

## **THE ADVENTURES OF “THE FLAMING SNIPE”**

### **An account of the ground war of No.255 Squadron RAF in 1943**

The text copied from AIR27/1520 was re-keyed November/December 2017 by Chris Eley, working from a microfilm copy of the original book. E&OE. Transcribed material commencing at page 4 is © Crown Copyright (reproduced here under the Open Government Licence v 3.0).

Names of people and places, where known to be corrupted in the original, have been corrected so as to facilitate computer searches. Additionally, some abbreviations have been expanded in the interests of clarity. Please refer back to the original whenever a published quotation is to be made, citing the source as TNA:AIR27/1520.

Doodles on the inside front cover of the original book (apparently partly in Arabic, not reproduced here) suggests re-use of a notebook previously in the possession of Piers Kelly. At some time in the book's life, folios were numbered using a mechanical numbering machine. The book is physically intact throughout the parts used. Folio 37 side 1 is annotated “END” and otherwise blank. Both sides of Folio 1 are blank.

There is an anomaly at Folio 31 Side 1, which repeats text from the start of Folio 25. This is consistent with someone having turned over several blank pages and later, upon realising their mistake, copied the text back from Folio 31 into its correct position on Folio 25. Half of Folio 31 side 1 and the whole of side 2 are, in consequence, blank.

The book is an unofficial Squadron diary covering the approximate period September 1942 to September 1943. The numerous references to the “Flaming Snipe” relate to a Humber Snipe motor car used by the Squadron as Officers motor transport.

A number of variants of the Snipe existed in the British military – the open-top tourer (such as General Montgomery's “Old Faithful”), a 4-door saloon and an estate car known as a “woody” on account of its timber-trimmed bodywork. It is clear from the following text that the “Flaming Snipe” had a sunshine roof, suggesting that it was not a soft-top. Most probably it was the saloon car version, but this is unconfirmed.

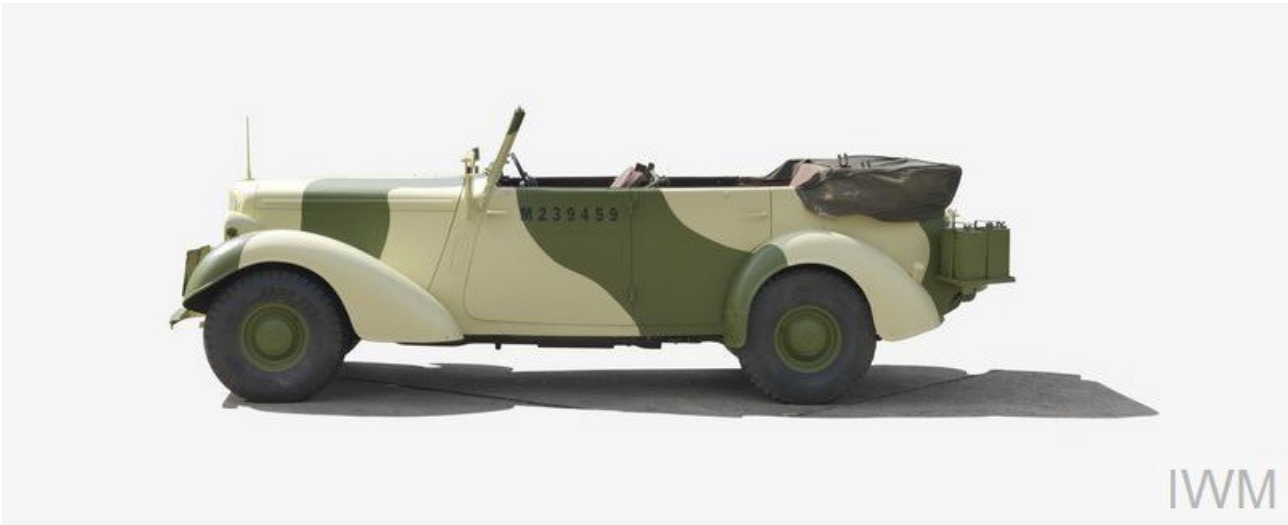
CE  
Harrow, Middlesex  
January 2018

**Variants of the Humber Snipe in British military service**



Above: The saloon version, believed to be the variant used by 255. Photo credit: Dave Haskell  
Below: Utility / Shooting Brake / Station Wagon version. Photo credit: [www.nevsepic.com.ua](http://www.nevsepic.com.ua)





IWM

General Montgomery's Humber Snipe tourer, "Old Faithful".



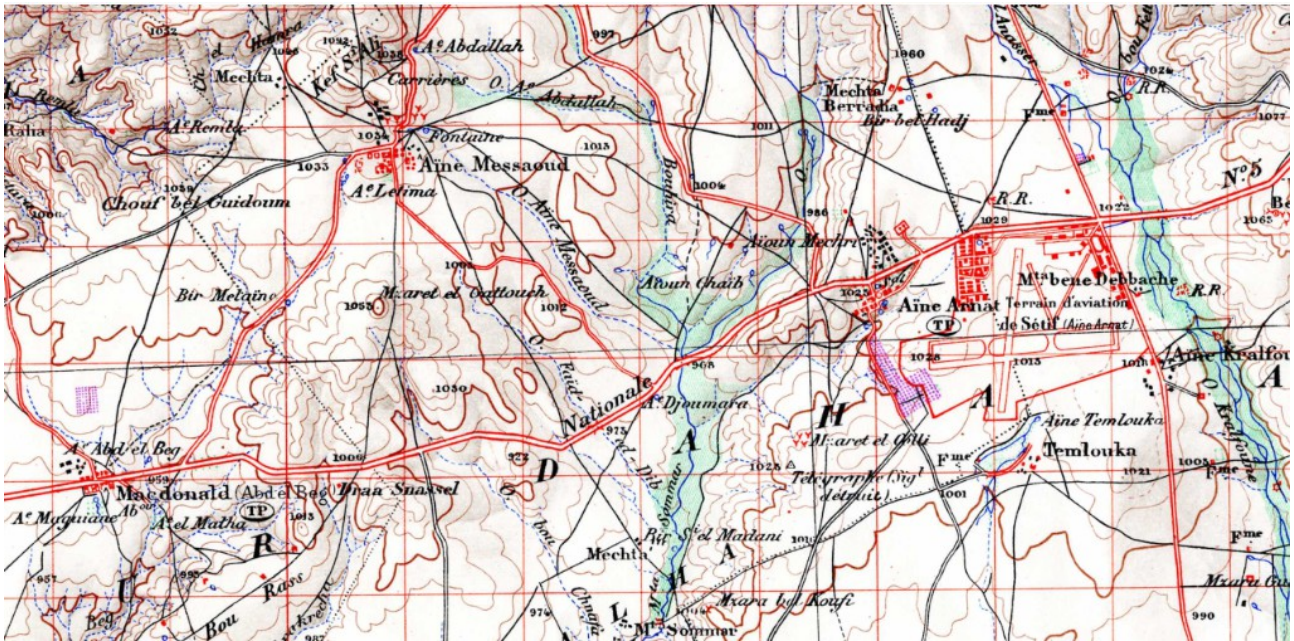
IWM



IWM

**Maps available to the Squadron:**

The map extract reproduced below illustrates the standard of cartography available at the time in respect of French colonies in North Africa. The example shows the relative positions of Macdonald (near the western edge of the sheet) and Sétif Aerodrome some 7½ km to the east. Note the spelling Aïne Arnat, the Ain/Aïne discrepancy further extending the possibilities for confusion of North African place names.



Extract kindly supplied by the *Institut Géographique National*, Paris

**The transcription:**

This humble columnist joined the Squadron on Sept. 25<sup>th</sup>, 1942.<sup>1</sup> News of the Squadron's imminent departure for service overseas, heralding as it did a period of comings and goings, of successions of visitors, of numerous farewells, of intense training, was then but three weeks old.

Leave and first farewells being over, the process of

<sup>1</sup> Shown as Pilot Officer G.H.Poker at first entry in the ORB. Actually 125365 George Henry Roker, known as Ted.

kitting out began and an urgent desire for some definite action manifested itself throughout the Squadron.

Security lectures, which had included grim talks of sunken ships, of lifetimes spent in open boats in the freezing wastes of northern waters or under the boiling sun of the Red Sea had made us all security minded. Cryptic discussions, born of every rumour which grew mushroom-like in every corner of the station, flared up when two or three were gathered together, only to die away to a hushed whisper on the approach of any foreign body.

Pants woollen fought gamely with pants silken for the right to accommodation in the resplendent Blacks Ten<sup>2</sup> trunks which had begun to give our quarters the appearance of one colossal lost property office. The search of the shops and stores of England, Scotland and Wales for such items as bug powder, torch batteries, chewing gum etc started a hoarding competition which swept through the Squadron.

The more prominent visitors during this period were:-

Group Capt. David Atcherley DFC on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> October.

S/L D.H. Mills on 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct when he was presented with a cigarette box.

Air Commodore Steele on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> Oct.

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2 Shipping trunks manufactured by Blacks, capacity ten cubic feet.

Air Vice Marshal W.P. Dixon CB DSO OBE AFC 28<sup>th</sup> Oct.

Wing Commander Bandit and Mr Watson of I.C.I. On the 28<sup>th</sup> in connection with re-doping machines.

On 7<sup>th</sup> Nov. Wing Commander Cunningham DSO DFC and his R.O. Flight Lieutenant Rawnsley AFC DFM visited and talked to aircrew.

Lieutenant Brown who talked of the Libyan campaign came on 10<sup>th</sup> Nov.

Departures for other units included...

F/Lt D.H. Mills, posted to Group H.Q. At Preston and afterwards promoted to Squadron Leader Oct. 10<sup>th</sup>.

P/O Marshall Friend who left us for 54 O.T.U.

F/O Holmes to RAF Valley.

New arrivals were:-

F/O T. Henry in charge of the R.A.F. Regiment

F/O G. Roker for Codes and cyphers

F/O Cronser for R.A.F. From 456 Squadron

F/Lt Murfin our Adjutant who only joined us a few days before our departure.

The amazing efforts of the entire Squadron during the past few weeks should be put on record. A working day of some ten hours was gradually stretched to twelve and more. A hurried cleaning off and re-doping of all of our aircraft called for even greater efforts. Aircrews mingled with Ops WAAFs as they swarmed like ants round, under, over, and on the machines. Scraping ever scraping<sup>3</sup>, work took on a more furious pace, rising to a terrific crescendo with a 24 hour working day and the achievement of being ready before the orders to move came.

Last, in a less exacting way, but in a form which proved quite arduous, came the task of toughening the bodies. By now we had all been issued with heavy duty dress and proudly clumped about the station in khaki battledress of many hues, gaitered and noisome in heavy boots. Truly a motley collection of "Brown types". We had all mastered the art of assembling the jigsaw collection of webbing equipment, and though there was some doubt as to the orthodox style of using the revolvers issued to us (IE the crouching style of the Wild West or the more universal style of the film-land gangster) we commenced a routine of route marches and trips to the local battle course.

On the social side we had managed various visits to the Second Mess and to the Old Crab Mill at [Blank, never filled in. Probably the Old Crab Mill Inn at Preston Bagot]. Unfortunately the last of these visits was the cause of giving Hamish severe heart strain.

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<sup>3</sup> Done to remove inappropriate camouflage from the Beaufighters. Previously, an early form of black radar-absorbing "stealth" paint had been used (RDM2). The resulting rough surface is now known to have increased drag.

We left a credit of three shillings and sixpence and despite all efforts to secure some method of recovery it is regretted that the 3s 6d still remains to our credit at this hostelry.

On two of these visits we had with us Wing Commander Hargreaves from [Blank, never filled in] who spent a few days leave with the Squadron.

W/O Curtis did sterling work in organising odd dances for the men. Occasional parties in the different messes helped to give the newer officers an opportunity of knowing their N.C.O.'s and men.

On Nov. 2<sup>nd</sup> a party was arranged. Unfortunately few guests could make the journey but numerous telegrams arrived with "Good Luck" messages.

November 11<sup>th</sup>. On this day instructions were received for the aircrews to proceed and again on the 12<sup>th</sup> came a message calling for the services of our machines as soon as possible in the theatre of operations.

Friday November 13<sup>th</sup> was the big day. Aircrews were standing by at 10.00 hrs. After numerous consultations over the weather the planes began to taxi out at 12.20. At 12.35 the first machine was airborne.

A great send-off was arranged and the entire staff of controllers etc etc had manned the roof and verandah of the control tower armed with Verey pistols. Rockets, red lights, green lights, all sailed into the air as each group of three



*machines started their "take off". The Station Adjutant Flight Lieutenant Childs, armed with a ginormous flag, had climbed onto the higher-most part of the control tower. This flag he proceeded to wave until one or two of our machines roared over his head at 0 feet. There appeared to be an effort on the part of some of our pilots to dislodge the Station Adjutant.*

*A few minutes before the 'take off' began, the following message was received:*

*"Both present and past Air Officers Commanding No.9 Group and entire Group Staff wish to thank 255 Squadron for their willing efforts, excellent cooperation and first class work in this Group and now congratulate 255 on being given further opportunities of showing their worth and wish them the very best of luck and good hunting."*

*The following was sent in reply...*

*"All ranks of 255 Squadron very much appreciate the very kind message from present and past Air Officers Commanding No.9 Group and entire group staff and would like to tender their own appreciation of the kindness which has always been shown to the unit during its stay in the Group. It hopes for new opportunities to acquit itself well and will not let the old Group down."*

With the departure of the planes we were able to settle down to more intensive toughening training. Route marches, visits to the local battle school and trips around the Honiley assault course were a feature of the daily programme. However, with machines and aircrews gone, Honiley did not seem quite the same and everyone was anxious to follow them and get down to a real job of work. At last, after a waiting period that seemed twice as long as it really was, we received orders to move. During this period we had heard indirectly from one or two of the aircrews... of their safe arrival at Gibraltar and on the last day news that at least one crew was in Algeria.

The night 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> Nov. Arrangements for the move were carried out with clockwork precision. At twelve o'clock midnight the Squadron paraded in the hanger ready to move off. They had been given a good hot meal, supplied with a ration for the journey and issued with 1s 4d<sup>4</sup> for the purchase of food if opportunity presented itself. At 00.40 hrs "A" Flight marched out of the hanger, led by P/O Ward for the march to Berkswell Station. The baggage HT<sup>5</sup> vans had gone on ahead and P/O Sexton had charge of the baggage party at Berkswell Station where kitbags were unloaded and stacked. At 01.40 the first Flight arrived followed at five minute intervals by the others. 02.40 hrs saw our special train pulling out on schedule and at 06.05 hrs, once again dead to our time, we came to a halt in Liverpool. The journey across to the docks, though not particularly comfortable, was accomplished

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4 One shilling and fourpence, a little under 7 pence in post-decimalisation currency.

5 Horse Transport (as opposed to MT, Motor Transport).

without mishap. By 07.00 hrs we were all in the main sheds of the docks and the business of getting 404 men on board had commenced. By 08.00 hrs the complete Squadron had been embarked without casualty.

Little need be said of our sea journey. The weather was kind with the exception of one night. Crackers did look a little pale but nevertheless no one missed a meal throughout the whole trip. We disembarked at Bône<sup>6</sup> on December 7<sup>th</sup> after a pleasant 10 days undisturbed by the enemy. The next 10 days we enjoyed the hospitality of No.4 Transit Camp at Bône, situated in the "Tabacoop". This was one place we were all pleased to leave. The Hun was too fond of disturbing the nights.

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The following illustrations are not part of the original document:



The Tabacoop, a prominent triangular site located next to a river confluence, made an easy target for the Luftwaffe at night despite it being a New Moon on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Aerial photo by Charles Ciantar, 1955. The east elevations of the warehouses are facing the camera.

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6 Since re-named Annaba.

At Bône the men had their first taste of sleeping out in the open. It was considered safer to take the men out into the hills to sleep and for 3 nights we all made our way – Gipsy fashion – to the hills. Crackers and the Scribe found a most comfortable ditch to which we had become really attached when it was found possible to move from the transit camp to our base at Sétif. Our strength had by then been considerably reduced. Numerous parties and convoys had been sent off with equipment. Some to Souk-el-Arba<sup>7</sup> and some as an advanced party to Sétif.

Our journey from Bône is worthy of comment. Doc Brennan, Crackers and the writer accompanied 179 bodies. Once again our move was at night. Leaving our hillside resting place at 02.00 hrs we marched to Bône station.

For 46 hours we enjoyed the luxury of a super cattle truck. Stops varied from 5 minutes to 10 hours. Much credit is due to the Squadron cooks who managed to give us good meals under exceedingly difficult conditions. Though on some occasions they had to run alongside the moving train complete with fires and large tins of tea or stew, we managed to complete our journey with the same number of bodies with which we started. By the time the train arrived at Sétif we had all resigned ourselves to spending at least another month 'riding the rails'. We had accordingly retired for the night and it was with no little surprise that we awoke at 23.30 to hear S/L Eliot and F/Lt Murfin knocking on the truck and enquiring for 255.

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<sup>7</sup> Since re-named Jendouba.

December 19<sup>th</sup>. At last we begin to gather our resources. The successful evacuation of Bône, and the peaceful occupation of Macdonald<sup>8</sup> and a portion of the aerodrome at Sétif has provided our aircrews with the very necessary ground organization. By December 23<sup>rd</sup> our encampment is ready for occupation and numerous plans are being made for organising the Officers Mess in a residence belonging to [blank space for name, never filled in], the village mayor. On Dec 23<sup>rd</sup>, F/O Cracknell and this columnist, entrusting their lives (and kits) to the professed road-worthiness of the "Flaming Snipe" and piloted by L.A.C. Shipman (pilot in chief to the Führer<sup>9</sup>) set out for Souk-el-Arba. They were accompanied by Sgt MacLeod. All was well until we reached a point some 20km from Constantine. Here, for no apparent reason, the "Flaming Snipe" waltzed in girlish fashion for some 100 yards along a tree lined road and then staggered into the air in true Whitley style. The "take off" might have been successful had the driver and/or pilot continued in his efforts to climb over the 30 foot high shrubs on the roadside. However, in a moment of indecision he attempted to roar through an opening. Alas for his efforts the "Flaming Snipe" shuddered rather sickeningly, lurched to port and then stalled into a six foot ditch. The pilot blamed the condition of the runway; F/O Cracknell seemed to agree, but the writer is still convinced that the famous Cracknell Kit, which occupied at least ¾ of our cabin, should be put on record as a contributory factor. Thanks to the efforts of REME at Constantine and the cooperation of the Yankee driver who carried Crackers into town in a jeep, we were all able to make

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8 Appears in some US and French documentation as "Abd el Beg". Since independence, also known as El Mahdia.

9 Not Adolf Hitler! This was the Squadron's tongue-in-cheek nickname for their own CO, Piers Kelly.

Constantine and the Cirta Hotel in time for tea. Our slight mishap required the "Flaming Snipe" to undergo an immediate operation. The steering rod had to be strengthened and a new petrol tank fitted. The new petrol tank incidentally was borrowed from a brother Snipe, the property of some Group Captain. At 10am on Christmas morning we proceeded on our journey. Apart from a short stop at Bône for dinner - tinned bacon and a fried egg - our journey was uneventful and it must be said in favour of the Snipe that she did yeoman service in making Souk-el-Arba just after dark. After much groping around in the dark, followed by 40 minutes of frantic telephoning, we were promised a guide to lead us to 255 dispersal. The guide duly arrived 1½ hours later and we embarked onto a sea of mud en route. We hoped for a meal and bed. After wading about in the mud for ½ hour and pushing the "Flaming Snipe" over two or three ploughed fields, during which process "she" (the bitch) lost her exhaust pipe, we did eventually arrive at dispersal.

My contemporary's diary does, I hope, deal fully with Christmas day (and with his own part in it).

Times and dates should be carefully noted in the following paragraphs.

On Dec 26<sup>th</sup> The Führer, S/L Player, F/L Lammer, F/O Wynzar and the aforementioned 'pilot in chief' left Souk in the 'Flaming Snipe' at 15.30 hours en route for Sétif via Bône and Duzerville.

At 11.00 hours on the following day this columnist departed on the same journey in a three ton lorry.

At dusk on the same day (27<sup>th</sup>) the three ton lorry arrived at the open space which should at some time or other become Duzerville aerodrome. This columnist and Sgt MacLeod tramped  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile across the mud to investigate one small and lonely tent, which was reputed by a local AA gun's crew to house the RAF detachment. Like Mother Hubbard we found the cupboard bare and were about to retrace our steps when we heard what we first thought to be the staccato rat-tat-tat of machine gun fire. Sgt MacLeod looked around hastily for a slit trench but just then we noticed a trail of red sparks following in the wake of a car's headlamps. From Greenland's icy mountains to India's coral sands only one car makes such a terrible noise; only one car trails such a fiery wake.

Once reunited we set about finding accommodation for the night and in the home of Monsieur Caninan we found a haven of rest and met F/L Dunning-White, at the time in charge of the Duzerville campaign, and his able staff officer (also the local ambulance wallah) F/O J Cameron Cox. Our surroundings were pleasant and most of us would have tarried awhile. However, F/L Dunning-White had conducted a masterly campaign and it was decided, over and round about some excellent wine, that we should push on to fresh fields and pastures new. The 3-tonner made first start and arrived at a suitable camping site some 4 miles east of Constantine at about 5pm. Some minutes later the Führer's party, minus the Führer, thundered along, stopped for a few moments and then

*set off in search of the Hotel Cirta.*

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The following photograph is not part of the original document:



Hotel Cirta, Constantine, Algeria, built circa 1912. Photograph ©2017 APS Photos. Closed for renovation in 2017, due to re-open 2018 as part of the Marriott Hotels group.

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*Of such adventures as these, and S/L Johnny Player's night in the deserted maid's dressing room, my confrère must write. So also will I leave to him an account of our meeting the next day and a pleasant drink in the American Bar of the Casino. The 3-tonner reached Sétif at 4.30 29/12/42 to be followed some two hours later by the "Flaming Snipe".*

*Under the guidance of Hamish, some of the boisterous spirits welcomed 1943 in the correct manner.*

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## 1943

With the score at 14 we enter the new year on top line, are hoping that the coming months will see more successes and that by next year we shall all be reunited with our families once again.

Life at Macdonald has now become more settled. Our Officers Mess has begun to look more like home and thanks largely to our Signals Officer P/O Sexton and Sgt Williamson, feeding and drinking arrangements have reached a higher standard than had been hoped for in so short a time. In the camp, bathing organization is under way. The men have their own canteen, now placed under the writer's direction, and the Sergeants have taken over another house in the village for use as a Sergeants mess.

Now there is talk of our own night fighting Wing<sup>10</sup>. All sorts of people are whistling here and whistling there. The Adjutant, accompanied by the pay corporal carrying a large box of five franc notes, has whistled up to Souk on the pretext of doing a pay parade. Pat's kit consisted of one toothbrush and two packs of cards. Why the heck he took the empresseed money with him no one knows. If he doesn't trust us why doesn't he say so?

F/L Dunning-White and his Staff Officer Cameron Cox returned from their Campaign. Two homeless refugees, Geoff Humes and Arthur Woolley, returned from Souk after Arthur Woolley had a spot of bother with a petrol stove.

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<sup>10</sup> This did materialise, as No.325 Wing with headquarters at Sétif.

*Odd spots of scrounging at various ASP's [Note here in a code not understood] have unearthed odds and ends of equipment we needed.*

*January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1943.*

*Player, Lammer, Oswald, Gloster  
Add their names to the medal roster  
D.F.C's for celebration  
Lots of fun and grand orations.*

*Good show, and some more to come we hope.*

*S/L Player and Ronnie Wynzar have gone to Algiers. Vague disturbing rumours have reached us about Ronnie. He tells everyone that he has the interests of the Squadron at heart. Time alone will tell. [At this point the words "In the meantime" have been deleted. The intended sentence was never completed.]*

*Squadron Leader Foorde, Welfare Officer, visited the camp and took quite an interest in all of our arrangements. He promised to try and get us some films.*

*Squadron Leader J.G.M. Kelly, the Wing<sup>11</sup> padre also visited us.<sup>12</sup>*

*It is with deep regret that we record the death of F/O Weston and P/O Hiles at Bône on the morning of Jan 6<sup>th</sup>. We*

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11 This refers to 325 Wing, headquartered at Sétif in the *École des Jeune Filles* (the school for young girls). See AIR26/433, entries for 04 and 13.Jan.1943. The school buildings functioned both as offices and accommodation.

12 The Wing padre was 116930 The Reverend James Ganly Marks Kelly. Reference to him here as "Squadron Leader" is questionable. Chaplains were supposed to be known and addressed by their ecclesiastical titles and not by their rank titles, which existed only to indicate their relative status in the RAF. See KR&ACI (A.P.958) Para 68.

shall miss them both.

P/O Sproule and Sgt Auld, a new crew from home, joined us a few days ago. Pat Murfin has been back some days and now seems ready to go off again. Our Adjutant seems to be of a restless nature. Now he has whistled down to Algiers.

Days slip by quickly and dates become insignificant. At long last our cypher staff have manned their post and now do their turn of cypher watch. If the N.A.A.F.I. profits continue as they are now this columnist will be able to buy an air force where cyphers are obsolete.

29<sup>th</sup> Jan. Our pilots now do "duty pilot". Incendiary O'Sullivan starts the ball rolling and finds that "Duty Pilot" is something of a misnomer. At 23.00 hrs or thereabouts the writer (himself doing a spell of duty) climbed the winding staircase that leads to the Watch Tower. From the Watch Tower came the amount of noise one would expect from the combination of a boxing match and a movie newspaper office. It was with no little trepidation that the writer completed his journey and dared to ask how the job of Duty Pilot was going. The conversation which followed ran something like this:

Duty Pilot: "Duty Pilot hah! Do you know..." (Interruption whilst six telephone bells all ring and the DP gyrated round the office like a top, snatching at receivers). "I'm !!xx!! DP, I'm !!!!! Intelligence, I'm \*\*\*! Controller." (Another interruption while the six telephone calls all ring again. With a rapid

side stepping movement the DP answers all at once thereby entangling himself to choking point in the mass of wires. At last he is free.

Me, very meekly: "Are you busy?"

Duty Pilot: "!!!!\*\*\*. I've got two Beau's just up. Four Hurri's just down" (Interruption whilst one telephone rings plaintively). "I've got a 3-tonner wants homing from Sétif."

Me (interrupting and very brightly): "How about some tea?"

Duty Pilot: (With his eyes popping out like organ stops and his face glowing very red) "Tea - 2 !!!!\*\* DP"

At this moment some twerp decided the time and place appropriate to set fire to a tin of petrol outside the hanger. The D.P. then gave a fair imitation of a bargee. Rushing to the balcony and placing cupped hands to his mouth he bellowed forth "Put that bloody light out!"

After this exhibition the writer decided to retire to the comfort of the Cypher Office.

Jan 20<sup>th</sup>. The Führer and Ronnie have left for Souk. The masterly manipulator has gathered some new R.O.s into the shelter of his wings. The Squadron's never ending programme of whistling here, and nipping there, goes on with unabated fury. On the 21<sup>st</sup> Phil Kendall and Charlie Hill came back with some souvenirs. During the next night Val Philips, after

taking some weeks to tear himself away from England, pushed our score up to 22 by disposing of one Heinkel He.111. At the ungodly hour of 08.30 on the following morning Elmer and Hamish left for Souk in a 15cwt. By this effort Elmer definitely proved that he is capable of action even in his sleep. Sunday gave us two victories. One in the afternoon when we beat 600 Squadron at Soccer 1-0 and the other when F/Sgt Cameron gave a Dornier Do.217 the works at night. The soccer victory was achieved by the somewhat unusual procedure of disguising the Adjutant in Soccer kit and letting him wander aimlessly about the pitch. These tactics successfully confused the opposing team.

On Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> we were unfortunate when Souk was bombed at 13.30 hrs. AC Loy was killed, 2 Beaus written off and 3 damaged. On the same day we had five new Beaus allocated to us and at night had our first "scramble" from Sétif. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the "Flaming Snipe" returned once more having accomplished the journey without any compulsory stoppages. With regret it is recorded that the occupants of the car had taken the opportunity to delay their journey whilst they visited some English nurses in Philippeville. Ronnie Wynzar and Mike Gloster, having baled out of the Snipe at Constantine, returned the following day. - No trade? The Führer also returned on the 28<sup>th</sup> and departed again on the 29<sup>th</sup>. On the 30<sup>th</sup> the Adjutant departed by air for Souk. The excuse this time - Pay parade. So ended January.

February has started on a high note with talk of

leave. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> we have commenced to vacate Souk-el-Arba and the rate of exchange has dropped from 300 to 200.

Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> is an important day as it marks the first move in the second Dunning-White campaign. The Adjutant and the Diarist accompanied by navigators Kobber Kane and O'Hickmore set off in the Flaming Snipe to find a camp site and Hickmore had a spot of finger trouble some 10km from camp. Whilst searching for the road to Bougie<sup>13</sup> he ordered the pilot (F/L Murfin) to fork left onto a little used cattle track. After negotiating four hairpin bends we regained the main Sétif road 100 yards ahead of where we had left it. Eventually, by taking some notice of the official signposts, we turned on to the Bougie road and followed it without event, through the gorges of Kerrata and Chabet-el-Akra and on to the shore of the Mediterranean. Some 10 miles before we reached Bougie a pleasant spot was found. It consisted of a row of beach chalets and investigation proved that they were ideally suited for our requirements and as yet not taken over by the Army. Our next visit was to the Town Mayor at Bougie who at first proved anything but helpful. Our determination to secure the place had been increased by the sight of 3 ATS girls when we stopped at the Town Mayor's office. A further visit, this time to Lieutenant Colonel Woodhouse, finally settled matters and in a short while it was arranged for us to send an officer, one corporal and 4 airmen to the chalets the next day to take over. The fact that an English show was on in town and that the aforementioned ATS girls were still in

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13 Since re-named Béjaïa.

the vicinity were factors which may easily have led lesser men astray. However, we whistled back to Macdonald and made the necessary arrangements. F/Lt Dunning-White (Honorary Colonel of 18<sup>th</sup>) assumed command for the opening stages of the campaign and appointed Kobber Kane<sup>14</sup> as his ADC.

By now the entire Squadron had for the first time been collected together in one spot.

Over the weekend 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> F/Lt Dunning-White returned from Bougie and departed again with an advance party. F/O Tharp claimed a probable after a combat with a CANT 1007.

On Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> [sic, should say 9<sup>th</sup>] the first party set out for Bougie at 09.15 arriving at 13.00 hrs. As usual with Dunning-White campaigns the organization was first class and most of the comforts of life were provided for. The magnificent cooperation of the army had turned the spot into an ideal resting place. It is regrettably noted that F/O Kane had by this time become involved in the "affaire Kobbaire" though it must be said in his favour that he was putting up a resistance compatible with an English gentleman.

Our four days stay passed all too quickly. The hospitality of Monsieur Remandet and his daughter Renée had proved interesting and very enjoyable. Table tennis, and dancing (provided we let Peter dance with Renée when Moonlight Cocktail<sup>15</sup> was played) were the favourite pastimes

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14 At the time, his paired navigator 116694 F/O Rowland Hope Kane.

15 A popular Glenn Miller jazz tune of 1942.

except for Kobbaire who was found to be very much under the control of P.

On the fourth day of our visit the Führer arrived with Doc Brennan and Geoff Humes to find an airman stranded on a rock about 150 yards out in the breakers. Peter and the dearest had been in the water to help the chap out of difficulties but he had swam away from them and clambered onto the rock. Arrangements had been made for an Air Sea Rescue Launch to come across from Bougie and at the time that the Führer arrived Crackers was then steaming across the bay. The combined efforts of Geoff and Doc and the WingCO, who incidentally got stranded on the rock himself for a short while, got the man ashore and by the time the launch arrived everyone was safely ashore again.

Our signals officer P/O Sexton did his stuff by borrowing two so-called white handkerchiefs (he never uses them himself) mounted the balustrade in front of the Remandet's villa and proceeded to semaphore 'OK'. After 235 efforts the launch crew seemed to understand and we all returned to the mess for tea. Unfortunately the short sea trip did Crackers no good as he was unfit to come back the following day due to an attack of sciatica.

We returned to Sétif to find that some really bad weather had been experienced including a blizzard and lots of snow.

The rest of February passed without event. A steady



flow of leave parties was maintained. Various aircrews vanished on visits to Algiers and on the 24<sup>th</sup> the Führer with Kendall, Gloster and Hill left for Cap Serrat.

The first day of March gave us a very mild foretaste of what we might expect when the African summer arrives. A generous display of bodies, sponsored by our "Strength-Through-Joy"<sup>16</sup> leader Doc Brennan was well supported by Blondie Humes, John Lewis, Doug Greaves and others. Colonel Cox (of the 18<sup>th</sup>) (ex Mafeking) maintained the dignity and honour of the Regiment by keeping his body fully clothed and contenting himself with the addition of sunglasses (aircrew pattern).

One regrettable fact has to be reported for Feb 28<sup>th</sup>. In a Soccer match versus the Wing our midfield spectator (F/L Murfin) mysteriously became entangled in the game itself and sustained injuries to his right ankle.

On Tuesday March 2<sup>nd</sup> the Führer and his party returned from Cap Serrat.

Of this episode it would perhaps be best to allow one of the party to tell the story in his own words. With his usual modesty Phil Lies Kendall has kindly offered his personal diary and from this the true story has been written.

As a preface to this story may the diarist say that he believes every word to be true. Written midst the dangers that

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<sup>16</sup> *Kraft durch Freude* (German for Strength through Joy, abbreviated KdF) was a large state-operated leisure organization in Nazi Germany, active 1933–1939.

beset those who go out to protect the far flung outposts of the Squadron, these pages bring to you in stark reality something of the lives of those at Cap Serrat. You may well ask "How do I know they are true?". I say they are true because not once is used the expression "There was I...".

"Left Macdonald 24<sup>th</sup> February for Constantine to await Group Captain Atcherley. An initial success was obtained by the Führer who achieved telephonic communication with base. The evening was spent at the Casino where the Führer displayed marked tendencies for 'liaison' work with the ladies of Constantine. A vote of no confidence was passed on the dinner.

"On the 25<sup>th</sup> we toured the city with an American journalist. During this tour the Führer, always with an eye for beauty, managed to find an American Red Cross nurse.

"Feb 26<sup>th</sup>. Departed from Bône in the Flaming Snipe and had lunch at Highclass<sup>17</sup> with F/Lt Roebuck who was in fine fettle and wished to be remembered to 'his boys'. After lunch course was set for La Calle<sup>18</sup> where the Führer found the Town Mayor and another telephone. We were accommodated for the night by a charming old French lady who arranged to provide one double bed for four bodies. Charlie and I claimed the mattress which we put on the floor. The Führer and Mike shared what was left of the bed. During the night Mike made advances to the Führer by throwing his arms around his neck

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17 A temporary Radar Station. For its Operations Record Book see AIR29/185.

18 Since re-named El Kala.

and snoring in his face. The opinion was formed that F/O Gloster had not fully recovered from the Wynzar habits he cultivated in Algiers.

"The Town Mayor it was discovered had visited Kuala Lumpur thus providing the writer with an opportunity to speak his native tongue again.

"Feb. 27<sup>th</sup> <sup>19</sup>. Set off for Hotel Luminosa<sup>20</sup> at Tabarka to find that Group Captain Atcherley had already left for the front. We followed at high speed in the Flaming Snipe making as much noise as a Squadron of Harvards. We next stopped at [Blank, never filled in] to enquire the route and the Führer commenced to barter for eggs. It was while these proceedings were going on that a second Snipe approached at terrific speed from the direction we were about to take. It ground to a halt in a cloud of dust and from it emerged a figure clad in blue trousers topped by a brown smock with fur collar. This was none other than the Group Captain, who seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself. He informed us that he was trying to find Brigade HQ and that he had recently passed 300 Italian prisoners coming down the road looking most dejected. After asking several of the local soldiers of the whereabouts of the HQ we managed to find an army ammo supply Captain who rose from his bed and informed us that he had not slept for two days. He gave us a brief outline of the

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19 From this point through to the evacuation of the radar station at Cap Serrat, the events described here need to be read in the context of the the recent appointment of General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim as commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army and Arnim's push north towards the north coast of Tunisia, codename *Unternehmen Ochsenkopf* (Operation Ox-Head). This advance was apparently done in the mistaken belief that Axis forces had been more successful at the Battle of the Kasserine Pass than was actually the case.

20 Suspected drafting error in the original. Thought actually to refer to the Hotel Mimosa.

position as far as he knew. It appeared that the enemy had advanced on the right flank during the night and that the Sidi Mechri road was in a fluid state as Italians had been captured on the road itself. The Group Captain then proceeded to Béja (Divisional HQ) afterwards returning to the Mimosa where the party again assembled and a war council held. In view of the fact that the enemy were only Italians it was decided to follow the road to Sidi Mechri. On the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> we once again set off. This time at an even greater speed in the two Snipes with a lookout protruding through the sunshine roofs. We had proceeded about ½ mile when the leading Snipe came to a sudden stop and the Flaming Snipe followed suit. A rapid evacuation of the Snipes ensued and the party took cover behind some cactus plants from a supposed air attack. It was here that I found a solitary British Tommy's grave in the middle of a field. One or two disabled tanks were seen in adjoining fields. When it was thought safe the journey was resumed at an even greater speed. We had proceeded but a short distance when both cars came to a sudden halt and within 10 seconds the occupants had apparently performed the impossible by completely disappearing. Although everyone acted with extreme alacrity the Führer's effort was phenomenal as he was last seen disappearing over a hilltop 100 yards away in a cloud of dust. The cause of this bother was 2 single seat fighters which had made their appearance. Charlie Hill (the recognition expert) volunteered the information that they were Spits but as these Spits had radial engines and were proceeding to beat up the road ahead of the Snipes, Charlie's powers of observation were

regarded as somewhat below par. We later passed a British Standard car with 4 flat tyres, a broken windscreen, no instruments and a British Army Officer trying to make one spare tyre go round four wheels. Several French soldiers were seen walking back from the front. It was obvious that had we not met the Group Captain we should, in all probability, have enjoyed dinner in Tunis. We were just turning off of the Sidi Mechri road when we once again made a hurried exit from the cars. The trouble this time was a formation of Mitchell bombers. Another start was made along this track and undaunted by a notice reading 'TYPHUS - Out of Bounds' we carried on, passing several camouflaged gun positions. Finally we met a 15cwt Bedford into which we climbed. This had been sent down to meet us as the track was too bad for the Snipes. These machines were sent back and we proceeded on our way with the GC perched on the roof of the Bedford. After passing several troops of the Corps France we reached the next point of our journey, Sidi Mechri. Here we had lunch in an improvised mess. An excellent steak and kidney pudding gave us a feeling of inward comfort. An Arab guide with a white horse was waiting to escort us to Cap Serrat and a start was made with the horse carrying all the coats and myself. (Note by Mike Gloster: Phil continuously asked "Who wants to ride on the horse?" but showed a marked disinclination to get off of it). Led by the Group Captain we had commenced our tack over grass but this was soon left behind and sand made hard going especially for Charlie who more often than not was knee deep in sand. By reason of his great height the Group Captain was now able to set a hard pace with Mike taking two steps to

everybody else's one. The writer, stirred by school day memories of the story of Joan of Arc, kept a firm grip on his seat on the aforementioned white horse until forcibly removed by Charlie. The horse took one look at Charlie's bulk and was distinctly heard to mutter "this is it chaps". After considerable delay Charlie became horseborne and the horse was stirred into making an effort to catch up with the main party. With much grumbling about straws breaking camels backs and union rates by the horse, the rest of the party were overtaken just as they had chosen to stop for a short rest. The spot chosen by the Group Captain was an open piece of land on a rise surrounded by bushes which could, and probably did, harbour in their midst numerous Italian soldiers. After a short rest we continued on our weary way, the horse was now in open mounted rebellion. It was on the second part of the journey that a solitary rifle shot was heard and the party's nerves were very much set on edge. We were finally intercepted by an RAF Regiment<sup>21</sup> officer who came out of a bush behind us, but not before we had paid off our Arab guide 25 francs for a 15 kilometre trek which had been accomplished in 2½ hours. This officer guided us along a narrow track finally coming to a halt by a large bush. The aforesaid officer then spoke to the bush which answered "come in old boy, have a whisky". A portion of the bush disappeared leaving a small hole some 2ft across and the entire party disappeared into the hole to find an armoured car in which was sitting a RAF Squadron Leader with a

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21 The RAF Regiment contingent guarding the AMES (ground-based radar) Station at Cap Serrat from 04 February to 05 March 1943 was No.2721 Squadron. Surviving records are filed at AIR 29/76/4. Original document – requires TNA Readers Ticket to view.

magnificent ginger beard. In his left hand he grasped a bottle of whisky, in the other a telephone. The Führer was radiant and immediately proceeded to ring up The Sultan of Sopley<sup>22</sup> otherwise known as The Prince of Bône.

“We had only just settled ourselves in this leafy abode when a Ju.88 proceeded to fly over the area, apparently seeing nothing of what was going on.

“The whole of the day was spent at the Cap. In the evening a visit was made to the lighthouse where F/Lt Priestley was doing his stuff with the Gubbins<sup>23</sup>. Several interceptions were seen, unfortunately without success. After dinner a visit was paid to The Prince of Bône and a conference held when it was decided to evacuate the secret equipment and the Technical Wallahs. We left the Cap that night in an assault landing craft with 3 French soldiers (injured). They had been fighting very hard at Monopole, now in the hands of the Wops<sup>24</sup>. The Italians were only 3 miles from the Cap when we left. We finally made Tabarka ¾ hour after dawn where we stayed the night after an afternoon of swimming and sunbathing. Our return to Macdonald commenced the following day. Group Captain Atcherley was left at Cap Serrat, contemplating attacking the Wops for whom he obviously has very little regard as soldiers.”

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22 74440 Squadron Leader John Laurence Brown, MBE, senior GCI Controller.

23 At the time, RAF slang for radar equipment.

24 Derogatory term for Italian forces.

During the first three months of the year there have been several changes amongst the types. New, and often low, types have arrived from England. Various members of the Squadron have departed for new, and we hope happy hunting grounds. The diarist has to confess to a somewhat lengthy period of finger trouble. It has been noticed that few of these changes have been recorded, an omission which the writer hastens to amend.

P/O Sproule, a Canadian, joined us 1.1.43

P/O Kench, left 16.1.43

P/O Greenland : This collection of 'boozy' types

P/O Goucher : (particularly Dick Goucher)

F/O Tharp : arrived on 16.1.43

F/O Brook

P/O King

F/O Phillips rejoined us on that date also. He had hung on in England as long as possible. Were there special reasons for his sudden liking for North Africa? Another exceedingly low type in F/O Campbell arrived 28.1.43. His R.O. F/O Bullock is not quite so low.

On 20.2.43 "The Menace" (F/O Haggis Henry) left for 4351 AA Flight. This posting is purely a paper entry since Hamish continues to haunt Macdonald.

February 21<sup>st</sup> found us inflicted with a further batch of boozy aircrew types.



Our Angus F/Lt Horne quickly proved his ability to stay the course at the bar. His R.O. F/Lt Reggie Browne, incidentally an old member of the Squadron from Coltishall days, has also proved himself no mean second.

Messrs Davey, Street and Moss, 3 F/Os of the quieter type, have since displayed an ability to join the gatherings at the "Hole" cocktail bar.

The posting of F/O Wynzar on 23.2.43 is a big loss to the Squadron. No longer shall we be able to refer to Ronnie as the reason for a prolonged stay in Algiers. P/O Incendiary O'Sullivan has since made a noble effort to occupy the Wynzar pedestal but at the time of writing the diarist has a suspicion that Kevin is losing his grip.

On March the 8<sup>th</sup> S/L Player AFC [sic – should say DFC] was promoted to Wing Commander and given Command of the Squadron. Our Führer, Wing Commander Kelly, was posted to NWACAF. We wish the Führer good luck in his new position, and many quick and jolly rounds.

W/Cdr Player's appointment to Commanding Officer was celebrated in our usual style. The last two surviving Colonels of the 18<sup>th</sup> (Colonels Cox and Greaves) deemed the occasion important enough to bestow upon the WinCO the exceedingly high honour of appointment to the Honorary rank of Field Marshal. The new Field Marshal was presented with his baton. In a short speech he referred to the past glories of the 18<sup>th</sup>.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> Sandy left for the UK and on the same evening P/O Street added a Ju.88 to the Squadron's list of victims.

March 16<sup>th</sup> gave us the opportunity to welcome two Honiley'ites when F/O Leppard and P/O Houghton arrived from 96 Squadron.

Most of March has been spent hatching new plans for Height Murders Inc. The Squadron has settled down with Field Marshal Player as our leader.

Softball has been adopted as a Squadron game but our Soccer tactics have been reversed. In this American version of our "Rounders" the Adjutant disguises himself as a spectator but actually takes part in the game.

On March 20<sup>th</sup> F/Lt P. D-W was promoted to the rank of Squadron Leader. It was generally agreed that the "Sir" should be used merely as a prefix to "Peter". It is expected that ultimately the full title will be "Sir Peter Dunning-White DFC of Duzerville and Bougie". Anyway, good show Peter.

On March 22<sup>nd</sup> the writer, accompanied by Incendiary O'Sullivan, proceeded to Algiers on Welfare Duties. Ronnie Wynzar was found, gracing the front of the Aletti.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately work prevented the writer from enjoying the pleasures of Algiers to the full but a quick "check up" was

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<sup>25</sup> This is a reference to the Hotel Aletti, since renamed the Hotel Es-Safir.

*made of the various spots frequented by members of the Squadron on visits to the city. In spite of the various crude suggestions made by The Murfin the writer insists that his marriage vows are still unbroken.*

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**The following photograph is not part of the original document:**



**The magnificent Art Deco interior of the Hotel Aletti, Algiers, built in 1930. The building also housed the Municipal Casino. Date of photograph uncertain, probably pre-1939, from the collection of Bernard Venis. Insensitive modernisations have since destroyed the uniformity of style of the original building and its décor.**

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*Back at Sétif the Squadron's new plans were meanwhile getting well under way. S/L Eliot, John Lewis, Dick Goucher, F/Sgt Lancashire had passed on the information about intruding that they had gathered in this*

trip to Malta. If John Lewis can be believed, then S/L Eliot's efforts at Malta were up to the high standard set by the lowest types in the Squadron. Those who know the Squadron will appreciate the full significance of the foregoing.

During the latter part of March, Wilbur has developed a partiality for imbibing champagne in large quantities. Maybe he has some excuse, sharing his tent as he does with the Adjutant. Colonel Cameron Cox has embarked on a new campaign, being entrusted with organising some of the details of our new campsite. His well known scrounging ability will, it is hoped, result in at least a comfortable latrine.

Once again the Squadron's resources have been scattered far and wide. Bougie is still "going strong" whilst another detachment has moved into Bône. It is from this 'drome that our aircrews continue their work.

F/O Oswald has left us being medically unfit. Congratulations to F/L Horne on being promoted S/L. Unfortunately it means that we lose him and his RO F/Lt Browne as they have been posted to 600 Squadron.

One low type who has been a frequent visitor to the Squadron during the last few weeks is one Derek S/L Foorde. It has been our privilege and pleasure to make him "comfortable" on more than one occasion.

There have been other changes in the mess arrangements during the month. Pat took over the job of Mess

Secretary. Unfortunately as soon as he had completed arrangements for sending money home mess fees were reduced to 5 francs.

On March 27<sup>th</sup> Kevin left for Algiers to change our film. His return will be noted in due course. 28<sup>th</sup> The Adjutant departed for Bône to hold a pay parade.. He is also expected back. The "affaire Kobbaire" still provides the post ops with an excuse to go to the A.P.O. daily.

The Adjutant arrived back just 24 hours later than he was expected (officially). On March 30<sup>th</sup> Mike Gloster. Having heard that we might wear drill on April 1<sup>st</sup>, decided that the time had come for him to shed his winter coat. The barber was therefore called in and after Mike had removed his collar and tie the said barber was able to start hacking away at the golden curls.

April 1<sup>st</sup>. Colonel Cox's Plan 'A' has now been put into operation and the accumulation of beds camp, beds various, tables various and tables scrounged, together with numerous boxes and kit bags of old days, known as kit, have started to migrate to our new camp site. P/O Sexton has been so bewitched and bewildered that it has been quite a simple matter for an airman to enjoy a meal at the new site and also reach the old site and claim a second meal there.

April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Cameron's Plan 'A' is still working. The usual routine, the same old moans. The writer is worried. Our new camp site is within walking distance of the office. No

more shall I be able to groan about transport. The big trouble will be what to do with the time now spent looking for the elusive 15cwt (not the Flight Commander's, I wouldn't dare).

April 3<sup>rd</sup>. It is with deep regret that the writer has to record that Geoff Humes and Johnny Sayer have not returned from last night's intruding. We shall be thinking of them both and hoping they are OK.

At last Kevin has managed to get back from Algiers. His story is worth recording as it may be of value to future visitors to that city. He arrived in Algiers on the Saturday, but too late to change the film. On Sunday the American Special Services depot was closed, and by Monday morning Kevin was confined to his bed with a cold in his tummy. That's his story – and he's sticking to it.

April 4<sup>th</sup>. Our camp at Macdonald is beginning to assume the forlorn and deserted air of Hampstead Heath after a Bank holiday. Ringmasters Cox and Wright are gradually coaxing the menagerie into their new quarters at Aïn Arnat.

April 5<sup>th</sup>. F/O Cracknell has managed to obtain the use of a three ton lorry. The fact that he had to move the Intelligence Office was a reasonable enough excuse. Anyone knows it would take a three ton lorry, or most of it, to move the Cracknell Kit. Remembering the amount of room this kit occupied on the boat, the writer was surprised to see it go on one lorry. However, by kind consent of the Intelligence Officer this diarist was permitted to balance his own kit on the tail

board and thus we proceeded to Aïn Arnat. This evening we held our first cinema show in the new camp. Our late Führer<sup>26</sup> visited us for breakfast this morning and later gave us a demonstration of his famous semi-circular take-off.

April 6<sup>th</sup>. It would appear that by tonight our move is almost complete. The "bull" factory has opened up in an adjoining field. The office trailer has also moved and in positioning this the Adjutant has shown a certain amount of cunning. It is placed midway between the tents and our luxurious latrine. Should the Adjutant require someone for a stooge job he is well situated on a main traffic route.

One noticeable fact about the move is the fact that Sir Peter conveniently found a job to take him well away from proceedings. This cunning would not have been so apparent had Sir Peter not been so careful to leave his R.O. behind to move their joint possessions. It is to be hoped that Kobbaire found some consolation in being on hand to receive a small pink envelope, bearing the Bône postmark, as soon as it arrived.

April 7<sup>th</sup>. A quick and short day with everyone making a gallant effort to level off the interiors of their tents and scoop out drainage ditches outside them.

April 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>. The early pick and shovel enthusiasm seems to have died down. A slight rise in the temperature has given scope for some original ideas on dress.

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<sup>26</sup> Here and hereafter, references to the "late Führer" refer to Piers Kelly, one time CO of the Squadron. Kelly survived the war; at no point should "late" in this context be interpreted as "deceased".

Hickman took an early lead in this brighter dress movement. Unfortunately he displayed a somewhat feminine tendency to change at frequent intervals. During the space of two hours the writer observed him first swathed in a green silk dressing gown; next in shorts and shoes. Later he donned a shirt and so on until most of his wardrobe had been displayed to the local populace. On the 10<sup>th</sup> the writer whistled to Algiers for the purpose of changing a film. A quick jolly round in the Bristol and an enjoyable lunch at the Aletti were sufficient reasons to have delayed most people. However, unlike the Adjutant, this writer was able to resist the temptation and returned to Sétif in the afternoon.

The 11<sup>th</sup> was a quietish day. Most of the aircrews are busily sunbathing. Led by Dr Strength-Through-Joy Brennan they wander around in a state of semi-nudity. The underlying motive is to turn the skin a nice swarthy Italian brown - a case of looking ahead, or the shape of things to come?

April 12<sup>th</sup>. The Adjutant seems to spend most of his time flying. During last night friends Brook and Greenland paid a visit to Sardinia and left a present for the Führer<sup>27</sup>. This present took the form of an old French photograph suitably amended to represent the Führer and with the addition of some lewd remarks in German.

Today's "Local boy makes good" story concerns our much maligned Adjutant. This morning he nobly answered

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27 This time it really is a reference to Adolf Hitler.



the call to partake in a spot of air sea rescue work. This columnist is proud to bring to these pages our own Pat Murfin to tell us the true story of his adventure. It's all yours Pat so take it away, but remember should you try to get your own back – well, as a solicitor, you know the laws of libel.

“In response to a call from the “Groupers” the Führer and the Masterly Manipulator took off at 07.55 hours to conduct a search for a Radio Navigator of 153 Squadron who was in the drink somewhere NW of Algiers. At 08.15 hours F/O Street and F/Sgt Thomas took off closely followed by F/O Humphreys and Sgt. Robertson (our new “discoveries”) to assist the Führer and a square search was commenced. At 10.10 hours F/O Graham with yours truly as his R.O. set off to join in the search and on arriving at the appropriate position were fortunate enough to report the dinghy and its occupant at once. We proceeded to orbit and called up the rest of the hunt and F/O Humphreys was first to arrive and spotted the dinghy after we had lost it in the sun on our sixth orbit. After this the dinghy was continually kept in sight whilst the Führer shepherded the air sea rescue launch to the spot and the R.O. was fished out at 11.00 hours under the watchful eyes of four Beaus of 255.”

Thanks Pat.

The Air Sea Rescue adventure proved to be the starting gun for a 48 hour period of intense activity. On the night of 12/13<sup>th</sup> 'Gordy' Sproule treated us to his interpretation of

intruding. After a rapid Cook's Tour of Decimomannu, Elmas and Villacidro, Gordy flew up the Gulf of Oristano and on until he came to the aerodrome at Alghero. It was a brilliant moonlit night and Gordy orbited the 'drome with his fingers just itching. To his undisguised delight far below he could see one nice aircraft parked in a dispersal bay and fairly adjacent to some beautiful hangars and workshops. Unfortunately for the Luftwaffe this son of Canada just loves the fresh air and hates the thought of poor mechanics being cooped up in hangars. At the same time there was not much point in having a serviceable aircraft there. The poor mechanic would have nothing to do next day. After cruising around for 20 minutes whilst he debated these points, Gordy eventually stuck his nose down at 2,000ft and for a space of 12 seconds (except when his thumb slipped off the tit) proceeded to group cannon shells and machine gun bullets into the aircraft and hangar roof.

On the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> April, whilst one or two of our mathematicians were still working out the duration of the burst required to melt the Browning gun, came the news that the Squadron were to be given their first chance of some daylight work. The Huns were expected to make a daylight torpedo attack on a convoy which was nearing Algiers. The task of the Squadron was to stop them.

Red Section, comprising Wing Commander Player DFC and the masterly manipulator (our Freddie, Flight Lieutenant Lammer DFC); Squadron Leader H.W.Eliot DFC and Flying

Officer Barker; Colonel J Cameron Cox of the 18<sup>th</sup> and Sergeant Madge, took off at 15.20, proceeded to the patrol line and proceeded to patrol until relieved by Green Section.

Green Section comprised F/O Mike Gloster DFC and Hank, F/Sgt Wall; F/O H K Humphreys and Sgt Robertson; Gordy P/O Sproule and Sgt Auld. This Section took off 16.25 to 16.35, arrived on patrol line at 17.40 and commenced to patrol.

Blue section, with F/O Doug Greaves DFC and W/O Robbins DFC; F/O Frankie Street and F/Sgt Thomas; P/O Kevin (Incendiary) O'Sullivan and Sgt Wally Hood took off at 16.45.

Blue 1 and 2 had just commenced to patrol at 18.00 hrs when Blue 2 saw a tight formation of 12+ enemy aircraft flying at 50 feet coming from the east about 40 miles from Sardinia. This formation consisted of Ju.88's and He.111's. Blue 1 and 2 attacked from astern, keeping out of range of enemy machine gun fire. Blue 3 now arrived on the scene and went in to attack, damaging one He.111, black smoke pouring from its starboard engine. Blue Leader thought it foolish to attack in the face of the concentrated fire. It was decided to break up the formation. Blue section then made a starboard attack in echelon. The enemy aircraft panicked, broke formation and started to climb, dropping 15-20 torpedoes. Blue 1 attacked 2 Junkers in turn. The first went into cloud with much black smoke pouring from one engine and is claimed as probably destroyed. The 2<sup>nd</sup> was attacked from 250yds. Blue 1 followed it in a turn giving deflection

shots and closed to 150yds firing until ammunition was exhausted. Return fire was experienced, one shell passing through the Navigator-Radio's cupola. Fire from the rear gun ceased before end of combat. This Ju.88 disappeared into cloud, it is claimed as damaged.

During the second combat Blue 2 told Blue 1 that he was hit in the leg and that one motor had gone. He said he was making for Bône at sea level and asked Blue 3 to follow him. Blue 3 searched on vector 140° without result. Blue 2 has not returned.

Green Section had now completed the third leg of the patrol and saw several enemy aircraft making for Sardinia. After chasing a Junkers which he could not overtake, and seeing another Junkers shot down by his No.2, Green 1 saw another aircraft ahead which turned round as if to get behind him. Turning a little to Starboard, Green 1 came in behind, identified the aircraft as a Do.217 and fired a short burst at 200yds range. The enemy aircraft took violent evasive action. Following for 1 minute Green 1 gave another burst at 200yds after which the enemy aircraft went into the sea with a splash and disappeared. This aircraft is claimed as destroyed.

Green 2 attacked a Ju.88 flying at 50ft in a north-easterly direction. The aircraft saw the Beaufighter and dropped a torpedo into the sea. The Beaufighter followed at 290 MPH IAS<sup>28</sup> but a minute later saw another Ju.88 above and to starboard. It turned to port and then starboard in

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28 Indicated Air Speed.

towards the Beau. Green 2 gave a half ring deflection shot at 400 yards then, pulling nose up, gave a long burst (again with all guns) into the belly of the aircraft which dived towards the sea. Green 2 followed seeing red flashes and flames extending under the whole length of the fuselage of the enemy aircraft which crashed into the sea. This aircraft is claimed as destroyed. Green 2 saw that another Ju.88 had turned back from the direction of Sardinia and attacked from starboard at the same level, giving a long burst with deflection at 500ft range. Return fire from the rear underneath gunner stopped. The enemy aircraft went over to port and turned very sharply towards Beaufighter which gave another short burst at 400ft. Green 2 continued to fire short bursts following in direction of Sardinia at full boost. The upper rear gunner had now got the range with cannon and Green 2 had to take violent evasive action. This enemy aircraft is claimed as damaged.

Green 3 attacked a Ju.88 which jettisoned its torpedoes when 8,000ft ahead. Green 3 went flat out for 20 miles and closed to 3,000ft. Attempted to fire from dead astern, but guns failed to operate. Whilst checking for faults closed to 2,000ft. Attempted to fire several times without result and gave up chase. Turned about and met 4 aircraft head on. Identified one as a Ju.88 as it crashed into the sea. Also saw a Do.217 slightly above and to port. The other 2 aircraft were Green 1 and 2 attacking the Bandits.

The enemy aircraft were camouflaged black on top, dark and light green with red splashes underneath.

Blue Section played an important part in the engagement by attacking the enemy in the face of heavy fire and breaking up the formation.

Claims:           1 Ju.88 destroyed (Green 2)  
                      1 Do.217 destroyed (Green 1)  
                      1 Ju.88 probably destroyed (Blue 1)  
                      1 Ju.88 damaged (Green 2)  
                      1 Ju.88 damaged (Blue 1)  
                      1 He.111 damaged (Blue 3)

Weather:           Patches of 5/10<sup>th</sup> cumulus at 1,000 to 1,500ft. Difficult to see into sun owing to haze.

In addition to the foregoing a claim of one probable has been submitted for Blue 2. Frankie Street was heard over the R/T to say [Blank, never filled in].

Also heard over the R/T from Green 3 "You goddamned son of a bitch".

No further comment is necessary. We shall miss Blue 2, but we shall go on.



The night of the 13<sup>th</sup> gave one of our new crews an odd spot of entertainment over Sardinia. F/Lt Fox found a road convoy and promptly proceeded to expend to advantage a few rounds of cannon and machine gun ammunition.

Most of the 14<sup>th</sup> was spent in searching for Blue 2 without success.

April 15<sup>th</sup> was an eventful day marking the birthday anniversary of Sir Peter. There seemed to be some doubt as to the exact date but Peter was sure it was either the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>. He was also a little bit hazy about his age; the nearest information that he could give being that he was the same age as the WingCO. That gets us nowhere. In the evening Peter gave a party at the Hamma Baths. It was a terrific evening. After an excellent meal the business of "toasts" began and for the next hour we were all bobbing up and down in our seats. Kobbairé spent most of the evening trying to create a reserve supply of drink. As soon as he saw a bottle in front of him he carefully tucked it under the table. Fortunately Wilbur kept an eye on Kobbairé and by frantic gesticulation arranged for someone on the other side to the table to remove the bottles as fast as Kobbairé put them there, with the result that two or three bottles were busily chasing themselves under and over the table. On our return to camp, and after he had prepared for sleep, the wretched Kobbairé decided to go for a ride on Charlie's Pride. It is a great pity that Pueró could not be there to see her Kobbairé clad in pyjamas and bedroom slippers careering around on a bicycle. Kevin meanwhile had managed to produce some pretty good streamlining effects on Elmer's bicycle. The process was a simple one and consisted of driving a 15cwt backwards and forwards over the bike.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> Kevin set up a new record for speedy

change of films. He did not 'take off' until nearly midday and was back by 5.30pm on the same day.

The 17<sup>th</sup> brought us bad news when we heard that Johnny Tharp and King were missing from an operational trip from Maison Blanche.

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> was a peaceful day.

During the last few days we have said goodbye to several familiar faces as various crews leave for England for a well earned rest from ops. They are Charlie Hill, Doug Greaves and his R.O. W/O Robbins, Arthur Woolley, [Blank space sufficient for several more names, never filled in].

The night of 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> was a successful one for the Wing. 3 Destroyed, 1 Probable and 3 Damaged are results which are hardly likely to encourage the Luftwaffe to enjoy, or should one say attempt to enjoy, the night life of North Africa. The Squadron's contribution was 3 Damaged over Sardinia. One by Squadron Leader Hugh Eliot and 2 by the dreaded Colonel Cox of the 18<sup>th</sup>. By this effort the Colonel has clearly shown that as the last surviving Colonel of the 18<sup>th</sup> in this campaign he intends to lead his Regiment to still greater campaigns and greater honours.

April 19<sup>th</sup>. Using the excuse of replenishing our supplies, Squadron Leader Eliot, accompanied by Yorkshire Canadian Charlie Greenland, proceeded to Constantine and the American Hospital at Hamma. They did get some beer. Sir Peter returned from Algiers this morning and proceeded to



*Bougie in the afternoon.*

*During the night 19/20<sup>th</sup> we once again disturbed the peace of Sardinia. F/O Davey and Phil (Lies) Kendall found some fun in shooting up trains. Our RDF Officer Earl Elmer Crouser had his second intruder operational trip. Knowing Elmer's love for his sleep it is difficult to believe that he does keep awake all the time.*

*20-24<sup>th</sup> April. Colonel Cameron Cox must be unpopular with the heavenly bodies in charge of weather arrangements in North Africa. Tons of water have been poured onto our new camp site and for these four days the poor old Colonel has plodded about in gumboots, his face growing longer and more morose, his shoulders visibly bowing under the added responsibility of providing new roads and improved drainage. Otherwise the days have been quiet. Incendiary O'Sullivan has been to Algiers by road, and returned on time. Squadron Leader Eliot and Flying Officer Greenland have paid their second visit to the 26<sup>th</sup> General Hospital. The writer takes a dim view of this latter expedition but has every intention of evening up the score within the next 48 hours. The afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> saw the opening stages of the third Dunning-White Campaign. Conferences and consultations were the order of the day. Our late Führer with his customary skill on the Kellyphone caused the amazing organising system of the 255<sup>th</sup> to be put into motion.*

*By 11.30 hours on the 25<sup>th</sup> April Sgt Shaw and*

various bodies were endeavouring to stow into one DC3<sup>29</sup> (provided by our late Führer) sufficient equipment to fill at least 3 of these aircraft. Charlie Sexton and his entire signals staff had departed in one 15cwt, and the writer was standing by with a convoy of 3 lorries, one bowser, one floodlight and a goodly assortment of tins, cans, tents etc.

It was at this moment that one Angus Horne decided to take some interest in proceedings. He must be commended for his polite, nay apologetic manner. Hearing that we were bound for Monastir he gently pointed out that it would be pointless for us to go too. From the innocent look on Angus's face, as he remarked to Peter "I don't want to be a spoil sport, but..." the writer quite expected to see wings sprouting from his shadow at any minute.

Thus ended the 3<sup>rd</sup> P.D-W campaign. However, more plans are being hatched.<sup>30</sup>

Still the 25<sup>th</sup>. Tomorrow morning the writer hopes to proceed on a duty run to Aïn Beïda, Constantine, Hamma, Philippeville, Djidjelli, Bougie and then home. It is hoped to combine cypher duties with a quick review of the Squadron's social resources. In the meantime the writer reluctantly hands over to Pat F/Lt Murfin, the flying agitator.

[There follows an extended blank, ending near the foot of Side 2 of Folio 22]

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29 Numeral omitted in the original. Unlikely to have been a DC2, more probably a C-47 Skytrain.

30 On 25<sup>th</sup> April 1943 there were still German and Italian ground troops active in Tunisia between the Kasserine Pass and Monastir. Thanks to Allied air supremacy one could fly from Sétif to Monastir in relative safety, but not travel overland. Notwithstanding that the British First and Eighth Armies had linked up on 6<sup>th</sup> April, the land battle in Tunisia continued as *Operation Vulcan* and then as *Operation Strike* until the Axis surrender on 13<sup>th</sup> May.

The foregoing space was reserved for Pat Murfin to become diarist during the absence of P/O Roker. Are we to assume that Pat's report for these 3 days is thus issued in the form of a "White Paper"??

The evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> found the writer back at Aïn Arnat. Apart from getting lost once at Aïn Beida, and once at Philippeville, the trip was uneventful. These, and a lot of low cloud were the contributory causes to a delay of 24 hours in returning to camp. A brief halt was made at the 26<sup>th</sup> General Hospital where two nurses asked me to convey greetings to S/L Eliot and Charlie Greenland. Calling at Tichy the writer was in time to greet Tiny Bullock on his return from Bougie in the 3-tonner. As a point of interest Tiny was riding in the back and the fair Renée occupied the seat of honour. Tiny looked his best when he entered the mess with a large bunch of flowers in one hand and a bottle of champagne under his arm. From the Remandets came wishes for Kobbaire and Petaire, also the Wing Commander, his Adjutant, Wilbur, Phillips and Kendall.

29<sup>th</sup> April to 5<sup>th</sup> May. Routine days with little to record. F/Lt Donald Roebuck has been staying with us and so far has behaved as a gentleman. We now operate from Paddington<sup>31</sup> as well as Bône.

The Adjutant accompanied the Wing Commander and his masterly manipulator on a trip to Cap Serrat. For once the Adjutant arrived back on schedule but the credit for this is

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31 A temporary airfield at Souk-el-Khemis.

due more to the Wing Commander than Pat. Our first quiz evening was the chief cause of their return.

Our camp at Bougie has been taken over by the Army but it is hoped that this does not mean goodbye to Bougie and the friends we have made there.

It would be well to start the month of May with a short summary of departures and new arrivals.

P/O Charlie Hill DFC has left for a well earned rest.

[The remainder of Side 2 of Folio 23 is blank, leaving much space for entries that have never been made. The substantive text recommences at the start of Folio 24 with an entry dated May 20<sup>th</sup>.]

May 20<sup>th</sup>. Work and other occupations have filled in so much of the writer's time that the diary has been neglected. During these three weeks the North African campaign has drawn to a close. 'Never a dull moment' Kendall pulled down a Ju.52, thereby giving the Wing their century in North Africa. On the same evening Phil damaged another. During this period Phil has also shot up a couple of aircraft landing in Sardinia and obliged Phil Houghton by taking his girl friend home. Maybe Phil Houghton did not know that her husband was at home - maybe.

It has been a month of dances. The Wing Mess gave one thus giving Incendiary O'Sullivan the golden opportunity for putting up a black. This he achieved by introducing Air Vice Marshal [Blank in original, no reference found in Wing ORB] to Pat

Murfin. The big point was that he introduced him as AVM Lee-Mallory.

Possibly the best story of the month comes from Charlie "Big Licks" Sexton. An airmen's dance was organised and in the search for a set of jazz drums the writer, using LAC Hall as an interpreter, eventually secured the promise of a loan from the French Army in Sétif. It was arranged to collect them the day before the dance. That day arrived and the writer - "Cunning \_\_\_\_ he was" - persuaded Charlie to do the collecting.

When Charlie had calmed down he described his visit in fluent 'air force'.

After shaking hands with all and sundry he had been asked to wait in an office. Fifteen minutes later there was a knock on the door which was opened and there entered one drummer, complete with drum. The fact that the said drummer had cleaned his boots is sufficient evidence that the matter had been treated as one of importance. In his full regalia, with drum and trappings cleaned to perfection, the drummer was ready to depart with Charlie. When things had been more or less straightened out, and various other Frenchmen drawn into the discussion, a further period of waiting was requested. By now Charlie was prepared for the worst and from his story it seems he nearly got it. After another hour of waiting there came to his ears the distant sound of martial music. The Frenchmen, with one accord, rose to their feet and flung open the windows, exclaiming as they

did so "They come!". To Charlie's dismay a full military band marched onto the barrack square. They were led by a resplendent Drum Major, wildly waving a large mace to which was tied a red flag.

Sir Peter's famous words "This is the end!" must have flashed through Charlie's mind. However, it is all well that ends well. The drums were borrowed and the dance was a success, much to the chagrin of F/O Davey.

May 20<sup>th</sup> sees the Squadron once again on the move. The dreaded Colonel has been away for some days inaugurating the new campaign. Soon we shall have said goodbye to Sétif and moved to another hunting ground.

May ended with the Squadron scattered far and wide over North Africa. During the first four days at Sebala<sup>32</sup> Val Phillips got one confirmed, "never a dull moment" Kendall got yet another and the dreaded Incendiary O'Sullivan two in one night.

Towards the end of the move the Adjutant and the diarist, staying behind to clear up the odds and ends, moved into the Wing mess. One very enjoyable feature of the stay was a football match held in the mess. The game commenced at 1am and did not end until the Wing Doc had wheeled away 2 or 3 casualties. No record of the score was kept but six windows were definitely confirmed [presume word "broken" omitted from original] and Wing Commander Paddy Green sustained a really

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32 Read as Sebala II. This huge airfield complex near Tunis was sub-divided into Sebala I and Sebala II.

beautiful black eye.

Somewhere about May 31<sup>st</sup> the diarist packed a lot of ridge tents and the Adjutant into a Beaufighter and saw them depart for Sebala. The following morning the last remnants of the Squadron equipment and one week's supply of NAAFI goods left Sétif for our new hunting ground.

This record of the Squadron's activities is compiled from the Adjutant's diary and the writer's memory. Strange as it may seem, the writer did do a fair amount of official work. The cypher office was situated some 9 miles from the 'drome, thus when the poor cypher officer was not on duty he was either going to or coming from.

After a brief revue of the aforementioned Adjutant's diary I have no hesitation in awarding to F/Lt Murfin the travellers medal for ground officers.

On June 15<sup>th</sup> our Signals cum Missing Officer F/O Charlie Sexton was posted to Lampedusa.

Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> June was a red letter day. The whole Squadron paraded at Sebala I to welcome HM The King.

Friday 18<sup>th</sup>. The popular W/O Bill Parish left us to go to No.2 Base Area Pool.

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June brought news of commissioning of F/S Hank Wall, F/S Jack Talbot and Sgt Jimmy Hood.

On 24<sup>th</sup> June Wing Commander Player and F/Lt Freddie (masterly manipulator) Lammer pushed the score up by one when they disposed of one of Musso's Cant 1007's.

On Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> we had the bad luck to lose F/Sgt Ernie Scroggs who crashed near Sétif. He was buried at Sétif, S/L Dunning-White and F/Sgt Izowsky being present.<sup>33</sup>

Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> June was the occasion of the Officers Dance at Belvedere Casino. Nick Goucher gave a neat display of footwork. Phil (Chaser) Houghton it was noticed did not exactly waste the evening.

S/L Eliot and the Masterly Manipulator missed the dance. By ways and means both devious and cunning they had contrived to visit England. They told us little of this visit but the writer would hazard a guess that their brown knees caused no little amount of heart flutter amongst the WAAF's when they landed at Biggin Hill.<sup>34</sup>

I see that the Adjutant has an entry "Adj indisposed" against July 1. Poor show for the morning after.

On the night 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> July Sgt Griffiths and Sgt Hilliard crashed. Sgt Griffiths was killed. Sgt Hilliard badly injured.

Monday July 5<sup>th</sup> marks the return of F/O Jimmy Ward, fully recovered from the effects of his crash at Sétif. It

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33 Subsequently exhumed and re-buried in a CWGC War Cemetery, in line with the 'grave consolidation' policy.

34 In fact, this flight's first landfall in the UK was at RAF Chivenor.



also gives the first chance for some of our men to visit the ENSA show in Tunis. In the evening we were successful in showing open air films.

6<sup>th</sup> July sees the opening of another Dunning-White campaign when Peter and Kobbaire leave for Monastir to get 415 Squadron operational<sup>35</sup>.

July 9<sup>th</sup>. We have to compliment Bob Graham on his promotion to Acting Squadron Leader. Congratulations too go to P/Os Lewis and Harley on their success in shooting down a Cant 1007B. Squadron Leader Peter Dunning-White DFC leaves us for England, Home and Beauty. What a party. In no time now Peter will be teaching the inhabitants of the Berkeley to do the oompah and how to send rockets.

Great excitement and speculation on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>. First news of the invasion of Sicily.

Lieutenants Bugge and Bjorn left us to rejoin 604 Squadron on the 12<sup>th</sup> and on the night of 12/13 F/O Killer (never a dull moment) Kendall and P/O Jack Talbot had the misfortune to crash. They were both injured and taken to 97<sup>th</sup> General Hospital.

On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> Mike Gloster, Bob Davey, Colonel Cameron Cox, Warrant Officers Whitby and Biggs left us for a well earned rest.

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> brought us to the Airmen's dance. It was

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35 Refers to 415<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron, USAAF, newly arrived in Africa and flying Beaufighters at the time.

far too hot for normal folk to dance but great work was done at the bar where an ample supply of beer, wine and fruit cup was ably dispensed by LAC Wilkens and Corporal Thompson.

Wednesday we achieved our 2<sup>nd</sup> quiz evening, Thursday the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of Beau Gen was published, on Friday F/Sgt Izowsky carried our discussion group evenings a stage further by giving an interesting talk on Freedom and Democracy and the week was rounded off on Saturday when the finals of the Airmen's darts tourneys were held. F/Lt Murfin presented the prizes (not on a commission basis).

By July 25<sup>th</sup>, with 5 months to go for Christmas, we were thinking of fresh fields and pastures new.

On July 27<sup>th</sup> Squadron Leader Eliot flew to Sicily to give the 'dromes the "once over". The same evening the second Airmen's dance was held. Corporal Johnston (pay A/C's and a friend of the Adjutant accordingly) enlivened the proceedings by endeavouring to teach the French lassies the highland fling.

July 28<sup>th</sup> saw lots of new crews arrive. They were:  
[Blank space, never filled in]

On July 29<sup>th</sup>. Squadron Leader John Arnsby arrived to take [presume words "command of" omitted from original] 'A' Flight. Gordy Sproule left for duty with Calibration flight.

July 30<sup>th</sup>. A very pleasant evening was spent at the Max Doll in Tunis where S/L Eliot threw a party to say farewell to Wing Commander Player and the Masterly

Manipulator before they left for England for a well deserved rest.

July 31<sup>st</sup>. The party was continued when a sing-song was held in the Airmen's mess. A final touch in the business of bidding "bon voyage" to our popular CO and his back seater was given when S/Sgt Cameron and P/O Hood finished off a Ju.88 40 miles North of Palermo.

On August 1<sup>st</sup> Wing Commander Player and Flight Lieutenant Freddie Lammer left for Algiers and no sooner had they gone than the Squadron card champ came and informed the writer that he was to leave for Sicily in approximately one hour. A rather hectic party the night before had left the writer with a slight hangover and he took a dim view. However there was a rather stern look in the Adjutant's eyes so aided by one pint of Andrews<sup>36</sup> and 4 Aspirin the writer began to pack. The adventures which befell the advance party may be told later. For now we will continue with the "gen" from the official book.

Following the WinCO, F/L Campbell, F/Os O'Sullivan, Bullock, Goucher, Kane and F/Sgt Hood commenced their journey home.

S/L Eliot DFC was promoted Wing Commander and assumed command of the Squadron.

Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup>. F/O Greenland stitched another ring on to become senior R.O. F/O Humphreys and F/S Robertson

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36 Andrews Liver Salts – A proprietary remedy for indigestion and, in overdose, a laxative.

bagged another Ju.88.

For Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> I see a small screed about the Orderly Room marquee being taken down. The screed includes such intermissions as "(B\_g deadly)". I don't know what that means.

There followed one or two baseball games but no results are given (I suspect we lost) and on the night of 6/7<sup>th</sup> Ginger and Stan claimed a Ju.88 damaged.

### Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> August

Notification received from AM<sup>37</sup> that the Adjutant F/Lt Murfin was the father of twins – one boy, one girl.

Hi-ya Champ.

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August 8<sup>th</sup>. Farmer Giles and F/Sgt Drake eliminated one Cant 1007b.

Monday 9<sup>th</sup>. In the evening a film show. Towards the end of the film instructions were received for movement of the Squadron. Oh boy what a flap. However, by working all night the job was done and in the morning Wilbur's Laddies settled down for a couple of hours well earned rest.

After a normal reveille at 05.00 hours on 10<sup>th</sup> July [sic – should read 10<sup>th</sup> August] and a morning of gathering up the various

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37 Air Ministry.

odds and ends the main party of the Squadron with F/Lt Wilbur Wright and F/Lt Pat Murfin left for Arizona<sup>38</sup> at 14.00. By this time the writer was comfortably settled at Bo Rizzo, thinking occasionally (with a certain amount of satisfaction) of the joys of Arizona and the tedious business of coaxing vehicles on to an L.S.T.<sup>39</sup>

It appears that Wilbur and Pat spent one night in the staging camp, going on board LST 325 on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup>. This diarist takes a dim view of the expression "up with the crack of dawn" used in the Adjutant's diary. He never heard the dawn crack.

The Squadron was still maintaining night readiness at Sebala.

Thursday seems to have been spent in weighing the anchor but no record of the weight has been entered in the official book.

One good story, not included in the oft-mentioned book, is the one of the incident when, whilst Wilbur was superintending the loading of the ship an American naval officer drove up in a Jeep. He was promptly told where to take the Jeep. Later, when the Squadron's vehicles were all safely stowed the American naval officer was allowed by Wilbur to park his Jeep in a small space for which the Squadron had no use. It turned out afterwards that the officer was merely captain of the ship.

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38 A shoreside transit camp, occupied prior to embarkation on LSTs for the sea crossing to Sicily.

39 Landing Ship Tanks.

Whilst Wilbur and Pat were busy weighing the anchor F/L Fox and P/O Pryor, busily getting on with the war, disposed of one Cant 1007b.

The complicated business of weighing the anchor was completed on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> and at last the LST was able to sail.

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup>. LST 325 steamed into Palermo and Wilbur took over from the skipper.

For Monday 16<sup>th</sup> I see the following entry: "It is believed that we were some of the first British seen by the people in this area". I object. They were second.

The time has come when I can reasonably take over. At approximately 14.30 hrs on 16<sup>th</sup> August we heard the distant roar of the Flaming Snipe. At 15.30 we were greeting the Adjutant with a nice "cup a tea".

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> Aug saw a pretty demonstration of formation flying when 18 Beaus arrived led by Wing Commander H. Eliot DFC. The Adjutant did remark to the writer "What a pity they did not come over in formation" but he was just being catty because he was not with them.

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> the Orderly Room staff provided 90 Lire to buy Diana Lesley Murfin, Dudley John Murfin<sup>40</sup> and Susan Joy Cracknell some socks. It is not known whether this

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40 Baby's forename corrected from the original on the basis of entry in GRO Births Index for Sep.Qr.1943.

subscription was voluntary or made via the bridge table.

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> saw the departure of the Adjutant for Palermo and the writer to Tunis.

The night of 22/23 gave us yet another victory when Farmer and F/Sgt Drake shot down one Ju.88 and probably destroyed another. Tiger Leppard and Phil Houghton added their quota by also disposing of a Ju.88 the same night.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we had the misfortune to lose Sgt Lennards [sic – should say Flight Sergeant] and Sgt Rastall who were killed when their machine crashed into a hill returning from N.F.T.

Friday 27<sup>th</sup>. F/Lt Sproule attached on Calibration duties had the misfortune to lose an aircraft which was shot down by an American Spitfire Squadron 5 miles East of Scopello. The pilot F/S Waddell and his passenger F/Sgt Noonan were killed. F/Sgt Noonan was the pilot of a Wellington which made a successful forced landing at the 'drome the previous night.

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> we received our first mail since leaving North Africa.

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>. The first real rain for some months. Great fun by various foxy types who managed a shower bath. Air Vice Marshal Sir Hugh Pughe Lloyd, Air Commodore Kenneth Cross and Air Commodore Scarlett-Streatfeild<sup>41</sup> visited us for lunch.

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41 James Rowland Scarlett-Streatfeild (note the unusual spelling of Streatfeild, corrected from the original).

Night 29/30<sup>th</sup>. One SM.84 destroyed by Val Phillips and F/Sgt Dennis Pollard.

F/Lt Murfin can now have his diary back.

Whilst the main body of the Squadron were engaged in this major operation the writer accompanied by two Corporals and 15 men was busily fulfilling the function of Advance Party. These duties were not completely without some incident.

We departed from Sebala with great urgency on August 1<sup>st</sup> and arrived at Arizona to find that no-one there had ever heard of us. A period of shunting followed and we alternately found ourselves at the head of an American convoy and completely absorbed by two AMES<sup>42</sup> units engaged in the same pastime. After three days, chaos became order and we eventually left Arizona at 01.00 hrs on Thursday. I don't think anyone really understood how we got on the boat. The main point is that we did. Everyone took a dim view of the ship's rolling capabilities but we arrived at Palermo with everyone on their feet. Our 3-tonner was first ashore, and we set up the record of being the first convoy into Palermo and the first RAF Squadron to land there. We arrived at the staging camp at 10.15 the same night after a rather hectic convoy through Palermo. The following morning the writer visited 1<sup>st</sup> Air Defence Wing and had a talk to Major Lichens. Once these formalities had been completed no time was lost in

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42 Air Ministry Experimental Station – cover name for ground-based radar installations.



getting on the road for Bo Rizzo. During the first afternoon we became entangled with a large American convoy. This companionship lasted as far as Alcamo where the convoy became entirely disorganised. The writer, driving the Fiat, was tailing along behind a number of Jeeps which followed a most devious course through the town.

The 3-tonner was nowhere in sight but the diarist entertained great hopes that it was following closely behind. His surprise was therefore great when, emerging from Alcamo, the Jeeps disappeared in a cloud of dust and in their place the 3-tonner loomed up going in the opposite direction. After this it was decided to forsake the protection of the larger convoy and travel alone. We camped at a farm for the night and arrived at Bo Rizzo at 10am on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup>. A temporary camp was chosen and a scouting expedition organised. Colonel Little of 814 Engineer Battalion informed the writer that the 'drome would be ready by 18<sup>th</sup> August, this date being just 5 days later than the date given by Major Lichens. This information was conveyed to Colonel Stone of 1<sup>st</sup> ADW with a request for supplies of petrol, oil, ammo and oxygen to be available by that date. On Monday the pukka camp site was chosen and work commenced on the various bits. Dispersals were examined and a claim staked. Arrangements were made with No.5 Squadron and 15<sup>th</sup> Fighter Control for these dispersals to be reserved and the airfield on either side of the runway graded.

On Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> we were visited by a F/Lt Sexmouth

who informed the writer that the Squadron were going to use Castelvetrano airfield with effect from that night and unlike the field at Bo Rizzo it was ready. I gathered that the advance party was expected to get cracking and provide a flare path party etc.

This information was given at 1 o'clock and at 2 o'clock a start was made in the 3-tonner. F/Lt Sexmouth had informed me that there was a perfect flare path and Chance light at Castelvetrano and that a "homer" and all supplies had been laid on.

Arriving at Castelvetrano at 1600 hrs we were greeted by F/Lt Sexmouth (he having flown over in a Piper Cub). His perfect flare path consisted of a collection of red near-boundary lights and a few boxes of insulators. The Chance lights were there and appeared to be OK apart from the fact that there was no power to light them. When questioned about supplies of petrol Sexmouth airily pointed to a Yankee grader and said "oh - see those chaps, they have petrol". It took quite a while to make him understand there was some difference between a Beaufighter and a grader and that different petrol would be required. After an hour of fruitless discussion this flying vacuum cleaner salesman left the writer to accomplish the following: find a power plant, get a Jeep, find some petrol, procure an ambulance and a crash tender and get the 'drome operational.

The next 3 days were spent whistling backwards and forwards between the two 'dromes. The various instructions

had been immediately forgotten but with our own flare path the 'drome was made ready in case of emergency. Needless to say no Beaufighter ever used the 'drome due possibly to the fact that they did not know that it could be used. As Sexmouth said when asked to inform the CO of what was happening "It's got nothing to do with him".

On the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Graham landed at Bo Rizzo and informed the writer that the remainder of the Squadron would be over on the following morning and that Wilbur and Pat had been left for some days.

That afternoon the main convoy arrived and the following morning the Beaufighters and the remainder of the ground crews turned up in DC3's<sup>43</sup>. At last 255 was safely at rest at Bo Rizzo aerodrome.

Sept 5<sup>th</sup>. So far this month has been uneventful. The diarist has had a 4-day tour of the island covering 600 miles in search of booze. The search was unsuccessful. Farmer Bastille Giles has made several abortive expeditions but does not appear to gather much booty. Our messing officer John Fox, keeping his finger out as usual, has provided us with some very good food.

F/Lt Murfin and F/O Sid Cracknell (the Birmingham Banker with Canadian friends) continue to extract money from the over-worked and under-paid Orderly Room staff.

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43 Again, more probably C-47 Skytrains, the military derivative of the DC3 civilian airliner.

Doc Atabrine<sup>44</sup> Reeves daily poisons our water and binds like buggery every evening about shorts and Atabrine.

6<sup>th</sup> September. Our Doc has already scraped acquaintance with numerous other low types. Various Lieutenants and Captains of the 56<sup>th</sup> Medical Battalion USA have been initiated to the sobriety of the mess. They visit us frequently and fortunately the Doc can periodically find excuse to proceed to 56<sup>th</sup> Med Btn at Castelamare.

7<sup>th</sup>. A moderately quiet day. Night 7/8<sup>th</sup> Farmer Bastille Giles and Maurice Eskimo Nell Drake disposed of a Do.217.

8<sup>th</sup>. The start, we hope, of lots of fun. Italy has surrendered unconditionally. That's a good show but we still have to push the Hun out of Italy. An invasion fleet is on its way to Naples, and our job is to give them night protection.

Night of 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup>. Pat and the writer, Jimmy Ward and the horrible Doc whistle down to...

[At this juncture one finds the start of Folio 31 in the original. The text hand-written on Side 1 of Folio 31 clearly belongs elsewhere, reciting in duplicate as it does events at Sétif several months earlier. It is not transcribed here. Side 2 of Folio 31 is blank. This transcription recommences at Folio 32 Side 1.]

...'B' Flight to greet the first patrol. The news is good. Sgt Hale and Sgt Cooper have pushed down a Heinkel He.111. Phil Brook and Charlie Greenland followed closely behind with a Ju.88 and a little later Joe Berry and Jan Watson

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<sup>44</sup> Trade name for the drug quinacrine, at the time used for the treatment of intestinal worms and for malaria – the latter both by way of prophylaxis and treatment.

followed with another Ju.88. In the early hours of the morning Tiger Leppard and Phil Houghton returned with yet another Ju.88 to the Squadron's credit.

In the excitement of recording so many successes the writer has omitted to record two fires in 'A' Flight. The afternoon of the 7<sup>th</sup> saw 'A' aircrew marquee disappear in a cloud of smoke and flame. The unfortunate writer had the task of doing the investigation and is now wondering how the aircrew manage to fly in this warm weather with so much flying kit on.

On the morning of 8<sup>th</sup> September our petrol bowser, deciding that the life of a petrol bowser was dull, suddenly burst into flames. Unfortunately AC Johnson was burned badly. Otherwise these fires did have the effect of keeping F/O Roker out of mischief for a couple of days.

'A' Flight's theme song is now "We don't want to set the world on fire".

9<sup>th</sup> September. Today we had our shower bath erected. It consists of a two gallon can with a 50-cigarette tin soldered into the bottom and/or base of the cigarette tin is punctured and/or drilled with several holes. This ingenious apparatus is balanced on an iron structure borrowed from Wilbur / 'C' Flight. Alongside stands a cunningly devised platform with three rather rickety steps leading up to it. The procedure, as demonstrated daily by Doc and Farmer, is quite simple. Having secured two "buckets canvas" filled with water, one

scrubbing brush, one sponge and one piece of soap and/or one bucket of sand one nips smartly up to the platform with the "buckets canvas" filled with water and pours them into the two gallon can. It is advisable to disrobe before reaching this stage. The water will immediately shower out from the base of the cigarette tin, whereupon one nips very smartly down the rickety steps, picks one's self up and then makes a sudden dash for the gently cascading water. By special request Bastille will strum a tune on the accordion whilst one cavorts beneath the water. Without any request numerous passers-by will pass lewd comments. For example... The Doc was busily prancing and splashing when Jeep Smith, passing by, was overheard to say "RAF items in lighter vein - my weapon's bent".

The night of 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> brought us further successes. The CO Wing Commander Hugh Eliot DFC succeeded in "giving the winks" to one Me.210, Squadron Leader Bob Graham finished off a Heinkel and damaged a Ju.88, Joe Berry with Ian Watson as his R.O. sent another Me.210 to its rightful end. Store basher Allan Barker rode behind the WingCO and Sgt Jeep Smith gave Bob a guiding hand.

Sept 10<sup>th</sup>. The whole Squadron riding high on a wave of enthusiasm brought about by these successes. A word for Wilbur and his laddies. Theirs is no easy task. For just about a year now they have had the throttles wide open. Fame passes them by but they have the satisfaction of knowing that the boys who fly have confidence in their efforts.

Night 10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>. Our luck is not in. No Huns fall to

our guns. Unfortunately Bob Graham and Jeep Smith do not return from patrol. We are all hoping that they baled out OK and have been picked up by some passing ship.

Sept 11<sup>th</sup>. It is time a word was said about the Adjutant and his latest commissioning to rake in some cash on the side. About a week ago Pat started to have a barber call on him every morning. For two or three mornings Pat sat patiently whilst his stooge finicked and fussed, powdered and parted. At last the idea caught on and numerous tired aircrew types began to queue up with their 10 Lire notes. I for one refuse to believe that Pat ever pays for his own shaving and haircutting.

We have a quiet day with most of the aircrew needing some sleep. The one or two ground types stooge around looking busy. The night brings us more success and a spot of bad luck. P/O Gunn and P/O Carter dispose of one Ju.88 and Phil Brook and Charlie Greenland hack down another. Unfortunately Phil and Charlie had to bale out. Now we are all hoping they are OK. Heard over the R/T just before they left their machine, they sounded quite calm and had everything under control.

12<sup>th</sup> Sept. No news yet of Bob or Jeep. The writer had morning coffee with the Adjutant after a hasty trip to the aerodrome with Wilbur. The Doc is in a bad way, feeling the strain of over-work. He rises at 06.15 hrs and holds Sick Parade at 06.30. By 07.00 he has washed (sometimes), shaved (sometimes) and cooked eggs and bacon. He then retires to the

Sick Bay, adopts a recumbent position and declares to all and sundry "I'm shagged out". This "shagged out" state of affairs lasts until lunch time. After lunch it starts again and carries on until teatime. He then proceeds to the mess to drink tea and laugh at the aircrew making faces as they swallow their quinine tablets<sup>45</sup>. There follows another brief rest followed by more food and then the exhausted Doctor retires for a well-earned rest.

Today the Adjutant has been ill all day but this evening it is assumed that he is slightly better as he is able to prop himself in a chair to take some cash from some of the types.

September 13<sup>th</sup>. Ted Roker having heard how easy an 'admin' job is, has managed to slip out of Codes and Cyphers into an Admin job. Unfortunately it will mean his leaving the Squadron but no doubt he will be back.

Today we had a new crew arrive, F/O Porter and P/O Johnson.

[At this point the hand-written text ends and the subsequent folios are blank. If the routine of keeping an unofficial Squadron diary did persist uninterrupted, the volume covering mid-September 1943 to the end of October 1944 has not survived.]



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45 Malaria was still endemic in Sicily at the time.