Victory' which won an Oscar for the best war documentary. On D-Day, 6 June 1944, ten men from the AFPU went with the first wave of troops ashore, whilst others landed with the airborne troops – continuing to accompany the Armed Forces as they fought through Europe. In later years footage from D-Day provided background information for the opening scenes of 'Saving Private Ryan'.

RAFFPU

The Royal Air Force Film Production Unit, typically abbreviated to the acronym RAFFPU, produced propaganda films depicting RAF personnel and aircraft both on the ground and in aerial action during World War Two from 1941 to 1945. Personnel included early commander Flight Lieutenant John Boulting; later, director Richard Attenborough flew camera missions over Europe.

The RAFFPU was formed after it was recognised that captured film footage was being processed by civilian companies before it could be securely classified. Additionally, many civilian cameramen were not able to be taken on bombing raids, so service personnel were trained to be able to perform these tasks. The RAFFPU had two main tasks; to document the RAF's work and to produce propaganda films involving the RAF.

One of its early successful propaganda films was 'Target for Tonight'. The aim of the film was to show the public how Bomber Command operated, especially with a crew drawn from Britain, Australia and Canada. The film followed a Wellington crew (F for Freddie) bombing railway infrastructure over Germany. The film was a big success with the British public and its investment of £6 000 was brought back 12 times over as it took £73 000 at the cinemas. The film's director, Harry Watt, later regretted that most of the allied aircrew who starred in the film, did not survive the war.

The RAFFPU mainly worked out of Pinewood studios which is where Richard Attenborough was seconded to. He starred in one of their films, 'Journey Together', which was directed by John Boulting. After the war, Attenborough went on to be directed by Boulting in the film 'Brighton Rock' because of his connection to the RAFFPU. Personnel from the film unit were present on many notable raids, such as Operation Jericho, the Amiens prison raid, which was flown to free members of the French Resistance under threat of execution. The director, Lewis Gilbert, also served in the unit during the Second World War.

The unit had access to Beaufort, Anson, Hudson, Havoc and Auster aircraft based at RAF Langley and RAF Benson, a fact confirmed by the Benson Heritage Centre curator, Mick Prendergast, recently. Whilst production stopped in 1945, the unit was officially stood down at RAF Stanmore Park in March 1947 when it became the Film Production Unit Library. These were some of the films produced by the RAFFPU:

Target for Tonight (1941)

Mosquito Day Raid (1942)

Fly Away Peter (1942)

Malta GC (1943)

Desert Victory (1943)

Operational Height (1943)

Now it Can be Told (1944)

The Big Pack (1944)

The Nine Hundred (1945)

RAAF over Europe (1945)

Journey Together (1945)

Air Plan (1945)

Pinewood Studios

Every year Pinewood Studios hosts a Remembrance Service on 11 November, specifically to honour the members of the AFPU and RAFFPU. There is a Memorial Plaque there which records losses proportionately as high as any Unit in the war. The plaque is displayed in the corridor leading to the cutting rooms where so much of the film footage, which is still frequently seen on television, was edited.

Chris Perkins matching the RAFFPU script to the film

Niall and Paul doing some WW2 aircraft recce

Roll ‘em! Dave Stewart with a genuine WW2 camera

Paul Davies with a gun camera mounted in the wing

Really? This is what they used?

When in the East End - DC tries pie, mash and liquor

“Doesn’t he look familiar? ”

Two RNZAF pilots flying with the RAF in Europe die within three days of each other in late 1944 - one in the Netherlands, one in Cornwall. Seventy five years later, genealogists confirm a suspicion….

Neil Evan McLeod MacDonald

Ian Douglas McLeod

You may recall the article in the last edition of ‘Loyalty’ about a chap called Ian McLeod, who had contacted Chris Perkins from Sydney in Australia after seeing the presentation that Chris had given to his local PROBUS branch about Walcheren online. Ian had been named after his uncle, a pilot with 66 Squadron who had been shot down and killed while attacking a train on Christmas Day 1944. He had recognized George Roney in Chris’s presentation because he had a photograph of his Uncle Ian sat next to George, as they had gone through flying training together. On the back of the photograph was written ’George Roney and self’.

Chris had sent me a copy of the photograph and I had thought that Ian MacLeod's face looked familiar. It was while I was looking through the photographs that Evan MacDonald’s nephew, Scott Beal, had sent over from Invercargill, when I was researching the Mixed Pickles story last year, that I thought I recognized the face sat next to George. I was convinced that I was looking at Ian McLeod standing between Evan and George in one of the photographs, and in another he was leaning against a Spitfire wing (see right, with unknown lady). Scott knew George’s face from an earlier ‘Loyalty’ issue, but had said that neither he nor any other member of the family knew who the other man was.

Acting on my hunch, I sent the photographs to Ian and Scott, and both agreed with me. That led to a flurry of emails between New Zealand and Australia, and they came up with a theory that both of their families had lived in Hedgehope, South Island, where Evan’s grandfather, Andrew MacDonald, had married a Christina McLeod, a relative of Ian McLeod. On Saturday 27 April 2019 Scott emailed me to say that a genealogist had confirmed that Evan and Ian were second cousins. Having discussed this with his mother, Scott wrote to say that she believes that the lady in the photograph was an Air Traffic Controller who Evan was seeing, and who had written to the family after Evan’s death. Sadly, no letters survive.

Jan Westhoeve went over to Heiderust Cemetery in Rheden last year to visit Ian’s grave. As an Association we still have to pay our respects to Evan, who came from Invercargill, while Ian came from Dunsdale, both on South Island. Evan was buried in Bath (Haycombe) Cemetery on 1 January 1945, having crashed near Predannack on 28 December 1944 while converting from the Spitfire to the Tempest V.