



No. 6 SQUADRON R.A.F. . . .

the confusion of the retreat, S/L. Weld and the ground party were lost for two days, but eventually turned up intact.

The enemy again outflanked our troops and a further withdrawal was made to Derna, but for a short while A Flight went back and operated from Maraua. F/O. Pike, in charge of the road party, found that enemy armoured units threatened to cut off Derna; on receiving this information he moved on to El Adem.

A message was dropped on A Flight explaining the position. They, also, attempted to withdraw. The air party flew to Gazala and continued to carry out Tac. R sorties, arriving at El Gubbi, within the perimeter of Tobruk, on April 8th. F/L. Saunders and a percentage of the ground personnel were cut off and taken prisoner.

Ordered to stay in Tobruk for so long as the garrison held out, the squadron moved over to the west airfield. General Wavell, visiting Tobruk, personally thanked No. 6 for its work during the withdrawal; and later, on his return to H.Q. in Cairo, he sent along a couple of bottles of champagne as a token of his esteem.

The unit's aircraft suffered badly from lack of spares, but not once was a request for a recce refused. Lysanders were often flown without tail wheels and Hurricanes with non-operative hydraulics. On one sortie from Tobruk F/L. McFall, D.F.C., and his air gunner, Cpl. Copley, shot down a Ju52 over Mechili.

B Flight pilots, who normally flew Lysanders, were introduced to the controls of the Hurricanes. Each did some "circuits and bumps" before taking the fighters on ops, but air space was so limited at Tobruk that during each of these practice flights the Hurricanes were fired on by enemy flak. There were no casualties from this cause.

On April 19th, A and C Flights were ordered to report to 204 Group H.Q. at Maaten Bagush. Four long-range Lysanders took off at night to avoid enemy fighters and two more pilots departed in the squadron Magister. Maaten Bagush was reached safely; the only hazards encountered were the British searchlights and anti-aircraft guns in Tobruk, which opened up as they flew over.

The Hurricanes left Tobruk, under the command of F/O. H. G. Fletcher, flew many reconnaissances and conducted successful artillery shoots under appalling conditions. Regular and intense shelling of the airfield was one major trouble, enemy fighters another. The Germans were based at Salala, only 20 miles away, and when their ground troops reported Hurricanes taking off, the Messerschmitt 110s would arrive over Tobruk and wait for the Hurricanes as they came in to land.

S/L. Weld was killed on a reconnaissance during April, and with his going the unit lost a very fine commanding officer. He had set a splendid example of courage in adversity and had undoubtedly saved many of his squadron from falling in enemy hands during the withdrawal. S/L. P. Legge took over; he was no stranger to the squadron, for he had been with No. 208 when No. 6 was attached to them for a while during the previous year.

During the middle of May, 1941, came news of the intended army attack to relieve Tobruk and everyone concerned was asked to make a very special effort. No. 6 excelled itself and a number of congratulatory messages were received. While on a Lysander recce on the evening of the 16th, F/L. McFall located the advanced units of the enemy, which had broken through the wire and were attacking our troops in force. He landed beside a battery of guns and directed their fire. Two days later he put down by our forward troops, discussed the situation with the brigade major, and then took him up and showed him the enemy dispositions. For this he was awarded an immediate Bar to his D.F.C.

At the end of May the last Lysander recce was made—by F/O. Hillier—around Maddelena. From then onward Hurricanes were used.

The actual attack opened on June 15th at 0600 hrs. F/O. Hardiman was first off and reported that the battle was going satisfactorily. P/O. McBarnett was next away. He was in company with a cannon Hurricane of No. 274 Squadron when three Me109s attacked. Both Hurricanes were shot down; the 274 Squadron pilot was killed and McBarnett, wounded, walked back to our lines.

F/L. McFall was next away; intercepted over Fort Capuzzo he had to crash land at Sidi Barrani. Enemy aircraft ground- strafed him in the wreckage of his aircraft and he was so badly wounded that he died the next day. Two more pilots, P/Os. Sowrey and Grosvenor, were lost on the 24th and 25th.

After such a gruelling time the squadron was more than overdue for a short breather and, being relieved by No. 451, R.A.A.F., moved up to Tel Aviv rest camp for six weeks.

At the end of the rest period a move was made to Wadi Halfa with C Flight at Kufra Oasis. The Hurricanes had gone and the squadron again had a mixture of aircraft on charge—three Lysander Mk. 1, three Lysander Mk. 2, five Gladiator Mk. 1 and six Gladiator Mk. 2. In September two Hurricanes were added to this miscellany and in November three Blenheim 4s, complete with crews, were allocated for service at Kufra.

On the last day of 1941 came news of a move to Iraq. Gladiators were flown to Khartoum and the detached flight returned to the unit, which foregathered at Helwan until it moved to Kilo 26 on January 22nd. S/L Legge was posted to H.Q. Middle East and S/L Roger Porteous came from Iraq Command to take over. This period marked the all-time low in equipment—the squadron's aircraft on charge was just one Hurricane Mk.1.

Scarcely had the unit settled-in than there was talk of a move to the Sudan—in fact, some of the airmen were detached on duty to Port Sudan. It transpired, however, that the squadron was to be re-equipped and again sent into action. To this end they were sent to Landing Ground 224, on the Alexandria-Cairo road, and until their new mounts were ready helped to receive and service aircraft and crews operating from Malta at night.

On April 20th, 1942, the squadron moved to Shandur and started intensive training on Hurricane 2Ds each fitted with two 40mm "S" guns for tank busting. Eighteen rounds were



One of the 40-mm-gun Hawker Hurricane 2Ds at Shandur in 1942.

Not a wing-loading test, but a squadron group photographed at Fayid, in the Suez Canal zone, in 1943.

