

EXTRACT from Diary of Flight Lieutenant C.B.Hull, D.F.C.

13<sup>th</sup> May 1940.

We all had to get up at an unearthly hour and left the Caledonian Hotel in a large bus specially chartered, which took us off to Greenock where the "Furious" was waiting. After some delay we all got aboard and set sail as the gangway was raised - very smart. At 12.30 our 18 Gladiators were flown on without mishap. Imagine our dismay when we returned to the harbour. Thoughts flew at once to France and our C.O. did his best to wangle a changeover. Visited the Bay Hotel that evening and got pretty tight.

14<sup>th</sup>.

More rumours until a good one arrived at 19.30 that evening. We were at sea by 20.30. Spirits soared again and gin was swallowed at a feverish pace in the wardroom.

15<sup>th</sup>.

Well out at sea in company with the "Glorious" and four escort destroyers. 46 Squadron is aboard the "Glorious". Am getting to know our crowd a bit better - they seem a good lot, but those of 263 who were in the first Norwegian show are a bit in the air about it still. The gunnery officer of "Furious" has very decently fixed those of us who have lost their R.A.F. revolvers with new ones. The R.N. can get things done in the right way; no bother with auditors etc.

16<sup>th</sup>.

We are getting fed up with the uncertainty. News from France seems so bad that we must turn back. Had some target practice with our gats to-day. We also got the flights sorted out - I have "B" flight and asked for Williams and Falkson and got them with Jacobsen, Purdy, Bently and two of the good sergeants. Wyatt-Smith has had to return to England to get the small piece of shrapnel out of his leg, so Tony Lydekker the F.A.Arm armament officer is to come with me and bring out the 9<sup>th</sup> machine.

17<sup>th</sup>.

Getting near now. Rumour that we fly off to-morrow, so the Nautics are giving us a dinner to-night. We all got pretty noggers.

18<sup>th</sup>.

Anti-climax - we can't land as our aerodrome at Bardufoss is not yet serviceable - Hell!

19<sup>th</sup>.

Still delay and if we don't get away by the 21<sup>st</sup> our fuel will be running so short that we will have to go back to Scapa Flow and have another shot at getting out.

20<sup>th</sup>.

Nothing more all day. Tomorrow 08.00 hrs. is the latest we can stay in these waters. In the evening Commander gave us a lantern slide lecture on Gough's 5<sup>th</sup> Army. It was rather appropriate in view of the fact that we are being swept back in France. Just as it ended a signal came through saying that we were to fly off at 02.00hrs. next morning.

21<sup>st</sup>.

We flew off in very thick weather and one section had to return and four pilots made a deck landing. On arrival at Bardufoss we heard that one section consisting of Mills, Richards and a Swordfish had gone astray. This place is the real wild and woolly business and if we get going before the Huns bomb us out we should have a good time.

22<sup>nd</sup>.

Still no news of the missing pilots. Ede who was following the same Swordfish said that a disaster was certain, as he had to break away when they went into cloud and he saw a ball of fire rolling down the hillside. The C.O. is very upset as Mills had been his right hand man for some time and they were great friends. Started flying to-day and in the evening I led five of the flight over Harstadt where a raid was reported. After a long search we saw vapour trails at about 15,000 feet. Climbed up carefully and eventually at 20,000 feet it looked as if we would soon be able to engage as they had not seen us. The attack was not successful as the Heinkel 111's opened up and although we chased them for about 20 minutes, they got clean away. I gave the hindmost one some long bursts from 800 yards, but although it slowed up, a cloud bank at 500 feet saved it. Only two guns worked as the rest were frozen up.

23<sup>rd</sup>.

All kinds of alarms. Craig-Adams is missing. We heard that Mills and Swordfish crew were safe after crashing but Richards was killed. Don't seem able to get to grips with these Heinkels.

24<sup>th</sup>.

4 M.E.110's appeared over the aerodrome. A.A. fire broke them up and Ede took off. We saw them go for him and he wisely came back to the aerodrome. Went up to look for Craig-Adams' crash which had been reported in one of the hills. He had collided with a Heinkel and they both went in - a fine end.

On the way back saw an H.E. hotly pursued by a Gladiator coming over the hills. Intercepted and joined in. The H.E. was already damaged, so it soon came down in a show drift. Two people got out.

25<sup>th</sup>.

Ede bagged a 4-engined aircraft over Harstadt. In the evening Purdy got one also with the help of Sgt. Kitchener. It was bombing a destroyer.

At 12.30 I took Jack Falkson and Jacobsen on a long patrol South of Narvik. We hoped to get some seaplanes which were reported to land in Rombaks Fiord at night. The country was wild and desolate, and running into cloud we turned back. Over R. Fiord we roared down from 4,000 feet to sea level and swept up as far as the sunken German destroyers. No sign of anything. Back over the Rombaks mountain we went and found a collection of Hun tents with a swastika outside in the snow. Decided not to attack and returned home tired and fed up.

At 07.00 hrs. we had another patrol for 1½ hrs. at Salanger. No luck.

After breakfast just as we were going for some sleep the C.O. asked me if I would like to take a section down to BODO to operate for a day with the Army. Jumped at the chance and took Tony Lydekker and Jack Falkson. Set off at 12.00 feeling pretty heroic. On the way we encountered 2 H.E.111's which were going North. They fired at us from about a mile away, but we could not afford to pursue. Reached Bodo and found a landing lane was being marked out. The landing was terrifying and I thought we would go over on our noses.

Soon all of us were bogged down. A Heinkel appeared so I ordered Lydekker to take off. He made it all right, being half out of fuel. Our aircraft were refuelled by 4 gallon cans and I reported to Wing Commander Martin. He explained that the Army were retreating up a valley East of Bodo and were being strafed by the Huns all day. Sounded too easy, so I took off just as another Heinkel circled the aerodrome. God, what a take off. Came unstuck about 50 yards from the end and just staggered over the trees. Jack followed and crashed. I thought that our expedition was doomed to dismal failure and that I had better do as much damage as I could before landing again, so told Tony to land over the blower, and set off towards the valley.

Saw some smoke rising so investigated and found H.E.111 at about 600 feet. Attacked it 3 times and it turned South with smoke pouring from both engines and fuselage. Broke off attack to engage Ju.52 which crashed in flames. Saw H.E.111 flying South - tried to intercept but failed. Returned and attacked two Ju.52's in formation. No.1 went into clouds. No.2 crashed in flames after six people had baled out.

Attacked H.E.111 and drove it South with smoke pouring from both engines. Ammo. finished so returned to base. The troops were very cheered by the report and I thought another patrol might produce more fun. The Wing Commander did not like the idea of risking another take off but after a lot of persuasion he agreed to it. It was quite shattering in spite of some wooden planks laid across the bad patches.

This time the valley was deserted and the only thing I could do was amuse the troops by doing some aerobatics. They all cheered and waved madly every time I went down low - I think they imagined that at last we had air control and their worries were over - vain hope. Returned to base after 2½ hours. Everyone felt dead tired so we went off to the R.A.F. billet - a grand little house with every modern luxury including some beer.

Millsom also showed us his Poppet as he called her. A sweet little Norwegian girl who did the cooking and waiting.

After a short discussion with the Wing Commander we decided that our two Gladiators would have to cover the Rognum evacuation between 24.00 hrs. ad 10.00 hrs. next day.

Tony took off at 23.00 hrs. and I arranged to follow at 24.00 and our patrols would overlap for half an hour. Tried to get some sleep but could not so had a cold shower. F/Lt. Millsom and F/O Clarke from Biggin Hill were absolutely grand and helped no end.

At 24.00 hrs. off again and met Tony over the Salte valley. It was a beautiful morning but at Rognum the troops were blowing up ammunition and pushing off in large "puffers" as the glorified flat-bottomed boards were called. One had a feeling of impending disaster as the evacuation looked so vulnerable and we were a puny force to protect it against any vigorous onslaught. Tony and I did some formation and then off he went to refuel. I amused myself by shooting up the boats and how those chaps waved. It did one good to see their pathetic confidence.

27<sup>th</sup>.

After 2¼ hrs. I went back and passed Jack on the way out. Landed and saw the Wing Commander and told him we had better stop the patrols or an aircraft might get damaged on the effective but rough runway. This was agreed to and we had some breakfast and returned to our aircraft where we lay basking in the sun. All was peaceful except for one abortive warning which must have been a square head recce machine.

Suddenly at 08.00 hrs. the balloon went up. There were 110's and 87's all round us and the 87's started dive bombing a jetty about 800 yards from the aerodrome. Tony's aircraft started at once and I waved him off, then after trying mine a bit longer got yellow and together with the fitter made a dive into a nearby barn. From there we watched the dive bombing in terror until it seemed that they were not actually concentrating on the aerodrome. Got the Gladiator going and shot off without helmet or waiting to do anything up. Circled the 'drome climbing and pinned an 87 at the bottom of the dive. It made off slowly over the sea and just as I was turning away another 87 shot up past me and his shots went through my windscreen knocking me out for a while. Came to and was thanking my lucky stars when I heard rat-tat behind me and felt my Gladiator hit. Went into right hand turn and dive but could not get it out. Had given up hope at 200 feet when she centralised and I gave her a burst of engine to clear some large rocks. Further rat-tats from behind so gave up hope and decided to get her down. Held off and then crashed.