



1971- 2021: Puma reaches 50 years of RAF service

LOYALTY

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Top: The 30 Squadron/33 Squadron Memorial at Maleme in Crete.

Bottom: A wrecked German glider lying next to the Tavronitis Bridge, close to the airfield at Maleme.

ACE OF ACES - PAT PATTLE

Squadron Leader Marmaduke Thomas St John Pattle DFC and Bar

Extracts from ECR Baker's book about the top scoring Allied fighter pilot of World War Two



On the day that 80 Squadron returned from the forward operating base at Paramythia to Eleusis airfield near Athens, 33 Squadron was taking off for Larissa. The previous day, Pat's squadron commander, Squadron Leader 'Tap' Jones, had flown in to Paramythia to inform him that their remaining Gladiators were to be handed over to 112 Squadron, and that Pat's flight was to return to Eleusis for a short rest from operations. As Pat was about to protest that his flight did not need a rest, 'Tap' Jones told him the rest of the news. "As soon as you get to Athens, Pat, you had better see the tailor about getting an extra half ring sewn on. My orders are, that from the 12th March, you are promoted to Acting Squadron Leader and are to assume command of 33 Squadron." Looking down on Eleusis airfield as 33 Squadron's Hurricanes took off, he was not impressed with the straggly-looking formation.

When 80 Squadron landed at Eleusis, they also received the news that Pat had been awarded a Bar to his Distinguished Flying Cross, and Sergeant Hewett had been awarded a Distinguished Flying Medal. As there were no operations, 80 Squadron had a celebratory party which continued well into the early hours and even the normally sober Pat had to be helped back to his quarters. On 12 March 1941 Pat took his leave from 80 Squadron, which he had been with since its reformation at RAF Kenley in March 1937, deploying with it when it moved to Egypt in April 1938. The 80 Squadron ORB summed up the thoughts and sentiments of everyone in the squadron:

Pattle promoted to Squadron Leader and posted to 33 Squadron to command. It was a sad day for the squadron when it had to say good-bye to Pat, as his great skill and determination as a pilot, combined with his sterling personal qualities had contributed in no small measure to the success of the squadron. His promotion is well deserved and the good wishes of all go out to him in his new position.

33 Squadron had many years of overseas service in the Middle East to its credit and, until the arrival of 80 Squadron in the desert, had been undisputed premier fighter squadron in the command. Unlike 80 Squadron, which was a closely knit unit with a tremendous team-spirit, 33 Squadron's reputation had been established by the sheer brilliance of its pilots as individuals. They were a tough bunch who hated red tape; discipline was practically non-existent. Most of the pilots were pre-war regulars and the wide range of accents confirmed that they had come to the squadron from many distant parts of the Commonwealth.

There was Ping Newton, a Rhodesian who always seemed to find himself in the odd spot of bother now and then, such as coming back from a sweep with his undercarriage full of camel thorn. Another who hailed from Rhodesia, where he had been in the Police Force, was the happy and carefree Frankie Holman. He was the humourist of the squadron, and very popular with everyone. In the desert he had shot down half a dozen of Mussolini's aircraft and had already added to this when flying with a detachment of Hurricanes at Paramythia.



Ping Newton examines Charles Dyson's shepherd's crook given to him by Greek peasants after his crash-landed. (Photo: C H Dyson.)

British Columbia in Canada was the home of Vernon Woodward, who was probably the quietest member of the squadron on the ground. But in the air he was a killer, and with twelve Italian aircraft to his credit, headed the squadron's scoreboard. John Mackie also came from Canada. Tall, dark and good-looking, he was most popular with the fairer sex, and his tent was crammed with photographs of women in full dress, undress, and even no dress at all.

Charles Dyson, better known as 'Deadstick', because of his numerous forced-landings in the desert without the use of his engine, came from Jhansi in India. Already he had collected two 'gongs': a Distinguished Flying Cross awarded in September 1939 for operations in Palestine, and a Bar to this decoration awarded in December 1940 after he had shot down six Fiat CR.42s in less than fifteen minutes.

From Johannesburg, where he had been a secretary before the war, came Harry Starrett. Not a brilliant flyer, but a very sound type, Harry could always be relied upon in a crisis, and already had four Italian scalps in his belt. Kenya had presented the squadron with a real baronet – 'Blueblood' Kirkpatrick they called him. Very tall, elegant and good-looking, his gentlemanly bearing and Oxford accent showed clearly to the others the benefits of an English Public School education. His calm reserve never deserted him, even in the middle of a dogfight, and he was respected for it by everyone.

The Flight Commanders were both English. Flight Lieutenant Littler, the stoutish leader of 'A' Flight, was known to everyone as 'Pop' for some other reason than age – possibly wordly wisdom, size, appetite or even his appreciation of food. The other flight leader, Dixie Dean, was already well known to Pat, for he had been

with 80 Squadron at Ismailia. He was a quietly spoken charming character, full of fun, but he took his job seriously and led his flight well. He possessed a terrific wardrobe of pyjamas and unknowingly helped to kit out Pat in night attire, soon after Pat took command of the squadron. Pat had only one solitary pair of rather tattered pyjamas when he arrived at Larissa and his batman, who also looked after Dixie's kit, felt so sorry for his new C.O. that during one of his dhobying sessions he 'accidentally' miscounted and left one extra pair for Pat – and one pair less for Dixie.

Another Englishman, who at this time was an unknown flying officer, but who was to become a group captain with a DSO and several DFCs, was Pete Wickham. An ex-Cranwell cadet who had joined 33 from 112 Squadron, Pete was a very aggressive character, who lived and fought hard. He was to end the war with very nearly a score of 'kills' to his credit.

Of the sergeant pilots attached to the squadron, Len Cottingham was undoubtedly the most experienced. A stocky man from Grimbsy, Len had been with 80 Squadron before coming to 33. He had proved his worth in the desert, where he had shot down three Fiat CR.42s and a Savoia 79. He was to shoot down many more aircraft in Greece and to win a well-earned Distinguished Flying Cross soon after being promoted to warrant officer.

They were a cosmopolitan crowd who had little respect for authority, but as fighter pilots they were first-rate. Already they had chalked up ninety-one victories for the loss of only four pilots in the desert war, and now they had arrived in Greece they were all out to catch up on 80 Squadron's score.

Their Hurricanes had remained in the Athens area for



Fiat CR.42



Savoia Marchetti SM.79

several weeks, and the pilots were getting bored whilst they awaited the arrival of their new C.O. When they heard that Squadron Leader M T St John Pattle from 80 Squadron was to be the new boss they had at first been indignant. They all felt that one of their own flight commanders should have been promoted. However, they had all heard of Pat's reputation as a fighter pilot, and many of them had flown with him in the desert, so that by the time they assembled at Larissa to meet their new leader they were quite prepared to listen to him.

"This is my first command," Pat began, "and I intend to make it a successful one. You have done well in the desert, but you are not a good squadron. A good squadron looks smart. You are a scruffy-looking lot! Your flying, by my standards, is ragged. Flying discipline starts when you start to taxi and doesn't end until you switch off your engine. In future you will taxi in formation, take off in formation and land in formation at all times unless your aircraft has been damaged, or in an emergency."

Pat then apologised for his lack of experience in a Hurricane. He had, after all, only been flying one for a few weeks, whilst the others had been flying Hurricanes for more than six months. If any of the pilots of 33 would oblige, he would be very glad to get in a little dog-fighting practice during the afternoon.

After that berating, here was the ideal chance for the pilots to get their own back. Almost unanimously they selected Ping Newton to take on their new squadron commander. If Ping was not the best pilot among them, he was certainly the most reckless, and would undoubtedly soon put Squadron Leader Pattle in his proper place with a Hurricane, if not with a Gladiator.

After lunch all the squadron personnel assembled on the airfield to see the show. Pat and Ping agreed on a procedure. They would climb up in formation and at 10 000 feet they would separate, coming in for a head-on attack at constant height and power settings. A break to the right and the fight would be on, with neither of them having an advantage.

Ping had worked out his tactics carefully. The two Hurricanes approached and broke away. Like a flash Ping pulled high to the right, slammed on full right rudder with the stick back, flicking viciously and catching the flick on the three-quarter roll mark to go swinging back in a steep diving turn to the left. Ping felt proud of himself. He had never done this manoeuvre better. Pattle should still be turning to the left and all Ping would have to do would be to pull back for the deflection shot. He looked for his C.O. in his sights, but there was not a sign of him. What had happened? Ping pulled up hard and flicked again. Still no sign of Pattle. Something made Ping look in his rear-view mirror. He

could hardly believe it! Pattle's Hurricane was sitting on his tail not twenty yards behind him. This was terrible. Ping gritted his teeth and pulled and pushed and hammered at the controls. His head wanted to burst and there was a red film over his eyes. But every time he glanced in his rear-view mirror there was Pattle's Hurricane, sitting right on his tail. Only now he was so close that he was almost formatting with Ping's aircraft.

Ping gave up and they started again with another head-on attack. But it was hopeless. Within seconds of the fight starting Pattle was back on his tail and remained there.

When they landed Pat was smiling.

"You fly quite nicely, Ping, but you are much too smooth on the controls. You've got to be rough with them in a dogfight!"

Ping's head was drumming, and his whole body ached from the exertion of it all.

Pat ignored the silent onlookers. He knew that he had convinced them of his capabilities as a pilot, but psychologically it was not the correct time to press home his advantage. He would let them brood on it for a time.

The next morning he was up early, inspecting dispersals, maintenance, instrument section, armoury and the signals department. Everywhere he was greeted with a smart salute. He had earned the respect of the ground staffs by his example and skill in the air, and they were quite willing to believe that this small man with the steady eye and unwavering square chin would be just as determined and reliable on the ground. Already he had begun to win their loyalty and admiration, which was the first step towards making his squadron smart and successful.

The Hurricanes began formation-flying practice after lunch, and when any aircraft lagged behind Pat's voice was polite and calm, but crisp and firm, and the unfortunate pilot knew that it was meant to be obeyed. Soon the formation flying was perfect. Cloud flying, practice interceptions, air-firing tests and mock dog-fights followed, and within a week the whole squadron had begun to click together as a team.

When they were not flying the pilots were usually sitting in a circle by the operations hut, discussing ways and means, and then flying again to try them out. During these discussions Pat's view on air fighting were stimulating and provided that lively spark which gave all the pilots complete confidence in his ability, both as a fighter pilot and as a leader of men.

"You must be aggressive in the air," he would say, "but not to the extent of recklessness. Always be ready to take the initiative, but only when you have the enemy



Pilots of No. 33 Squadron RAF, at Larissa, Greece, with Hawker Hurricane Mark I, V7419, in the background.
Above L-R: Pilot Officer P R W Wickham, Flying Officers D T Moir and V C 'Woody' Woodward, Flight Lieutenant J M 'Pop' Littler, Flying Officers E H 'Dixie' Dean, F Holman, and E J 'Chico' Woods, Pilot Officer C A C Chetham, Flight Lieutenant A M Young, Squadron Leader M St.J 'Pat' Pattle (Commanding Officer), Flying Officer H J Starrett, Flight Lieutenant G Rumsey (Squadron Adjutant), Pilot Officers A R Butcher, W Winsland, and R Dunscombe. (IWM)



aircraft at a disadvantage. You must be ready to react instinctively in any situation and you can only do this if you are alert both physically and mentally. Good eyes and perfect coordination of hands and feet are essential. Flying an aeroplane in combat should be automatic. The mind must be free to think what to do; it must never be clouded with any thought on how it should be done."

The squadron soon settled down in Larissa, and after the desert enjoyed being 'out to grass'. Larissa town looked very different from Pat's last impression of it. Less than a fortnight earlier a violent earthquake had reduced most of the town to ruins and much of what still stood had been unmercifully bombed by the Italian Savoias. With the arrival of 33 Squadron, the bombing raids had ceased.

The troops salvaged various equipment from the ruins of the town, which helped to make the so-called field conditions a little more bearable. There were soon iron bedsteads to replace the camp beds in the canvas tents, and these were followed by stone fireplaces, built by handyman pilots from the piles of debris in the town. Various livestock found wandering among the ruins was escorted to the airfield and soon a miniature farm flourished behind the cookhouse tent.

On 23 March, Pat led his new squadron for the first time on an operational mission. Thirteen Hurricanes left Larissa soon after half past six in the morning, and after a pleasant forty-five minute trip over the Pindus Mountains arrived in the beautiful valley of Paramythia. They joined forces with eleven Gladiators from 112 Squadron and set out to escort six Blenheims from 84 Squadron on a bombing raid to Berat. Thick cloud forced the whole formation to fly just below the cloud base of 1900 feet. The bombers made their bombing run at 1500 feet and were successful both in hitting their targets accurately and getting away from the area without a great deal of damage from the considerable amount of anti-aircraft fire. 33 Squadron's Hurricanes were not so lucky, two receiving severe damage to wings and fuselage but capable of flying back but at a reduced speed, guarded by Frankie Holman's section. Near the Albanian border Charles Dyson was jumped by a Fiat G.50, which holed the Hurricane's glycol and petrol tanks before climbing away in to cloud. Dyson managed to nurse his Hurricane a few miles south before the engine came to a grinding halt and he had to bale out. Having been picked up by a Greek patrol, he was back at Larissa within a few hours.

After lunch Pat received orders to ground-straft the aerodrome at Fieri as a reprisal for an earlier Italian raid on Paramythia. It was a tough assignment. Fieri was a long way behind the Italian lines and was known to have heavy anti-aircraft defences and a standing

patrol of fighters over the field. At the pre-flight briefing Pat detailed the way to the target, in two sections, making the final approach at a steep glide in order to effect some element of surprise.

Not one of the ten pilots relished the thought of strafing Fieri, and most of them breathed a sigh of relief when, shortly after starting the final glide on the field from a height of 25 000 feet, they were attacked by a strong force of about twenty Fiat G.50s and Macchi 200s. For the next ten minutes it was a free-for-all, during which the Hurricanes 'hammered the hell out of the I-ties'.

They were all split up during the fighting and, with fuel running low, they straggled back to Paramythia. One by one they landed, then someone realised Pat had not returned. They scanned the sky anxiously as the minutes ticked by, knowing that if Pat was still in the air his fuel endurance was almost expired. Then they heard the buzz of a Hurricane in the distance. Pat landed and they all surged around him. In turn he questioned everyone on the results of the sortie. Frankie Holman, Vernon Woodward and Ping Newton claimed three kills and a couple of probables, but Pat listened without a smile. He was white-faced and angry. "I am not interested in the dog fight. Your orders were to ground strafe Fieri aerodrome. How many of you did so?"

Only Vernon Woodward had gone on to the airfield. The others, once they had been jumped, had never given it a second thought. Pat berated them for about ten minutes, turning the air blue, and then he told them his story. When the fighters had attacked, he had immediately set one on fire, and then pressed on to Fieri, where he made three runs over the airfield in the face of a solid wall of flak, destroying three aircraft on the ground and shooting a fourth as it was approaching to land. He saw it roll on its back at about 200 feet, but as he did not actually see it hit the ground he would only claim this as a probable!

This was very typical of Pat. He knew the risks he was taking; he was a frightened as anyone. But the order was to ground-straft Fieri and orders were to be obeyed. He would calculate the risk and minimise it by clever tactics, but he would never evade the job to be done.

The latter part of March was fairly quiet and there was not a great deal of flying, except for training trips and the occasional recce flight. Pat, as usual, was not happy in being grounded for too long and, leaving most of the administrative work to his Adjutant, George Rumsey, spent a lot of time in the air with a group of youngsters who had only recently joined the squadron: Pilot Officers Winsland, Dunscombe, Chetham and Sergeant Genders. They had yet to meet the enemy in the air and had a lot to learn. They had an excellent instructor in

Pat and, accepting his advice without question, they all learned quickly. In a short time Pat was convinced that given the chance they would all prove to be sound, efficient and reliable pilots on operations.

Pat was Station Commander at Larissa, as well as being the C.O. of 33 Squadron, and was responsible for everything that happened on the airfield. There were no other personnel other than the squadron based on the aerodrome, except for an Army Liaison Officer, by the name of Captain Churtons. The safety of the Hurricanes worried Pat, which were dispersed around the perimeter of the airfield and covered with bushes and branches in an attempt to conceal them. Pat knew that the Italians would one day pluck up enough courage to strafe the airfield, and many Hurricanes could be set on fire. They needed to be moved to a refuge, unknown to the enemy. The problem was that it had to be sufficiently large and flat for a Hurricane to land, and yet from the air had to look too small to be a landing ground.

After a great deal of searching, Captain Churtons eventually came up with the perfect solution. Six or seven miles south-west of Larissa he found a grass field, much smaller than Larissa and relatively flat and well drained. It was of a rectangular shape, with a deep ditch running along one of the shorter sides. When Pat first saw it from the air he had grave doubts as to whether it was big enough to land a Hurricane, but decided to try. By touching down as near as possible to one side of the field, and by using full flaps and very generous application of the brakes, he finished up only a few yards from the ditch. Others tried and landed successfully, so from then on the satellite airfield came into being and was used daily as a dispersal area. A small tented camp with field-cooking facilities was organised and the site christened 'Churtons' Bottom' in honour of its discoverer.

Pat was most anxious to see that the squadron was never caught unawares by an enemy raid, and after much thought and discussion with his officers organised an early warning system which was to prove most successful. With the aid of Captain Churtons he established a considerable number of observation posts at strategic positions on hilltops to the north, east and west of Larissa. Each post was equipped with a telephone which was in direct contact with a group of airmen acting as operators in a small wooden hut on the airfield at Larissa. This operations hut had a large table in the centre, covered with a huge map showing each of the observation posts, which were boxed off into squares and identified by using the letters of the alphabet.

When an enemy raid was spotted by the observation post it would immediately contact the operations hut at Larissa, give its own code letter and then the number

of aircraft involved, the estimated height and the direction of the raid. On receiving this information the operator at Larissa would place a card giving all these facts at the appropriate spot on the map. The Operations Control Officer in direct radio contact with the stand-by flight would then pass on this information, and within thirty seconds of receiving news of the raid the stand-by Hurricanes would be taking off from both Larissa and Churtons' Bottom. From the beginning, the early-warning system, operating daily from dawn to dusk, was most efficient and was a boon to the squadron.

Pat and 33 Squadron were at Larissa when news of the German attack came through early on the morning of 6 April; instantly all aircraft were refuelled and rearmed ready for immediate take-off. But it was not until after lunch that Pat received his orders to make an offensive sweep over Bulgaria. In the Rupel Pass the Hurricanes met the Luftwaffe for the first time, but were not impressed by the Germans. A formation of twenty Me. 109s was engaged by the squadron, which quickly knocked down five of them with suffering even so much as a scratch. Frankie Holman had his first experience of flying wingman to Pat in a dogfight, and after landing commented: 'I never had a chance – we came up right behind this pair of 109s – Pat just gave them a left and a right and it was all over. Both went down in flames.'

Len Cottingham shot down another 109, whose pilot baled out. As the parachute floated down another 109 circled round to give protection, but this aircraft was also shot down by the tubby flight sergeant. The fifth Messerschmitt was downed by the aggressive Wickham.

The squadron was still in the air returning to Larissa when the early-warning system was brought into action for the first time. Pop Littler and Kirkpatrick took off, and about five minutes later were followed by Vernon Woodward's Hurricane; his ammunition belts were still being loaded when the alert was given and he had to wait for the armourers to fix the covering panel. When he took off only the four guns in the port wing would fire. The other four in the Starboard wing were empty.

Littler and Kirkpatrick intercepted five Cant Z. 1007's over Volos Harbour, and after firing all their ammunition sent one of the Cants down in flames and chased the others away. Woodward caught up with these four over the Gulf of Corinth, and by means of some excellent shooting got two of them in flames and so seriously damaged a third that it eventually dived into the sea near the western mouth of the Gulf. When Woodward returned to Larissa with not a single round of ammunition in his guns Pat and the rest of 33 were there to him. As he told his story all the chaps crowded round to congratulate him, except Pat. He was most annoyed when he learned that Vernon's aircraft had

not been fully loaded with ammunition.

'You might have downed the lot if your groundcrew had been more efficient,' he barked at the quiet Canadian. 'Don't let it happen again!' Then in a softer, friendlier tone, as the astonished Woodward stood speechlessly in front of him; 'Come on, Woody. I'll buy you a beer.'

They all adjourned to the mess tent, where the beer was quickly supplemented by half a dozen bottles of sherry, which seemed more suitable to celebrate the squadron's most successful debut on operations with the Luftwaffe. The following morning the miserable weather matched their hangovers, and no one was sorry when all operations were cancelled until the cloud lifted.

By three o'clock the mist had cleared, and Pat led six Hurricanes to escort the bombers of 11 Squadron, which had been detailed to bomb a German transport convoy near Strumitsa. The Blenheims and Hurricanes were on their way back, flying at 17 000 feet; below in the haze they could vaguely discern the Struma pass like a twisted cotton thread. Quite suddenly Pat shouted: 'Bandit dead ahead at about five thousand feet.'

They all searched the indicated spot, but could see nothing, so Pat left them all with the bombers and dived away to deal with the intruder. About thirty seconds later everyone saw the enemy plane, when it burst into flames. Pat rejoined them, took up his station on the starboard side of the Blenheims and then, at the request of the leader of the bombers, informed him that the enemy plane had been a Fiat CR.42.

For the whole of the week the weather was shocking; if the situation had not been so critical, the squadron would have been grounded. As it was, Headquarters requested the aircraft to take-off whenever possible in order to give some support to the hard-pressed Greek and British troops, who were striving desperately to hold the increasing pressure from the overwhelming number of Nazi invaders.

On the 8th the squadron flew through almost solid cloud over some of the most dangerous mountains in Europe, whilst escorting eight Blenheims from 211 Squadron. They bombed and strafed an airfield near Patrish in Yugoslavia, where they left a number of aircraft blazing on the ground. Not a single German aircraft came up to intercept them. The weather was probably too bad for them to take off.

The following day the weather was even worse and it was impossible to even think about getting the bombers off the ground. Six Hurricanes from 80 Squadron, who had tried to carry out a fighter sweep,

were forced to land at Larissa after getting hopelessly lost in the mountains. The only Hurricanes from 33 Squadron which managed to get into the air were those of Pat and Charles Dyson. By pure chance they came across a Ju. 88 which was heading south towards Larissa. Pat gave it a good burst of machine gun fire which caused smoke to gush from the starboard engine. As it disappeared into the clouds he was almost sure that he saw flames spurting from the engine. He could not be certain, however, and consequently when he landed claimed only a 'damaged'. After lunch he was delighted when it was confirmed that the Ju.88 had crashed and, since there was nothing else to do at Larissa, he drove out with Frankie Holman to inspect the remains.

The squadron took the Blenheims of 11 Squadron to Betjol in Yugoslavia just before dusk on 10 April, and over the target had to ward off a number of attacks by Messerschmitts. Pat downed a 110 which crashed in flames, and a 109 which spun down, after its pilot had hurriedly evacuated his doomed aircraft.

Pat got another two Huns just after breakfast on the morning of Good Friday. He was already in the air on his way to the satellite airfield at Churton's Bottom when the early-warning system announced the presence of a number of unidentified aircraft flying fairly low near Volos. Within a few minutes he was over the harbour, sighted several Heinkel 111s and Junkers 88s apparently trying to lay mines in the sea at the entrance to the harbour. He managed to send two of the minelayers into the watery depths before the standby flights of Hurricanes arrived and chased the other away.

With a general improvement in the weather the next day, the squadron was able to fly on two sorties. During the morning they flew an escort mission with six Blenheims, and all returned safely without sighting a single enemy aircraft. In the afternoon Pat led his Hurricanes on an offensive sweep along the Struma valley, during which he shot down a Dornier 215. As the squadron was returning to Larissa they were warned over the radio-telephone from the operations hut to keep an eye open for three Savoia 79s escorted by Me.109s. Almost before he had finished acknowledging the message Pat sighted the enemy formation flying some 2000-3000 feet lower down on the starboard beam. The escorting fighters were flying on either side of the three-engined bombers. Ordering the last three sections to keep the Messerschmitts busy, Pat led his own section, consisting of Frankie Holman and Harry Starrett, to attack the Savoias. He chose the leading Savoia as his target, and went about his task in his own recommended way. First he silenced the rear gunner, then he holed the petrol tank, and finally put a short burst into the escaping fuel, with the result that the

bomber ignited and fell away enveloped in flames. Holman and Starrett took a little longer, but between them managed to shoot down a second Savoia. Pat was unable to find the third Savoia, so he dashed off to help the rest of his squadron, who were actively engaged with the Messerschmitts. Unfortunately he was now very low on ammunition and had time for only a short burst at one of the fighter, which caused one of its undercarriage legs to fall down, and a panel about a foot square to fall from beneath the starboard wing. He followed it for a minute or so, hoping that he had damaged it enough to make it crash-land, but a glance at his petrol gauge soon made him break away and head for Larissa.

The early-warning observation posts were connected to the operations hut at Larissa by telephone which had to go through the exchange at Salonika. Consequently when the Germans captured the great Greek port the system was put out of action and the squadron had no means of knowing what was happening on the other side of Mount Olympus. As a result Pat had to send up aircraft singly and in pairs on reconnaissance flights.

During one of these lone reconnaissance flights on Easter Sunday, 13 April, Vernon Woodward was intercepted by three 109s between Monastir and Vire. He put up a magnificent flight in spite of the odds, shooting down one 109 for certain, and damaging a second before breaking away to continue his sortie.

Pat was in the air three times during Easter Sunday. Early in the morning, directly after lunch, and again just before dusk., he was leading his Hurricanes on escort duty. The Blenheims were conducted to Yanitsa, Ptolemais and Koziani, and each time bombed their targets and returned safely, without meeting the Luftwaffe.

Another raid by six Blenheims from 211 Squadron, for which no escort was available, was not so fortunate. All six Blenheims were shot down in flames before they even reached their target area. The Luftwaffe was now operating fighters and dive bombers from forward landing strips in the north of Greece., refilled and rearmed by scores of Junkers 52 transport aircraft. These would have been juicy fat targets if the Hurricanes could have got to them, but Pat's squadron was fully occupied defending the Anzac positions north of Mount Olympus, when they were not engaged on bomber escort missions.

It was over these positions, on 14 April, that Dixie Dean and Vernon Woodward found six Stukas peeling off to attack an Australian convoy. Ignoring the escorting Messerschmitts, they shot down three Ju.87s and severely damaged another two, in full view of the cheering Australian troops. As soon as the two Hurricanes turned towards the Messerschmitts, they turned

away.

Flight Lieutenant Mackie, Pilot Officer Chetham and Sergeant Genders were on dawn standby the next day. Usually the standby Hurricanes simply warmed up their engines and then shut down, but this morning the engines continued to roar and the three Hurricanes began to roll across the airfield. John Mackie had spotted fifteen Me. 109s coming in very low, obviously with the intention of strafing the airfield. The three Hurricanes had not left the ground when the 109s made their first pass, which was completed without a shot being fired. The German leader must have seen the trio taking off, and was deliberately letting them get into the air before he attacked. Three very brave pilots struggled with their controls to pull up the Hurricanes to a height which would give them a chance to make a fight of it, but their altimeters were barely registering 1 000 feet when the yellow-nosed Messerschmitts screamed down behind them with cannons blazing.

Chetham was first to go, but his end was a bit of a mystery. The onlookers, all standing in the open outside their ridge tents, saw Chetham's Hurricane glide down, almost as if under control, and disappear behind some trees.

The Messerschmitt which had hit Chetham now overshot the other two Hurricanes and immediately John Mackie fastened on to its tail. He chased it right across the airfield. It was a fatal mistake. Another Messerschmitt came in close behind him. Mackie could have turned away and climbed out of trouble, as Sergeant Genders was now doing, but instead he deliberately hung on behind the 109 and opened fire. The pilot of the Messerschmitt baled out from 1000 feet , whilst the plane landed perfectly on its own in a field alongside the aerodrome, not far from the officers' mess tent. As the German floated down towards the airfield some Greek ground gunners fired at him, and Pat was furious when he learned later on that the pilot had died in the MO's tent.

In the meantime, Mackie's Hurricane had been hit. It staggered, went into a steepening dive, and finally flicked over the vertical before hitting the ground and burning. Sergeant Genders, who had never taken part in a real dogfight before, weaved and climbed away from the 109s like a veteran. He not only managed to escape with his life, but also shot down one of them. He landed at Larissa when the Me.109s had disappeared without a bullet hole in his aircraft.

Pat, who had watched the whole thing from outside his tent, drove off in the staff car with George Rumsey to try and find Chetham's Hurricane. It was not far from the airfield, and when they got to it Chetham's parachute was on the ground at the side of the riddled Hurricane. Pat and his adjutant searched for more than

30 minutes, but could find no trace of the tall, dark pilot officer. No one ever saw him again.

Not a single Hurricane on the ground had been hit, most of them were parked safely at Churton's Bottom, but an odd assortment of Greek aircraft, including some old Avro Tutors, a few Gloster Gladiators and a captured Savoia 79 all went up in flames. As the groundcrew were busy trying to clear up the mess, the Air Officer Commanding the RAF in Greece arrived. Sir John D'Albiac had brought some distressing news. General Wilson's forces had been outflanked by the advancing German Panzers and had decided to abandon the positions around Olympus and move back to Thermopylae. This meant surrendering Larissa, and all the other airfields in the north. It also meant that there would then be only three airfields for the whole of the RAF in Greece, two of them, Menidi and Eleusis in the Athens area, and the third, Amphiklia, just south of the Thermopylae Pass. Pat realised that the result of this decision could be one of two alternatives. Either the evacuation of the Air Force from Greece or total annihilation on the ground by the Luftwaffe, for it would be impossible to defend adequately just two or three concentrated targets with the limited number of fighters they had.

Pat saw the AOC off in Lysander after lunch, escorted by five of the squadron's Hurricanes, with orders to remain at Eleusis after completing the escort. He then arranged for the remainder of the squadron's Hurricanes, only eight were in flying condition, to leave for Eleusis as soon as they were ready. George Rumsey organised the convoy loading with as much vital equipment as possible, the remainder being destroyed by setting fire to it. It was almost dark before the convoy was ready to leave, but Pat gathered all of the airmen together at quietly explained the situation:

"I am sorry things have turned out like this, chaps, but since the army has decided to retire to the south, there is nothing else that we can do here. Our orders are to move back to Eleusis. We shall move out at 2030 hours, and make a brief halt for a meal and refuelling at Amphiklia. Don't show any lights on your vehicles, and keep a sharp lookout for strafing fighters and dive-bombers. Keep your chins up. We'll get a bit of our own back when we get to Athens. Good luck, chaps."

Pat, tired out by the tremendous amount of operational flying, and disappointed by the trend of events, allowed himself to be packed into the staff car by George Rumsey and Doc Henderson without a murmur. By the time Rumsey had the engine running, Pat was asleep. It was just starting to rain as they drove out of the airfield at the head of the last section of the convoy.

It was a miserable night, drizzling with rain, the clouds hanging heavily around 500 feet, the convoy stopping

and starting along treacherous and slippery mountain tracks as the Luftwaffe strafed and bombed throughout the night, yet Pat slept through it all.

The first of the convoys reached Amphiklia soon after dawn. The troops stayed for a snack of tinned meat and vegetables, and then climbed back on to the trucks, now weighed down by full fuel tanks, to push on towards their destination. Pat awoke when the sun was well above the horizon. His head was buzzing, he was shivering and he had lost his voice. He did not feel like eating, but quenched his thirst with a hot cup of tea brought to him by the Doc. Very soon his eyes closed and he was fast asleep again. Doc Henderson had dosed the tea with a sedative.

During the day 33 Squadron's Hurricanes, singly and in pairs, appeared frequently over the convoy to ward off attacks from the Luftwaffe, and all were able to fly back to Eleusis without a great deal of damage, although Charlie Dyson had a lucky escape. Flying low over the convoy south of Lamia to drop a message, a bomb dropped beside the road just ahead of his Hurricane. There was a tremendous explosion and Dyson flew through part of it. His cockpit hood was shaken loose, his oxygen mask was torn from his face by a metal splinter, and his hydraulic system was put out of action. Somehow he managed to get back to Eleusis, and had a terrific struggle to get the undercarriage to lock down using the hand pump, but he made a good landing. The following morning he came down with a fever and a high temperature, and ended up in the hospital in Athens.

The convoys began to arrive at Eleusis during the morning of 17 April and the squadron began to sort itself out, all the flying being done by 80 Squadron, who were already settled in at Eleusis. Pat was still sick with a high temperature, so took it easy and left George Rumsey to organise things under the general direction of Squadron Leader Tap Jones, who was now acting as overall wing leader at Eleusis.

There was continuous ground strafing by the Luftwaffe throughout the day, with Me. 109s pilots even throwing out hand grenades from their cockpits. The anti-aircraft defences were practically wiped out, but the ground and administrative personnel put up a valiant fight, even though their only weapons were revolvers, rifles and machine guns. That afternoon six Ju.88s raided a gunpowder factory half a mile from Eleusis, but were caught by 80 Squadron's Hurricanes, who shot down three of the Stukas in full view of the cheering groundcrew at Eleusis.

Five Hurricanes arrived from Egypt during the morning of 18 April, one of them was flown by a young flying officer, Noel-Johnson, who had just been posted to the squadron. He was in the office introducing himself to



33 Squadron's Medical Officer—'Doc' Henderson.



Pat and George Rumsey when the aerodrome was strafed for the second time that morning. After the strafing seven of the less badly damaged Hurricanes were earmarked for repair and after dark the repair sections led by Chiefy Salmon and Chiefy MacLachlan pushed the aircraft into a hangar - in great secrecy, so everyone thought - and worked all night on them.

Many of the aircraft were beyond repair, and were robbed of equipment to repair those less badly damaged. Replacement were out of the question, so cannibalisation and improvisation were resorted to on a large scale. There was a sandbagged pen in which the ground staff could do some of the work, but the pen was continuously being strafed. Together with the spares problem, maintenance was very difficult. The latest aircraft to arrive that morning required new technical know-how and different specialist tools, particularly for the new-type propellers. These tools were filed by hand from old metal drainpipes and any old pieces of metal available. These were hopelessly inefficient but, with the aid of hammers and sheer force, managed to do the job effectively, although somewhat crudely.

By dawn five of the seven Hurricanes had been patched up sufficiently to be classified as available for operations and Chiefy Salmon was just on his way to Pat's office with the good news when there was a droning from the north-west. A few minutes later fifteen Junkers 88's appeared and concentrated their entire bombload on one particular target—the hangar containing the repaired Hurricanes. Both hangar and aircraft were completely destroyed within a few minutes. It was one more instance of how the Germans were being informed about goings on in Athens by their Fifth Columnists, and that they were still in control of the telephone services.

After breakfast Pat led seven Hurricanes on an offensive sweep up the main road north towards Lamia, where dozens of Army trucks were all heading towards the Greek capital. He spotted a lone Henschel 126 fighter on a reconnaissance trip flight after twenty minutes, led his section (Woodward and Littler) down in line astern for one burst each. After the burning Henschel had smashed into the forested hillside, the three Hurricanes climbed up to rejoin the sweep towards the north.

Minutes later, in a narrow valley with mountains on the left, the Hurricanes came face to face with nine Me 109s. The two formations crossed without hitting each other, then Pat executed an Immelmann to position himself behind the Messerschmitt on the extreme left and opened fire. The Me109 shuddered, the propeller slowed until it was rotating like the sails of a windmill, then the aircraft flipped over on its back and smacked

into the ground upside down.

Pulling back on the control column Pat saw the sky behind him was full of diving, twisting, turning and climbing aircraft. Spotting a Messerschmitt sneaking away along the valley towards Lamia, he opened the throttle to full boost and curved down behind the Me.109, which flew on straight and level, unaware of the Hurricane bearing down on him. Coming out of his power dive, Pat raised the nose and lowered flaps, steadying the aircraft to line up his gunsight on the Me.109's cockpit. One quick burst, the German pilot threw up his arms and slumped lifeless in his cockpit, the aircraft entered a steep dive and smashed into rocky ground below.

Returning again to the dogfight, Pat found three of the Hurricanes still circling at about 5000 feet. Enquiring about the other three Hurricanes, Vernon Woodward said he seen Frankie Holman's Hurricane smoking badly and heading south along the valley, but when he tried to join it, a couple of Messerschmitts had blocked his way - one of these he had shot down in flames.

The four Hurricanes returned to Eleusis safely, just in time to see Mitchell attempting a crash-landing. The fabric covering the fuselage, torn by cannon shells, was still continuing to tear and blow backwards, until the tailplane was almost completely blanketed. In order to maintain control, Mitchell had to land at very high speed, but he managed it successfully.

The news of the other two missing Hurricanes was not so good. Flying Officer Moir had managed a crash-landing at Amphikia and was now on his way to Eleusis in an army truck, but his damaged Hurricane would have to be destroyed because there were no replacement parts. Frankie Holman was dead. This was a real blow, because Frankie was the character of the squadron. A dashing rugby player, always ready for a lark, he enjoyed life to the full and was liked by everyone. He died after trying to land his damaged Hurricane, with wheels down, in a swampy field near Megara. The plane had overturned, and Frankie, who had loosened his straps, broke his neck. Later in the day, when George Rumsey, his best friend, went to Megara to collect the body, it had been laid out and covered in flowers by the local womenfolk.

In the afternoon there was another sweep, but Tap Jones, having been warned by 33 Squadron's MO, Doc Henderson, that Pat was overdoing it, ordered Timber Woods of 80 Squadron to lead it. Despite Pat's protestations, Tap would not change his decision, but conceded that Pat could remain at Eleusis on standby and would only be allowed to fly if there was an air raid alarm.

He slept for a couple of hours before he was awakened by the five Hurricanes returning from the afternoon

sweep. They had caught a formation of Ju. 87s and Me.109s at the aerodrome at Almyros, destroying four Stukas, one Me.109 and possibly more. Sergeant Casbolt's aircraft was hit, but he had made it back to Eleusis. During this informal debrief the tannoy came to life. 'Attention, attention. Standby pilots take off immediately. Enemy aircraft approaching from the north-west.' Within minutes Pat's Hurricane was climbing away from the airfield and heading towards the raiders.

Fifteen minutes later he could see the harbour of Khalcis and watched his wingman, Sergeant Casbolt, shoot down a Ju.88. Pat spotted another Ju.88 going very fast towards the north, diving towards the safety of its own lines, and gave chase, finally catching it a few miles south of Akra. Having silenced the rear gunner with his first burst, he started demolishing the Junkers piece by piece until the crew baled out and the aircraft dived into the sea.

He returned to Eleusis and drove into Athens in the staff car as soon as it was dark. He headed to the flat of Tommy Wisdom, an RAF Press Liaison Officer, who was on duty at nine. Pat took a long hot soak in the bath and had a good night's sleep in a decent soft bed.

A number of pilots were kept on standby at Eleusis throughout the night, expecting the Luftwaffe to keep up their attacks and stop the pilots and ground staffs from enjoying a few hours much needed rest. Although these attacks did not materialise, the tension was so great that very few pilots were able to doze off for long. Mick Richens and 'Cas' Casbolt played cards for most of the night, and consequently were first off the ground soon after five o'clock when the first alarm sounded on Sunday 20 April—Hitler's birthday.

For more than an hour they patrolled back and forth over the crowded Piraeus harbour. Below them they could easily pick out the red crosses of the hospital ship, on to which were being loaded an almost non-stop stream of stretchers carrying wounded soldiers. Such an inviting target had, so far, been left alone by the Luftwaffe, but it could not last. So, too, were the only two aerodromes still in British hands: Menidi and Eleusis.

When Richens and Casbolt returned to Eleusis, it was obvious that some German bombers had managed to get through to the aerodrome, a Yugoslav Savoia 79 was blazing furiously at the top end of the field. Most of the other pilots had become involved in fights with Ju. 88s and Me.109s, and the servicing crews were still hard at it, striving valiantly to do the impossible. Three or four times during the morning the Hurricanes were scrambled to intercept the enemy, then the skies cleared.

With the situation easing, at least for the time being,

Tap Jones planned an offensive sweep, hoping to give the pilots and groundcrews a moral uplift to help them survive the onslaught. The sweep was detailed to take off at six o'clock. At five o'clock the pilots gathered in the readiness hut for the briefing. Pat still had a high temperature and was lying shivering on a couch, covered with blankets.

Suddenly the air-raid siren sounded and a voice over the tannoy announced that more than a hundred dive-bombers and fighters had been sighted, heading directly towards the harbour. In a few seconds the room had cleared, except for Pat and George Rumsey. Pat flung his blankets off and started for the door. Rumsey tried to stop him, but Pat was equally determined and hurried out of the hut towards the nearest aircraft some two hundred yards away. As he ran towards it an Me. 110 swept past, spitting cannon shells. Pat stopped in his tracks. He felt a violent thump on his back and a fitter ran past, shouting:

'Come on, sir, I'll start you up.'

When Pat had the engine running the fitter unplugged the external battery, and then ran way out into the middle of the field, where he stood and waved Pat off. Fifteen Hurricanes had taken off—these were all the fighters left in Greece—and some of these in less difficult circumstances would have been classified as unserviceable. But because of the size of the German raid, the biggest yet, everything that would fly and fight had to be put into the air.

Squadron Leader Jones' voice could be recognised over the radio from the control room at Eleusis and on his instructions the Hurricanes climbed to 20 000 feet and proceeded to Piraeus harbour.

Ping Newton, Peter Wickham and Harry Starrett were first on the scene. They found the hospital ship being dive-bombed by about fifteen Ju.88s. The three Hurricanes caught the dive-bombers just at their most vulnerable moment, when they pulled out of their dives. Five of the Stukas went straight into the harbour, and three more were smoking badly before the Hurricanes had to leave because they had used up all their ammunition. Newton and Wickham returned to Eleusis, rearmed and refuelled and went back into the battle. Poor Harry Starrett was not so lucky. His Hurricane was hit and set on fire. It was not burning badly, however, and Harry, knowing how desperately short of Hurricanes they were, refused to bale out. He flew the Hurricane back to Eleusis and had to make a belly landing, with his wheels up, because his hydraulic system had failed. He made an excellent job of it; the Hurricane had almost come to a standstill when the glycol tank exploded. The plane was enveloped in flames. Harry managed to get out of the fighter, his clothing in flames, and rolled over and over on the

ground. But he could not get his burning parachute off.

When they got to him Harry was severely burned and unconscious, but still breathing, and they hurried him off to the hospital in Athens. He died from his burns two days later. Another brave and unselfish man, who had put duty before all else.

Overhead the battle still raged. Len Cottingham and Vernon Woodward attacked the Me. 110s who were supposedly guarding the Ju. 88s. Vernon got one Me.110 for certain and damaged three others before breaking away to return for more ammunition, whilst the tubby flight sergeant set three of the Messerschmitts on fire. He was then wounded by the rear gunner of another Me. 110 and forced to bale out.

Cherry Vale found thirty dive-bombers circling and taking it in turns to dive on the shipping in the harbour. He made several attacks on the Junkers, and finally had the satisfaction of seeing one of them go down in flames. He attacked another, and watched big chunks breaking away from the wings and fuselage. It was going down vertically with black smoke pouring from both its engines when Cherry broke away to elude an Me. 109 which had tried to sneak up behind him. He used up all his ammunition on the dive-bombers.

Ted Hewett found himself alone above six Me. 109s. He dived down behind the last one of six and got in a burst which caused it to roll over and go down with smoke streaming out behind it. The rest of the 109s had still not noticed the presence of the Hurricane, so Hewett closed up behind the next Messerschmitt; after some attention the pilot baled out. The sergeant then had a go at a third 109, but this time he did not stay to see what happened, because the other 109s turned on him viciously.

Timber Woods had been one of the first off the ground, closely followed by Sergeant Wintersdorf, a Frenchman and new addition to 80 Squadron, and the ever-reliable Sergeant Casbolt. They had joined up together and, after climbing to 21 000 feet, had been led down by Woods to attack a formation of circling Messerschmitts. After two or three attacks on these, Timber Woods returned to Eleusis to rearm. Wintersdorf got one of the Messerschmitts and was then himself hit and wounded in the leg and had to bale out. Casbolt got two of the 110s and then was hit by another in the rudder, a piece almost a foot square being shot away. He broke away and was attacked by an Me.109, which he easily outmanoeuvred and shot down in flames. He, too, then broke away to return for more ammunition.

In the meantime, Timber Woods had climbed back into the fight and spotted another group of circling Me 110s. This time, however, they were right above him. But this did not deter the reckless Irishman, who

climbed right up towards them.

Pat had now reached the scene of the fight and was 1 000 feet above a defensive circle of Me. 110s when he saw a lone Hurricane climbing towards them, and at the same time saw one of the Messerschmitts detach itself from the circle and dive towards the Hurricane. Pat knew that what the Hurricane was doing was extremely foolish. All the advantages were in favour of the circling Messerschmitts, but he could not stand by and do nothing. Without hesitating for a single moment, he put on the nose of his Hurricane and dived down through middle of the maelstrom of 110s to protect the tail of the Hurricane. He knew that they would follow him like a swarm of enraged wasps, but he kept going and pulled up beneath the first Me. 110, which was now firing at point blank range into the Hurricane. The 110 burst into flames a split second after the Hurricane began to blaze.

The cannons of the pursuing Messerschmitts were now barking louder and nearer. Knowing that the 110s could outdive his Hurricane, Pat pulled his fighter up and round. The sky seemed full of aircraft, all of them with two engines, black crosses and cannon guns spitting red and yellow flashes. He dived frantically into a space with no Messerschmitts in it, and almost collided with a German which was banking sharply. He pressed the gun button and just had time to see the Hun stall and then fall flaming before he tugged the Hurricane away from another attack. No one actually saw Pat die except the pilots of the Messerschmitt, but a few minutes later Jimmy Kettlewell arrived on the scene, He saw the Hurricane diving, with its pilot slumped forward across the dashboard. Flames were spreading towards the cockpit and two Messerschmitts were still firing at it. Jimmy clobbered one of the Messerschmitts and watched sadly as both it and Pat's Hurricane fell almost side by side into the depths of the bay south of Eleusis.

A few minutes later Jimmy, too, was hit and had to bale out. That night in the mess was unusually silent—not because of fear of the dangerous situation they were in. They were all resigned to the fact that the Battle for Greece had now been lost and they would have to evacuate. They all knew that the best thing for them to do now was to get back to Egypt, to rebuild their strength both in men and materiel, so that they could hit back at the Hun, and avenge the death of their bellowed Pat.

EPILOGUE

The author of 'Ace of Aces', ECR Baker was born in Dudley, Worcestershire and trained as a teacher. It was his interest in wartime fighter pilots and aircraft that led him, almost by accident, to discover Pat Pattle in the early 1960s while reading the Royal Air Force Review. After producing an article on Pattle and 80 Squadron in the Greek campaign, he was approached by a publisher to write a series of articles about the fighter aces of the RAF. It was while researching his first book that he interviewed Vernon Woodward, who told him that Pat Pattle was his CO when he was a Flying Officer on 33 Squadron. Having seen a copy of Pat's Certificate of Service, which had no mention of him serving with 33 Squadron, Baker's curiosity was aroused. Further research put him in touch with Pat's elder brother Cecil in South Africa, and both 33 and 80 Squadron's Adjutants - George Rumsey and Ted Tyler. George Rumsey was living in Hokitika, New Zealand and was able to provide a lot of detail about the retreat to Eleusis, having kept his log book with him when he, and 85 others, boarded a Sunderland to fly to Crete. He also gave Baker short biographical notes on all of the flying personnel of 33 Squadron, adding after Pat's death they talked of his final score being around 65.

FINAL RESTING PLACE

Pat Pattle's body was never recovered, but Gareth Attridge has been kind enough to forward me a message that he had received from a friend over in Crete, who had spoken to a Greek researcher, Kostas Thoctarides. Kostas is involved in a project with the History Department of the Greek Navy, who are recording all of the historical wreckage on the bed of Elefsina Bay, where Pat's aircraft sank, and to date they have recorded about a quarter of the seabed with their multibeam sonar equipment. Who knows? One day in the future we may hear about the wreckage of one of the RAF's greatest fighter aces being discovered.



The Men in the Larissa Photographs



Peter Reginald Whalley Wickham: born Nairobi, Kenya , 26 Mar 1918, educated Marlborough College and Farnham Military College. Entered RAF College Cranwell Jan 1937, commissioned 17 Dec 1938, graduated in 1939 - posted to 3 Sqn. On 16 May 1939, posted to 112 Sqn when this unit was formed aboard HMS *Argus* in Portsmouth, and in September he was sent out to the Middle East and Egypt. When the war started in North Africa, 112 Sqn was based at Helwan, south of Cairo, solely responsible for the defence of Egypt's Capital. End of Jun, he was temporarily assigned to 33 Sqn at Maaten Gerwala to gain experience. Posted from 112 to 33 on 30 October 1940, he claimed two victories during the First Libyan Campaign (Dec 1940-Jan 1941). Awarded DFC July 1941. By 27 Apr 1942 Wickham was a Squadron Leader with 111 Sqn in England. Retired 26 Mar 1961, died 29 Apr 1970.



David Thomson Moir: posted with fellow instructor Flt Lt A B Mitchell to 33 Sqn in Greece at the beginning of March 1941 after instructor duties at 70 OTU (Ismailia). He flew sorties from Maleme at the beginning of May, and was part of the flight that formed in Amriya on 1 Jun with 30 Sqn. He was awarded a DFC as a Flight Lieutenant with No. 156 Sqn (Lancasters) on 9 Jul 1943. Squadron Leader David Thomson Moir DFC and his crew died in Lancaster BI TW902 of 115 Sqn on 31 Jan 1948 near Istres in France. His obituary said that he had flown Lancasters for nearly six years, including a tour of duty with the Pathfinder Force.



Vernon Crompton Woodward: born Victoria, British Columbia 22 Dec 1916. Sailed to England to join the RAF, accepted short service commission as APO Sep 1938. Posted to 33 Sqn May 1939, joined the sqn in Egypt wef 1 Jun 39, with P/O EJ Woods. Promoted Flying Officer Sep 1939. Moved to Greece with 33 Feb 1941, awarded DFC 9 May 1941. Promoted Flt Lt date tbc. Flt cdr in Crete May 41, Woodward evacuated to Egypt by destroyer from Suda Bay 26 May. Tourex with 33 11 Sep 1941, became instructor at 20 SFTS in Rhodesia, promoted Squadron Leader 2 Jul 1942 and commanded 213 Sqn Jan-Aug 1943. Staff posts followed, promoted Wing Commander Jun 1944. Retired from the RAF Jan 1963, died in Victoria 26 May 2000.



J M 'Pop' Littler: APO posted in from 4 FTS 19 Feb 1938, mid-air collision 25 Feb 1938, hospitalised with head injuries; discharged 7 Mar 38. P/O 10 May 1938, Sqn Adj wef 8 Jun 1938, until 10 Jan 1940, when he handed over to George Rumsey. Flt Lt by 11 Nov 1940, he was granted the rank of Squadron Leader (war subs) on 19 Jun 1942. The London Gazette records, under Secretarial Branch, that Wing Commander J M Littler (39884) was retiring wef 22 Jul 1961.



Ernest Henry Dean: Dixie was born 21 October 1917, Fulham, London. Educated Chelsea Central and Emmanuel School. Short Service Commission 15 Mar 1937, qualified as a pilot, Sep 1937 posted 151 Sqn Jany 1938. Three months later joined 80 Squadron, went to Middle East. Flying Officer Sep 1938. Apr 1940 posted 33 Sqn. End Mar 1941 Flt Lt A. M. Young posted, Dixie promoted A/Flight Lieutenant and B Flt cdr. 17 Mar 1941 MiD. After Greece/Crete, posted 71 OTU Jul 1941, posted 30 Sqn Oct 1941. promoted Squadron Leader Dec 1941, joined 274 Sqn 12 Feb 1942 and became CO Mar 1942. Awarded Greek DFC 29 Dec 1942. 'A' Class Reserve Nov 1950, retaining rank of Wing Commander. Worked as a sales manager for Martini-Rossi. Dixie passed away in 2005.



Francis Holman: Frank was a Rhodesian who was posted to 33 Sqn from No. 103 Maintenance Unit on 2 Aug 1940. Attached to 'C' Flt on 5 Aug. Francis was killed on 16 Apr 1941 when attempting to land his crippled Hurricane in swampy land near Megara, which overturned. Having loosened his straps, he broke his neck.



Eric Joseph Woods: 'Chico' was born 1921, Sydenham, South London. Short service commission on Aug 1938, posted to 33 Sqn with P/O Woodward wef 1 Jun 1939, confirmed Pilot Officer 27 Jun 1939. Flying Officer 3 Sep 1940. Woods flew with 33 Sqn in Greece and Crete, helped reform 33 Jun 1941 at Amriya, and was quickly back in action, supporting the unsuccessful Operation 'Battleaxe'. At 16:45 on 17 Jun 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. This was 33 Sqn's first encounter with the enemy since Crete, during which Woods was shot down. At the time of his death he was credited with 2 biplane victories and a total of 4.

Eric's brother, Steve, was posted to 33 Sqn in 1941. (See Eric and Steve Woods: Thirty Three's Brothers In Arms' in 'Loyalty' Issue 10 Summer 2019 page 36-41).



Charles Arthur Copeland Chetham: born Oct 1919, Newton Abbot, joined RAFVR Sep 1938, commissioned 26 May 1940, posted 1 Sqn at Tangmere mid-Jun 1940. Posted 33 Sqn Jan 1941. Chetham was killed 15 Apr, aged 21, flying Hurricane P3732 or V7419, both were shot down during combat with Me109s over Larissa. Despite reference in Baker's book that Pat Pattle and George Rumsey's failed to find Chetham's body at the crash site near the airfield, official records state that he is buried in Phaleron War Cemetery, Athens.



A M Young: no information found online to date, no reference to posting in or out in the ORBs.



Marmaduke Thomas St John Pattle: born 23 Jul 1914 Butterworth, Transkei, South Africa. Commenced flying training with RAF at Prestwick 29 Jun 1936, APO 24 Aug 1936, posted to 80 Sqn early 1937, promoted Pilot Officer 27 Jul 1937, moved with 80 Sqn to Egypt 29 Apr 1938. Promoted Flight Lieutenant 3 Sep 1940, arrived with 80 Sqn in Athens 16 Nov 1940. Awarded DFC 11 Feb 1941, converted from Gladiator to Hurricane wef 20 Feb 1941. Promoted to Squadron Leader 12 Mar 1941 and given command of 33 Sqn. Awarded Bar to DFC 18 Mar 1941, citation said that he had now destroyed at least 23 enemy aircraft. Killed in action 20 Apr 1941. Historians and researchers now claim Pattle's final tally of destroyed enemy aircraft to somewhere between 40 and the mid-50s.



Harry Starrett: posted to 33 Sqn as Acting Pilot Officer from 4 FTS 8 Jun 1938, Rejoined 33 22 Jul 1939 after an attachment to Aboukir wef 22 Apr 1939. C Flt cdr wef 8 Aug 1940. Went to Greece with the squadron, crash landed his Hurricane back at Eleusis during the Battle of Athens on 20 May 1941, which burst into flames. Although he got clear of the aircraft, he was badly burned and died in hospital two days later.



Mervyn Warren Rumsey: Constantly referred to as 'George', Rumsey arrived on 33 Sqn from 4 FTS 8 Jun 1938. Had commenced leave in UK wef 31 Jul 1939, rejoined 33 wef 1 Sep 1939. Took over Adjutant role from P/O Littler wef 12 Oct 1939, resumed flying duties 25 Sep 1940. Awarded DFC for work in Palestine 9 May 1941, promoted Flt Lt 16 Mar 1941. Played a vital role as 33 Sqn Adjutant under Pattle in Greece. Signed off the Jun 1941 ORB as Officer Commanding; Sqn Ldr Marsden took command 28 Jul 1941. Rumsey handed over command of A Flt to newly promoted Flt Lt Winsland 8 Feb 1942, and returned to UK on 1 March 1942 after 3.5 years with 33 Sqn.



A R Butcher: ORB states that he was posted in from 112 Sqn wef 27 Oct 1940 with P/O Wickham, as P/Os Brown and Costello had been posted from 33 to 112. No other information available, apart from comment on the May 1941 RAF Form 541 'Detail of Work Carried Out' Sheet that refers to his fate being unknown. There is a comment made about him becoming a PoW.



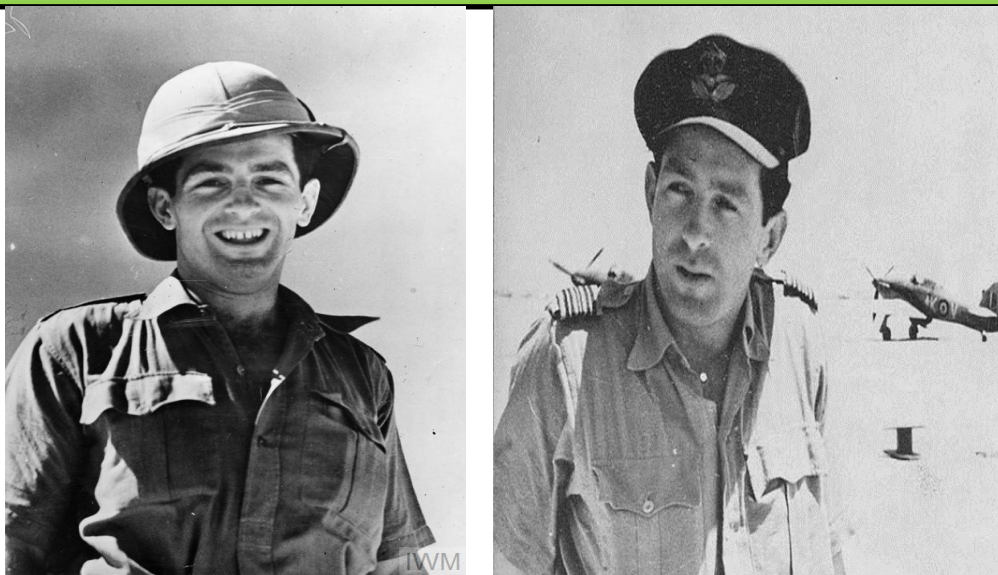
Dudley Winsland: P/O Winsland arrived on 33 Sqn Jan 1941, with P/O Chetham and Dunscombe. Promoted Fg Off 22 Jan 1942, Flt Lt 8 Feb 1942 and assumed command of 'A' Flt vice Flt Lt George Rumsey. However, he was then posted to HQME on 10 Mar 1942, ORB quotes he was operationally tired. Winsland is mentioned frequently in Don Edy's book 'Goon in the Block', but there very little evidence of him online.



Raymond Douglas Dunscombe: born Croydon 11 Nov 1918, joined RAFVR Jul 1938 as an Airman u/t Pilot, called up 1 Sep 1939, posted 213 Sqn 8 Jun 1940. Posted 312 Sqn Duxford late Aug 1940. Baled out of Hurricane V7228 during combat near Cranbrook on 17 Sep, sustaining serious injuries. Commissioned in Nov 1940, Dunscombe underwent plastic surgery at Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead and was one of Archie McIndoe's 'Guinea Pigs'. Posted 33 Sqn Jan 1941, killed in Crete May 1941, recorded as fighting alongside NZ troops and RAF groundcrew at Maleme airfield on the 20 May. He is commemorated on the 30 Sqn / 33 Sqn Memorial.

'Woody' Woodward - the quiet Canadian

With extracts from Hugh A Halliday's book, *'Woody – A Fighter Pilot's Album'*



Wing Commander Vernon Crompton Woodward DFC and Bar

Vernon Crompton Woodward entered the world on 22 December 1916, the first of three children. His father ran a market garden on Vancouver Island. Like Alfred Bocking, Vernon Woodward was another young Canadian who, lacking a university education and therefore unable to apply to the R.C.A.F., looked across the Atlantic for a route into a flying career. In 1938 Woodward made his way to England to seek entry into the R.A.F. Unlike Alfred Bocking, Woodward had an uncle in Gloucestershire, an ex-RNAS pilot from World War One turned farmer, who regaled Vernon with stories of anti-submarine patrols in Scotland, Zeppelin raids on England and balloon busting in France. Vernon Woodward was accepted for a Short Service Commission and on 20 August 1938 his name was among the 124 men gazetted as Acting Pilot Officers on probation.

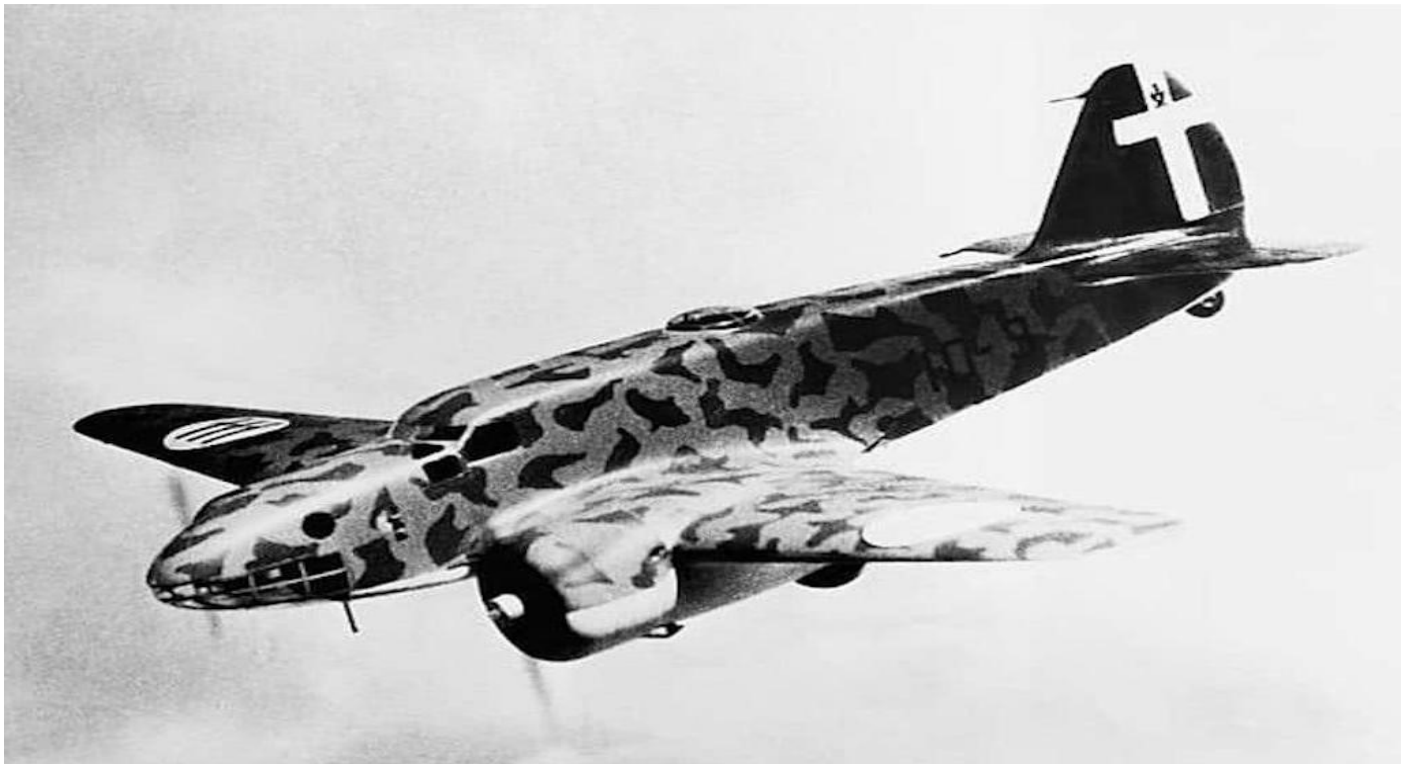
After Elementary Flying Training (EFT) in Perth, Woody he returned to No.1 Depot at Uxbridge where, having successfully completed E.F.T. those students who hadn't washed out were given R.A.F. uniform. His flying training continued at No. 6 Flying Training School (FTS) at Little Rissington in Oxfordshire, and Woody arrived as part of Course No.10 (35 officers, 11 NCOs) on 5 September 1938. No. 6 FTS was divided into Intermediate Training Squadron and Advance Training Squadron, and students would spend 13-15 weeks on each, flying Hawker Audaxes, Harts and Furies. Flying brevets were awarded at the end of the first term, and students were granted two weeks leave before returning for the second term. Unfortunately, having lost his logbook during the Battle of Crete, Woody

could not recall exactly when he had received his wings, but records show that the Advance Training Squadron were at Warmwell in Dorset to attend the Armament Training Camp between 9-11 March 1939. He was then posted to No. 33 Squadron, Ismailia, Egypt, where he would become a member of a privileged circle – an RAF officer and fighter pilot defending the British Empire – enjoying perks he would never have imagined back in Victoria, B.C.

Woody reported to No. 33 Squadron on 1 June 1939, along with Pilot Officer (P/O) D.M. Illsley and Acting Pilot Officers (APO) R.C.F. Finch and E.J. Woods, who had been in the same officer draft; on 27 June they were all confirmed as P/Os. Having left Britain as a light bomber squadron equipped with Hawker Harts, 33 Squadron was now a fighter squadron, equipped with Gloster Gladiators, having entered service in 1937. With an 830hp Bristol Mercury engine, the Gladiator II could hit 257 mph at 14,600 feet, climb to 10,000 feet in 4 minutes 30 seconds, and attain a ceiling of 33,500 feet. Its armament made the Gladiator a pioneer though. The RAF had abandoned its traditional two-gun approach. A pair of fuselage-mounted .303 Brownings fired through the propeller arc, and two more wing-mounted Brownings doubled the firepower. Each fuselage gun had 600 rounds, each wing gun, 400. As the RAF's first multi-gun fighter the biplane Gladiator was not to be mocked. Commanded by Squadron Leader (S/L) Hector McGregor, No. 33 Squadron shared the aerial defence of the Suez Canal with No. 80 Squadron. Due to the Arab revolt in Palestine the squadron had flights in Palestine and Egypt. Woody was



Gloster Gladiators of 33 Squadron at RAF Ismailia, Egypt. (IWM)



Caproni Ca. 310 of the Italian *Regia Aeronautica*

never in action against the Arabs, but enjoyed the three-ship task of sweeping down the length of the Canal from Port Said to Ismailia and across the Great Bitter Lake to Suez itself, passing the twin pink granite towers of the ANZAC Memorial at Gebel-Mariam.

Tensions rose in Europe throughout the summer of 1939, and No. 33 Squadron's 'C' Flight was recalled from Palestine to Qasaba on 25 August, the rest of the Squadron having been there since 5 August. A few days later, on 1 September 1939 - the day that Germany invaded Poland - 33 Squadron moved to a barren outpost of tents and whitewashed huts halfway between Alexandria and the western border with Libya - Mersa Matruh. Gone were the Sudanese batman and evening mess dinners; now it was work, heat, sand, flies, with swimming in the Mediterranean as the principal means of relaxing, as the bar was sparsely stocked, a shadow of the one kept at Ismailia.

When war was declared on 3 September 1939, Italy, the nearest probable enemy in the Mediterranean theatre, was neutral, waiting for an opportune time to enter the fray. The RAF in Egypt and Palestine possessed around 205 operational bombers, fighters, army co-operation aircraft and long-range flying boats. Supplies and spare parts were scarce, and there was little prospect of immediate reinforcement from Britain. Italy had around 313 in Libya and the Dodecanese - 140 bombers, 101 fighters and 72 other types. In army terms the situation was more serious. The British had around 36,000 troops in Egypt and could be reinforced from the 27,500-man garrison in Palestine. However, the divisions were not fully organized and vital equipment like tanks and artillery was scarce. Facing them in Libya was roughly 117,000 regular troops plus 40,000 reserves (Blackshirt units, native troops, frontier guards). They were well stocked with supplies, but the level of training varied and they had equipment shortages, notably artillery and vehicles. Despite Mussolini's 16 year dictatorship, the people were not enthusiastic about the war, troop morale was low, and food and living conditions were poor.

33 Squadron's ORBs for this period are available to read in the Members Forum in the Association's website; a flick through the pages will show lots of training exercises, both air-to-air and air-to ground and joint exercises with the Army, reconnaissance flights and the establishment and stocking of forward operating airfields. This was all in line with the R.A.F.'s three general tasks - reconnaissance, air defence and offensive action. The weather was bad, with sandstorms, gales and torrential rain causing damage to aircraft, tentage and equipment. It would be 10 months before 33 Squadron had the opportunity to put its training to use, with Mussolini not declaring war on

Great Britain until 10 June 1940. No. 33 Squadron was busy from the start of hostilities, flying 27 sorties on 11 June and flying dawn patrols from 14 June onwards. It was on 14 June that Woody opened his score over Capuzzo with a confirmed Ca.310 and a probable CR-32. Woody's skills in the Gladiator between 14 June and 25 July, during which time he notched up four confirmed kills and four shared / unconfirmed, would earn him a Distinguished Flying Cross.

On 17 June 33 moved to Maaten Gerawla to be closer to the enemy, and this is where Woody first saw the effectiveness of the new Hurricanes entering theatre. There were four Hurricanes in the Middle East by this date, three in the rear for canal defence and training, and one deployed forward with 80 Squadron. Air Commodore Collishaw made the most of this Hurricane, dubbed "Collie's Battleship", moving it around and hitting Italian targets. This confused the Italians considerably. They thought a whole squadron of Hurricanes existed and so spread out their forces to combat them, diluting the Italians effectiveness in the



Helwan. (L-R): Sergeant Slater, Pilot Officer 'Woody' Woodward, Flying Officer 'Dixie' Dean and Pilot Officer Alfred Costello.

air. On 25 June 1940 the rotation of pilots and aircraft saw a Flight Lieutenant M T StJ. Pattle replace Flying Officer P.G. Wykeham-Barnes as part of 80 Squadron's forward detachment with 33. These rotations continued, with Woody and four pilots detached back to 80 Squadron from 16-23 July. On 28 July the whole squadron was pulled back to Helwan for refit and rest, with some pilots being loaned or posted to 80 Squadron. On 8 August 33 was informed that it was to move to a two flight basis within a week, 'A' and 'B' Flights forming the nucleus, and 'C' Flight moving from Helwan to Amiriya on 23 August to be absorbed into No. 274 Squadron, which came into being on 19 August.

On 13 September 33 received the news that they were to reequip with Hurricanes, handing over their

Map 4

THE EGYPT - PALESTINE BASE

Showing principal communications

Legend

Installations existing in 1939 shown in Blue

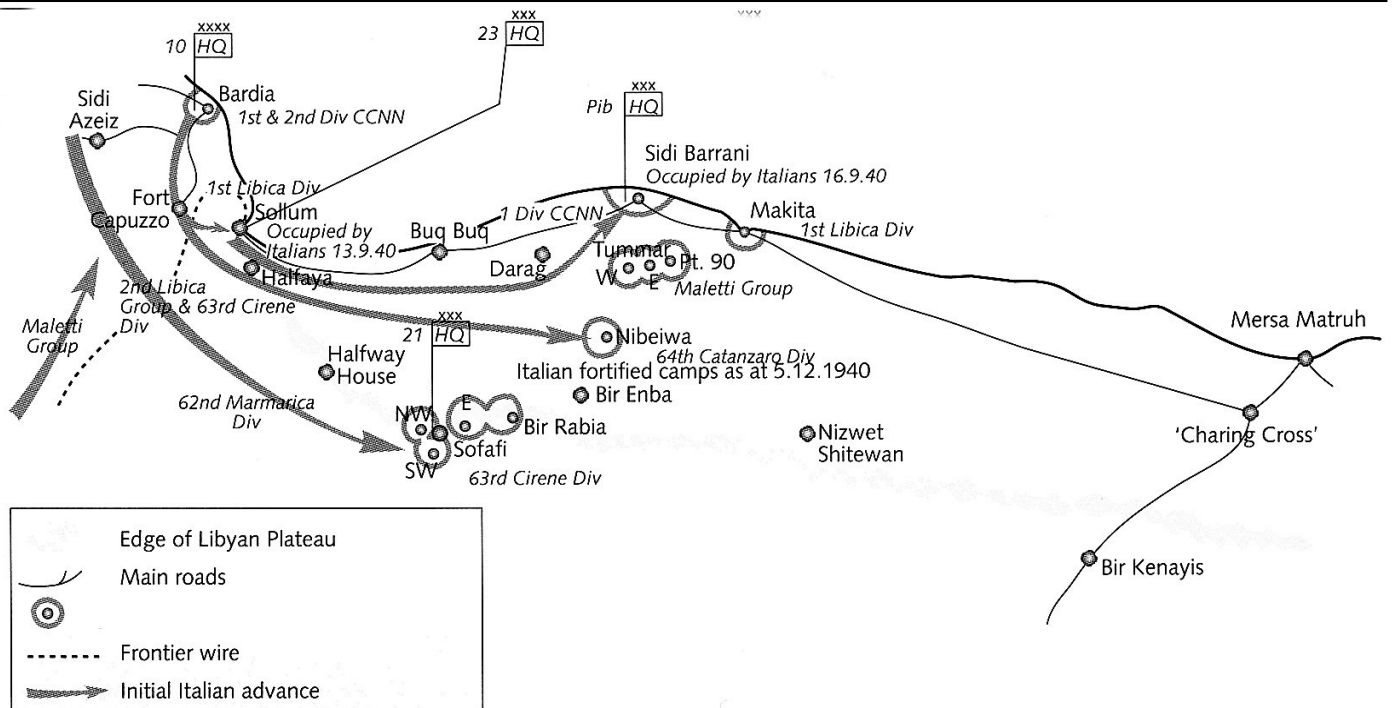
Planned expansion at new sites shown in Red

- Airfields
- Landing grounds
- ✈ Flying boat bases
- ✈ Flying boat alighting areas
- ① Supply depots
- ② Ammunition & bomb depots
- ③ Bulk petrol
- ④ Ordnance depots
- ⑤ Ordnance workshops
- ⑥ Vehicle depots & stores
- ⑦ Engineer stores
- ⑧ Personnel camps
- ⑨ Hospital areas
- ⑩ RAF maintenance units





The Western Desert of Egypt 1940



The Italian Advance into Egypt 13-20 September 1940

Gladiators to No.3 Sqn RAAF. They were expected to be back at Fuka with their new aircraft by the end of September; however, an Italian offensive into Egypt between 9-17 Sep that halted at Sidi Barrani led to a change of plan. The squadron was ordered to move forward early, with an advance party leaving for Fuka on 20 September. Ten Gladiators flew forward on 22 September, so that half of the squadron was on the front line, the other half undertaking Hurricane conversion at Helwan.

Woody had 10 minutes in Hurricane N2624 on 24 September, 20 minutes on the 27th, 45 on the 28th. On 3 October, Squadron Leader L C Ryley – the new CO and an ex-230 Squadron pilot – took nine Hurricanes to Fuka, allowing the other half of 33 to begin their conversion. 33's last Gladiator was disposed of on 31 October.

Woody did not fly to Fuka with Ryley, he went back to Abu Sueir to ferry Hurricane P3729 forward on 5 October. His first operational Hurricane sortie was on 11 October, a recce between Sollum and Bir Gib. By November he had been promoted to Flying Officer, but it is difficult to recount his movements and actions due to his lost logbook and the fact that 33 Squadron's records for December 1940-April 1941 also disappeared in the moves, retreats and evacuations. The ORB available on our website that were created from memory, merely provides a rough recollection rather than an accurate record of events. We should note that Italy had invaded Greece in October 1940, and Britain had despatched squadrons to assist that nation, but 33 Squadron was still in the Western Desert and preparing to support General Wavell's 'COMPASS' offensive against the Italians on the Sidi Barrani line.

The results of 'COMPASS' exceeded expectations. The offensive started on 9 December, and in three days General's Wavell's British, Indian and ANZAC troops captured 38,300 Italians and Libyans, together with 237 guns, 73 tanks and about 1,000 vehicles – all for the loss of 624 men killed, wounded or missing. By 16 December Sollum had fallen and Egypt was clear of enemy troops. Bardia was breached on 3 January 1941 and taken on the 5th, Tobruk was captured on 21-22 January and Benghazi fell on 6 February. Support to the offensive started for 33 Squadron on 8 December and attacks on the Italian lines of communication, vehicles, troop convoys, plus encounters with the *Regia Aeronautica*, kept the Squadron busy until mid-January. Woody added his tally in his Hurricane, claiming another five confirmed kills and six damaged.

On 12 January the Squadron was placed on standby by H.Q.M.E. to move to Greece with No. 11 and 112 Squadrons, joining No. 30, 80, 84 and 211 Squadrons. Weather conditions prevented flying on several occasions, although vehicles were given Temperate

Camouflage and equipment was renewed and overhauled. Three new pilots arrived at the end of the month – Pilot Officers Winsland, Dunscombe and Chetham - while the CO, Squadron Leader Ryley was informed that he had been promoted to Wing Commander.

GREECE

Circumstances delayed the deployment to February, and it was not until the 17th that Wing Commander Ryley led the 16-strong air party to El Adem to meet up with the Blenheims that would lead them to Eleusis, near Athens, via Crete. Bad weather again delayed them, but they eventually flew in to Eleusis on 19 February 1941.

About a week later, having decided that Athens was too far from the front, a detachment was sent forward to Paramythia, some 50 miles from the left flank of the Greek lines. Our ORB states that the move took place on 23 February, but No. 211 Squadron's ORB states that six of No. 33 Squadron's Hurricanes arrived on 25 February. This small discrepancy is indicative of the problems accounting for 33 Squadron's activities after leaving Egypt, while the absence of names makes it difficult to know precisely who was doing what and when. The detachment was on bomber escort duties with No. 80 Squadron on 26 February, escorting Blenheims from Nos 11 and 211 Squadrons, flying sorties against Tepelene, Fiers and Valona. Similar missions continued into March, with the *Regia Aeronautica* often coming second best as it attempted to regain control of Albanian airspace. No. 80 Squadron were causing many Italian losses, notably through Flight Lieutenants R.N. Cullen and M T St.J Pattle.

Woody had remained at Eleusis with the bulk of No. 33 Squadron's aircraft and personnel, which goes some way in explaining why the unit's reconstructed diary was so unclear about operations at Paramythia. This situation changed slightly when the Squadron moved forward to Larissa. The ORB states that the main party departed on 4 March, while No. 211 Squadron's ORB recorded on 5 March: "At 2230 hours 140 airmen on No. 33 Squadron arrived at this station. All transport was turned out, a hot meal provided, and accommodation found in the hangars." No. 11 Squadron's ORB reported the arrival of 12 Hurricanes belonging to No. 33 shortly before noon on 7 March. During an operational sweep to the east of Tepelene on 13 March, No. 33 Squadron shot down three CR.42s and claimed two CR.42s and a G.50 as 'probables'.

Around this time No. 33 Squadron acquired a new C.O. – Squadron Leader M T StJ 'Pat' Pattle, who transferred from No. 80 Squadron. Pattle's biographer, E.C.R. Baker, describes No.33 Squadron as being notable for its intolerance of red tape, irreverence for authority,



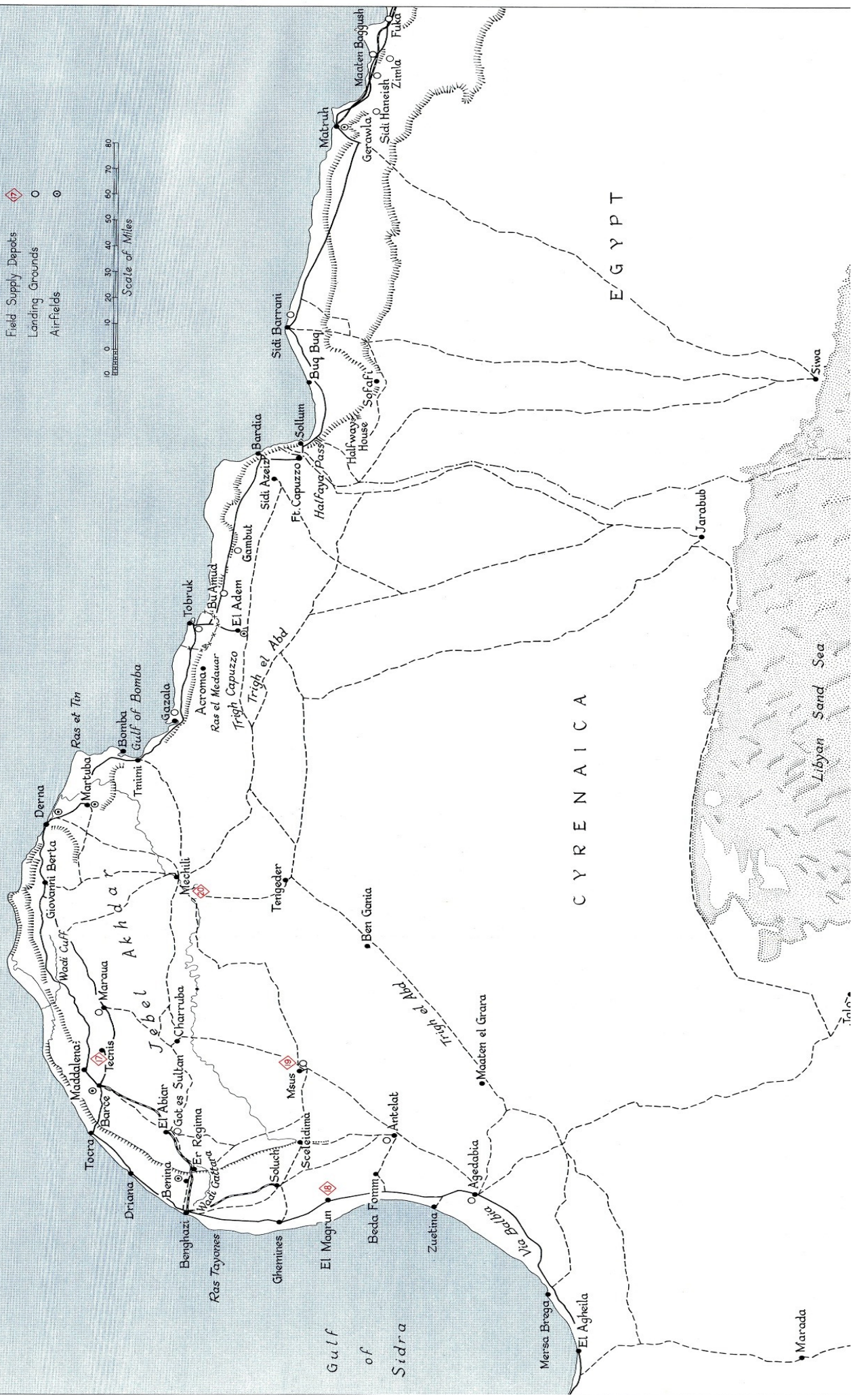
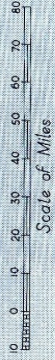
Fuka, Egypt: Pilots of 'B' Flight, No. 33 Squadron walking away from one of the unit's newly-acquired Hawker Hurricane Mark Is. From left to right, they are: unidentified, Flying Officers C H Dyson, P R Quintin and H J Starrett, Flight Lieutenant G E Hawkins, Sergeant J Craig, Flying Officers J F Mackie and V C Woodward, and Squadron Leader Charles Ryley (OC 33 Squadron)



Woody dons his parachute beside his Hawker Hurricane Mark I, at Fuka, Egypt. By this time, he had shot down six enemy aircraft, and was to gain a further 19 victories before he left the Middle East Theatre in September 1941.

CYRENAICA IN MARCH 1941

- Field Supply Depots (diamond symbol)
- Landing Grounds (circle symbol)
- Airfields (circle with dot symbol)



CYRENAICA

EGYPT

Libyan Sand Sea

Gulf of Sidra

Marada

and a professional approach to flying – although Pattle was not impressed with its aerial skills. Baker further states that initially Pattle was received with resentment, for the men of No. 33 felt that one of their own flight commanders should have been promoted. When Baker met Woody while researching his book on Pattle, Woody described Pat as the outstanding fighter pilot of the whole of the RAF at that time, with a score of well over thirty enemy planes destroyed, and the majority of those shot down whilst flying an obsolescent Gloster Gladiator.

The stalemate in Albania between the Italian and Greek armies was finally resolved on 6 April, when Germany launched its invasion of Greece - Operation MARITA. On 5 April, the RAF had nine squadrons in Greece but only 80 serviceable aircraft. The Luftwaffe would have around 800 aircraft for operations in Greece, and between 200-400 more once Yugoslavia had been crushed. The Italians had roughly 160 aircraft in Albania and 150 for missions from bases in Southern Italy. As the Wehrmacht struck, British units began to fall back. By 20 April it was evident that no line could be held, and the evacuations that would continue until 1 May began. Despite Axis air superiority, some 50,732 personnel were evacuated.

The RAF battled on bravely, managing to attack convoys on congested roads in Yugoslavia and German troops advancing down the Florina Valley. Woody shot down an Me109 while on a recon flight over Monastir on 13 April, and he was with Dixie Dean on 15 April when they shot down three JU.87s – two for Woody and one for Dixie. The Luftwaffe struck hard on 15 April, concentrating on RAF airfields across Northern Greece and destroying 14 Hurricanes and 18 Blenheims. Fifteen Bf.109s strafed Larissa airfield as three of No. 33 Squadron's Hurricanes were taking off. Pilot Officer C.A.C. Chetham and F/O John Mackie were killed, but Sgt. G.E.C. 'Jumbo' Genders managed to shoot down a Bf.109 and return to Larissa without a scratch. The satellite airfield at Niamata, 10 miles from Larissa, saw 10 Blenheims destroyed, while 46 aircraft were destroyed at Paramythia, many of which were Yugoslavian machines that had escaped the early German onslaught. As German troops began pushing by Mount Olympus, the Hurricanes withdrew to Eleusis, where they were joined by Hurricane reinforcements from Egypt. Flying with Pattle on 16 April, Woody bagged two more Bf.109s but the Squadron lost F/O Francis Holman in the dogfight who landed a crippled Hurricane in swampy land near Megara, which overturned, breaking the pilot's neck.

Scrambles and sweeps were wearing down the RAF fighters. Even when no losses were sustained, aircraft serviceability was plummeting. As of 20 April there were only about 15 Hurricanes available for the

defence of the Athens area. To make matters worse, the primitive air raid warning system – observers in the hills linked by telephone to Eleusis – had broken down in chaos. Any German air attack had a good chance of achieving surprise.

A sweep had been ordered for 1800 hrs on 20 April, using the Hurricanes of Nos. 33, 80 and 208 Squadrons. They were formed up, preparing for takeoff, when the Luftwaffe struck. Wave upon wave attacked the field – Ju.88s with Bf.109 or Bf. 110 escorts. The Hurricanes scrambled in ones and twos, linking up hurriedly in elements and sections before engaging with the enemy with all the odds against them. In the terrible battle, which raged chiefly over Piraeus harbour, several Hurricane pilots ran out of ammunition, returned to base for more, and took off again to rejoin the fight. It was the last great air battle in Greece. In his official dispatch, AVM D'Albiac reported that 22 enemy aircraft had been destroyed and eight more probably destroyed; actual German losses were closer to eight destroyed and two damaged. Five Hurricanes were lost, several more heavily damaged, and even D'Albiac had to write, "Small as our losses were, they were crippling to our air force."

No. 33 had put up six aircraft that day. Every pilot had claimed something; Woody had been credited with a Bf.110 in flames, plus two Bf. 110s and one Ju.88 damaged. Other pilots had been credited with two destroyed, two 'probables' and three damaged. The price had been terrible. Sqn Ldr Pattle was killed; Flt Lt Starrett, badly burned following a crash landing, would die of his wounds within hours. FS Len Cottingham had been wounded. There was no future for them at Eleusis.

At this point, Woody and No. 33 Squadron parted company briefly. He was detailed to return by Sunderland to Egypt; Nos. 228 and 230 Squadrons were running a virtual evacuation schedule run between Greece and North Africa. His assignment was to pick up a Hurricane intended for reinforcement and ferry it back to his unit. By the time he rejoined 33, events had taken the squadron to a new location.

CRETE

When Woody rejoined his unit, sometime about mid-May, it was at Maleme, Crete. The island had been garrisoned by British troops since November 1940, but no defence networks had been built – neither fortifications nor communications lines. In a list of commitments that included North Africa, East Africa, Greece and Iraq, Crete was never a top priority. When the garrison swelled in April and May 1941, it was largely augmented with exhausted troops evacuated from Greece itself, without heavy artillery or anti-aircraft guns. Other vital items – signalling equipment,



Above left: At Larissa. (L to R): Dixie Dean, Peter Wickham, Vernon Woodward, David Moir and Charles Chetham.

Dixie Dean (right front) and Young meet two Greek airmen. (Both photos from C H Dyson)



Fiat G.50

OPERATIONS RECORD BOOK.

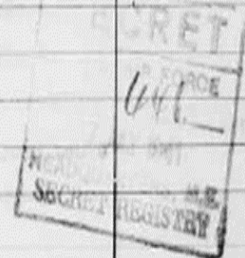
DETAIL OF WORK CARRIED OUT.

From hrs. to hrs.

By 55 Squadron (Maleme, Crete)

No. of pages used for day

Aircraft Type and No.	Crew.	Duty.	TIME DATE	Time DATE	Details of Sortie or Flight.	References
Hurricane						
7461	F/O Woods	--	1.5.41	2.05	Patrolled Suda Bay (Crete)	
7800	P/O Winsland	--	"	2.00		
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	.55	"Interception" (Nothing sighted)	
7297	P/O Winsland	--	"	.50		
7826	F/O Neel-Johnson	--	"	1.45	Patrolled Suda Bay	
7800	Sgt. Genders	--	"	1.50		
7461	F/O Woods	--	2.5.41	1.00		
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	.50	"Interceptions" (Nothing sighted)	
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	.45		
7800	Sgt. Genders	--	3.5.41	1.00	Intercepted about 24 JU 88s Sgt Genders damaged four.	
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	.40	F/O Woods shot down 1 JU88 confirmed and damaged another	
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	.10	A scramble	
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	2.10	Patrolled Suda Bay	
7800	P/O Winsland	--	"	.15	Flight Test	
7826	F/O Neel-Johnson	--	4.5.41	.40	Intercepted 12 JU 88s Damaged two.	
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	1.45	Intercepted 12 JU 88s Also damaged two	
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	1.20	Patrolled Suda Bay	
7800	Sgt Genders	--	"	.45	Scramble (single aircraft)	
7800	Sgt Genders	--	"	1.00	Scramble " "	
7800	P/O Winsland	--	"	.55	Scramble " "	



13



Top and next page: 33 Squadron's Work Sheets for May 1941, showing five Hurricane serial numbers: 7181, 7297, 7461, 7800, 7825 and 7826, along with Gladiators 5513 and 5535. The pilots, from left to right, are Flying Officer 'Chico' Woods, Flying Officer Noel-Johnson, Pilot Officer 'Winnie' Winsland and Sergeant 'Jumbo' Genders. On the next page, Squadron Leader Howell, Flying Officers Butcher and Moir, Pilot Officers Dunscombe and Kirkpatrick, and Sergeants Butterick, Loveridge, Reynish and Ripsher are also mentioned. There is no reference to Flight Lieutenant Woodward.

Aircraft Type and No.	Crew	Duty	Date	Time	Details of Sortie or Flight	References
Hurricane						
7181	F/O Noel-Johnson	--	5.5.41	.20	Scramble	
7181	F/O Noel-Johnson	--	"	.35	Intercepted JU.88, but could not get within range	
7800	P/O Winsland	--	"	.25	Scramble	
7800	P/O Winsland	--	"	.10	R/T test.	
7800	P/O Winsland	--	"	.25	Scramble (Single aircraft only)	
7800	F/O Noel-Johnson	--	6.5.41	.30	Scramble " " "	
7828	Sgt Ganders	--	7.5.41	.30	Scramble " " "	
7461	F/O Woods	--	8.5.41	.30	Scramble " " "	
7181	F/O Noel-Johnson	--	9.5.41	.10	Scramble " " "	
7800	P/O Winsland	--	9.5.41	1.55	Patrolled Suda Bay (Single aircraft only)	
7461	F/O Woods	--	10.5.41	1.55	Patrolled Suda Bay " " "	
5585	P/O Winsland	--	11.5.41	.20	Local Flying Practice	
7181	F/O Noel Johnson	--	12.5.41	.30	Scramble	
5512	F/O Noel-Johnson	--	"	.30	Patrolled base (Maleme)	
7461	F/O Woods	--	"	.40	Scramble.	

F/O Weir also took part in many of the patrols and scrambles, completing some 14 hours flying. P/O Kirkpatrick and Sgts Leveridge and Butterick also took part in many of the patrols and "scrambles", averaging about 10 hours each from May 1st - 11th, but records and details of times etc, are not obtainable. Sgts Leveridge and Butterick are missing since the evacuation of Crete.

More flying was carried out after May 12th until about May 18th with the same machines but by a different set of pilots. All records, however, of times etc, were lost during the final evacuation of Crete.

Between May 18th - 19th however the following results were achieved:-

S/Ldr Howell shot down 2 ME 109s confirmed
 " " " " 1 JU 52 confirmed & 1 ME confirmed

Sgt Ripsher " " 1 ME 109 confirmed

Sgt Reynish " " 1 ME 109 confirmed

No further flying was carried out after about May 18th, all our remaining machines having been wrecked by strafing or shot down (Six machines in all)

Sgt Ripsher was shot down and killed in action.

S/Ldr Howell, F/O Butcher, P/O Dunscombe and Sgt. Reynish are all missing since the evacuation,

all now being believed killed with the exception of F/O Butcher whose fate is unknown.

To: The Under Secretary of State,

Air Ministry

Admiralty House

Kingway, W. 11.

70: HQ. M.E.

entrenching tools – were in short supply. Fewer than 30 tanks arrived before the enemy struck.

Crete itself presented difficulties for defenders. The island, 170 miles long, 40 miles wide at the broadest point, has a mountainous interior. At that time there was only one road, in places no more than a rutted track, running along the northern coast. The defenders, some 26,614 by 20 May, were thinly spread and had little opportunity to reinforce particular spots once the Germans attacked. Although an airborne assault was anticipated, hopes were placed on the Royal Navy to frustrate any seaborne reinforcement of the attack. In this the navy succeeded, but the aerial invasion was more deadly than had been expected.

The Germans had assigned overwhelming air power to 'Operation MERCURY', including 228 bombers, 205 dive bombers, 114 Bf. 110s and 119 Bf. 109 fighters, 50 recon aircraft, 500 transports and 72 gliders. Italian air support amounted to 51 bombers, fighters, torpedo-bombers and floatplanes. Against this mass the RAF, with Fleet Air Arm assistance and some reinforcements from Egypt, could never muster more than 36 aircraft, chiefly Gladiators and Blenheims. No. 33 Squadron had brought four Hurricanes and eight pilots to the island; No. 80 Squadron was reported to have also brought four Hurricanes. To these were added seven Hurricanes, which arrived on 12 May, the probable date of Woody's return. The new CO, Sqn Ldr Edward Howell, also arrived around this time by flying boat with some of the rested pilots and new sergeant pilot replacements, allowing some of the Greek veterans to head back to Egypt on the flying boat for some well-earned leave. Howell had two obstacles to face: taking over the decimated remains of a famous fighter squadron from the legendary Pat Pattle and learning to fly a Hurricane, having only flown Spitfires in England. Two more Hurricanes were flown in around 15 May. Cannibalization was the only way to keep aircraft serviceable, and by 19 May there were only seven fighters fit to fly. These were evacuated to Egypt rather than sacrifice them in what was clearly a hopeless battle.

During No.33 Squadron's time on Crete its remnants were pooled with those of No. 80 to form 'The Hurricane Unit, Crete,' All servicing was done by No. 33 ground crews, who had arrived in some numbers, although with no spare parts and only two boxes of tools. This heroic band was directed by two NCOs identified only as FS Salmon and WO Clarke. The unit was based at Maleme. In all of Crete there were only three airfields – Maleme, Heraklion and Retimo. Only Heraklion boasted facilities such as hangars and a modest repair capacity. Maleme was little more than a strip levelled near the beach; Retimo served only as an emergency landing site. A fourth airfield at Kastelli had

been started then abandoned for lack of resources to defend it. The runway had been ploughed up to deny its use to the enemy.

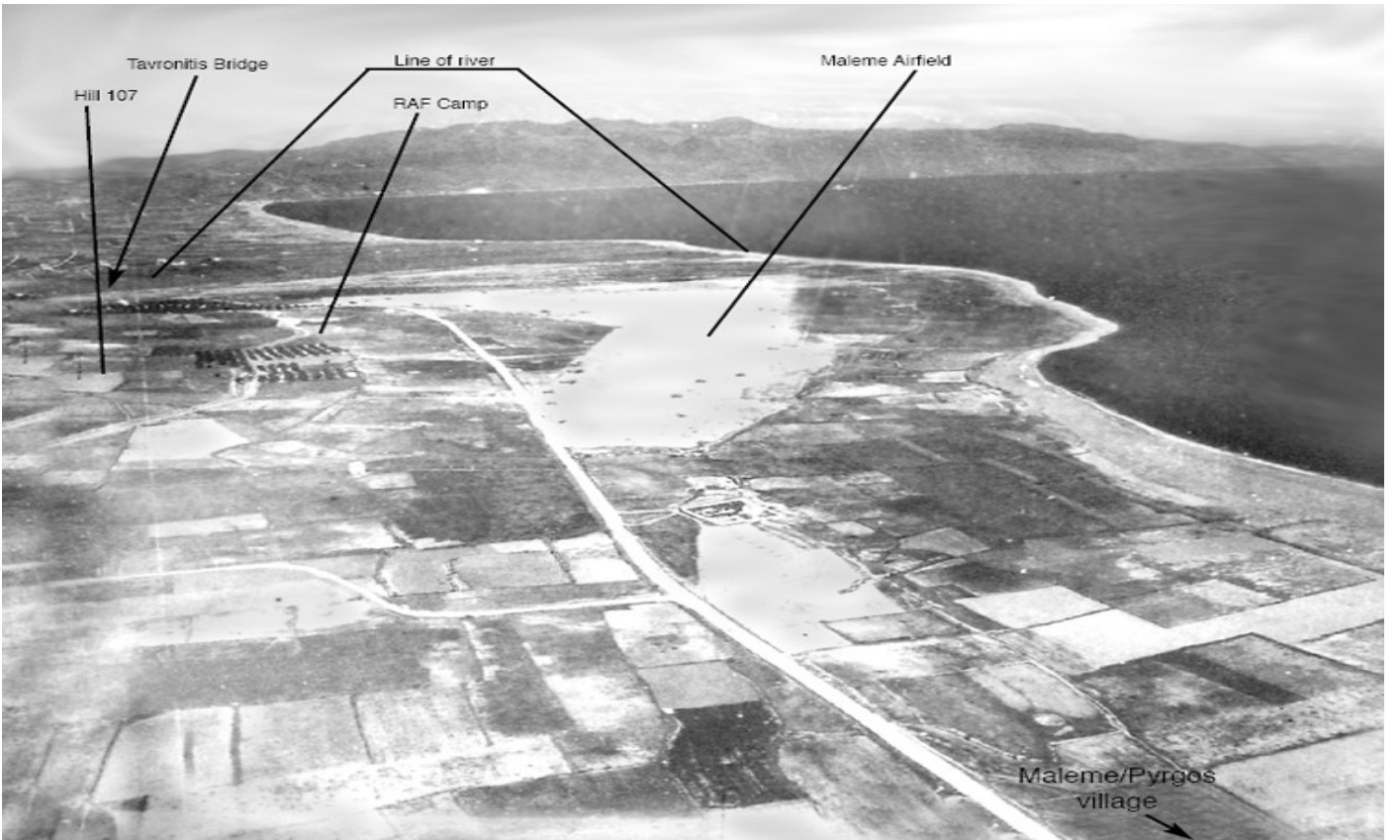
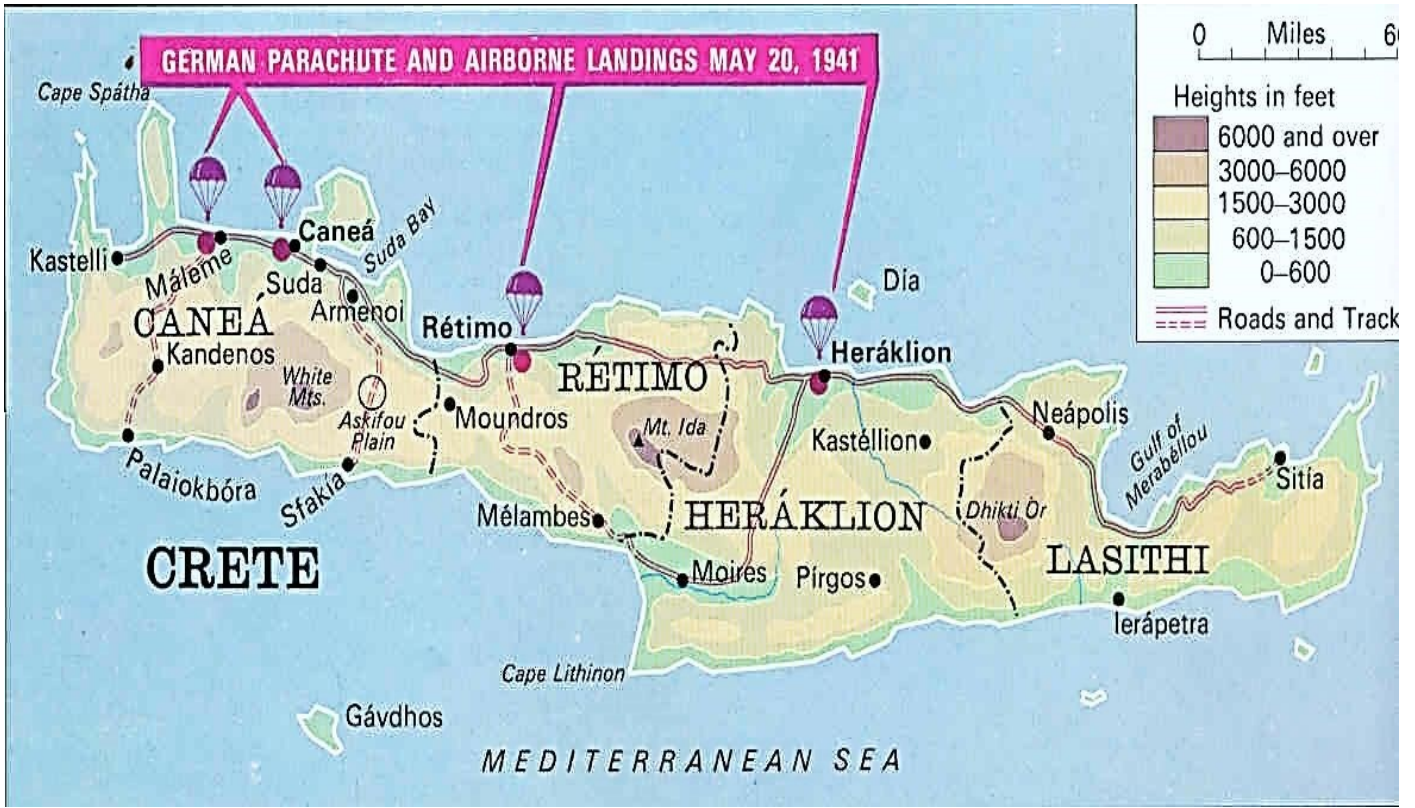
In the run up to the German assault, the Hurricanes managed to discourage several German reconnaissance aircraft and shoot down a number of victims. Between 3-16 May No. 33's pilots claimed 8 enemy aircraft destroyed and 11 damaged. The Squadron lost one pilot in the course of these actions. There is confusion over the date that Sgt Ripsher was shot down during a one-sided battle with several Bf.109s – CWGC records state 15 May, while 33's reconstructed ORB says 16 May.

Luftwaffe attacks on the airfields intensified from 13 May onwards, with Hurricanes scrambling in the middle of strafing attacks by Bf. 109s. A fuel dump was hit on 17 May, while on the 18th Maleme was bombed and strafed throughout the day, with an attack at 14:30 hours that saw AC Marcel Comeau awarded a Military Medal for an act of bravery during the raid. That evening it was evident that the RAF had reached the end of its tether., and a party of ground crew, led by the indomitable FS Salmon, was evacuated by Sunderland. On 19 May, with strafing Messerschmitts making the building of more aircraft pens impossible, the remaining fighters on Crete - four Hurricanes and three Gladiators - were flown to Egypt. RAF personnel remaining on Crete would help to defend the island, and be on hand to fly and service RAF aircraft if any returned. Twelve Hurricanes were flown to Heraklion on 24 May in an attempt to influence the battle, but by day's end there were only three serviceable.

On 20 May 1941, within 24 hours of the last fighters' departure, the German assault on Crete began. No. 33 Squadron's ORB prides us with a detailed account of the attack. Nine months later Woody wrote of his experiences during the battle and his personal account was published in the February 1942 issue of RAFTERS, a magazine produced by RAF personnel in Rhodesia. His version of events differs slightly from that of the Squadron diarist. Indeed, both narratives do not agree fully with the official reports of the battle, notably on the dates that the enemy finally captured Maleme airfield and when they began landing reinforcements by Ju. 52 transport.

Woody recalled that Maleme airfield was defended by anti-aircraft posts and sandbagged forts. Each morning RAF personnel would take up positions with New Zealanders on hills commanding the area, half a mile from the base. They were most alert between 0430-0730, the time deemed most likely for an enemy attack. He was at breakfast on the morning of May 20 when German bombing commenced. He recalled:

After an age that must have been about an hour, the



bombing slackened. From the slit trench I could see hundreds of troop-carriers approaching, line behind line of Ju.52s, many of them towing three gliders. The squadron commander and I rushed to the camp to collect the men for the defence posts, but we only managed to gather about 30 in the next few seconds before the Germans played their next card. The machines which had been bombing from 6 000 feet swooped down and roared overhead, 50 feet up, hundreds of sirens screaming, and machine guns blazing at any sign of movement. In that inferno of noise it was impossible to hear a man shouting net to you. The idea was to create a panic and confusion and to give the parachutists a chance to land by keeping everyone under cover. The first canopies appear, white, green and red. Some hundreds of figures are drifting down. The first parachutists were dead before their parachutes open; hundreds die before they reach the ground. Yet so many land alive in the first ten minutes that our half-mile to the New Zealand positions is two hours crawling on our bellies, dashing across a space to the next cover, never knowing from which direction the next Tommy gun will bark.

The green uniforms of the parachutists, and the mottled green of the capes that covered their heads and shoulders, made them almost invisible against the background of olive grove or vineyard if they chose to stand still. It is typical of the thoroughness with which all German equipment was planned. The German uniforms were superior in quality to the New Zealand uniforms, which they somewhat resembled, and the German troops were far better equipped than the New Zealanders, who had with them only what they had brought out of Greece.

The German troops used white parachutes and their section leaders were marked out by red canopies. Green parachutes indicated the supplies which were dropped in large cylinders, and which included Tommy guns, ammunition, and excellent rations. Because the confused warfare upset supply arrangements, the New Zealanders were often reduced to bully beef and biscuits, so the German 'travelling trucks' were much sought after.

When our party of 15 reached the top of the hill we were immediately allocated two machine gun posts, and for the next two days we operated with the New Zealanders, occasionally undertaking patrols. During the first day most of the fighting consisted of skirmishes between New Zealanders who had been disposed against a parachute attack and small pockets of Germans. Until late in the afternoon there was no sort of line, and in the confusion the German air force could do little against us. Large numbers of gliders landed in small river valleys near the aerodrome, and before noon a sufficient force had gathered to take the

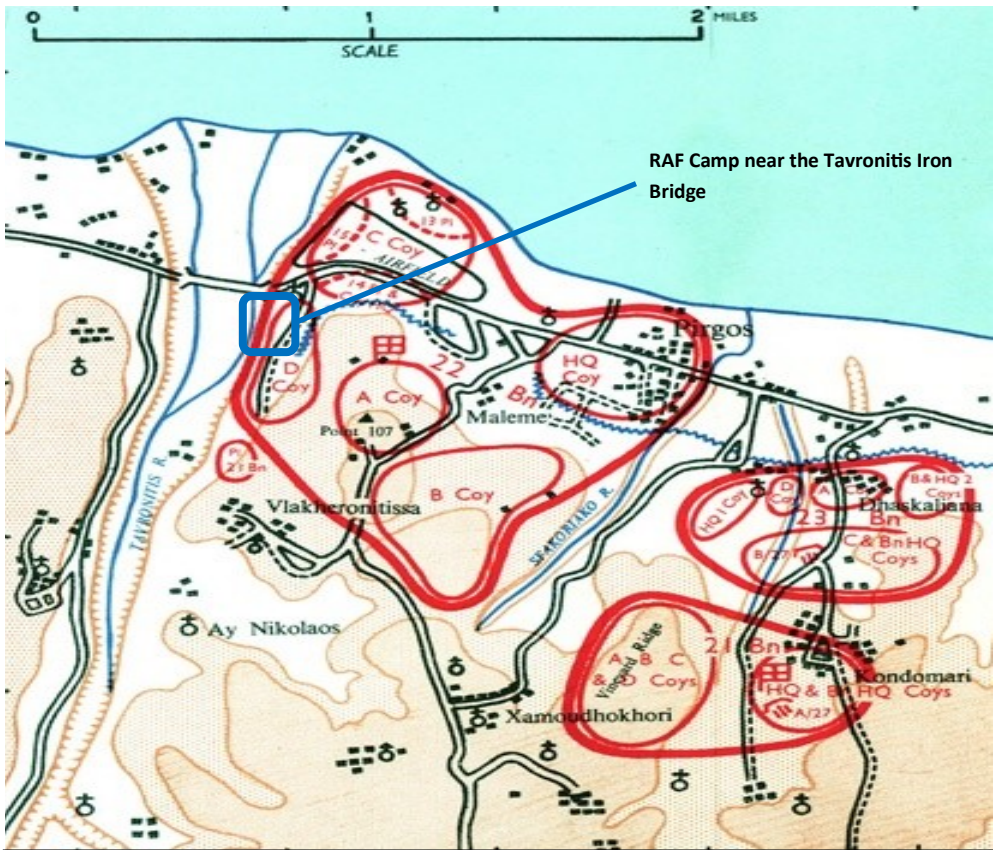
aerodrome for the first time. The Germans emptied the sick quarters and took many other prisoners. Armed only with Tommy guns they could not take the ack-ack forts. The Australians holding them had rifles with a longer range. The batteries held out until that night, when the rifle ammunition ran out and the Australians got away under cover of darkness.

The first substantial attack on our hill positions came shortly after the capture of the aerodrome. The Germans came up behind a shield of 50 of their prisoners. The New Zealanders held their fire as long as they could—we could recognize individual faces among the prisoners—then they tried to pick off the Germans behind the human screen. The attack was frustrated, at a cost.

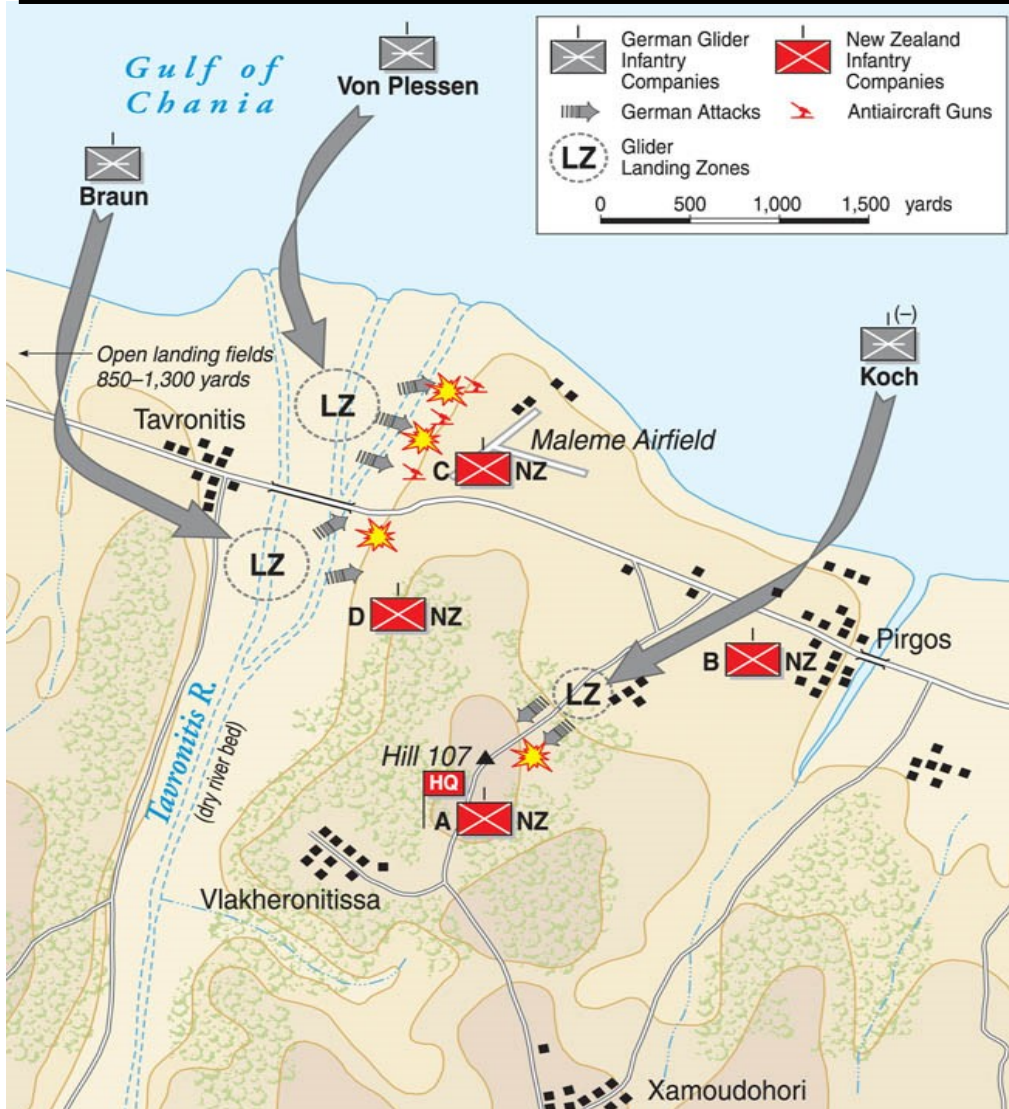
The Maoris charged and retook the aerodrome. If their warlike nature needed any spur, this display with the prisoners was more than enough. With blood-curdling war-cries they swooped on the Germans with fixed bayonets. Towards dusk on that interminable first day we had our first experience of concentrated dive-bombing. The Germans were better organised by then, but could make no impression on our defences, so they called in the bombers. The bombers just about blew the top off the hill. The only thing to do was to get out of the way and then scramble back into what was left of the positions ahead of the Germans, and in time we beat them off. We succeeded twice in accomplishing this manoeuvre, but after that there was so little left to go back to, that in the night the order came to withdraw to another line.

In their account of the battle, No.33 Squadron's diarist and Woodward were fairly close for May 20, but after that their narratives diverge. The most likely explanation is that Woody remained in the battle zone while the anonymous unit chronicler accompanied wounded men out of the area where fighting was in progress. Both had been very detailed about the first day of the battle, they both compressed the events of succeeding days. The ORB covers May 21 at Maleme, May 22—23 between Maleme and Canea, where the RAF HQ evacuated personnel to Traivoros, 15 miles east of Suda. Meanwhile, Woody was still in the thick of the land battle, described in detail following the slugging match of May 20:

The next day began as the first one finished, with dive-bombing and ground-strafting that was to last almost continuously for two days. The aerodrome was recaptured and cleared again and again. It was an impossible position for either side to hold against a determined counter-attack. Our chief concern was to prevent the Germans from becoming established well enough to use the aerodrome. The New Zealanders worked steadily away at the mopping up, and by the end of the second day had almost cleared the area



Above: New Zealand positions around Maleme 20 May 1941.
 Below: German Assault 20 May 1941



between our positions and the sea, but over a high ridge of land where our forces were weak the Germans had established a concentration in the river valley, and these forces were augmented by troop-carriers landed on the beach. They steadily poured more men into this reservoir, which provided reinforcements for those lost in the continual struggle for the aerodrome.

The Germans actually started landing Ju 52s on Maleme on 21 May, touching down, unloading hastily and taking off as quickly as possible.

By this time the New Zealanders were running short of ammunition and could no longer clear it of enemy troops, but they kept it covered with artillery. In spite of the losses from gunfire, the German troop-carriers kept on coming in. Whenever one crashed, a squad of 50 men ran out to remove the debris from the path of the next one. One Ju.52 had not stopped its landing run when I saw a hatch in the side open, and out bounced a motorcycle and sidecar, engine running. A machine-gun and gunner were mounted in the sidecar.

One incident on that day showed the confusion that still prevailed. A New Zealander, an airman and I were sharing some bully beef and biscuits by way of lunch when an old woman came up the lane next to which we were sitting, gesticulating wildly and talking about a parachutist up the road. We soothed her hysterics and went on with lunch. Suddenly I looked up at the hedge screening the lane, and at the same moment a head in a green cape bobbed up on the other side. He was evidently a little more surprised than we were, for I shall never forget the look of utter astonishment on his face. For a few moments he stood as if petrified, looking at us, and we looked back at him. He ducked down behind the hedge, and we all burst out laughing at the memory of his blank face. We dashed after him, but he had slipped down a ledge into a vineyard and we did not see him again.

May 22 marked the decisive point in the battle, although this was not immediately apparent to those involved. Enemy airborne troops and reinforcements had now gained an unbreakable hold on Maleme airfield. More important was a decision by Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham that the Royal Navy could no longer operate by day in the vicinity of Crete. German aircraft would simply wipe the fleet off the map. That meant that the British defenders would be only weakly reinforced by night, and the enemy would be able to reinforce vigorously by day. The logic of that situation meant that Crete must fall. The best the British might do would be to conduct a fighting retreat and salvage as many troops as possible through evacuation. Even that was a gamble. How many men might live if captured but die if they boarded ships that were likely to be sunk? Woodward and the men of No. 33 Squadron were swept up in the retreat, although they

followed two different routes. The unit diarist covers the period 26-28 May with the men moving from Traivoros in lorries over the 7 000 foot mountain range to Sphakia on the south coast of the island, where they hid up until taken off by destroyers during the night to Egypt.

Woody had his own peculiar adventures, which he recounted in his February 1942 account, written when it was still stark and fresh in his mind:

By the fourth day there was not enough ammunition left for the New Zealanders; none could be spared for the few RAF, who were not so useful in this land warfare. The senior New Zealand officer urged us to try and get out through the German lines, as we were of no use there. There was no knowing our chances, so it was left to each man to wait or try and get through. I spent most of the day collecting those who were left of our party and making arrangements. A long time for a small task, it seems, but we were still in the midst of the blitz, dive-bombing and machine-gunning from the air, and the ground. I would gather a group and tell them to wait for me while I rounded up others or went to headquarters, and I might come back to find that the line had fallen back at that point in the face of a sudden attack, or that the ground they were to wait on had been blown away. Then I had to find them again. We started off after dark that evening, but ran into the fire of a strong enemy force and had to return.

The next night we were a larger party when we tried again, 20 of the RAF and about 100 Royal Marines. The officer in charge of the Marines and I took turns leading the column. I had some uncomfortable moments marching into pitch blackness at the head of those men. Even my German Tommy gun was small comfort. We were fired on several times, but by making as much noise as we could we gave the impression of being a party of 500 instead of 100, and evidently there was no German unit strong enough to attack such a large force.

We marched all night, passing twice through the German lines in the 18 miles to Canea.

The Navy was carrying on in the face of the constant air attack. The destroyer in which we reached Egypt was attacked steadily by the dive-bombers for the first hour.

Woody recalled that he personally had been taken out by an Australian vessel. This details pinpoints the exact date of his departure. On the night of 26 May, HM ships *Abdiel* and *Hero*, and HMAS *Nizam*, all destroyers, disembarked troops and supplies at Suda Bay. These were the last reinforcements put ashore on Crete. They had then taken on 930 evacuees, chiefly merchant seamen, for removal to Alexandria. Thus Woody escaped the cauldron that was Crete. He had left many friends behind. Some were dead; most were prisoners of war.



Above: Maleme airfield on or after 22 May, with abandoned German aircraft all over the airfield. You can just make out three or four aircraft pens to the north of the white road where it bends south, eventually crossing the Tavronitis Bridge. Below: A different view of the crashed glider shown on the cover. The motorbike and sidecar has just stopped before crossing the Tavronitis Bridge, with Hill 107 clearly visible to the right hand side of the picture.



NORTH AFRICA

The evacuees returned to a theatre radically changed by events. British forces in North Africa had been only slightly reinforced, in air power they had been depleted, while a campaign in East Africa mopped up most of the Eritrean / Ethiopian portions of the Italian empire. The last pockets were not cleared away, however, until November 1941. Greece, Crete and Iraq represented added drains on resources. At the same time Italian troops had been joined by the first elements of Germany's *Afrika Korps* which, under the inspired leadership of Lieutenant-General Erwin Rommel, had driven Wavell's armies back to the Egyptian-Libyan border. The front had become static as the enemy laid siege to Tobruk.

Woody was told that he had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, it had been announced in 9 May of the London Gazette, though with no citation other than he had displayed 'gallantry and devotion to duty in the execution of air operations'. A person receiving a DFC also got a cash payment of some 25 pounds, enough to stage a fair party in celebration.

No. 33 Squadron had suffered grievously in the Greek and Crete affairs. As of 1 June it had no aircraft and only seven pilots. For the moment these were attached to No. 30 Squadron at Amriya. On 13 June they received seven Hurricanes. A detachment was duly formed and sent to Gerawla where they were attached to No. 274 Squadron. Their quick return to front-line duty was due to the fact that a British offensive, code-named 'BATTLEAXE', was about to begin along the Libyan border. They resumed operations on 15 June as five of their aircraft, one piloted by Woody, escorted a Hurricane of No. 6 Squadron on a photographic reconnaissance mission. No. 33 quickly became involved in patrols around Sollum and Mersa Matruh. Nothing of any account happened for the first two days, but on 17 June 33 was back in the fight. Six Hurricanes, led by Woody, encountered eight or nine Ju.87s, escorted by six Bf.109s and six G.50s. A total of six enemy aircraft were shot down and three damaged; Woody claimed a G.50 destroyed and one damaged, but the dogfight had cost 33 Squadron an aircraft and a pilot - Flying Officer E J 'Chico' Woods. The loss of Chico was sorely felt by Woody, as they had been together since their training days.

June 17 had been a crucial day. On the ground, German anti-tank guns had broken British armoured units, and the offensive was called off that evening. The Luftwaffe had tried hard to play a role, and one dive-bombing raid had inflicted 1 200 casualties, but overall the R.A.F. had succeeded in keeping enemy aircraft off the backs of the soldiers. The theatre now witnessed stalemate.

For the next two weeks, 33 led a gypsy life. Woody flew

three sorties on 18 June, including an escort trip to No. 73 Squadron on a ground strafe. On 19 June the detachment flew to Amriya, where it was attached to No. 806 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, a unit that had become land-based when their home ship, HMS *Illustrious*, was damaged by enemy bombers near Crete. They parted on 2-3 July, when 33, also squadron strength, moved to Heliopolis, where the unit took a crash course in aerial interceptions, using the latest techniques of radar detection and radio direction from the ground. Their first attempts were not impressive—three contacts in eight practice scrambles. Nevertheless, they were cleared to take up duty at Port Said on 4-5 July, and then at Amriya once more, 10-11 July. The twelfth brought good fortune in the form of Woody's last victory. The ORB records the details as follows:

At 1250 hours two aircraft were told to scramble to 20 000 feet, the aircraft being flown by Flight Lieutenant Woodward DFC and Flying Officer Crockett (30 Squadron). After being vectored for nearly an hour and ordered to 26 000 feet they intercepted one Ju.88 on reconnaissance, first sighting it directly over Amriya. After the first attack the enemy half-rolled on his back and dived vertically towards the ground flattening out at only 500 feet with a speed of at least 330 m.p.h., and the two Hurricanes still on his tail. After a chase at ground level lasting two or three minutes, the enemy was shot down in flames about 40 miles south-west of base. Two of the crew were seen to get out of the wreckage apparently unhurt, but both died later in hospital.

The action was also notable, in that the interception was controlled by HMS *Formidable*, undergoing repairs at Alexandria. Woodward himself was flying Hurricane Z3477, the same aircraft that had been piloted during his successful scrap of 17 June. The Ju.88 brought his score to approximately 20 victories—'approximately' because, with so many records lost or conflicting, it is impossible to compile a satisfactory list of his successes.

The following two months were taken up with inconclusive 'scrambles' and squadron exercises and the summer was largely uneventful. Things began to look a little more interesting in early September when 33 moved forward once more, this time to Sidi Haneish North. However, Woody was not to see further action with No. 33 Squadron. On 11 September his lengthy tour finally ended and he was posted away to serve as an instructor at No. 20 SFTS at Cranbourne, near Salisbury, in Southern Rhodesia, where flew Harvards from October 1941 until June 1942. After a short spell at Headquarters Rhodesia Air Training Group he was returned to operational duties, and arrived back in North Africa on 3 January 1943 to take command of No. 213 Squadron (Hurricanes) based at Martuba, near

Alexandria. Woody saw no action with the Squadron, and he was posted away on 27 August, shortly after he was awarded a Bar to his DFC.

FIGHTER ACE

Various sources list Woody with a score somewhere between 19 and 24. A commonly accepted total is 21; Christopher Shore, in *'Aces High: the Fighter Aces of the British and Commonwealth Air Forces in World War II'*, with more boldness than authority, fixed it at 21.83, while the Canadian 'Aces of WW2' list has Woody as equal second with 22, tied with Henry Wallace McLeod.

A Greek Tragedy

Remembering the dark days of Greece and Crete in 1941

by Squadron Leader W F J 'Tug' Wilson

Bill Wilson joined the RAF in 1936 as a wireless operator, serving with 33 Squadron in Palestine, Egypt, Libya, Greece and Crete, where, for a short time, he was a reluctant guest of the invading German paratroops. Post-war, Bill served for several years in Training Command, interspersed with tours in Sri Lanka, Singapore and Malaysia, where he spent three years on secondment to the newly-formed Royal Malaysian Air Force as OC Electronics. He retired from the RAF in 1971.

We needed very little preparation for this new phase in the Squadron's history; our aircraft had been maintained fully serviceable, as had our transport, and it was to be the disposal of our personal kit which would take up most of our time. The bulk of our effects had already been deposited into store when we moved into the desert, but now we were to rearrange our belongings by removing our blue uniform from store and replacing them with our khaki drill, which would be most unsuitable attire for the Greek winter ahead. Once the problem of kit had been solved, our vehicles were loaded up and driven to the docks in Alexandria for shipment on the small freighters which had been designated to transport us to the port of Piraeus, under cover of darkness.

Our arrival in Greece, and the subsequent off-loading of our transport, was a momentous experience. As each vehicle was slung ashore, it was claimed by the nominate driver and driven to a small side road near the harbour to add to the convoy already assembling. To say that we received a tremendous welcome would be a gross understatement. Within seconds of our lorries coming to rest, we were swamped with garlands of flowers, brought by small children and pretty young girls, who subjected us to a most generous and heart-warming display of sheer pleasurable acceptance.

We were given a reception of such warmth that we felt absolute frauds in accepting such affection, and there was little doubt in everyone's mind that our stay in Greece would be most memorable and pleasant, a thought that was emphasised as we left the city behind and followed the route to the Athens airfield of Eleusis, during which our progress was monitored by cheering crowds, and impeded by the many volunteer passengers who had managed to secure perches and handholds on all our vehicles.

Their welcome was, undoubtedly, an expression of

thanks for the help already received for mother RAF units, which had assisted the Greek army to repel, with considerable heavy losses, the Italians who had entered Greece through Albania.

After a short spell near the capital, we were to travel northwards along the one main road, which ran like a vertebrae from Athens, through Lamia and Larissa, over two massive mountain ranges, as it weaved its way past Mount Olympus to Macedonia, on the Bulgarian and Yugoslavian borders.

Our convoy was under the stern control of Chiefy Salmon, whose power of command was perhaps best illustrated by the fact that he even had junior officers sitting in the back of the three-ton lorries so that the front seats might be occupied by more useful individuals, such as relief drivers and MT fitters.

Before we set off, Chiefy had been briefed by the AOC, AVM D'Albiac, and warned that if the convoy failed to arrive on time, the AOC would decorate his office walls with his flight sergeant's stripes. Apparently, the last convoy had lost a quarter of its vehicle en route.

We night stopped at Lamia, where everyone except a couple of NCOs and a detail of guards was allowed to go into the town. It was only a small place, and what with the difficulty of the language, it wasn't long before we were back again. After all, we were due to be off at about six in the morning, and unlike most of the troops, I had a cosy bed in one of the signals tenders.

Our journey was reasonably uneventful; we had a few breakdowns but the convoy was not permitted to stop, except for a few minutes at a time. The accepted routine was that only the faulty vehicle would stop, and the fitters at the rear of the convoy would stay, survey the job and carry out whatever repairs were necessary. The only real snag was the CO's car, where all four tyres succumbed to the rigours of the journey and as all the spares had been used it was necessary to leave it behind. I understand that Chiefy Salmon returned with wheels from other vehicles, once the convoy had reached Larissa, but there were harsh words echoed around the squadron, because many of us felt that if the CO had released the car for a proper overhaul before we left Eleusis, this would never have happened.

Our entry into Larissa on the morning of 4th March occasioned questions from the locals, demanding to know why we hadn't brought our aircraft with us. For

the last week, they had been subjected to heavy bombing raids by a flight of SM 79s, which had arrived over the town regularly at noon each day.

It was pleasant to see the looks of relief on their faces when we explained that tomorrow - *avrio* - we would have aeroplanes - *Hurricanes* - and all their problems would be over. If only it could have been a day earlier!

The time was eleven-fifteen in the morning, we had just finished erecting our tents and were about to brew up when we experienced a particularly strange sensation. Several of us were actually rocked off the petrol tins we had taken for seats by the most vigorous of earth tremors. It took several seconds for us to realise exactly what had happened, and we were still chattering excitedly about it, when a deep rumble reached our ears from the direction of the town, a distance of about three miles. From our position at the airfield, situated on a rise overlooking the town, we could see buildings beginning to sway, then crumble, and finally disintegrate in a cloud of dust.

It is doubtful if any of us had ever experienced anything like an earthquake before, and we were still discussing what help we might be able to offer when the unmistakable throb of three-engine bombers pierced the air, and at noon precisely the inevitable formation of six SM79s bore down on the helpless town and unloosed their bombs on citizens still struggling to salvage something of their lives from the area devastated by Mother Nature. I don't think that I've ever felt so utterly helpless in all my life.

Eventually our suggestion was accepted that we should present our tents to the people of Larissa, retaining only the fly-sheets for ourselves. A party of us set out to collect and distribute to the townspeople, and whilst the local populace was very grateful for our contributions, it seemed to many of us that we were still to blame for not having any aircraft to defend them. It was so difficult trying to explain to the uninitiated - particularly when you have no command of their language whatsoever - that a base must be prepared, with refuelling and servicing facilities before planes can be considered operational. However, we made up for it the next day!

Well before noon, six of our Hurricanes had arrived, refuelled and taken off again, to form a standing patrol some distance north of the town. As midday approached, so did the SM 79s. But this time they were not allowed anywhere near the town. Every single intruder was shot down, parachutes and aircraft were falling out of the sky all around the place, and we could actually hear the cheers of encouragement from the town.

That evening we were literally dragged into Larissa and presented with the feats of a lifetime. The town was

one large barbecue, with whole sheep roasting on spits as far as the eye could see, and casks of *Mavrodaphne* (red wine) and *Asprodaphne* (white wine) and local Retsina being set up at every street corner. Life in Greece was, indeed, pleasant!

One week after our arrival at Larissa, our new CO took over. It was Squadron Leader Marmaduke Thomas St John Pattle, a South African who had joined the RAF in 1936. I had seen him on the outward voyage of the *Lancashire*, and also remember the whole station at Ismailia turning out to watch him make a one-wheel landing in a Gladiator one breakfast-time.

He had since gained a reputation as a first-rate fighter pilot, but as he was coming from the opposition - 80 Squadron - there were many who treated his appointment with reserve. But soon after his arrival he had demonstrated his expertise in the air by taking on two of the Squadron's experienced pilots: Flight Lieutenant 'Dixie' Dean and Flying Officer 'Ping' Newton, in aerial combat exercises, and out-flown them both. This display took place over the airfield, in full view of the Squadron, pilots and ground crews alike. Within a week, every single member of the Squadron was an ardent supporter, and he could do no wrong.

The Squadron was beginning to enjoy the comparatively relaxed atmosphere of our operational situation. It was certainly pleasant to see friendly native faces, and smell real fresh air, after the trials of desert warfare. We were helped, of course, by the knowledge that we were pitted against an enemy we had already beaten in another theatre, and whom we considered to be inferior in every respect.

It was with this air of mental calmness that two of us set off for a weekend at Volos, a small fishing town, only thirty miles south-east of Larissa. My companion was 'Ginger' Griffiths, an AC1 fitter's mate. Despite a language deficiency we experienced little trouble in finding suitable accommodation and ordering satisfactory meals; we even basked in the splendour of being the first visitors in RAF uniforms to visit Volos, although I confess that my personal ego took a sharp jolt when an elderly gentleman came up to me, fingered the chevrons on my arm and said, "You, caparel?"

"Yes", I agreed, "I'm a corporal." pleased with the recognition.

He then turned to Ginger, and pointing to the Good Conduct stripe on the bottom of his sleeve, said, "You, sargan-mejjer?"

Ginger grinned all over his face as he nodded his head. "Yes, I'm a sergeant-major!" He immediately became the guest of honour with an enormous fan club.

On Sunday morning, 6th April, we came down to breakfast to find a glum-looking group huddled round the wireless set in the lounge. We were at a loss to discover the reason for such solemnity, until a middle-aged lady came over to us, and announced in halting English that Germany had declared war on Greece and Yugoslavia.

It was imperative that we rejoin our unit immediately, so with the greatest reluctance at having no time whatsoever to become familiar with what had been promised to be a delightful part of the country, we promptly brought our weekend pass to an end and made our way to the railway station to catch a train back to Larissa.

From the time Hitler made his last move, our problems multiplied. The airfield was plastered daily by Junkers Ju88s and Dornier Do 17s, and in an attempt to find some security against surprise attacks our aircraft were dispersed to a makeshift landing ground close by, leaving only three aircraft operating on a dawn stand-by.

It was on the morning of 14th April that we were rudely awakened by a sound not unlike the tearing of canvas. It was, in fact, the front guns of a flight of Messerschmitt 109s, which had swooped over the hill at the rear of the airfield, and were now tearing the place apart. We manned the gun-posts and did our best, but the element of surprise had beaten us all.

Against this background we could hear the Merlin engines of our own three aircraft as they attempted to take off; the pilots were Flight Lieutenant Mackie, OC 'B' Flight, Pilot Officer Chetham—d'you know, years later, I was still referring to him as 'Chatham' - and Sergeant Genders.

The fifteen marauding fighters tore down on young Chetham in line astern, he didn't stand a chance. John Mackie looked as though he might get away with it, but he took up the cudgels of retaliation at the expense of his own safety, and while he was accounting for one of the attackers, another 109 took him from behind.

For the survivor, Sergeant Genders, this must have been a day to remember! Up to now, this youthful-looking sergeant-pilot had been shielded and sheltered by his seniors - very much against his will, we often felt - and had never been permitted to engage the enemy. I can remember the occasion, not more than a week before, when he was one of the three standby pilots, and was asked to report to the flight commander's office on some pretext. The other two aircraft were scrambled during his absence.

But today, with out the restraining hands of his well-intentioned guardians, he was given the chance to demonstrate his maturity in tactics, courage and

ability, and to take his place among the heroes of this campaign. He successfully evaded the would-be assassins during take-off, and returned to shoot down three of them.

The aerial activity increased, Larissa was pounded by successive waves of Junkers Ju87s and Dornier Do 17s, and before the end of the day we received instructions to pack up everything and make our way back to Eleusis. Quite few of our members were over at the satellite airfield and we had no means of knowing their fate. We could only hope that they survived.

I cannot recall a sadder sight than the elders of Larissa, already laid low by earthquake and Italian bombing, leaning against the walls of burning buildings, with shoulders shaking, and tears streaming down their faces, staring at us with incredulity as we withdrew our support and left them to face the future alone.

Throughout the night we drove southwards, the roads were thick with retreating traffic, the night skies were full of attacking aircraft. Time after time, bombs would explode to the front of the convoy, lifting vehicle and occupants high into the air, before depositing them unceremoniously into the canyon, whose steep sides came up to the very edge of the roadside.

As each lorry sustained too much damage to continue, the New Zealand Infantry would call on all extra hands to remove it, to keep the road to safety open for those following on behind. The offending vehicle would be manhandled off the road and the occupants of other vehicles did their best to make space available to accommodate the extra passengers. The resourcefulness and resilience of the British serviceman remained unsurpassed. Even in the midst of low-level bombing raids, with the countryside permanently illuminated by flares from prowling aircraft, it was always possible to find a cheery face, helping hand and a brew of tea at any enforced stop.

When daylight broke through, we sensed a warmer feeling of security and safety, as we recognised Squadron aircraft patrolling above the road, providing some element of cover from enemy bombing and strafing whilst, at the same time, searching for their own people among the thousands of refugees below. It was a sorry group that eventually crawled back to Eleusis. When we counted the cost, it was discovered that many of our specialist vehicles had been lost. The power tender had left the road at a point where a bomb crater had appeared on a blind corner of the highway; it was fortunate that we suffered no casualty there.

It seemed that the remains of the entire RAF fighter force was now concentrated at Eleusis, and with reduced numbers, and the consequential increase in the odds against us, we could expect our flying

programme to be intensive, to say the very least. We could certainly expect to lose more pilots.

Flight Lieutenant Frank Holman, who had just taken over command of 'B' Flight on the death of John Mackie, was the first to go, followed by Flight Lieutenant Harry Starrett, who made a courageous attempt to save his aircraft when he landed after it had caught fire in the air. Although we managed to pull him from his burning machine, unfortunately he died in hospital soon after.

Our aircraft had just returned from what had been a reasonably successful fighter sweep, and were being refuelled, when twelve 109s screamed out of the setting sun and proceeded to strafe the line of Hurricanes and petrol bombers. The damage was tremendous and would require all the ingenuity and competence of the ground staff to remedy. Chiefly Salmon had been instructed to transfer seven of the damaged aircraft into one of the hangars and, by cannibalism, invention or sheer magic, produce five serviceable machines by the following morning.

I was ordered by the Squadron Signals Warrant Officer, 'Whacker' Payne, to liaise with the airframe tradesmen to ascertain which mainplanes would end up on which fuselages, to facilitate the rewiring of the navigation lights, reflector gunsights and undercarriage circuits. He also intimated that this might form the practical element of a trade test for me to remuster from wireless operator to wireless and electrical mechanic. However, I gave precious little credence to his promises. I was still seething at his previous lethargy concerning my remustering. Under Chiefly Salmon's expert guidance, and with the help of a young electrician named Tommy Yeomans, I worked through the night, as did all the other tradesmen, and had completed my share of producing the five serviceable machines by six-thirty.

The undercarriage operation had been checked by the engineering warrant officer, Nobby Clark, three pilots had assisted us to carry out two-way radio checks on all five aircraft, so it was with some sense of achievement that I reported the results to the flight sergeant, who expressed satisfaction with our efforts and suggested we make our way to breakfast. He indicated that final engine checks would be completed as soon as the pilots arrived, which could be within the next half-hour.

We were sitting outside the cookhouse, contemplating our meagre ration of tinned bacon, complete with slivers of greaseproof paper, which seemed to be a fundamental component of this American delicacy, when the air raid siren sounded. A solitary Messerschmitt streaked across the airfield, overtaking us as we moved towards the shelter and proceeded to circle the hangar - the very hangar where those five aircraft

were awaiting engine tests - producing a clear, white vapour ring immediately over the building. Less than five minutes elapsed before the air was filled with the frightening screams of Ju 87 dive-bombers hurtling down out of the morning sunlight, aiming for the hangar we had so recently vacated.

The sight was devastating, large chunks of masonry were hurled into the air, followed by lengths of twisted metal, as plane after plane delivered its deadly load directly on to this building. It seemed as though the Hurricane was the one weapon in our armoury that scared the Luftwaffe, and they were determined, at all costs, to destroy any remaining on the airfield. The airfield was littered with many types of aircraft, both RAF and Greek, but no attempt was made to attack them, and we were more convinced than ever that the Germans owed much of their success to the fifth column activities within Greece.

It was many months later that we discovered that the Germans were actually in control of the national telephone system, even while we were still operating in the south of the country. That may have accounted for the tone of local news broadcasts, obviously designed to lower morale of British service personnel and encourage a spirit of hostility and distrust among our hosts. In this, they could count a high proportion of success. Day by day the bulletins poured out details of allied shipping losses in the Mediterranean, stressing our shortage of fighter aircraft and often quoting the names of ships whose only cargo was said to be Hurricanes. We knew, for a fact, that no replacement aircraft had been received, and it became very difficult not to accept as true other aspects of the news, no matter how pessimistic the implication.

It was, perhaps, with a feeling of relief that I found myself being invited to volunteer to join a representative team of tradesmen who were required to go over to Crete, for the express purpose of assembling Hurricane aircraft due to arrive by sea from the UK. We would fly from Eleusis in Blenheims of 30 Squadron, but there was more than a mild sense of urgency as we collected together a composite tool kit and carried it to the apron in front of the skeletal remains of that large hangar.

The Bristol Blenheim was designed for a crew of three, but the machine to which we were directed was expected to carry five of us, as well as that cumbersome tool box. Fortune smiled on me! I found myself in the turret, where breathing space was abundant, but our first disaster struck as we taxied out to take off. The tail wheel burst, the wheel jammed, and the aircraft ploughed a deep furrow in the grass runway before coming to a halt. After some hurried discussion between the pilot, the control tower and the duty crew, punctuated by the ominous wail of the air raid

siren, the chain of events which followed seemed totally unreal.

A lorryload of airmen, towing a starter trolley, raced across to the take-off point. The four large, heavy batteries were removed from the trolley, the tail of the Blenheim was lifted bodily into the air and lowered carefully on to the starter trolley, which now formed a temporary tail wheel. The two engines roared in a deafening crescendo, and the entire plane shuddered, straining against the brakes.

As the brakes were released the machine moved majestically across the ground gathering speed as it charged for the opposite side of the field. I was facing the tail, so I could not gauge just how far away, or how near to disaster we may have come before reaching the limits of the airfield, but I was very much aware of an involuntary gasp for breath as the tail of the aircraft lurched upwards, jettisoning its erstwhile tail wheel, which proceeded to execute a series of ungainly cartwheels across the ground beneath us, while heavy white smoke belched from the overheated axles.

Seconds later we were airborne and heading for Maleme in Crete, and as the coastline of Greece receded my mind was filled with thoughts of regret and disappointment as I realistically weighed up my chances of returning. Events of the previous two months had flown past so rapidly that no-one really had a chance to savour the historic magic of the country which had given birth to so much legend and beauty. It was true that I had lived, for a short time, within the shadow of Mount Olympus and had visited the Valley of Fairy Tales—Paramythia. I had even seen the Stadium and the Temple of Athene at the Parthenon, but only at a distance. Our sojourn in this beautiful country had been too short, and too full of other thoughts for me to take away any lasting memories of the past that was truly Greece.

The airfield at Maleme stretched down to the beach at the north-west corner of the island. From the air, it looked as though the place was well-equipped with planes. Our Blenheim came in to land, abruptly grinding to a halt as the tail strut became firmly embedded halfway down the runway, and we were able to make a clear assessment of the capabilities of the machines that we had noticed dotted around the perimeter. There were Brewster Buffaloes, Grumman Martlets, Fairy Fulmars, a single Curtiss Kittyhawk and some Gloster Gladiators, but only a few of the last named proved to be airworthy; several of the others were short of engines, wheels and, in two cases, mainplanes. We had stumbled into a graveyard of aeroplanes!

The camp was manned by Fleet Air Arm personnel, except for a small group of airmen under the command of Air Headquarters in Canea, these were mainly telephonists and wireless operators sharing the

communications duties with naval ratings in the building referred to as the Regulating Office, the equivalent of our Station Headquarters.

We had been allocated some tents in the olive grove at the foot of the hill which dominated this area, and after settling in we paid a visit to the airfield to find out all we could about the task we were expecting to carry out. Our enquiries were received with whimsical amusement by the three naval pilots who occupied the Flight Office.

“The only Hurricane parts we've seen,” volunteered one of them, “are those long range tanks over there.” He pointed to half-a-dozen large wooden crates nearby. We then offered our services to work on the Gladiators, but although we were thanked most sincerely, it was pointed out that there wasn't enough work to go round at present. But, if we would make ourselves available in the camp area, our offer would certainly be taken up ‘when business improved’.

During the first few days I did manage to occupy some of my time on duty in the Signals Cabin, where a continuous watch was being maintained with Air Headquarters and the Mediterranean Fleet, but in general we were just waiting for something to happen. And something did happen, but without benefit of news broadcasts we were totally unprepared for what followed.

For as long as daylight lasted, a never-ending shuttle service of Bristol Blenheim and Bristol Bombay troop carriers poured into the airfield, on a programme of mass evacuation from Greece. Among their passengers were others from the Squadron, bringing distressing news that most of our pilots were either killed or missing, and that the Germans were advancing so rapidly down the length of Greece that our forces were being driven literally into the sea.

We were told that many of our friends had managed to get aboard some Sunderland flying boats that had landed in the harbour near Argos, in the southern part of Greece, and might even be fortunate enough to reach Egypt.

Most distressing of all was the news that our CO, Squadron Leader Pattle, had fought his last battle. Pat was the first fighter ace of the desert campaign, and had met his death in the Battle of Athens, leading his pilots to intercept about twenty Dornier Do 17s which were escorted by 109s and 110s. The odds were about thirty five to one, and although our pilots destroyed several of the enemy, we lost nearly all our aircraft and pilots. The CO had already accounted for four of the Germans, but was killed as he attempted to remove a fighter from the tail of his Number Two, Warrant Officer Cottingham. Pat's remains were scattered over Eleusis Bay. Within the short space of three months,

we had seen our premier 'Desert Rat' Squadron reduced to a handful of war-weary pilots, three Hurricanes - which had more than earned their place in historical archives - and just over a hundred members of the ground staff, scattered throughout the Middle East, from a brewery yard at Kalamata in Southern Greece, to Cyprus, Palestine, Egypt and the Sudan. We were not to know that within a fortnight some of these number would also be found in the PoW cages of Greece, or in the cemeteries, hedges and ditches of Crete.

The newly constituted fighter force consisted of six Hurricanes and three of the Fleet Air Arm Gladiators, all that remained of four fighter squadrons from Greece, but this sadly depleted air arm was to carry out many sorties against the might of the Luftwaffe before it, too, was torn asunder. I remember one pilot, actually it was Bill Vale, now a Flight Lieutenant with 80 Squadron, returning from a trip with four Ju 88s to his credit, laughing with derision at Lord Haw Haw's latest announcement from Berlin, saying that 'today, a mock attack was carried out on the British Naval Base at Suda Bay. Our aircraft were intercepted by the remnants of the famous RAF fighter squadrons from Greece. All our aircraft returned safely after shooting down those aforementioned remnants.'

On 12th May our new CO arrived. He was Squadron Leader Howell, who had flown Spitfires in the Battle of Britain. He informed us that the Squadron was being reformed in Palestine, half the members would be sent on leave that day and in one week would return to relieve those who had stayed behind. A frantic half-hour of drawing lots for leave was followed by hurried preparations for departure by some, and a dismal walk down to the airfield for the less fortunate ones.

For the next few days life dragged on monotonously. Our fighter defence appeared to be limited to a standing patrol of one aircraft, except when a bombing raid was due, and on those occasions anything that could fly was put into the air. Squadron Leader Howell won his Squadron spurs with an incredible performance in full view of the airfield. I don't think he intended to fly at that precise moment, he was apparently familiarising himself with the Hurricane cockpit when the airfield was attacked by 109s and 110s, and two other machines took off. The fitter dashed over to three CO's aircraft, plugged in the starter, and before he knew what had happened he was racing down the runway.

He audaciously joined a formation of 109s in the outside left position, and then proceeded to shoot down the aircraft on his right. Twice this manoeuvre was successfully carried out until the formation leader peeled off to dispose of this trespasser. The lone Hurricane dived to zero feet and hedgehopped to

safety. He found himself unable to land at Maleme, due to enemy presence, so he landed at Retimo, where he refuelled the machine entirely unaided. The ground crew feared the worst, but they were elated when they heard the familiar sound of the Merlin engine sometime later. The pilot's reward for this brave action was a barrage from the Bofors guns defending the airfield but, fortunately, the damage was slight.

The depth of feeling for the CO was illustrated most profoundly by Chiefy Salmon when the CO stepped out of his plane. With a totally uncharacteristic gesture - and, for a senior NCO of the old school, bordering almost on insubordination - the flight sergeant flung his arms around the CO's neck, hugged him closely, and said, "Thank God you're back," and then, after a slight pause, "but where the bloody Hell have you been?" That was a time for learning something about our hard-bitten flight sergeant, as well as the new boss.

Two days afterwards, we were assembled outside the Regulating Office and addressed by the CO, in the presence of the naval Lieutenant Commander. His words were brief, and to the point. "As an air force," he said, "we have virtually ceased to exist - for the time being," he added quickly. "Each of you will be issued with a rifle and fifty rounds of ammunition and will receive instructions on your new role." He paused. "We are all in the New Zealand Army now." Another pause, for the full meaning to sink in.

"Naval Intelligence has advised us that we may expect three days bombing, followed by one day's intense dive-bombing and strafing, followed by an attempted invasion. These New Zealand NCOs will brief you on your exact duties. Good Luck to all of you."

Our new guide and mentor was a tall, tanned, efficient-looking sergeant. He counted off a party of about eighteen, and marched us off towards the hillside - Hill 72, it was called - where we were detailed to specific slit trenches cut in the flat areas serving as steps up the slopes of the hill. This was to be our 'action station' when the big day arrived.

My defence post was situated in an ideal position, with a commanding view of a large and wide expanse of ground. It housed a machine gun and six riflemen. It was there that we were instructed in such hitherto unheard of things as 'arcs of fire' and 'friendly forces'.

"Your arc of fire is from that bridge to that large tree on the left."

"But what happens if someone lands behind us, or to the left of the tree?" we all wanted to know.

"You shouldn't have noticed him," we were told, "that's outside your area. Someone else will have taken care of him."

We could find no fault in the organisation, every single

but still no bombs. square yard of territory was covered by crossfire, and morale was extremely high. This would be our rendezvous at four in the morning of 20th May, when the invasion attempt would be made. In the meantime, we could disperse.

Naval Intelligence was certainly accurate. On the following three days - 16th, 17th and 18th- we were subjected to hourly attacks by Ju 88s, Do 17s and Heinkel 111s; on 19th May by Ju 87 dive-bombers and Me 110s, the fighter with a sting in the tail.

Reveille was at four on the fateful morning. This was it! Hitler was to attempt an invasion today, if our regular sources of information were to remain reliable. We made our way up the hillside to our appointed positions, and within five minutes were 'standing-to' while a new Zealand sergeant grilled us on the instructions we had now learned by heart. Every man in the vicinity of Maleme knew exactly what to do when Jerry arrived and we were all confident that no-one could elude this tight cordon of defence which encircled the airfield. This air of confidence was not altogether misplaced, as official reports maintained that the paratroops in the first wave were all accounted for before they had time to form up.

A tense silence persisted until seven-thirty, when our NZ sergeant appeared once more. "You jokers can stand down now." he said. "If Jerry had been coming, he'd have been here by now, ready to make a consolidated attack at first light." Thus reassured, a few of us decided to wend our way down to the cookhouse, whilst the remainder, preferring the security of the slit trenches on the hillside, attempted to catch up on some lost sleep.

I had barely collected my ration of greasy tined bacon from the cook when the drone of aircraft engines came to my ears. Almost immediately, confirmation of an imminent attack arrived in the form of the clanging of the station fire bell - our air raid warning signal. In record time I covered the distance to my favourite trench, an 'L' shaped construction with a large tree at the junction of the two legs, and for the next ninety minutes we were on the receiving end of the heaviest aerial bombardment I have ever dreamed possible, with low level attacks by Junkers, Dorniers and Heinkels, and the dreaded Ju 87s screeching down in vertical dives on our gun positions, and our living quarters in the olive grove to our left.

Forty-five Junkers Ju 52s, old lumbering three-engined troop carriers, packed in a tight 'V' formation, plodded across the airfield at about five hundred feet. My first thoughts were that they'd realised we've no aircraft, so they're sending over any old crate to bomb us. Retreating further into the sanctuary of my new trench, I watched the procession with bated breath, eyes alert for the first sign of bombs. The steady thud

of ack-ack continued, accompanied by the sounds of every type of small arms fire available - but still no bombs.

As the tail end of the circus passed overhead, I caught a glimpse of a parachute. "Good," I shouted, "They've got one." This last remark was intended to refer to the accuracy of the anti-tank gunfire. "And another, and another ..." this was too good to be true. I raised myself above the parapet of the trench, and an empty feeling crept into the bottom of my stomach. The air was full of parachutes: white ones mingled with red, green and brown. Swaying bodies were floating down among the occasional cannister of supplies and ammunition. The invasion had begun.

Who was the fool who'd decided that Jerry would come before dawn? I couldn't help feeling that my fifty rounds of ammunition could have been used more effectively from the defence position we'd vacated earlier that morning. The point was, how to get back and, in fact, what chance did we stand of ever making the journey, between the cross fire of friendly and enemy weapons?

At that point, we saw one of the troop carriers receive a direct hit from an anti-aircraft gun. The area immediately to the rear of the trailing edge just disintegrated and the plane broke its back. Bodies began to tumble out of the aircraft in a haphazard fashion but no parachutes opened and they just fell to earth. The aircraft itself adopted a 'falling leaf' configuration, and burst into flames on impact.

After a quick discussion it was decided that perhaps the situation was not quite as critical as we had first imagined, and our best plan might be to remain in our present location, keeping a sharp lookout until the Army boys had disposed of the main force. Once we heard the all clear we would rejoin our comrades up on the hillside. But after a couple of hours we realised that things were not going according to our calculations. Further waves of troop carriers appeared, towing gliders, each with a load of fully armed troops. We were now in an isolated pocket, liable to be cut off completely from our own forces. One by one our numbers dwindled, as we sought the vantage points afforded by the higher lopes of the hill.

Our first objective was a First Aid Dressing Post, half-way up the hill, and threading our way through the trees we arrived without incident. About forty people were crowded into the small place, two stretcher cases lay on the ground, neither of these looked in very good shape. One airman was unconscious, and the second lad was covered with blood down the left hand side of his body, having been much nearer to an explosion than was good for him. His continued moans of pain were quite frightening.

A quick glance at the faces around me convinced me that this was no place in which to linger. Apparently two others were of the same opinion - Harry Whitehurst, an engine fitter, and Jimmy Pickering, another member of the Signals fraternity. No word was spoken, just an enquiring look, a curt nod, and we were off.

We had only covered about five yards when a machine gun opened up and Harry fell to the ground with a yell. I wasn't sure if it was a cry of pain or surprise. I was back behind the sandbagged wall in front of the First Aid Post in a matter of seconds. I scanned the ground on all sides, but could see no sign of an adversary, so decided to have another try at reaching the hill top. When I reached the point where Harry had fallen I was agreeably surprised to see that he had gone, and resolved to follow very smartly in his tracks, but once again the unseen gunner tried his hand. Fortunately his aim was poor and only disturbed the ground a few feet in front of me. However, it was still too close for my liking, and I dashed back once more to the shelter of the sand bags to collect my now scattered thoughts. Maybe I could make it around the other side of the First Aid Post, and so keep this structure between me and whoever was interested in my progress.

As we left the confines of the First Aid Post and looked over the top of the sandbags, we were confronted with a shattering sight. Seven German paratroopers were advancing slowly on our retreat from about fifteen yards. Six tommy guns were trained on the entrance, whilst the seventh character had a stick bomb at the ready. Our position was impossible. I have no doubt we could have disposed of perhaps two of their number but, by that time, the First Aid Post would have been blown sky high. Discretion was obviously the better part of valour.

Slowly we crept back inside to tell the occupants of the situation, whilst the thud of heavy boots came nearer. Then a dark shadow filled the doorway, the barrel of a tommy gun poked round the corner of the door frame, and a guttural voice called out "Englishmen, Hands Up!"

The speed with which we all complied would have brought a smile of satisfaction to the face of the PTI at Uxbridge, who had groomed us in the movement of 'Arms, Upward Stretch.' I didn't follow much of the one-sided conversation which ensued, my German was limited to about half a dozen words, none of which was used on this occasion. There was certainly no mistaking the tone of this young German's voice, as he ordered us outside, where we were relieved of our tin hats and searched.

We were then herded towards an olive grove, which had already been marked out with large red Nazi flags

for the benefit of their pilots, who kept up a constant patrol. Our wounded comrades were carefully laid in the shade, and water was brought to them by our captors. I was rather surprised at the apparent friendly treatment we then received, we were offered cigarettes - I noticed that they were Players, with 'NAAFI' stamped on the packets - and given friendly pats on the back by our guards, two of whom spoke some English.

Having heard many tales of German brutality during the earlier days in Greece, we were prompted to ask the inevitable question: "Are we to be shot, or taken prisoner?" The non-committal answer did nothing to relieve my feelings. "Germany has too many prisoners."

I tackled the second guard with the same question, probably hoping for a more encouraging response. "You will not be shot.....today." he curtly replied, adding the last word almost as an afterthought. After about half an hour the camaraderie was rudely shattered by a German of the pre-war Warner Brothers type, a veritable Conrad Veidt. He barked orders, shouting and screaming at his subordinates, who later translated his threat that 'the next man to give an Englishman a cigarette will be shot'.

Returning some minutes later he issued further orders. Translated, these indicated that we were to join the other prisoners at the top of the hill, and remember, the first man to run will be shot. Assembled in a line-abreast formation, with about seven or eight paratroopers at our rear, we were then prodded forward. As a living screen for those behind us, we commenced the terrifying climb up the hill. Throughout the journey, our own troops continued to fire down on us. They had already experienced ambushes in Greece from Germans dressed in British uniforms and were taking no chances. We heard the bullets zipping past our ears, and the chilling whine of the occasional ricochet drove many of us to our faces, thereby bringing heaps of abuse and sharp prods in the back from our more suitably-equipped escorts. As these Jerries were only a matter of inches from us, and the British troops to our front were at least half a mile away, common sense told us that we stood more chance of catching a German bullet than one from a friendly source.

As we approached the first British gun post, the firing became decidedly more accurate and several of our unfortunate colleagues fell by the wayside, dropped by New Zealand bullets. This drew the hysterical entreaty from our lips, "Don't shoot, we're English!"

Within two hundred yards of the summit, there was a noticeable lull in the firing and, almost at the same time, a wave of Air Force blue appeared before us, glistening

with spots of polished steel. I could hardly believe my eyes, the RAF was making a bayonet charge! Not only that but their foremost member wore in his sleeve two and a half rings of braid. Our new CO was indeed a leader on the ground as well as in the air. Never have I been so proud to belong to the Royal Air Force. What made it more satisfying was the sight of khaki uniforms bringing up the rear. The Australians and New Zealanders had been quick to follow his lead, and the flash of steel as they hurtled towards me prompted me to act quickly. I felt it was time to relinquish my present role, and with what I hoped was a realistic moan I dropped to the ground and remained motionless. (Editor's Note: Edward Howell does not mention a word about this bayonet charge in his book 'Escape to Live'. He talks of heading off to look for the NZ Battalion HQ after the initial parachute assault and he was seriously wounded on the way.)

Eventually I clambered to my feet and ran towards our lines. I was grabbed rather roughly by a couple of New Zealanders and hustled before an Army Intelligence officer, who fired questions at me.

"What's your name? What unit do you belong to? What aircraft have you got? Can you tell me the numbers of any of them? What pilots were on the Squadron? Who's your CO?"

I'm sure that no German could have survived such questioning. In fact, I began to feel almost guilty myself. Having finally passed muster I attempted to reequip myself by removing a tin-hat and rifle from a khaki-clad figure wrapped in a blanket. He would never need them again. No sooner had I grabbed the rifle and checked the contents of the magazine than a Royal Marines sergeant tapped me on the shoulder and said, "And you, corporal."

"And me?" I questioned.

"Yes. Up there." He pointed to a low stone wall which bounded the field we now occupied.

"Hold that ridge at all costs."

That sounded rather dramatic. It was the sort of thing I'd read about in fiction. It just didn't happen in real life, or so I thought until I glanced in the direction indicated. There was scarcely a foot unoccupied along the length of the wall, and I recognised shoulder flashes of New Zealanders, Australians, Fleet Air Arm, Royal Marines, Cheshire Regiment, Pioneer Corps, RASC and RAMC. Four NZ sergeants paraded behind this 'thin red line', constantly checking points, pausing to identify targets and generally keeping up the morale of all concerned. Our orders were to fire at anything that moved, but I fear many rounds were wasted on windswept bushes.

We were almost thankful to be told at about three in

the morning that the position had become untenable, and a withdrawal had been ordered. Accordingly we made our way, in an ill-disciplined trickle, towards the shelter of a range of hills to the west.

Dawn was almost upon us before I came across any other airmen, they were also detached from their units. Among the half-dozen airmen in the group was Jack Diamond, an airframe mechanic from Liverpool. We had been instructed to move along the edge of a field, exercising particular caution when crossing gaps in the hedges, as snipers were known to be ready to open up at the slightest sign of troop movements. While most of us decided to make a dash across these open areas, Jack decided to crawl across, and a sniper's bullet put a neat furrow across both cheeks of his bottom, causing a flow of blood that took ages to stem.

There was no semblance of organised activity, bodies were just wandering around looking for someone to direct them towards some useful contribution. I volunteered to try to establish contact with the Headquarters in Canea, less than ten miles away, and pass on to higher authority details of the local situation. The greater part of the route I was detailed to follow lay across the short but steep slopes of the hillside, which were interrupted by meandering, fast flowing streams. It was the sight of this crystal liquid that reminded me how long it had been since I had eaten or drunk. My only utensil was my tin hat, so without any thought of health hazards I scooped up a generous helping and quenched my thirst before climbing to higher ground.

As I followed the bank of the stream around a corner of a hill, imagine my surprise to find the body of a German paratrooper suspended upside-down from the top branches of a tree. His legs were entwined in his parachute cords, the 'chute had caught in the tree, and he appeared to have been knocked senseless when his head hit the ground. For me, the most disturbing thought was that his head was submerged in that very stream from which I had taken a most refreshing drink a few minutes earlier.

There did not seem to be a great deal of enemy activity in that region, except for the regular sweeps by reconnaissance aircraft, which combed the area at almost head height. During one of these raids, when I was sheltering in a gully, I was accosted by one of the Maori Regiment, who appeared to be interested in my activities.

"well, how do you like being on the other end of strafing for a change?"

"Not too good," I replied, "I can think of many more pleasant things to do."

"Holy Jeeze!" he exclaimed with genuine surprise, "I

thought you were a Jerry. From twenty yards your uniform looks just like their filed-green. When things quieten down, you'd better come with me and I'll fix you up with a khaki battledress."

I thanked him for his consideration, and we settled down to await the duel of our trench mortars on the right, and the Germans over to the left who were retaliating with the Bofors guns they'd captured at Maleme. True to his promise, he kitted me out with a khaki battledress which fitted me, nudging me as he said, "You can be proud to wear that." pointing to the 'New Zealand' flashes on the shoulders. He even took me over to the cookhouse trailer, where we were given tinned sausages and hard biscuits, which went down very well after so long without food. I was about to take my leave and set out once more on journey to Canea when one of their officers came along and ordered a quick assembly. Instructions had been received to proceed to Maleme and recapture the aerodrome.

The excitement was fantastic, every one of them accepted the news with enthusiasm. It seemed to me that all they ever wanted to do was fix bayonets and charge. I decided to stay with them, for the time being at least, telling myself that their route must take us some way towards Canea.

My new friend recognised that I lacked the battle experience of the Maori and made sure that I wasn't thrown too far into the deep end. I was given the task of helping to transport trench mortar ammunition, which meant taking two clips of three inch shells and following behind the gunners. This burden turned out to be much heavier than I'd first imagined, and it wasn't long before I found myself not only following the gunners, but nearly the entire regiment, as I was rapidly overtaken by almost everyone.

My situation was readily appreciated by a hefty-looking fellow at the very end of the column. He had been sharing the load of carrying a large cauldron of soup over a rifle barrel. He grinned sympathetically, grabbed the two clips, tucked them under his arm, handed over his half of the soup carrying, and strode off into the distance, leaving me plodding on in the rear.

We had almost reached the outskirts of the airfield, passing on the way a fair haired lieutenant standing in the turret of the only serviceable tank on the island, when we came to an abrupt halt. It transpired that although the regiment had reached its objective, no-one had been following up with ammunition and supplies, and they were now required to fight a rear-guard action to extricate themselves. As the line of retreat had, in fact, taken us quite a way towards Canea, I obtained permission to press on with my original task, and set off in the darkness, hoping that

The main road would still be free of Germans by the time I arrived.

It must have been well after midnight when I stumbled gingerly into the built up suburbs of the town. I didn't think that I'd made any noise at all, and was absolutely shaken to the bones when a sharp Geordie accent bellowed from a darkened doorway, "Halt. Who goes there?"

I'd have recognised that voice anywhere. It belonged to Matt Hogg, one of the Squadron's electricians, with whom I'd shared a tent for twelve months and spending the first nine of them trying to decide what the devil he was talking about. He was as pleased to see me as I was to see him, having given him for lost after the attack on the aerodrome. He wasted no time in directing me to the Signals Officer, who in turn passed me to the Group Captain, George Beamish, one of the four international rugby-playing brothers serving in the RAF - three were pilots and one was a dentist.



Group Captain, later Air Marshal Sir George Beamish, who played for Leicester, Ireland and the British & Irish Lions.

The Group Captain showed a particular interest in all the information I could give, passing it on to his Navy and Army fellow commanders. He had already been advised of developments at Maleme, and treated me as someone quite special for merely surviving. He even gave me a packet of twenty cigarettes and handed over his camp bed to me, saying that he had no need of it for a while. From the look of some of his staff, they could have used some rest, but I suppose that when the top brass stays awake, there's nothing else one can do.

In the morning we were told that all RAF personnel were to be evacuated from the island back to Egypt. In the interim, we would be moved to a camp in the hills to await further instructions. Once again, however, the best laid plansFurther attacks on the naval base at Suda Bay had rendered the planned evacuation impossible, and infiltration of German forces into the

immediate locality had forced a further change of plan. We would now proceed to the south coast, where the Navy had planned a consolidated evacuation programme.

The only road to Sphakia was soon congested with retreating troops, in vehicles and on foot. The road soon became cluttered with abandoned transport, stretching back some considerable distance, advertising most effectively to the enemy the expected departure point of the thousands of stranded servicemen. The spotter aircraft were not slow to take advantage of the information, and their bombers needed no second invitation to saturate the ravine with anti-personnel and high explosive bombs. This bombardment lasted through the hours of daylight.

When the Navy arrived, four destroyers anchored about a quarter of a mile from shore while a flotilla of flat-bottomed barges carried out a series of death-defying journeys back and forth, while enemy bombers attacked the area. Each barge was manned by two sailors, and contained crates of hard biscuits and bully beef, which were off-loaded on to the beach to make room for the wounded on stretchers and some of the walking wounded. Many eyebrows were raised at the sight of so much food, and eventually the question was on everyone's lips; 'If the Navy is evacuating all remaining troops in the area, who is all this food for?' After we had loaded our fifth barge with stretchers, seen all of the available space taken up and stood back to await the return trip, a shout from the retreating barge stunned us into silence: 'We're not coming back.'

Patiently we waited until it was dark, and we could no longer make out the shape of the destroyers, let alone the smaller barges. Nor could we hear the many sounds associated with the transfer of stretchers from barge to ship. Yet we waited...and waited...and waited until the words of the leading seaman in the last barge eventually penetrated our trusting minds. They were not coming back.

I wandered aimlessly along the beach towards the village, and then bumped into a mixed group of seven others with similar thoughts - to get away from Crete. There were two Maoris, two Fleet Air Arm, two from the RASC and one from the Cheshire Regiment, and we prepared to consider any possible means of achieving our aim.

We split into two groups of four, agreed to scout around and report back within the hour. One factor loomed large. It had to be by sea, and that meant a boat, a fairly large boat. My group had no luck, but at the rendezvous we discovered that the Maoris had had some success. They had found nothing more than an oversized rowing boat, with a sail that resembled the

discarded cover of an old mattress, and it only had one oar and a length of wood that might aid our propulsion. However, the best thing was that our newly-found craft could accommodate the eight of us—we hoped.

Making as little noise as possible we eased our 'Kontiki' from its moorings and pushed it away from the shore before climbing aboard. We set off into the darkness, without the faintest idea of direction, to the half-hearted cry of 'Alex, here we come'. We tried to raise the sail but didn't have much luck, so it was left hanging, rather like a distress signal. One Maori pulled away on the oar, his fellow countryman valiantly trying to keep pace with the plank of wood.

After what seemed like three hours, but could have been as little as thirty minutes, our bobbing craft was suddenly illuminated by a large searchlight mounted on a dark grey hull, which had manifested itself out of the inky blackness. From high above us came the throaty chatterings of excited observers leaning over the rails. Such was the state of our minds that more than one of us thought they might be Germans.

I was still trying to translate the noise from the warship, which had now become more visible, when our New Zealand contingent screamed out in unison, 'We're Kiwis! We're bloody Kiwis!' They, at least, had realised that this was no German vessel, it was a destroyer of the Royal Australian Navy, HMAS *Nizam*. A spate of feverish activity followed. A rope ladder was dropped over the side and we were urged to climb board as quickly as possible. Never having climbed a rope ladder before I made painfully slow progress until I was within reach of the grasping arms above, and was hoisted bodily aboard.

Once aboard, friendly faces dispelled all my fears. Willing hands directed me below decks, where other helpful crew members were busy distributing large mugs of cocoa and slice after slice of fresh white bread, liberally plastered with real butter and strawberry jam. Life in the Savoy could not have been better, and it was a very contented person who eventually laid down his head in a hammock and sank into oblivion.

The sound of a massive explosion brought me back to the land of the living. Repeated flashes and the smell of cordite filled the mess-deck, and I dived for cover under one of the mess tables. A strong pair of hands reached down and dragged me out again, and a friendly voice reminded me that there was no need to hide under there, it was just the ack-ack. Sheepishly I emerged and took stock of my surroundings. The tables were littered with stretchers, every one carried a sorry-looking khaki-clad figure. The whole ship appeared to be alive with bandage-waving, temporary

medical orderlies dashing all over the place, dispensing relief.

Out on deck the sound of small arms fire attracted our attention, and we went to investigate. It was being directed at three Heinkel 111s which had just completed a bombing run across our path, supplementing the gunfire from three other destroyers steaming in echelon on our starboard quarter.

The anti-aircraft contribution of all four vessels must have been effective, because we witnessed one enemy aircraft spiralling down into the sea, one rapidly losing height and making off with black smoke pouring from one engine, and the third member of the formation deciding not to linger any longer, swoop down to wave top level, and make for home.

The remainder of the voyage back to Alex was completed without further incident, except for the forceful display of anti-RAF feeling exhibited by one severely wounded New Zealander. "RAF, I know what it stands for," he said bitterly, "Rare as F...."

I was thankful for my own safety that I was wearing a khaki battledress instead of my normal RAF uniform, but my feelings changed to bitter resentment within five minutes of landing at Alex. It was just before mid-day when we steamed into harbour, to be greeted with hoots and whistles from every other craft in the vicinity. The quayside was crowded with well-wishers and it should have been a tremendous homecoming for all.

As we tied up we could see the extent of the welcoming party. Movietone News cameras were very much in evidence, NAAFI had opened up a large counter from which free issues of tea, chocolates and cigarettes were to be made. Red cross officials, nursing staff and ambulances lined up to care for the wounded, and at one end of the quay were half a dozen trestle tables, covered with blankets and manned by army clerical staff. We were instructed to notify them of our personal details - number, rank, name, unit etc - in order that information could be sent to our next-of-kin, advising of our safe return from the combat zone.

As soon as I mentioned that I was in the RAF I was curtly instructed to 'stand over there', and from then on was deliberately ignored whenever I approached the table for further instructions and guidance. No attempt was ever made to take down any of my personal particulars.

At last my patience was exhausted, and when I saw an RAF lorry making its way slowly past the line of soldiers climbing aboard trucks that were about to deliver them back to their barracks, I decided to hitch a ride to the nearby RAF Station at Aboukir.

The driver eyed me with suspicion, I had no means of

identity, and my ten day's growth of beard and filthy army battledress certainly didn't proclaim me as one of the 'Brylcreem Boys'. However, he agreed to take me to Aboukir, where we expected RAF staff to show a little more interest and compassion than had been demonstrated by their army counterparts.

We decided that the best course of action would be to contact the Orderly Officer for advice, so the driver pulled up at the rear of the Officers' Mess, and I commenced my search for the gentleman in question. I was till prowling round, looking for an entrance, when an important-looking personage apprehended me. He surveyed my disreputable appearance with some horror.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Corporal Wilson 33 Squadron, Sir," I replied.

"Where the devil have you come from?"

"Crete, Sir," I replied, "this morning."

"Really?" His manner changed, and I detected a distinct friendliness. He placed an arm around my filthy shoulder and said, "Pretty rough, I suppose?" and without waiting for a reply, continued, "When did you last have a good meal?"

"Some days ago," I replied. I really couldn't remember. I don't suppose you could count the Navy's bread and jam.

"Come with me," he instructed, as he propelled me into the staff quarters of the kitchen, where he directed the duty chef to provide me with a decent meal, and sent a mess steward off to find the Orderly Officer.

Motioning me to be seated, he took the chair opposite, and proceeded to quiz me on my experiences over the past couple of months. We were still in deep conversation when a flight lieutenant appeared, no doubt the Orderly Officer.

"John," said the senior officer, whom I later found out to be the Station Commander, "get hold of Williams and Johnson and get the Corporal's kit replaced, find out where his unit is, and arrange transport to get him back as soon as possible. I imagine that his unit will be pleased to know that he's turned up, after all they've been through."

"Yes, Sir," the officer nodded understandingly, "but Williams is playing for the Station."

The CO rocketed to his feet. "I don't give a damn if he's playing for England. I want him over here straight away." The flight lieutenant raced away to do his master's bidding.

The Group Captain then turned to me. "When you've had your meal just wait around until the stores officer

and the accountant turns up to look after you. They shouldn't be too long." As a rider, he added, "When you've collected your bits and pieces, get the duty driver to go round past the Guardroom and organise some accommodation for the night, if you need it."

I thanked the CO profusely, but he waved a hand in dismissal. "Glad to be of help, Corporal. Have a good trip back to your unit." With a friendly nod, he left the Mess.

It was a pity that his other officers didn't come up to his standards in courtesy and understanding. They were livid at being dragged away from their personal relaxations, and intended that I should be made well aware of this.

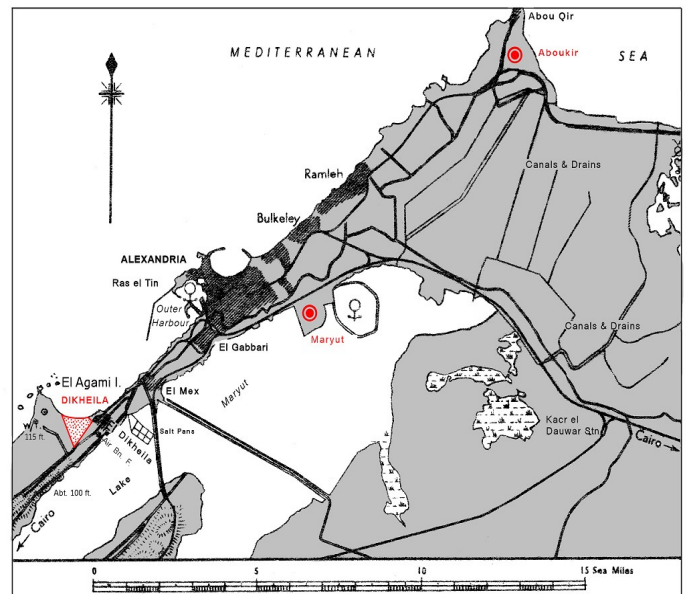
We climbed aboard the Hillman pick-up truck provided by the duty driver. Well, to be exact, it was me who climbed aboard, the other two gentlemen eased themselves into the front seat. First stop was Station Headquarters, for the accounts officer to alight, then we drove to Main Stores, where I expected to receive a full range of clothing and equipment. My sum collection, however, turned out to be one each of shirt, slacks, socks, shoes, underpants, towel and hat - without a badge. When I tried to explain that I had lost every single item of kit that I possessed, I was politely told, "You'll be issued with the rest at your own unit."

My treatment in the Accounts Department was no better. Although I had received no pay for at least a month, my advance of pay was limited to thirty shillings, which was one hundred and fifty millemes in Egyptian money. I am writing this account in 1980, that's about one pound fifty pence. By the time I had purchased soap, toothbrush, toothpaste and razor, I

couldn't afford either a packet of cigarettes or a pint of beer.

During our Western Desert days we had often spoken disparagingly of those who served at the centres of civilization - the 'base-wallahs' - but now, I was certain that our judgement had been well-founded.

The orderly room staff had already traced my squadron to Heliopolis, which wasn't too far away, and had prepared a rail warrant for the journey. As my recollections of Cairo were still relatively clear and pleasant, I determined to take the earliest train from Alex and rejoin my friends. There was a train which arrived in Cairo at about ten o'clock that night, and arrangements could be made for transport to be at the station, so I took my leave and used the train journey to free my mind of any acrid thoughts of the army, stores officers and accountants.



RAF Station Aboukir (uppermost red spot on the map) with the airfield in the foreground.

30 Years on - The Maleme Memorial

A brief background to the memorial set up to commemorate all of the 30 Squadron and 33 Squadron personnel who were lost during the Battle of Crete in May 1941



The pristine memorial, constructed near the Maleme airfield and consecrated on 25 May 1991.

Some photographs found in an old envelope by Paul Davies in the 33 Squadron History Room, shown overleaf, recently led me to investigate the background to the setting up of the Memorial in Crete, close to Maleme airfield and the Tavronitis Bridge. We scouted through some of the albums but did not find a lot of useful information, so I wrote to the Chairman of the 30 Squadron Association, Wing Commander Tony Main, who sent me this information:

'David,

I promised you an update on the Maleme Memorial. I have delved into the previous committee minutes and the text of 'Flat Out', the book written about the history of 30 Squadron.

The memorial project was conceived by a number of Crete veterans in the late 1980s. AVM David Dick, the Chairman at the time, took on the task with the aim of consecrating the Memorial on the 50th anniversary of Crete in 1991. The design was done by the Reading College of Technology and the granite tablets were made in the UK and flown out by Olympic Airways through the Crete sponsor, Elef Tsiknasis.

Elef's family had been brutally treated by the Germans and he was grateful to the RAF for all the help they had given to his family and the Cretan people. Elef had secured the site on the lower slopes of Hill 107 facing North East and overlooking the Tavronitis River and the old bridge around which most of the heavy fighting took place. Elef had trained in England and flew with the Greek Air Force. We think Elef actually bought the land on which the Memorial stands.

David Dick and his committee raised £10 000+ to procure and erect the Memorial and it was ready on time for the Consecration on 20 May 1991. It was attended by HRH Duke of Kent and dedicated by the Chaplain in Chief, AVM Ron Hesketh. The ceremony was attended by both OC 30 and OC 33, with their Squadron standard parties, members of both squadrons, veterans, families, friends and many Cretans who had been members of the resistance or who wished to remember others connected with Maleme.

Since its opening it has been included in the Annual Crete commemorations with a ceremony of remembrance as part of the programme. 30 and 33 have tried to attend but operational needs (cont. on p117)



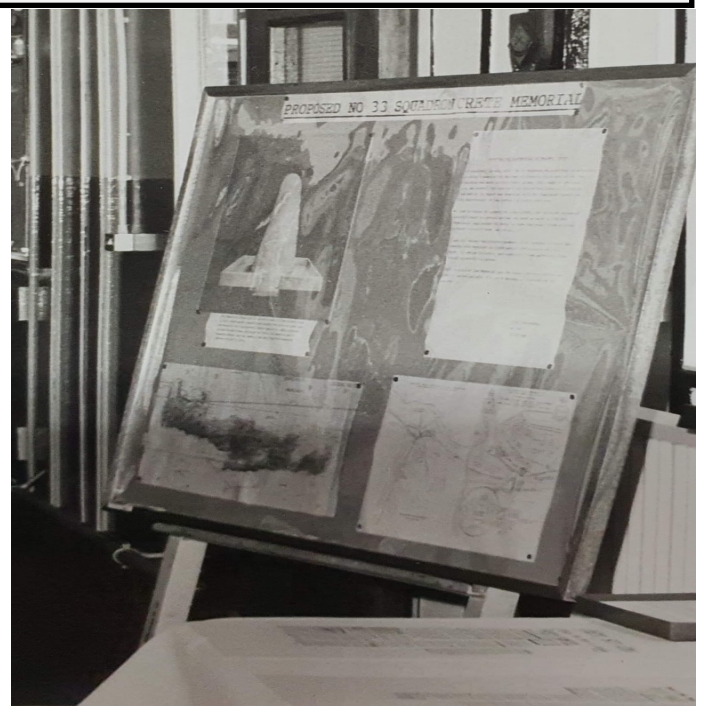
The undated photographs found by Paul Davies, showing an exhibition in the 33 Squadron crewroom at RAF Long Sutton, when 33 was based at Odiham. Reminiscent of the displays that were laid out for Crete Day, the board on the right (shown below) has the 'Proposed No 33 Squadron Crete Memorial', which looks very different to the Memorial in place today. Looking at the memorabilia around the crewroom, is all of this now on display at Benson? No sign of the uckers board!

THE ORIGIN OF CRETE DAY

When Paul Davies asked last week for attendees for the 80th Crete Anniversary Commemoration Service at Benson on Thursday 20 May 2021, former OC 33 Keith Harding wrote to him. In light of the sad news regarding Stan Smith's death recently, and the fact that for the first time since the 60th Anniversary at Duxford we are marking the Battle of Crete, I thought it apt to include Keith's reply to Paul:

Paul,

Believe it or not Crete Day was my idea. Having spent some time with the army I had noticed that all the regiments had their 'Days' so I thought why not one for us? I was keen that it should be not just to celebrate the aircrew and, as you well know, the groundcrew were the ones that fought the Battle of Crete. (As usual the aircrew b.....ed off and left them to it.) The other original feature was that the flypast consisted of four aircraft led by Stan Smith, if I remember rightly, but with three first tourist pilots. I was a little nervous during that phase but they did well. I am not sure that this bit is true but I heard that Crete Day became more popular than the station day which upset one or two of



the Station Commanders. I would like to bid for a place to attend but unfortunately I am otherwise engaged.

Have a good day,

Keith Harding

and funding have sometimes made it impossible for full representation.

The Cretans are still very proud of the Memorial and the 30 Squadron Association has funded the maintenance throughout to ensure it is a peaceful and tranquil site for those who are still able to return and remember loved ones or commemorate the part played by the two Squadrons towards the liberation of Crete.

I was there on the day, met many Cretan partisans and listened to some amazing stories of the events. It is a fitting tribute to all those who served and especially those who gave their lives during the attacks. I do not think we can ever fully understand what Crete went through at the hands of the German invaders.

I hope that gives you a little more background into the Maleme Memorial.'

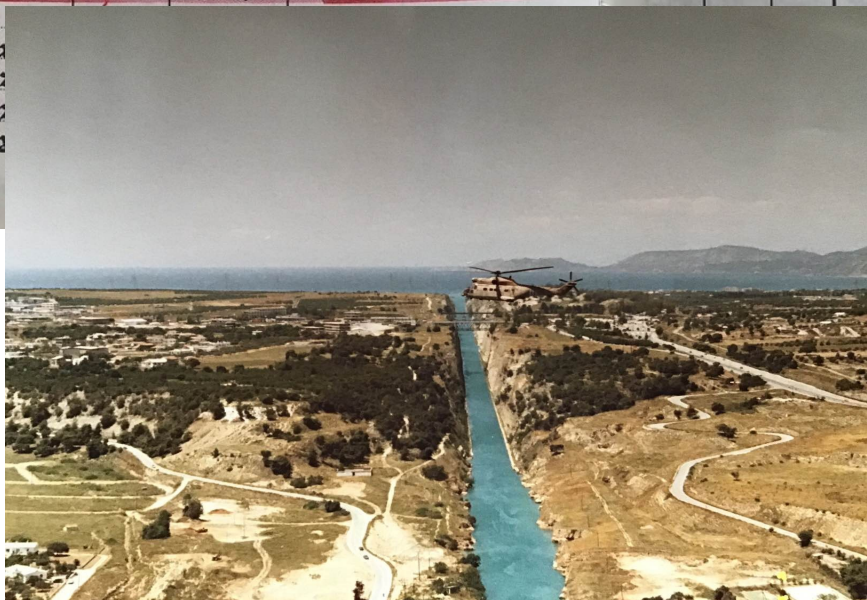
The 30 Squadron Association Secretary, Peter Gregory, told me that the late AVM David Dick started the 30

Squadron Association during his time on the Squadron back in the late 1980s. He also said that there was plenty of detail of the Battle of Crete in 'Flat Out', along with pictures of the dedication of the memorial on 25 May 1991 by HRH Duke of Kent. He was sure that there would be similar photos and information in the 33 Squadron history files too - we're still looking!

While writing this, 'Flat Out' - written by John Hamlin and published by Air-Britain—is retailing on Amazon for £45, so if any of you have a copy at home and would like to let me know what is said about 30 Squadron in Crete and the building of the memorial, I would love to hear from you.

Back at Benson, I had a look at my logbook to see who signed my monthly summary for May 1991, it was OC 33 Squadron, Wing Commander Jim Grisdale. So I contacted him and asked him if he remembered flying out to Crete for this rather special event.

Year 1991		AIRCRAFT		Captain or 1st Pilot	Co-pilot 2nd Pilot Pupil or Crew	DUTY (including number of day or night landings as 1st Pilot or Dual)	Day Flying			Night Flying			Flight Time	
Month	Date	Type and Mark	No				1st Pilot (1)	2nd Pilot (2)	Dual (3)	1st Pilot (4)	2nd Pilot (5)	Dual (6)	Total Cols 1-6 (7)	Captain (8)
						Totals brought forward								
MAY	17	PUMA HC1	XA935	SELF	SOLO	AIR TEST - TRACK AND VIBE								
MAY	17	PUMA HC1	XN234	LUCK	SELF	INSTRUMENT FLYING								
MAY	21	PUMA HC1	XN214	SELF	CARY	BEAUVAIS TO FRESUS VIA MAFRA CONNA								
MAY	22	PUMA HC1	XA935	GRISDALE	SELF	FRESUS TO ROME CIAMPINO			2.15					2.15
MAY	22	PUMA HC1	XN214	LONG	SELF	BRINDISI TO CORFU			.55					.55
MAY	23	PUMA HC1	XA935	SELF	GRISDALE	CORFU TO ATHENS			1.45					1.45 1.45
MAY	23	PUMA HC1	XN214	LONG	SELF	ATHENS TO SQUA, CRETE			1.15					1.15
MAY	26	PUMA HC1	XN214	SELF	GRISDALE	CRETE TO ATHENS			1.30					1.30 1.30
MAY	27	PUMA HC1	XA935	MARTIN	MARTIN	CORFU TO NAPLES			2.25					2.25 2.25
MAY	27	PUMA HC1	XN214	SELF	GRISDALE	BASTIA, CORSICA TO FRESUS			1.05					1.05 1.05
MAY	28	PUMA HC1	XA935	GRISDALE	SELF	FRESUS TO CLEMMERY FERRAND			1.50					1.50
MAY	28	PUMA HC1	XA935	GRISDALE	SELF	LE HAYRE TO ODIHAMI			.55					.55
MAY	29	PUMA HC1	XN209	BENNETT	SELF	INSTRUMENT FLYING			1.10					1.10
MAY	30	PUMA HC1	XN207	LUCK	SELF	INSTRUMENT FLYING			1.15					1.15
						SAN LDR		SUMMARY FOR MAY 91		TYPE PUMA HC1				
						OCC FLY		UNIT: 33 SAN		TOTAL MONTH				
						Wg CDR		DATE: 1 JUN 91		18.45 6.15		1.15		26.15 10.30
						OC 33 SAN		SIGN: Paul Carr		TOTAL PUMA HC1		93.35 63.50 24.30		17.45 17.20 4.05 226.05 21.00
JUN	3	PUMA HC1												1.00
JUN	5	PUMA HC1												.50
JUN	5	PUMA HC1												1.00
JUN	6	PUMA HC1												2.35
										5 52.10 27.35 132.55		744.00		



He remembered the ceremony in Crete well, and sent back some excellent information. He said the key man involved in the project on 33 Squadron was the GLO, and that must have been the hackle-wearing Fusilier major, Major Martin, who always started his morning briefs with, "On this day in history....." Major Martin did all of the liaison with David Dick in making sure that the right names were given to the engravers, which involved him spending many hours at the archives in Kew. Jim said that 'Hess' was nearly missed from the list because he had changed his name for obvious reasons.

He took two Pumas out to Crete, one still in Gulf War colours, and recalls proudly that on 24 May he flew XW214 into Maleme, the first 33 Squadron aircraft there since 1941. The consecration ceremony with the Duke of Kent was on the next day - 25 May. He said that he will always remember the rehearsal because when he bent forward to lay the wreath the trousers of his stores-issue No. 6 KD split right up the back seam. Fortunately the receptionist at the hotel was able to do a very quick BDR before the main event but he made sure that when he laid the wreath at the real thing it was more of a curtsy than a forward bend!

Among the attendees were a good show of veterans from 1941 who he got to know well during his time on 33, including Edward Howell. He recalled that standing by the memorial looking across to the airfield and the old bridge while they described their involvement was a humbling experience. He thinks he met the 33 Squadron medic who won the MC for dashing into open ground to pick up an injured chap - I think that may have been 30 Squadron's medical orderly, LAC Norman Darch, who was awarded the MM - and another chap who was captured by the Germans twice, escaped twice

and then went over the mountains to be rescued from the south coast. ACM Sir Dennis Smallwood was also there, a great character.

Jim was surprised there were no pictures in the photo albums. He was certain that he had a few prints of the trip - XW214 with him alongside at Maleme in May 1991, several air to ground of the area around the airfield, one with Edward Howell at the Souda Bay cemetery ceremony, and one of the memorial immediately after the inauguration with the wreathes on it. He also has some official pictures of the ceremony itself which David Dick sent him. The hunt for them has started!

Having told me that his log book indicated other members of the crews included Captain Long AAC, Lieutenant Shawcross RN, Flight Lieutenants Cass, Martin, Smith and Gray, I contacted Dave Cass to see what he remembered. Along with the pages from his log book showing one of those trips that 33 Squadron pilots only dream about nowadays, Dave also sent over the photos of the Puma crossing the Cornith Canal, and the view from the top of Hill 107 looking over Maleme airfield, shown below. Intriguingly, Dave said that he spoke to Edward Howell, who chatted about his experience captured in the painting hanging in the Squadron now, but also of the combat on the hill and the fix bayonets command as it was about to go hand to hand. Even Alfred Bocking mentioning that the 30 Squadron flight sergeant who kept pigs lost his life leading a bayonet charge in Crete, and there is a 30 Squadron flight sergeant listed on the Memorial. Maybe our Corporal 'Tug' Wilson did see the CO charging towards him, bayonet glinting, from the top of this hill?



Maleme Memorial Crete_ No.33 Squadron Personnel

Ser (a)	Name, Rank, Number (b)	Age (c)	Remarks (e)
1	87403 Pilot Officer Raymond Douglas Dunscombe RAFVR	23	From Croydon, Surrey
2	370163 Sergeant Richard Ambrose Cross	37	From Aylesbury, Bucks
3	561114 Sergeant Idris Clifford Elson	u/k	nil
4	779028 Sergeant Charles David Ripsher RAFVR	26	From Clydebank, Dumbartonshire
5	561644 Sergeant John Maurice South	29	From Plymouth
6	522274 Corporal William Henderson Caldow	24	From Hamilton, Lancashire
7	983217 Corporal William Percival Hutchinson RAFVR	24	nil
8	566615 Corporal Henry George Whitehurst	24	From Westcliffe-on-Sea, Essex
9	626946 Leading Aircraftsman Kenneth Austin Eaton	20	nil
10	625844 Leading Aircraftsman James Robert Benjamin Green	20	From Quinton, Birmingham
11	618912 Leading Aircraftsman Alexander Mair	30	From Glasgow
12	569410 Leading Aircraftsman George Arthur Stone	u/k	nil
13	631988 Leading Aircraftsman Walter Henry Trinder	u/k	nil
14	624237 Leading Aircraftsman Cyril George White	31	From Paddington, London
15	Aircraftsman 1 st Class Hess		Not known
16	631430 Aircraftsman 1 st Class George Johns	21	From Cardiff
17	943705 Aircraftsman 1 st Class Arthur Stanley Pryor RAFVR	21	From Heanor, Derbyshire
18	956983 Aircraftsman 2 nd Class Cyril Edward Banks	23	From Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire
19	573107 Aircraftsman 2 nd Class Peter Graeme Smithson	18	From Neutral Bay, NSW, Australia



14 May 1941, Maleme airfield, Crete: Squadron Leader Edward Howell (inset) takes off on his first ever Hurricane flight!