

By JOHN YOXALL



for Ministry
Photo
CH. 15698

PART II

No. 6 SQUADRON R.A.F.

1939-1950 : Anti-tank and Anti-shiping Work in the Second World War

(Part I of this article, published last week, told the story of the squadron from its formation in 1914 and through the inter-war years)

AT the outbreak of war in 1939 the squadron was at Ramleh and Haifa. A mixed collection of aircraft was on charge. At Ramleh there were ten Hawker Hardys, six Gloster Gauntlets and two Westland Lysanders, and at Haifa another eight Hardys. Although the unit had been on a war footing for a long while, a complete mobilization order came into effect on September 3rd. Life went on much as it did before, with operations against Arab bands, but by the end of January, 1940, it was felt that the lack of operational commitments would allow for a return to a more normal training programme.

The importance of this programme was accentuated a month later, when the role of the squadron was changed back to one of army co-operation. S/L. W. N. McKeachie, E.G.M.,* was in command at the time and the unit was still at Ramleh. On charge were 13 Lysanders, two Gauntlets and one Hardy. The remaining Hardys had been allocated to the Rhodesian Air Force for training.

It is curious that during a major war the squadron should have had one of its longest periods of non-operational flying: but from January to September, 1940, only training flights were made, interrupted by a stand-by when the Italians declared war in June and by a demonstration to show newcomers how to handle some undesirable elements of the Palestine rebellion who had drifted back.

In September, C Flight left Ramleh for Qasaba, Egypt, for operational training and the first sortie by No. 6 against the Italians was by F/L. McFall, D.F.C., who made a tactical reconnaissance over the Bogora-Matruh area.

S/L. R. E. Weld took over command, and a full list of squadron duties included tactical reconnaissance with the Australian Division, the organization of No. 4 Air Intelligence Liaison Officers' Course, desert reconnaissances, coastal patrols to spot refugee-ships and submarines, and occasional trips to Amman to co-operate with the Arab Legion.

* E.G.M.—Empire Gallantry Medal

On October 1st, F/O. Hayther, flying from Qasaba, detected enemy activity at Maddelena and an attack was made. The next day, F/L. Hay, operating from Siwa, saw so much enemy transport on the move that it was certain that the Italians were building up. To discourage No. 6's work the Italians sent five Savoia S.79s over Qasaba, where they dropped between 30 and 40 100 kg H.E. bombs without causing either damage or casualties.

A month later, when B Flight relieved C Flight, the squadron sustained its first casualty of the 1939-45 war. F/L. D. T. St. H. Dawes and his air gunner, Sgt. Chantry, were shot down by flak. They were buried beside their wrecked Lysander.

Meanwhile, from Ramleh, S/L. Weld led a formation of six Lysanders to salute the Emir Abdullah of Transjordan on the occasion of his receiving the honorary rank of Air Commodore in the R.A.F. After the fly-past the pilots were presented to the Emir, who showed great interest in the squadron that had been his air bodyguard for nearly 20 years. Early in 1941 the C.O. and some of the officers were entertained by the Emir and his son at their winter camp in the Jordan valley.

The disposition of the squadron at the beginning of February, 1941, was: H.Q. and C Flight at Ramleh; A and B Flights at Tobruk, attached to H.Q. No. 202 Group. Events moved fast, however, and a month later road and rail parties left for Heliopolis to take over from No. 208 Squadron at Barce, Cyrenaica. A Flight was re-equipped with Hurricane Mk 1s and based at Agedabia to operate with the 2nd Armoured Division. B Flight stayed at Barce with squadron H.Q. to fly flank reces and perform general army co-operation duties.

C Flight remained at Heliopolis to be re-equipped with long-range Lysanders for co-operation with certain of our forces which were to attempt the capture of one or more of the Dodecanese islands. This project was dropped within a fortnight.

At the beginning of April, when the German advance materialized, A Flight stayed with the forward troops until their landing ground was menaced. The squadron was ordered to retire on Maraua, where A Flight rejoined the unit. In

(Left) "A" Flight with their Lysanders at the A.O.C.'s inspection in 1940. (Right) Emir Abdullah of Transjordan passes down the line of aircraft as he inspects the squadron on the occasion of his appointment as an Honorary Air Commodore of the Royal Air Force.

