

WESTERN DESERT

Introduction

There are 90 dated entries when Bull was there for 228 days so an entry about each 2.5 days. But it varies according to the action with a 15 day gap, many between 5 & 7 days apart but also days with more than 1 entry.

Time Period

Starts November 1940. They arrive in Egypt 26 April 1941. Ends 9 February 1942

Notes & Cross References

I have added page references thus [Tucker p5] in this section. That is the page number that covers the same event in:

Per Noctem Per Diem; The story of the 24 Squadron, South African Air Force, E.N. Tucker & P.M.J. McGregor, 1962

<https://www.amazon.com/noctem-diem-story-Squadron-African/dp/B0006BP5K8>

I have added page references thus [AIR p12] which refer to the National Archives, Kew, UK document AIR-27-298 24 Squadron, South African Air Force, War Diary.

Highlights

To me the highlight is the account of the escape from Crete in a barge in the June 10 entry.

Lesser highlights are the 'bombing' of a brothel. 17 August.

Maryland out running ME 109. 23 August.

Bull's tribute to the Maryland "best bomber in Middle East". 12 September

Bombing raid on German tanks with the German perspective. 17 September. See also 4 December.

Boston out running ME109F. 10 November & 28 November.

Fly down German held Hellfire Pass at 700 feet in a Boston. 28 November

Timeline

I think it will help if I put Bull's time in the Western Desert into a timeline showing the events.

This video shows the back and forth movement of the battle front: It is titled "The Western Desert campaign Animated - 1940-1943 (Complete)" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuIB_tjbPC0

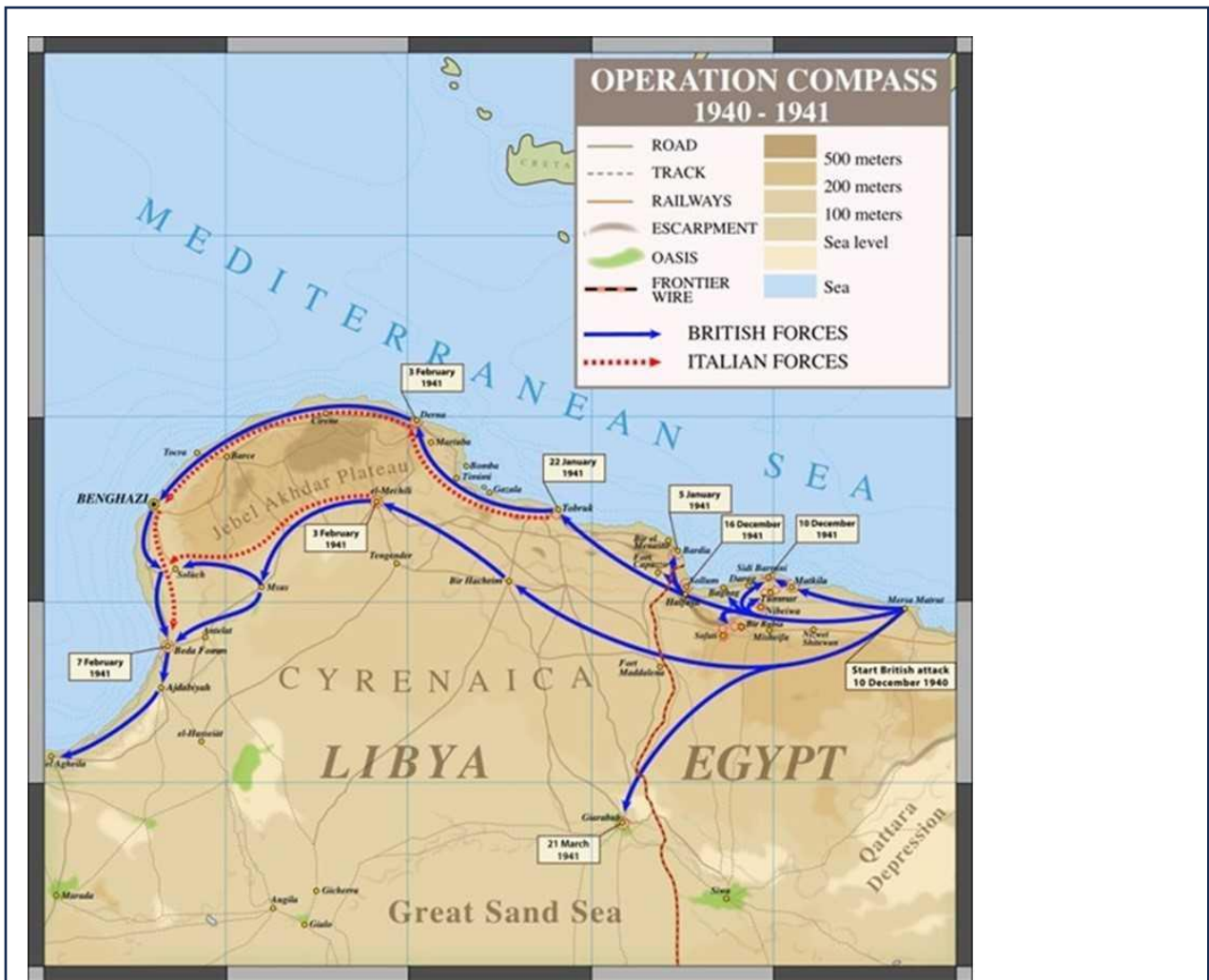
Bull arrived late April 1941, that is at 0:55 in the video after Rommel had pushed the Allies way past Tobruk. Bull left at the beginning of February 1942, that is at 1:46 just as the Germans recapture Benghazi after having been pushed right back to El Agheila.

As the video shows from April till November the front line was static so there was not a lot of air activity. Operation Crusader (mid November till end December 1941) the allies advance to Gazala but a pocket of the Axis held out at Hellfire Pass. At that time 24 Squadron had just converted to Bostons which were used for tactical reconnaissance initially & then had insufficient range when the Axis were pushed far back.

This video gives the number of tanks apposing at each of the battles. It also puts the Western Desert campaign into context to the surrounding campaigns. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Odk0Cp2D_fU

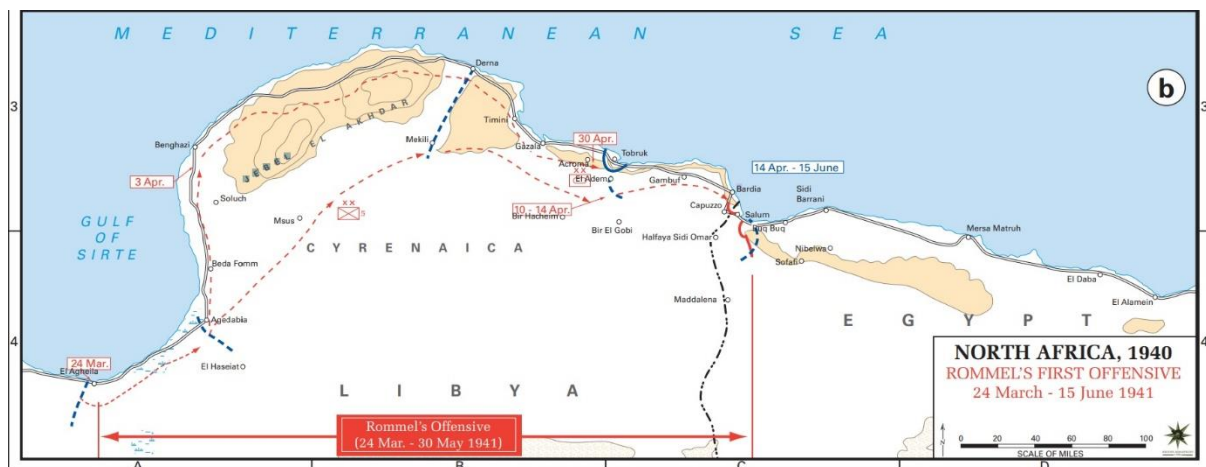
The Italians had invaded Egypt from the Italian held Libyan border during September 1940. Called Operazione E. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_invasion_of_Egypt

The British then drove them back & pursued them far across Libya to El Agheila. Operation Compass 9 December 1940 – 9 February 1941 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass



Picture source: : https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WWII_-_British_Operation_Compass_1940-1941.svg

Hitler sent Rommel & the Afrika Corps to Libya during February 1941 with orders to defend Tripoli & Tripolitania. In Unternehmen Sonnenblume 6 February 1941 to 25 May 1941 the Afrika Corps drove the British back across Libya. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unternehmen_Sonnenblume
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Sonnenblume



Picture source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e2/AfricaMap2.jpg>

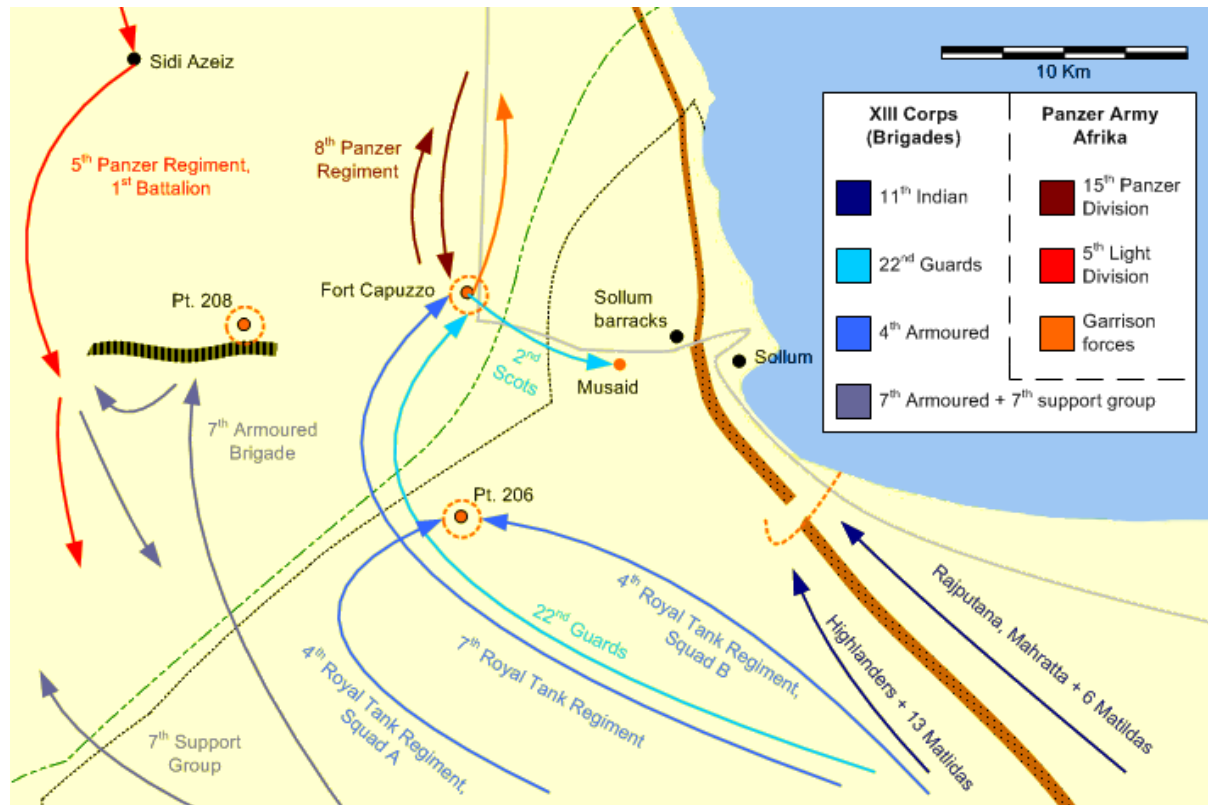
Bull arrived in Egypt on 26 April 1941 so towards the end of Sonnenblume. However the Allied forces in Greece had been driven out to Crete at that time. This is well illustrated in the second video listed above. The

Germans sent airborne troops to Crete so that the Allied troops had to be evacuated but that was hardly accomplished and the bulk were captured.

May. Bull went on several flights taking supplies & strafing the Germans on Crete

On the ground Operation Battleaxe 15 – 17 June. Intended to raise the siege of Tobruk. Failed. Wavell was replaced to Supreme Commander Middle East by Auchinleck as a consequence.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Battleaxe



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Battleaxe#/media/File:BattleaxeDay1.PNG

June. Only 2 raids. Bombed concentrated tanks & Gazala South airfield.

On the ground things were static until mid November when Allies launched Operation Crusader.

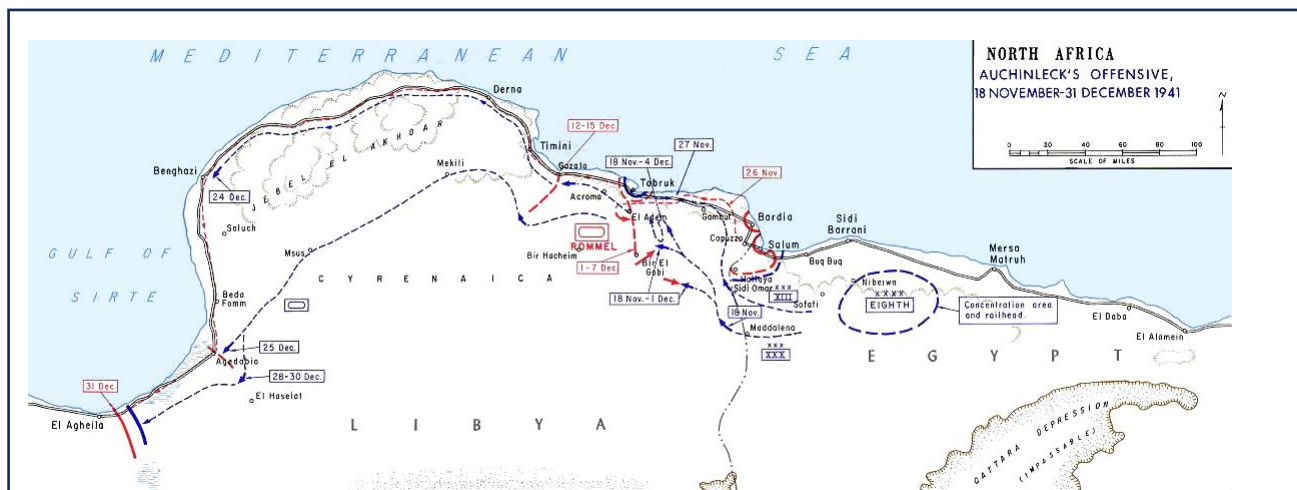
July. Dusk raid but too dark to bomb accurately. Raid on tanks (Bull not included) misses target completely – bombs in sea & on beach. Night bombing but not a success as they could not see the targets. Escorting Hurricanes out to the Fleet which was on the move.

August. Bombed big guns at besieged Tobruk. Searching for a mythical tanker. Bombed aerodromes but Bull missed as they were flying into the sun. Did photo mosaic of El Alamein for the army.

September. Army co-operation practice at Heliopolis

October. Nothing much as they prepare to change to Douglas Bostons.

On the ground Operation Crusader which drove the Axis forces back across Libya to almost El Agheila again. From 18 November till 30 December 1941.



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Crusader#/media/File:AfricaMap3.jpg

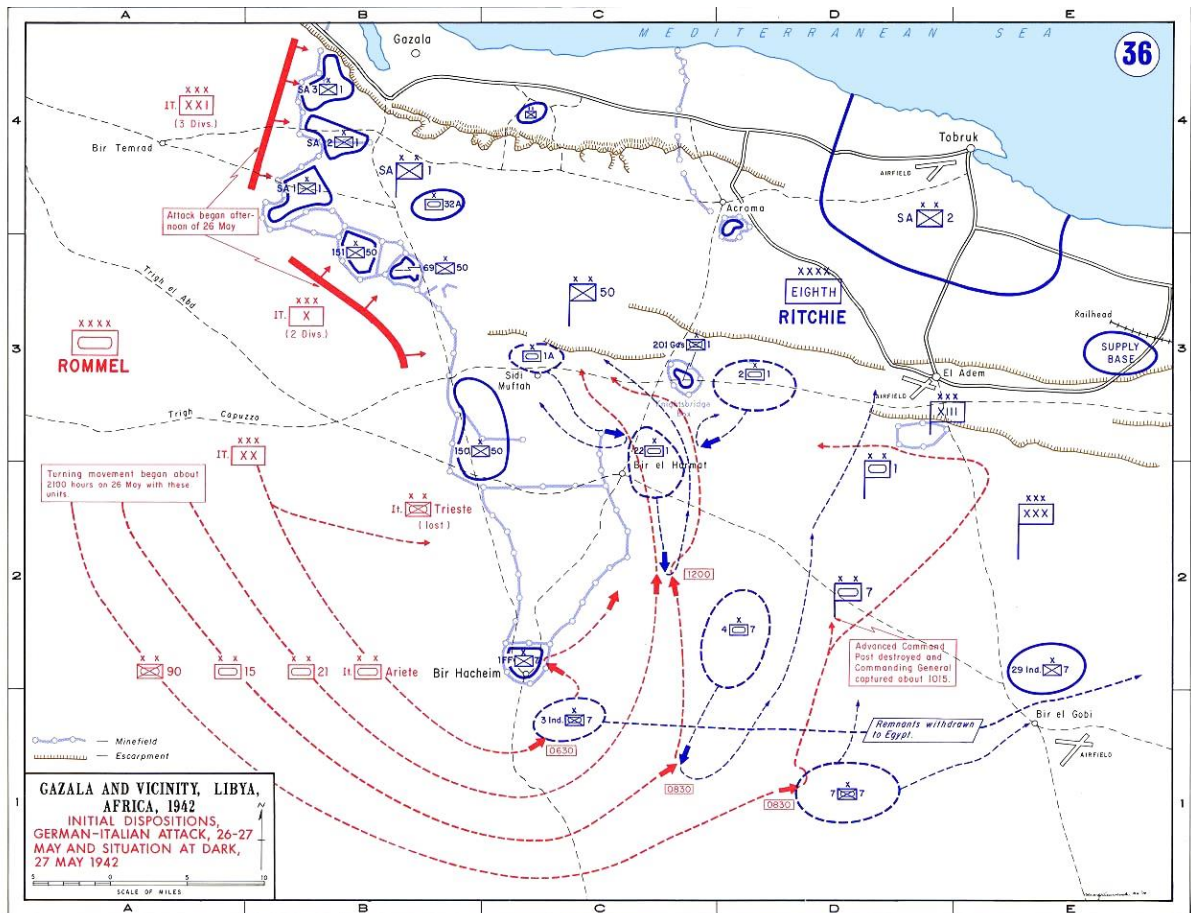
November. Bostons used for low level reconnaissance of fighter 'dromes. Doing 3 shows per day usually. Over time the Germans gained experience of the Bostons and the raids became suicidal. Towards the end of the month Bull was used to give live commentary on the state of play in the tank battles which were very useful & popular listening material.

December. More recce work then bombing raids. First without fighter escort they were jumped by Germans and only 1 of 6 planes came back. 7 planes with 25 fighter escorts sent to bomb Derna but Pietersen can't find it & drops 7 tons of 500 pounders 40 miles from Derna

January. Germans in full retreat. Boston has short range so not much used. The squadron was withdrawn to El Daba (slightly west of Fuka). Bull had been notified he was returning to the Union on 24 December. He was sent back to Cairo & on to the Suez Canal while his passage was organised.

On the ground at end of January Rommel sent out three strong armoured reconnaissance units from the front just east of El Agheila which met little resistance so he changed it to the start of an offensive which drove the Allies right back to Gazala where a pitched battle took place from 26 May till 21 June. Operation known as **Unternehmen Theseus** by the Germans. The final battle known as **Battle of Gazala** by the Allies. 26 May to 21 June 1942

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unternehmen_Theseus https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gazala



Picture source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gazala#/media/File:Map_of_siege_of_Tobruk_1942.jpg
 February . Bull embarks Highland Monarch bound for the Union 9 February.

 This picks up part way through the entry dated Nov 24. Youngsfield



Africa Star

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa_Star

The five of us on our way down decided to have a little competition as to who would be the first one to dip his wick, & after these few months in the bundu I think it's going to be a close competition.

When we landed at Waterkloof we were rushed straight to the offices, given tickets, & had to rush to the station to catch the first train to Cape Town - no time to see anybody or do anything - after coming from active service we get rushed about like so many school kids - it's a bugger!

That night in the train we got stuck into the beer & had quite an enjoyable party & sing song in the saloon. We were struck by the extraordinary good treatment we got on the railway - before we went North soldiers with treated like so much dirt on the train.

At Worcester I got off the train, & stayed over with Piet, Georgie & Marie [*] until the next morning when I caught the train, got off at Wellington & stayed with Edwin & Marjorie [*] until that afternoon. I eventually arrived at Youngsfield two days late, but got away with it, as the O.C. of our course, Lt. Lomberg, is a very decent fellow, one of the best.

[*] Piet & Georgie = Pieter Christiaan Naude & Georgina Roberta Luyt . Piet was a close friend of Bull's & one of my god-parents. He was a farmer in the Worcester district. I think I met him once. They married June 1940. Georgie died 1945 aged 31.
Marie = Stanley's wife.
Stanley = a younger brother – see a bit lower down
Edwin = Edwyn Jordan – see a bit lower down
Marjorie = Edwyn's wife (though Bull also had a sister named Marjorie).

Here we find that the observers course has now been lengthened to 4 1/2 months, & we are the first fellows on the lengthened course. There seems to be a bit of a mix-up tho', as there are supposed to be 12 of us on the course, us 6 from up North (Pip is coming down too) plus 6 others from all over the Union, but the others haven't arrived yet, so they will be put into another section & will be a bit behind us.

Youngsfield has been improved a lot since we left, the 'drome has been drained, new grass planted, tarmac all but finished, 13 hangers, any amount of Avro Ansons [*], no more Harts, & in their place they have Hinds [*]. The place is really coming on fine & there are still lots of workmen going all day.

[*] Avro Anson https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avro_Anson



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avro_Anson#/media/File:CF15_Avro_Anson_ZK-RRA_040415_01.jpg

Hind = Hawker Hind. Developed from Hart (Hartbees)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawker_Hind



Picture source
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawker_Hind#/media/File:Hawker_Hind_K5414_\(Shuttleworth_Uncovered\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawker_Hind#/media/File:Hawker_Hind_K5414_(Shuttleworth_Uncovered).jpg)

The new camp is almost completed next to the 'drome, & we will be moving in one of these days, it looks a nice roomy camp.

The instructors seem a nice lot, but Lt's Lomberg & Duby seem by far the best - they are both nice natural blokes with no bullshit. As for the course - Ye Gods! that's the one fly in the ointment - we will have to pull our fingers right out, & there doesn't seem to be much time for leisure, what with logs, sines, cosines & meteorology etc thrown in for good measure .

Tuesday 21st Jan 1941

It's a hell of a long time since last I entered up anything. We are now in the new camp, & a very nice place it is although it isn't completed yet. The first six weeks of the course were pretty bad, lectures following one on the other, & even the flying although done in the Ansons wasn't very pleasant as we were rushed all the time & couldn't enjoy it. Now it is quite pleasant, we have more leisure, & we're getting the hang of the navigation which is very interesting. I even managed to pass the maths exam, although I never took it at school & a very stiff paper was set.

Pip followed us down about a fortnight later, he was out at a rest farm at the time we left. He seems completely recovered from his wound except for a slight scar above the eye.

I won this little competition among the five of us after being here 5 weeks - after all we had said on the way down.

We got 12 days leave over Christmas & New Year, but I took on an extra 3, & again got away with it. Pip got married on Boxing Day, & I was his best man. I got back from Worcester only just in time, dressed in civies with my uniform in a suitcase. I was supposed to meet Pip at the station, but as he wasn't there when I got there & it was late, I went to the shithouse & was just starting to get dressed when he rolled up. I got into the car with parts of my clothing dangling all over, & finished dressing at the Olympics Club. However we were in the church with one or two minutes to spare & the wedding went off very nicely. Pip's wife Joan is a very nice girl indeed & they should hit it off very well.

In the meantime Adolf has been going great guns, he's been awarded the D.S.O., & a painting of him has been presented to the Union by Mr SF Waterson. The painting was unveiled in the National Art Gallery in Cape Town, & the family were more or less all present, Mom & Dad were down on holiday, Stanley was down on leave & I was there. Dad was asked to make a speech, & started sprouting such a lot of utter bullshit that after about half-an-hour I had to go up & quieten him.

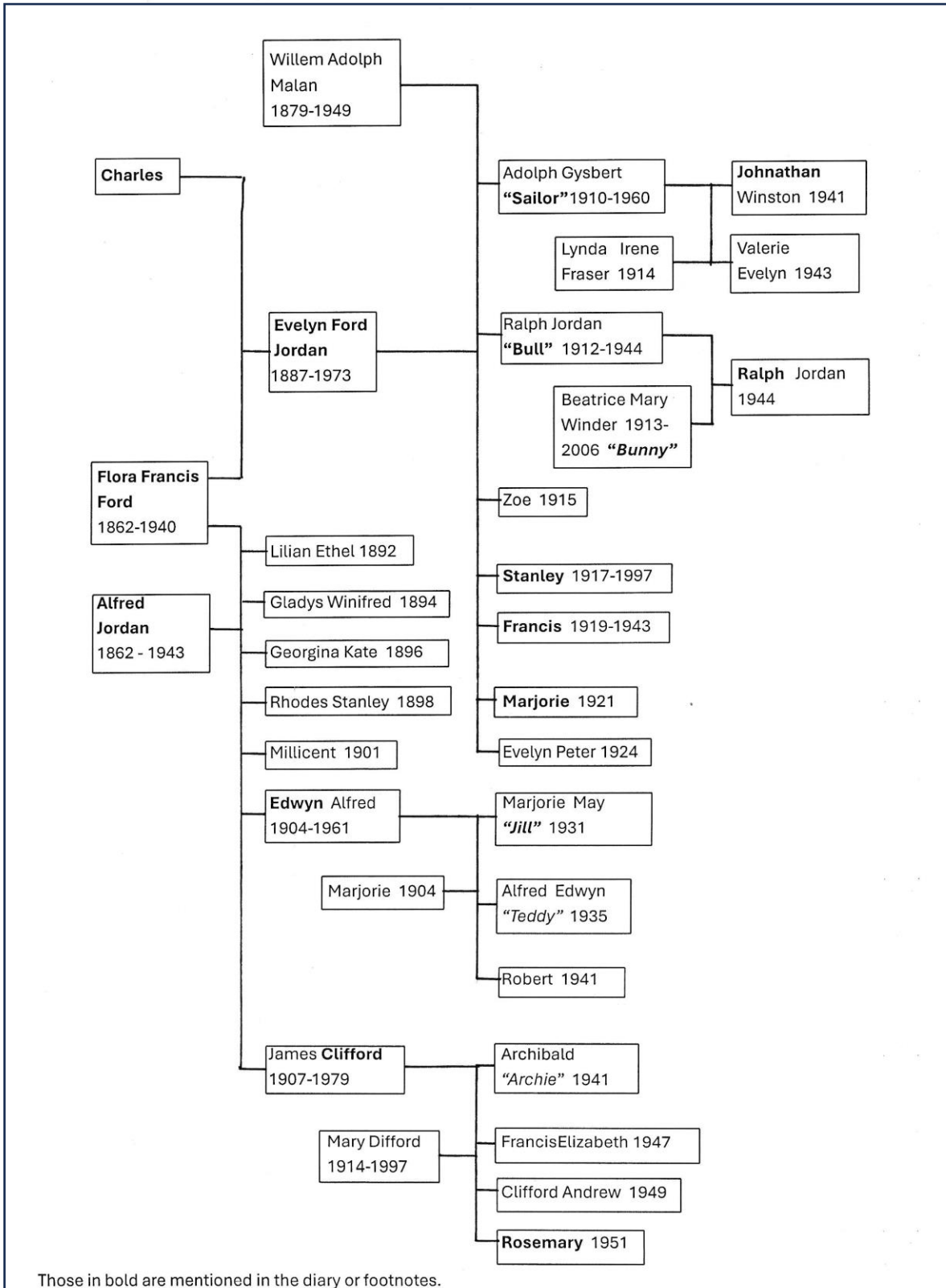


L to R: Bull (Ralph), Mother (Evelyn), the portrait of Adolph, Father (Willie), Stanley
Adolph was his older brother. a.k.a. "Sailor" Malan
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sailor_Malan

Stanley went to the Western Desert in armoured cars. They met up there several times. Marie is mentioned several times; she was Stanley's girlfriend/wife.

There was some fall out between the National Gallery & Adolph's daughter, Valerie. She withdrew the picture from the gallery. 2023 Valerie is still alive & has the picture.

Here is a good place to record some family relationships. The family tree will make the relationships clearer.



Those in bold are mentioned in the diary or footnotes.

In an earlier draft of this note I recorded the family story of my grandmother's parentage:

"Bull's mother, Evelyn, was born in 1887 in Southsea, Hampshire, England. Her mother, Flora Francis Ford, was married to an American seaman. It later transpired that he had earlier married in America and thus Flora's marriage was bigamous and her child, Evelyn, thus illegitimate. Flora was thus in social disgrace. She fled to South Africa in 1889 taking her child with her. There she married Alfred Jordan (bootmaker ex Leicester). Evelyn was adopted so became Evelyn Ford Jordan. "

Southsea is close to Portsmouth and not far from Southampton explaining the American seaman. We (wife & I) were puzzled as to how she could arrive in South Africa and get married so quickly. My suspicion was that Flora & Alfred were on the same boat when she came to South Africa and thus they got to know each other during that voyage of about a month.

Antonia, my wife, did some on-line research and found from www.familysearch that they married in 1889 in Southsea. The child Evelyn would then have been 2 years old. Thus Alfred had moved from Groby, Leicestershire to Southsea, Hampshire. They came to South Africa in the year of their marriage, 1889. [*] When I told my "cousin" Jill (see family tree) about Antonia's discovery she queried how that could be since they married in Wellington, South Africa. Jill had the same erroneous family understanding as I.

Rosemary van der Vyver (nee Jordan – see family tree) was in contact with the Ford family in England. She has a copy of their book *"The Ford/Friend Family"*. From that we know that Flora's father, Henry, was a bailiff in several farms totalling 750 acres and "employed 14 men and 7 boys". So Flora came from a well established family. She was one of ten children.



Lower Farm, Gussage St Michael's Dorset. Home of Henry Ford and family in 1875 according to Kelly's Directory. He was bailiff in several farms in the area. The 1861 census says he had 750 acres and employed 14 men and 7 boys.

Flora and Alfred had seven children. The first was born in 1892, when Evelyn would have been 5 or 6 years old. Their sixth child was Edwyn born in 1904 when Evelyn would have been 17 or 18 years old. Their last child was Clifford who was born in 1907. Both Edwyn (spelled Edwin by Bull) and Clifford are mentioned in this diary. Here is the generational gap between Bull and Edwyn: they were born 8 years apart so like cousins but actually uncle/nephew on the family tree (in fact half-uncle/half-nephew (same maternal line but different paternal line)).

Thus Bull (and Sailor's) mother was illegitimate by an American. Antonia found Evelyn's baptismal certificate

which lists her father as Charles. She found no marriage certificate to Charles so the story about a bigamous marriage to an American seaman may be a family cover up for Evelyn actually having been born out of wedlock.

My mother told me that when she and Bull became engaged Evelyn called her aside and explained that she was illegitimate and that she would quite understand if my mother chose not to proceed with the marriage in the light of this. Of course my mother married Ralph but it shows that my grandmother was generally accepted as being a Jordan.

Bull's grandfather was Jan Gysbert Malan who had 9 children, some died young and there were only two sons, Petrus (Piet) and Willem (Willie). They inherited the family farm *Versailles* in Wellington in 1886 with Willie getting the lesser portion. Later he sold it to Piet. He was the manager of *Groenfontein*, a Rhodes Fruit Farm when he married Evelyn in 1909. In 1915 Willie bought *Slent* on the Paardeberg but he went bankrupt in 1918 forcing him to sell *Slent* when farm prices were depressed following WW1. He had simply invested too much into improving the farm and was caught by the post 1918 slump in food prices.

Willie did not actively side with the Boers during the Anglo-Boer War, whereas his brother Piet did. It wasn't until Smuts' notorious general, Manie Maritz, came down to the Cape, harrying the British, that Willie joined up on the British side. At Twenty-four Rivers (Halfmenschhof) in 1902 Willie was hit by two bullets while astride his horse, one went through both thighs and the other smashed his right arm. He was not expected to survive, but after six years of pain and stubborn persistence he was able to ride around the farm again. His one leg was said to be two inches shorter than the other making him disabled for the rest of his life. By this time he was also suffering from mental illness and Evelyn was left to cope with a sick husband and by now a family of five children. She moved back to Wellington and did dress-making and took in boarder to make ends meet. In 1928 he had recovered sufficiently to take up employment and got a job at Golden Valley Citrus Estates near Cookhouse in the Eastern Cape.

Evelyn & Willie had 7 children. Adolph "*Sailor*" (1910-1960), Ralph "*Bull*" (1912-1944), Zoe (1915 -?), Stanley (1917 - 1997), Francis (1919-1943), Marjorie (1921 - ?), Peter (1925-?). Francis was the first to die, those with ? I don't know when they died but they all married.

When Ralph married he gave his address as *Bradgate*, Wellington. That was the Jordan home. His family were in the Eastern Cape then.

[*] The book *Sailor Malan*, Oliver Walker, 1953, Cassell & Co, p21. also states that they came to South Africa as a family in 1889 intending to go to Wellington, New Zealand but on learning there was a Wellington nearby he went to see what the prospects were there and got a job at the boot factory there (actually Panther Shoes, a division of Western Tanning).

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My mother married Bill Ribbans (a British man) in 1946. He had been married twice before with 3 children from his first wife (who died) and one from his second marriage (ended in divorce). Then there was me plus they had two children together. So that was seven children all together though Donald, of the second marriage, lived with his mother in Johannesburg.

My mother was wealthy as she inherited from her father who was a successful stockbroker and property investor. Bill Ribbans was a successful businessman who grew those funds significantly.

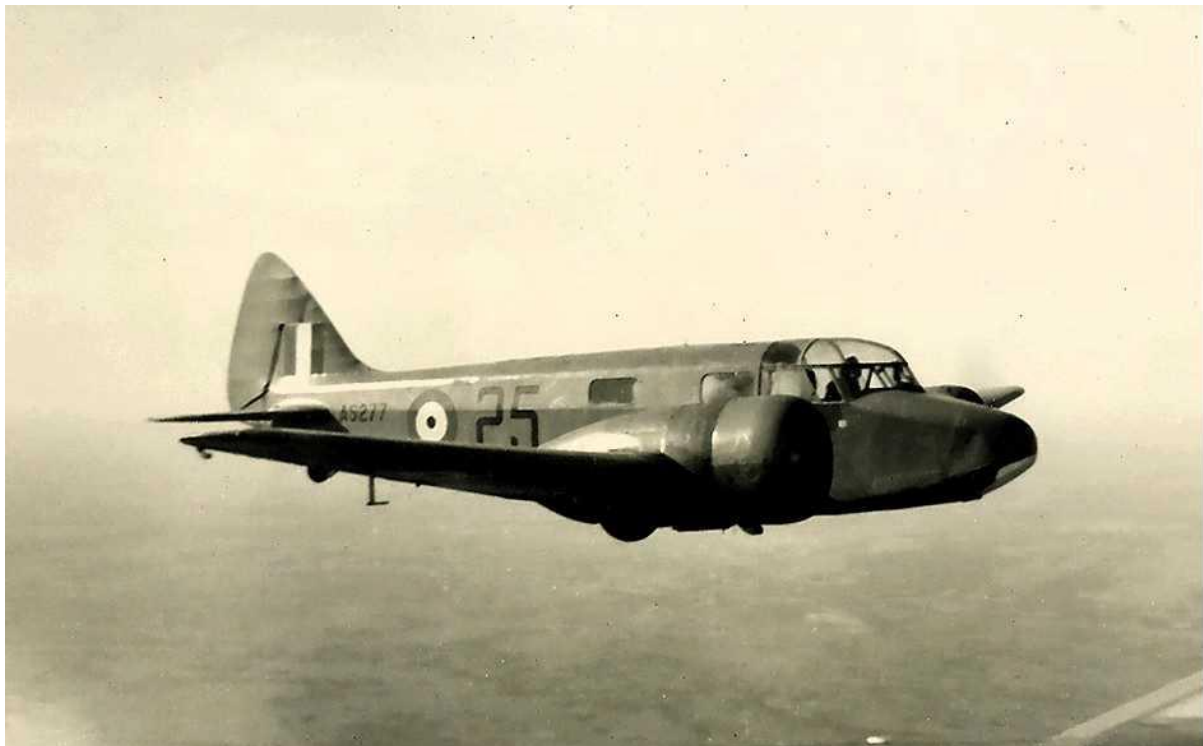
My mother bought a house in Somerset West (where we also lived) for my grandmother to live in. In her (grandmother) old age she went and lived with her youngest daughter, Marjorie, in Kroonstad where she later died. Marjorie fell on hard times so my mother bought a modest house in Rugby, Cape Town where Marjorie lived until her death. So my mother supported those in need (plus at least one other that I am aware of).

I had a very pleasant leave over Christmas & New Year which I spent at Wellington, Worcester & Robertson - just like old times. It was spoilt by me seeing Lt. Jubber's name in the casualty list - he

crashed in to Marsabit mountain in heavy mist it is said. It was a bit of a shock to me, a good man gone, one of the very best, so the *Sheik of Elwak* flies no more.

Last week Ted, Les & myself had a bit of luck, we were selected to navigate three new Airspeed Oxfords [*] from Wingfield where they were being assembled, to Pretoria. We left on Monday morning but when Les's machine was started up its oil pressure was defective so he stayed & came on the next day. Ted & myself got to Pretoria that afternoon, went to Jo'burg that evening, back to Pretoria next morning, got our railway tickets for the return journey, went back to Jo'burg & spent until the Wednesday evening with two girls staying alone in a house.

[*] Airspeed Oxford https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airspeed_Oxford



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airspeed_Oxford#/media/File:RAF_Airspeed_AS.10_Oxford_II_Brown.jpg

Old Ted knew them well & took me along & by Jove did we have a time? Not a care in the world as to trains & Air Forces & such-like minor things. No siree! Les didn't go so well though, he left here a day after us, caught the first train back & landed here a full day before us - much to his own disgust, & when Ted & myself got back we again got away with it, we hadn't even been expected so soon!

When we got back it was to hear the news that Brinkie had decided to get spliced, to a very nice little girl from here at the 'drome, she is only about three bricks & a tickey [*] high & Brinkie has given her the name of Fairy Queen. Ted is to be the best man & the job is to be done on the 8th of next month.

[*] tickey was a small "silver" coin worth 3 pennies; say 2,5 cents. It was the smallest coin physically, smaller & thinner than a farthing.

This wedding business seems to be contagious, Lama has just got engaged, & I expect he'll push off before the end of the course although he as yet says no - that means it will be only Ted, Les & myself left of the old timers.

Last week a plane crashed at Mbeya on the way up to Nairobi, & I see in the casualty list of 16 that Jock van Niekerk, or "*Singapore*" as we used to call him at Bloemfontein is one of the victims- he was a damn fine fellow- slept in the bed next to me at Bloemfontein.

Captain Wardrop, our rather unpopular O.C. crashed a few days ago too & got killed - poor old Uncle Boo Hoo, I will say this much for him tho' he really did want to lick A Flight into shape even if he did set about it wrongly, & by golly he could fly a machine - I wonder what was the cause of the crash, [*] & whether he had a passenger at the time. I wrote to Goose & Lab ages ago but haven't heard from either of them yet since I left.

[*] See entry for 26 April for answer.
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When we got down here from the North the five of us put in a statement to the effect that we had been forced to leave most of our kit behind us on account of the 40lb restriction, so have just received new outfits - very nice, so now we have double kit in almost everything.

March 25th [1941]

Brinkie's wedding duly came off, & what a wrought it turned out at the end. Brinkie rolled up in church very much under his own steam, & when he had to kiss Nan in front of the pulpit he sort of lost his balance & damn nearly kissed the parson by mistake. They gave a big reception afterwards, & there was enough booze to float a battleship. To start off with everybody hung back on the liquor & it looked like becoming a very tame affair, but when the older people left everybody got going & things went swimmingly & it looked as if all the liquor wouldn't be enough.

It tickled us no end to watch Brinkie trying to act sober as he went about thanking everybody for attending. Ted who was best man afterward said he had been to many weddings, & had been best man at a good few but this was the first one where he had seen the groom helped into the car for the going away. I who was elected master of ceremonies at the last moment showed them all the way - how many I put away goodness alone knows, anyhow for the first time in my life I found that in dancing my feet would persist in going one way while my body picked some other course & I had to leave most of the navigation to my partner.

It was at Brinkie's reception that I met Barbara, "*Bail Out Barbara*" as we call her; a name she was given for being a parachute packer at the 'drome - she was one of Nan's Guard of Honour, a girl after my own heart, & the only one who seemed to be capable of navigating me around the dance floor in spite of my "*list to starboard*" as she called it.

Nan is only about two bricks & a tickey high, & Brinkie has to stand on his toes to look up a duck's arse - they make a real cute little pair. Monty Symons who is very keen on racing in his little farewell speech asked him to hurry up & produce the son which Monty could train as a jockey.

We have finished the navigation school now, & are doing the bombing & armaments stuff in the Armaments school now. We don't find it as pleasant as a navigation school turned out to be towards the end, for one thing the lecturers don't compare with the navigation lot - even cocky little Tatham turned out trumps in the end & began taking a personal interest in us.

We have decided not to worry much about the course, just having a good time & doing our stuff in the practical exercise - that is all except Alexander & de Burgh White two of the new fellows who joined us on this course here - they study like hell, when we come home from parties & gadding

about we see their lights on & find them swotting - but then they need it I think, lack of good common sense.

The other new fellows on the course with us are O.K., & damn fine fellows, Les Gill, Monty Symons & Herby Raw, especially old Les Gill he's one of the best & just can't worry about such details as swotting.

We are really having the times of our life - most nights of the week & come home at all hours of the morning - I reckon I just about know every milkman in most of the suburbs & all about his early morning rounds. Mind you, some evenings have turned out to be a bit of a flop, but they seem to have been few & far between - there was that episode with Anne, I used to know her well at school, when I was a good little boy, school rugby captain & all that - however I met her again after all these years in town the other day & she's been asking me to come & see her & after the umpteenth time I thought maybe there might be something in it, & she may not be as uninteresting from a point of view of an "airman" out for a bit of a fling, & when I received a note from her stating that as she was engaged & due to be married in a month's time, but would like to know what it's all about as she hadn't had any previous experience, & thought I was just the man to show her the ropes. I thought there may be more in it than appeared at first sight, & as I didn't know the "lucky man" from a bar of soap I rang her & made a date. After the show I took her home, & just before the last bus left & I didn't seem to have made much headway I suggested going back to camp to bed but she reminded me that there were plenty of buses in the morning - so I stayed but she just didn't want to listen to reason, & I had to catch the early morning bus in the rain - I swore that morning I'd never let my better reasoning be swamped by a lot of circumstantial evidence again - it was a bad show as she wasn't at all an otherwise interesting girl.

On the other hand I have had a hell of a lot of real clean fun & happy carefree days & nights mostly in the company of "Bailout Barbara", the two of us have got on famously, shows, dances, swims at Clifton & Muizenberg, & then there are the lunch hours at the 'drome. The Women's Auxiliary run a very efficient canteen on the 'drome, & a lot of us instead of going back to the camp for lunch buy sandwiches on the drome & have lunch under the trees. The whole gang of us together - good company plenty of fun & jokes & none of the fag of travelling over to the camp & rushing back - I'll never forget those lunch hours - just a lot of brothers & sisters together.

Then there was the Sergeant's dance; real good show - good music, good floor, good fellows, & very nice companionable partner in Baleout Barbera, & yet there was not a single fellow the worse for liquor in spite of the dance lasting until 4:30 in the morning. I got Barbara back at 5:30 & got back to camp by about 7 a.m. on parade at 8:30 & then buggeries of buggaries we had to write an exam, but it was all well worth it.

My ears have been giving me a bit of trouble lately & I went to see a specialist sometime back who bugged my nose & ears about & did them the world of good, so when the Rosebank show came round I cooked up ear trouble again & went to see the show on two successive days, saw a lot of my old pre-war pals, & saw Berrano put up a magnificent display as S.A. Champion Hackney Stallion - I hardly recognised him as the colt I had trained a few years back.

One night in a cinema I saw the film of the unveiling of Adolph's picture, & it looked rather funny seeing my own dial on the screen as also the rest of the family. Next day lieutenant Tatham wanted to know which snappy female I had with me at the unveiling, & he wouldn't believe me when I told him I hadn't taken anyone. However he persisted that I had as he had seen her standing alongside of me on the screen. He was very surprised when I told him that it was my mother he was referring to.

We have had lots of fun on the practical bombing - some days we find it damn hot & uncomfortable lying down on the bellies of the Hinds with the bombing hatch open & the hot fumes & oil coming in from the radiator - causing the grease pencil to melt & run all over the bombsight, your hands

& clothes. I was a hell of a dab hand at dropping things through the bombing hatch; there's a perfectly good watch & a gold pencil lying somewhere at the bottom of False Bay.

Old Ted's effort was about the best of the lot of us I think. He takes off for the bombing & when he's in the air he discovers that he had forgotten to install the bombsight & the strut thermometer - however he decides to bluff his way through, so he finds wind by the 3 course, & tells the pilot to make for the range, & he drops 4 bombs on the target, & got quite near too. Then he thought of the row there would be if he landed without a sight & had to explain it away, so he told the pilot all about it. Luckily the pilot was a jolly fine fellow, Paterson, & laughed it off & kept it under his hat.

A few days later I had to go up & bomb in a hell of a hurry, & as it was rather late I didn't fancy the idea of drawing & installing bombsight, computer, thermometer, parachute etc, so I took a chance & persuaded the pilot to go up like that. My bombs were damn near the target too.

Then came the day when we commenced bombing at moving targets, the crash boat which was cruising about False Bay. I was first up, & off we set. Neither my pilot Spud Murphy nor myself had seen the crash boat before, but we were informed that it would be the only boat in the danger area in False Bay. After finding wind we made for the target - I was lying in the bombing position with a very limited view of anything but what passed more or less vertically beneath us.

Eventually Spud says to me "*I can see the boat, are you ready to bomb?*" Says I "*ok*" & we make a run at the boat. When I get her dead in the sights I pressed the tit & away went my first bomb, a stannic chloride practice bomb. It hit the water about 30 yards in front of the boat - not too bad at all for a first shot at a moving target from 6000 ft. We made a circuit & came round for a second run, but just before I got her in the sights I noticed a hell of a commotion on deck, & next instant a red streak comes tearing up at us & bursts - a red Verey light - danger signal. I realized at once that I had been bombing the wrong boat, & Spud & myself had a good laugh & went looking for the real boat. Those fellows in the other boat can't have been feeling too secure with us circling up above them - the practice bomb would have made a nice mess of their wooden deck if one had hit them.

Lately we have been doing cross-country trips & bombing on coming back - combined navigation & bombing exercise, & very interesting they have been. Monty Symon's however had a not so very pleasant time the other day - he went up with Captain Gin - a bottle arsed cheeky cocky little half-pinter, & he bugged poor old Monty about to such a degree that Monty could do nothing right. Eventually they managed to navigate back from the cross-country to the Range where Monty did his bombing. Then Gin asked Monty for a course back to the 'drome. By this time Monty was pretty fedup, so he says to Gin "*Can you see Youngsfield from here?*" says Gin "*Yes!*" says Monty "*Well fly to it.*" Needless to say when they landed there was hell to pop & Gin put in a very bad report which didn't worry Monty in the least.

A few days ago a few of the Glen Martins of the newly-formed 14 bomber Squadron were down here doing some practice bombing, & who should we meet on them but my old friend Pietersen, now a 2nd Lieut - he went through the last observers course, & has now been attached to 14 & given his commission - a bit tough on the other qualified observers who did much better than him on the course & are still sergeants. I only hope we don't get posted to 14 with Pietersen when we qualify in a few days time. [*]

[*] His hopes were not realised. Bull & Pietersen were together in 24 Squadron in the Western Desert. 24 squadron was renamed 24 in the Western Desert to avoid confusion with RAF squadron 14. Pietersen appears repeatedly in what follows and was mentioned 8 times in 01 Initial Training.

Bainskloof April 3 [1941]

So the Observers course is something of the past, & the happy Cape Town days are over but I reckon every man Jack of us will remember the time we had there. We didn't go in for so much of the sheer

schoolboy pranks such as were the order of the day at The Heights, Durban & Bloemfontein when we first joined up, what with Pip & Brinkie marrying off our hands, Llama making violent love & becoming engaged, & Ted & Les having people in Town, but somehow we had lots of quieter fun & all enjoyed ourselves in a more sensible mature way - I think that even Alexander & “*Tuborg*” enjoyed all their excessive swotting - but poor buggers, what a hell of a lot they missed.

When we had written our last exam we were all boarded - had to stand & face 2 Colonels, 2 Majors, two Captains & 2 Loots, & they all took it in turns to fire all sorts of funny questions at you & then you were told to bugger off & the next man came in. The next day we will all given application forms for commissions to fill in, but whether that means we will get them I can't say.

Lieutenant Lomborg, who was far & away our most popular lecturer, & was one of the examining board amused us by sending out a personal message to me to the effect that I “*must for Christ sake march in smartly & give a snappy salute instead of your usual sloppy Howdy! effort.*”

When my turn came I even surprised myself by my smartness & Lomborg told me later he didn't think I had it in me - my assessment for bearing I was told by someone who saw the files was “*Excellent!*” When next the rest of the boys call me a sloppy Bastard I'll remind him of it.

We were told that we had been far & away the brightest Observers course so far, & that the school didn't ever expect to get such a high average class again - we have been the first course to be recommended lock stock & barrel for commissions. One thing is certain, we were popular with everyone we came in contact with - even the usually acid & sarcastic Lt. van Niekerk who was our chief Armaments lecturer had nothing but praise for us towards the end - after we had buggered him about a good deal.

We completed the course on 29th March & were given 7 days leave, after which we have to report to Waterkloof where we will naturally be posted to squadrons. I came straight out to Wellington & have been staying up here at Bainskloof with Edwin & Marjorie having a few real peaceful days of rest to make up for the last few months. It's lovely up here on the mountains - fresh air, & the lovely pools in the Witte River for bathing. I have realised one of my boyhood ambitions by diving off the cliff into the Potholes pool. As a school kid I saw a fellow do it once & heard him say he would never attempt it again - the only other fellow I know of who has done the dive, but actually its not dangerous at all - I did it quite a few times. [*]

[*] I found out where in Bain's Kloof Potholes is & went and took these photos December 2024.



From the side, the lower possibility is at the top of the jutting out piece.
The upper possibility is at the top of the rocks above that.



Looking face on. The lower possibility is obvious. The upper possibility is at the top of the rocks to the left of the lower. You can see that the lower one is not in the way of a dive from the upper. I rather suspect it is the upper as it is unusually high whereas the lower is high but not exceptional so I expect it would be 'dived' fairly regularly.

This river gorge & the mountains are part of Cape Nature who have camping & pick nick area at the pools lower down (Tweede Tol). Access to this pool is serious boulder hopping from the regular pools so it is not much used. Certainly the staff at the entrance were unaware of it. Thus diving or jumping off those ledges is irregular nowadays I would suggest.

That Coca-Cola colour of the water comes from the fynbos peat. It is a feature of the rivers of the Western Cape. It is lovely soft and delicately flavoured water which we locals much love.

I have lost the note that I had. There were some loose notes tucked into the last journal which have been lost. I recall reading a note by my father (in a letter to my mother?) saying he had dived off a high bridge in Foggia, Italy (when he was in 31 squadron it was to be based in Foggia so I am assuming it was Foggia). After he had done so a local said to him this was the first time it had been done. My father wrote in the note that it was not as high as the blue gum (eucalyptus) trees at Silwerstrand on the Breede river at Robertson which he had dived from. Judging from the pictures on the internet the river level at Foggia varies a lot.

<https://fondoambiente.it/luoghi/ponte-romano-ascoli-satriano?ldc>

At the head of 06 Death is the ribbon for the Italy Star. I assume that indicates that he had been to Italy but did not get as far as writing that up.

See also the entry 10 October 1943 in 05 Advanced Bombing Course, UK

Waterkloof April 13. [1941]

So here I am back where I started the diary, but things have changed a bit in the meantime.

From Wellington I went to Worcester, where I saw Stanley who was back on embarkation leave. I spent the day with him & Marie, a day with Piet & Georgie, went over to Robertson where I was unfortunate in finding most of the Goree [*] people away at the seaside on holiday, but nonetheless it was nice seeing all the old places & a lot of the old faces again. From there I went back to Wellington & went in to Cape Town where Barbara, Joan, Pip & myself had a bit of a farewell party. Monday evening I caught the train with Pip, George, & Les & we had a quiet uneventful journey up here. When we landed at Waterkloof the first thing we were told was that we had got our commissions, were posted to 24 Bomber Squadron as 14 is now called, & we had to rush about like hell signing umpteen papers & making statements & filling in forms for our commissions. Then we had to rush about drawing equipment & buying things, running about from one outfitter to another trying to find uniforms to fit as we are leaving for Egypt tomorrow & there's no time to have uniforms made.

[*] Goree is the name of part of the Breede river upstream from Robertson. Bull was employed by Gideon (Gippie) Rossouw who had a farm there.

<https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/EJC115398>

To add to it all it all happened just on the long Easter weekend, & about the only time we have had for shopping has been Saturday morning when most of us went in to 'Joburg. I managed to get one quite well fitting uniform, & indented for a length of baratheia which I intend having made up in Cairo if we have a chance to get there.

It's been a bit of a bugger for us, having to have our meals in the Officers Mess & not being in uniform - one feels such an utter arse - the first evening Les Bensimon & myself took off our pips & went & had some grub & a few drinks in the men's canteen with Les's brother. However after a hell of a rush we are more or less okay now, & we are pushing off for Egypt tomorrow morning at sparrowfart.

The officers of 24 Squadron seem a decent lot of fellows on the whole, so I hope we won't feel Pietersen's presence very much. Our O.C. is Major Martin D.F.C. - late of 12 Bomber, as are a number of the pilots notably Captain Danny du Toit D.F.C. Another one is Lt. Charles Keary (of Valencia fame) [*] he should be the real type of pilot for a bomber Squadron.

[*] See entry for 10 November 1940 in 02 Abyssinia

Two of the pilots whom I know are Jim Williams who used to be one of our most popular staff pilots down at Youngsfield on the Gunners course - & the other is Jerry Genie who I know from Robertson - both good fellows. My pilot is Captain Jones, but except for only speaking to him for a few minutes I can't say anything about him - he seems very quiet, sensible & reliable tho'.

Two of us are staying behind & we'll have to follow later by boat, the rest are all flying up in our respective 'planes tomorrow. The two who have been chosen to stay are Les Gill & Llama.

Well so I'm an officer now, but somehow I don't think that's going to make much difference to my behaviour - I hope not at any rate.

Shandur 26th April [1941]

Here we are in Egypt that last, I always wanted to see this place & have been looking forward to coming up here - but I'm not so sure at all that it's going to be all it's cracked up to be.

We left Waterkloof on the morning of the 14th flew as far as Lusaka, & as the weather report from Mbeya was bad we spent the night there. Next morning we flew to Mbeya where we found that two of the Martins of the first flight of our Squadron had collided in clouds about 100 miles off, one airscrew chewing up the complete port aileron of the other, but the pilot Haupt had flown on & made a perfect landing at Mbeya - it says a lot for the airworthiness of the Glen Martin [*] flying on & landing with only one aileron. From Mbeya we flew to Nairobi where we found the drome at Eastleigh very wet & boggy as a result of heavy rains, & two of our planes got bogged there. [AIR p30] We stayed in Nairobi for 3 days - raining heavily most of the time. We were very surprised to find that Miller the cocky little sergeant who had been so officious when we passed through Nairobi on the way down to the Union is now a 2nd Lt - & more cocky & unobliging than ever.

[*] Martin Maryland https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Maryland

In this diary they are often referred to as Glen Martin.

Wiki says crew of 3 but SAAF operated them with a crew of 4, pilot, observer, upper gunner & radio operator/lower gunner. [Tucker p5] Bull was the observer = navigator who sat in the front of the plane. The Observer of the leading aircraft was also the bomb aimer for the flight when doing pattern bombing - the other aircraft released their bombs when the lead plane's bombs appeared.

The Maryland was unusually narrow. It had a good speed, 500 kph max.

The engines were Pratt & Whitney R-1830 Twin Wasp

The designation of the engines was systemized. <https://www.designation-systems.net/usmilav/engines.html>
R = radial engine

1830 = total displacement in cubic inches (rounded to next 5)

So 1830 cu inch = 30 litres (divide by 61)

1200 HP = 880 kW

2 rows of 7 cylinders each

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pratt_%26_Whitney_R-1830_Twin_Wasp

It had 4 machine guns in the wings so it was also a ground attack aircraft but it was also used as a fighter as you shall see – against Stukas chiefly.

There were dorsal & ventral machine guns facing rearwards.



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Maryland#/media/File:Martin_Maryland_RAF_North_Africa.jpg

Martin Maryland nice in flight video 1m01

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcvuuvbighA>

Videos in the desert. Silent. Notice the big dust cloud kicked up when taking off. This made them aware when German bases were active & fighters were scrambling to come after them. 2:05

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZxWXd6-8nl>

Free French Noticeable how big the engines were wrt the fuselage. Silent. Good definition. 4:18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xu1gkDqA1Hk>

I tried to get through to Bunny [*] by phone but couldn't as there was such heavy military traffic on the line. Although Nairobi is no longer blacked out of a night we found it just as up to shit as ever. In Nairobi I met Tommy Ward & Pierce, two of 40 A.C. mechanics - actually the two on Jubber & my plane, & heard all the latest 40 A.C. news from them - A flight is broken up very much - very few of the original fellows left - Jubber's death was a hell of a shock to them, & incidentally Captain Wardrop was arseholes when he had his crash & was killed.

[*] His girlfriend who became his wife & my mother. She was an army nurse stationed in Kenya & later in Mersa Matruh in the Western Desert. When Rommel made his great push towards Egypt they were within shelling range & had to beat a very hasty retreat.

On the wonderful animated map that I linked at the beginning of this thread that push by Rommel starts at 1:42. At 2:13 they overrun Mersa which is when the hospital staff & patients had to be evacuated. The push was halted at El Alamein at 2:17

She was awarded the medal "*Associate of the Royal Red Cross*" which was quite rare I believe. Strangely our house was broken into a few years after the war and just the medal was stolen.

Her name was Beatrice Mary Winder, her school & nursing friends called her *Bunny*. She was known as Betty to subsequent friends.



Contemporary picture of Bunny.



Slightly earlier picture with *Bunny* at right end of back row (arrowed). Showing that she was petite whereas *Bull* was the converse.

In Nairobi Charles Keary picked up his dog "*Butch*", a 10 month old Alsatian who has done over 300 hours in the air. From Nairobi we flew to Juba where we had our first sight of the White Nile, or its feeder streams. We stayed the night at Juber in a nice little hotel which had quite a nice swimming bath of which we made good use.

Next day from Juba to Khartoum - hot as hell - there we drank countless seed drinks & sweated them all out again after a few minutes. Khartoum is a queer mixture of very dirty looking mud houses & very impressive artistically built state buildings & palaces etc. facing the Nile. We made good use of the swimming baths at the Sudan Club for the two days we spent there.

After takeoff from Khartoum one of the planes of our sub flight gave trouble so we turned back & left again for Wadi Halfa the next day with three machines, Captain Jones (myself), Haupt (Ted Cronin) & Charles Keary (Herby Raw). About an hour out of Khartoum we struck a duststorm, called locally an "*Haboob*" & visibility became very bad - eventually when we thought we should be near Wadi Halfa we came down to 1000 feet but could not see the ground, & eventually the three planes lost sight & touch of one another. After searching about for about half an hour at a few hundred feet we managed to make out the dim black outline of the Nile immediately below us, & a little while later Wadi Halfa. We circled the town a few times, but saw a landing in that poor visibility was out of the question, so we set course back to Abu Hamed & then Atbara [AIR p33] where visibility was good enough to land.

Captain Jones immediately reported by phone to Khartoum, but they could not tell him anything about the whereabouts of the other two planes. Late that night we heard from Khartoum that Haupt had crashed at Wadi Halfa & that Ted had been killed, but they knew nothing about Kearey at all. The news of Ted's death was a hell of a shock to me - he was one of the very best & damn

popular among us - poor old Ted - it's pretty rotten luck getting killed in a crash on the way to the theatre of war. [Tucker p6]

In the meantime the *Haboob* was spreading & next-day visibility at Atbara was very bad & we couldn't take off - we had to wait in Atbara for 3 days before we could eventually fly to Wadi Halfa, & all this time no news at all of Kearey.

Atbara is a very nicely laid out little place - pretty residential area with avenues of shady trees along the streets on the banks of the Nile, as are all these towns for that matter. We stayed in the Rest House for Government officials as there was no hotel. The first night after supper I lay down on the bed out on the stoep, & as I was pretty dead beat I promptly fell asleep. I can vaguely remember somebody trying to wake me up during the night but I just didn't wanna know. Next morning I found out that it was an Indian Army Colonel's bed I had fallen asleep on, much to the disgust of the said colonel's Indian bearer.

We landed at Wadi Halfa & found about 5 Glenn Martins from our squadron there who had come back from Egypt to look for us as we were reported missing in Egypt, but Kearey was okay - he had flown right through the *Haboob* & landed on the shores of the Red Sea & had notified Cairo at once. There must be some damn bad organisation up there for Cairo HQ & Sudan HQ in Khartoum to not to be able to compare notes in 2 1/2 days - both knew of the Wadi Halfa crash but in Egypt we were reported missing & in Sudan Kearey was reported missing. I hope this is not going to be the conditions we are going to battle under in the Middle East. [*]

[*] You will learn that this was a perpetual problem.

The crash was a bad one, the one engine was wrenched off & cut off the whole nose of the plane - Ted's body was picked up about 15 yards from the rest of the fuselage. Haupt had circled the town for an hour & a quarter but couldn't locate the drome in the "*dusk*" (it was about 11 a.m.) so he eventually decided to land on what looked like a levels stretch of desert just out of town but his engine cut about 100 feet up & in he went. The two sergeants in the back were hardly hurt at all but Haupt has broken his pelvis bone the doc in the local hospital thinks, he can't say for sure tho' until an x-ray photo has been taken for which Haupt is being sent down to Khartoum.

After salvaging what we could from the wrecked machine yesterday we flew from Wadi Halfa on the last leg here to Shandur which is to be up base for a while at least.

Shandur is on the west shore of the Little Bitter Lake about 18 miles from Suez & about 40 from Ismaelia but for all that it's right in the bloody desert to all intents & purposes - a dusty Gawdforsaken joint, [*] a rather good 'drome with tarmac runways & two hangars & any number of tents, but not so much as a bush anywhere near. We are the first South African bomber Squadron to come to Egypt. The Glen Martins have the new Mark X [*] bomb sight installed & none of us know anything much about it, so we have to get stuck in & familiarise ourselves with it as there isn't anybody out of England who can tell us anything about it. It is used in conjunction with a special computer which gives you the most important settings, but there are no computers at all in the country, or anywhere else out of England & when we will eventually get them the Lord knows - more efficient Middle East organization - how the hell they have hung around here thus far nobody knows - no wonder they have evacuated Greece, & at this rate there is going to be many an evacuation before the war is over - the bastards who are running the show have the bloody elbows rammed well up.

[*] Tucker p6 "*a grim unlovely place ...*"

[*] Mark X bombsight

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_Setting_Bomb_Sight



Picture source

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c8/Course_Setting_Bomb_Sight_Mk_X.jpg

12th May [1941]

Gawd! what a bloody country- miles & more miles of absolute sweet buggerall. Hot as hell most days, & when the wind does blow you can't see yourself think for dust & flies! I've never seen so many tame ones in my ruddy life! When you share your food with them & you start cutting away at a chunk of meat to which a bull fly has beaten you you can positively see him bristle his mane prior to charging the knife, & their favourite honeymoon resort is your face when you lie in your tent of an afternoon trying to sleep in the Turkish bath of perspiration. Then we have here the sandflies or sandfleas - nobody knows which as they are so small that nobody seems to have ever seen one, but by Jesus! you feel them - you come out all in bumps all over your arms, legs & neck & itch! You have no idea, & the more you scratch the more they itch & more bumps appear, & naturally the more you scratch, & the more you scratch the more the Doc & other well-meaning bloody bump-free fools tell you not to scratch, & the more they tell you not to scratch the more you tell them to go to hell- which all doesn't seem to relieve the itching in the least.

I will say though the new Doc we have here is really doing his best, the few days he's been here he has got stuck into things & is fighting the flies all over the place, & they seem to be getting less. He's a good Doc who knows his job & is truthful - I went to him about these bumps & he says he doesn't know whether they are caused by the sandflies or sandfleas, heat rash or just autosuggestion or a combination of the lot - anyway he gave me some stuff to paint on the affected parts but said he didn't think it would help much- he was right.

The conditions in Kenya were a blinking Sunday school picnics compared to this, down there we at least had bush & trees & mountains about to break the monotony, but here it's so bad that we have

been considering transplanting at least one date palm in camp for the benefit of Butch - we're growing a bit peeved at him making do with our tent poles, or, when we happen to be looking the other way - our legs. If this is what the desert is going to be like then Beau Geste is welcome to all his Foreign Legion glory thank you.

The one saving grace is the Suez Canal which is just next door & every afternoon we go for a swim two miles away where the Little Bitter Lake drains into the canal. It's nice & cool & about the only thing worth living for - the water is rather salty & one can almost float without any movement at all. The other day we had a bit of a scare tho' - & number of us were swimming when a couple of big fish were seen showing their fins about 100 yards from us - there was one hell of a rush for the shore as our one thought was sharks, but luckily they turned out to be porpoises. It's no joke swimming in among sharks without even so much as a costume to protect your doings!

A few nights ago we had our first air raid, it was a very thrilling sight. The Jerry came over late about quarter hour after we had been given the alarm & dropped a few heavy bombs out Ismailia way & then a few near our swimming place, one hell of a big one missed the canal by about 80 yards & made a hell of a crater. The search lights along the canal picked him up in no time & the ac ac got going at him - tracer & incendiary bullets spitting up at him & shells bursting all around him, but by far the most spectacular sight was the flaming onions- like a grand scale Guy Fawkes display, only more so. Unfortunately the ac ac, altho' good didn't seem to score any direct hits & the bomber got away.

[*] Ismailia

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ismailia>

On the Suez canal north of the Great Bitter Lake.

Shown on the map in 10 Oct entry.

When we arrived here we found a R.A.F. squadron, 39 (also Glen Martins) here & among the gunners were Jack Ross & Bill Sass, the two of them were among the 20 gunners who were attached to the R.A.F. down in the Union. We were damn glad to see the two of them again & swopped many yarns & we pulled old Sass's leg no end about his trip from Bloemfontein down to C.T. with us on the train, stowed away on the top bunk behind a hell of a lot of luggage because he hadn't enough money for a ticket & had a few days leave from Bloemfontein when we went down on the practical gunners course at Youngsfield.

B. Flight had gone to the Western Desert to operate from there - they have taken most of the experience pilots & just about the lot of observers. There's only Tuborg & myself - "*Tuborg*" because he is doing the typing in the office & myself because Captain Jones hasn't gone.

The night before B. Flight left for the desert base, Fuka Satellite we had a bit of a sing-song in the mess & we had most of the R.A.F. fellows - damn fine fellows, most of them Ausies all around us listening to the songs, joining in & giving us some of their typical Aussie songs. I was very tickled by Danie Jakobs' expression after a particularly harmonious tune or strikingly smutty lyric - "*Oh shit! Good Show!*"

The next morning he landed at Helio & forgot to put down his undercart - he made a superb landing on his belly, & hardly so much as dented the belly plates. "*Oh shit! Bad show!*"

May 22 [1941]

Last week I thought at last I was in for some excitement - a rush order came through from HQ for one fully-equipped Martin to report to Heliopolis at once, so Eustice Newborn as pilot, self as observer & two gunners took off [*]. When we landed at Helio about 4 in the afternoon the plane was pulled into the hanger, umpteen armourers got busy cleaning the guns & giving them the once-over & another

bunch got busy with the spray guns etc & painted out the S.A. markings & put Vichy French colours on her. "Hell!" thought we, this is going to be some hush-hush job & may turn out to be very interesting. We were told on the 'drome that the plane was leaving on the job early next morning but they didn't know what or where it was going to be. So Eustice & myself went into Cairo to the Continental Hotel & Eustice from there on to H.Q.M.E. to report & receive instructions.

[*] note 2 gunners. SAAF had 4 man crew whereas Wiki states a 3 man crew.

There he was told that we were not going on the trip at all - the plane was being given to the Free French & they were going to shoot up Jerry planes on the French 'dromes in Syria. We were damn disgusted, but what could we do? - just hang about Cairo & see the sights & this we did for two days until we were fetched by Captain Jones. We heard later that the Free French did good work with the plane - poor buggers, if they have been shot down in a plane with Vichy colours they would have copped it in the neck.

Cairo is a hell of a funny joint, I don't mean funny ha-ha! but funny peculiar. I've never heard so many car hooters going off together in my life - everybody blows his hooter a few times every twenty yards, by far the worst offenders are the taxi drivers - they all seem to go in for the pawp-pawp variety with the rubber bulbs you squeeze - I don't suppose they can keep on buying batteries for electric hooters. I will always think of Gippy taxi driver as a fellow with a perpetual horn.

We hired a dragoman to show us around the sights, the Pyramids, Sphinx, Alabaster Mosque etc., & he took good care that no taxi driver or hawker overcharged us but he took it out on us in the end by charging us through the neck for his services. I've come to the conclusion that the whole Gippy nation are a bunch of dirty robbers.

We went to a few cabaret shows & saw a rather good *Shikarabie* dance done by a streamlined nicely built Gippy girl just in a brassiere, a bit of lace & some beads - she waggled her bum about as she had double jointed spring-loaded hips. By Jove! I reckon these Gippy dancing girls would sure know their onions.

The last day we stayed at the famous magnificently decorated Shepherds Hotel where again we were shamelessly overcharged for what actually was very ordinary service.



Picture source. <https://www.searlecanada.org/misc/images/shepheards8.jpg>

In the meantime the boat with our ground staff, transport & baggage has arrived, also Les Gill & Llama but they have been posted to B Flight & left by lorry for the desert this morning. I have done very little flying since I've been here, only a few flips to Abusuweir & a few practice bombing runs.

The other night we had another air raid alarm the Jerry dropped a few bombs near Ismailia but a South African Hurricane pilot, Moolman, took off & shot the Jerry down. He crashed into a Gippy house killing 9 Gippies.

We have lots of Italian prisoners working about camp here - under guard of course - they seem quite happy & are very well treated & seem very glad to be out of the war. There was a bit of a joke in connection with them the other day. The Group Captain in charge of the camp walked about camp, & came across a lot of prisoners digging an air raid trench, & was surprised to find the guard stripped to the waist working with them. The Group Captain asked him what the idea was. Said he "*Well sir I'm tired of standing about doing nothing in the hot sun, so I'm doing a spot of work for exercise*". Said the Group Captain "*That's all right but in the meantime who was guarding the prisoners & where is your rifle?*" "*Oh sir, there it is, that prisoner is looking after it*" pointing to a prisoner sitting in the shade of the tent about 50 yds off. The G Captain thereupon proceeded to give the poor guard particular hell.

May 28 [1941]

Well at last I've been on an operation & don't feel such an utter base whallah any more & I damn nearly didn't go on the job. Captain Jones was detailed to go, but the Major reckoned I had to stay behind & lecture 7 sergeant gunners we are busy training as makeshift observers, but I objected most strenuously & with the help of Captain Jones I managed to work the point & went.

A few days ago however the Navy stationed at Kabrit challenged the officers of 24 Squadron to a cricket match. We went across & played on a cement wicket, & had quite an enjoyable match, &

after the match the navy entertained us to dinner, drinks & plenty of good fellowship to the accompaniment of the full ships orchestra. It was really a good show & a good time was had by all - there was tons of booze, & the navy didn't seem to like the sight of an empty glass.

When we were all well on the way to getting steamed up we were asked to give them a couple of Afrikaans songs, so in no time we gave the band & idea of the different tunes & then we gave it stick, we positively drowned the music.

Later on when things got hotter still in more senses than one "Bok bok staan styf" [*] was suggested so we South Africans picked two teams of five each & gave it the works. The major, 3 Captains & two veteran pilots of the last war, all merrily playing Bok Bok like school kids. In no time the navy caught on to the idea & also entered the team & then we really got going - potbellied jovial Lieutenant Commanders & Commanders & Captains jumping away like so many frogs - we made a hell of a mess of their stateroom.

[*] Bok, bok, staan styf = Goat, goat, stand firm. (Afrikaans)

A children's game. The group stands in a row. First takes a few paces forwards, bends forwards & places hands on ground = the first goat, next trots forward & springs over the first, hands on his back & feet spread apart then assumes the same position a pace or two ahead. Next one has two goats to spring over. Continues until all are in goat position when the first stands up & continues with the process. Eventually most are exhausted & game comes to an end.

At about 10 p.m. the band played *Auld Lang Syne* but we never caught on to the idea that it was a tip for us to leave, we just joined in & sang at the top of our voices. At 11 the band struck up *Old Lang Syne* again but we just didn't wanna know. At 12 it gave it a third & final go & when we wouldn't take the hint they fucked off themselves, but that didn't worry us in the least, we went on supplying our own music with song. Song! did I say? my Gawd it sounded more like a cow giving birth to twin rolls of barbed wire. When our throats ran dry there was plenty of lubrication forthcoming from the bar.

Among other things we got onto the "drink it down down down" song & one of the jovial old Lt. Commanders with a corporation like a barrage balloon grabbed the handiest bottle off the counter for his down down down tilted his head back & poured down the contents of the bottle. It happened to be a soda water, & half way down he got unstuck & the soda bubbled & fizzed out of his mouth & nose like a New Zealand geyser. Undeterred he had another go but exactly the same thing happened - Gawd! it was funny.

Eventually after giving them a couple of Zulu war dances we left, but they all made us promise to come back soon & give a repeat performance - they enjoyed it every bit as much as we did.

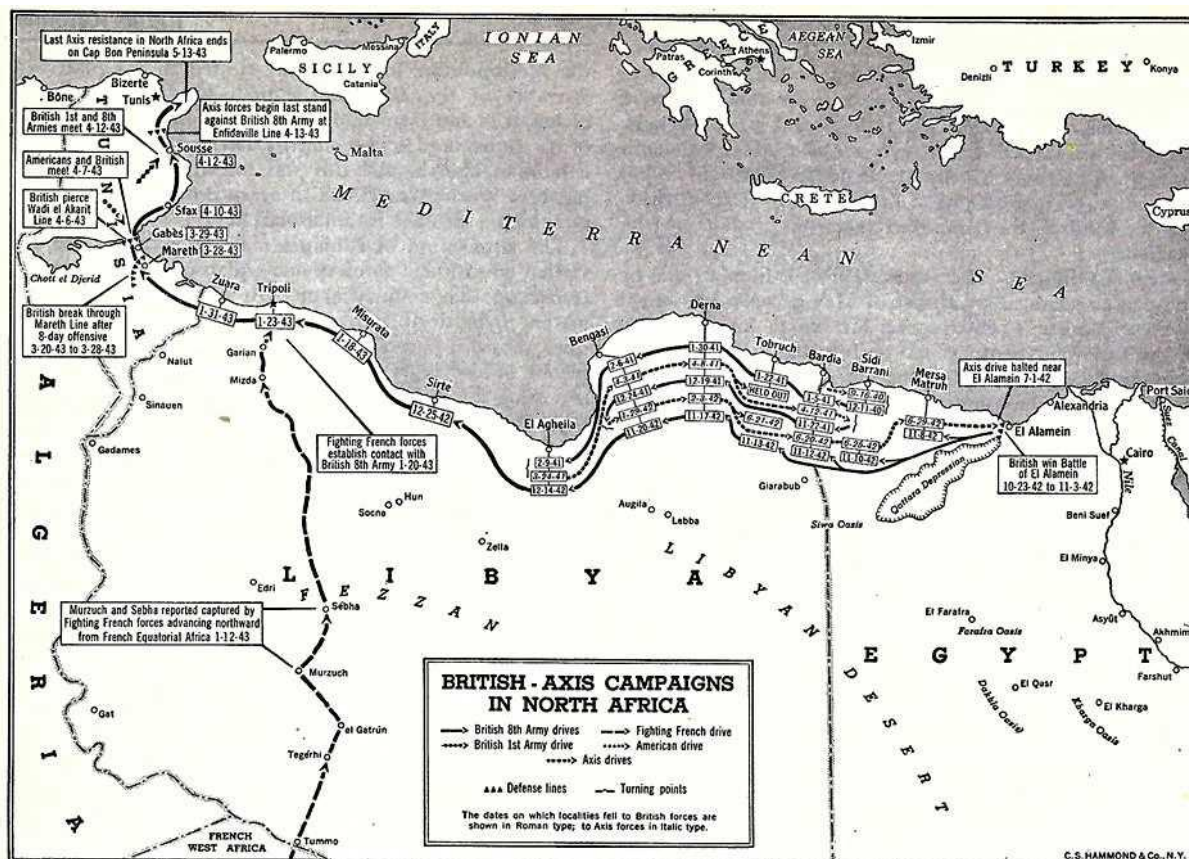
We had hardly got back to camp & into bed when there was an air raid alarm but not all the bells in camp nor the trembling of bombs bursting in Ismailia could wake me - I only heard about it the next morning.

It will be sometime before poor old Tommy forgets that Bok Bok party - he tore the ligaments in his knee in one of the falls & has had his knee in plaster of Paris ever since.

The operation we were to go on was dropping medical supplies, machine gun spares & ammunition on the troops on Crete, & two of our planes set out for the job, Captain Jones & myself & Eustace Newbourn & Charles Gordon as his observer. We were to land at Kabrit to pick up the medical stores there, then some more at Helios then carry on to Fuka Satellite refuel & then set out for Crete. We had Sergeants Venter & Brand as gunner & W.Ops in our plane & we were trying out our wireless set so Brand was in constant communications with our base wireless van here .

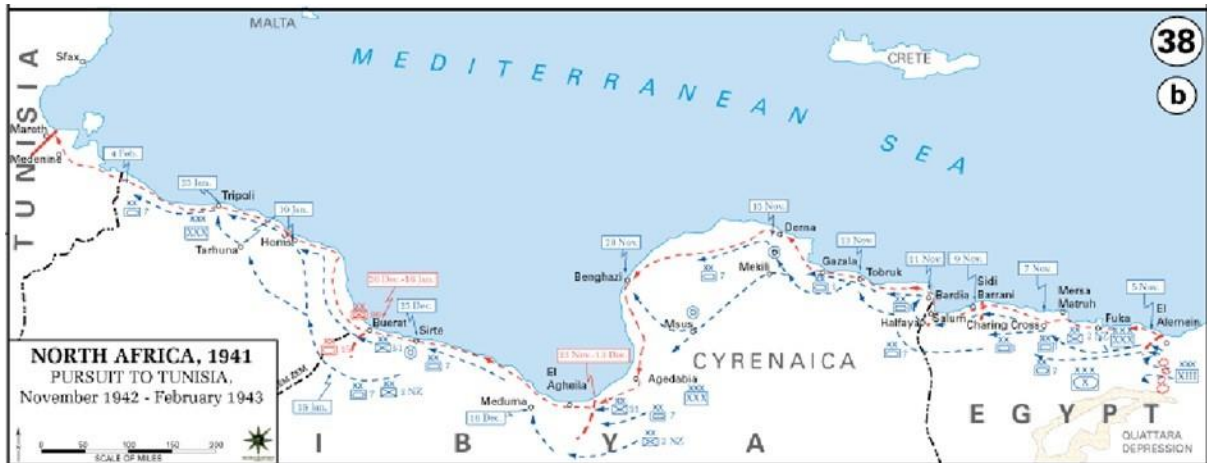
We landed at Kabrit made a good touchdown run for about 300 yards with all of a sudden one of our oleo legs collapsed. Down went the Martin on one wing - swung right round, burst the other tyre & came to a rest .

Here is a potted summary of the Battle of Crete. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/the-battle-for-crete/overview>



Source of Mediterranean map <https://www.britannica.com/event/North-Africa-campaigns>

This map shows the Suez canal, Nile river & Alexandria, El Alamein & Mersa Matruh plus Crete & Greece. Heliopolis is just downstream from Cairo. Kabrit is on the Great Bitter Lake which is part of the Suez Canal.



Source of Crete & Coast map <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Joint-by-Design%3A-The-Western-Desert-Campaign-Gaetke/7691ff32b8de7bc00ad7d364e499e2cbd9a4e73/figure/0>

Here you can see Fuka where they staged. Fuka Main is marked. Fuka Satellite was nearby but further from the coast.



Source of map of Crete <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/beyond-all-praise-british-defense-of-crete/>

Wiki map (not posted) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Crete#/media/File:Battle_of_crete.svg

In the meantime Brand was giving a running commentary on events & we could all hear him, so could Eustace who was circling the drome & our base operator. This is somewhat what it sounded like - "We are circling the drome, our undercart is out - we're coming in to land, we're coming in, we have touched down we are down on one side, we are crashing, - yes we have crashed, one leg seems to have given in, nobody hurt though, & the plane doesn't seem to be very much damaged."

Our crew then transferred to Eustace's plane loaded the stores & carried on to Helio where we had a hell of a job getting the R.A.F. to get out their mechanics (it was a Sunday) & pull their fingers out & parcel the stores into suitably shaped packages & fit the bomb racks of the Glen Martin.

The R.A.F. wanted us to load up all the supplies on our plane - an absolute impossibility so eventually they sent a signal for a Free French Martin to come along & take the rest.

The R.A.F. who were damn dozy, took all that afternoon & worked until 1 that night & again until 10 the next morning to load the stores into the two planes, a job which if they had set about it in the right way from the start & followed Captain Jones's instructions they could have done in a few hours.

Next morning we flew to Fuka Satellite where we met the rest of our boys who were leading a very happy & very dirty existence in the desert. It's a hell of a dusty bleak place - not a tree in sight & when the wind breezes gently you can't see for fine powdery talc dust. Water is very scarce & hard to get & has a nasty brackish taste The boys are only allowed 3/4 of a gallon a day - water that is, not beer. There seems to be enough of the latter to keep them smiling & happy. At least it is not hot in the desert, one can actually sleep under a blanket of a night as it gets quite chilly towards morning.

There we heard about Gillie Ford & Les Gill. They had been on a bombing raid over Crete in company with another Martin (Jim Williams) & two Hurricanes. When they approached Maleme to bomb 9 Jerry fighters took off & the two Hurricanes engaged them while the two Glenn Martin's carried on with the bombing. After bombing they shot up into the clouds to escape the fighters & when they formed up again out of the clouds about quarter of an hour from Crete smoke was seen to be coming out of one of Ford's engines. He turned around immediately for Canea [*], a drome towards the east end of Crete which is definitely in our hands. Jim escorted him just over the mountains but then had to turn for home as he was running short of petrol for the long journey back over the Med. [Tucker p9] What actually happened to Les & Gillie nobody knows now, except they were safely over land & over the mountains making for Canea. So we presume they must be O.K. even if he had to pancake the plane in a field somewhere. The two Hurricanes were not seen after diving to the attack on the 9 M.E. 110s - poor fellows the odds were too long & they were handicapped by their long-range spare petrol tanks.

[*] Canea = Chania?

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chania>



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chania#/media/File:Aerial_view_of_the_Old_Venetian_Harbour_in_Chania,_Greece.jpg

After lunch the Frenchmen & we took off for Crete, pumped full of stores. How unhealthy a place it was, full of Jerry fighters & dive bombers & we had to drop our supplies from as low as possible. The Mediterranean was the sight I will long remember, so blue & calm, the sight of it makes one forget there's a war on, all you want to do is sunbathe & swim.

Crete itself we found a very pretty peaceful mountainous Island with no sign of war being fought except for the sight of hundreds of German parachute lying all over the place & any number of German planes crashed in the fields around Retimo.

We both dropped our supplies over Retimo & then we flew towards Suda Bay [*] to drop a second lot there, mostly machine gun spares & ammunition while the Frenchmen flew around the mountains looking for something to shoot up. [Tucker p10 Bull mentioned] After dropping our last supplies we flew around the other side of the mountain also looking for something to shoot up but found nothing & when we got back to the south coast of the island where we were to meet up with the Frenchmen again we waited about for them but as they didn't put in an appearance & we couldn't wait longer on account of petrol we flew back home to Fuka - the Frenchmen never came back - they must have run into something behind the mountains & caught it in the neck.

[*] both shown on the map

Retimo =Rethymno <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rethymno>



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rethymno#/media/File:Rethymno_-_Venetian_fortress.jpg

Suda Bay = Souda bay https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Souda_Bay



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Souda_Bay#/media/File:Souda_Bay_inlet.jpg

We slept at Fuka that night & were supposed to leave for here next morning, but as we were getting ready to take off an order came through for standby for a bombing raid on Crete. So Captain Jones volunteered to lead the raid & we stayed, but late that afternoon the raid hadn't materialized so Captain Jones decided to leave & we landed at Helio & slept the night in Cairo & flew back here this morning.

[*] Fuka shown on the maps posted earlier
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fouka,_Egypt

There is no doubt about it the Martin is it damn fine plane, easy to fly (Captain Jones has given me the stick for a short while [*]) can stand up to considerable punishment as born out by the collision at Mbeya, can outdistance all but the very best fighters. Only it's rear armament is a bit poor, even though we have brought in a few modifications mounting twin G.O.s top & bottom, thus making 6 guns backwards instead of four. Also they seem to be having a bit of teething trouble, especially with their tail wheels & undercars, but no doubt these will stop before long.

[*] The Maryland was fitted with fold away joy stick & pedals in the observer's cockpit plus throttles – no other pilot controls.
Tucker pp 1 6

June 5 [1941]

12 bomber Squadron have arrived here too, just up from the Abyssinian campaign, freshly equipped with Glenn Martins - I was very glad to see Phillie Kleyn, Jeffries, & CP Marais & the boys again - we had a bit of a party in the sergeant's mess to celebrate the reunion.

At last a signal has come through about Les Gill, Gillie Ford & the two gunners who had engine trouble & turned back for Crete - they force landed on the beach & are safe, but whether they have been evacuated with the rest of the troops we don't know - they may be prisoners of war by now . [AIR p44]

This Crete show has been a hell of a bad business - rank rotten organisation, they are supposed to have been in continual communication with the island yet Intelligence seems to know absolutely nothing - it took them about five or six days to find out that our crew are safe, & they don't seem to have known at all what the position on the island was at any time. We claim naval superiority in the Med & yet the forces on the island are said to have been short of everything hence us dropping supplies - why the bloody hell couldn't they have taken over enough supplies & reinforcements by sea weeks ago?

15,000 have been evacuated & 8,000 been taken prisoner - say another 2,000 killed & wounded that means 25,000 men who had weeks & weeks in which to dig in & get supplies from Africa (if there was anything like proper organisation) have been chased out by 30,000 Airborne troops [*] - it's a bloody shame - no wonder we have been driven out of just about every country in Europe & we're getting used to this evacuation game. If H.Q. thought it wasn't possible to hold the island as they should have known, having all the available intelligence reports & statistics, why the hell didn't they leave the island to the Germans in the first case & take off the troops weeks ago? The answer seems to be Finger trouble in the commanding circles.

[*] 30,000 a typo? 3 000 Airborne troops landed initially followed by 19 000 subsequently.

From <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/germans-conquer-crete>

"On the morning of May 20, some 3,000 members of Germany's Division landed on Crete, which was patrolled and protected by more than 28,000 Allied troops and an almost equal number of Greek soldiers. The German invasion, although anticipated, was not taken seriously; the real fear was of an attack from the sea. Those initial 3,000 parachutists were reinforced—to the tune of an additional 19,000 men, arriving by parachute drop, glider, and troop carrier."

Another instance of the Middle East organisation in the newly opened assembly shops in Geniefa [*] - they were supposed to assemble Glenn Martins there but they haven't a single man on the station who has so much as seen a Martin so we had to send assembly crews of South African mechanics from our Squadron to put the first few planes together.

[*] Geniefa is near the Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal.

Yesterday Tommy Pope our Armament officer goes across to Geniefa as the first few planes are almost ready, & he intended having a look at the guns & giving them a few tips. When he asks to see the guns the O.C. of the station says *"Oh Lord! guns? Guns! By Jove! I never thought of that, but I suppose we have to fix guns in the machines, but I don't know whether there are any guns here at all."*

So they had a look through the files, in all the crates - no guns. So they got busy on the telephone to H.Q. Middle East & the one passed it on to the next, burning up the wires as they went, but where the guns are, or whether they have been located, or even sent out here we don't know - but we have to fight a bloody war. [*]

[*] Problems such as this persisted. The entry for 25 September Later has more about it & links to a detailed inside account in 02 Madagascar by Captain Jones.

The sandbag story of the last war when a whole shipload of bags full of sand or sent to Egypt from England when sandbags were asked for will have nothing on some of the stories after this effort I'm sure.

However when the HQ organisation has been dealt with & forgotten & the South Africans have started up their machines & gone on the job they know how to carry it out - 24 Squadron has three victories to its credit, the boys out in the desert have been doing good work. They have been escorting the Fleet back & forth from Crete, & they did it very well, keeping all German aircraft away. Miles Barnby shot down a Junkers 88 [*], then Charles Kearey shot down another JU 88 & then Jim Williams put them all in the shade by shooting down a Messerschmitt 110 [*], outdistancing the Hurricanes to do it too. Damn good work! [AIR pp 39 46 47] [Tucker p10]

[*] Junkers 88 (captured in USAF markings) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_88



Picture source <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/37574/how-this-nazi-recon-plane-ended-up-being-tested-in-the-united-states-during-world-war-ii>

Messerschmitt 110 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt_Bf_110



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt_Bf_110#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101I-360-2095-23,_Flugzeuge_Messerschmitt_Me_110.jpg

Evidently the boys didn't like the job very much, Brinkie who is back from the Desert with a machine to be serviced says he & Danie Jakobs were escorting them the day before yesterday, they circled around the fleet for an hour & a half & for an hour & a half the fleet were pumping ac-ac up at them in spite of them firing the signal light of the day half a dozen times.

June 10 [1941]

Les Bensimon & Jim Williams are back here with a machine which has to be fixed up, & Les is staying with me in the tent - they arrived here late the other afternoon, & when he undressed for bed Les casually remarked that he had an idea his feet weren't smelling too good as he hadn't washed them for about five days in the desert. Did he say "*not smelling too good?*" Ye Gods! "*Rotten*" or "*decomposing*" would have been closer to the mark. Luckily he got them under the blankets quickly & I'm alive to tell the tale.

Next morning I was up early for a change doing a spot of work & when I got back for breakfast Les had just got up & was washing his bloody feet in my canvas water bucket - the one from which I fill my water bag etc. When I'd said my say & the air had cleared a bit Les calmly goes on shaving with the same water, next he washes his face & neck & behind the ears in the approved fashion, then he wants to "*gloss*" his hair as he calls it & then buggary of buggaries! he outs with his toothbrush, dips it in the liquid filth which formed the contents of my water bucket & procedure to brush his teeth. When I was quite satisfied that he had finished & wasn't going to gargle the water next I ventured to reopen the subject but all I got from him was - "*All right, wait till you've been out in the desert for a few weeks on 3/4 of a gallon of water a day you'll do the same, it becomes second nature*" - what the hell could I say to that?

Incidentally Les tells me that the bombing so far hasn't been too good at all as the figures they have been using for the A & B settings of the Mark X bomb sight are only mere approximations. The correct settings have to be worked out on a special computer which should go with the sight, but the bomb sights have been sent out without the computers & nobody out of England has so much as seen a Mark X computer.

The Major tells me that he sent frantic cables to England a month before we left the Union for the computers to be sent direct to Cairo, but so far we haven't heard anything further about it - more finger trouble higher up! [*]

[*] See end of entry for June 29 when they were eventually found.

The financial position up here is becoming critical, the mess is run on R.A.F. lines with about 6 waiters to an officer, the 5 senior ones telling the junior one what to do. Luckily they haven't tried to bring in any of their formal ideas though but I don't see how they could possibly do that with 3/4 of the members South Africans - we just would not stand for it. All of us have made allotments & only draw about half pay here, but we have to pay £5 a month messing & with washing, entertainment, servants, mess guests & booze it comes to about £10 to £12 a month & as yet neither my field allowance nor flying pay have come through orders, & in spite of having two attempts at filling in forms for S&T for the trip from the Union we don't stand much chance of getting a penny for it - & it must have cost us about £15 each.

Our South African paymaster has been out to see us twice & we have put up such a hell of a moan to him that he has promised to try & do something for us but I suppose it will simply be left at that.

The Major & Captain Jones had been trying to fasten the lecturing job with the would-be sergeant observers down to me, but I think I have effectively wangled my way out of it now & "*Tuborg*" has taken it over unofficially - the silly arse is simply lapping it up, it's just in his line.

The last few days I've been busy making myself a wardrobe from timber I pinched all over the camp & have now finished it - I had it ducoed [*] this morning & it looks O.K. When we go out into the desert, as we should be towards the end of the week or early next week, it will be very useful for keeping my clothes out of the dust. I reckon there is place to hang at least half-a-dozen uniforms on coat hangers so the fellows who go in the same tent as I do in the desert will welcome it too.

[*] Duco was the trade name of spray paint as used on cars (& aircraft apparently)

The Major amused us with two of his yarns the other night. A few days ago he went to Port Tewfik [*] & watched polo match played by the R.A.F. on donkeys. The match was meant to supply lots of amusement, but not in the form it eventually took as one of the donkey mares was on heat & one of the other mounts was a Jack & it didn't take him long to find out that there was a honeymoon in the offing, so he promptly broke formation & started chasing the mare with a raving horn in spite of the R.A.F. fellow on his back doing his utmost to dissuade him. In the meantime the poor fellow on the mare had his work cut out & was using his polo stick with good result keeping the Jack from becoming a pillion passenger.

[*] Port Tewfik is the southern entrance to the Suez canal.

All this met with very mixed outward reception from the spectators - 90% enjoyed it to the full laughing and barracking - 9% seemed to be enjoying it but hadn't the pluck or indecency(?) to show it

& the best they could do was to put on a very sheepish expression & pretend to be very interested in something else - the other 1% promptly went home but whether in disgust or just that the donkey had given them ideas they didn't say. But the old donkey Jack wasn't worried at all by the consternation & disorganization he was causing to the polo game - he was concentrating on his five-legged race until a well aimed polo stick hit him below the belt.

The other yarn concerns the Itai airmen & was told the Major by one of the senior R.A.F. officers. One night 3 Savoyas [*] came over Port Sudan but the ac ac made it so hot for them that they dropped their bombs a few miles off & run for it. It later transpired that when they landed the Flight Commander or whatever they called him in the Itai lingo put in a very convincing & colourful report of the bombing of Port Sudan - every bomb hit, everyone caused huge fires which spread & spread until in no time the whole joint was one raging inferno - in fact Port Sudan was no more .

[*] Sovoya = Savoia. Posted in Nov 24 report - 3 engined low wing bomber.

A few days later another Itai machine was shot down before it could get near Port Sudan but the pilot managed to pancake her & the occupants were all taken prisoner unhurt - two of them of quite high rank. They were put in a car with this R.A.F. officer & driven to the local H.Q. in Port Sudan.

When they entered the town the two Itais looked around them, started an excited conversation with each other in Itai. Then one of them asked the R.A.F. chap what town they were in, & when told that it was Port Sudan they grew if anything more red under the collar, waving their arms about a jabbering away at each other in Itai lingo. The R.A.F. chappie asked him what all the excitement was about, & one of them calmed down sufficiently to reply "*No! we just tink mebbe one pilot him beeg shit.*"

Two days ago we heard a rumour that Les Gill, Gillie Ford & the two gunners, Sgnts. Mc William & Muller had escaped from Crete in a boat & when they were well out to sea an Itai submarine had popped up alongside, taken Les & Gillie prisoner & told the rest they could bugger off [AIR p54] but I for one discredited it as a flight of imagination, but who should roll up here in camp last night but McWilliam in the flesh, & as it was late & he had no bed I gave him one in my tent & heard the whole story from him & what an interesting one it is too.

Gillie pancaked the plane on the south east shore of the island on a rocky beach & the whole crew came out without a scratch. As they weren't quite sure whether they were on the British occupied part or Jerry occupied Gillie & Muller stayed at the plane & Les & McWilliam walked to the nearest house which was about half a mile off & they arranged that if they found they were in Jerry hands they would give a signal & the other two could set the plane alight. When they got to the house, out popped a couple of furious looking little Greeks with huge carving knives in their hands. When the Greeks found they were British they couldn't hide their disappointment at being done out of their kill. At a signal from the Greeks any amount of Greeks, Aussies & Black Watch appeared from behind vines, brushes etc. - Mac & Les had been covered with rifles all the time on their way to the house.

The four of them soon made friends with the Greeks, Aussies, Black Watch & a few R.A.F. fellows who had also force landed on the island at different times. There were about 800 or so on the south coast waiting to be evacuated, & they tried to remain more or less organised with a HQ in a village some miles away & this HQ professed to be in touch with HQME by wireless so Gillie reported to them & they said they would report to HQME & Gillie was told to destroy the wireless set. Two days later the HQ reported that their wireless was bugged, they had been unable to get through, & they had had the perfectly good Bendix radio of the Glen Martin destroyed so that was that.

The fellows on the south of the island were leading a precarious existence - they were practically cut off from everything, they had hardly any rations & had come down to eating green beans on the pod & green mulberries, & as for smokes, they simply had none, & were rolling paper & smoking that - all letters & paybooks went that way. They were mercilessly ground strafed by the Jerries every day & were kept running about from one hole to the next.

The 2nd afternoon Gillie & an R.A.F. bloke went down to the beach, undressed & we're just going in for a dip when a Jerry came over & groundstrafed them. They discarded all ceremony, run like hell over the sharp rocks & dived under the nearest bushes, & the Jerry planes keep them away from their clothes until after dark - they had to spend the rest of the afternoon skulking about *kaalgat*.

Next they decided to set the plane alight, but when they got there they found that the Aussies had drained all the petrol to use for transport & they couldn't set the damn thing on fire so eventually they put a match to the oil sump of the one engine & got a fire going there - everything was going nicely & they were all keen to watch a nice bonfire when there was a hell of a hiss & out went the fire - the automatic fire extinguishers in the engine had got going, so that was that.

They then decided to get some petrol back from the Aussies & give it another go, this they did, carrying the petrol a hell of a way, but as they got near the plane the Jerries came over again, & they had to run for their lives while the Jerries groundstrafed the plane & in no time set it alight for them.

Then one afternoon Les & Muller decided to go into the nearest village to scrounge some food & Greek wine, but no sooner had they got to the outskirts of the little village when Jerry came over & opened up on them. Less dived through the nearest door slamming the door behind him, & Muller dived into what transpired to be a combined fowl-house & pigsty, the Jerry overshot them & turned back & dropped a stick of small bombs down the centre of the street blowing doors & windows & plaster over Les & as for Muller he found himself in the middle of a cackling mass of feathers, fowls, squawking & grunting pigs & flying pig & fowl shit - luckily neither of them was hurt but for the rest of the sojourn on the island Muller could not get rid of the smell & the lice.

Les always has been notorious for his farts - something like the Limerick about;
*The fellow from Umtata
who was an awful good farter
who could fart anything
from God save the king
to Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata*

But what with green raw beans & green mulberries Less fairly overdid himself - & one of the R.A.F. Squadron Leaders who was very full of the Old School tie stuff & "*be a gentleman you Cad*" attitude did not approve of Les at all especially when Les drowned the noise of Jerry machine guns & they couldn't make out whether the Jerry plane was coming towards them or not.

However one day the Squadron Leader was having a shit into the deep slit trench they had made especially for the purpose out in the open a little way from their "*camp*", when Jerry came over & opened up on him. The nearest cover was some distance away, & the Jerry was uncomfortably close, so without hesitation the S/L dived into the slit trench & into safety- he never had any remarks to make on Les's farting after that.

One night an Aussie officer asked for two volunteers to fetch some supplies from a neighbouring cove which had been captured by the Jerries, & there were two lorry loads of provisions reported to be on the beach. Les & McWilliam went along with the Aussie officer, they got hold of an old almost seaworthy rowing boat & rowed around to the cove in the dark, landed, skulked around, located the provisions, & commenced loading up the boat with bags of tea, sugar, coffee etc. & boxes of tinned bully beef. When they had loaded what they considered to be a fair load they hopped in &

commenced rowing back, but the boat immediately began shipping water, & so they had to heave a lot of bags of tea & sugar etc. overboard, bale out the water & then they carried on.

When they got into the surf at their own beach they overturned in the breakers & spent most of the rest of the night salvaging what tinned stuff they could in 5 feet of water & piled it on the beach. Eventually they were so tired that they crawled under some bushes nearby & went to sleep. They woke up with the sun well up, as hungry as could be, but when they got down to the water's edge where they had dumped the bully beef they found it all gone - the troops had been there before them.

The Aussies had nothing but praise for the Jerry Airborne troops - said they were clean fighters & good fighters - every morning they would raised the Red X flag & the Aussie MO would go out to treat all his wounded, then two Jerry officers would come out, blindfold the MO, take him into the Jerry lines where he would attend to the Jerry wounded, & then he would be escorted out again blindfolded into no-man's-land, & when he reached our lines they would hall down the flag & give it stick again.

They say the Jerries landed any number of motorcyclists who opened up with Tommy guns before they hit the ground - the Jerries also landed three staff cars by parachute unbelievable as it may seem.

After they had been on the island for 6 days, expecting to be rescued every night they gave up hope & decided to salvage one of two big steel oblong tank carrying barges which were wrecked on the rocks. 70 of them got together, mostly Aussies, & in spite of the statements of a few Naval & Port authorities amongst them they decided to give it a bang.

They had to lift the barge off the rocks & in spite of their number it was no easy matter - they slaved away for half a day with no result & next morning they decided to give it another try & if they couldn't shift it they would abandon the attempt. As they were busy next morning in the grey dawn & it looked as if they wouldn't make it they heard a Jerry ground strafing the neighbouring beach & this put so much boost to their effort that with one mighty concerted heave they slid the barge over the rocks into the water & then run for shelter.

When they came back they found that the barge had sunk in a few feet of water as all the sea cocks had been left open, so it meant bailing her out again - a two hours job, dry the two engines all over again & then they could set about working on the engines.

The only man who had any knowledge of engines at all was McWilliam, so he was elected Chief Engineer. One engine was completely unrepairable & the other was in a very bad way too & its propeller was buckled & bent to hell & they couldn't straighten it for fear they would hurt the bearings.

Mac got stuck into the one engine, found a lot of parts missing, but with bits of wire, lengths of string & other Heath Robinson fittings he was going great guns when the naval big noise, Port Captain or something came along, looked down into the engine room & said to Mac *"I'm afraid you are doing this at your own risk as I can't possibly sign up your engine room log for this trip as the engines simply are not engines at all & you are not qualified to work on them."* But he had to make a hasty retreat amid shouts of *"Fuck off you old bastard! We don't need you & your bloody signature!"* from the Aussies who were giving Mac a hand.

That day they cleaned out one of the ballast tanks & filled it up with fresh water & put what petrol they could find into the petrol tanks of the sound(?) engine & when Mac had done what he could to the engine they tested her & after a lot of trouble she started.

They held a council of war, elected the men to the different jobs - Captain Fitzharding (an Aussie) was O.C. of the boat, Les Gill navigator, Gillie Ford first mate, McWilliam Chief (in fact only)

Engineer & an Aussie Sergeant Major was Quartermaster. They also decided that only the 70 of them who had got together, tackled the job & did their share would embark & that any stowaways would be thrown overboard no matter how far from the land they were discovered.

They embarked that night (Monday) after dark, and it wasn't until the Wednesday that they discovered two Palestine Jews who with hats pulled well over their faces had stowed away among them. As the barge was leaking and it needed two men to bail all the time they put the two Ikes onto the job and made them work the passage with a vengeance.

The Aussie Quartermaster was sick all the time & spent all his time on the trip stretched out on the box of provisions (48 tins of bully beef & 6 bottles of pickles among the 70 of them).

The only compass they had was the one from the Glenn Martin, & they found it had so much deviation when put on the steel barge as to be practically useless - eventually they put it in the middle & hoped for the best but the helmsman couldn't see it there, so they had to have one man at the compass & another in the engine room hatch & directions would be shouted back & relayed to the helmsman.

The rudder was so bent & buggered & battered about that the slightest movement to one side would cause the boat to swing completely round, & to get it a few degrees to the other side they had to apply full rudder.

The propeller shaft was so bent that instead of the normal 3600 revs they couldn't give the engine more than 900 revs for fear she would tear the shaft out of her bearings. However they steamed off as happy as larks at quarter past eight that night, very relieved to be off the island at last.

At 3 the next morning they observed a dark object moving around them at a distance in the gloom - this carried on for about 20 minutes, then they recognised it as a submarine. After inspecting them from every angle the sub pulled up alongside ordered them to stop, and on finding out that they were escaping British soldiers the Commander of the Itai sub (for such it turned out to be) ordered first the officer in charge, & then all the officers to leave the barge & come aboard the sub.

Captain Fitzharding, Les Gill, Gillie Ford & four other officers swam & jumped across, but one wounded Black Watch officer & another one stayed. The Itai then told the men on board the barge they were free to go & it sailed off & submerged.

Mc William was then given command of the barge, doing all the navigation as well as looking after the wonky engine. His method of working out their speed was pretty ingenious - he would throw empty bully beef tins or pickle bottles overboard, & get the fellows to judge when they were 100 yards astern - time it on his stopwatch & work out their speed from that - it worked out to a steady 4 knots.

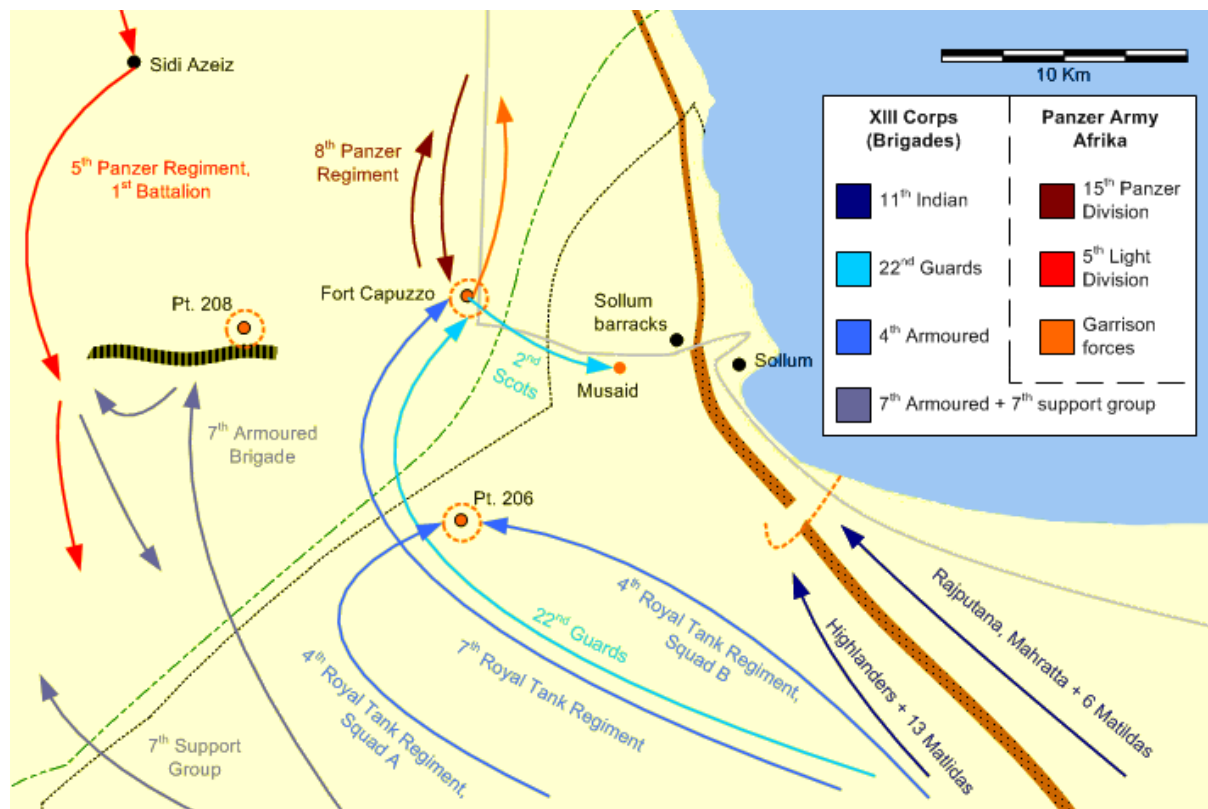
The next incident came soon - the key of the rudder shaft slipped out & fell into the sea & they went round & round in circles for ever so long while they looked for something to use as a makeshift, until eventually Mac got a file in the engine room, broke it in half & it fitted as if it was especially made for the job.

Eventually after 70 hours of anxious sailing they hit the coast at Mersa Matruh & were they pleased? By now I suppose Les & Gillie Ford are in some Itai prison camp.

Later orders have just come through that we have to leave for the desert as soon as we can as we have to start operating on Friday. [Tucker p11]

Fuka Main Sat June 14 [1941]

On the ground Operation Battleaxe 15 – 17 June. Intended to raise the siege of Tobruk. Failed. Wavell was replaced to Supreme Commander Middle East by Auchinleck as a consequence.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Battleaxe
 So 24 Squadron moved to Fuka just as Battleaxe was taking place.



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Battleaxe#/media/File:BattleaxeDay1.PNG

Things were then static until mid November when the Allies launched Operation Crusader.

We got all A flight ground personnel & stores etc loaded onto lorries in record time & got them on their way for here; I was put in charge of loading the Armament section & needless to say I found room for my wardrobe, & here it is & will come in very handy when I get a chance of collecting my kit & getting a tent & settling down - as yet I haven't had a chance of doing a thing for myself as I have been made acting armament officer & have a hell of a lot to do getting 320 bombs fused & ready, all guns loaded with sequence of A.P. & tracer & bombing up - it's a hell of a job.

We took off yesterday morning & landed here at about 10:30 Friday the 13 - a hell of a date to start operations on a new drome, & it doesn't seem to have gone too well as a beginning either.



A group of 24 Squadron officers in the early days of Marylands. These are: (Back row) LIEUTS. G. MARSHALL, A. DE BURG-WHYTE, G. A. FRANCEY, H. RAW, R. J. MALAN, J. C. HICKSON, B. G. ROXBURGH, G. P. RAWLINSO. (Middle row) P/O. C. H. DUNCAN, LIEUT. D. L. COCK, CAPTAIN A. J. PUTTICK, LIEUTS. R. PEARSON, R. J. PETERSON, C. W. HARLEY, A. G. CROWTHER, A. E. HALSE, C. W. E. BLAKE, G. GENIS, J. A. WILLIAMS, JER OVENSTONE, E. E. POPE and M. E. DRAPER. (Front row) CAPTAIN C. W. LEPPIATT, LIEUT. MILLS BARNBY, CAPTAIN D. A. DU TOIT, CAPTAIN TOMMY THOMPSON (adj.), LIEUT-COLONEL CHARLES MARTIN (C.O.), CAPTAINS K. S. P. JONES, G. L. BATEMAN, R. W. FREAN and LIEUT. CHARLES KEAREY. Some of these officers were subsequently killed, and many went on to serve the Squadron with the utmost distinction.

Picture source Tucker p4

Eustace Newborn with Charles Gordon was sent out on a recce yesterday afternoon directly after lunch & haven't come back - so they are a goner, either prisoners or killed.

Then last night Captain Bateman & Cecil Clarkson went out, they were supposed to land at Sidi Barrani [*] for refuelling & go on a bombing raid this morning early, but both crashed at Sidi Barrani, Captain Bateman on landing last night & Clarkie on taking off this morning - luckily nobody is hurt but what damage is done to the machines we don't know yet.



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WesternDesertBattle_Area1941_en.svg

Fuka shown on coast.

Sidi Barrani further west on the coast.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidi_Barrani

I include this map many times so that you don't have to scroll back here to see it.

Sat June 21 [1941]

Hell! I've had a hard 10 days, but it has been very interesting & educational work this armament officer racket so it hasn't been so bad at all .

Fuka Main isn't such a bad little place after all as these joints around here go - it's right on the railway line, has a station consisting of one building as far as I can see, right on the main road to Alexandria, & only 3 miles from the sea, & by the sea I mean the one & only Mediterranean Sea. But for all that it's to Hell & gone out in the Western Desert midway between Alexandria & Sidi Barrani. As far as I can make out there are no water holes anywhere within reach & all water has to be brought here by rail. The desert about here is of the hard variety with sparse desert shrubs & bush about, only a few inches high, but vegetation of some kind at any rate - there are no trees anywhere within sight & no landmarks at all. The dust here isn't anywhere as bad as at Fuka Satellite which is about 7 miles to the West. We have a lovely big drome, & we are entirely South African here - that is as a Squadron, as B Flight arrived here the day before we did, we have a couple of Aussie gunners & R.A.F. M.T. [*] drivers on our strength for the time being, but only until we can fill up with South Africans.

[*] Motor Transport

We have a very nice mess, a wooden shack with cement floor, good cooks, good food nicely done, & we pay only £1 a month - what a relief from the R.A.F. mess at Shandur [*]. The climate out here is nice & cool & bracing too & one doesn't feel continually fagged out as was the case in Shandur, & of a night one can crawl under the blankets & fall asleep without sweating all over & gasping for breath.

[*] Shandur is on the Suez Canal at the Great Bitter Lake

But to get back to this bloody armaments job I've been holding down. When it came to bombing up the machines I discovered that all the new machines which hadn't carried bombs before wouldn't take the bombs as the bombays had been assembled wrongly - that meant I had to get stuck in & change the bombracks around, & as it was urgent it had to be done in double-quick time which meant working late into the night - up to 12 & 1 most nights & then coming back to camp in the dark without any landmarks to navigate by & blacked-out lights on the lorry. I would get lost on each & every occasion, taking anything up to an hour to get back to camp - a distance of just over half a mile.

And then what would get me down would be to be awakened at 5 in the morning & be told that I am on standby for a raid - & be kept on standby for the whole day without the raid coming off as happened a few times, but standby or no standby I carried on as the last week the Armoury tent has been erected & a telephone installed & I could always be got hold of.

The saving grace of the job has been that the armourers are a very willing & obliging crowd & didn't mind working 18 hours a day if needs be.

We wanted to disperse our planes well off the edge of the drome, & as the ground is full of minor bumps which cause inconveniences in taxiing we had to make a number of runways from the different parking spots to the edge of the drome, & the fellows were rather amused at my idea of towing two lengths of railway line behind a 3 tonne lorry by means of an aircraft tow cable & levelling out the runways in no time.

Tommy Pope arrived late day before yesterday thank goodness, so yesterday was my last day on the job - I spent most of today getting my corner of the tent organized & making up for some of the lost sleep. From now on I can renew my contact with my old pals in the Mess, & go for a few swims. So far my only contact with the Mess has been a rush in for a hasty meal usually after the other fellows have finished, & I've had only two swims instead of at least one daily as most of the other fellows have been having.

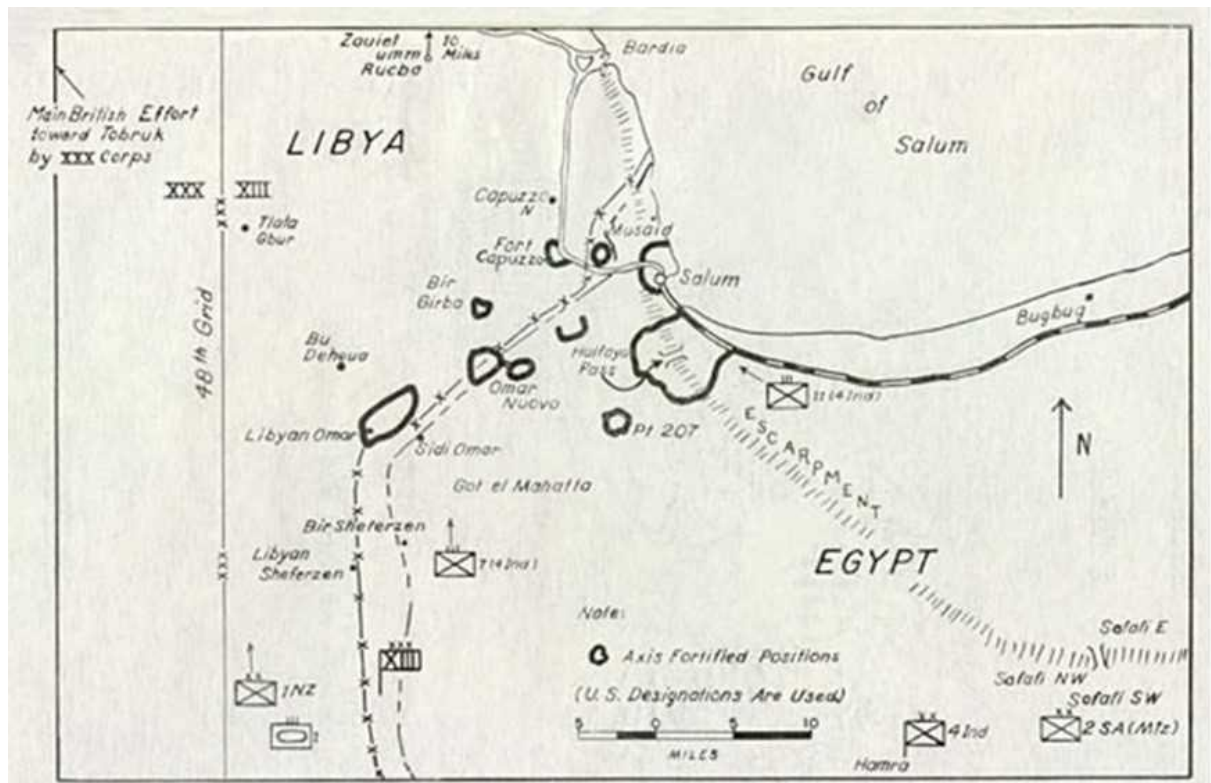
And by Jove! what a delight it is swimming in the Mediterranean? The water is blue & calm & clear & warm, you can simply stay in for hours if time permits, & you can swim out to the depths of about 20 ft, put your head under water & see the bottom. It has Muizenberg & Durban beaten hollow.

On Tuesday morning we were suddenly called upon for a bombing raid - we had been waiting for it ever since Sunday, because we had been told by Intelligence that we were making a big push & that the whole Squadron was on standby for intensive bombing if necessary. We were informed that our push on Sollum had failed & that the Jerries were launching a severe counter-attack with heavy tanks.

We were to locate the tanks near Sidi Omar [*] & give them the works. We got 10 A/C into the air & in conjunction with 15 Blenheims [*] set out to find the Jerries - flying in 4 flights. Captain Jones with myself leading one flight, Captain Brain leading the other, & the Blenheims flying in two flights of 9 & 6 each. We located the tanks & M.T. - hundreds of them moving across the veld like so many sheep being driven out loosely to pasture.

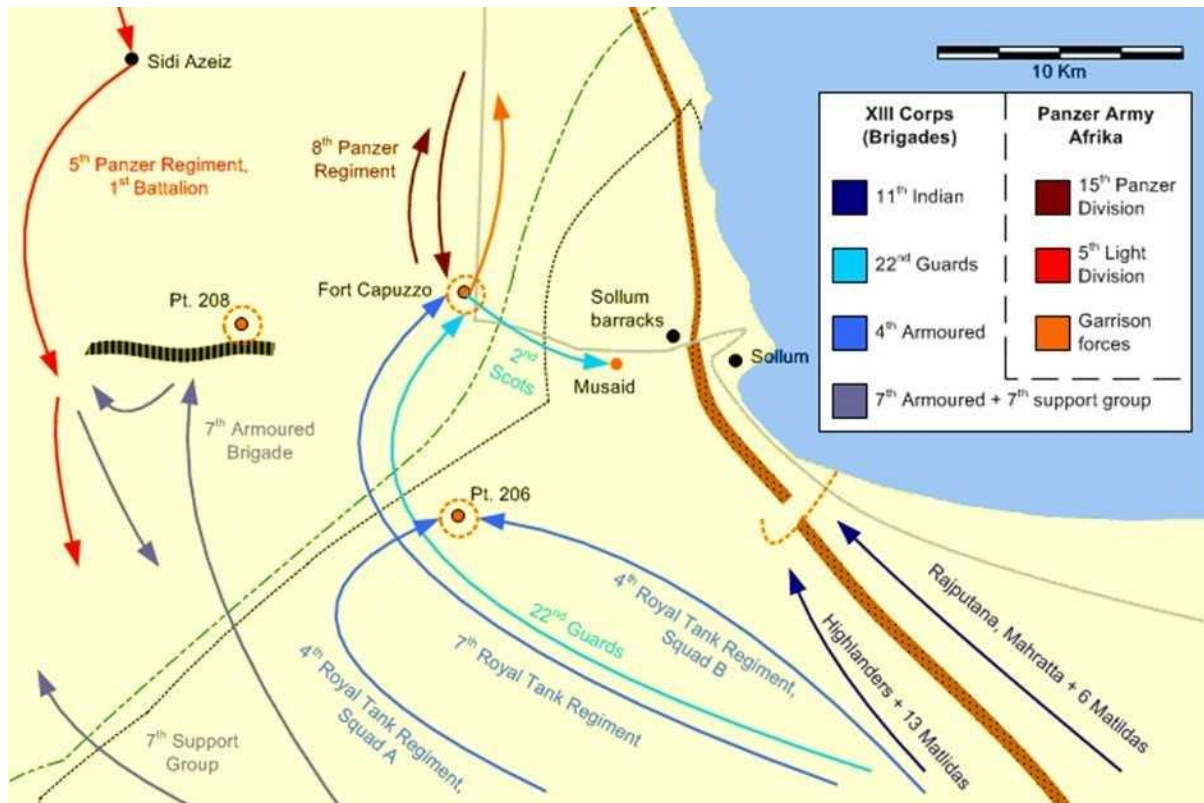


Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Desert_campaign#/media/File:AfricaMap1.jpg
Shows Salum (on coast) & Side Omar (on dot dot dash line). Map is of Operation Crusader which followed in November.



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidi_Omar#/media/File:Operaci%C3%B3 Crusader.jpg

Shows the Escarpment & Hellfire Pass (Halfaya Pass) which features many times in what follows.

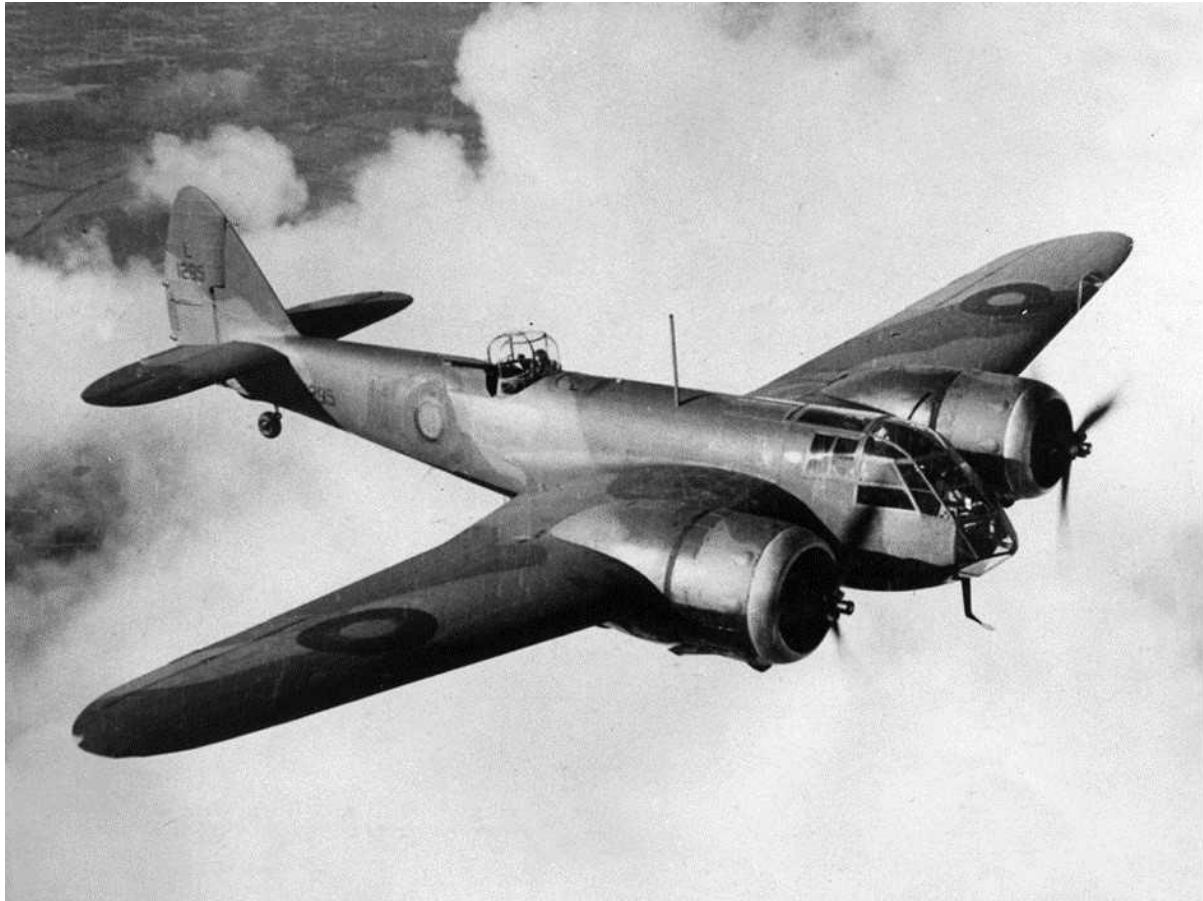


Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Desert_campaign#/media/File:BattleaxeDay1.PNG

Called Operation Battleaxe. This is June 15 action. The battle raged 15 June (Sunday)-17 June (Tuesday) 24 squadron attacked on the Tuesday. Wiki describes it well except they credit the RAF with stemming the German tanks.

"The British failure led to the sacking of Wavell, the XIII Corps commander, Lieutenant-General Noel Beresford-Peirse and Creagh, the 7th Armoured Division commander. General [Claude Auchinleck](#) took over as [Commander-in-Chief](#) of the Middle East Command. In September, the Western Desert Force was renamed the [Eighth Army](#)."

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Blenheim



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Blenheim#/media/File:Bristol_Blenheim_ExCC.jpg

The tanks weren't all in one big bunch, but in smaller groups of from 20 to 40 & the whole lot grouped about in one big collective bunch. Each flight picked a bunch of tanks, made the run up at about 3,600 feet & dropped the works - it was a grand success - we simply couldn't miss. When we turned away there was lots of ac ac, but luckily all behind us.

We came back, had grub, & while the other fellows all sat about in the mess or lay down on the beds I had to get stuck in & bombed up again as we were to be in the air again in 2 hours. My machine was the last one I bombed up, & I had only got 5 bombs hung in her when Captain Jones came along & said we had to be off.

While the other pilots started up & taxied out & took off I tightened down the crutches & fixed fusing control links & when Captain Jones started up I closed the bombay, slipped on my parachute & hopped in & off we went. We were a bit behind the rest of the Squadron. When we had flown about 1/4 hour it's suddenly struck me that I didn't remember taking out the safety pins of the bombs. I told Captain Jones so we turned out to sea & I dropped one bomb to see whether she was live or safe. The bomb struck with a splash, but that was all so we turned back - me with my tail between my legs.

When we had landed & taxied out to our parking place I hopped out, opened the bombay & had a look at the other 4 bombs, & what was my disgust when I saw that the safety pins were removed - it was only the pin of number 5 bomb I hadn't removed .

Captain Jones just grinned & told me to forget about it as it wasn't for want of trying. The truth is I was too rushed & hadn't time to do things methodically. It was damn fine of the skipper to take it as

he did tho' - he's one of the very best & I'm damn lucky to have him as my pilot & Flight Commander. [*]

[*] They stuck together through the Western Desert & went to Madagascar as a team. Captain Jones became a SAA pilot & I met up with him & stayed at his home in Cape St Francis for some days together with my wife in the '70s

When the other fellows returned they reported that it had been chickenfeed bombing the tanks again, & they did a lot of damage.

The Major is up here now, just arrived, & he has brought two Mark X computers with him, one for each flight, he says they were found in stores in Abu Suweir by Hillhouse of 12 Squadron & the storeman there didn't even know what they were or that anybody was worrying about them - he said they had come into stores about a week previously - Gawd! What organisation! - some people higher up won't dare suck their fingers after this war.

Sat. Night Captain Jones has given me 3 days leave - says he knows I've been working hard lately, so I'm the first man in the Flight for leave, am going to Alexandria tomorrow morning with Llama & Captain Brain from B flight.

Intelligence informs us that the push has failed, instead of us driving in a wedge behind Sollum as was the intention, & capturing it in a matter of time we met with ever so much more resistance than we had bargained for, the Jerries had 6" naval guns mounted on Hellfire Pass [*] & our forces found the pass to live up to its name & our fellows were simply mowed down & had to fall back. Then came the Jerry tanks, who all but drove a wedge into our lines - causing us to "*retreat according to plan*" & fall back on our original positions. This retreating & falling back & evacuating seems to be becoming a chronic complaint on our side; it's playing up merry old hell with the morale of the troops & folks at `

[*] Hellfire Pass = Halfaya Pass
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halfaya_Pass

As a matter of fact the yarn goes that it is affecting the birth rate of Britain - the dropping off of the English birth figures is said to be due to these here "*strategic withdrawals*".



Picture source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WesternDesertBattle_Area1941_en.svg

Hellfire Pass is actually called Halfaya & is shown on the map. Always referred to as Hellfire in Western Desert speak. Map shows the Escarpment which was the great challenge for the army.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halfaya_Pass



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

MED0303

Picture source <https://crusaderproject.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/4005387-1.jpg>



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

MEC0985

Picture source <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/MEC0985/screen/4011976.JPG>

View from the top overlooking Sollum

See Nov 28 where they flew down here by mistake at 700 ft when the Germans were in possession of it. Bull wrote . " *I reckon we are the only crew which has flown that height anywhere near Hellfire Pass & got away with it.*" The pilot, Labistour, got *poeg eye* drunk after they had landed.

26 June [1941]

We spent three very pleasant days in Alex. It is ever so much nicer than Cairo, it's more Western & civilized - has a larger proportions of Europeans, mostly Greeks & French, & what honeys those olive skinned dark eyed Latin girls with the Whoopee hips are! & they're so damn friendly too. Alex has quite a respectable residential area too, & judged by Egyptian standards it is on the whole a very clean & hygienic city with a very impressive waterfront reminding one of Durban.

The first night after the usual round of cabaret shows we got to bed at about 1 but by 3 we were rudely awakened by the Air Raid alarms - we slipped on our shorts, went downstairs & into the street on the promenade to watch the fireworks. The Jerries came over one & two at a time at about 10 minutes intervals. They dropped 12 parachute flares over the Dock area. The searchlights were beaming up into the sky, the ac ac guns were throwing up any amount of shells & the Flaming Onions looked like a fireworks display for kiddies on a large scale, the big 4.7" guns were kicking up such an ungodly din that we never heard any bombs explode at all.

We felt quite safe out on the esplanade until the shrapnel from the ac ac shells after heavy bursts overhead began falling into the street around us & into the sea alongside, then we made a beeline for the protection of the verandahs of nearby buildings. The Jerries kept it up till 5 o'clock as day was beginning to break & then they bugged off. Considering the time they spent overhead they did very little damage - we saw what there was to be seen next day.

They hit a couple of multi-storied Gippie houses on the borders of dockland & killed a few hundred Gippies, so actually they did a good night's work everybody agrees.

The more one sees of these Gippies the lower they sink in one's estimation - there are useless, lazy, dirty, begging, persistent, scrounging, V.D. ridden degenerate race, & it's very hard on the imagination to think that at one time they were a cultured civilized nation.

I reckon I have the classification of the Gippie nation as it is today pretty well taped, and this is roughly as I see them:

[*] I was posting this section about the Western Desert on the Wild Dogs adventure motorcycling site. It was not getting many views and the board it was on was only accessible to members (though anyone could join). I then decided to transcribe the entire diary and offer the actual books and the annotated transcription to the National Archives. I then ceased posting on Wild Dogs.

I chose to exclude the following section, where the Egyptians are classified, from the Wild Dogs thread. This is a true transcription so it is included here.

Wild Dogs thread <https://wilddog.net.za/threads/bulls-war-journal-continued.278524/page-2>

9% are hawkers, hawking anything from overripe fruit to drapery and I find it very difficult to get rid of them as even the usual army "*Fuck off!*" doesn't seem to help anymore, but have found my empty revolver very effective lately.

11% are taxi drivers, & where they get hold of the family heirlooms I don't know, & funnily enough they all seem to go, but the only really efficient thing about the taxi is the overworked "*pawp pawp*" horn.

13% are Garry drivers, but most of them more likely than not otherwise nicely knitted Arab ponies could do with a few months feed and rest. Incidentally the most conspicuous thing about these Garry rigouts are the balls of the horses - 99% of them are entire.

7% are shoeblacks, mostly young Gippies & they are as persistent or more so than the hawkers - the "*Fuck off*" is also losing its effectiveness as a weapon, but the revolver works the point.

8% are Dragomen - the official guides who hang about the hotels & streets to catch the uninitiated & take them all over the joint & see that they are not overcharged by other Gippies, but in the end he gets his whack which costs you more.

12% are waterborne sewerage, - they sail their Falukas on the sea & canals - dead into wind, & through dead calms - must have the spirits of all the dead Pharoes blowing them along - they contribute their fair share towards the upkeep of their beloved land by shiting in the canals - freshwater ones for preference - just to add the Gippie flavour to the country's drinking water.

14% are dirty loungers on already overcrowded pavements or low cafes stoeps & verandahs where they drink some vile evil smelling bright coloured concoction and smoke their funny water-cooled pipes.

15% are clerks in banks & shops, dressed like Europeans, and they make a more or less respectable living by rooking the public.

5% are pimps who slink up to you in a most surreptitious manner & offer you Paris pictures of nudes for sale and invariably end up with the question "*Wanna fuck-a-my sister?*"

3% are the rich overfed wealthy landowner class & are always to be found in the best hotel lounges neatly dressed in European clothes with red Fez's on their heads, resting the fat pot bellies on their laps sipping some drink - presumably whiskey & soda - if anything they are the most obnoxious of the lot.

2% are artisans, & they are responsible for building the up-till-5-story Gippie buildings of mud and wood in the Gippie quarters, then they pray to Allah in the East 3 times a day that it doesn't rain and cause the walls of their masterpieces to dissolve and collapse.

1% are the workers of the nation, they are very seldom seen as they are always busy working out in the fields. Their work takes the form of loading a 2 ton load onto the back of an undersized wiry little donkey, then they hop up and perch themselves on the top of the load & kick the donkey in the ribs as regularly and continuously as a pendulum to get the willing little creature into top gear.

¼% consists of the shapely scantily undressed streamlined female Gippies you find dancing in the Carberet shows, & they don't seem to be too bad at all.

The other 13% you don't ever seem to see except for an occasional hooded head peeping out at you from some low evil smelling dive or a partially blacked out window, & they are the real backbone of the nation according to Gippie standards - they evidently are hard at work producing more and more small squint eyed V.D. ridden Gippies - rolling them aside and carrying on with the job - good old mass production.

This adds up to - let me see - well a bit over the 100%, but that is just how it is - there are so many of them that I'm sure the census dept has never caught up with them all, so nobody can argue the point with me, as to whether they run true to at least the one western rule, of being 100% - I have my doubts.

I did some shopping while in Alex, bought a lot of presents for relations & friends back home & was horribly done in the process, I paid £11 for articles at 1 shop which I subsequently discovered I could have got for £6 at a European shop, but it was too late - it seems as though you have to barter like hell to do business in this blinking country, & I'm simply not made that way. However I couldn't get presents for all the people I wanted to as my money gave in - I went through £23 in the 3 days - or rather 2 1/2 so will have to get some more next time, but I will know where to go then.

We got back here at 11 yesterday morning to find everybody running about getting things in the aircraft as a hurried operations order had come through. Captain Jones was leading the formation so I had to pull my finger & run around like a two-year-old getting the dope & my things in the plane & I only just made it.

It was a raid on Gazala South [*] aerodrome & we bomb from 20,000 ft. We do pattern bombing in close formation, the leading man does the aiming, & when his bombs go the others drop theirs, so everything depends on him.

[*] Gazala is on the map above.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gazala>

Tucker p8 has *"On 25th June the Squadron followed 113 and 14 Squadrons R.A.F. to bomb Gazala. The entire formation got lost and never reached the target. "A" Flight under Captain Jones broke off on their own from the main formation, and found the target which they successfully bombed."*

The diary section entries read p11:

"25 June Only "A" Flight successfully bomber Gazala.

26 June The operation of the previous day, co-operating with 113 and 14 Squadrons R.A.F. , was very successfully repeated. Five enemy aircraft were destroyed on the ground and others damaged."

AIR however has the following entries p59 [note the different dates]

"25th [June] Nothing to report. Other than H.Q. Staff with the only Adjutant left for Fuka Main when the real work began."

"Fuka Main 28th Daylight raid by 10 of our machines ordered to bomb GAZALA in formation with Blenheim Sqds; Our Boys found it very difficult to keep formation due to their greater speed, The Blenheim Sqd #113 leading unfortunately lost its way and failed to find the Target: Maj. Jones machine had to return fully bombed much disgusted wasted effort.

Later OC 113 rang up to apologised "Balls up". Capt Jones broke formation with his flight and managed to find the target and straddled it with flight pattern Bombing with good results. Photos being taken, 28 bombs dropped."

This Mrk X bombsight seems to be okay as from that height my first bomb hit within 10 yards of where I aimed it, but unfortunately the other 7 bombs hung up, & 3 of the other planes had hang-ups too, so even though the bombing was of the best we didn't do all the damage we should have.

When we landed the machines which had had the hang-ups were placed U.S. pending investigation, & it wasn't until this morning after the rest of the Squadron had gone off on a repeat raid that the trouble was discovered as being due to bent trigger guards - bent in by bumping the bombs up against them while bombing up at night we think.

The second raid was even more successful than the first as there were no hang-ups. I will be relieved when we get these bombracks to operate smoothly, as there have been a lot of hang-ups lately. [*]

[*] Tucker p14 *"The Squadron now began to develop its famous pattern bombing, and put it to much effect in subsequent raids. Each aircraft carried eight 250 lb bombs hung on hooks at the sides of the bomb bay. A mechanical device could be set to release these bombs in succession at a determined spacing, and the drill was for four aircraft to fly in formation, releasing their sticks of bombs simultaneously and alongside each other. In this way an area about 1.000 yards by 500 yards could be covered by 250 lb bombs never more than 50 yards apart. Extension rods were used on the nose fuses of the bombs so that the bombs exploded just above the ground with high fragmentation effect. It was a terrifying method of attack on concentrations of tanks or troops."*

3rd July [1941]

Last night we made dusk raids on Derna, Maturba & Gazala North [*] - two machines to each place. Charles Kearey & Buck Buchanan on Derna, Captain du Toit & Danie Jacobs on Maturba & Captain Jones & Dick Roulston on Gazla, but at the bottom of the drome Dick's tailwheel burst so Captain Jones & self carried on. We timed things too late & when we got to Gazala visibility was very bad owing to the dusk & a bit of a shitstorm they were having that we couldn't see much, so I bombed at the ac ac but couldn't see what damage I did - the Jerries seem to be fond of using the Breda miniature Flaming Onion ac ac, & I must say it provides a marvellous fireworks display - all the balls of red, amber, yellow & green flame.

[*] Derna & Gazala on map above. Maturba = Martuba (?) about 40 km south of Derna

The names are pilot & observer.

Derna is on the map.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derna,_Libya



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derna,_Libya#/media/File:%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B8%D8%B1_%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%85_%D9%84%D9%85%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A9_%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A9.jpg

Derna in 2020

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martuba>

Charles & Buck couldn't locate Derna Satellite which they were to bomb so they came down to Gazala. Charles saw Buck caught in the searchlight at Derna. Charles carried on to Bardia [*] & bombed there, meeting no ac ac, but he didn't see Buck again, & Buck failed to return. [AIR p60 Tucker p13] This morning Captain Jones with Jeck Ovenstone in the back made a square search all round camp for a radius of about 40 miles looking for Buck as there is a slim chance that he may have force landed somewhere around here as there were a number of unidentified aircraft stooging around at a low height as if lost. In fact there seems to have been a good bit of a balls-up last night. Mersa Matruh opened up the searchlight at Capton du Toit, Charles Kearey & us coming back last night, & all three of us had identified ourselves - as it is they shot a Blenheim down into the sea last night.

[*] Bardia. On the map

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bardia>



Picture source <https://collection.nam.ac.uk/images/960/109000-109999/109120.jpg>

As it was in 1942

However we saw nothing of a crashed machine on the search, but visibility is very bad as there is quite a heavy shitstorm on the go - they wouldn't let us land here when we got back as visibility was down to 50 yds, so we landed at No 1 Fighter (SA) near Fuka Satellite & were fetched by lorry.

While we were up we had a look at our dispersal drome out in the desert - just a level pan where all available aircraft are landed & parked for the night while the moon is bright, & as the moon is waxing we are starting to disperse as from tonight. It is a very good idea, as our drome is sure to be bombed on the moonlight nights to follow. Every squadron has its own particular pan on which it disperses.

It's a pity about old Buck - he was one of the very best, [*] & his two gunners Dan Malan & Hollie Thomas were both fine fellows too - I only hope they have been taken prisoner & not killed.

[*] AIR p60

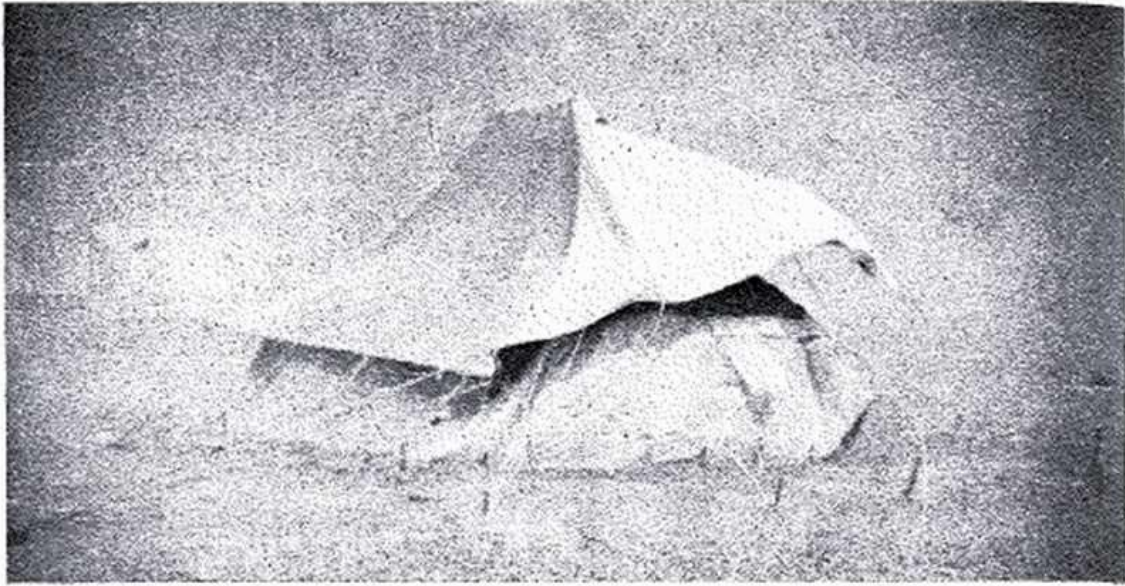
"Buchanan was great favourite in Squadron. Known only as "Buck", to his mechanics "Skerpion" the Dutch [also Afrikaans] word for Scorpion due to his method of taking off "tail well up"

Bull uses the expression "very best" to describe 7 of his colleagues who were killed in this section of the diary

9th July [1941]

There has been a hell of a shitstorm [*] blowing the last 4 days or so with the result that everything has been covered with a thick layer of dust, the dust has even got into closed suitcases & steel trunks, & tempers have not been too sweet, it has been damn unpleasant, we have been eating, breathing & chewing dust, when one wakes up of a morning you have to rub your eyes open, & when you blow your nose or spit it's just a splash of mud, & unless you have Gippy tummy you just about shit mud pillars - reminds me of the 12th Squadron song concerning a place called Mobiel where:-

*There's no paper in the bogs
so you wait until it clogs
and you saw it off in logs*



Conditions could be most unpleasant. This flapping tent gives but a mere idea of what happened when the gale-force winds and swirling sand of a *Khamsie* hit the camp.

Picture source Tucker p20

Poor old Charles Kearey has been having a very severe dose of Gippie guts, & he has been in bed a few days with it, shitting about a dozen times a day & puking half as many times. Yesterday he was up & was sitting at dinner table with that far-away-look-in-his-eyes-like-a-dog-having-a-shit, chewing every morsel of food about 50 times before he would swallow it very gingerly. When we remarked on it he replied: *“Yes, I make sure of chewing it very fine, then it doesn't tear my throat to ribbons when it comes up again.”*

There have been lovely big breakers here the last day or two - must be Spring tide or something - colossal waves & the surfing has been marvellous, almost too much so - you catch a big one about 50 yards out, & by the time it piles you up on the beach you have gone through a series of loops, stall turns, slow rolls & end up with a crash landing - I've never seen such waves on a beach before.

The other evening operation orders for a raid Bardia came through & we were all on our way to the aircraft when it was cancelled - it appeared that we were being given fighter escort, but when the fighters landed at Sidi Barrani for refuelling they found no fuel. However the raid came off next evening, but I was not on standby as we had a burst tailwheel so didn't go - the raid wasn't too much of a success tho' - a lot of the bombs fell in the sea. Pietersen leading . [*]

[*] Earlier I said note this name.

In last night's Daventry news it was said that Adolf who is now a Wing Commander has been awarded a bar to D.S.O , & is the first man to win bars to both the D.F.C & D.S.O. in this war. It was also claimed that he is the No 1 pilot in the R.A.F. & heads the list with 35 victories confirmed. *Mooi so!*

The Jerries have been paying us a bit of attention the last couple of nights, luckily the bombing has been very poor, doing no damage at all, but we had a lucky escape the night of the Bardia raid, - just as the last machine to land touched down bombs started falling - if they were aimed at the landing aircraft or the flare path they were really putrid attempts as the nearest one landed almost two miles off.

Last night our Squadron operated right through the night, we were told to take off from 8 p.m. at 2 hr. intervals, & drop two bombs apiece on Derna Satellite, Martuba, Timimi [*], & Gazala North & South. Captain Jones with myself, sgts Black & Venter [*] took off just after 8 but when we got to Derna the moon wasn't high enough to see properly, & there was a short in our intercom so we were very handicapped so I dropped 3 bombs or what I took to be D. Satellite & 3 on what I took to be G. North & then came home - the ac ac was well behind us.

[*] Timimi. On the map, south of Derna.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timimi>

[*] Note the 4 man crew contrary to the 3 that Wiki states

Tommy Hulse & Clyde Harley, both in my tent gave it stick tho' - the buggers were using oxygen at 6,000 ft & when they got there they were feeling full of beans, they stooed around over Derna town, picked out the likelier spot, & in spite of searchlights gave them hell, each dropping 4 bombs on the town itself. Tommie's bottom gunner put out one searchlight, & when Clyde arrived there he was caught in two searchlights, but threw the machine about & put her nose straight down, pulling out at 3000 ft doing 300 on the clock. His bottom gunner McWilliam of Crete fame had his sights nicely trained on one searchlight when Clyde turned the plane inside-out & next minute Mac found himself aiming at the moon & only then realised that something was wrong - anyhow, Clyde got out of the searchlights.

Charles Kearey was supposed to take off at 10:00 but when he had taxied out the Jerries come over & bombed the joint, & kept them there until 11 & only then could you take off. When he got to Derna he saw another machine flying about, so he gave chase, but when he couldn't catch up he told Herbie Raw (his obs) to jettison the bombs, but even then the other plane got away, so Charles came home.
[*]

[*] Being used as a heavy fighter.

All in all it was a bad night, for as Cecil Blake was coming in to land after the raid a Jerry came over & put a stick of incendiaries across the drome & H.E some distance away. Cecil promptly took his engines again & buggered off, flying about over the desert for 1 1/4 hours before lack of petrol forced him to land - he needless to say crashed her in the desert but nobody was hurt. Why he didn't return here after say half an hour & try to land again I don't know.

24 Squadron have quite an impressive list of pileups, write-offs & machines lost for such a young Squadron:-

2 to Eustace Newborn

1 to Captain Jones

1 to Captain Bateman
1 to Jack Ovenstone
1 to Tommy Hulse
1 to Dick Roulston
1 to Cecil Clarkson
1 to Roxburgh
1 to Danie Jakobs
1 to Haupt
1 to Gillie Ford
1 to Cecil Blake
1 to Eustice Newborn (missing)
1 to Buck (missing)

That makes 15, but all of them are not complete write-offs, only about a third of them, & some of them could not have been helped, as they were due to mechanical defects such as those of Captain Jones, Dick Roulston & Danie Jakobs.

11th July [1941]

These goddamn Jerries really are becoming a damn nuisance - they are keeping us awake every blinking night, & they are more of a damn nuisance than anything as their bombing here has been really very bad although at other places we hear it has been pretty good.

Night before last was about the worst, I was writing letters - or rather I intended to, - I started at about 9 o'clock, but every half hour or so one would come over, do a bit of bombing in the vicinity - anything from 3 to 10 miles away & we would have to douse the lights & run for the funkhole - they kept this up till about 12 o'clock, & after every few explosions the donkey of the laundryman (a Gippie here) would start braying most mournfully & cause us all to laugh - every time without fail - the poor bugger must have been wondering what the hell was up.

We eventually got to bed at almost 12:30, & I slept like a blinking log, but at 4 in the morning I was woken by a hell of an explosion which seemed right in camp & then I heard Whee - Whee - Wheeeee - Bang! -

Donder & Bliksem! [*] I made a dive for the floor alongside the bed, but I got entangled in the flysheet & blankets, but in no time all but my feet were flat on the floor - my feet were knotted up in the doings. The plane was still circling overhead so we lay flat down, & only later ran out to the nearest funkhole, but nothing further happened so we went back to bed. Those two bombs were the nearest so far - about a quarter mile away, near N.A.A.F.I's shop on the crossroads.

[*] donder & blits	= thunder & lightning
donner & bliksem	= rough up or beat up
bliksem!	= yikes! exclamation of surprise when used alone
Donder & Bliksem!	= mixture of the above
(Afrikaans)	

As I say these raids have been more of a nuisance than anything so far as the bombing has been up to shit, but the whole lot of us have been kept awake most nights so the last two nights all of the available men have had to sleep out of camp - each a/c takes 5 to the dispersal drome, [AIR p61 Tucker p13] & the rest of the mechanics who aren't on standby go way out into the desert by lorry & sleep there - I went with them last night & had a good night's sleep & was only woken once by bomb bursts which happened to be near N.A.A.F.I again .

Our Flying pay & Field allowances are through in orders now, & I have had another go at filling in S&T forms for the trip from the Union as the paymaster has been here, & I hope to get it eventually. Tommy took him back to Wadi Natrun [*] yesterday & crashed the plane on landing - he couldn't judge the height from the white reflecting surface & on his third attempt put a wing in - nobody hurt, but another plane U.S. for a month. That puts Tommie's score up to 2 & the total at 16.

[*] Not on map. Slightly west of the Nile mid way between Cairo & Alexandria

12th July [1941]

We had our first peaceful night in camp last night for about a week or more. The donkey is getting damn good on the job now, he no longer waits for the bombs to explode - no Siree! he gives tongue now when he hears an aircraft approaching of a night, we hardly need an Air Raid warning or sound detector now.

This morning Tommy Halse & self took a ton lorry & drove all the way to Mersa Matruh [*] to see the D.M.Rs who were supposed to be there, but we found out there that they are still back at Cairo, so we had all that journey for nothing. Next we tried to locate No. 2 Fighter Sqdrn (S.A.) which are somewhere near Martin Bagush [*], but after driving through miles & miles of defences, up & down steep escarpments where a baboon would need the help of a stick, & being bumped about on the worst dusty roads or tracks imaginable we gave it up & came back - we did about a 100 miles between 11 a.m. & 2 p.m. - all for nothing.

[*] Mersa Matruh

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mersa_Matruh



From Google Earth

Martin Bagush = Maatin Bagush. On the coast slightly east of Mersa Matruh, on map posted earlier.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maaten_Bagush

13 July [1941]

The buggers came over again at about 4 this morning, but as all the lights all along the coast have been put out - even the dummy flarepath the sods must have lost their bearings as they wandered about overhead for about half an hour before dropping a stick of bombs about 3 miles off. One of these was discovered to be unexploded this afternoon.

Monty Symons who has been grounded the last month on account of kidneys or something left this morning for Cairo & is going back to the Union tomorrow - that makes three of our observers who are on their way to the Union - Larkan & Mitchell were grounded about 2 months ago too - but the 3 of them aren't much loss everyone agrees.

Henry Rose-Martin rang up from Cairo this afternoon to say that word has come through that Eustace Newborn & Captain Driver (from 2 Fighter) are both Prisoners of War, but Eustace's crew are presumed killed. Rosie is also leaving for the Union tomorrow, lucky bugger, & we are all damn sorry to lose him. No word of Buck tho'.

Les Bensimon has just come back from leave in Alex, & says they are having a 10 p.m. curfew In Alex for all S.A. troops - this is not going to go down well at all. I'm glad now that I refused my leave - I was told I could take it this morning - I would like to wait a bit & go to Palestine next time. I am on Operations duty from 3 a.m., so I'm off to sleep now. Captain Jones is on leave as from this morning, so I don't suppose there will be much for me to do the next few days. Tommy Pope has gone on leave too & has asked me to keep an eye on the Armaments section while he's away, but there's not much doing in that department now.

16th July [1941]

One simply doesn't get a night's rest in this joint any longer. Every night there are a few silly buggers overhead stooging about & blasting big holes into the unresponsive desert - last night or rather early this morning it was definitely an Itai as I could hear the 3 engines job of the Savoya 97 [*] - he bugged around for ever so long, dropping one or two bombs at a time - mostly on or around the dummy flare-path. Dick woke me up after the bloody howling alarm had sounded, & out we ran for the funkhole, but after he'd made his second dummy run we came back to bed, but thereafter he made ever so many more runs overhead & my hair would rise & I would wonder whether I should shake off my sleepiness & laziness & get into the safety of the funkholes or just forget about him & stay in bed. & Then every time I'd hear the Wheee! of a bomb I'd wish I was in the trench & when it had exploded miles off I'd be thankful that I'd stuck in bed - bugger these Jerries & Itais - why the hell don't they send over the experienced pilots who can locate the target, drop their bombs & get to hell out of it - these novices they send over here spend hours stooging around looking for targets & then they drop their bombs all over the ruddy show - you never know where the next one is going to drop - they may even hit us one of these fine nights & if a few bombs had to hit the camp there would be no end of a mess as very few of the fellows run for the funkhole now .

[*] I think that " Savoya 97" is a typo. No 97 listed but 100 79s were used in the Western Desert. (12 Sept post is for Savoya 79)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoia-Marchetti_SM.79_Sparviero



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoia-Marchetti_SM.79_Sparviero#/media/File:Two_Savoia-Marchetti_S.M.79_over_Sciacca.jpg

The Major reckons it's up to shit having funkholes & not using them, & as we all prefer to stay in bed we have to make out tents safe, so the occupants of every tent has to sink it 2 ft into the ground & use the excavated soil to build up a double row of sandbags another 2 ft around it - making 4 ft of protection .

I know what's going to happen in our tent - there are 5 of us, Les Bensimon, Dick Rouleston, Clyde Harley, Tommy Hulse & myself, & the last 3 of us will have to do all the work if we want it done - I know all about Les from the Garba Tula days - he simply can't or won't use himself - I'm surprised he even bothers to take off his pants for a shit & I think Dick just about beats him at his own game.

If it wasn't for the two of them I reckon our tent would be the neatest & best rigged out in camp, but they just won't bother - yes, it will be Tommy & myself, & maybe Clyde will give a hand, but then he still has a broken thumb as a result of falling down the stairs of Rosettes in a drunken stupor one night.

The old Mediterranean has been playing us merry hell with the fellows around here lately since the big waves have been in - one fellows eardrum broken as a result of a wave whacking him alongside his coconut, one drowned, & yesterday Brian Brain had his shoulder dislocated & his collarbone cracked - wave bashed him down on the beach. And one would never think it of the usually placid old Med.

This inactivity is getting on our nerves- we haven't done a raid for ever so long now, & it's not good for us. However there is a likelihood of us doing some jobs over the sea next, as H.Q. has asked us whether we could take 250 lb Semi Armour-piercing [*] & Anti Submarine bombs, & it was my job to get hold of the bombs & try them on the racks. We can take 250 S.A.P. & 100 lb A.S. as our bombay is now, & we can take 500 S.A.P. & 250 A.S. if we take out the centre guides of the bombay.

[*] S.A.P.

<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C285410>



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

REL23085

Picture source <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/REL23085/screen/3831753.JPG>

250 lb S.A.P. bomb



Picture Source https://airandground.org/_Media/100-lb-454-kg-anti-submarin_med_hr.jpeg

Our Adjutant Captain “Tommy” Thomson has just got his Majority & we have been having a bit of a party in the mess as a result - he's a damn fine fellow, & the promotion has been a very popular one in the Squadron.

There has been a hell of a shitstorm again today but our tent is pretty well fixed & very little dust seems to be getting in if we close it up. I am off to Alex tomorrow morning & coming out in the afternoon with the batch of fellows who are coming back from leave - I got permission as I am not in a crew now that the skipper is on leave, & it will give me an hour or two in Alex to do a bit of shopping to send presents back to the rest of the folks back in Gawd’s Country.

18 July [1941]

Went into Alex yesterday morning & did a bit of a hurried shopping, spent a fiver on curios & presents for friends in the Union - that just about disposes of the lot now. While there we were entertained in the Hotel Cecil by a Gippie conjurer with some very good card, coin & general palming tricks - a couple of chickens called Abyssinia, McGregor, Mackenzie etc figured in most of them - he was really good, but the item that got the most applause was the last one just before he left. He asked Dick & myself each to put a cigarette in our hands, hold our hands together, & then asked us if we would like to see the cigarettes disappear to which we replied "*Yes sure*"

He then waved his little stick over them, said *Killie Killie Kalie*, counted *one - two - three*, & at "*three*" Dick & myself had to say together "*cigarettes go away*". When we had said this he calmly took the cigarettes out of our hands, said "*Thank you very much gentlemen*" & with a broad smile walked off - he must make a lot of money a day, but he really is worth it.

Yesterday afternoon late Alexander was suddenly taken very ill - his one lung collapsed after some very strenuous swimming earlier on, & he was rushed off next door to the hospital - he is much better this evening but how serious it is the docs can't decide yet.

The Skipper & Tommy Pope got back this evening- the Skipper's Majority is also officially through now [AIR p63], & there is a very subdued party going on in the mess, due to the presence of a D.R. *predekant* [*] chappie who rolled up this morning too. He caught me nicely, I didn't know he was a Padre as he was in uniform & I didn't notice the cross, & I was yarning away next to him in Afrikaans, using my usual expressions. When I had finished he came up to me & said "*Neef ek hoor jy praat baie glad Afrikaans, mag ek verneem wat voer jou naam?*" & when I told him he gave me his & added he was a bloody Dominie - the boys all had the laugh on me when we got outside.

[*] predekant = parson (Afrikaans)

Long bit = Nephew I hear you speaking very fluent Afrikaans, may I ask what your name is.

Dominie = pastor

When he had finished his supper he walked round the mess looking closely at all the beautiful pictures of nudes we had hanging all round, & next to the bar counter some very candid closeups of some of the more unsuspecting among us who have been caught in the nude down on the beach. He had a damn good look at all the reclining female nudes, & when you have finished the O.C. asked him what he thought of our art gallery. "*Oh, very nice!*" he replied "*but you must bear in mind that I looked at them from an Aesthetic point of view.*"

None of us have gone on dispersal tonight. I think it's at an end now. In any case the Jerries & Itais seem to have stopped the moonlight serenading with the theme song of "*Oh how I miss you tonight.*"

24 July [1941]

The lull was at last broken yesterday - the Med Fleet is or was out of harbour, steaming from Alex towards Malta way, escorted by fighters all the way, & it was the duty of 24 squadron to navigate the various fighter squadrons out to the Fleet & lead back the squadron that was being relieved. Different planes of our squadron did this continuously for about from about 11 in the morning till about 6 in the evening, when a full patrol of Martin's (6) went out to do double patrol. This patrol was led by Major Martin who has now at last gone on operation after lots of talk as to what he was going to do. Evidently there was a bit of a mix-up out there during his patrol as they were mistaken for enemy a/c & the Hurricanes gave them the works - luckily missing them.

We (Major Jones & crew) led No. 2 (SA) Fighter Squadron out & although we got over the Fleet dead on time we could not find the formation we had to lead back, so after flying over the Fleet for 1/4 of an hour we came back. The Fleet was a grand sight - 20 boats in wide formation - 2 battleships in

the centre. What is in the air nobody of course knows - there is a rumour that it is only a blind to draw the enemy dive-bombers away from an important convoy on its way from Britain to Gibraltar, while others seem to reckon they are out looking for the Itai fleet.

We spent the morning with No.2 Fighter - they are a damn fine crowd of fellows, & I like their O.C. Major Truter very much - he seems a very capable man too - personally interested in his men & things generally. They are flying Tomahawks [*] & are very satisfied with them.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curtiss_P-40_Warhawk



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Curtiss_P-40_Warhawk#/media/File:Curtiss_P-40_Warhawk_USAF.JPG

Very informative video with extensive Wester Desert content.

In particular it discusses the poor reputation of the P-40 compared to the "(they) are very satisfied with them" comment by Bull. In 11 Dec aft. post he writes about Tommahawks "it's what they are simply praying for - their complaint is that the Jerries lately won't come down & mix it with them."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyqLC0hoIPU>

Part 2 of the video. Not much about the Western Desert.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D22azJabJ04>

None of our machines found the fighters they were to lead back - they all seem to have gone back before their time was up & there was a hell of a spin late in the afternoon when frantic messages came through that two Grumman Martlets, [*] the American F.A.A. machines, had come down in the sea

through lack of petrol & two of our machines took off with dinghies to drop for them, but they could not locate them. Later transpired that they had been sent out after some enemy a/c by the Fleet, thus running out of petrol.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grumman_F4F_Wildcat#Royal_Navy_Martlets



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grumman_F4F_Wildcat#/media/File:F4F-3_new_pitot_tube_of_later_model.jpg

About 10:00 last night the 6 machines that had been on the last patrol came back, & all landed safely except for Jim Williams, he came in once, very badly, took his engines & made another circuit & seemed to be coming for the flarepath low down when he suddenly disappeared. We rushed out in the dark to look for the plane, & located at about 3 miles beyond the flarepath completely written off - Jim had a very nasty gash in the head, & Les had one arm broken & a lot of cuts about the body, & one of the gunners had hurt his back - how seriously we don't know. They were taken to hospital before I could see them & I haven't been able to see them today as I am on duty - Aerodrome Control Officer. It seems as though Jim's artificial horizon conked in, & what with all the dust of the other planes which had landed before him he had no idea how high he was off the ground.

This morning we had a very interesting lecture by Brigadier Gatehouse, an expert on tank warfare & actually in charge of the 9 tanks in the last tank battle when we bombed at Sidi Omar. He explained the whole push to us in detail - showing us what they had planned, what actually happened, why it happened etc.

It appears that what prevented things going to plan were the big guns on Hellfire pass, the fact that the infantry who were to occupy the places captured by the tanks were too far back, & that the artillery got stuck in heavy sand & most of the battle was fought without any artillery at all or very little.

He says the big tank vs tank battle they had hoped never materialised - there were many minor skirmishes between small detachment of tanks tho' & why we lost so many tanks was because when the tracks were broken they had to keep on fighting as stationary pillboxes as the infantry were behind schedule & couldn't take over so that the tanks could be withdrawn for repairs, & when eventually the retreat took place they had to be left there & destroyed as much as could be done.

A hell of a lot of damage was done to the Jerry tanks, & actually both forces commenced withdrawing at about the same time, but the Jerries were the first to recover & push forward again thus taking back all of the territory we had gained in 3 days. There were two very successful bayonet charges too, one at night & one in daytime, both taking their objectives. If the wireless intercom hadn't failed at the critical moment when the Jerries were seen to be retreating & this news could have been passed back to H.Q. we would have pushed in hard after the retreating Jerries & won the day. However -

We lost 80 tanks & the Jerries 92, & a hell of a lot of infantry.

The attack by 24 squadron is described above on June 24

12 Squadron were moved out into the desert day before yesterday & are at present stationed at Fuka Satellite, but are moving down to El Daba very soon. We will soon have lots of Glen Martins out here, but all of them U.S. as we hear there are no more tailwheels to be had - only those on the planes now - the tail wheel is definitely the weak spot of the G.M. - our squadron have gone through a hell of a lot - taxiing at about 5 mph on level ground .

Later:- Group Captain Guest of 204 Group has phoned us congratulating 24 Squadron on yesterday's show.

Pip, Llama & Brinkie have just come back from seeing Les in hospital, they say Les is very cheerful & full of beans & is looking forward to a trip to Palestine when he comes out of hospital. However Les has a few stitches up his arse where the bombsight cut it open.

Les has concocted his own version of "*The Gallant young Airman lay dying*" - this is his version:

*"Take the bombsight out of my arsehole,
The Verey lights out of my brain
The control column out of my kidneys
& assemble the cockpit again."*

26 July [1941]

Jim is up & about with a hell of a big bandage around his head, but Barry & Wilkinson (one of the gunners) aren't so lucky - Wilkie will have to remain flat on his back for a few months as one of the links are the spinal column is cracked. Les is feeling very irritable & restless on account of his bruises & arm. They are sending him down to base hospital tomorrow.

We had another very interesting lecture & demonstration by an Intelligence Officer - one of those blokes who examines every Jerry or Itai prisoner - & he told us all the tricks of the trade which we have to look out for in case we are taken prisoner - he also showed us a few very ingenious articles which I think I had better not even mention in this record .

I see in a newspaper cutting sent up from the Union that Adolph's baby is having Winston Churchill as his Godfather- I guess the old people will be Bucked at that. [*]

[*] My uncle said it was the bravest thing he ever did – ask Churchill to be Godfather. Churchill accepted.

Dick & myself started digging in the tent this morning, but was stopped by a Captain Lippiat who thought he would like the site I chose, so this afternoon I picked another & probably handier site right near the entrance of a big deep funkhole & picked away for about an hour - I now have a handful of lovely blisters in all stages ranging from small ones just beginning, on to lovely watery cushions & ending with broken ones which are damn sore.

Captain Freon our Intelligence Officer left for the Union this morning, & so help me Bob, he was heartsore, tears in his eyes - there must be something good in us after all.

Friday 1st August [1941]

Nothing has been happening here, life has been damn monotonous lately - everyone is damn browned off & ready to jump down everybody else's throat, & then when eventually a job does come our way, & we get everything organised it gets cancelled at the last minute.

We were to go & bomb the shipping in Suda Bay on Crete tomorrow morning, & got everything shipshape this afternoon - we were going to use the new long delay fuses from 36 hours to 144 hours delay, with the idea of messing up the salvage work on the boats in Suda Bay, but all of a sudden the show gets called off this evening. No reason is given, but we presume that it is for political reasons back home.

Anyway, it has buggered things nicely for me, as I had arranged for leave as from tomorrow afternoon & was going over to Palestine with Pip & Jerry, & was pretty sure of my case as our machine 1651 has only a few more hours to go for her 60 hr. inspection & was going down to base after the Suda Bay show - now however she will have to go on the Tobruk raid against the Jerries big guns which is scheduled for Sunday, & this means I won't be able to go along with Pip & Jerry - damn those O.B.s [*] in the Union .

[*] O.B.s = *Ossewabrandwag* = rightwing group opposing the war.
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ossewabrandwag>

We have been doing no flying at all lately as a squadron - it's been pretty terrible loafing about camp here. Our plane went up the other day on a Radio Test in conjunction with the heavy 9 (?) tanks - it went off quite well up to about 50 miles I recon, & it looks as tho' we may work in conjunction with the tanks on their next push. However before a thing like that happens the Radio section will have to pull their fingers & get the sets working properly.

A few days ago it was suddenly decided to give a "*Braaivleis Aand*" [*] so Pietersen was sent out to shoot a few gazelle & came back with 6. We invited representatives from about 7 squadrons in the neighborhood, 12, 1, 2 S.A.A.F & 39 & a few other R.A.F squadrons. It was a hell of party - huge chunks of half raw venison, lots of beer & whiskey, plenty of yarns, & some good songs to the accompaniment of 12 squadrons orchestra. By the way, Pikkie Rautenbach was playing the guitar, & I was damn pleased to see him again.

[*] braaivleis aand = bar-b-que evening.
AIR p66 Pietersen is spelled Peterson. Bull has carefully corrected his journal to have it always spelled Pietersen throughout the journal.

I was a bit under the weather when I eventually got to bed, & when I got out of bed in the morning I had a drink of water, so help me Bob! I got drunk all over again, & was pretty well U.S. all that day, very shaky, & whenever I moved my position suddenly the chunks of raw venison in my guts would knock together with a dull thud.

In spite of all the blackout regulations we had a huge fire going outside the mess & were all seated around it. We were so damn hungry that we didn't wait for the wood to burn down to embers & do the meat on the embers, no, we got stuck in right away & singed the outside edges in the flames, but it was very nice while the party lasted, it was only the following day which was a bit of a bugger.

Les has been sent down to Alex or Helio or somewhere to a base hospital, & I reckon he'll be away for at least a month or so. Clyde Harley is back from leave with his moustache shaved off - some female in Alex must have objected to it, & I don't blame her - Now we will miss old Clyde's effort to get his moustache to point in some general direction, they used to stand out like the nails in a weaning halter for a calf.

Dick has been transferred back to Shandur to join 21 Squadron who are now there but he doesn't like the idea at all, & says he is going to find out what is behind the move, & if there isn't a good & sufficient reason then he's going to try & get back to us. We are damn short of Pilots & Observers now as George Francey is grounded with sinus too, only he has the real thing & not the kind the fellows have been swinging lately.

August 8 [1941]

On Sunday morning we went on the raid on the enemy big guns near Tobruk with 9 machines, Major Martin also going. The prevailing winds around here are very consistent from 290° - 350° but on Sunday the wind was given from due North to 30° with the result that we all decided to use the one from 360°. We bombed from 8000', but missed to the west by 50 yards. It was very consistent bombing tho', as all our bombs fell in one stick, & if we had used a 30° wind we would have hit the guns. However, a miss is as good as a mile except that the 36 bombs all exploding 50 yards away must of shaken the gun crews, & the few odd tons of shrapnel flying about must have done some damage. [*]

[*] AIR p67 has for 3 August:

"Machines left at 06.30 hrs for Target EAST of Tobruk. & some wonderful (Pattern) Bombing was done Unfortunately we missed the target by 100yds."



Picture source:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WesternDesertBattle_Area1941_en.svg



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Desert_campaign#/media/File:AfricaMap3.jpg

Fuka Main is just off the map on the right. Tobruk was encircled by the Germans. Sidi Omar is shown. The original Wiki map is much clearer & you can zoom it.

From there we flew over Sidi Omar where we dropped pamphlets on the Itais. When we landed here we found some press photographers & war correspondents who took photos of us as a group after which we adjourned to the pub & had a couple of spots & yarns, when all of a sudden one of the photographer Johnnies just about grabs hold of me by the scruff of the neck & hauls me outside for a snap. He explained that his speciality was “Types”, so there I was facing the blinking camera with the fellows all pulling my leg. I've been called many things before, but a “type” is a new one on me. However he didn't qualify it as “low” or otherwise.

I was lucky to get a lift in a Lysander [*] within 2 hours of landing here. My intention was to try & catch another plane at Helio which could take me out to Palestine so that I could catch up with Pip & Jerry there, but I could find no convenient plane, so I went in to Cairo where I met Dick Roulston who was having a roaring time. The two of us took out two S.A. nurses that night Willie & Wee Willie & spent a very pleasant evening dancing & yarning.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westland_Lysander



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westland_Lysander#/media/File:Lysander_5_Aug_2012_a.jpg

Next morning I caught the diesel train to Alexandria where I joined up with Pip & Jerry, they hadn't gone to Palestine after all as Jerry was running true to style & had met a couple of girls.

Had two good nights there, one with Pip in a cabaret, where at the cost of about £3 apiece we got one of the cabaret girls so sozzled that she passed out, but it was good fun even tho' the other one was very dumb.

We went & saw Pompey's Pillar & the Catacombs. They really are a work of art & marvellous engineering & all that, but candidly the whole issue left me cold. We got back here last night broke as usual.

The first news on getting here was that we have been doing a few night raids on Derna, & that Clarkie failed to return from one of them. Jack Ovenstone (Jek) came back from one of these raids, dropped his machine from about 20 feet in a night landing, he had 3 hang-ups, & his undercart & the bombs were strewn all over the drome. This brings Jek's total up to 2 & the total of the squadron up to 18 - not bad going at 35 thousand a time.

Another bit of news is that Brian Brain has left for the Union & of all things he has been put in charge of 50 evacuee women - he'll be a complete wreck when he gets down there.

This morning Bruce Anderson & two more broadcast war correspondent rolled up here - it appears that this week is the 21st birthday of the S.A.A.F., & Adolf broadcasted from Daventry a few days ago congratulating us on our majority. These fellows got hold of a story that a brother of Adolph's

was here, so they got onto me & wanted me to broadcast too, & eventually after a few drinks they got me so far as to say I would give it a bang.

They wrote out my script for me, & I made a few suggestions, & it was typed out & all I had to do was put it across onto a record from which it is relayed to the BBC. I fortified myself with a couple more drinks & off we went. After a few words I began to stutter & fumble for words, came to a halt, & finally let out an "*Oh Christ*" so it all had to be done over again.

Next the fellows wanted someone to broadcast in Afrikaans, & I had great pleasure in leading Brinkie & Danie Jakobs to the slaughter. They put over a very nice show between the two of them.

This morning we had a very interesting talk by Flight Lieutenant Dougan-Smith, a bomber pilot just out from England. He told us all about the low-level attack on shipping, you fly along at about 5-10 foot off the deck & pull up just in time to clear the ship, dropping your bombs just before & during the pull up - the bombs fused 12 seconds delay. This method has been used overseas for months & months with marked success & very little loss to our planes, but it is something quite new out here - H.Q.M.E. hadn't heard of it before & he has been sent around to explain the tactics to us.

He also told a few of us privately that he was very disgusted with what he saw & heard at H.Q.M.E., but he assures us that somebody new is in charge of the Bomber Command now & everybody's arse is being booted into shape & he reckons from now on things will be run more efficiently & squadrons will operate as such.

This new low level attack really sounds good, & we are all looking forward to it - that is all except Pietersen who as usual is finding a lot of faults in it - even trying to tell the Flight Lieutenant he doesn't know what he's talking about.

August 10 [1941]

Yesterday afternoon late there was a recce out to sea to look for an enemy tanker supposed to be on its way to Bardia [*], & as Major Jones was away at Bagush, I went along with Jek Ovenstone. We went out to within about 50 miles from Crete, but saw nothing except the peaceful looking island. We got back after dark, & Jek made a perfect night landing & is feeling very bucked at having broken his hoodoo.

[*] Bardia shown on map posted higher up. Crete & Bardia shown on map posted for May 28.



Bardia from Google Earth

This morning the tanker was reported in Bardia harbour & 4 machines were ordered to go along & do a low level attack on it. [Tucker p15] Much to "A" Flights disgust "B" Flight was given the job & off they went. Miles & Alex, Jerry & Pip, Danie & Brinkie, Clyde & George. [*]

[*] The names are pilot & observer.

They came back & reported the most thrilling raid of their lives. They roared into the harbour 5 ft. off the deck clocking about 220 - the harbour is very small, surrounded by 400 ft cliffs, & the 4 planes could only just get in together. They found no boat in the harbour, so swept on right over the narrow waterfront where they saw men running in every direction. Their front & rear guns were blazing away, & they dropped the bombs among the buildings & M.T., pulling out only just in time to clear the cliffs by inches. They caught everybody completely by surprise, but nonetheless the guns opened up on them & Clyde came back with a hole the size of a teatray in his rudder & another as big in his starboard wing. One of Pip's bombs was seen to enter the side of one building, go right through it & enter the next. They had hardly got away when the whole issue went off together (12 sec delay). The whole show was over in under 20 seconds & everything was just one blur of excitement. [AIR p69]

When they got back & put in their report I had to stand by & listen to it all, enjoying the excitement secondhand & feeling very very envious. [*]

[*] Tucker p15 *"On 10th August a particularly gallant attack was carried out on Bardia by three Marylands led by Lieut. Miles Barnby. Orders were to get a tanker which was reported to be in the harbour. The defences were strong especially on the two headlands at the narrow entrance to the harbour. Of necessity the formation had to attack at low level from the sea and pass below the strong crossfire from both headlands. The tanker was not there, but in a low level attack with all guns blazing the Marylands bombed the warehouses and did considerable damage to enemy equipment and troops. Zeesen referred to the event next day as the "massacare of Bardia" and went on to inform the Squadron that it was known and would be wiped out."*

August 13 [1941]

This tanker is causing a hell of a lot of flapping, as its whereabouts has been reported & denied half a dozen times within the last 3 days, & in the meantime there has been a submarine story thrown in too. This sub is just as elusive as the tanker - we sent out 3 planes after it yesterday, but they couldn't locate it. [AIR p69]

Yesterday afternoon late the tanker was reported around the point at Ras el Milh, & we were sitting in the ops room waiting for the final order to go after it when word came through that it was a wreck. Then again this morning at 5 I was hauled out of bed on immediate standby for the sub which is reported in Bardia harbour, but it was called off again & we will be on immediate standby this afternoon if the sub has definitely been proved to be there - I wish they would make up their minds as to whether this is a tanker and/or a sub.

[*] Ras el Milh cape is not marked on the map. It is the cape just to the north west of the Bardia harbour.

Day before yesterday we witnessed & nasty accident here, a Tomahawk shot up the camp, & pulled out into a climbing slow roll - he skidded along upside down at 200 feet, power stalled, spun, came out of the spin at about 100 ft & went straight into the deck in a burst of flame.

Thommy saw everything happen, & looked very down as he said it was sure to be his cousin Mac McConnell from No. 2 Fighter who was here visiting him the previous afternoon.

The crash happened about a mile from camp & by the time the lorries & fire engines & ambulances etc got there it was much too late to - in any case even if the plane didn't catch alight nothing could have been done as Mac's head (it turned out to be Mac) was cut clean off his body.

Things have been very quiet of a night lately, we've had only two raids this last moon, & as usual the bombs were dropped to hell & gone out in the desert. Our old donkey pal the predictor has lost touch with disuse & hasn't been operating at all during the raids.

17 August [1941]

News has come through that Captain du Toit D.F.C., Captain Miles Barnby, Danie Jakobs & Major Martin are going back to the Union, & that Major Jimmy Durrant will take over the squadron. It is damn good news about a new O.C. as Jimmy Durrant is accepted all over as being far & away the best Squadron O.C. we have, & he more than proved himself in good old 40 A.C. However Major Martin really has got things going since he is been out here in the desert with us & we will miss him when he leaves, especially if the new O.C. has to tighten things up as he most probably will.

Lately it has been more or less accepted theory that if Major Martin left the squadron Major Jones would be our next O.C., & a damn fine O.C. he would make too, but then that would mean I would lose Major Jones as a pilot whereas now I retain a splitarse pilot, a damn fine Flight Commander & topnotch O.C.

A few days ago two new pilots arrived for us, Lieutenant Richie Tennant, the bloke who shot up the race meeting down in Kenya a little while ago with a Glenn Martin & was given 6 months Orderly Officer for it, but after about a month they pushed him off & here he is. The other one was Captain Sephton who came into our tent, but he only lasted 2 days. He tried to compete with Clyde & myself after a supper consisting largely of a Heynes' Baked Beans, but he was hopelessly outfarted altho' he did, or rather overdid - his best with the result that he has had to be sent down to hospital for an operation (rupture).

Tommy & Clyde who have been paying No. 1 Fighter a visit tell us that No 1 have been told by Group that 24 is far & away the best bomber squadron in the Middle East. Needless to say we are very bucked to hear it. [*] There is another development which seems to back up this statement - Group has decided that we will no longer operate as a pure & simple bomber squadron. We are being turned into an Army Striking Force - kind of Co-Op squadron, only we won't do much in the line of spotting etc. our job will be to backup our tanks & armoured cars & bomb the enemy who, of course, will be moving about & may be only a matter of a few hundred yards from her own A.F.Vs. Altho' it is a hell of a honour to be picked for the job it's going to mean ever so much more work, & more accurate work for us observers. It will also mean a lot of preliminary practice in cooperating with our tanks & learning to distinguish from the air between the enemy & our own tanks, & needless to say we won't be able to hover overhead & make up our minds - we will have to pull finger or we'll be shot out of the sky. In this respect we are lucky to be getting Maj. Durrant with all his Army Co-Op experience in Abyssinia.

[*] I want to comment on this. When doing pattern bombing – which was usually the case, the observer of the leading plane of a Flight is the bomb aimer for the flight. When he lets his bombs go the others in the Flight let theirs go. Captain Jones was usually the leader of one of the Flights so the accuracy of that flight's bombing was determined by Bull.

The other observers were Les Gill, Herby Raw, Monty Symons, Brinkie, Ted & Pip. Plus Pietersen. So this reputation of 24 Squadron depended critically on the observers to get the Flights to the target & bomb accurately. Bull was very proud of their reputation (to which he had contributed a lot) and detested what Pietersen was doing to that reputation.

Bill Draper our Intelligence Officer has told me another Oliver Carey yarn, concerning the popular & wayward Lt. Carey of 40 A.C. It happened in Mogadishu when 40 A/C were there & the local brothel was working overtime.

Carey & a pal decided to “bomb” the brothel one night. So they got together & formed their plan of action, the only stage props being an Itai Fiat motor car they had looted, 3 or 4 hand grenades, & the klaxon hooter of said Fiat. Carey went into the brothel where we hung around talking to Madam, a couple of the for-the-moment unoccupied whores & the Italian policemen on duty there, while his pal was outside around the corner in the car which was parked in the dark.

All of the sudden a drone was heard, & Carey jumped up, put his hand to his ear, listened intently & in a hushed stage whisper said “Avion!”. The prostitutes stopped their jabbering, listened, & then said “No”, or the Italian equivalent. (The revving up with the Fiat wasn't very realistic at all.) But Carey was very emphatic about it, & after all, being a pilot he should know what an aero engine sounds like. Madam by this time had retired for the night so she wasn't there to reassure them.

However, when a few minutes later the mournful note of the klaxon rent the quiet night & Carey became noticeably agitated they (the whores) became quite nervous even though they realised that the Air Raid siren didn't have quite the same note as usual, but Hell ! when a moment later they heard bombs explode a little way off there was pandemonium! *Kaalgat* [*] prostitutes came rushing out of closed rooms followed by equally nude soldiers wondering what it was all about, everyone made a bunk for the front door, including the Itai policeman & Madam in a flowing nightdress, & Carey was hopping about inside telling everybody to get out & into the public shelter as they were & not to worry about minor details such as clothes & generally causing a hell of a panic.

[*] *kaalgat* = colloquial Afrikaans for naked

Madam was one of the last outside when she remembered she had left her days takings behind, so she had to battle her way back through the door, made a rush for her room, scooped the money into the lap of the nightdress & out she ran, holding a nightdress well up so as not to spill any of her precious hard earned money, & not worrying how she was exhibiting her gaping old money box. She was in such a hell of a hurry that she runs slap bang into one of the gate posts & did an Immelman turn, only

forgetting to straighten out at the top, & there she lay on her back, money box gaping open & the money all over the ground, but in no time she was up & about again not worrying about the money at all, & made a dive for the funkhole. There they all were, nude whores, Madam & the Itai bobby all kneeling down in prayer & devoutly crossing themselves the while Oliver Carey & his pal, who by this time had stopped throwing grenades about were rolling about & hugging themselves with laughter.

Our two parachute packers have been asking for some time now to do a jump, so yesterday they were taken up & bailed out & everything went O.K. [Tucker p15 includes a picture of it] Lately we have been doing a lot of lowlevel practicing & it's great fun, but with all the shooting up of the camp when coming home, sometimes below the level of the tents something is very likely to happen soon, & I would hate to be in the nose of the Maryland that rams the mess & piles up among the tents.

A few days ago we had a Padre spending the day here he was a damn fine type of Padre, & must get on very well with his men. One of the yarns he told us was about one of the fellows in his brigade, who has been away from home for 16 months now & his wife has just written him to say she's expecting a baby soon, & the poor fool is as pleased as punch at the idea of becoming a proud father one of these days. He must have a keyman for a neighbour.

23 Aug [1941]

On the 19th we were sent out to look for the phantom tanker again which this time was supposed to have been seen just off Crete making for Derna [*]. We went in two pairs of two, Richie Tennant going along with us. We refuelled at Sidi Barrani [*] & set off, bombed up with 12 sec delays, but needless to say there was no tanker anywhere near where it was reported to be, & we turned back in full sight of Crete. On coming back Major Jones & myself decided that we weren't going to bring our bombs back, so we turned off between Gambut [*] & Ras el Milh, right on the deck, & caught them napping hopelessly. We gave them the works with front & rear guns & I dropped my bombs & two salvos among tents & M.T. Richie who was flying slightly behind & to one side of us saw one of my bombs hit the ground, ricochet off minus its tail, bounce off the ground again & finally land in among a cluster of tents & M.T. & go off with a hell of a bang. It was all very thrilling & the front gunning was excellent, it was fine watching Major Jones' incendiary going through lorries, tents & the crashed Wimpey [*] which they were busy salvaging. Major Jones shooting was first class. We landed with a feeling that we had done something to warrant the trip in spite of not finding the tanker. [Tucker p20 diary entry] I wonder how much blinking petrol & time we have wasted looking for this blasted tanker. Group should check up on the recce people who report these nonexistent tankers lately .

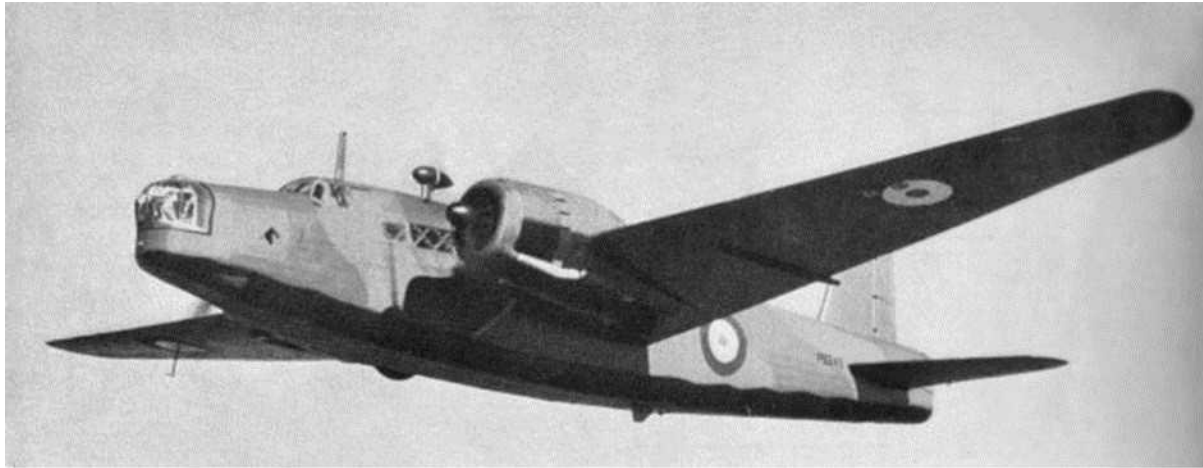
[*]

Derna, Sidi Barrani, Gambut are shown on the map in Aug 8 post. Ras el Milh is not shown. It is the cape just to the north-west of the Bardia harbour.

Gambut = Kambut <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kambut>

Wimpey = Vickers Wellington

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_Wellington



[*] Wimpie = https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_Wellington

Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_Wellington#/media/File:Vickers_Wellington_Mk2.jpg

On Tuesday 6 new Commissioned observers arrived from the Union. They seem a decent lot. Among them is George Bennett the Afrikander breeder from Adelaide whom I have so often seen at shows, & the two of us have some good yarns about the good old show days in Civvy life. The next day the makeshift Sergeant observers left on their way back to the Union.

That afternoon there was a big raid on which Major Martin was leading, & as Major Jones wasn't going & Jek was & his sergeant observer had left, I managed to worm my way in with him. It was an important raid on a heavy concentration of tanks near Gambut, & to make things doubly sure Major Martin with Pietersen as his observer did a recco of the target that morning. They came back & told us how distinctly the target could be seen from 18,000', so it should be easy meat from 8,000', the height from which we had decided to bomb.

We set off in a hell of a big formation (for these parts) 9 from 24 & 12 from 12, all Marylands & at Sidi Barrani we picked up 200 Squadron (Tomahawks) [*] for escort. When we circled Sidi Barrani the Tomahawks took off, & what a sight it was, they took off 9 at a time, & when they were 100 feet off the deck they were in formation & the next batch took off. From then on there was nothing to worry about on the raid, as the leading bombardier had seen the target that very morning, we were a close formation of 18 good bombers, we had ample fighter protection of the very best, & were all freshly impressed with a businesslike performance of said fighters. We had cameras installed to take photos of the damage we were going to do to the tanks so sure were we of our case.

[*] Tomahawk (British name) = Warhawk (American name) = Curtiss P-40

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKdnMZCA-9k>

This video discusses that although the Merlin engine was used the Allison engine was preferred. The Allison was pretty much on a par with the RR Merlin below 12 000 feet. As you will have noticed 24 squadron (& all other aircraft in the Western Desert) was operating between 3 000 & 9 000 feet most of the time. This raid was at 8 000 feet.

The Americans had the P-38 Lightning, P-47 Thunderbolt & P-51 Mustang as high altitude fighters. They also needed as many Merlins for the Mustangs & to send to the UK for use in Spitfire, Hurricane, Lancaster & Mosquito. Besides that it simplified things greatly if all P-40s had the same engine. So using the P-40 where low altitude fighters were needed is what the Americans chose to do.

P-40 was also much used in Russia where again the requirement was for a low altitude fighter. They were very satisfied with the P-40. They actually preferred the P-39 Bell Aircobra. Another plane with a poor reputation because of its poor performance above 17 000 feet yet perfectly suited for the Russian front.

But what happens?!! Pietersen turns into the coast when we get opposite the target, & makes a run for the edge of the target & lets his bombs go before he even crosses the coast - at least 5 to 10 seconds before he should have. Seeing that it was pattern bombing we all had to bomb on him, but when I saw his bombs go I simply couldn't believe my eyes, but as I hadn't even bothered to put any settings on my sight I thought my judgement must be at fault & pressed the tit about 2 seconds later & then watched where our bombs were going - as I thought about half of 24 squadron's bombs fell in the sea, & the rest on the beach & the sand dunes on the edge of the beach, but not a single one burst among the A.F.Vs or tanks. Luckily 12 Squadron bombed on their own & did much better work, half their bombs are said to have burst in among the tanks.

When we landed & went into the Operations room to give our reports we were all very disgusted with the whole show - that is to say, all except the pilots you couldn't see where the bombs had burst, & Pietersen who emphatically stated that he had seen at least one full stick of bombs of the leading formation of 3 machines bursting in among the tents & tanks, & when he realised that all the other reports contradicted him he had the cheek to say that the camera would bear him out. Naturally when the films were developed they did no such thing. Even then Pietersen hadn't the sense to back down & admit that he had put up a very poor show. Instead of that he blustered & made a lot of wild statements & excuses.

When Major Martin saw the photos he was very very disappointed, for as he said it was the last raid he would lead us on. Pietersen's name now stinks with him too, especially as he had had the whole crew's kit moved from the plane in which they had done the recce in the morning to one which he (Pietersen) knew was the best in the squadron & had a bombsight which he himself had tested & aligned. In a way it serves Major Martin right as it has taken him a hell of a long time to catch the man out. The Major & Captain du Toit have been the only two to be taken in by Pietersen's bullshit - 6 months of it. [*]

[*] Tucker p20 diary entry "20 Aug. Major C.E. Martin and crew, during a recce flight over a concentration of enemy tanks and A.E.Vs about 50 miles west of Bardia, attacked this target. Their bombs started two fires. Later a formation of nine Marylands was directed to the area, but their bombs dropped into the sea."

This raid has done 24 Squadron a hell of a lot of harm & it will take us at least 3 or 4 good raids to get back our good name. Not only does it go down on record, but 12 Squadron & the Fighter Squadron saw it all. 12 Squadron have now discarded the Mrk 10 bombsight & use the Mrk 9, [*] & not only will they think we are up to shit, but they will point it out as proving that the Mrk 10 is no good. Probably Group have now changed their minds about us being the best bomber squadron in the M.E. & that just because of the bullshiting, bombastic, bumptious, brainless bastard.

[*] Mk. IX bombsight
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_Setting_Bomb_Sight



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Course_Setting_Bomb_Sight#/media/File:Course_Setting_Bomb_Sight_Mk._IXA_stowed.jpg

Day before yesterday we went out on another raid, we went in pairs & had to bomb all the dromes between Tobruk & Bardia, 12 Squadron were out on the same job & the fighters were in the neighbourhood escorting boats to Tobruk. The idea was that the Jerries knew about the boats & were massing their fighters & dive bombers on these dromes to attack the boats.

Major Jones & Hollenbach went to Capuzzo North [*] & some other drome just south of Bardia which incidentally wasn't there - anyway we couldn't find it at all. Just this side of Sidi Birrani we passed the convoy of boats escorted by Hurricanes - by this time we were at 18 000' & 5 minutes later we flew over the formation of 18 fighters flying in the line from Sollum to the fleet. These subsequently turned out to be the Jerry fighters going out to the fleet, where they incidentally got well & truly buggered up by the Hurricanes of No. 1 South Africans. 4 were shot down, 2 probables, & 2 shot up, but unfortunately we lost a damn good man in the engagement which is said to have lasted half an hour - Major Truter who was late in getting out to the fleet was attacked by a couple of 109s & was shot down before he could join up with the rest. However the odds 18 to 10 it is not bad at all.

[*] Capuzzo is marked on the map on entry of Aug 8
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Capuzzo

Luckily when we flew over the 18 fighters they were about 8,000' below us so even if they had seen us we were too high for them to attack successfully. But a minute or two later Basil v.d. Berg our top gunner for that trip reported 6 twin engined planes following us in the distance, & even though he said they may be Glen Martins we couldn't understand it as we knew all the Glen Martins were operating in pairs. However, the ruddy sky seemed alive with a/c, & we couldn't make out whether they were friendly or enemy, & every now & then v.d. Berg would report one or two new ones, & we could see a hell of a cloud of dust over Gambut aerodrome which showed that the Gambut Jerries had taken off. The only 2 a/c we were sure of were Captain Bateman & Lennie Leizergang who were flying a little way off on our right as they had to attack N/Finistair & another drome north of Bardia at the same time as we did ours.

We went in & made the mistake of attacking West into the sun, & although you could see very distinctly vertically down & behind, you couldn't see plainly at any angle forward towards the sun, & I can't do otherwise than give that as the excuse for not picking up the target until we were just about

vertically over it & too late to give enough directions - anyhow I missed - not by much, but still a miss is as good as a mile. However, it has taught me a lesson - “never bomb into the sun if you haven't a very distinct target which stands out like a dog's balls”. What I should have done when I saw that I couldn't make sure of the aim was to call it a dummy run & come in again down sun. When we had dropped the bombs & taken the photos, we carried straight on into the sun & gradually turned south & came home over the desert. Incidentally Major Jones reckons this saved our bacon as will be clear when I relate what happened to Captain Bateman & Lennie who were bombing only about 30 miles away at the same time as we did.

They dropped their bombs & turned back immediately the way they had come in & flew towards Sidi Barrani Down Sun, & no sooner had they done this than 6 ME109s dived down on them out of the sun & gave them the works. Wiggle, Captain Bateman's top gunner was put out of action with the first burst, he got about 5 or 6 bullets into him, all up the one side, one shattering his left ankle, & just about one whole side of the bombay [sic] was ripped open with cannon shells, & the plane caught alight in the bomb bay. Captain Bateman told his crew to get their parachutes ready as they were to abandon the plane as soon as they got over land at Sidi Barrani. (they were then 15 miles out to sea) & he put her nose down a bit & opened up & left the Jerries out of range. By this time the intercom had conked in, but when they got over the land Wiggle, who was in great pain bailed out, but his harness caught on the bottom gunsight, & there he was dangling about, unable to do anything. Joubert, the other gunner tried to disentangle him, but in the battle he ripped his own parachute, so eventually he threw Wiggle out guns & all & gathered his own canopy together in his arms & bailed out himself. His parachute took some time to disengage & sort itself out, & when it did jerk open some of the cords were wound round one arm & his shoulder was dislocated. Next to go was Auriel & then Captain Bateman. All made safe landings & were immediately brought in & seen to by the army there. [Tucker p19]

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt_Bf_109



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messerschmitt_Bf_109#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101-662-6659-37,_Flugzeug_Messerschmitt_Me_109.jpg

For completeness I post this about the well known ME 109 (I omitted the Hurricane). But note that by doing a shallow dive the Maryland could out run the ME 109. See below where the Daimler-Benz engine fails chasing the Pratt & Whitney engined Maryland.

Wiggle's wounds were found to be mostly flesh wounds except for the one that had shattered his ankle & his foot has had to be amputated. One bullet went right through the inside of his thigh high up missing bones by fractions. Captain Bateman & Auriel are both with us again & very little the worse for wear but the two gunners are both in hospital next door & will be sent down to one of the base hospitals soon.

In the meantime we've left Lennie Leizergang in close formation with Captain Bateman when things began to happen. He got about 4 cannon shells in his plane, & when he saw what had happened to Captain Bateman's plane & saw no return fire from Wiggle he put his nose down as hard as he could & gave the Glen Martin all he could & kicked on alternate rudder every few seconds. He says the Airspeed indicator went right up to 400 mph & all the other needles such as Boost, revs, Cylinder head temperature etc were well off the clock.

One 109 stuck on his tail but couldn't get within range again. When Lennie straightened out opposite Sidi Barrani he was still clocking 300 mph & kicking on rudder with the 109 going all out behind him, & one of the fellows at Sidi Barrani who saw it says that he saw the 109 begin to spit smoke & then he turned back. Probably over boosted his engine too & the 109 couldn't take it like the Pratt & Whitney's.

When Lennie began to check up on his gauges he noticed that one tank was losing fuel at a hell of a bat & when she was just about empty he feathered the prop & came in here on one engine, still kicking his rudders about. He made a split arse landing on one engine & was rather peeved when he was asked why he hadn't put his crossfeed on for the other tank - They hadn't told him it could be done at the O.T.U. [*] course at Shandur - & he their star pupil. Lennie is a badly shaken fella now.

[*] O.T.U. = Operational Training Course

Captain Lippiat our engineering officer is damn annoyed at losing Captain Bateman's machine as that is the machine with his flame trap on which he has been experimenting, but we are all damn glad as we don't fancy these night stooges at all.

This being a kid brother of famous Ace is up to shit & is getting on my ruddy tits & the next fellow who asks me whether I'm any relation of the famous chappy oversees is going to think I'm being rude when I burst out with "*No I'm not & I don't wanna know the sod or discuss him*". The chaps tell me that my effort came through from Daventry on Wednesday night, so I hate to think of all the insinuating remarks & even gentle leg-pulling in my letters from the Union for the next how long I dread to think, & there's another thing I never thought of. All my sundry creditors & other people who have lulled into the fond hope & belief that by this time some Jerry will have rid the world of me will know I'm still at large - that means I'll have to answer a good many letters that I've just not bothered about up till now, & as it is I find writing up this Gawddamn diary is becoming a full-time job.

Then on top of it all who should roll up at camp today but the photographer who took the snap of Adolf with his dog Peter, & insists that he takes the snap of me with our new mascot Tommy Halse's little dog Tommie, & what the hell can I do about it? I simply had to squat down on my haunches with the pup on my knee & a big pis bucket in the near background & have the ruddy thing taken.



Sailor



Bull

1st September [1941]

Hell! to think of it, it's Spring down in Gawd's Country now, the trees are sprouting and everything and everybody down there is full of the joys of living, life itself is just coming into bud there, and

what are we doing here! - our best to put an end to as many as we can while trying to cling onto our own as long as possible, and strangely enough in spite of all our moaning and grumbling most of us are enjoying it - that's to say not the killing part of it, but the new experiences and kind of - what shall I say, varied monotonous life with the occasional sprinkling of thrills and excitement. With all the monotony of never knowing what may happen in an hour's time altho' you have a shrewd idea that it's going to be very much the same as yesterday same time, and the day before that, and that.

Major Jimmy Durrant arrived here about a week ago and took over the Squadron on Saturday.
[Tucker p15]

On the 25th we went on practice manoeuvres with the armoured cars out in the desert, and the whole show was very successful, we went with three planes, were in the air 5 1/2 minutes after the supposed signal came through and had on board an army Brigadier, Captain and Captain Bartlett our own Liaison officer. We managed to discover which of their ground signals are O.K. and can be seen from the air and which can't, and the Army blokes were able to see for themselves, and we made a few suggestions which should prove very helpful. Major Jones's idea of a big white roller blind which is simply unwound behind A.F.V. will prove very effective I think - he's full of original ideas. After that we flew down to El-Alamein where our 2nd Division are camped and are busy making fortifications. They had asked us to photograph the site of the future fortifications and this we did, but it was a hell of a job getting the proper overlaps on the runs with nothing on the featureless desert to guide you when you got away from the road & railway.

When the prints were made we had a hell of a job putting the mozaic [sic] consisting of over 200 prints together but it came out quite OK [*], there were one or two little patches missing, but as they were in places where there was bugger all but bleak desert we simply plonked in little pieces of our own desert. We finished the first mozaic day before yesterday and yesterday a 2nd Div. Captain came to fetch it and was very pleased with the job. The second mozaic will be completed by tomorrow and will be a 100% better than the first.

[*] In the post for 26 January 1943 (opening post in 05 Advanced Bombing Course) there is this:
"Another thing I learnt in Pretoria from a Major who used to be liason officer to the 2nd Div. was that the only detailed and accurate map they had of the El Alamein Box and line of fortifications when they put up the big stand at El Alamein was the map made from the mozaic Maj. Jones and myself took when the 2nd. Div fortified the place when they first moved into the desert. - It goes to show how important small things can be - at the time we took the whole thing as a bit of a joke."

Richard Tennant and his crew had a narrow squeak a few days ago, they went out into the desert to practice this low-level bombing with live 11 second delay bombs. They attacked a hill only a few feet off the deck and let one bomb go, the bomb hit, bounced up and went clean through the tail end of the fuselage about 2 ft in front of the tail wheel and the root of the tailplane and rudder fin, and missed the control wires by inches. If it had hit any of the wires, or stuck in the fuselage nobody would have known how the accident happened. [Tucker p16]

65 coloureds of the Cape Corps have arrived here, attached to us for general work and batman etc, and we are damn glad to have him - they're streets ahead of these filthy wogs here. The other night we had another "*braaivleis*" as a farewell to the Major, the two Danies & Miles. Pietersen went out into the desert and came back with 9 gazelles (he's a split arse shot and used to be a big game hunter at one time). [Tucker p15] [*] The whole squadron was there as well as a few fellows from neighbouring squadrons, and this time we didn't make the mistake of underdoing the meat. Lofty Heyes from 39 was there with his guitar, and the Capias gave us their best which was damn good, and when the party came to an end there the sergeants carried on in their mess - it was good fun altho' I could see some of the sergeants had ideas of chucking me out of their mess when things got hot and everybody was wading about in beer and poor old Cactus was scratching raw egg out of his ears and eyes and from down his neck. But in any case I couldn't help it if he happens to be bald with nothing on top to kind of obstruct the downward ooze of the broken egg - it was a good party! [Tucker p17]

[*] Bull spells him Pietersen. Tucker has Peterson. Bull had corrected his books in several places so that he nearly always used Pietersen.

Day before yesterday an ops order came through for two planes to make a low-level attack on a tanker in Benghazi harbour [*], and as Gerry & Pip & Tommy & Pietersen were on standby they were told to go. This is not a very popular trip at all, for in the first place Benghazi is out of safe range even from Sidi Barrani where they were to refuel, and if they were chased at all and had to open up the throttles it would have meant probably coming down in the desert somewhere, and as for the chances of the raid itself - there are 40 ac ac posts reported around the harbour and a flackship lying in the entrance of the harbour with a hell of a lot of ac ac on her, and then there is always the possibility of barrage balloons and fighters from any or all the 'dromes between Benghazi and Salum.

[*] Benghazi is on the map below.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benghazi>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_of_Benghazi



Source of picture https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_of_Benghazi#/media/File:Benghazi_Italiana.JPG
Benghazi pre 1945

To say the least it was going to be a very dangerous raid with a very good chance of not coming back, but Pip, Gerry and Tommy didn't say anything, they set about the preparations and discussed the different lines of approach etc. Not so Pietersen, he said he wasn't feeling too well and didn't think he should go, and when that didn't help he went down to the sickbay (knowing full well that Doc was away on leave) and showed the medical orderly a few watery blisters on his arms and came back half

an hour before he was due to be in the air with the story that the orderly thought he shouldn't fly until he'd seen the Dr. However Captain Bateman who is his Flight Commander and had had enough of his bullshitting told him if he wasn't unfit to fly he had to go on the job and that was that.



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WesternDesertBattle_Area1941_en.svg

Benghazi, Sidi Barrani & Salum (Sollum) all shown. Fuka (the base) also shown so you can see how far away Benghazi was.

They left here at 4 in the afternoon, and landed at Sidi Barrani for refuelling and to await the arrival of the recce plane who would give them final directions and the lay-of-the-land etc. The recce plane was shot down over Salum and the Tanker was reported not to be there so the trip was put off much to everybody in the squadron's relief.

Major Martin, Captain du Toit, Captain Miles Barnby and Danie Jakobs left yesterday on their way for the Union, lucky buggers. Major Martin really was sorry to leave us, and we were sorry to see the last of him as he really has been damn decent the last 3 months out here in the desert, especially since he started going on raids and kind of became one of the boys. Who we will miss most of all tho' is little Danie Jakobs, he's been the life and soul of the squadron so far, always lively and cheerful, he's never been known to grouse or look down in the dumps - nothing can get him down.

Today a lot of sports equipment arrived for the squadron, badminton rackets and net, soccer balls a rugby ball and cricket goods. I don't know what the use of the rugby ball is, as there is an order out that no flying personnel are allowed to play rugby. The cricket equipment however was put into use right off, the N.C.Os challenged the Officers to a game this afternoon - the officers won.

It has been damn hot the last 4 or 5 days altho' not quite as hellish as down in Shandur, but one just goes about perspiring like a blinking water bag. I had one of the nicest swims of my life this evening just before supper - the water was calm and almost lukewarm and we played about in the sea until dusk.

I had a letter from Les Bensimon day before yesterday, he is still in hospital on his back, he says the tear in his bum has proved more troublesome than was expected. He seems to be damn browned off with life. He writes:-

“I will be bloody glad to get out of hospital and get back with you buggers in the desert. This may sound as if I'm being badly treated here which isn't the case at all, but after 5 weeks in bed things are inclined to get on ones nerves. This is a British hospital, & all the other patients are “Rooinecks”.[] On the whole they aren't a bad crowd, but there are 3 things that really has got on my tits. One is that when you tell them you belong to the S.A.A.F. they seem to be pained and astonished to hear that we actually have the cheek to have an Air Force of our own. Another thing is their firm belief that the entire show in E. Africa was done by units of the M'Bogo-Bongo tribe commanded from a distance of 500 miles away by means of bush telegraph by Colonel Bagwash-Bullshit. It is news to them that the S Africans had anything to do with it, and they don't seem to like it. “*

[*] Rooinek = colloquial Afrikaans name for British. Slightly disparaging. From Boer War era. Literally red neck.

Then he goes on to say that in case his watch which was lost during or after the crash has been found and handed over to me I must hang onto it until he gets back - *“and for Christ's sake don't take it on any trips with you because I value the thing”* - nice cheerful kind of bloke is Benny. And to think that when I lost my last watch was down in Shandur when I had that damnable itch on my arms so badly that I couldn't wear my watch and carried it about in my pocket and lost the damn thing the first day however I have replied to old Benny and reassured him that he need have no fear of me taking his watch on any raid and failing to show up again with it as it has already gone - we couldn't find it after the crash.

The last few days we have got quite a few new pilots from the pool, all South Africans, but their crews are all R.A.F.. These R.A.F. blokes seem damn fine fellows, mostly Aussies, and there seems to be no reason why we shouldn't get along very well indeed, but nonetheless I see no reason why we should not try our best to keep the squadron entirely South African as far as possible. After all, every man jack of us is very proud to belong to the S.A.A.F. and would not like going into the R.A.F., and in the sergeant's mess there is already bad feelings between the few *“Bolshie”* South Africans and a couple of the more *“Jingo”* R.A.F. fellows, and one never knows where it may end. However that is only my humble opinion and the Powers that Be evidently think differently.

The rumours that find their way back to the Union, and the short time they take, is just unbelievable. I had a letter from Benny's sister last week saying that although they had been officially notified that Benny had broken an arm in an accident, and a few days later a friend of theirs hinted that he had heard from somebody else that it was far worse than that, and although it wasn't actually said in so many words it was implied that Benny had gone for a loop - and would I please write her and let her know what was what.

When last I was in Cairo on leave and met some of the new observers with 21 Squadron they couldn't believe their eyes, as it was common knowledge down in Youngsfield just before they left that I had been killed, whereas Pip and Brinkie have both been blotted out twice, and Barbara writes to say that they hear in Y/F Benny has lost both arms and Monty Symons lost one leg, and I don't suppose one can stop these stories at all.

When the two Danies left yesterday Gerry and Pip asked me to move into their tent with them, and here I am altho' I didn't very much like the idea of moving out of the old one with Tommy, Clyde, and later Frank and Lionel, - they are a lot of good scouts and always up to some devilment and fun. However this tent has cement floor, electricity and we are only 4 in it, Jim Williams, Gerry, Pip and my honourable self.

I have just invented a nice portable table, a 2'x3' 3ply with an arc cut away to take my tummy, all I do is to sit in my camp chair, rest the plywood on the arms of the chair and there we are. That is how I'm writing this and probably explains my long-windedness.

Sept 6 [1941]

The tightening up of the discipline in the squadron is taking place, but it's not so much the new O.C. who is responsible for it as Major Tommy who has made use of the change over to get his oar in - he's turned out a proper old Scoutmaster since he got his majority. The old bugger positively goes snooping about lately looking for things he can tighten up on. We now have full parade with inspection every morning, and an Orderly Officer each day who in addition to two officers from each flight take the parade each morning. The men's and N.C.O's canteens must be closed at 10 each evening and all lights in the camp must be out by 11. Sergeant Major Normand has now been given his commission. What with the Major as adjutant and a disciplinary officer we will be playing at ruddy soldiers soon. It's about time the Jerries came over and ground strafed our camp one fine morning - it would make some of these ground staff playboy soldiers realise that one way of fighting this ruddy war is to get into a plane and fly over the enemy and give him hell.

We have actually had a few drops of rain out here in the desert, about half-a-dozen drops a few mornings ago and another dozen yesterday while I was up above the clouds at 22 thousand feet testing out cameras. Yesterday afternoon we played a game of touch rugby, the officers against the N.C.Os and jolly fine fun it was too. However the combination of the high altitude and the rugby has knocked me about a bit and I feel all buggered and bent, my ears have gone deaf with a kind of buzzing noise in the head and I feel shaky. I have just taken a hell of a dose of salts in case its a dose of cold or something coming on.

Our squadron has now come down to 7 planes of which at least two are always U.S. and a few days ago we had the fine total of two serviceable aircraft on the books, but we hear we are getting 10 or 11 new planes one of these days - then we will be able to do a few operations again.

Jeck got back from leave in Alex last night and told us that during a raid there on Sunday night the Jerries scored a direct hit on Mary's killing 18 officers and two whores and wrecking the whole joint. Of all the places in which to be killed!

Friday Sept 12 [1941]

We have been having great fun and games with this Army Co-Op racket - on the 7th 6 planes were ordered to go to Heliopolis [*] to take part in manoeuvres with the Army, so we went in with 6 full crews and a few extra - just about the whole squadron it looked like as we left only one plane behind us.

[*] Just downstream from Cairo

The organisation of the manoeuvres was just what we may have expected - we landed in Helio and nobody knew anything about us not even H.Q.M.E. (Muddle East, as they are aptly called) - We spent 4 days in Cairo and only worked with 1, 3 & 4 planes at a time the afternoon of the 3rd day and morning of the 4th - the rest of the time we hung around wondering when if ever anybody was going to take any notice of us. The 4th day all the ruddy Generals and Air Marshals and Brigadiers and big noises were hanging about when we were briefed to go and attack the "enemy" and we did a hurried take off in formation to show them how quickly it could be done, then they went out to the target (two little white squares on the top of a sharp hill) and we had to locate and bomb it in formation .

As Major Jones was leading the formation I had to do the bomb aiming. I had one bomb and the other two planes two each. Major Jones tried to be a bit too split arse and cut things down as much as possible giving me very short run up with the result that I was caught with my finger well up and I couldn't level my bombsight properly in time and the bombing wasn't so hot at all, - in fact, if one considers that there was no enemy fire and we did a steady run from 6000 feet it was bloody awful. The nearest bomb was about 30 - 50 yards away, but the rest were over 100 yards off and one hang up fell damn really 1000 yds away - all overshooting - I was pretty downhearted and disgusted

with the whole show even tho' it was a difficult target, but evidently the big noises in the army were very pleased with it.

While we were in Cairo Major Durrant was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel much to everybody's delight - he has endeared himself to the squadron already and knows most of the mechanics by name already. He was also told there that 24 Squadron were getting Boston's as soon as they could be assembled, [AIR p74] and that we would have to leave the Desert on the 18th to assemble them at Port Sudan ourselves. The idea was for us to go back to Shandur, but the O.C. managed to wangle things so that we keep Fuka as our drome and leave a skeleton staff here - Fuka is the best station in the W. Desert I think - bar none, so we are damn pleased at being allowed to keep it in the end.

Book 3

Fuka Main

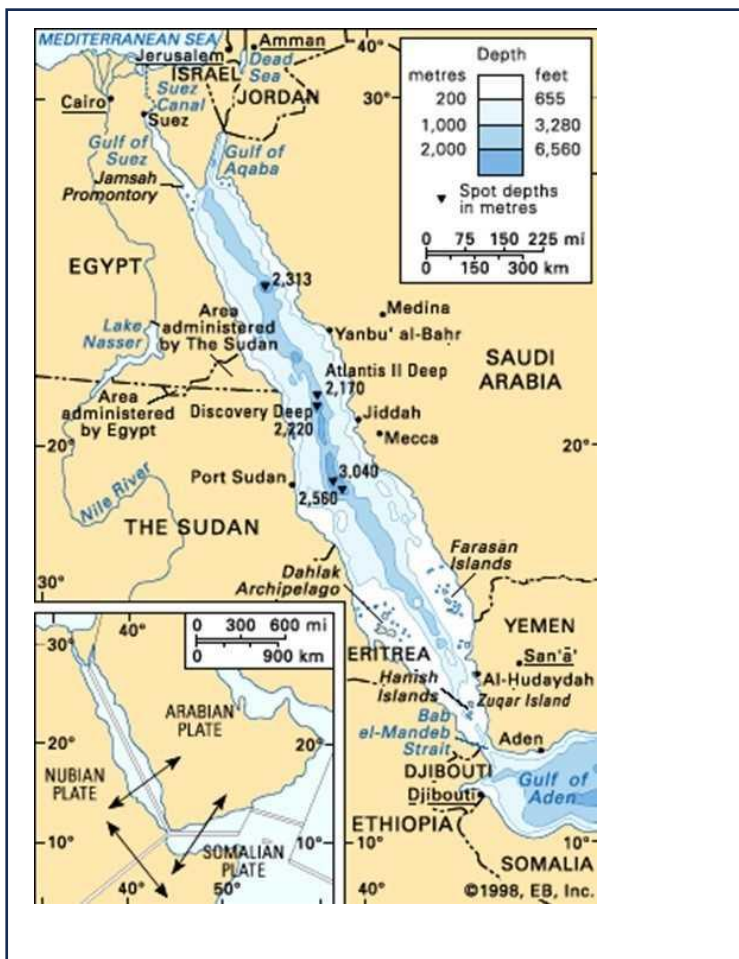
Western Desert

12th September 1941

(contd) [*]

[*] The title is because it is the start of the third book.

So far the idea of the pending re-equipment is that most of the pilots, all the mechanics, half the Air Gunners & a few of the senior observers are going down to Port Sudan [*] to assemble & fetch up the Bostons [*]. They are leaving by road on Wednesday for Fayid where they will await transport by boat to Port Sudan. I am looking forward to it, I reckon I will be one of the observers to go along - hope so at any rate. I suppose Port Sudan will be the usual dirty stinking hell hole Middle East Seaport, but at any rate it is a new place to be seen & it will be very interesting to see the planes being built on the assembly lines. I am due for 10 days leave on Sunday, & was banking on getting over to Palestine & Syria this time, but if needs be I'm even willing to forfeit it.



Picture source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Red-Sea>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_A-20_Havoc



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_A-20_Havoc#/media/File:Douglas_A-20G_Havoc.jpg

Douglas A20 = Boston in RAF & Havoc in USAF

Comparing	Maryland	Boston	
Speed	489	510 kph	
Engine	Pratt & Whitney R-1830	Wright R-2600	so 1830 vs 2600 cu inch
Power	1050	1600 HP	
Range	2100	1520 km	
Bombs	2000	4000 lb internally	

Martin Maryland nice in flight video 1941 1m01 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcvuuvbighA>

Maryland Videos in the desert. Silent 2:05 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZxWXd6-8nI>

Maryland Free French Noticeable how big the engines were wrt the fuselage. Silent 1945 4:18 Maryland.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xu1gkDqA1Hk>

Maryland. Recent appraisal 24:13 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JM78SNQG4kU&t=2s>

The text version of that video is here <https://militarymatters.online/forgotten-aircraft/martin-maryland-167-a3-overlooked-stalwart/>

In that video my father's Madagascar adventure is summarised at 22:37. That story was obtained from this French book about the Vichy Air Force

https://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B00DN4UNUW?ie=UTF8&psc=1&linkId=d93c07a64ab4bcf10d3337a8a00a953d&language=en_GB&ref_=as_li_ss_tl

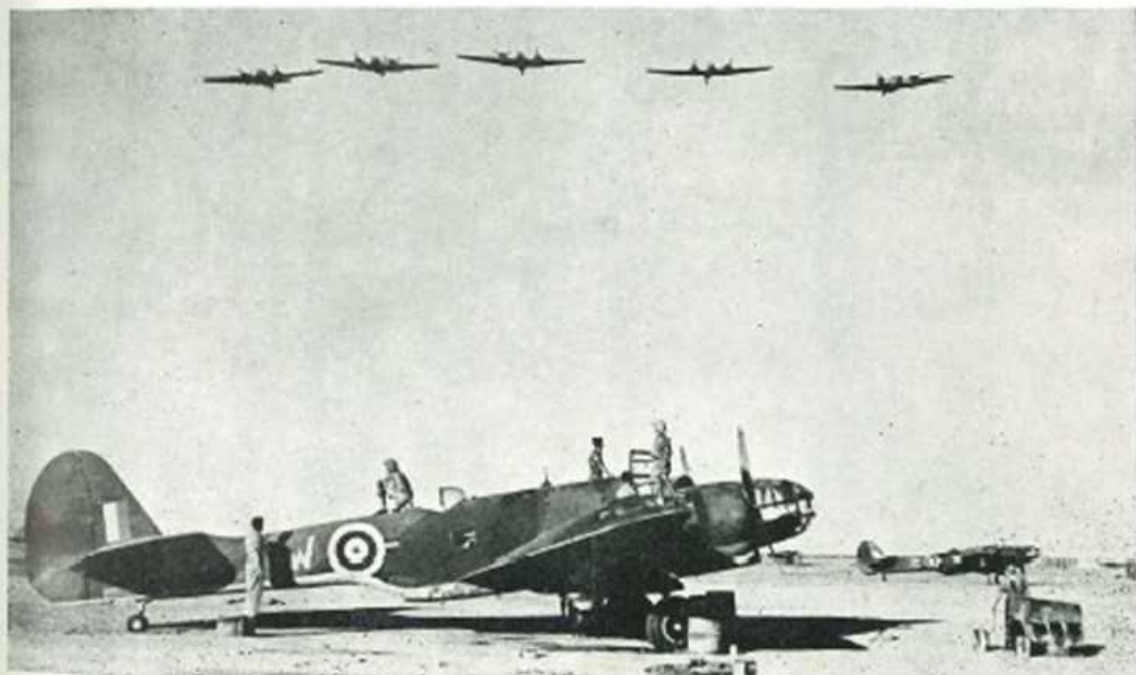
At 24:13 there is a picture of Bull being helped into the plane (presumably the ladder was unavailable). I say it is Bull judging by the boots. Tucker has a picture including Bull wearing boots like that – shown lower down.

Boston Video with strange accent commentary giving long technical intro & short performance appraisal towards the end 13:37 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEF1_1C-kk

Boston 13:14 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WG3K0rG-EJO>



Maryland in the desert. This group is: (From left to right) LIEUT. J. A. WILLIAMS (later Colonel, D.S.O, D.F.C.), LIEUT. L. B. BENSIMON, posted missing and never found; LIEUT. RALPH MALAN (brother to the air "ace" Sailor Malan), who was killed in action; LIEUT. P. CROWTHER; LIEUT. GEORGE MARSHALL, taken prisoner in 1941; LIEUT. CECIL BLAKE, also later a P.O.W., and LIEUT. BRINK.



Erks working on Maryland "W" pause for a moment to watch a flight of five set course.

Picture source Tucker p20
Note the boots "Bull" is wearing.



Same boots as in the video

“*Jek*” Ovenstone, who hasn't been feeling too happy about his eyesight lately & has been having difficulty with his landings went to Cairo with us to go before the Medical Board, & was grounded for good & has left us for the Union. Old *Jek* was very sad at leaving the squadron, it's funny how not even the thought of going down to Gawd's Country compensates for leaving a lot of pals behind - old *Jek* was a good Scout.

Before we left Cairo yesterday we all went to “*Muddle East*” with our Hotel bills & demanded payment, & after a hell of a lot of talk & persuasion by Major Jones they agreed, but it took us about 4 hours of hanging about before we got our money, & then it was only about 3/4 of our actual hotel bills - none of us has received a penny S&T for the trip up from the Union yet, & we don't intend letting them get away with any more of that.

When we got back here we found one new plane attached to our squadron, a long range Maryland for recco work, but as we are handing back all our a/c on Wednesday we won't be doing any more jobs in Marylands, or won't we?

I have fallen in love with a good old Maryland - she has been a good craft, & far & away the best bomber operating in the Middle East so far - I'll always have a soft spot for her - such beautiful lines like it twin engined fighter. I suppose 12 & 21 squadrons will now get what's left of our planes, & will put up a hell of a moan at us getting Bostons.

While we've been away Fuka has been bombed a few nights, & last night we were woken up by a few alarms again, but after the 2nd one I just didn't bother to get up until I heard 3 bursts of machine gun fire & heard Pip & the other fellows outside shout “*The 've got him*” - then I ran out & saw it come down in flames & hit the ground with a hell of a flash about five miles off.

We heard this morning that it was a Blenheim [*] from 113 Squadron being used as a night fighter which got him. It was a Savoya 79, but very little is left of it - some of the fellows went & had a look

this morning & say there are puffed up bits & pieces of hands, legs, entrails & heads etc. lying about - poor buggers. I wouldn't have felt in the least sorry for them if it had been a Jerry plane & crew.

I saw Jack Bradshaw & Gerry Smith in Cairo, they are back with 21 Squadron. "Lofty" Joubert the gunner who bailed out of Captain Bateman's plane with the ripped parachute has been awarded his D.F.M., but the papers have got hold of a very distorted version of the story - according to the papers Captain Bateman is supposed to have been the first to bail out, which of course is bullshit.

[*] Blenheim; I posted picture & Wiki link on June 21 post.
Savoya 79; I posted July 16 (there was a typo, Bull wrote Savoya 97 then but 79 now)

17th Sept [1941]

We have very bad news about Les Gill, a letter from Gillie Ford address to Major Martin arrived here, but we decided to open it to get the news, Gillie says Les was drowned swimming from the barge to the submarine. [*] That's damn hard lines on old Les. He was one of the best.

[*] That refers to the Maryland that had to turn back & force land on Crete. See June 5 entry. They escaped Crete on a barge but an Italian submarine surfaced & made the officers swim across to it & allowed the rest to "bugger off".
Fuka & Sollum are on the maps I posted several times earlier.



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WWII_-_British_Operation_Compass_1940-1941.svg

Sallum on this map of the campaign. It shows Dec 1940 to Feb 1941 whereas the diary is much later after the reversal in Sept 1941. Bull arrived during May 1941 – long after Compass & the German advance (Sonnenblume

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WWII_-_British_Operation_Compass_1940-1941.svg

From this we learn that the Panzer Group Afrika with Rommel in charge was formed in August 1941, so this was their early push https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panzer_Army_Africa

News has also got here that Major Martin has been promoted Lieutenant Colonel & is being sent to America to inspect & buy more planes. I'm glad about that.

On Sunday 14th we had a bit of unexpected fun, - the enemy suddenly decided to make a bit of an advance with about 1,000 vehicles, tanks, armoured cars & ordinary trucks & we were called on for support .

The enemy column was well into our territory & was refuelling out in the desert South East of Solum [*] when we were told to attack. We set off with 6 planes, Major Jones leading, & on the way we picked up 6 Hurricanes as Fighter escort. We found the enemy, but they were very well dispersed, & altho' the bombing was good, the bombs falling right in amongst them scoring a few direct hits & leaving fires, I could see many bombs burst on virgin desert in among the M.T.

[*] Solum = Sollum = Sallum Marked on map above.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sallum>

When we got back I went down into the Operations room to give my report, but what was my consternation when I found the Ops room crowded out with Group Captains & Wing Commanders & things & the big American Air Force chief, Colonel Brett or something with half a dozen of his satellites all gathered to hear the report of the bombing. Luckily just as I had finished my report the advanced lines of our army rang up reporting “ *very successful & accurate bombing which has caused considerable disorganisation to the enemy*” & they asked for us to repeat it as soon as we could. So while the planes were being bombed up again we had a quick late lunch & then set out again.

An account of that action is in “The Tide Turned at Alamein” by B.L.Bernstein, Central News Agency, 1944 page32

It was about this time that rumours began to circulate that strong German columns had crossed the frontier. Gradually the story unfolded itself. Enemy tank columns had nearly caught our armoured cars napping. Our frontier forces withdrew slowly. Finally, the Air Force hammered the Germans tanks unmercifully while they were refuelling. A South African squadron excelled itself in a triumph of well-timed co-operation. Many months later the captured diary of the adjutant of the German tank regiment involved bore eloquent testimony of the efficiency of our air attack.

“While we were still assembled British bombers appeared and dropped their bombs effectively from a low altitude. An hour later more bombers appeared at an altitude of 2:3 000 ft. Then followed a bomb barrage such as I have never experienced before in Africa. It was as if the floors of the planes opened, releasing a deluge of bombs. Individual hits could no longer be distinguished, just one general pounding. The march eastwards brought excitement. The British Air Force accompanied us all the way and at times their arty made our lives a misery.”

Lt. Col. Durrant decided to lead the second raid in Major Jones' place, but he took me along as his observer. Again we picked up the fighter escort of 7 Hurricanes, but this time we decided to bomb

from 5000' instead of 6,500, as on the first show. We flew right over the enemy flank, consisting of about 40 armoured cars, but put them aside as small fry.

When we got near the main column the rearguard put out a hell of a big smoke signal near which I sighted a number of staff cars directly behind the main force, & for these I aimed & had the gratification of watching the bombs begin right in amongst the HQ (as denoted by the cars) & continuing on along & among the main body. [*] In the meantime they were putting up quite a heavy barrage of light ac-ac.

[*] This ties in with what Bull writes on 4 December:

"We hear that the consistent & accurate bombing has shaken the Jerries no end. Two army officers who were captured by the Jerries & have since been recaptured tell how they were taken along in a car to what was evidently a pre-arranged meeting of General Rommel's staff.

The Jerry brass hats all got together & were having a heavy pow-wow when a big formation of Marylands was seen to be approaching. In two shakes of a duck's tail there was not a Jerry in sight above ground, & the two British officers were entirely forgotten. They say that Rommel was about the last man to duck."

While we were busy bombing a number of M.E. 109s & G50s [*] dived down on us from behind out of the sun & opened up - the first I knew about it, being in the leading machine, was a stream of incendiary & tracer streaking past us, & then the rattle of our own top gunner, Lorrie Venter opened up. As the 109s & G50s closed in on us the Hurricanes mixed with them, & the gunners reported that a sharp dog fight ensued in which the Hurricanes were outnumbered hopelessly.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiat_G.50_Freccia



Picture source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiat_G.50_Freccia#/media/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_101-425-0338-16A,_Flugzeuge_Fiat_G.50_und_Messerschmitt_Me_110.jpg

Ham, one of the new pilots whose first raid this was went down in flames, but one of the crew was seen to jump after a while, & next morning the Army reported that they had picked up 2nd/Lt Ham who was very badly burnt but alive. [AIR p73] [Tucker p17] We also lost 3 Hurricanes in the dogfight but shot down one 109 & one G50 & a couple were damaged.

Again Clyde Harley got away badly damaged, his port landing flap was just about shot away. What really was pathetic on this raid was our old weak point, the radio section - there was Clyde flying a few yards away from us & we tried to contact him to find out the extent of the damage, but it was only about 20 miles from home that we eventually succeeded in contacting him very faintly. Our radio section is a damn disgrace, they have one of the best sets in the world, a Bendix set costing £18,000 & we can never get the damn thing to function as it should & when it should.

However, we did a hell of a lot of damage on the second raid, very few of our bombs scoring anything but direct hits or near misses so we can't complain at losing one plane. [*]

[*] Tucker p16:

"Cooperation with the I-tanks paid dividends very soon. Rommel sent a feeler sortie of tanks and M.T. through the thinly guarded southern flank and headed for the northern edge of the Quattara depression. Desert Recce gave the alarm and 24 Squadron, with observer Ralph Malan doing the aiming, put down such an effective pattern on the spearhead that the sortie was withdrawn. Months later the scene of this action was visited and the damage that had been done was astonishing. Two tanks had received direct hits and it opened out like cardboard models. About six other armoured vehicles had been torn to bits."

That evening I was called up to 204 Group to give a personal report on the relative positions etc. of the enemy & at Group they had nothing but praise for the way we have carried out the raids & they remarked on our accurate if rather conservative reports on our own bombing, in both cases the army had reported more damage than we had reported.

While up at 204 Group Major Galgut asked me why I hadn't joined up as a pilot, & when I told him that I was applying for a pilots course as soon as I got back in the Union he said he would put in a personal recommendation for me.

Next morning early it was found that instead of advancing during the night the enemy had retreated to well behind their own positions, so 24 squadron & 12 Squadron who also made a raid on the tanks between our two raids beat back their advance just about on its own. It's the best day's work the squadron has done so far & I feel particularly bucked at having led both shows. These two raids have left a very nice taste in our mouth to carry with us while we are waiting for the new planes.

At Group I learnt something about the tactics of our army out in the desert. They don't attempt to put up any serious resistance, they poop away at the enemy, but retreat all the time drawing them on, the idea is that as gaining or losing a few odd miles of desert means absolutely nothing we may as well fight on ground that has been prepared to our own advantage so we want to draw them on to Mersa Matruh & give them hell there where we are strongly fortified, & if possible, cut them off in the rear, but the enemy seem to have a shrewd idea of this & aren't biting. However we hear that our ground forces did manage to cut off & capture 12 tanks on the show.

There are also some rather rum stories going the rounds about the number of enemy machines landing on our dromes at the front through lack of petrol. Four 88s [*] have definitely been captured on Sidi Barrani drome complete with Italian crew - run out of petrol or mistook it for Salum, but what is stranger still is that a few Stukas [*] force landed out in the desert behind our advanced lines & they have been captured intact & their crews report that there should be a whole squadron of 21 Stukas out in the desert somewhere. - They were given the machines by the Germans to do a 2-hour job with only fuel for 1-hour in the tanks. Our people are now searching the desert for the other planes.

[*] Captured JU 88 in USAF markings.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_88



Picture source: <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/37574/how-this-nazi-recon-plane-ended-up-being-tested-in-the-united-states-during-world-war-ii>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_87 Stuka



Picture

source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Junkers_Ju_87Ds_in_flight_Oct_1943.jpg

The last few days we have been busy cementing the hole into which our tent was to be moved & by the “we” I suppose I have to include all 4 of us in the tent. Jim did his fair share by taking a couple of snaps of the jobs being done. Gerry threw a few spades of muck about the place & Pip made a brave attempt at doing things & damn nearly succeeded. Anyway between the 4 of us we managed to pinch enough cement, cart sand & water from the sea & put down a splitarse floor.

When it was definitely decided that we were moving, & that all 4 of us would be going, the other 3 thought we wouldn't bother about moving the tent over the hole, but they reckoned without me.

Day before yesterday after lunch all was nice & peaceful, Gerry was lying on his bed in his usual state of coma, Jim was lying on his bed reading my diary, & Pip was sitting in his camp chair relaxing when I started undoing the walls of the tent & when I finished that & started undoing the guy ropes they wasted no time getting up & even went so far as to give a hand & in no time we had the tent moved & a damn fine abode it makes on the hole, & this afternoon we move off perhaps not to come back to this camp at all when we come, the war front may have shifted forward by then.

Yesterday we got new orders, we were not going to wait for the boat at Fayid, but at Shandur [*]
- Shit & corruption!

[*] Shandur is on the Suez Canal at the Great Bitter Lake.
It is the base he was at when he first arrived. See 21 June.

First of all the O.C. said only 3 of the observers could go along & that the six senior ones would have to draw lots, but we went in chatted him & worked the point so now all 6 of us are going along to the Sudan, & Tuborg & Pietersen are staying behind.

Yesterday morning Major Jones told all A Flight pilots to take their mechanics up for a flip as a token of appreciation for their work. Needless to say there was a hell of a lot of shooting up of the camp, Rox being the chief culprit until he came so low over the next door camp that he put his wing tip into a tent, taking away the steel tip of the tentpole, tearing a big rent in the tent & damaging his wingtip. When we landed he had to go & apologise to a very infuriated Squadron Leader Carfoot & for punishment the O.C. made him give a hand repairing the plane. The fellows who were in the tent at the time had the fright of their lives & came bundling out of it at the double, arse over tip - it was all very funny in a way.

Last night we had a bit of a party in the sergeant's mess. Papie, who is with 21 Squadron which has just come out to the desert came over, we were all very glad to see the old bugger again after all these months & months.

I have had a postcard from Stanley [*], he is on his way to Egypt at last, so when I get to Cairo I will find out where his regiment is stationed & look him up. I may manage it before we go down to Port Sudan if I'm lucky .

[*] Younger brother, in armoured cars.
In the photo of 21 January post in 01 Initial Training section.

We leave here this afternoon - fly down to B.L.G. at Wadi Natrum & from there by road to Shandur.

[*] Wadi Natrum = Wadi Netrun. To west of Nile in the delta.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wadi_El_Natrun

Shandur 22 Sept [1941]

From Fuka I flew down to B.L.G - probably my last flip in a Glen Martin, we slept at Wadi Natrum & next morning came on by lorry to this bloody place. It has been improved a lot since we left, the Mess building has been enlarged, a veranda built on, & a few trees planted, asphalt roads built in camp, they have an open air cinema with a new program every night, but they still have as many flies, & if anything the messing fees have gone up, & it's almost as hot as it was 4 months ago - I've already developed the first couple of heat bumps which are beginning to itch like hell - just like old times. But the worst of it all is that they do most of their flying in the early mornings here & you are woken up every morning at about 5:30 with machines taking off over the camp.

Since we left Suez has been bombed quite heavily, most of the European civilian population has evacuated Suez it seems. The Casino has been wrecked by a more or less direct hit - not much of a loss I must say, it was an evil money-grabbing joint at the best times.

Since swimming in the Med, we find the swimming at the Riviera Club very 4th rate - I went in for a swim once only & had enough of it & of Suez in general. The flamboyant avenues which used to camouflage parts of the Suez & Port Tewfik are no longer in bloom & if anything the Gippies are dirtier than ever.

When we got down here a signal came through that only 9 officers & 12 senior NCO's had to go down to Port Sudan, then a 2nd signal came through that the whole squadron was to leave Fuka & come down here, so Colonel Durrant went up to Muddle East on the dot to see about it yesterday, & went up again today & managed to work things that not only does the squadron stay at Fuka but those of us who don't go to Sudan go back to Fuka.

When we heard yesterday morning that only 9 officers were going down to Port Sudan, Pip & myself spoke to the O.C. & Major Jones about going down to the Union on a pilot course instead of hanging around for a few months doing nothing & were very surprised & pleased to hear that we had already been recommended for a Pilot's course, but we were advised to put in official applications which we did, & went up to Cairo yesterday afternoon to see Pip's half-brother Major Mc Blain who is second-in-command of Flying personnel up here. We were very lucky, & the O.C. played the game with us because when we got to H.Q.M.E. Pip's brother told us that the O.C. had flown up himself, handed in our applications, spoken to Brigadier Venter who is up here now, & put in a good word for us - he's a bloody white man the O.C. is. Pip's brother promised to do what he could for us & keep us informed, but he told us that there wasn't much hope of us getting into the next P.P. course as it was already full.

Now we have to be content to wait for things to develop, & it may take anything up to about 4 months to come off. At any rate we have the satisfaction of knowing that we have waited until the iron was very hot before striking & that we have struck quickly & hard & everything seems to be very much in our favour.

While in Cairo I found out that Stanley's reg is at Benin Yusif camp just outside Cairo, but didn't have time to look him up - will do so next time when I'm on leave - in about a week's time I think.

Fuka 25 Sept [1941]

Here I am back at good old Fuka, & glad to be here. We left Shandur by road yesterday morning & got here last night. We looked in at Helio on the way as we heard there was a Boston on the drome & found it to be so. We were shown over the a/c in a bit of a hurry & the O.C. was taken up for a short flip. It's a marvellous aircraft, probably the fastest in the Middle East & should do very well, but the rear armament will have to be modified a bit before she can go up into action. [*]

[*] The following note is inserted into the margin of the original.

Much later. I was a bit hasty & premature. The twin Browning's of the Boston on their roller bearing mounting is one of the best I've seen - in some ways even better than a power operated turret.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M2_Browning



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M2_Browning#/media/File:Cal50_Browning_2REI_2.jpg
I can't find a decent picture of twin Browning machine guns mounted in an aircraft.

The Yanks certainly can build aircraft to fly & fly well, but they simply haven't any idea of rear armament for bombers & rely too much on sheer speed. The Yanks don't seem to think too much of the R.A.F. organisation in the ME either, they were brought out at 24 hours notice & have been cooling their heels out for 3 weeks now with no tools to carry on with the assembly of the Bostons. This one they put together with as they say "*a screwdriver & a pair of pliers*". They are damn glad that the South Africans are getting their planes as they say we South Africans think along the same lines as they do. [*]

[*] In 04 Madagascar the long entry for 10 July Bull remembers the American mechanics "*foaming at the mouth*" trying to get permission to assemble 'planes followed by more detail about this as recounted by Major Jones.

The nine officers to go down to Port Sudan are Major Jones, Captain Lippiat & the 7 senior pilots, among them Jim, Gerry & Clyde. [Tucker p18]

Captain Bateman has been transferred from us to 204 Group as the powers-that-be maintain that he is too old for operational flying. We will miss him, but he will do a lot of good up at Group.

Fuka is a bit quiet now with nothing to do & so many of the fellows away, but it is a good place to be all the same.

5 of the Junior observers have been loaned to 2 Squadron until we get the Bostons, & Denis Dodd, Frank Austin & Mack Ferson were here this evening & haven't a single good word for the home life etc at 12 Squadron. They say Colonel Preller never speaks a word to anybody except to shit on him or

threaten him, & has his special table all to himself in the mess etc. - there simply isn't that comradeship which we have always had in our squadron. It's an established fact that an O.C. makes a squadron. [*]

[*] The following was inserted into the margin of the original:

*Lt. Col. Preller later became very human & proved very popular with his squadrons - they all swore by him.

General Brink sent Lt. Col. Durrant a personal signal congratulating him & the whole of 24 Squadron for its fine show on Sunday 14th September, from him & the entire 1st. South African division. [*]

[*] That was the demo the squadron put on at Heliopolis for "all the ruddy Generals and Air Marshalls and Brigadiers and big noises" where Major Jones cut it fine so Bull had little time & the bombs fell from 30 - 100 yards from the target.

Last night it rained for about 10 minutes.

The first edition of our Squadron magazine "Envoy" has come out & as a start it is pretty good. I don't think anyone would have credited Davies the A Flight clerk who is the editor, with the job of work like that. The idea is to make the mag. a monthly thing. We will all get lots of fun out of it, & at 2 piasteres a time it is dirt cheap.

Two new Majors have arrived here, Major Donnelly, the new O.C. of B. Flight, & Major Jansen who is attached to us for a while to pick up some tips after which he will probably form new Squadron.

The idea is to have the first flight off to the desert by the end of the week, but I don't think the machines will be completely modified or anywhere near it, so once again we will commence operations with half a squadron.

It has been bloody hot here the last few days - day before yesterday it was 116° [F = 46,5°C] at 3:30 in the aft. without so much as a breeze blowing. The only entertainment of an evening here is going to the local open-air cinema, where for 7 pt. you see films which have been cut & torn to buggaree - not once have I seen a film without at least two stoppages for joining the film.

In a way it's worth while going every night, because it's much cheaper than sitting in the Mess, & no matter if you've seen the film before, you would never recognise it here as there are usually a couple of important scenes cut out which put a new reflection on the picture, so you are kept guessing right up to the end, when you find that they have shown it arse about face - the 3rd. spool before the 2nd., & then there's always the "suspense" of waiting for the next stoppage. The last two nights we have had no show at all as the generator has burnt out.

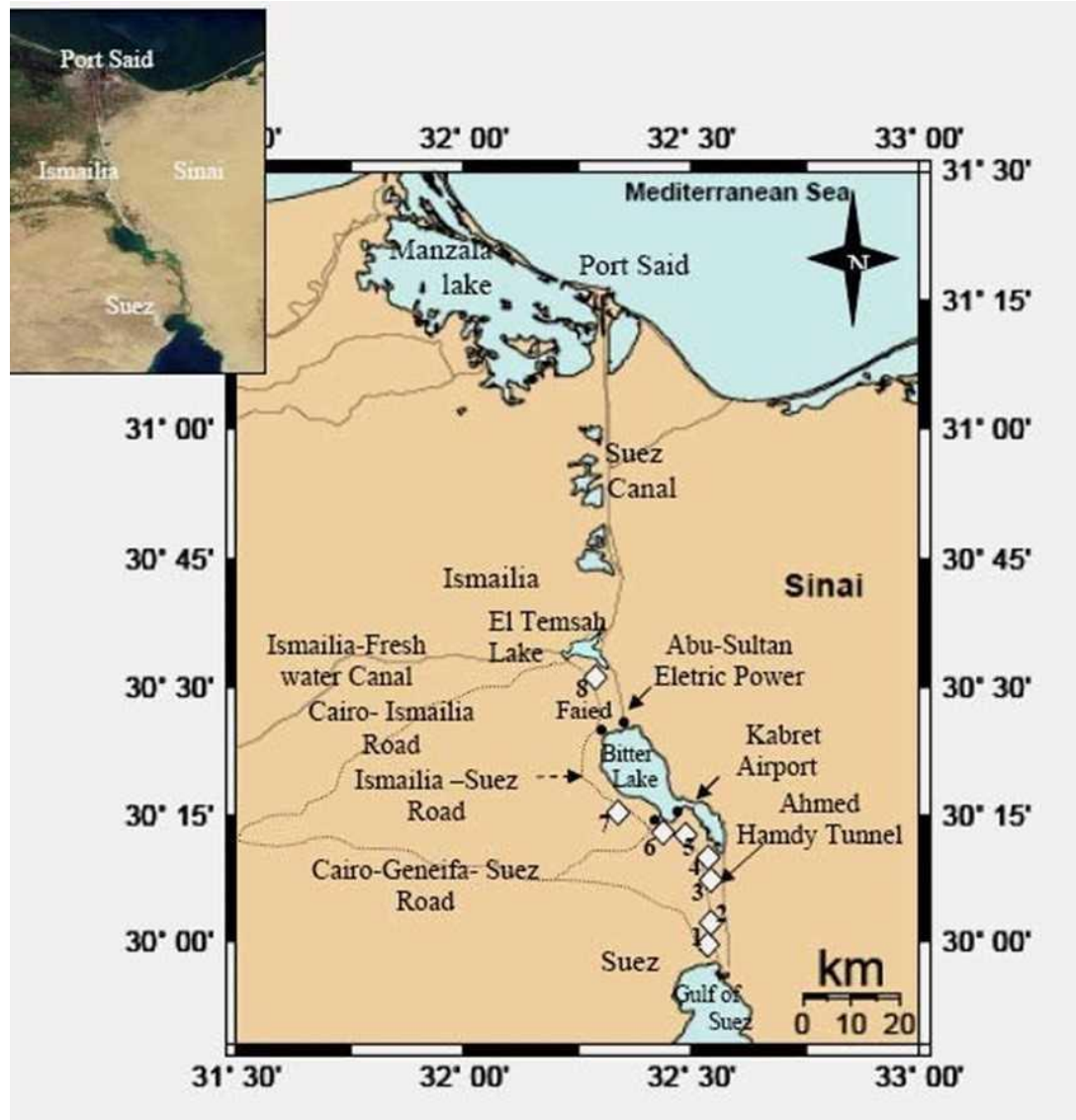
On the whole the Observers are putting up a hell of a bad show - of all those who have qualified so far only a bit over 3/4 are still flying, what with sinus, (real & affected) nerves, air sickness, Unionitis & going plain damn yellow - it's so bad now, one doesn't know which case is real & which is synthetic. Of those who qualified after us, John Coggan has gone back to the Union without going into action, Pat Rawbone has got himself grounded & is a clerk at H.Q.M.E., Jack Bradshaw has left for H.Q.M.E. this morning & Tuborg is due to be grounded next if he hasn't already worked it & I am almost prepared to eat a helping of ration cabbage the day Gregory goes on his first raid - About half of those who qualified before us are still going strong.

10th Oct? [? Is in pencil. It is a typo. Should be Nov 1941]

Our moving orders came through today, & we are to move out to the desert with the first 8 machines tomorrow. As we feared, we are going into action with machines with only half the modifications done, & only half the squadron at that. However we are used to that kind of thing by now.

Yesterday aft. a crowd of us went over to Ismailia [*] for a bit of an outing & had rather an enjoyable time which we spent at all the different clubs swimming, dining, drinking & dancing. We caused a bit of consternation in the town owing to a little fire alarm to which I took a liking at Geniefa [*]. I hooked it, put it in the lorry, & we had lots of fun driving through town winding away at the siren. It kicked up no end of a row, & we were lucky to get away without being run in. However, a good time was had by all, especially those blokes who got entangled with a couple of nurses.

[*] Ismailia shown on map



https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Location-map-of-sabkha-sites-in-the-study-area-Sabkha-sites-1-Entrance-of-Suez-2-El_fig1_258687483

7 on the map is Geniefa. a.k.a Kasfareet

The lagoon at top right is where Bull was killed.

Tommy Halse arrived here day before yesterday, he was getting browned off out in the desert as he wasn't getting enough flying in the Recce Flight, so he hitchhiked down here to join us. He has told us all the latest Fuka news - Jerry has been giving them a bit of his mind out there, in fact he has been getting quite above himself lately, coming over in daylight.

The other evening, just before sundown they were all going about their lawful business which needless to say consisted of loafing about, when a formation of 4 machines come over Ruas el Kanyas at about 5,000'! The boys came out to have a look, & passed remarks on the formation flying when all of a sudden they saw the bombay doors open & the bombs on their way. - Luckily the bombing was very bad & no damage was done - these Jerries don't seem to like flying over our territory in the light - very shy & bashful chappies they must be. Right through the moonlight stretches there have been any number of Jerries over & many of their bombs have not exploded, & old Squadron Leader Carfoot has been having the time of his life exploding them at the most awkward times. Tommy says the other afternoon they were playing cricket when a plane, evidently one of ours flew past & at the same time a bomb went off with a hell of a bang. The cricket match came to a sudden end with everybody running for shelter. Doc Puttic leading the field & Major Thompson bringing up the rear puffing & blowing in 2nd gear - too late they realised that it was just one of Squadron Leader Carfoot's "*duds*" going up.

In the meantime the Canal Zone has been bombed pretty regularly, & we have been woken every night by ac-ac. but I haven't even worried to get up to have a look at the fireworks - a bit of a change from our attitude when we first saw the exhibitions when we arrived here from the Union 6 months ago. The moon is just about at an end now so we should have a bit of peace of a night when we get out into the desert.

The best news Tommy brought from the desert is that High Tension Blake's two gunners shot down a 109 on a recco the other day. The gunners are two fellows from 12 Squadron Sergeants de Villiers & Fourie.

One of the Flying Fortresses has been lost already, they are said to have run out of juice on the way back from Benghazi & have force landed in the desert somewhere, but what has happened to the machine & crew nobody seems to know - it's a bloody poor show for a big longrange machine like that to run out of juice on a short job like the Benghazi run - somebody must have made a kak-up.

About 5 months ago I was told the story about the Gippo king Farouk asking for detailed plans of the intended push before Wavill brought it off last year. He was given a document containing all detail, & when the Itais were pushed back in such a hurry this self same document was found in a hurriedly evacuated office in Tobruk. Luckily Wavell was no fool & had given cooked facts in the document. When I heard this story the first time I thought it maybe just one of those stories which one hears, but today I saw the full story in an Aussie paper.

Yesterday & new batch of observers arrived here fresh from the Union to do the O.T.U. coarse here, & a lot of amusement was caused this morning when one of them came into breakfast neatly dressed in baratheia, side cap, & holy of holies! a ruddy swagger stick. Somehow or other we observers as a class seem to be a real lot of tits.

Our stay here hasn't been at all a bad one, in fact it has been a damn fine break but nonetheless we are all very relieved to hear it's at an end & we can get back to Fuka & its bombs & 88's & as far as the 223 fellows they will be damn glad to see the last of us, especially in Sergeant's mess where our fellows have been playing up particular hell, & strangely enough the worst culprits on our side have been the R.A.F. & Aussie sergeants in our squadron - they simply have no time for the R.A.F. element here & old Bachus (Sgt Grieg), an R.A.F. Sergeant Observer who came to us a few months ago is the worst "*offender*". He's a rum bloke, a Cambridge man, & ex Indian Army Officer, with the most poisonous ginger moustache I've ever seen - it's about 4 inches long & every hair is as stiff as a steel wire & everyone grows in a different direction giving him the appearance of being the results of the meeting of an amorous porcupine sow & a ginger tabby cat on the warpath in a prickly pear patch on a frosty night.

Old Bachus' claims to fame are many & varied, firstly his moustache, secondly his shorts which come down to just below his knees exposing an indelicate ¼" of bare leg above his stockings, thirdly his ability to absorb whiskey by the gallon, 4thly are his rather big protruding bloodshot eyes looking like poached eggs done in blood, 5thly he is rather a good mimic & has quite a decent repertoire & his versions of a dog cornering a pig has to be heard to be believed, 6thly he has a very sharp sense of humour & he'll get a grin out of the Sphinx, but in spite of his war-like moustache he is quite harmless & very polite & kind of friendly.

One evening during a hell of a hectic party when the floor was awash with spilt beer & floating plates & things, Bachus suddenly appeared from under the table on all fours wading through the slush barking & snarling like a dog. He picked up a floating saucer in his mouth & bit a chunk out of it (he has a very fine set of teeth) swallowed some of it & spat the rest out & next he swallowed a teaspoon, then, still on all fours he wended his snarling way up to the bar counter & took a bite out of the nearest R.A.F. leg. No - Bachus isn't very popular with the R.A.F. here at all, especially as he refuses to wear the R.A.F. cap badge on his side cap - he sports a S.A.A.F. badge & insists that he is S.A.A.F.

Another bolshie (by R.A.F. standards) is an Aussie Sergeant Observer we have, a big 6'3" hot head who stood up at the pub the very first evening & said "*Anyone here who has anything to say about 24 Squadron is herewith respectfully requested to get on his hind legs & say it!*" Needless to say nobody had anything to say.

There will be many sighs of relief in the Sergeant's Mess when 24 move off tomorrow. Luckily there have been no incidents in the Officers Mess except for my very tactless remark that their pub was up to shit, but I was duly ticked off by the 223 O.C. Windy Wild who is a damn fine fellow - incidentally he is a South African.

Fuka 11th Nov [1941]

Back in Fuka again, but it doesn't look as if we are going to be here much longer now. Maj. Jones has not come along as he is ill, kidney trouble or something & he has gone to hospital to be x-rayed, but what the outcome is going to be I don't know. I hope he is not going to be grounded.

Fuka has really been getting stick while we've been away. Evening before last two Albatrosses [*] were doing practice bombing with some new delay action bombs on Ras el Kanyas. They were circling about & bombing on a row of lights when all of a sudden two 88's joined in & also dropped a stick each on the lights & then calmly flew off leaving the two Albatrosses to their practice.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairey_Albatross



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fairey_Albacore#/media/File:Fairey_Albacore_ExCC.jpg

Successor to the Swordfish though they served concurrently with the Swordfish persisting after the Albacore was retired. Enclosed cockpit.

While we have been away Mac William has got his commission & we were damn pleased to find him in the mess when we got here - we hear Joubert has got his too & that Joiner is getting his one of these days. Ritchie Tennant got his third pip this evening too so there was quite a bit of pip wetting this evening.

The first 6 machines are moving to hell & gone out into the desert one of these days, from where they will operate, so it means that very very soon there will be no more cosy cement floored tents with electricity laid on & a plentiful supply of water & the sea right next door, it will all be changed, about a bottle of water a day & sleep in the dust in a hole dug well into the ground, with ground strafing 109s as the only visitors. [Tucker p21] & As luck would have it I received 4 parcels today & between them they produced a marvellous collection of soap - as to quantity quality & variety.

We hear that our first couple of jobs will be Low Tac. R's of the forward Jerry fighter drones - that's nice!

12th Nov [1941]

This morning we were given a very good pep talk by the O.C. who attended a conference yesterday. The push will be on in a very few days time evidently, & everyone has to pull his finger well out & get stuck in - its going to be the dinkum works this time, Tripoli being the eventual

objective, & it has all got to be done in one big push. We hope to be advancing all the time so we will only be allowed to take the minimum of kit - only a change of clothing.

Sunday morning 16th Nov [1941]

This war is getting bloody dangerous now, Drip Meadows from 12 has been shot down on his first raid, that was about 2 days ago, & yesterday Dick Roulston was shot down too, he was in 21- the 109 Fs climbed up under him & got him from below.

On Friday I had the surprise of my life. I got a letter from Bunny, written from, of all places, Mersa Matruh. Needless to say I went straight to the O.C. to get permission to go & see her, but had a hell of a job trying to convince anybody that I wasn't pulling their legs about there being nurses at Mersa. Then there was another difficulty, there had been such heavy traffic on the road that only convoys were allowed on the road, however Major Thompson gave me a pass to say that I was on a very special urgent duty, so I got through. It was damn fine seeing Bunny again. There are 8 nurses up there & a jolly little community they are. Gerry & myself intend going up there again this afternoon.

About 3 nights ago we saw another tragic crash, one of the 55 Blenheim's came in to make a night landing, made a hell of a long low approach & went into the deck about 10 miles away - the plane went up in flames & the crew were all killed & roasted.

Last night we had a *Braavleis aand*. Dock & Pietersen went out & shot 6 gazelle. Poor old Jim didn't enjoy it at all tho' as he was one of the fellows who went out to the crashed Blenheim & he had enough of the smell of burning flesh.

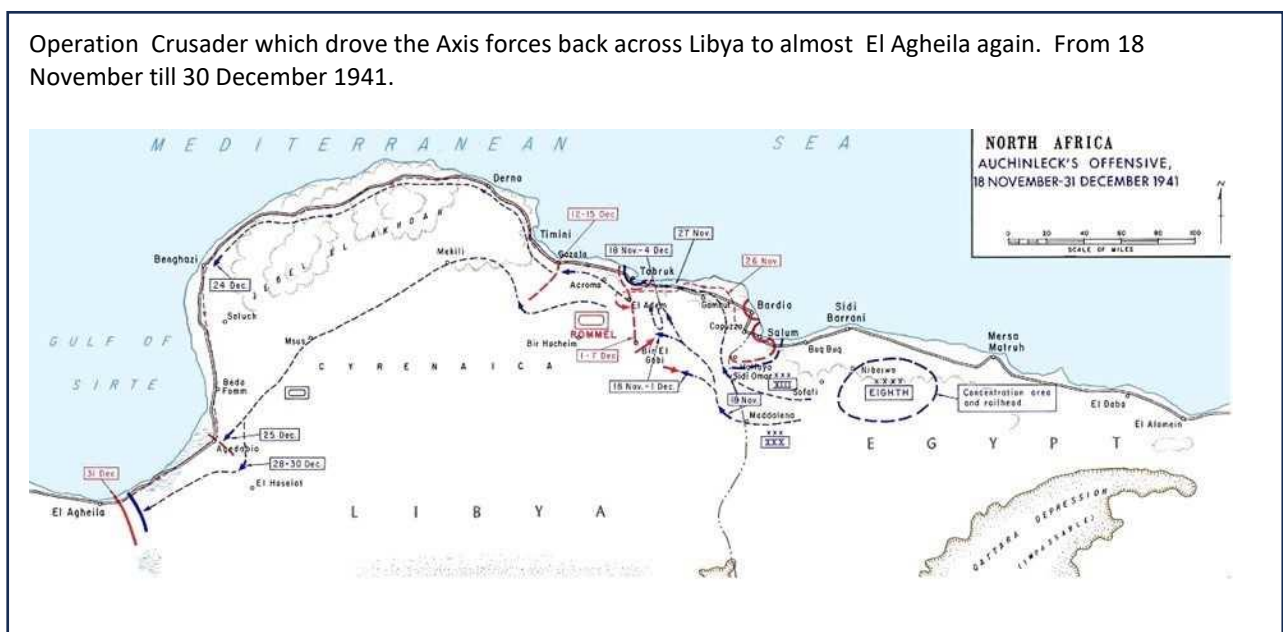
Our Squadron is like a ruddy League of Nations now, what with South Africans, Aussies, Canadians, Englishman & now the Yank test-pilot Murray who is spending some time out here with us.

Jim, Alex, Cecil Blake & George Marshall are going out to the desert camp this afternoon & 3 more planes are following tomorrow.

Les got back here day before yesterday looking very fit & full of life, he says his bum is still a bit tender, but he boasts that he is now the only split arse observer in the squadron.

17th Nov. [1941]

Operation Crusader which drove the Axis forces back across Libya to almost El Agheila again. From 18 November till 30 December 1941.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Desert_campaign#/media/File:AfricaMap3.jpg

Tucker p21 is "*Chapter Four The Squadron's part in 'Crusader'*"

I wrangled the O.C.'s staff car out of him yesterday aft. , & Gerry & myself set off for Mersa. When we got there we first went to look up a friend of Gerry's where, instead of having something to eat we had it out of a bottle, & when we eventually rolled up at the Nurse's Mess old Gerry was well on his way & I wasn't far behind.

We had a hell of a good party with the nurses, of which we enjoyed every minute. Eventually when the lights went out Gerry, whose aim was none too good in the dark sat down on a glass of whiskey instead of his chair. This naturally played up particular hell with his arse - not to mention the glass of whiskey & the floor of the Mess.

His backside was duly inspected by the light of matches, & then a torch was fetched & Gerry rather unwillingly had to take down his pants while I threw some light on the subject with a 3 cell torch, but when Bunny & Dulcie wanted to make pretty patterns on his bum with sticky plaster Gerry objected - it must have been a bit of a new one on him making love to a girl one minute & having her play about with his bare jack in the torchlight the next, but he took it well & enjoyed the joke with the rest of us. However as he was feeling weak he insisted on lying down in the car instead of bleeding all over the mess, & there he promptly puked all over the running board & the entrance to the mess, as he said a bit of an oblique.

However, when we got out of Mersa he allowed me to patch up his arse with a bit of plaster I had taken along for the purpose. We got back here at about 2 a.m., & as he was bleeding badly again then I woke Doc who put two stitches in his sunnyside.

This afternoon Gerry isn't feeling at all cheerful as his bum has gone stiff & he can only lie on one side. I haven't stopped laughing yet, but as Gerry says "*It was a hell of a joke last night but, by Christ, it's a bloody major tragedy now*". The boys in the Mess all think its a hell of a joke & it's going to take a hell of a lot of living down on Gerry's part.

3 More planes have gone up to the A.L.G. [*] this aft. Ritchie is in command of the Flight until Major Jones comes up. Major Jones has to go before the Medical Board & will probably be up here on Wednesday.

[*] A.L.G. = Advanced Landing Ground (?)

20 Nov at L.G. 112 [1941] [Tucker p22]

Here I am right back in the arsehole of the universe. Major Jones came up to Fuka on Tuesday intending to come along here the next morning but I suggested hanging on another day as I had a dinner date at Mersa for last night, & he O.K'd the idea so last night I went along again carrying old Gerry's sincere apologies, but the girls were more worried about Gerry's bum than the mess in their mess & were very relieved to hear that the cut was not serious & they could also treat the whole thing as a joke.

Gerry is getting on fine & was up & limping about today, but sitting down for a shit is his chief difficulty now.

Poor old Hugo Reid went for a loop day before yesterday, he was jumped by fighters somewhere near Gazala & was seen to hit the deck.

The push we have all been waiting for started day before yesterday, & at first it looked as if the whole idea was going to be knocked on the head by the enemy steadily retreating, but they have now turned & there is a hell of a big battle going on west of Solum & Bardia. [AIR p93] The Jerries foxed us there, for when they retreated we sent most of our tanks & heavy stuff towards Tobruk to engage them near there, but they suddenly switched back & now two full armoured divs with tanks are up against one tank Brigade near Bardia while our tanks near Tobruk are meeting with no resistance, or only the Itais which is the same thing - however we have lots of motorised troops & 60 pounders & 25 pounders in support south of Solum & it looks as if we have cornered the Jerries in the Solum, Bardia Ras el Milh cape [*]

[*] Ras el Milh cape is referred to again later. It is not marked on the map. It seems to be the cape to the west of the Bardia harbour. Bardia clearer on following 2 maps.

On Tuesday night the Jerries showed a bit of enterprise, 9 were captured at El Daba, & this is the story they told. 5 flying boats landed in the sea off El Daba [*] & put crews of 9 each to shore with time bombs & dynamite etc. which they put under the railway line. When they had done the job they were to row out to the flying boats in their dinghies, but the dinghy of this crew capsized so they swam back to shore & handed themselves over.

[*] El Daba is between Fuka & El Alamein.

On the other hand, on the same night we dropped parachute troops near the Jerry fighter dromes at Timini [*] & one or two other places, their job was to wreck as many of the fighters as they could, & then a plane would come over & drop supplies & tommy guns & dynamite at a prearranged spot for the troops to carry on their work with, but when the plane wanted to drop the stuff the bomb doors failed to open, so the poor blokes are stranded there & will be forced to hand themselves over - however we are told that they succeeded in wrecking a lot of planes.

[*] Timini is between Derna & Gazala



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Compass#/media/File:WesternDesertBattle_Area1941_en.svg

The Bostons have been doing a lot of low-level recces over the fighter dromes & so far have escaped unscathed, all ac.ac being well behind & the fighters not being able to catch up. Ritchie Tennant was chased by 8 this morning but only one, presumably a109 F stayed anywhere near at about 800 yards

behind was the nearest he could get, & Ritchie hadn't given the Boston the whole works, even so he was indicating 290 straight & level.



Signs of a considerable "flap" and impending aggression. As the Marylands attack a desert airfield three 109s scramble to attack, while four others taxi clear. The wide dispersal of parked aircraft is clearly shown.

Picture source Tucker p5

On Monday morning in Western - & Tuesday morning in Eastern Cynercia we had unexpected heavy rain, lots of tents & things along the line flooded out, & many of the pans looking like little lakes from the air - this rain will naturally affect the push no end, but so far it looks as if it may be in our favour as our Tac. R's report a hell of a lot of Jerry heavy stuff apparently bogged. The rain seems to have been ever so much heavier in Jerryland than over our tanks, & we can more or less pick our road where is the Jerries are right in it.

This is hell of a joint right down in the Desert, & water seems to be the biggest problem, it's even more precious than beer which is saying some. It's a hell of a change to live in holes in the ground & have one little ridge tent for a mess for about 30 or 35 of us, but we are all enjoying it & have lots of fun ragging each other, a spot of action & work is a damn good pick me up. [Tucker p22]

So far the Bostons have only being used for Tac R , doing about three shows a day - when we will be called on to do any bombing I don't know.

Major Tommy is the next one to be going back to the Union, he is only waiting until our base camp has been moved back to 21 Squadron according to orders, & then he is "*On his way*" to use one of his favourite expressions. His successor, Captain du Plessis has already taken over.

21 Nov [1941]

Things seem to be going rather well in the battle, (the 1st. S.A. Div. made contact with Tobruk this morning) [pencil brackets with this subsequently added "*Later proved to be only one of those rumours*"] & the Jerries & Itais in those parts seem to be hemmed in on all sides & have no alternative

but to fight which they have been doing all day. 70 Itai tanks were captured by the 1st. S.A. Div yesterday, and 19 aircraft, mostly G.50s complete with Jerry crews were captured too at Sidi Rezegh [*] Most of the Jerry fighters seem to have been withdrawn well back at the first sign of aerial activity because our plan to wipe them all off on the ground has not worked, they have not been there to be wiped. However we are told that all out parachute troops landed on Timini & Gazala to wreck fighters have got back bar 4 or 5, and that their job was a success

[*] Sidi Rezegh is on the map.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Crusader

21 Nov Rommel captured Sidi Rezegh airfield.

In the early afternoon, Rommel instead attacked Sidi Rezegh with 21st Panzer & captured the airfield. Fighting was desperate & gallant. For his actions during both days of fighting, Brigadier [Jock Campbell](#), who commanded 7th Support Group, was awarded the [Victoria Cross](#). However, 21st Panzer, despite being considerably weaker in armour, proved superior in its combined arms tactics & pushed 7th Armoured Division back with a further 50 tanks lost (mainly from 22nd Brigade).^[27]

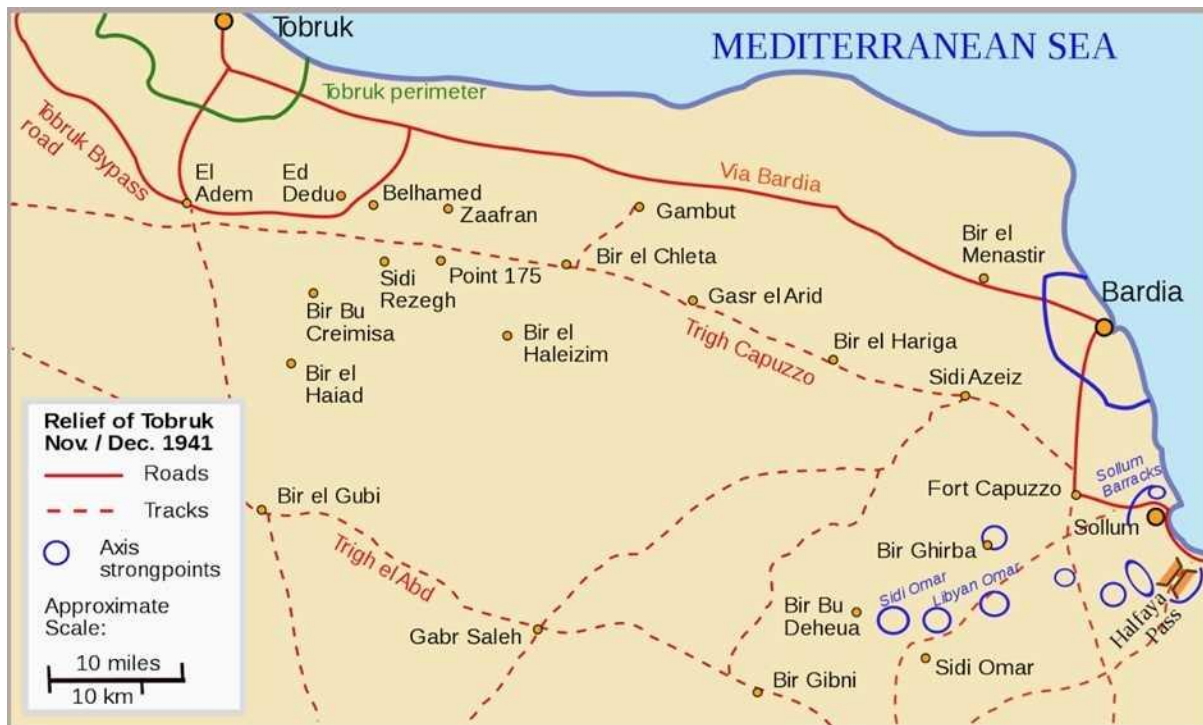
The fighting at Sidi Rezegh continued until 22 November, with the South African Division's 5th Brigade had become engaged to the south of the airfield. An attempt to recapture it failed, & the Axis counteroffensive began to gain momentum. 7th Armoured Brigade withdrew; all but four of their 150 tanks had become out of commission or destroyed.^[28] In four days, the Eighth Army had lost 530 tanks; Axis losses had been about 100.^[29]



German forces captured around the time of the Battle of Sidi Rezegh.

The most memorable action during the North African Campaign of the 3rd Field Regiment ([Transvaal Horse Artillery](#)) was during the Battle of Sidi Rezegh, on 23 November 1941. The South Africans were surrounded on all sides by German armour & artillery & were subjected to a continuous barrage. They tried to take cover in shallow slit trenches. In many places, the South African soldiers could dig only to around 9 in (23 cm) deep because of the solid [limestone](#) under their positions.^[30] The Transvaal Horse Artillery engaged German tanks from the 15th & the 21st Panzer Divisions, the gunners firing over open sights as they were overrun. That continued until many of the officers had died, & the gunners had run out of ammunition.

Many of the gun crews were captured. As darkness fell, those who could do so escaped back to Allied lines under the cover of darkness.^[31] The gunners of the 3rd Field Regiment managed to save five of their 24 guns from the battlefield & later recovered seven other guns.^[32] After the Battle of Sidi Rezegh, Acting Lieutenant General Sir Charles Willoughby Moke Norrie stated that the South African "*sacrifice resulted in the turning point of the battle, giving the Allies the upper hand in North Africa at that time*".^{[33][34]}



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Crusader#/media/File:Tobruk2Sollum1941_en.svg

21 Squadron lost 4 planes yesterday, but I don't know who the crews were. We haven't been called upon to do any bombing in close support yet - I hope they don't keep us on this Tac R. through the push, I'd like to give them the works good & solid. We are having a hell of a lot of trouble with the Wright Cyclone engines - they are simply eating up oil - rings giving in, but what the trouble is isn't certain yet - it's a bit thick when an engine uses 8 gallons of oil in an hour's run on the ground.

Tony Chalkley is missing, [AIR p88] he went on a recco this morning & has failed to return, I hope it is only a question of having run out of juice or oil, & that he has put down somewhere, he is a damn fine fellow who joined us down in Shandur two weeks ago.

The battle is raging day & night, we can hear the booms from here, the navy are giving them stick from off the coast in the night.

All the other squadrons with the ac.ac & everything else moved off from here this aft., but we received no orders to move, so this aft Major Jones went up to the local Tac.R. H.Q. at Fort Madelina [*] to find out, & they all seem to be so disorganised that they seem quite prepared to leave us to ourselves to do as we please, however we are moving up there tomorrow, its a very nice drome but rather overcrowded - they have 150 Fighters on it - there are no end of aircraft out in these parts for this push, there are 15 squadrons of Fighters & we are told about the same number of bomber squadrons. While we were there this aft 4 squadrons of Tomahawks [*] took off together to groundstraff the Jerries on the coast between Tobruk & Ras el Milh - I'd hate to be on the ground there when they all come over together & did their stuff.

[*] Fort Madelena is on the map 2 above. So is Sidi Rezegh.

Tomahawks - I posted Wiki & picture in 4 July post

In the meantime life here is not so bad at all except that there is no water, not that we mind the washing part of it's so much (at least I don't) but one doesn't get tea or coffee, & the pipeline is only about 20 or 30 miles away, but then the damn thing seems to be spouting water in all the wrong places

where it wasn't intended to at all. It's also damn cold of a night & in the early morning, but what with a flea bag, 5 blankets, pyjamas, sweaters & Teddy bears one can manage during the night, it's only getting up in the early morning that one feels it - taking off warm pyjamas & putting on cold clothes that it's a bit of a bastard. We suggested wearing our pyjamas under our clothes in the morning, but then the O.C. told us that all the fellows on his course who had been shot down went in their pyjamas, so now we don't wear pyjamas - I reckon in spite of all we say we flying personnel are a superstitious lot, not one of us will borrow anything for a stooge, as just about everyone in our squadron who has gone over with some borrowed kit or instrument has gone for a shit. [Tucker p22]

L.G. 122 23rd Nov. about 11 a.m. [1941]

We moved here yesterday aft. leaving behind us one Boston with a bent conrod - it's a hell of a pity to leave a perfectly good new machine out in the blue like that for the R.S.U.[*] to collect when they have time, which may be only in a month's time but the desert is positively littered with U.S. planes, mostly fighters on their noses. The first things to be removed from these planes are the watches & compasses. I made a point of going along to the Boston & removing both watches & compasses, the bombsight, the wireless set & the cushions & covered up all the cockpits.

[*] R.S.U. = Resupply Unit ?

Our ration lorry which went out to collect our rations 4 days ago & which should have been back the very next day hasn't put in an appearance yet - probably lost somewhere in the desert - luckily for them they have lots of rations, but one compass would have been worth its weight in gold to them.

Just as we were about to take off 2 F.A.A. [*] Hurricanes landed on the pan, one folded up his undercart while taxiing on the level ground, & the other burst a tailwheel. It was lucky for them that we were still there or they would have been stranded there until a passing plane had spotted them. We changed tailwheels for them & gave the chappy with the pranged oleo leg a lift here, but before abandoning the plane he tried to get the watch out but one screw had him foxed, but when he had left the plane I went back, took out both the watches & the compass & handed the latter over to him - I'm sticking to the watch.

[*] F.A.A. = Fleet Air Arm.

There are 2 S.A. squadrons here. Nos. 2 & 4 & it's damn fine meeting up with good old S. Africans again, when they heard about our ration lorry being overdue they had us over for a late lunch & supper last night & gave the F.A.A. chappie a bed in the hospital van - I reckon he will have a good word for South Africans wherever he goes.

It doesn't look as if we will go on any bombing raids in a hurry as the Bostons have been putting up such a good show on these low-level Tac.R's over the lines & Fighter dromes. Wing says that our reports are the only ones they can go by - we have the advantage over the Tac.R. Hurricanes in that we have far superior speed & 4 pairs of eyes instead of one.

Fort Caputso [*] fell yesterday aft. & the Jerries have been surrounded at Bardia, & the pipeline cut, so Jerry seems to be in a tight corner, but he seems to be putting up a hell of a fight nonetheless.

[*] Capuzzo I think. On both maps above.

George & Cecil came back yesterday reporting a hell of a lot of a/c on the Gazalas, about 60, mostly fighters on Gazala North alone but how the bombing is going we don't know as here we have sort of lost touch with the bomber wing.

With all these fighters on the drome we have all the latest fighter news, & they are working like hell, doing just about two shows a day. No. 4 S.A. Fighter with Tomahawks had a rather bad day

yesterday, losing 8 machines. Our fighters must be doing a hell of a lot of damage on their sweeps however, - they leave from here in batches of 30 or 40 but they don't seem to be able to find the Jerries in the air & when they do there is so much cloud cover that they can't give it a proper go, there is always a bank of cloud handy for the Jerries to duck for.

One Aussie rammed a G.50 yesterday, he came through a layer of cloud right onto an Itai. He swerved away but even so he caught the Itai fuselage with his wing, broke almost half his wing away & saw the Itai go down & a few minutes later they saw the Itai burning on the ground through a gap in the cloud.

These pans make marvellous landing grounds, they are as level & hard as any cement surface, & one can just about put up a netting fence or knock in wickets anywhere on them & have as good a tennis court or cricket pitch as you can wish for.

1:30 p.m.

Jerry isn't allowing himself to be so easily cornered, he seems to have broken out near El Alamein & El Jobi, or is pushing fresh reserves in between our lines & Corps H.Q. are either mixed up in a battle, or the phone wire has been cut or something, at any rate the local H.Q. can't get through to them to find out what's what, & they are relying entirely on the information we bring back & have asked us to carry on a constant recce over the battle area until things are cleared up.

With Jim Williams away with our Maryland com. plane down to 21 to fetch post & water, & Major Jones ill since last night it leaves only 3 crews to do it, Captain Gough (a new acquisition) Cecil Blake & Furstie.

Major Jones should never have been allowed to come back to operational flying after his attacks down & Shandur, not that they stood much chance of keeping him away in any case. He looks really washed out & ill. However now that we are here, even tho' it is sometime before we go on a show we at least are in it all & hear all the news more or less first-hand.

Midday 24th Nov. [1941]

Things don't look so rosy for us just now. Yesterday aft. we lost Cecil Blake with George Marshall as obs. & this morning Rox with George Francey as obs. , & the worst part of it is we don't know at all how they went - they just failed to return. This low-level recco at 3,000' over their entire army & fighter aerodromes simply amounts to suicide now - the Jerries evidently have the speed of the Boston taped by now & know how to lay the ac ac guns & the height is pretty much the same - 3 - 5 thousand feet & with a fighter patrol up at about 9 th. feet a Boston is cat's meat .[*]

[*] How acclimatised he has become to the death of his colleagues and friends is remarkable. Tucker pp 22 23.

The O.C. has gone to interview the big noises in charge of the Tac R. jobs about it, & we are all hoping to be taken off & put onto bombing, or at the very least to be sent out in twos or threes or with fighter escorts - it really makes our mouths water to watch huge formations of Marylands & Blenheims fly around overhead & pick up fighter escorts here of anything from 20 - 40 fighters & stooge off to drop their stuff, & every time the whole bang shoot come back.

This morning was George Francey's first op since he was grounded months ago on account of sinus, & ever since he has been back with us he has been as keen as mustard to go on a show.

The Doc of 2 Fighter vetted Major Jones this morning & has grounded him for 5 days to start off with, the Major has asked myself, Black & Venter, his crew, to fly with Labistour, who joined the squadron about 2 weeks ago. We are on standby to do the second job, Jim Williams is down to do the very next whatever it is.

From what we can make out the army seems to have things buttoned up again except for a hundred odd tanks they allowed to slip through past Tobruk.

26 Nov. 11 a.m. [1941]

No further news yet of either of the last two crews to go, but except for a shot through the main spar of Jim's machine yesterday we have had no further casualties.

Yesterday I was given a very interesting job, we were told to hover over a tank battle near Sidi Omar & I was to report it over the R.T. in Afrikaans so as to fox anybody who might have been listening in. [*]

[*] Tucker p23:

"Very often crews brought back reports of tank battles quite unknown to Headquarters and a new scheme was tried of getting the news back by R.T. Captain D Labistour with Observer Ralph Malan tried this out and the Army liaison officers gathered round the ground radio set were treated to a very forthright account of a tank battle, freely larded with such very typical Afrikaans expressions as "Pas op", "Neuk hulle", "Daar kom die boggers"! On the whole it was successful, but as the Boston crews were mostly fighting for their lives at the time they did not have much time for idle chit-chat over the radio"

We couldn't make out any artillery fire of any kind, but we had a nice bird's-eye view of three formations of our bombers doing pretty good bombing on what we all hope was the enemy - the movement was in every direction & from & to all places with the result that we hadn't the faintest idea which were ours & or which theirs - anyhow it was all very interesting.

Coming back we followed the wire, & I sat back eating from a tin of bully beef as I was damn hungry with the result that we flew slap bang over Madelina [*] & ended up well on our way to Jerabab, & then I hadn't the faintest idea whether we were North or South of Madelina - it was a hell of a bad show on my part, purely finger trouble getting lost on a 60 mile trip in a Boston flying down a conspicuous landmark like the wire & slap bang over Fort Madelina. However it taught me a lesson never to sit back & take easy stooges for granted. It must have shaken Labistour no end having a navigator like that.

[*] Fort Madelina is on the map in 12 Nov post.

Tucker p23 has *"Once Captain Labistour found himself somewhat lost after being chased by two German fighters. When he appealed to his navigator he was told to hang on as that gentleman was having his lunch."*

This running commentary job has proved a huge success, & two have been done this morning already, & I am on standby for the next one again.

Jerry has split up into bands of roving tank brigade all over the desert between Tobruk & Sidi Omar, & they are not running away, but attacking whatever they find, whether it is disorganisation on their part now, or merely perfectly organised guerrilla tactics I don't know, but I think the latter, & he is giving us no end of trouble as nobody knows where they are or are likely to show up next.

These tank battles all over the desert are proper mix-ups. An officer in a bust up tank passed through here yesterday on his way back from the battle at Bin Haschein [*], & he says it was such a muddle at one stage that there would be two or three Jerries in charge of about 20 British prisoners left sort of derelict on the desert. Then a Jerry lorry would come past & the Jerries would stop it, hop on & tell the prisoners they could go, & a little way off exactly the same thing would happen with the roles of prisoners & captors reversed, & at other spots they would be bunches of Jerries & Tommies all run out of ammunition standing around together swapping yarns as best they could.

[*] Written as Bir el Haleizen on map in 21 Nov posting (?).

Being a tank battle it was shifting about all the time & anybody left behind through a disabled tank or truck had to take his chances on being picked up by his own side. At one stage a Jerry Colonel gave himself up to this officer's tank, & they told him to hop on the back as there was no place inside, & when they had gone a little distance the Jerry was popped off by a Jerry bullet.

Night before last there was a bit of flapping here as a column of about 30 Jerry tanks & some M.T. etc. had broken through & were heading towards Madelina, but they turned north during the night, & it must have been them who were engaged at Sidi Omar yesterday.

27 Nov. [1941]

The story that Tobruk had been relieved, or rather that our forces had made contact with them about 4 days ago was all balls, they only made contact this morning, & things are looking much better now. The remnants of the two broken up Jerry army divisions which have been roaming about the desert the last few days giving everybody such headaches have at last joined up, or just about, between Sidi Omar & Sidi Rezeigh, & it looks as if the final big battle this side of Tobruk will start tomorrow, our troops should cut them off at the west & according to the positions of our troops on the map they should be attacking Jerry on all sides tomorrow. I am going out with Labistour at dawn tomorrow to report their movements.

Things at present seem to be in a hell of a mess; all our infantry & armoured units seem to be hopelessly split up & are looking for each other all over the ruddy desert, & we can only hope that Jerry is more disorganised than we are.

This R.T. Tac.R. job is going very well & is damn interesting work, & I can't imagine anything finer than a few of these jobs mixed up with a few straight bombing shows. We were chased by a 109 F. yesterday but with the help of a nearby bank of cloud we managed to shake him off doing 310 indicated with a little bit in hand.

These bivouac tents we are sleeping in out here are not at all popular just now, we hear that night before last a South African Colonel, "*Pop*" Strachan S.A.M.C., sleeping in one was run over by a transport column in the dark & he was discovered next morning's squashed all flat - not so nice.

We cannot yet seem to locate the Jerry fighter dromes, although about 40 a/c were reported at Derna last night - mostly bombers, but when the fighters went out there today to groundstraf them there was such a heavy shitstorm on the go that they simply couldn't see anything.

No. 3 Australian Fighter with Tommies had a very successful day day before yesterday, they shot down 11, & had 8 probables & 3 possibles - a mixed bag of ME's & G50s & various other odds & sods, including two "*Flying Storks*" [*]- they lost only two for it all, & the pilots may be safe.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fieseler_Fi_156_Storch



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/42/Fieseler Storch 3 %28cropped%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/42/Fieseler_Storch_3_%28cropped%29.jpg)

Likely to contain officers of the German High Command.

Friday Nov 28 [1941]

It's a bit of a bugger keeping up with the days & dates, I always have to go about asking half a dozen fellows & then have to take an average. One day is exactly like the one before except for the new yarns that come in. Things in the Tobruk - Sidi Omar - Sidi Rezegh area are improving rapidly - the Jerries who had formed up into more or less one body between Rezegh & Omar were badly beaten up by our tanks & bombers this morning & are now broken up & on the run again.

We went out on the dawn patrol this morning, fully expecting to encounter a Jerry fighter as this dawn patrol has been done far too regularly by a lone Boston. We located the Jerry concentration peacefully encamped with a few little fires going 10 miles NW of Sidi Omar [*], evidently making coffee or something. They were very closely concentrated & offered the best bombing target I've seen in the desert, & had hardly reported this over the radio when 6 109 Fs came at us out of the cloud above the concentration & we had to run for it with the Jerries hot on our tail for a few minutes.

[*] on the large scale map posted in Nov 21.

However, with the Boston indicating 340 in a very gentle dive from 3000' down to 700' we were by no means easy meat. The fighters soon gave up the chase & returned to their patrol over the Jerries. By this time we were much further north than we realised, & when we turned southeast intending to hit the wire at Sidi Omar flying at 700 ft we fondly imagined that any troops we would fly over would be our own, but what was our surprise when the very first lot we struck opened up at us with everything they had - light stuff, machine guns & heavy stuff.

It shook us, as we had no height to play around with, & the tracer & incendiary was flying past above & below us & the heavy stuff was bursting all around us. I could even hear two or three of the shells exploding & feel the plane rocking in the blast. We then realised that we were much nearer to Solum than Omar & right in among the Jerries, however there was nothing to do about it but carry straight on as the cloud was well above us at about 3,000'. That was an uncomfortable minute or two - wherever we looked we were looking into gun barrels & orange & red tracers & incendiaries. We got out of it without so much as a shot through the plane, but how, I don't know.

Dennis Labistour who is the oldest operational pilot in the S.A.A.F. & has tons of guts to be operating at his age, was badly shaken, & can't forget one particular big ac.ac gun barrel into which he was looking at one stage & then saw it belch forth a lot of smoke - he reckons he could see the ruddy barrel was dirty & that must have been the only reason it missed us.

After breakfast Labistour got stuck into a bottle of gin & a bottle of lime, & by lunchtime was well on his way, & by 4 o'clock afternoon he was quite *poeg eye* & ready for the next stooge.

This broadcast racket of ours is becoming quite popular & all kinds of people roll up at our wireless van in the hope of hearing a broadcast. It doesn't look as if we will ever be taken off this job as we are making a great success of it, & the A.O.C. has personally complimented us on our job, saying that our information was about all the Air Force is planning they're bombing raids on. For instance, before landing this morning, we passed the formation of Blenheims on the way to the target we had just reported on.

[*] pencil note in margin "*Hellfire Hope of bombing when 9 machines*". Following paragraph written with different ink.

When we eventually go on to bombing I will have the utmost pleasure in participating in a raid on Hellfire & Musaid, & knock half a dozen varieties of particular hell into those guns down the barrels of which we were squinting this morning. I reckon we are the only crew which has flown that height anywhere near Hellfire Pass & got away with it.

"*Hellfire Pass*" is labelled as Halfaya Pass on the maps with 20 Nov. That map also shows the escarpment which forced the army to have to use it. There are two pictures of the escarpment.

Dec 1st 10 a.m. [1941]

Time is getting on, December already, we will have to shake a leg if we want to stick to our program of having Christmas dinner in Benghazi - these Jerry tanks in the Tobruk - Rezegh area are doing their best to break up our program, they are really putting up a damn good show, but as usual he has been hopelessly underestimated, both in numbers, armament & equipment, especially the latter.

Doc. tells me that one of the local Docs went out to a Jerry column which has been shot up & abandoned quite near here, & he brought back a hell of a lot of Jerry equipment - far superior to ours in every respect - a power trailer working off an air-cooled motor, & trucks driven by air cooled engines, ideal for the desert, & full & complete medical first aid outfits in every truck, much superior to those carried in our aircraft. But the gem of the lot was a portable one man filtration plant, you strap it on your back & can carry it about like a haversack, all you do is dip one nozzle into a sewer, waggle a little handle, & bacteriologically pure water flows out of another nozzle.

The 5th S.A. Brigade was very badly smashed up at Sidi Rezegh last week, but exactly how much nobody knows as yet except that so far only 1 400 out of the 5 000 have remustered, in spite of the B.B.C. saying that not more than 1,200 were killed & taken prisoner.

The Fifth was formed up in U information at Rezegh, facing the enemy to the north, with their anti-tank guns etc in front, & their heavy artillery in the middle of the U, & all that transport & supply line strung out to the south. Jerry made a feint attack from the North when all of a sudden a much superior tank column came at the 5th from the rear, the tanks zigzagging in between the supply lorries, followed by motorcyclists with Tommy guns who cleared up the slit trenches, & in turn followed by the infantry in troop carriers who rounded up the prisoners.

Those who escaped this withering fire simply waited until the Jerries had expended all the ammunition & then made a break for it using such vehicles as weren't too badly shot up.

It was a hell of a good manoeuvre on the Jerries part, & we must take off our caps to them for being able to bring off an effective organised attack like that from the rear when they were supposed to be disorganised & more or less on the run. The South Africans stood their ground as best they could, but all the heavy stuff was pointing the wrong way for the attack, & couldn't be swung around in time, & they were simply mown down & run over by the tanks.

[*] In the entry that follows for New Year's Day, Bull's brother Stanley, who was there in an armoured car, lays the blame entirely on the S.A Command.

Another S.A. unit to suffer badly at the hands of the Jerry tanks was the 10th S.A. Field Hospital. A column of Jerry tanks came down on them & went right through them going right over the patients in the wards & knocking over & shooting up the ambulances in their way - that was a bloody bad show & the Jerries are going to pay dearly for it at the hands of the South Africans yet.

Any amount of stories are coming in which all illustrate what a mix-up this tank battle, or rather series of battles is or are. One of the latest concerned Sir William Beecher, who incidentally was at school with old Bachus (Sergeant Greig). Sir William was in a tank in one of the battles & his tank was badly shot up, all the other members of the crew being killed, & he slightly wounded. He got out of the tank intending to make a run for it, but no sooner had he got out than a Jerry opened up on him with a Tommy gun, knocking him down badly wounded in the leg & both hands.

Next the Jerry run up to him, & fixed him up pretty effectively with his own (the Jerries) field dressing & took him prisoner. A few hours later the whole party were captured by South Africans, & later that whole party was recaptured by Itais, & later the whole lot were in turn captured by an Imperial regiment. Sir William was captured & recaptured 4 times that day, & he ended up here yesterday where the last chunk of shrapnel was cut out of his ear & he was packed away to hospital in a Lodestar. [*]

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar#/media/File:Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar over Houston,1947-48.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar#/media/File:Lockheed_Model_18_Lodestar_over_Houston,1947-48.jpg)

This management or rather mismanagement of our Field Hospital & Clearing Stations up to now has been bloody disgrace, & it is reckoned that hundreds of lives or in some cases “*only*” limbs have been lost as a result of this mismanagement.

We have at our disposal a fair number of ambulance planes, most probably not half of what we could do with, but even so, these planes aren't doing a quarter of the work they are capable of & willing & eager to do.

The hospital planes, Lockheeds, D.H.86s & Bombays [*] use this drome as their number No1 calling station, & the Big Noise in charge of the whole Hospital System with the Army has his headquarters on the drome too, & yet only a matter of 4 or 5 miles away there is a big casualty clearing station which has been sending its casualties all the way to Matruh a distance of about 120 miles by road ambulance for the simple reason that they didn't know where the hell to contact the Hospital planes, & the same thing has been going on all the time all along the line - the ambulances have been driving right past our drome, & it was only about 3 days back that a convoy of about 20 fully loaded ambulance passed our camp on their way to Matruh that the Corporal! in charge of the convoy saw Doc's ambulance here, & as he had two very bad patients who he knew would not make the journey, he stopped to make enquiries from Doc about getting these two fellows to Mersa by air.

[*] DH 86 = https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Havilland_Express



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Havilland_Express#/media/File:De_Havilland_DH.86_1_AAU_RAAF_in_flight_c1942.jpg

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Bombay



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol_Bombay#/media/File:Aircraft_of_the_Royal_Air_Force,_1939-1945-_Bristol_Type_130_Bombay._CH2936.jpg

Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKb74xRPgQ>

One of the patients had only a double compound fracture of the arm, but he had been knocking in the desert from one field ambulance station to the next for 6 days in ambulances & trucks & the arm was all green & poisoned, & Doc says he will definitely lose the arm, & there is a 50:50 chance on his life. Doc got them on the ambulance planes in no time & they were on their way to Mersa.

This little episode brought to light the hopeless inefficiency of the old bastard who is supposed to be directing the casualty clearing part of the push & we hear he has been given the push, & a good job too, but in the meantime lots of patients have suffered & lost limbs & lives.

In the meantime the battle in the air is going very well, the fighter patrol which has been chasing the Bostons in the Tobruk Sidi Rezegh area was set a trap for yesterday morning. A lone Boston went out again over the usual "postal run" but well behind & above was a fighter wing of 24 MK II Hurricanes. This time it was an M.E. 110 who chased the Boston, & the Fighters swooped down & got him. Another fighter sweep yesterday morning ran into a squadron of Stukas escorted by a very heavy fighter screen, about 40 a/c in all. The Tomahawks dived down on the Stukas & got one, then the fighter escort dived down on the Tomahawks & the fun & games started. The official figures are 15 confirmed shot down, & 15 damaged, all G60s & Machi 200's [*] & the one Stuka, & all the Stukas jettisoned their bombs & ran, so the bombs were wasted too, & we lost 1 Tomahawk.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macchi_C.200_Saetta



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Macchi_C.200_Saetta#/media/File:Macchi_MC-200_920901-F-1234P-073.jpg

The moon has been up the last 4 or 5 nights, & the Jerries have been bombing the railhead down south of Sidi Barani at L.G. 76 every night like buggary, & it was only yesterday that we were told that it is a dummy railhead complete with dummy train & engine which puffs out showers of sparks every so often - the real railhead is about 2 miles back along the railway & has been absolutely undisturbed. We are definitely one up there, a damn good ruse it is too, actually I suppose we have hundreds of tricks like that up our sleeves which will only be made public properly after this shitstorm has blown itself out.

We have had a recce plane overhead at a hell of a height the last two or three mornings at about 11 o'clock, & this morning two fighters from No.3 Squadron (Aussie) were sent up at about 10:15 to lay for him & he has just come over, the ac.ac fired a few bursts at it & when the two Tomahawks got on his tail they stopped firing.

Last we saw of them the Jerry was running like hell into the desert southeast with the two Tommies hot in pursuit - they should get him.

It's a nice warm morning for a change with no wind blowing & we are all making full use of the sun. I am sitting in the sun alongside the mess tent writing this up, Dennis Labistour is demonstrating to the rest of the boys how to make beer glasses out of bottles by filling them up with oil to the required height, heating an iron rod on a blow lamp, & poking this rod into the oil, the surface of the oil start boiling & cracks the bottle as clean as a whistle, however Dennis is making glasses at the ratio of 4 bottles to 1 glass - the rest are either bust or don't snap off clean, these constitute what he calls "fuck ups".

The rest of the boys are sitting out here in the sun reading & chatting, or rather they were until a few minutes ago about five minutes after the ac.ac stopped when all of a sudden there was a dull thud about 10 yards from us, & it was a 4 inch by ½" by ½" chunk of shrapnel full of jagged ends - there was a rush for tin hats which they are all wearing now that there is no more danger of shrapnel. Major Jones is taking snaps of them all resplendent in tin hats - it's about the first time they've all had them on - me, I haven't one, in any case that chunk would have gone right through any tin hat.

These ruddy Jerry fighters are still chasing the Bostons over their own lines, Padre (Lt. Kingon, a new acquisition & a damn fine fellow who was taking theology before war) was chased by a 110 over Dena & Gazala this morning, but he got away altho' his rear gunner had to open up. [AIR p97]

Yesterday aft. Major Jones, Labistour & self drove over to Fort Madilina & then up along the wire about 15 miles & then back across the desert here. Madalina is just a jumble of stones & tiles now, but before it was knocked over it must have been a typical "*Beau Geste*" fort. What struck me most however was the good job the Itais had made of the boundary wire entanglement fence - it's about 10 ft across & about 5 feet high & is one mass of barbed wire, - it must have cost a fortune to erect, & all along the Libyan side the Itais have built a very good hard surface road.

Coming back across the desert it was an eye-opener to see all the tracks - the desert is literally ploughed up - miles & square miles of hundreds of miles of it - ever so much more effective than the Gypos could have done it with their ploughs. After the war it will take a lot of good hard rain to settle the surface again - the rain of centuries out here in the desert.

Talking of rain, water is the only scarce commodity out here if you don't count beer, but we are doing very well in spite of it with a shave every 2 or 3 days, a face wash & toothbrush once a day, & a foot wash about once every 4 days, & then use the same water to wash a shirt vest & a few pairs of sox - life's in the bag!

Grub is as good as at Fuka, it is mostly tinned stuff, but not the usual Bully & biscuit one day & biscuit & Bully the next - oh no, we have salmon, bacon, potatoes, green peas, carrots, & canned fruit & cream - all tinned, & occasionally we have pumpkin fritters (without pumpkin). [Tucker p22] Ja! we are being done very well for by Percy the little R.A.F. A.C.H. who used to give a hand in the kitchen at Fuka. Percy is the most important man in the squadron, he is really pulling his finger & lost that R.A.F. complex he had when you first came to us - I will never forget the day I nearly hopped over the kitchen door at Fuka to take him to pieces because he refused to give me grub because I was 5 minutes late, & he had been given official meal hours. He has lost all that attitude & knows that he is appreciated.

The Colonel was out here yesterday, & he says he is doing his level best to get us back on to bombing, he says as soon as we have 9 Bostons serviceable we will start bombing (at present we have only the 3 we have out here.)

Later The Tommies got the JU 88 (as it proved to be) about 25 miles from here but as far as I am concerned they spoilt it all by shooting two of the crew after they had bailed out of the burning machine. They were only obeying orders we all received a few weeks ago, & they had the added justification they had seen the Jerries do exactly the same thing to one of their own boys a little while ago - still, I don't think I could do it after cool consideration - even if I reckoned it may be done to me if the positions were reversed.

2nd. Dec. 4 p.m. [1941]

It's a hell of a nasty day today, cloudy, rainy & windy & as cold as charity. A couple of us have been sitting here in the mess tent writing letters etc since lunch & the tent is just about being blown away & is flapping about in the wind - thank Gawd for the rain, as there is not very much dust blowing about.

We have been called on to do only one recce yesterday morning & one this morning. The battle isn't going so well just now, the Jerries have broken our corridor to Tobruk, & our chaps have retreated into Tobruk & down into the desert. The only bright spot of local news is that the pockets of Jerries round about Sidi Omar have thrown in the towel - on account of water shortage we hear.

In the meantime we have been cut down to one cup of water a day to release water for all the troops down in the desert who have now been cut off from Tobruk as a source of supply.

It's a bit hard on the poor buggers, but nonetheless I reckon they should be given two days to remuster & reorganise & should then be told to bloody well push up & reconnect to Tobruk so as to re-establish supply lines - at present this local series of battles is more less 50:50 on the ground, with the Jerries giving as good as they are taking. Luckily for us we haven't any doubt as to who is going to be "*pushed*" in this push, for at present things don't look too bright at all. Jerry has been hopelessly underestimated again as usual - thank goodness we have the whip hand of him in the air & the navy are giving them hell off the coast. The land army can't squeal about getting any air or sea support this trip, I reckon it's up to them now. On account of the weather there doesn't seem to have been any air activity today other than a heavy bombing raid somewhere - the Blenheims came over here this morning to rendezvous with the fighters.

There are a hell of a lot of the boys in the tent now, & as usual the topic of conversation has swung around to the usual well worn channel, & Furstie, a little fellow of about 6' 3" weighing only about 220 lbs who used to have a shock of blonde hair but shaved it off short, all but one curly lock dangling over his forehead, about 2 weeks ago, remarked on how hot blooded the local women are, he said that one honey he met & spent his leave with at her flat all but pulled his bloody hair out during her "*loving embraces*" as the writers would call it.

Now we all know why Furstie has had his hair shorn & he is having his leg pulled no end. I have just told him that his little effort is going into my diary, & Padre, whose pen I am using says that the least I can do is add a footnote mentioning that he has expressed his disapproval of the whole affair.

The subject is just changed to our water shortage & how all whisky & gin will in future have to be drunk neat. Furstie has just proclaimed the fact that he hasn't taken off his socks for 2 weeks to which Dennis Dodd, who shares Furstie's bivvy tent replied that he knew it all along. Dennis Labistour has just told us how he watched a mechanic wash a pair of sox in petrol yesterday, & when they were dipped into the petrol they went pitch black & as stiff as top boots.

We have just heard that No.4 SA Fighter lost 4 planes today owing to the bad weather, they were supposed to have flown into the deck. No 2 also lost one the same way this morning, & Wing Commander Al Bowman was shot down in a Blenheim yesterday by our own ac-ac with his flaps & undercart down when he was coming in to land at Gialo. That's a hell of a poor show, apart from losing a damn good man, the fact remains that our own troops should at least know a bloody

Blenheim when they see it obviously coming into land. However, I suppose the same thing happens on the other side too.

John Hickson, commonly known locally as Hick Johnson, or Boogie Woogie has just come in & related his latest tale of woe. He thought he would be clever this morning & catch up some of the rainwater, so he put his canvas bath outside. He has just come back from collecting his water, but when he got to where he had left his bath he found no bath - it had literally Gone with the Wind, & should be miles away by now - Poor old Boogie Woogy, he always seems to slip on his guava somehow or other.

Major Jones sent the Maryland down to Base this morning with all the empty water drums & cans we could lay our hands on, so we should have plenty of water by this evening or tomorrow morning. It's about time we had a bit of water again, as we could all do with a wash. I have been in the same clothes for about a week now, namely vest, shirt, sweater, pants, teddy bear & the lumber jacket of my battle dress. All I do before crawling into bed is to kick off my boots & sox, & change my sox every two days or so. [Tucker p22]

3rd Dec [1941]

The usual crowd here in the mess tent again this evening swapping yarns to pass the time - anything which will raise a laugh is considered a good yarn, even old Blackie's one about the observer at Habanniyah who was told by his pilot to jump when their old plane commenced to break up in the air. The observer lost no time in bailing out, but the poor sod forgot to clip on his parachute pack & they had to scrape him together where we hit - a rather tragic story as Blakie told us before he related it, but whenever its told it never fails to raise a laugh.

There are always yarns coming in from the battle too. The H.Q. of one unit was badly broken up & scattered to the four winds, & eventually a few days ago the Brigadier decided to reform west of Madelina, so he stopped his car & planted his flag, but for two days nothing happened, not a soul of his unit rolled up. Then yesterday one of the corporals in his H.Q. unit who had always been the C.O's pet aversion, & who had been wandering about the desert for days, found out where he was supposed to rally, so he found his way to the flag, & when he got there the Brigadier fell on his neck & greeted him like a long lost brother - the unit was starting to rally.

Then there was another bloke who had also lost his unit & was on his way back to H.Q. to find out where he had to contact his unit. He got as far as Sidi Omar on the wire, but he knew that the place was mined, as were many of the other gaps in the wire so he hung on waiting for a convoy who could lead him through the minefield. Eventually a convoy formed up & they got going, but no sooner had they got going than he found himself in front, so he pulled up to get a couple of vehicles ahead of him, but these very soon developed "*engine trouble*" & other ailments which allowed them to pull up alongside & again he would find himself leading & not knowing when he would go up with the big bang. Then it transpired that nobody knew where the mines were, & the other fellows thought he was going to lead them.

In this convoy were about 20 trucks of Itai prisoners, & in the night these trucks got lost, but the fellow in charge of the convoy wasn't at all worried about losing them, he maintained that the prisoners would do their level best to get back to the convoy - & sure as fate, next morning they turned up, in the charge of one solitary little corporal.

During last year's big Wavell push the Itai prisoners were even more loathe to escape, another yarn is told of one solitary Aussie M.P. at a crossroads standing with his rifle slung behind his back, & about 40 Itais crowded behind him, following him like so many sheep.

The tank battle is no longer news, & as far as I can make out the two sides as far as tanks are concerned are just cancelling each other out - we seem to claim having destroyed about twice as many

of theirs as they have of ours, but it doesn't seem to worry Jerry very much. Most probably his salvage & repair units are the key to the whole position - he is not only salvaging his own tanks as fast or almost as fast as we knock them out, but seems to be repairing those that we leave behind, & is now using our own tanks against us - quite probably most of them are more of a liability to him than an asset.

Sidi Rezegh seems to be breaking all records - it has been captured & recaptured almost a dozen times up till now - 3 or 4 times in one night, & in whose hands it is now I haven't the faintest idea - probably just changing owners this minute.

4th Dec. [1941]

Percy has surpassed himself this evening, he went down to Base with the Maryland & put in some good work there with the results that we had a 3-course meal this evening, soup, steak & veg, & sweets - it's remarkable what meals he turned out on his three Primus stoves.

Today has been another good day in the air for us, our fighters met another formation of Stukas escorted by a strong formation of fighters & got stuck into them. The Stukas jettisoned their bombs on their own troops & ran. Here is the official bag: 13 shot down, 9 probables, & 12 damaged, & our losses were 2 Tomahawks which collided in the dogfight, but one of the pilots is safe among our own troops, - the other one who also bailed out is believed to be a prisoner.

We hear that the consistent & accurate bombing has shaken the Jerries no end. Two army officers who were captured by the Jerries & have since been recaptured tell how they were taken along in a car to what was evidently a pre-arranged meeting of General Rommel's staff.

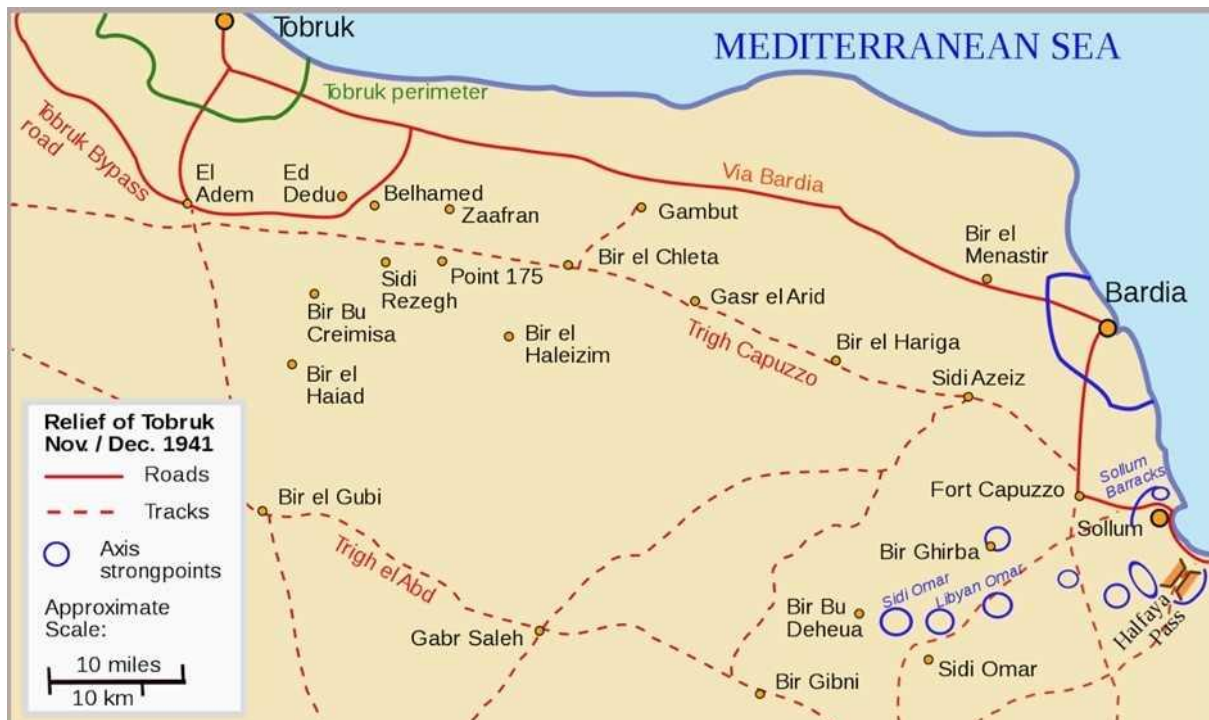
The Jerry brass hats all got together & were having a heavy pow-wow when a big formation of Marylands was seen to be approaching. In two shakes of a duck's tail there was not a Jerry in sight above ground, & the two British officers were entirely forgotten. They say that Rommel was about the last man to duck.

5th Dec [1941]

Today's news is again rather reassuring. Again the Air Force have made merry. The bag is 17 J.U.87s, 1 109, 1 G50, 1 Machi 200 shot down: 3 J.U.87s, 2 109Fs, 1 Machi 200 probable, & 2 J.U.87s, 1 109F, & 2 G50s damaged. I have forgotten what our losses are, but have an idea they are around about the 2 mark.

The Indian Div., northwest of Bir El Gobii [*] has been doing good work. The day before yesterday they captured two batteries of big guns, & three single guns, captured 14 M.K. 13 Itai tanks which they subsequently blew up, & captured 150 M.T. 70,000 gallons of petrol & sundry stores & took 700 prisoners, & when the Stukas came to dive bomb them they shot down 3 Stukas with small arms, that's a damn good days work I reckon.

[*] Bir el Gobi = Bir El Gubi. On this map.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Crusader#/media/File:Tobruk2Sollum1941_en.svg

The 2nd S.A. Div. is now in action around Hellfire pass & Bardia. It is reckoned that Hellfire pass can't hold out very long unless they have a large supply of water stored there. Solum by the way I am told was taken by us two days ago.

Today Major Jones, Dennis Labistour, Blackie Duncan, Pip & myself made a X desert trip in the station wagon up along the wire halfway to Sidi Omar to see what we could rescue out of a belly landed Maryland which has been lying on a pan there for almost 10 days now - all we got out of her were the four fixed Browning guns & a pair of camera leads - everything else had been rifled, compasses, watches, bomb sight, free guns, even the Pratt & Whitney embossed coat of arms have been taken off one of the engines with a cold chisel.

We also had a look at some damaged Jerry & Itai lorries which had been bombed on the road along the wire, & the remains of a burnt out two seater plane, looks like a Romeo [*] with two graves alongside - two wooden crosses, each saying "*Unknown Italian airman killed in action while doing his duty.*" - there couldn't have been much left of the poor fellows.

We think that B Flight has already moved up from Base to the pan where we were last at - L.G. 130, but we are not certain as we haven't heard a thing yet & were expecting the O.C. to come to tell us what's what.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IMAM_Ro.37



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IMAM_Ro.37#/media/File:Italian_IMAM_Ro.37_reconnaissance_aircraft_in_flight.jpg

Wiki bibliography has the Romeo name.

6 Dec. [1941]

The O.C. pitched up here today & told us we are definitely moving back to L.G. 130 tomorrow morning. From there we will operate as a bomber squadron as B Flight have 12 Bostons there. However Battle Headquarters do not want to release us from this Tac.R. job, so two planes will fly over to here every evening & be on tap here for the following day's Tac.R.

Major Jones is going back to Base tomorrow & from there on to Cairo where he will have to go before the medical board. I think he is going to be grounded personally, & that I will be left without a pilot & may have to team up with some inexperienced rookie pilot.

B Flight are doing the first bombing raid tomorrow morning with 6 Bostons. They have been given Bardia as a target, the "*Nursery Slopes*" as it is now called as all the split arse ac-ac they used to have there has been removed & it's supposed to be the easiest target there is now. I guess Bardia will wake up with a bump when 6 tons of 500 pounders hit it tomorrow morning.

There have been some particularly heavy bombing raids & fighter sweeps today, but we have not heard any of the results. Some big formations of Marylands & Blenheim's have come over to rendezvous with their fighter escort here, & swarms of fighters have taken off from here on their own to go on sweeps.

Cloudy Joe gave us a bit of excitement this evening, he took off on Tac.R. rather late, & was told to turn back at 5 p.m. so as to land before sunset, but at 5 he spotted a lot of movement on which they gave a report with the result that it was getting dark when he got back, & he had never done a solo night landing before in any plane let alone a Boston on which we had only about 4 or 5 hours. Luckily for everyone concerned the R.T. was working well, so he circled it drome while the flares were being put out & in the meantime Padre was giving him a spot of coaching & a pep talk

over the R.T. Cloudy came down & made a split arse landing. I think Padre's pep-talk had a lot to do with it.

This afternoon has been bloody cold, with the sun peeping out from among the clouds every now & again just to make the intervals in between seem 10 times worse. Percy came along to me & said that as this may be our last evening here he would like to give us a good supper & what should he prepare. I told him curry, & to make it plenty hot, & away he went with a happy smile.

When supper was served yesterday I found out the meaning of his smile -The curry was forthcoming & I enjoyed it, had two helpings. I must admit it didn't taste very much like curry, but it was very nice & plenty hot. Percy hadn't a very wide choice of hotting up ingredients but he seems to have done the job very effectively with plenty of curry powder, pepper, horse liniment from the sickbay, & powdered beer bottles.

Dennis Labistour, Furstie & myself were about the only fellows who appreciated it, the rest, when they heard the curry was my idea had some very scathing things to say. Major Jones seems to take it for granted that the Medical Board are going to ground him on account of an ulcerated stomach, & Doc reckons his tonsils are bugged & he will have to go down to the Union with the Major to have them out.

L.G. 130 8th Dec 10 a.m. [1941]

Yesterday was a bad day for us, we lost two Bostons. Padre went out on the Sparrowfart stooge & failed to return, we haven't any idea of how they went as they never used the R.T. at all. It's a hell of a pity, not only was Padre a damn fine fellow through & through, but he had the makings of a really top-notch operational pilot, & his observer, a New Zealand, Sgt. Rudge has been putting up a damn good show too.

Next to go up was Holly Hollenbach with Bakus as his observer, & they also failed to return without using their R.T. on the trip at all. This makes 5 Bostons we have lost on this Tac.R. & we don't know how any one of them has gone.

B Flight went to Bardia yesterday morning, but found low cloud so came back as it was more in the nature of a practice stooge & wasn't very important as a bombing raid. They went again this morning & have just come back & are busy landing. How it went I don't know except that all 6 planes are back flying split-arse formation.

Colborn or "*Aussie*" as we all call him, Cloudy Joe's observer, & one of the very best fellows has just come in & said that Japan has declared war on America & England. He is damn glad of it, & says it will make "*some of those bastards back home wake up & do their bit.*"

6 p.m.

This afternoon 6 more Bostons went out to bomb Bardia. I flew with Richie Tennant. We found the target very quiet with only light ac-ac & bombed from 7000 ft. Our flight of 3 went for some store buildings on the brink of the South Wadi & the other formation went for stores & dumps on the North Wadi alongside the hospital. My bombing wasn't so hot at all, under shooting a bit. I don't like this Quadrant release in the Boston at all, it's so easy to drop more than one bomb at a time. I dropped all 4 bombs where I meant to drop Nos 1 & 2. The other formation who were bombing from lower all but wiped out the hospital. We came home via Sidi Omar where another battle was in progress. [AIR p99]

We got away from 122 just in time, as some 110s 109s & 88s came over this afternoon & ground strafed the place. They shot down a D.H.86, a hospital plane, but I believe all 4 the occupants

managed to get out altho' two were badly burnt - the pilot landed her after she was alight. The ac-ac however shot down one 110. No damage was done to any of the planes on the drome at all.

Today's news is quite good, we have undisputed possession of Bir el Gubi now, & we have recaptured Gambut & found 20 wrecked & shot up 109s on the drome. The Jerry tanks have moved away westward & are beyond Bir Hasaheim [*] now. They seem to have left the Itais to carry on the fighting in the "old" battlegrounds of last week. It is also believed that we have pushed down from Tobruk to Sidi Rezeigh.

[*] Bir Hasaheim = Bir Hacheim ? On the map below.

The latest rumour is that the Japs are using mustard gas, but I suppose it is actually nothing more than just a rumour.

We have now definitely been taken off the Tac.R. job, & will only be called upon to help out when there are jobs which the Tac.R. Hurricanes can't do. Needless to say we are rather pleased as it is proved to be a bit costly to us.

9 Dec. [1941]

This morning there was no end of a balls up, 3 Wing, who is now in charge of us, last night gave us the job of bombing Derna today, but the O.C. said it was out of our operational range, so eventually they gave us the Martuba's as a target, but even that is too far, but eventually the O.C. found a way out, by asking if we could refuel at 134 on the way out & permission was given.



List of L.G. s with coordinates

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_North_African_airfields_during_World_War_II

LG 130 was 80 km west of Sidi Barrani. Maturba is not much closer than Derna.

This morning 6 planes took off, some loaded with 500 pounders & some with containers of 40 lbdrs. Ray Haupt with 4 500 pounders up was taking off & was doing almost 100 mph when one tyre burst. There wasn't much runway ahead but he pulled the Boston up without more than a gentle slow swing to one side. It gave us no end of confidence in the Boston to see how well she stuck to the runway under the circumstances - only a tricycle undercart could do that.

They landed at 134 only to find that they couldn't be refuelled there - no 100 octane spirit & while they were deciding to call the raid off another tyre blew out with a hell of a bang.

In the meantime Wing had realised that the job was too long a one to expect of the Bostons & they were trying frantically to contact them to call them back, but no one could get through to 134 to find out whether the 6 planes had refuelled & left or not & there was a hell of a lot of flapping at Wing - they then realised the soundness of our O.C.'s argument that if they were jumped by fighters & had to open up the taps for 10 minutes they would go down in the desert without fuel.

They had gone without a fighter escort as Colonel "*Piss Willie*" Wilmot the O.C. of Wing had poooh-pooohed the idea of fighter escorts for Bostons. The silly old bastard is said to have said "*Fighter escorts? God! you fellows are as bad as the Blenheims, wanting fighter escort!*"

However, we were all very relieved to see the Bostons back & hear all about it, it at least showed 24's willingness to take on the job.

Much heavier air activity on the Jerries' part is reported out here the last few days, especially today. 100 planes were seen at Derna drome yesterday, & the numbers encountered in the air have increased a hell of a lot. The Jerries have evidently got in fresh squadrons from the continent, so we will have to fight for air superiority all over again. Incidentally the army are to blame for this. If they had done their part of the job in anywhere near the time in which they undertook to do it we should be in Benghazi now & the fresh Jerry planes wouldn't have made much difference, even if Jerry could have got them in with Derna well in our hands.

We hear that Cunningham (army) has got the push as a result of his push not pushing according to plan. It seems a bit tough on him as most likely the blame lies more with the intelligence section for not giving accurate information of the actual strength of the local Jerries. As usual the Hun has been sadly underestimated again, in equipment as well as courage, fighting ability & leadership.

This afternoon I went along with the O.C. to L.G.76 where 3 Wing & 21 Squadron are. There we found Gerry Genis with another blown out tyre which makes 3 today. He was on his way up from base with Dan McPherson as observer & landed at 76 to drop post & a passenger when he had the blowout. We gave him & Dan a lift back here. Gerry's bum hasn't quite healed yet, he says the muscles are stiff & sore, & the cut still bleeds occasionally. From the 21 Squadron fellows I heard that Papie, Brian, Duffus, Mat Vermeulen & a couple of others have all "*gone for a shit*". 21 had a spell of very rotten luck, especially the one raid when 4 of their planes were shot down.

Ever since coming here I have not been feeling too bright, physically & mentally, mostly the latter. Firstly I don't fancy Major Jones's chances of getting past the board, which means our crew will be split up, & I doubt whether I'll get a pilot like him again, as it is I have been more or less split from my gunners Black & Venter, two of the very best, as there is a shortage of gunners the O.C. has nabbed them, & in addition they are being pushed in with any crew which has no gunners, so it looks like as if the whole happy family is being broken up, & as Major Jones himself said, we were by way of being a good crew.

It was only by luck that I got the stooge to Bardia the other day (seems weeks ago), & all I do here all day is just mope about with that "*nobody likes me*" look on my dial. I feel like a blinking orphan, & have been more miserable than ever today. I feel absobloodylutely motherless & browned off, & there's not even any beer in camp to cheer one up. This evening I went along to the Doc & took a double dose of salts & hope that will clear my works out & cheer me up.

Later My Gawd! I don't know about the cheering up part, but the cleaning out is well on its way. There is a change in me already, I am no longer mope about, on the contrary I am singularly nimble & light & fleet of foot if the way I have just been coasting around corners & guy ropes on two wheels is any indication.

10th Dec. [1941]

The salts have worked wonders with me, my attack of the blues has been driven out of my system in no uncertain manner & I feel a different bloke all together. A double dose of salts I reckon is the one & only cure for "*Unionitis*".

I could even take it this morning when my request for a few days leave until Major Jones comes back or we hear that he has been grounded, instead of my hanging on here like a spare part, was turned down by Captain Goch who is acting A Flight commander. The difficulty isn't getting the leave, but getting transport away from here, as we may have to move on any day & all available transport will then be needed - so my intended visit to Mersa Matruh has fallen by the wayside.

Today I reckon has been by far & away the blackest in the squadron's history, or it looks that way this evening at any rate.

This morning 6 planes took off for the raid on retreating columns of Jerries near Gazala - just the job for the Bostons, just about the limit of the safe range, & just the type of target they were designed for, but as events proved, the only snag was that the planes were given no fighter escort.

The 6 crews were Major Donnelly with Brinkie, Captain Goch with 'Erby, Tim with Alex, Gerry with Dan McPherson, Ray Haupt with Les Bensimon & Stewart with Harding. Soon after they left a hell of a shitstorm came up, one of the worst I've seen here yet, you could hardly open your eyes for mud & grit, & we wondered whether the formation would be able to find their way back to the drome so that we could direct them to land elsewhere.

After they had been away almost two hours the Radio Van picked one up trying to get a bearing, but reception was so bad that things were very doubtful. No plane circled us at all, & when the petrol time came along we all praying that they had put down somewhere safely, but we got no message at all.

This evening Major Donnelly rang up from 3 Wing & told the pitiful story. They were jumped by fighters over the target & made for the clouds still in formation, but with two planes burning, one of them was Gerry, but he doesn't know who the other one was. When he came out of the clouds he was alone, with both engines shot up - one very badly & he came home on one engine & landed in the desert near 76, it was him we had heard on the air.

Major Don never saw any of the other planes after entering the cloud, & as he had only one engine he had to come straight back & land. By the way all the planes went into the cloud in formation it looks as if the crews stood a good chance of bailing out, & as they were then over our own troops they should be O.K., but so far nothing has been heard.

11th Dec. aft [1941]

Things look very black for 24 Squadron today. No news whatsoever of the 5 lost planes or crews, & we sent a signal to all stations about them last night. Major Donnelly & Brinkie are back here & have told the full story. [AIR p100 has list of missing planes & their crews] [Tucker p24]

They were flying at 7,000 feet in between layers of cloud & had just sighted the two columns on the move & were flying along to the furthest one which would be the Jerries, when right in a big opening in the clouds they met a formation of Stukas. They were just on the point of getting stuck into the Stukas as they appeared to be unescorted & easy meat when they were pounced themselves by about 16 fighters, most looked like M.Es. the rear gunners opened up & two fighters were seen to go down, but as they were diving in a gentle glide across the big gap for the cloud layer beneath they

saw Gerry, & the gunners say they saw one of the others too still in formation, but on fire in one engine.

They carried on into the cloud & when they emerged on the other side there were still 3 fighters on their tail, but the top gunner kept them off until they got into the next cloud, & when they got out of that there were still two on their tail. When they got out of the 3rd cloud, on one engine, they were alone, not a fighter in sight.

The top gunner, a little ginger haired Scott by name of Mc Morland is a very reliable chappie & claims having forced one fighter to turn off with a good burst from his twin Brownings, but little Mickey Finberg one of the biggest little bullshitters out claims to have shot down both the fighters that were seen to go down - with his single Vickers G.O. [*], & what's more he seems to be sticking to about the 3rd version of his story, but adds as an afterthought that he put a good burst into one of the pilots he saw bale out with his chute opened - that's the last straw - the little shit.

[*] Vickers G.O. = Gas Operated. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_K_machine_gun



Picture source

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_K_machine_gun#/media/File:Vickers_K_cockpit.jpg

All we can do now is hope for the best with regards to the other 5 crews, some of them may roll up in a week's time or more, it has happened before now. About two weeks ago, Hyne in one of the fighter squadrons (No 1) was shot down over a battle & was picked up by one of our tanks & went through the whole battle in the tank, & got back to his squadron about a week later.

Peter Campbell was also forced down through lack of petrol & was offered a lift in a tank or armoured car, but he wasn't having anything doing when he heard that they were moving up into battle, he filled his bus up with M.T. fuel & took off & flew back to his drome.

Bob Patterson, late of Youngsfield was also shot down in a Blenheim in the desert & put her down O.K. he was taken prisoner, but his observer, a R.A.F. chappie made off into the desert & walked for 5 days. On the 5th he was within sight of our lines when he collapsed & had to be carried in - so there is still hope for some of our fellows - 20 of them all in one go is a bit tough. Blackie & Venter my two gunners are in it too, were flying with Ray Haupt.

As far as we are concerned "*Piss Willie*" Wilmont has proved himself a shit beyond a doubt. Major Don managed to come back on one engine having lost the formation in cloud with 3 fighters on his solitary tail after he had lost them, & he puts the Boston down in the desert on one engine without damaging it, & when he gives his report to Wing Piss Willie had the blasted nerve to ask him why he didn't turn back to look for his formation. Maj. Don's reply does not go on record.

I see now that we have our full quota of bloody fool South Africans up above with the red bands on their caps who have never seen a shot fired & who "*give out*" at running the war.

If he had seen about fighter escort the story would have been an entirely different one. The Bostons would have made short work of the Stukas, & if the 16 Jerry fighters had still ventured to dive down on an escorted formation of Bostons our fighters would have asked for nothing better, it's what they are simply praying for - their complaint is that the Jerries lately won't come down & mix it with them.

The one bright spot of news is that Zeesen has announced that George Francey is a prisoner & that Basil v.d.Berg the gunner is in hospital - so at least the two of them are okay.

I reckon we have had a break of bad luck now & things will look up again - 10 Bostons with crews of 40 in all lost in 3 weeks. Our luck is bound to change now. [Tucker p24]

Brinkie, Pip & myself are the only observers left of the original squadron, & unless Major Jones comes back, Charles Keary is the only original pilot. Clyde, Tommy & Lennie actually only came along as pilots later, altho' they came up with the squadron when it came up, but they hadn't flown twins before & had to be put through a short conversion course up here before they were given machines.

13 Dec. morning [1941]

Things look quite a bit better now, some of the fellows are safe at any rate. Night before last we got a signal from 134 to say that Jim Williams & Dan McPherson were O.K. & that Jim's two gunners, Slug Joiner & Ben Newall were wounded but not in danger. So yesterday morning we sent a plane along to pick Jim & Dan up - Slug & Newal had already been sent to hospital each with a couple of bullet holes through the fleshy part of their legs & sides.

Jim says they never stood a chance as the fighters pounced them too suddenly & made too good a job of it, scoring hits in all six planes in the very first swoop. When his plane caught fire he told everybody to bail out, & then he jettisoned his bombs. He got no reply from Alex at all, so he hung on as long as he could until he could feel the plane was getting the better of him, then he bailed out. While he was floating down two of the Jerry fighters circled him but made no attempt to shoot him up.

Dan says when they were hit he spoke to Gerry to find out if things were O.K., but got only a very faint muffled reply, & when he asked again he got no reply at all, & he felt the plane put her nose up & stall at the top, & as she side slipped down before getting into a spin he bailed out. The plane followed them down in a slow flattish spin & passed him, & when she hit he was about 50 feet above

her. Two of the 500-pound bombs went off & blew the plane all over the place. Gerry's body was thrown out & fell about 100 yards away. Dan says he thinks Gerry was already dead when she hit tho'. His two gunners Ross & Bowerman were either killed while in the plane in the fight or in the crash.

These two planes crashed within about a mile of each other, & the fellas who jumped were all picked up & very well cared for by the Indian troops.

Jim's first job was a very sad one indeed, he went out & buried Gerry - the two of them have been inseparable since they joined the squadron when it was first formed.

Of Alexander there was nothing to be found. He must most definitely have jumped as neither his body nor his parachute was found in the wreck or anywhere about. What they did find tho' was poor old Black's body - attached to his opened parachute, & riddled with bullets - there was no doubt about it, he was machine gunned while coming down by parachute. Poor old Black, he was such a damn fine fellow, & such a splitarse wireless operator-gunner, & so keen. He was determined to become a Fighter pilot & was as pleased as punch at being very highly recommended for a pilots course by both Major Jones & Colonel Durrant. Lorrie Venter, Blackie & myself [*] used to have a long talks out at 122 when we were more or less grounded on account of having no pilot, theorising about the day not too far distant when all three of us would be back in the Union on a pilot course together. Lorrie & myself fancied twin-engine bombers, but Blackie said no, there was only one plane for him & that was a single-seater fighter.

[*] Lorrie Venter & Blackie were the gunners in Bull's crew.

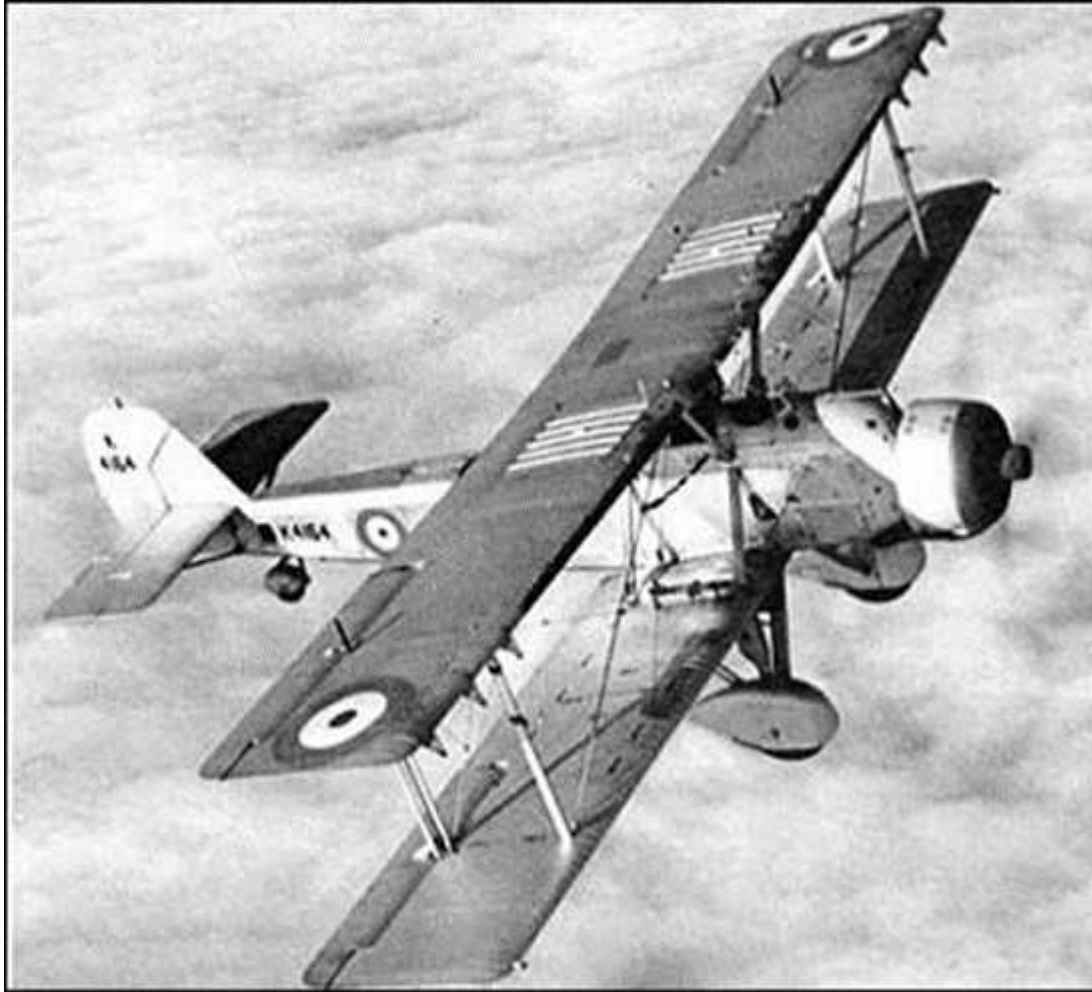
The O.C. was particularly hurt at the news of Blackie, he had done a few raids with Blackie & Lorrie in the back & had thought such a hell of a lot of them as a team.

Neither Lorrie nor Blackie were particularly keen on going on this raid either - like me they didn't like the idea of being broken up & flying with new crews.

The Indians were damn decent to Jim, Dan, Slug & Newall, they gave up most of their rations & blankets for them & did the best they could for the wounds of the latter two, and sent all four of them down to 134 from where Jim sent the signal to us. Of these two crews Alex is the only one unaccounted for, but as he evidently bailed out & no sign of him was found of him anywhere in the vicinity we all reckon he is somewhere up in front with the tanks as happy as a lark taking snaps of the battle & cursing for not taking along & extra supply of spools. Old Alex would take a snap of the devil himself if he landed in hell, & I don't think he'd be separated from his camera.

The next man to roll up here was Con. Stewart, he was flown down from 128 in a Vincent. [*] He was in flames, & told everybody to bail out, but thinks his intercom was out of action by this time. He opened his hood, & heard an explosion in the plane which must have been a 40 pounder exploding in the bombay or a petrol tank exploding, anyway his one wing broke off & his plane rolled over & commenced spinning. He was thrown out & made a safe landing, all but an ankle which he hurt slightly. He was picked up by our troops, & soon Lorrie Venter was brought in too with one wrist badly cut up by shrapnel. The other 3 members of Stewart's crew were all dead in the crash. Harding the observer, & van Dyk & Handley the two gunners.

[*] Vincent is similar to Videbeest https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_Vildebeest



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vickers_Vildebeest#/media/File:Vickers_Vildebeest_in_flight.jpg

Lorrie reported that when he & Blackie saw they were well alight & couldn't get through to Ray Haupt or Les Bensimon on the intercom they decided to bail out. Blackie as bottom gunner was first, & Laurie reports that he fell clear & the chute opened, then he himself bailed out & was picked up - what happened to the other two in the plane he doesn't know, in fact he didn't even know what had happened to Blackie after he saw the chute open.

The troops which picked them up couldn't take them back as they were moving up after the Jerries, but they managed to hitchhike back to 128 where Stewart handed Lorrie who was in great pain with his wrist over to a C.C.S. to be sent down to a hospital.

The next man to pitch up was Herby Raw, he is the only survivor from his plane. He was brought back to 122 by transport convoy, & was ground strafed 5 times by 109s on the way - he says it's not so nice to be groundstrafed.

Herby says they carried on in formation with everything burning furiously - he tried to speak to the rest of the crew but got no reply as the intercom had packed up & there must have been a fire in the bombay. He heard two explosions which must have been 40 pounders going off, & then he bailed out. The plane went in & both the gunners, Bert Delaney & Clulee were killed. Captain Goch was still alive tho' unconscious with a cannon shell through the groin & a bullet through the throat, he died after about an hour.

[* footnote] I see I have omitted to say that Captain Goch bailed out & actually hit the ground before

Herby, & that before the intercom packed up Bert Delaney said “*They've got me.*”
[end of note]

All 5 planes are now accounted for, & the only fellows unaccounted for are Les, Ray & Alex, but I think the only one likely to be alive is Alex, altho’ you never can say.

It's a pretty sad story, but at least we have some of the fellows back which is ever so much better than things might have been. Last night we had a hell of a party in which just about all the flying members joined. It lasted pretty late & I didn't worry about writing up the day's news when the party was over.

Yesterday morning I went over to 12 Squadron to see Phillie Kleyn, & found him in the best of health & spirits, 12 & 21 had each sent Marylands out to sea between Crete & Derna day before yesterday to intercept 52's [*] which are bringing in supplies, mostly petrol.

[*] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_52



Picture source https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkers_Ju_52#/media/File:Junkers_Ju_52-3mg2.jpg

21 Squadron shot down 2, & 12 shot down one, Phillie’s pilot shot it down, for which Major Fisher the acting O.C. of 12 gave Phillie & his pilots each a bottle of whisky - this we proceeded to deal with.

Phillie says the 52s are damn well armed, cannons in the rear, & machine-guns poking out of every window in the cabins, & it shook him sitting defenceless in the nose of the Maryland flying straight into all this fire.

Some of the Sgts in 12 Sqdn have really been given a raw deal as far as home leave is concerned - Phillie has done 66 raids, & one fellow has done 75, but nothing is said of Union leave.

Yesterday morning, typical of our tactics, the Marylands were sent out to go & repeat the job - same place & everything, but naturally Jerry wasn't going to be caught the same way twice running - the Marylands run into M.E. 110s - 21 Squadron lost three planes, Major Fowler among them, & 12 lost 2, Major Fisher among them.

Last night there was some more good news from Zeesen - Rox & Ken Gordon are both prisoners of war - that accounts for all 4 members of Rox's crew, but not a word about the other 4 planes we lost on Tac.R.

Herby says he saw the burnt-out remains of a Boston day before yesterday near Gazala, with two nameless graves alongside, but it couldn't identify the number or letters of the plane so we can't place it.

The Ground Staff of A. Flight are moving up to 3 Wing today, but as yet flying personnel haven't been given any orders. I suppose Gambut will be our next drome.

The O.C. told us last night that if Major Jones is not grounded, & comes back to the Squadron he will be the O.C. of the squadron, & he, Col Durrant, will take over 3 Wing. If it happens we will miss Colonel "Jimmy" a hell of a lot, but we will be lucky in having as good an O.C., & having a capable man in charge of us at Wing. "Piss Willie" will go, but where to we don't know, & for that matter, don't care either.

By the way we have all done little Micky Finberg an Injustice, Herby Raw said that Finberg was really doing his stuff, shooting like a man possessed, & he definitely saw one plane (109) shot down.

Evening:- The O.C. has come back from a trip up to Wing with the news that we will be moving up to Sidi Rezegh when we move, which should be in a day or two's time. Another hot spot of news that he brought along is that a large convoy is on its way from Italy or somewhere escorted by the complete remnants of the Itai fleet, & that it is now about 220 miles from Benghazi where it seems bound for. It seems as though we are going to have a crack at it in a big way tomorrow - all the Marylands are to do high-level bombing on it, & the Blenheims are going to do low-level attacks. It seems very much out of our range, but it seems as if we may have a crack at it too as there is a Bombay [*] on its way here loaded up with 500 lb. S.A.P. bombs for us. It's not going to be a particularly healthy target with all that escort.

[*] Wiki link & picture in 1 Dec post.
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Presumably our fleet will be on its way somewhere in the Mediterranean heading for the convoy - if the convoy gets through to Benghazi it's going to strengthen the enemy a hell of a lot. So we have to do all we can to sink it before it gets into harbour - it seems as if this is the long-awaited opportunity of getting the Itai fleet out of port - I only hope our Med. fleet isn't too weakened by now to polish the Itais up.

The 5 Marylands we lost yesterday on this 52 hunt haven't been absolutely free gratis & for nothing, they shot down 6 52s - not a good price for the Marylands, but it helps none the less. Rouse from 12 Squadron got 3 with his front guns, & his gunner got one.

By far the best news the O.C. brought back tho' is the news that Jim Williams' 3rd pip has come through - we have been waiting for it for a long time now, Jim has honestly deserved it as he has put up a remarkable good show all along the line - it's a pity Gerry isn't here to celebrate it with Jim.

14 Dec. [1941]

We got post & lots of parcels today. Brinkie got news that he is the proud father of a daughter & has been busy celebrating. He reckons a Germans can shoot him down now, or he can be pensioned off to the Union as he has done his duty to his country.

Major Jones is in hospital under observation & is being sent back to the Union when they let him out. I'm sorry we lost him, but on the other hand we are all glad he's on his way. I have been teamed up with Jim & I'm damn glad to have him as a pilot.

Ray Haupt is safe, he was brought in to 134 last night on a stretcher & has been taken to hospital with a broken leg. He says his wing came off & when he jumped he must've ricocheted off the tail plane & broken his leg then, but he never knew his leg was broken until he tried to get up after alighting with his chute. This leaves only Benny & Alex unaccounted for, & we are giving up hope now of hearing that George Marshall, Cecil Blake, Tony Chalkley & the others who went while on Tac.R. are prisoners of war.

The S.A.P. bombs arrived this morning for the show on the convoy, but it was reported that the convoy which turned out to be only about 5 ships escorted by the naval might of Italy, turned back during the night & was steaming away at full throttle back for Italy with the warships leading the field & a few British destroyers behind - so the Itais have funked at the final Battle of the Med.

It's just as well for us that we didn't have to do a low-level on the convoy, as it was discovered that our armourers were on the point of putting .12 sec detonators into the bombs instead of 12 seconds delay detonators - a very small difference, just a matter of a dot, but not a single Boston would have come back to enjoy the telling of the joke.

My very pointed & nasty remarks down at Shandur re some of these tit observers which have been sent up lately have been borne out in one case already I see. Tester, one of the most objectionable & windy of the titty ones has got himself grounded before doing a single operation & is assistant operations officer or something at 12 Squadron. He said a few nasty things in the mess & was taken out & slapped up by Charles Morgan.

"*Farmer George*" Bennett bought himself a very nice wireless set while in Alex, & his tent is a very popular gathering place as a result of the News Service & good catering. They put up with coffee & tea etc. So far the news about our local war is still very good, the army is pushing the enemy up towards Derna where he will most likely make a stand, & our fighters are still shooting down plenty of Jerry aircraft.

This evening at supper table Farmer George caught the fellows for suckers with a new version of the old catch. He was asked what the news was "*Oh not so bad at all*" replied George, "*Except that the Japs have now taken Tiger Neck.*" "*Where the hell is Tigers Neck anyway?*" was the question from half a dozen of the fellows. "*Don't you know?*" from George "*it's about 6 ft. from the Tiger's arsehole.*"

Doc Puttick isn't so popular in camp this evening. As we intend to be in territory soon which has been in the hands of the enemy recently & we may expect to find the water supplies polluted, Dock has injected us all against Typhoid today, & our arms are all damn sore & we expect to feel a damn sight worse tomorrow.

15 Dec [1941]

Today has been a cold windy day with an odd spot of rain, but in spite of the rain there has been a hell of a duststorm raging all day, & over & above this most of us feel quite ill as a result of the Doc's ruddy inoculation. Personally having had Typhoid I think I much prefer the typhoid. I spent the day letter writing - quite a few of them letters of condolence. I am still hanging on a few days there before I write to George & Less' people.

16 Dec. [1941]

Just another day - no operations, but we hear there is a likelihood of one tomorrow. The O.C. has gone down to Base to find out why our replacements haven't shown up - 4 new crews were supposed to arrive here today but as yet they haven't.

The poor dummy railhead is being bombed like stink again tonight, the Jerries have been dropping lots of parachute flares, 6 at a time, but their bombs aren't anything as heavy as those they have been dropping lately, especially last night when we could distinctly hear the booms of the 2,000-pounders.

It's remarkable how the bombing raids mount up without one knowing it. I was very surprised when I found out the other day that we were bombed 68 times while we were at Fuka Main, & that we were the most heavily bombed area in the local war - & we never had a single Maryland holed, & had only 3 casualties in all those raids.

The figures come out of our Squadron War Diary, & they go to prove how ineffective night bombing can be unless you have a nice big fat target where all stray bombs can do damage.

17 Dec. [1941]

Has been a marvellous day today by way of a change - a couple of us went about without shirts this morning to get a bit of sun onto our by now bleached bodies. It's not been such a good day for the squadron tho', & again Pietersen has dropped us in the shit.

7 Planes set off to bomb Derna Aerodrome on which there were 130 reported planes. The bloody fool didn't find the target - Derna of all places, & with a full wing of 25 fighters as escort & not any ac-ac fired at them. He bombed some little joint about 40 miles away. [AIR p102] Everybody is thoroughly browned off with his effort - 7 tons of 500 pounders wasted & a hell of a blot on our record. Thus far he has led 3 raids & has made complete fuckups of all three - He is being given a chance to redeem himself tomorrow as there is another raid on - where we don't know, but recon it will be Derna again, & the same 7 planes or rather crews are going.

Another of the lately arrived Tit observers has gone the way I told him to his measly face at Shandur he would go. Gregory has got himself grounded & sent back to the Union without even completing O.T.U course. This is getting a bit too thick now, these bastards are making the observers half wing look damn cheap, & it's about time something was done about it.

4 new crews & 5 new Bostons have arrived here from Base this afternoon, & the O.C. is back.

Sidi Rezeigh December 21. [1941]

3 Days ago Bill Draper had to go in to Mersa Matruh to get a fresh supply of maps. Labbie flew him in, & I went along, we had tea & lunch with the nurses, & saw Lorrie Venter & Ray Haupt who were both still there waiting to be evacuated to Cairo. Ray told us that Les Bensimon's body was definitely found in the aircraft, so poor old Bennie has gone, that leaves only Alex unaccounted for, but I reckon he must have bought it too. When we got back to 130 we found that orders had come through to leave for Rezeigh the next morning. There weren't enough aircraft for all crews to fly so Jim & myself chose to go by road so as to see something of the battlefields.

We spent the best part of two days on the road & saw quite a number of wrecked tanks etc. , but nothing like the numbers around here where the fiercest battles seem to have been fought.

For miles around here the desert is dotted with burnt out & wrecked tanks, lorries, cars, field guns & abandoned kit of every description, mostly German, & there are hastily dug graves all over the place,

mostly very shallow ones, one about half a mile or less from camp has one foot of the buried soldier still protruding, & there are ever so many dead bodies lying about & sitting up in the tanks etc which haven't been found by the burring parties - thank goodness it's winter or else this place would not be fit to live in - the battles around here must have been fierce & merciless.

The squadron is just about bristling with loot, at least a dozen motorbikes, one German Peoples Car, a really nice little job with a sewing machine like little apology for an engine in the back, but it goes like hell, - as for Mausers, just about every man in the squadron has one & every man has hopes of getting his back to the Union - I wonder how many will succeed, & how many courts martial will result.

The squadron has done two raids in the meantime, both very successful, but the Jerries are running so fast now that we are just about out of range even here. Dera has been captured with about 40 planes - all U.S. on the drome. I really thought that the Jerries would put up a hell of a fight in the mountains & waddies around Derna & Apollonia, but they have simply kept on running - our troops must really be putting up a marvellous show pressing them as they are all the time - the new General Ritchie who has taken Cunningham's place must be hot stuff too.

Benghazi was due to be attacked by noon yesterday, but we haven't heard any news as we are kind of out of the way & the telephone lines haven't developed properly all over the place yet.

Probably the Jerries are running back to rally & make a stand at Tripoli or somewhere back away.

Pietersen & De La Cour were told this morning by the O.C. that they were leaving for the Union immediately, & have gone to Base in the Maryland. Nothing is said officially, but we all know why the "*evacuation*" has taken place. It seems to be an easy way of getting back home - just making one oblique on the other, & you're on your way. Poor old Dal tho' hasn't been at all well, & after being sent to hospital from Shandur we never thought he would fly again in a hurry.

Dennis Labistour has also left us - he has been transferred to Wing - he is older than most of the fellows there who have been found too old for operational flying.

We were told this morning to be ready packed to move off this afternoon, but the final movement order didn't come so here we are still - all packed up & nowhere to go.

Tobruk are being bombed pretty heavily tonight, & the ac-ac is putting up a terrific barrage - they seem to have any amount of Woofu-woofu guns there & the flashes positively light up the skyline, & what with sundry parachute flares & shells bursting in among the clouds & streams of Breda & Bofors crisscrossing all over the place, it's the heaviest barrage any of us here have seen so far. The ac-ac got one plane about half an hour ago.

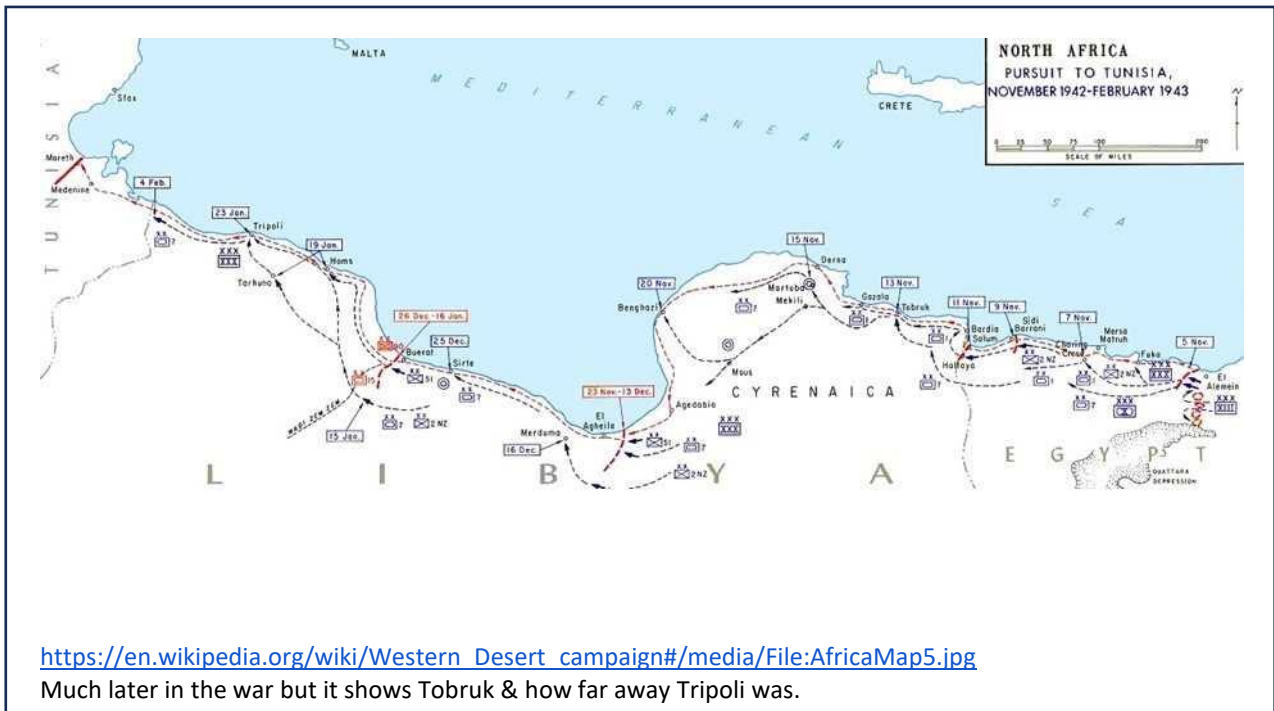
The Jerry bombers are damn persistent about it too, they are circling about & making runs every now & again - they must be damn sore at Tobruk being still in our hands, as they had fixed Nov. 20 as the day for their offensive on Tobruk when it was to be taken at all costs, but our intelligence got hold of the information so we started the push on the 18th & buggered all their plans.

Labby has gone down to Base in the Maryland to bring up our Xmas dinner - £100 has been put aside to buy everything of the best for one damn good meal for the Squadron.

Dec. 23 [1941]

We are still here in Rezegh, & don't know when or where we move next. We have only done one more raid in the last 3 days although we have had 9 planes on standby all the time. On the last raid 7 more engines conked in - oil trouble again. We have only 6 planes serviceable now & they are all on standby. I've been on standby all day & am on again tomorrow when we have hopes of being given a

target. The trouble is that all the targets are out of our range again as the Jerries are running like hell. Benghazi hasn't fallen yet but there are streams of transport running along the road from Benghazi to Tripoli.



A lorry load of us went to see Tobruk yesterday - it must have been a very nice little place in peacetime, but all the buildings are pretty well bombed to hell, & there are any amount of ships sunk or beached in the harbour.

The Jerries are great ones for booby traps & mines - the engineers have been exploding mines & booby traps all around here the last few days, but there have been a number of casualties as a result of fellows picking up quite inoffensive looking objects.

One can see by the way the Jerries have buried the Itais that they don't think much of the spaghetis. Most of the Itai dead who have been buried by Jerries have simply been lightly covered over in shallow hollows, & in some cases even on the level ground whereas they have buried all their own fellows properly.

Tommy Halse's dog Punch has gone the giddy limit - yesterday he dragged a nice fat Itai leg into camp & deposited in the armoury tent - some fellows swear they saw him drag it out of ration tent, but the cook swears to it that what we have been having has been plain bully beef.

Captain Lippiat is busy fixing one of the 17 U.S. G 50s which were captured on the drome, he reckons he can make it serviceable with parts from the others.

12 Squadron lost two Marylands today, Loopy Lotz & Charles Morgan were shot down by fighters.

Today has been washing day for me, & about time too as I haven't had any clothes which would not stand up on their own.

Xmas Day [1941]

Benghazi was taken yesterday & our troops are still pushing the enemy along at top speed along the road to Tripoli. Over 100 aircraft, mostly U.S. were captured on the drome.

The latest news is that owing to shortage of petrol further ahead it has been decided that only one light bomber squadron will be sent ahead, & it will be a squadron comprising all the remaining Marylands - the rest of us will probably be sent back to the Canal Zone, all the Blenheims & us, & when that happens there is every possibility that the remaining "*Old Originals*" in our squadron will be sent back home - there aren't very many of us left.

Last night the chances of us having our Xmas dinner weren't very rosy at all as the Maryland hadn't come back - we were all set for a Xmas dinner of bully & biscuits. There were only 4 bottles of Gin left in the pub - nothing else, so we gave it a bang on that & I came to bed very unsteady on my pins. Hell! gin is lousy stuff, & it has only one saving grace as far as I can see, & that is that instead of a hangover it leaves you with a very clear light head next morning.

Labby was back with the Maryland loaded well up early this morning, & everything was tiggertyboo, we had a marvellous lunch & supper complete with fresh vegetables, roast turkeys, Xmas pudding, Xmas crackers & lots of beer & had a damn fine day.

Labby, Brinkie & myself spent the day going out shooting with Jerry Mausers & visiting sundry battlefields just having a look around & picking up anything useful we found.

We found one disabled Jerry van full of explosives & fancy little wires & whatnots, it was a moving booby trap layer, & we got lots of fun shooting Jerry bullets into these boxes of explosives & watching them go up with big bangs.

One rather remarkable sight was an Itai medium tank turned over on its side on the level ground. It must have been rammed by one of ours - looks so from the tracks. All told we had a very interesting Xmas day - what with Brinkie & myself racing about the aerodrome on motorbikes & having good beer again.

Our squadron will look more like a blinking Dispatch Riders Corps than anything else soon, we must have at least 18 serviceable motorbikes now & Gawd knows how many U.S., about 4 or 5 Jerry cars, & the latest acquisitions are an armoured car & 3 Bren carriers, I wouldn't be surprised if we had a few tanks & a battleship soon.

27 Dec. [1941]

We had a hell of a shitstorm yesterday, the worst we have experienced so far, you couldn't see more than about 5 yards in front of you at the height of the storm. I was out in the battlefields in a car when it came up suddenly, & I damn nearly got lost when within a few hundred yards of the drome - I came right through camp & could only see two tents.

This morning Gilfillian & myself went exploring in a Roman well & a few caves on the escarpment near camp. Nobody else would go as booby traps were feared. We took a lantern down & mucked around but didn't find any hidden arms & all the whatnots we half expected to find stowed away. These Roman Wells are very interesting "*feats of engineering*" a 3 ft square opening is cut through about 2 ft of solid rock into the soft sandstone underneath & a huge cave is hollowed out underneath. These wells are always in slight depressions with the results that they have large catchment areas, the rainwater of which is stored in the well.

Our intelligence is becoming quite hot stuff now. This afternoon we were warned that the Jerries were going to raid all coastal targets in this area this evening, so we dispersed all our planes well away from the drome, & sure as fate, this evening there are planes all about overhead, but there is a very kind blanket of 10/10 cloud over everything with the result that they can't locate the

dromes. Tobruk however is getting it in the neck & is putting up its usual intense ac-ac barrage. They got one plane again about half an hour ago. Intelligence reports that there were 30 planes over Tobruk the other night when they gave it the works.

The figures of the air battles as from the beginning of the push up till Dec 23 have been made available now. We have destroyed in the air & on the ground (only counting those destroyed on big recognised dromes) 497 enemy aircraft as against our own loss of 167 - not so bad.

28 Dec. [1941]

We have had damn good news today. The O.C. called all the remaining "*Old Campaigners*" of the squadron into the orderly room & told us that as soon as we got back to base he was going to send in our names with a recommendation for us to be sent down to the Union - that's to say he added, unless any of us wished to stay on. In any case there isn't any likelihood of the squadron doing any more operations for some time as our mechanical staff would most likely be used as a kind of servicing unit at some base for some time, to find out what actually is wrong with these ruddy Wright Cyclone engines seeing that they are the only fellows who have had anything at all to do with Cyclones.

There aren't very many of us Old Boys left, only 4 observers, Pip, Brinkie, "*Erby*" & myself, & 5 pilots, Jim, Charles Keary, Tommy, Clyde & Lenny. Jim is the only one who is in two minds whether to go back or not - the rest of us didn't need minds being made up at all. "*Erby*" has also decided to apply for a pilot's course, but I wonder whether the Training Command in the Union will take us - it's just like them to refuse to train us any further.

The 7 U.S. planes were flown back to L.G. 21 at El Daba [*] today, the 7 good ones are hanging on here until we get orders to move back as there is a faint chance of us getting some work to do. When the U.S. planes started up & took off the smoke from their exhausts all but formed ruddy smoke screen - I wonder how much oil they are going to throw out on the flip to El Daba

[*] El Daba is on the map posted 9 Dec. On coast between Fuka & El Alamein.

This afternoon we had a Loot parade at which all loot was registered so as to get it past the barriers on the way back to base, & the turnout was amazing, 26 motorbikes of all makes, BMWs, Itai bikes, Nortons & BSAs, 5 cars including a Mercedes-Benz, & two German Peoples' Cars, one Bren Carrier, 1 Armoured car, & Gawd knows how many Mauser rifles & revolvers & automatics.

Now that half the mechanics are on their way back to base & the rest of us merely hanging on awaiting orders to go back too Captain Lippiat has stopped work on the G50. It's tough luck, it would have been great fun arriving back at base with a salvage Itai plane.

30 Dec. [1941]

Yesterday morning Doc. & myself went for a nice long ride on the motorbikes through the desert looking at the wrecks on the battlefield, & in the afternoon Denis Labistour & myself took a L.D.V. & went out shooting. We shot 3 gazelle, Labby got two & I got one, we punctured a tyre racing about over the desert, & as we had no jack we came all the way back on the flat tyre bugging the rim no end, but the general opinion was that it was worth the fresh meat - Hell! we're pretty tired of the this eternal bully beef by now.

The Yank representative of the Wright Cyclone engines was flown up here in a new Boston straight up from Port Sudan, to see whether he can discover what the fault in the engines is, but he is stumped too, we noticed that the new machine he flew up in & flew back in today is beginning to cough out smoke too - it won't be long before that plane goes the same way too.

This aft I went for a long motorbike ride to El Adem [*] & down into the desert & back, but 3 miles from home I had a puncture & had to leave the bike & walk home - I got back late & missed a damn fine supper, venison with real red currant jelly, & tinned vegetables pooled from all the fellows private supplies.

[*] El Adem is shown on the maps above. Just south of Tobruk.

Gilfillian who also went out into the desert this aft on a bike is missing - the poor bugger probably had a breakdown or has got lost. There are lots of dead men's blankets in the desert tho'

31st Dec [1941]

Went for a drive with Tommy Pope this morning - it's funny how these stooges out into the desert are never monotonous, one is always seeing something new, & there are always lots of hand grenades & Mills bombs to throw about. My collection of shell cases is getting on famously, I must have at least 20 different ones of all sizes.

Talking of shells, it's only after these rains now that I see these millions of snail shells lying about all over the desert are not fossils of bygone Queen of Sheba days. Lately I've seen quite a number of snails crawling about the desert with the shells on board, & they leave a helluva trail of slime in their wake, but where the hell they get the slime from I don't know, unless this bloody weather is giving them colds too.

On the whole, except for a few of the fellows there doesn't seem to be much celebrating of the Old Year going on tonight, most of us have left the mess early & are turning in - all we have is whiskey & gin - nothing else, & Tobruk water to go with it, & this Tobruk water is really vile stuff, tastes almost as bad as sea water - actually I think it is 50/50 distilled water & seawater.

An R.A.F. fellow trod on a landmine a few hundred yards from camp today & had his foot & leg badly smashed up - how the hell our fellows have managed to avoid any remaining land mines & booby traps so far is more than I know. Gawd knows we have all been poking about & scratching around all over the show but haven't had any casualties so far. Gilfillan rolled up today, his bike conked in, half the squadron were out looking for him.

New Year's Day 1942

The little party of seers of the New Year sure did give it a bang last night. They got well hooched up, & from 11:30 till almost 1 a.m. this camp wasn't at all a safe place to be in, there were grenades going off by the score, & rifles & revolvers & machine guns, & at 12 sharp there were loud & prolonged wails on the air raid siren (the one I acquired for the squadron), & last of all there was one Godalmighty explosion near the brothel (as the big community dugout built up bombproof sleeping quarters which the Itais left on the side of the drome is called) - one of the blokes had laid down a hell of a big charge of dynamite there, & long after the explosion there were pieces of rock & muck falling about the place - this morning it was discovered that the electrical light bulbs in the mess had been shot out & the shades & tent riddled with bullet holes. There were a couple of very sore heads in camp this morning. Jim Williams eventually had to go out & stop the row or they would have carried on till daybreak. Jim says he was never so shit scared in his life what with very unsteady revolvers & Mausers blazing away in every direction.

This morning a party of us went out into the desert towards El Gobi & El Adem in the station wagon, & on coming back ran into a very intense & sudden shitstorm, simply a huge black wall of dust moving across the desert - actually it was one of these funny things which old Captain what's-his-name used to tell us about in the Met lectures - a cold front & the dust was mixed with it like colouring matter to make it visible.

This afternoon I had a pleasant surprise who should come driving into camp but Stanley, looking for me or my grave. He is on his way back from beyond Derna to the Railhead where they are being disbanded or re equipped or something. He is spending the night here & is going on tomorrow morning.

The two of us went out shooting in his jalopy this aft & had a very interesting trip. I got one Gazelle.

Stanley says Brigadier Armstrong was entirely to blame for the 5th Brigade debacle. [*] His armoured car scouts came in & reported the whereabouts, numbers & disposition of the advancing Jerry tanks, but he didn't take any steps to prepare for the fight at all, he had his whole brigade, heavy guns, Infantry, hospital unit & transport all cluttered up together with the result that the artillery couldn't open fire on the tanks when they did appear as their own men were all in the way - the incompetent out bugger, he is p. of w. now, but he's no loss to us at all. Philip Myberg is a p. of w. too.

[*] This refers to the events detailed on 1 Dec. The 5th S.A. Brigade was very badly smashed up at Sidi Rezegh

Stanley gave us some lovely fresh Derna water which makes a hell of a difference to the pub.

The fellows all say it has been damn cold today, but I have been on the go all day & enjoying myself so I haven't noticed it at all.

Charles Morgan from 12 Squadron who was a prisoner in Derna has been recaptured, & he says he saw Padre from a distance in Derna, also a prisoner, & he thinks Padre's whole crew are prisoners - that's a bit of a good news (*), & there is also a story going the rounds - how authentic I don't know, that Stakemire & Atkinson, Cecil Blake & George Marshall's gunners are prisoners but no news of George & Cecil.

Wing informed us this evening that there is a possibility of a job for us tomorrow morning, but they don't say what the job is, altho' we have an idea it will be Bardia or Hellfire.

[* Pencil note in margin.] I saw Charles personally later & he told me the story is entirely false - he never saw anybody.

2nd Jan. [1942]

We got the planes bombed up this morning, & were on half an hour standby for a raid on Bardia, then we were told to stand down, & took it for granted that Bardia had been taken, & we were just organising a trip to the coast due North when we were put on an hours standby - needless to say we took a poor view of that, & we have been on standby all day.

Bardia has been taken by our 2nd Div, & with it 1150 of our prisoners recaptured.

At last we are moving from here, we are all going back to base at El Daba [*] tomorrow. [AIR p115 - p117] Altho' I haven't been at all bored here as I've enjoyed the running around the desert here, I am just as pleased as all the rest of the fellows to get back to base - now that Bardia has fallen there isn't much likelihood of us getting any more raids up here except perhaps on Hellfire which is still holding out, but that we can do equally well from base.

[*] El Daba east of Fuka & Bardia well West. Both on the map.



Tonight is full moon, but luckily there is the odd spot of cloud about as there has been every night lately, & as it has been raining quite a bit today again the drome doesn't stand out very much even when the moon isn't behind a cloud, so even tho' we have had 3 or 4 Jerry planes high over us this evening we don't expect bombing. Tobruk however was given stick for about two hours earlier on, & put up a very intense ac-ac barrage again, but everything seems to have quietened down now.

This blinking moon seems to be far more in evidence now during wartime than it has ever been in peacetime - I never used to notice the moon in the good old days except at boarding school when it came in very handy for pinching apples & watermelons, but we know all about the moon & its frequency & candlepower now I'm telling you.

The next sweet young thing that rolls her eyes & sighs like a punctured tyre & murmurs something about the peace & quiet of the full moon won't know what gives out when I make a quick duck for the nearest hole or slit trench.

El Daba 3 Jan [1942]

Here at base it's just as bloody cold & wet as it has been at Rezegh - it rained more or less continually all through the night, & the blinking desert looks like a series of waterlogged swamps in places.

The wogs round about here have taken advantage of the rains & are plowing [sic] up patches of desert with the funny wooden one horse camel plows [sic] - I would like to be here to see just how their crops get on & what they are sowing or planting.

This desert soil is for the most part of the very best Karoo I've ever seen & if it had reasonable rains it would be marvellous farming country.

We flew here today in two flights independently of each other & encountered rather heavy cloud & light rain on the way. Richie who was leading the other flight flew into the cloud & Daniels & Mc Lindsey who were forming on him haven't been seen or heard of since, what happened to them no one knows.

I have been spending the evening writing letters to catch up on my correspondence.

4 Jan [1942]

The two missing planes haven't been heard of yet. Ritchie has gone back to look for them.

I wish this cold windy drizzly weather would play itself out it's almost unbearable we have rigged up a field kitchen boiler stove in the mess for heat, but the bloody thing generates more smoke than heat.

5 Jan [1942]

The O.C. has gone into Cairo to find out what is happening to the Squadron & also to find out about those of us who are due to go back to the Union.

The mystery of the two missing planes has been solved - they got into difficulties in the cloud - it seems as if the controls weren't functioning properly, they must have packed a lot of kit up against the cables. Lindsay's observer bailed out, & the two planes crash landed very badly near Madelina [*] - Daniel's obs broke his collarbone (Colbert the Aussie Sergeant) - the planes are completely written off, but we haven't heard the full detailed story yet - Anyhow it was a damn bad show from start to finish.

[*] On the map above.

Brigadier Armstrong the doting old bugger who made the 5th Brigade muck-up has just been awarded the D.S.O. but what for nobody seems to know - useless old well-meaning gentleman.

Thank goodness we have had a bit of sun for a change today.

8th Jan [1942]

I've been in the Air Force exactly two years today - in some respects it seems as if it was only yesterday that the bunch of us were lined up at C.A.F.T.D. to sign on the dotted line, but sometimes it seems as if it all happened years & years ago. On the whole they have been two pleasant years, & at last one begins to feel that something has been done & all the months of training & feeding have been turned to some good end.

I got back from two days leave in Mersa this morning, enjoying every minute of it. The O.C. is back from Cairo, & he thinks we may go down by boat very soon, so it looks as if I won't see Bunny again for a hell of a time.

The fellows who crashed in Madelina are back too. Solly Solomon was in the nose of Daniel's plane was very shaken after the crash even though he escaped unhurt, & he didn't fancy coming back in one of the planes which went up to fetch them, & it would be his luck to fly back with Clyde who's nose wheel packed up when he landed here. She slid along on her nose but the plane isn't badly hurt at all. Solly swears he won't fly again even if he has to walk back to the Union.

Thank goodness the weather seems to have changed for the better now - the sun has been shining all day & it has been quite pleasantly warm again - in fact everything is under control & the garden is brightening up.

We are moving down to Geniefa [*] lock stock & barrel on Saturday thank goodness we are spared going to Shandur.

[*] Geniefa. They were there 10 Oct. On Great Bitter Lake, Suez canal. On the map posted then.

Middle East has informed us that Cecil Blake is a p.o.w., but no news of George.

Hellfire is still holding out, & the Jerries who have been hemmed in at Agedabia for some time now have broken through & seem to be continuing their run westward.

Cairo 10th Jan [1942]

Yesterday aft late we were informed that all the Old times who had been recommended for the Union had to report at H.Q.M.E. today, so we got busy & left Daba this morning, & here we are. I touched at Alex on my way to Abukir to see the damn Greek about the parcels which never reached the Union, & when I couldn't get any satisfaction from him, gave the matter over to the Military Police who I hope will get the £11 out of him some way or other, even if it is only in causing him a hell of a lot of unpleasant inconveniences - the little cross-eyed skunk - I'm still sorry I didn't give way to my desire to slog him over the counter for a six.

I got here too late to go to H.Q.M.E., but it seems as if we catch a boat on the 17th, so there was no need for all this rush this morning.

The Desert on the way from Daba to Alex has changed lately - a lot of plowing [sic] with silly little wooden plows & single camels & donkeys going on & grain coming up already.

Another change is that the brave Gypo army has now moved up to almost halfway to El Daba.

The hotels are all full, & 'Erby Raw & myself are staying at Morris's Rest House - damn homely & comfortable - Morris is a real card, does everything he can to make one at home & comfortable - but I don't like this patent hot shower he has, you light some kind of burner & turn on a couple of taps & then cold water comes out of the shower, & when you turn the cold water tap back the ruddy flame goes out - but Morris really put up a damn fine meal - second to none, & has been entertaining us in the pub all evening with his yarns, jokes & funny remarks.

Kasfareet 17 Jan [1942] [*]

[*] Kasfareet & Geniefa are the same place it seems. Possibly the name of the village & airfield.
<https://wikimapia.org/19684683/Kasfareet-or-Geneifa-Airbase>. On the map I posted 10 Oct

We stayed in Cairo until day before yesterday, just long enough to do everything we wanted to do, & not long enough to spend all our money & become bored.

I ran into Cans v. Blumenstein, Carey Levi & Goosie, & together with Phillie Kleyn who by the way has now got his commission together with a couple of the other old 12 Squadron gunners such as Archie Rink, C.P. Marais & Mitch - Poor little Jeffries was killed about 3 days before his pip came through.

We had a bit of a reunion party which ended up at Mary's Satellite to have a look-see at the joint. I was really disappointed with the show - it wasn't anything like what it was cracked up to be - the drinks were second rate, the music was bad & the women were weather worn & very second hand looking. The only sort of novice looking one - must have been 16 - 17, took a bit of the fancy to me & did her best to wangle me into an odd spot of business, but we weren't having any, we stuck to the pub & reception rooms & left the recreation rooms severely alone.

Now that the war zone has moved away Cairo is showing quite a bit of light of a nighttime & it is quite a pretty sight with all the multicoloured lights, it does make the joint look kind of Eastern like. I also noticed that the amount of hooting has diminished considerably. The Gippies must be damn surprised that one can get about town just as well on your accelerator & brakes as on your horn. 'Erby & myself while walking home from a cinema one evening had the pleasure of both being knocked arse over tip by one of those newly silent Gypo taxis.

I had a uniform made in Cairo, & did quite a lot of shopping, accompanied by Morris who is a good man to have around on these expeditions, he won't allow you to take anything until he is satisfied that you have got it for a reasonable price. I found it great fun driving the little 1/2 ton truck through the bazaars, scraping through swarming masses of humanity (?) in narrow alleys.

One morning the expected happened, Morris's patent hot water shower went out with a bang & we had to carry on with cold water, but when it was repaired it worked better, & we actually have a real hot shower the last morning.

In spite of the fact that we could have got accommodation at any of the big hotels after the first day, & that our S&T claims were paid out in full I'm glad we stayed on at Morris's, we really enjoyed the companionship & homeliness we met there.

Pip & Charles Keary managed to wangle seats on a Lodestar, [*] & may have left by now for all I know - the rest of us are waiting here for the next boat. We are staying with the squadron as paying guest - the boat may leave anytime within the next month - no one knows.

This drome is simply packed with planes, mostly Bostons, Baltimores & Kittyhawks.[*] I like the Baltimore a lot, she looks even a nicer plane than the Boston, it's a pity she hasn't a tricycle undercarriage tho'. However, all these new Yank planes develop all their faults as soon as they are put into action & have to be modified no end before they give anything like satisfaction. What price Baltimore?

[*] Lodestar in post of 1 Dec.

Kittihawk = P-40=Warhawk=Tomahawk. In 4 July post

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Baltimore



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Baltimore#/media/File:Martin_A-30A.jpg

Successor to Maryland.

24 Squadron Bostons are all being modified here, they are having extra tanks installed in the bombays, of 130 gallons capacity. This means that their already small bomb load will have to be still further reduced, but what can do? The Yanks at least have given them the speed, & this extra tank will give them about 1 1/4 hours longer range. Another modification is a scare gun in the tail.

The most terrific shitstorm has been raging right through from yesterday morning - these bloody things seem to be getting worse & worse, every one seems worse than any previous ones, this one may not be quite as intense as far as dust & blackout goes as the Sidi Rezegh ones, but it's far far worse in every other respect - the wind has been blowing a bloody gale for about 36 hours, & one can hardly walk against it or breathe & everything is covered in dust, & as far as the tents - about half of the camp has been blown down, my tent was one of the first to go yesterday, but luckily it collapsed right on top of my bed & kit thus keeping the dust off. Others weren't so lucky, their kit is in the open covered in fine sand & dust, & one tent is completely missing. It's a hell of a bloody country, & just as I was beginning to take a liking to it. At any rate it isn't so damn cold down here in the Canal Zone as it is out in the desert.

A whole lot of us tentless waifs slept in the mess on chairs last night & didn't find it at all cold - we will have to repeat the performance tonight as it's hopeless trying to pitch tents yet, probably tomorrow if the wind dies down during the night.

Hellfire fell today & 5,000 German prisoners were taken.

This sudden change from the cold desert to the warm canal weather has caused no end of colds in the squadron - I have a tit of a cold, my chest felt like ruddy blast furnace all yesterday, it's not so bad now, but now my nose would put any sheep to shame. However every cloud has its silver lining, when my throat & chest was so damn sore yesterday I decided to give up smoking for a while so have decided to make it until we weigh anchor for home, whether it be two days or two months.

Cairo 24 Jan [1942]

After waiting all this time at Kasfareet we are informed that there will definitely be no boat this month, so I have decided to spend a few days with Bunny & I'm on my way to Mersa Matruh. I hitchhiked from Geneifa this afternoon & I'm carrying on that way tomorrow if I don't find a suitable train.

Brinkie is staying here at Morris's with me, he is leaving for the Union by plane tomorrow - the rest of us who want to will go down by plane too at the rate of about 4 a week.

I've spent the last few days taking snaps all over the joint, & borrowing negatives & having prints made so as to get up a bit of a collection.

A few of the 3rd Recce fellows on leave here tell me that Stanley is still in Mersa so I'll be able to see him too.

Kasfareet 1st February aft. [1942]

Here I am back again & no boat yet. I spent 4 lovely days in Mersa, saw Stanley & had quite a bit of a party with his lot - they were at the point of moving off forwards again as old man Rommel had chased our people well back & retaken Benghazi, there was quite a bit of a flap on what with all leave being cancelled & every available unit been pushed forward.

I stayed in Mersa until the last possible moment, Bunny & myself getting privately engaged. I got back here yesterday midday, passing 24 Squadron convoy on the way moving up - a hurried movement order.

When Tommy Halse heard that his Squadron was going back into action so soon he promptly rejoined it, so is no longer among our lot going back.

All flying personnel have been on standby to fly up, & at about 11 this morning the order came - to go to El Adem, [*] & there was a lot of running about.

[*] El Adem on map of 1 Jan. A bit south of Tobruk. Sidi Rezegh (referred to below) also there.
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However, when the first 3 planes were in the air & on the way the order was cancelled again, but the 3 planes couldn't be contacted so they have gone off.

So this Muddle East war is still just the same, it hasn't changed a bit.

Our gang of homeward bound troops have been on standby for embarkation since midday yesterday as there is supposed to be a boat in Suez, but I doubt it - there are thousands of Aussies with all their transport heading towards Suez from Syria & Palestine & I reckon all available boats will be used by them to get them out towards the Far East & the Japs, so most probably we'll be here for a few more months.

Evening:- Just like old times, this evening another signal has come through for the Squadron to move at first light tomorrow morning for Sidi Rezegh - at this rate it will be good old Fuka by day after tomorrow.

Those dead Itais at Rezegh will be just about ripe now, & summer will be on hand one of these days - the flies are starting here already.

It's full moon again this evening, & really beautiful moon - maybe there'll be many whoofu whoofu birds over the forward dromes tonight. Somehow tonight's moon made me think of the Garba Tulla days when a full moon meant an elephant shoot with cattles out of the tree near the waterhole, & down in the Union it meant a sandy beach & silvery sea & romance & all that, but up here it simply means a comfortable corner in a funkhole & many whoofus - & yet it's the very self same old moon which the lights up all three places.

2 Feb [1942]

Last night orders came through 24 Squadron to take off at daybreak this morning, so they decided to leave after breakfast. Again, no sooner had the first flight got off than another call came through cancelling the move, but it was too late to call them back, so they got as far as Bagush, found a dust storm raging, refuelled & are back here again now, all but Tommy Halse who is presumably still at Bagush.

In spite of the fact that the Squadron has been given 21 brand new Bostons, with air filters fitted which are supposed to be the secret of all the trouble, two machines packed up on today's 3 hour stooze, one of the planes used up all its oil - 19 gal to each engine, landed with one feathered prop, & the other one cut just as she touched down - so it looks as if they will have to use the extra fuselage tank for oil instead of petrol if they want to get anywhere with the Bostons. 24 Squadron Bostons are all over the ruddy joint now - nobody even knows where the O.C. & the two planes forming on him which left the first time, have put down - they are simply lost, probably they are waiting at Rezegh.

The latest decision is for all the Bostons to be test flown here for about a 3 hour endurance test, & any doubtful planes thrown out of the squadron & replaced before they move up.

At last we seem to have a boat - there is one at Suez which is going down to Durban, or rather is supposed to be going down about Friday & we are all booked to go on it. It is a dirty looking tub but is supposed to be quite fast.

Fillie Kleyn has been awarded the D.F.M. - nice work! He has done a hell of a lot of raids & has deserved it.

Another fellow of our original gunners course to get the D.F.M. is old George Bates the old card who shot up the one & only water tank at Eerste River Range. Carey Levi tells us the bombing at Garissa used to get old Bates down, one day he ran so far from camp that he got lost & they had to send out a young search party to look for him.

4th Feb. [1942]

There have been some more orders & counter orders & changes of opinion etc. - the idea of endurance testing the Bostons was dropped the same day, & the whole lot have been declared U.S., & the engines or rather pots of every one has to be taken down & new rings fitted, this will take at least 10 days, & in the meantime the ground staff are all up at Sidi Rezegh & Durna has been evacuated by us today, so they must be having uneasy moments at Rezegh - probably they will be on their way back here again by now. [AIR p120]

Col. Durrant has not turned up yet, & we presume he is at Rezegh too - in the meantime Major van Pittius, a new bloke who has only just joined the squadron after being booted out of two Fighter Squadrons, has assumed 2nd. in Command over the head of Major Don, & he is making himself damn unpopular all round with his domineering habits. He's just a bloody nasty type who likes asserting himself.

Van Pittius's latest bit of nastiness was this evening just as dusk fell. A whole truckload of surface mail & parcels arrived, & a whole lot of us were busy sorting it in front of the mess - doing nobody any harm & getting in nobody's way, & enjoying the job as it was a pleasant break in a boring day - it was almost like Xmas morning in the nursery, - when along comes van Pittius & Orders! us to stop sorting the mail & put it away until the morning. Needless to say everybody is damn disgusted with him except for one or two of the junior new arrivals who are hanging around him now in the pub, arse crawling.

All I can say is Thank Gawd I have left the squadron if this is what is happening to it. Colonel Durrant will be relieved in a month or so & then life & it will be just about unbearable.

5th February [1942]

Ross Pearson came back from Cairo this morning with different instructions that we were to put our kit aboard tomorrow & we're sailing the day after, Saturday, morning, & now the R.A.F. Movements Officer has just rang up from Tewfik saying the boat has been postponed until Monday 9th - still the same old bloody war. I wish we could now get to hell out of this place, it's getting more unpleasant by the day - van Pittius is getting more & more unbearable - the latest outburst was today when he reckoned the bar was open after hours & he waited until Major Don & Jim Williams who had been drinking there had left, & then he jumped on poor Hickey Johnson & chewed him up good & proper as he is Bar Officer. The man is making himself as unpleasant as he possibly can & everybody is wishing that the O.C. would come back from wherever he is. How the war is going I don't know.

On Board Highland Monarch 9th Feb [1942]

At last we're on our way - we weighed anchor at 11 this morning. The Highland Monarch is a damn fine boat of medium size - does about 15 knots. When she started on her way I lighted my pipe & really enjoyed the smoke - it must be almost a month since I stopped & had just about got used to it.

The boat is pretty well loaded - 80 S.A.A.F, about 50 R.A.F & a hell of a lot of Army & Navy, & about 30 women, mostly evacuees & the number of Generals, Admirals & other Army officers' wives & daughters. We are about 2,000 all told.

