



HAWKER HURRICANE 2D 1942      V.A. SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE 9 1945      HAWKER TEMPEST 6 1946      D.H. VAMPIRE FB5 1950

carried for each gun and the recoil during firing cut flying speed down by some 40 m.p.h. Two .303 guns were also carried for sighting purposes

After only five weeks' training with the new weapon, No. 6 was sent to Gambut for operations in the Western Desert. In common with all other squadrons, No. 6 was required continually to be at two hours' readiness to move—either forward or rearward, according to the fortunes of the day.

The debut of the 2Ds came on June 7th, but the sortie was abortive in that the target was found to be unsuited to the new form of attack. On the next operation the destruction of two tanks and two lorries was claimed. From then onwards there was a continuous list of tanks and motor transport of all sorts damaged or destroyed, though not always without casualties on our side.

The unit was still moving, first to L.G. 75, later to Sidi Haneish. These moves were followed almost immediately by two more, to L.G. 106 and L.G. 91. Pressure was so great that, in order to get every possible aircraft serviceable, the squadron was told to ignore major inspections. Enemy bombing also caused a lot of extra work. Nevertheless, most effective fighting was being done and the list of enemy vehicles claimed mounted quickly.

In the last week of July, 1942, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder arrived by air in a captured Fieseler Storch to visit No. 6 and inspect the gun-carrying Hurricanes.

Early in August two immediate D.F.C.s were awarded. F/L Hillier gained his by pressing home a determined low-level attack on armoured vehicles in the Sidi Rezheim area. He was so low that he broke off his tailwheel and part of the tail unit on one of the tanks he attacked. F/L Simpson, who received the other award, was wounded in the chest while leading an attack on tanks at Bir Hacheim. Despite this severe wound he continued his attack, scoring further hits, until his Hurricane was hit by flak. With hot oil and glycol smothering his face, he flew blind for a while before baling out at 500ft.

The air liaison officer with No. 6 at this time was Major Hugh Rice, who is now with the public relations department of de Havillands. He recalls for us some interesting happenings of eight years ago.

"My connection with No. 6 Squadron," he writes, "was a very modest one and extended roughly from July to November, 1942. Earlier I had met Roger Porteous when he had No. 244 Squadron in the Persian Gulf in 1941, and used to lumber up to Mosul in an ancient Vincent at intervals to see how the Army Co-operation Flight of two Gladiators, which was Iraq's sole close-support force at that time, was getting on.

"Early in 1942 I was stationed at the Army Co-operation O.T.U. at Aqir, and there we passed out a lot of embryo recce pilots who had just completed their Magister training in Rhodesia. Quite a number of them were posted to the Delta area to join Roger Porteous's squadron, which was then doing something very secret and mysterious. Porteous and his A.L.O., encountered at the Gezira Club, would smile enigmatically, but it gradually became known that they were learning how to handle the Hurricane 2D with its tank-bursting 40-mm guns.

"No. 6 were naturally regarded as very experimental to start with and, indeed, shared an airfield with another experimental squadron, No. 7 S.A.A.F., which had Hurricanes with Jefferies sticky bombs, which were supposed to adhere to tanks but which at that time were only moderately successful. Attached to the two squadrons was a certain group captain who devised even more unorthodox weapons. He would fly at night over enemy areas in an ancient all-black Gladiator with a bomb slung transversely, so that, when released, it would (he said)

'roll along the ground into the target.' His activities were surprisingly successful and quite fearlessly conducted night after night, to the amazement of all.

"The Hurricane 2D first saw action in June, 1942. By the time of the Battle of Alamein there was a reasonable amount of experience accumulated and our own measure of air superiority was continually increasing, although it was not complete. The Hurricane 2Ds were few and vulnerable and were therefore never sent out without medium and top cover. As a result the planning of a strike was a relatively complicated job, particularly as the covering squadrons were themselves pretty busy on routine work. Only targets which were certain to be identifiable at low level, which were not in the thick of the heaviest flak and whose existence and location were absolutely certain were attacked. This policy resulted in a very high percentage of successful operations, with great damage to enemy armour and with very low casualty rates. The Army were always delighted; the Air Staff sometimes faltered in their belief in the justification for so much fighter effort against a target which might be no more than four armoured cars.

"As regards the atmosphere of life in the squadron, I suppose it was very like that of any other desert unit. We were based on a cluster of landing grounds at Amiryra, west of the Cairo-Alex road. The area received a good deal of intruder attention from Ju88s at night; I remember one pilot in particular who always preferred playing poker in air raids, because, by being the last under the table, he could just have time to look at the other chap's hand. Each morning it was necessary to watch out for clusters of small spikes dropped over the airfield in order to puncture aircraft tyres.

"As the battle moved forward the 2Ds were sent out unescorted—this policy was the result of the reduction in enemy air resistance and the operational difficulty of getting an escort from different airfields, when the whole air force was moving forward daily. By the time the Tunisian show was over casualties had reached a level which I think could be called 'worrying,' and the 2D was clearly past its prime. Meanwhile, R.P. was coming along.

"The short life of the Hurricane 2D should not be allowed to obscure its positive value over a few short months. Its work was perhaps more directly appreciated by the private soldier in the Eighth Army than was that of any other branch of the Desert Air Force. The armoured divisions in particular came to know that their cavalry units could call for a No. 6 Squadron strike against a small but highly obstructive enemy objective and that, if aircraft were able to come at all, they would almost always achieve something effective. No. 6 Squadron's work was, of course, most intimately tied up with the Army, so that we had three A.L.O.s to the one squadron (as compared with the usual scale of two to a whole wing), and a very high standard of inter-Service co-operation was reached."

Our history of No. 6 may now be resumed on the day when A.V.-M. Coningham visited the squadron and told them of the impending offensive—which actually began on the morning of October 23rd. The famous artillery barrage at El Alamein could be heard at L.G. 89, where No. 6 was stationed.

In the first operation of the battle No. 6 got six Honey\* tanks, and two hours later claimed a further eight Honeys and two Crusaders\* The fighting was most intense but gradually the enemy gave way and on November 2nd the Eighth Army broke through. All units were ordered to be in the highest state of mobility.

Germans and Italians crowded the roads and No. 6 asked

\* The enemy were using a number of captured tanks.

(Below) Four Hurricane 2Ds of No. 6 Squadron in formation over the Western Desert in 1943. (Right) S/L Weston-Burt (extreme left) briefing the pilots for a sortie in the El Hamma region in 1943.

