

APRIL - MAY, 1940

THE SECOND NORTH WESTERN (NORWEGIAN) EXPEDITION.

While the Air Party were engaged in the First Expedition, the ground staff of the squadron were in constant expectation of joining them. After a number of complex movements which began on April 25<sup>th</sup> and which fluctuated between Edinburgh, Leith and Scapa Flow, the ground parties were reunited on May 3<sup>rd</sup> at Turnhouse where twelve more Gladiators were received.

On May 7<sup>th</sup> the Advance Echelon of the main party (221 in number) boarded SS "Chrobry" and reached Sjørvin on May 11<sup>th</sup>, and was then occupied in unloading stores and equipment and in transferring them to the airfield and Bardufoss.

Severe air raids of every type were so constant a feature of this expedition, that the squadron's day to day return occurrence has not been recorded; work went on right through them.

The Second Echelon boarded the SS "Sobriesti" at Glasgow on May 18<sup>th</sup> and joined the main party at Bardufoss on May 20<sup>th</sup>. The thirty-six members of Headquarters staff never got beyond Scapa Flow.

On May 17<sup>th</sup> W/O James was killed on active service; he was shot by a revolver accidentally discharged.

The Air Party of the Second Expedition again consisted of eighteen Gladiators and eighteen pilots. Of these S/Ldr J.W. Donaldson, F/Lt Mills, P/O. Wyatt Smith, P/O. McNamara, P/O Richards, P/O Craig-Adams, P/O Hughes, P/O Purdy, P/O Jacobsen, P/O Bentley and Sgt Pilots Milligan, Kitchener, Whall, and Russell were veterans from the First Expedition. F/Lt C.P. Hull F/Lt. A. Williams, F/O Ede and P/O Falkson were new comers to the squadron. Seven other pilots sailed on the SS "Chrobry" and "Sobriesti", F/Lt. T. Rowley, F/O Olivier, P/Os McDermott, Britton, Parnell, and Sgt. Pilots Watson Parker, and Mason. F/O. C.W. Cole was Intelligence Officer and F/O. P.M. Fowler, medical officer; other officers who accompanied the squadron were F/O Riley and P/O Wilkie. The Gladiators were flown onto HMS Furious by pilots of the F.A.A. on May the 12<sup>th</sup>. After a false start they sailed again on May the 14<sup>th</sup> arrived off Norway on May the 17<sup>th</sup>., but were forced to await the service-ability of Bardufoss airfield until May the 21<sup>st</sup>. Pilot Officer Wyatt Smith had been troubled by shrapnel in his leg, he had been wounded aboard S.S. Delius and was taken back to England by Tender on May the 16<sup>th</sup>. His place was taken by Lieut. Tony Lydekker of the F.A.A.

On the 21<sup>st</sup>., the squadron flew off in a gale of wind and rain with very poor visibility. One section managed to fly back onto the "Furious" but another, led by a Swordfish of the F.A.A. crashed into a mountain North of Soreisa. Pilot Officer Richards was killed and Flight Lieutenant Mills dangerously wounded. Fourteen pilots and "Gladiators" had landed at Bardufoss by 09.00 on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Those that arrived on the previous day carried out forty sorties in maintaining a standing patrol. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> there were fifty-four sorties and three indecisive combats. Further, Pilot Officer Craig-Adams either shot down or rammed a Heinkel 111. His body was found in his Gladiator next to the ruins of the enemy aircraft.

May the 23<sup>rd</sup>., forty sorties: Sgt Whall destroyed a D.O.17 and baled out himself, having run out of petrol.

On May 24<sup>th</sup> numerous sorties were made. F/O Ede damaged an M.E.110 and shared with F/O Riley and F/Lt Hull the destruction of an HE.111. They destroyed the rear gunner, the starboard engine and the port engine respectively. Orders were now given for pilots to stay together on patrol.

May 25<sup>th</sup> F/O Ede destroyed two JU 90s. P/O Purdy and Sgt Kitchener shared a third. One May 26<sup>th</sup>, F/Lt Williams and Sgt ~~Milligan~~ Milligan shared a Ju 88 They caught it by cutting across the turns. F/Lt Hull, P/O Falkson

and Lieut Hull were detached to Bodo landing ground where they were bogged and lost a Gladiator when they did manage to take off. F/Lt Hull probably destroyed an H.E.111 before making sure of a JU 52. It is not surprising that enemy tactics, when Gladiators were observed, can now be summed up in a word - evasive. However, F/Lt Hull probably destroyed another HE111 before nightfall and P/Os Purdy and Bentley pursued a DO 17 and destroyed it in a ravine 20 miles South of Narvik. P/O Purdy bagged another DO17 on the way back. F/O Riley and P/O Parnell picked off two of five HE111s. F/O Riley was wounded in the neck and chest. On that day the Squadron destroyed two JU52s, two DO17s, two HE111s, one JU88 and probably two more HE111s.

May 27<sup>th</sup>. On this day three Gladiators covered the evacuation of British troops from Rognum. Meanwhile Bardue was bombed by a large mixed force of E/A. F/Lt Hull and Lieut Lydeker took off to attack them. The latter shot down a JU 87 just before he himself was wounded in knee and hand. Meanwhile Lieut Lydekker tackled the remaining E/A. He was wounded in the neck and shoulder, and his aircraft was shot to pieces before he landed. "As a result of the actions of these officer's, troops at Bodo enjoyed comparative immunity from air attack for a period of seven hours. This enabled them to carry out the evacuation successfully". Sgt. Milligan attacked four He 111s and destroyed one of them. On this day Lac. R.P. Jones and Lac. S. Hurley were killed on active service in an air raid on Bardu.

May 28<sup>th</sup>. F/Lt Williams, at the end of a long patrol destroyed an He 111. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May F/Lt Williams destroyed an He 111 over a fiord West of Narvik and Sgt Milligan destroyed one of three He 111s that bombed the aerodrome. During these last days of May the Squadron carried out the first ground strafing raids in its history. In about twenty two of these raids in the Narvik area, troop concentrations, motor cars, lorries, railway stations, pillboxes and German H.Q. at Hundalen were successfully attacked without serious damage to the Squadrons aircraft. May 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> weather obstructed operations. The opportunity to rest the pilots and to repair the aircraft most of which had been damaged in combat - was eagerly taken.

June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Fifty-five sorties were made including a continuous standing patrol of the Narvik area. F/Lt. Williams and Sgt. Kitchener destroyed three He.111s of 15 e/a encountered. Six or more Do.17s then appeared and jettisoned their bombs when they saw the Gladiators. Our pilots shot down one of a pair of Ju.87s and damaged another. They probably destroyed a He.111 before ending the patrol. P/Os Jacobsen and Wilkie attacked a pair of Ju.88s and P/O Wilkie was shot down and killed. He was the second pilot of the squadron killed in air combat. P/O Jacobsen alone destroyed a Ju.88, two He.111s and probably a third, and finally, without ammunition and with petrol low, had to evade several other enemy aircraft before landing. He used the low flying, evasive tactics which have often been adopted lately by Whirlwinds.

June 3, 4, and 5<sup>th</sup>. Weather restricted operations. On June 6<sup>th</sup> numerous sorties were made, but enemy aircraft fled before they could be attacked. On June 7<sup>th</sup> the evacuation of the squadron was ordered. Files and reports were destroyed. It appears that three enemy aircraft were destroyed and two probably destroyed before the squadron flew on board HMS Glorious in the night of June 7/8<sup>th</sup>.

One June 8<sup>th</sup> HMS Glorioso was sunk in action with the Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. There were no survivors from 263 Squadron. On that day died:-

S/Ldr J.W. Donaldson, DSO, DFC, AFC, F/O H.F. Grant Ede, DFC.,  
F/O H.E. Vickery, F/O A.T. Williams DFC, P/O J. Falkson,  
P/O P.H. Purdy DFC, P/O L.R. Jacobsen, DFC., P/O S.R. McNamara, DFC.,  
P/O M.A. Bentley, Sgt Pilot E. Russell, MM.,

F/Lt Hull, F/Lt Mills, P/O Hughes and Sgt. Pilots Milligan, Kitchener and Whall returned safely to England with the ground staff. The

details of the journey are not known but F/Sgt Hatter's diary, which with that of F/Lt Hull's has been of great use in compiling this summary, mentions the SS "Arandora Star" as one of the ships in which squadron personnel were carried.

Little has been said about the part played by the ground staff in this Expedition and indeed there are few records of it. Let this one fact stand as a tribute to them: after the eighteen days of the tremendous operations which have been noted, there were ten Gladiators serviceable. Alas, it was these ten which were flown on to the Glorious.

The Second North Western Expedition cannot be lightly summed up. The brief outline above must speak for itself. Twenty-six confirmed victories and five unconfirmed were officially attributed to the Squadron, but a count of the combats recorded gives a total of thirty-six destroyed probably destroyed and damaged. This figure is, therefore, unofficially adopted. With the fourteen victories of the First Expedition, the total is fifty. Only two pilots were killed and two Gladiators destroyed in air combat.

The followin awards were promulgated after the Second Expedition:-

The Distinguished Flying Cross was posthumously conferred upon S/Ldr J.W. Donaldson, DSO., Pilot Officer H.F. Grant Ede, Flying Officer A.T. Williams and Pilot Officer L.R. Jacobsen.

Sergeant Kitchener who survived, received the Distinguished Flying Medal.

The British Empire Order was conferred upon Flight Sergeant A. Johnson and F. Goss and on Corporals M. Gilbert and H. Rogers.

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