

## Gloster Gladiators

### 3Sqn RAAF Sep40-Feb41

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3 Squadron began its brief tenure with the Gloster Gladiator on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1940 when a signal from Headquarters Middle East (HQME) directed the Squadron to equip with two flights of Gladiators. At that time the Squadron was based at RAF Ismailia approximately 120km NE of Cairo and personnel were busy receiving stores and equipment from overseas. Additionally, they were busy uncrating and assembling six new Lysander aircraft that had recently arrived for the Squadron from the UK. The CO, SQNLDR Peter Heath, decided to split the squadron into three parts: an advance party to proceed to Helwan on 18Sep and begin taking over the Gladiators from 33Sqn; a servicing party to remain at Ismailia until all the Lysanders were assembled and tested; and, the main party to finish receiving and sorting incoming equipment before moving to Helwan on 23<sup>rd</sup> September.

Accordingly, on the morning of 18<sup>th</sup> September the following seven officers and 14 airmen departed Ismailia in the advance party consisting of SQNLDR P. Heath, FLTLT C.B Gaden, FLGOFF J.R Perrin, FLGOFF A. Boyd, FLGOFF M.D Ellerton, FLGOFF A.A Gatward and FLGOFF B.L Bracegirdle. The airmen were SGT W.G Smith, SGT P.J Johanson, CPL F.A Smith, CPL H.W Conquest, CPL R.H Allen, CPL R.C Brealey, CPL E.A Currie, LAC H.E Cameron, LAC B.T Cranney, LAC R.J Elliott, AC1 R.B Whittington, AC1 V.R Cramer, AC1 D. Ransford and AC1 C.W Burgess. Over the next five days the advance party took on charge 12 Mk.II Gladiators from 33 (F) Sqn RAF<sup>1</sup>. During the handover period the pilots were put on daily stand-by for 33Sqn operations which was the air defence of Cairo. An extra eleven airmen were sent to Helwan to ease the heavy workload<sup>2</sup>.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> September the main party moved by road to RAF Helwan where they joined the advanced party and for the next five weeks the Squadron was relieved of their operational obligation to devote all their time to training on the new aircraft type. The training was intense and included a wide range of scenarios to prepare pilots for their baptism of fire in the near future. Exercises were held with 6<sup>th</sup> Division AIF, British AA defences and air fighting tactics with Blenheims of No.84Sqn. The usual spate of minor accidents and teething problems were experienced and during the early weeks N5756, N5766, N5764 and N5769 all suffered various ailments that took them [briefly] out of service.

After the short familiarization period ended the Squadron was warned it would soon move to Gerawla Landing ground in the Western Desert for operational duty and all aircraft, stores and personnel were to prepare for the move over the period 26-31Oct. A small advance party moved to Gerawla on 29<sup>th</sup> October to prepare for the Squadron's arrival and on 2<sup>nd</sup> / 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov40 the Squadron finally moved to Gerawla. During the first two weeks of November the Squadron partook of several training exercises with various Army units to give the units some understanding of what they could expect in future combat facing dive bombers and fighters.

The first operational use of Gladiators occurred on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1940 when FLTLT Gordon Steege departed Gerawla in N5777, escorted by FLTLT C.B Gaden in N5780, for a 2 hour tactical reconnaissance of enemy positions in the Sofafi area. Misfortune dogged the first mission however when Steege landed at the Minquar Quaim landing ground to report the results of his reconnaissance to the Air Intelligence Liaison Officer of an Armoured Division. The aircraft sustained damage on the rough ground and was not flyable; it was later salvaged for repair by No.53 Repair & Salvage Unit and did not return to the Squadron until mid-December.

More tactical recce missions were made without incident until 19<sup>th</sup> November when 3 Sqn's first aerial combat in the Western Desert took place. FLTLT Blake Pelly (N5753) departed Gerawla at 1320hrs to carry out a tactical reconnaissance of enemy areas in the Sofafi-Ravia-Bir Enba areas. Pelly was escorted by SQNLDR Peter Heath (N5750), FLGOFF Al Rawlinson (L9044)<sup>3</sup> and FLGOFF Alan Boyd (N5752). At approximately 1400hrs the formation was seven miles east of Rabia when they sighted a large gaggle of CR.42 fighters attacking advancing British troops and, in line with standing orders regarding recce flights, the formation turned around and headed home. No sooner had they changed course the three escorts were attacked by nine Fiat CR.42 fighters and Pelly attacked by another eight or nine CR.42s<sup>4</sup>.

The next 25 minutes were spent by both sides trying to get the upper hand in a typical rolling dogfight that saw Peter Heath shot down and killed. The escorts later claimed three CR42s definitely shot down and three others as probables. Alas, as with many air battles the claims and verified kills were not the same. Italian records claim one Fiat heavily

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<sup>1</sup> The 12 Serials were: L9044, N5750, N5752, N5753, N5754, N5756, N5764, N5765, N5766, N5769, N5777 and N5780.

<sup>2</sup> The 11 airmen were CPL A.M Cockburn with 10 AC1s O.S Barton, A.J.S Bursle, N.W Chapman, M. Irvine-Brown, J.W Kerr, B.E Martin, R.W Sterrett, J. Taylor, E.A Wehrman and H.J Yeo

<sup>3</sup> L9044 was in fact an Egyptian Air Force Serial. The aircraft was built as N5889 and sold to Egypt early in 1940 with the Egyptian Serial No. The aircraft was returned to 33Sqn RAF in Jun40, then to 3Sqn in Sep40 and for whatever reason the Egyptian serial was retained.

<sup>4</sup> The Fiat CR.42 fighters came from 77, 78 and 82 Squadriglia, 13 Gruppo Regia Aeronautica Italiana.

damaged and three others damaged but all aircraft returned to base. The Italian claims were even more optimistic as they claimed that they had attacked eight Gladiators, shot down six and probably shot down the other two. The only actual loss for the day was the Gladiator of Peter Heath.

No more encounters occurred for the remainder of November and the Squadron continued with tactical reconnaissance missions in support of the advancing British 8<sup>th</sup> Army.

[For the remainder of December and early January the Squadron was split between different locations and for the sake of clarity the information for each location is shown in the following discrete paragraphs.]

#### Operations from Gerawla airfield 01-31Dec40

In November 1940 Gerawla airfield was ideally located close to the Front but after the British began the 1<sup>st</sup> Libyan campaign on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1940 and made rapid advances into Libya the base became somewhat of a backwater. Operations were confined to a few days early in the month and for the remainder Gerawla was a repair/replacement and servicing base in support of the aircraft detached to the Advanced Landing Ground (ALG). Operations were only flown on the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> of the month and were offensive reconnaissance patrols during which no enemy aircraft were encountered. On 13<sup>th</sup> December all serviceable aircraft were flown from Gerawla to the ALG and all future operations flown from the ALG. On 25<sup>th</sup> Dec HQME advised the Squadron that A Flight would hand back their Lysander aircraft to 102MU and re-equip with six Mk.I Gladiators from 112Sqn. This directive was completed on 31<sup>st</sup> Dec when six Mk.I Gladiators were delivered to Gerawla and taken on charge.<sup>5</sup> One of the Mk.Is (K6142) departed Gerawla at 1610hrs for a transit flight to the ALG with FLGOFF John Jackson at the controls. However, soon after lift off the engine failed and Jackson made an emergency landing but could not avoid a large Wadi depression and the aircraft sustained serious damage in the resultant crash. Jackson sustained minor bruising and shock and the aircraft was recovered by a crew from No.51 RSU and taken away for repair and/or salvage.

The attached Tables 1 thru 6 outline all known Gladiator operations from September 1940 to February 1941.

#### Operations from Advanced Landing Ground 74 from 8<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> December 1940

By early December the Squadron was hard pressed to support the forward elements of the advancing British units and on 8<sup>th</sup> December Headquarters No.202 Group ordered the squadron to detach a flight of Gladiators to an advanced landing ground for a period of approximately 10 days. Accordingly, early the following day five of ten Gladiators on a morning patrol from Gerawla landed at ALG.74 south east of Sidi Barrani in Egypt. The Detachment comprised of FLTLT Steege/N5810, FLTLT Gaden/N5765, FLGOFF Boyd/L9044, FLGOFF Bracegirdle/N5780 and FLGOFF Gatward/N5766 and were placed under the direct operational control of RAF Group Captain Brown, whose first order was to have the Gladiators placed on stand-by readiness for the remainder of the day. The following morning (10<sup>th</sup> Dec) the five aircraft departed the ALG at 0635hrs for an Offensive Patrol in the area to the south of Sidi Barrani and at 0730hrs a lone Meridionali Ro.37 *Lince* reconnaissance aircraft was encountered and shot down by FLTLT C. Gaden. No other action ensued and the patrol returned to the ALG at 0905hrs. Four Gladiators were scrambled at 1200hrs to reports that Allied troops were being staffed near Tummar but by the time the aircraft arrived no enemy were located. Another four Gladiators departed the ALG at 1540hrs for a patrol over troops in the Tummar area and upon reaching their assigned patrol area they sighted a force of 12 enemy fighters strafing allied troops. Unbeknownst to the 3Sqn pilots they had happened upon one small part of a large Italian raid that consisted of 30+ Fiat CR.42 fighters from 366a, 367a and 368a Squadriglia of 151° Gruppo that were providing cover to seven Ba.65 bombers of 50° Stormo for an attack on Allied positions. Their formation became dispersed after the bombing and strafing began and, as luck would have it, the two close cover squadrons (366a and 367a) lost contact with each other just as the Gladiators arrived on the scene.

The Gladiator leader SQNLDR Ian McLachlan (N5765) quickly realised his formation was perfectly placed to bounce the unsuspecting Italians and attacked immediately. After a short, sharp encounter the CR.42s were able to use their superior speed and climb to disengage but not before sustaining casualties. Ian McLachlan shot down one fighter which was seen to crash and both Steege (N5810) and Gatward (N5766) claimed possibles; the Italians claimed one Gladiator. Italian records showed the McLachlan had shot down the Fiat flown by *Sergente Maggiore* Gino Bogoni of 367a Squadriglia and, the fighters of *Sergente Maggiore* Benco and *Sergente* Zanarini were heavily damaged but managed to limp back to Base. *Capitano* Bozzolan also had a lucky escape after his engine was severely damaged by two Gladiators and was saved by the intervention of his compatriots.

Four serviceable Gladiators took to the skies early on the 11<sup>th</sup> Dec for an Offensive Patrol in the Sofi-Tummar area but no enemy were present. The same four Gladiators flew the same patrol a few hours later with the same result. Similarly, two further patrols were flown in the afternoon each providing the same result as the morning patrols. However, the pilots did get to vent their frustrations a little when they spotted a Savoia-Marchetti SM.79 *Sparviero* bomber on the

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<sup>5</sup> The six Mk.I Gladiators were: L7615, L7616, K6142, K7922 and K8048

ground 11km north of Sofafi and strafed the bomber until it burst into flames. It was later learned the SM.79 had been forced down by No.33 Sqn the previous day.

The first early outing on 12 December by four Gladiators was again an uneventful patrol but the second morning patrol more than compensated for the earlier dull periods. At 1125hrs five Gladiators departed the ALG for an Offensive Patrol in the Sofafi area, and just a few minutes earlier a mixed formation of Italian fighters from 84, 90, 91 Squadriglia 10° Gruppo and 96 Squadriglia 9° Gruppo had departed their base for a free fighter sweep. Bad weather prevented the Italian force from reaching their intended target so they set course for home and enroute were bounced by the five Gladiators 10km NW of Sofafi. In the short but intense dogfight that followed the Australian pilots made the most of their advantageous position and quickly shot down three Fiat CR.42s without loss Arthur (N5752), Boyd (N5782) and Gatward (N5764) each claiming a victory. The Italians claimed two Gladiators shot down and several probably shot down. A further uneventful patrol occurred in the late afternoon and this proved to be the last operational mission from ALG74 as a message from HQ 202Grp at 1830hrs ordered the detachment to move the next day to Bir Mella airfield.

#### Operations from Bir Mella airfield from 13<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1940

At 0600hrs eight Gladiators departed ALG74 and arrived at Bir Mella a short time later where they were immediately readied for operations. Six Gladiators led by FLTLT Gordon Steege (N5810) departed Bir Mella at 0800hrs for an Offensive Patrol over the Sollum - Fort Capuzzo – Halfaya area and when they arrived they sighted what they thought was a group of unescorted SM.79 bombers attacking Allied troops. Steege immediately ordered his flight to attack and in the first pass Steege shot down a bomber and claimed a second as a probable. The SM.79 rear gunners extracted some measure of revenge when they shot down FLTLT C. Gaden (N5765) who made a semi-successful crash landing but was later found dead in his cockpit by lead elements of the 7th Hussars and was buried beside his aircraft by Lt J. Napier.

As the Gladiators were attempting to climb above the bombers and reform for another attack they were bounced by the hitherto unseen escort of ten Fiat CR.42 fighters from 9° Gruppo. In the ensuing melee the Italians attacked aggressively from above and four of the remaining five Gladiators were either shot down or forced to land from damage inflicted upon them.

- \* FLGOFF Lex Winten<sup>6</sup> (N5766) was hit by an explosive bullet that went through the fuel tank, entered the cockpit, shattered his left hand and gave him flesh wounds in the stomach. The aircraft engine was smashed by enemy bullets and Winton was left with no option but to bale out.
- \* FLGOFF A.A (AI) Gatward (N5764) was forced to land when his engine was destroyed by enemy bullets.
- \* FLGOFF W.S Arthur (N5752) stated his mount was ‘shot to pieces’ and as it was going down the centre fuselage section crumpled and the wings folded back trapping Arthur in the cockpit. He forced his way out, crawled along the top of the fuselage until he reached an area from which he could abandon the stricken machine. Arthur survived the ordeal with only minor scrapes and bruises and after walking towards the advancing allied troops he was picked up by a long-range desert patrol and returned to the Squadron ALG.
- \* FLGOFF A.H Boyd (N5782) claimed two CR.42s shot down before another CR.42 shot away his port wing wires causing him to make a forced landing. As it happened he landed not far from F/O Gatward and after they made temporary repairs to Boyd’s aircraft they took off with Gatward sitting on Boyd’s lap and flew back to the ALG.
- \* FLTLT Gordon Steege was the other aircraft to return to Bir Mella but the aircraft had sustained serious damage.

Black Friday proved to be a watershed for the squadron and a future Commanding Officer, FLTLT Peter Jeffrey, recorded the following: “... we had a very bad day on 13th December, it was over Salum (...) we had an extraordinary bad day – ran into a very big lot of CR.42s and Flt Lt Gaiden [Gaden] was killed but Arthur, “Wilf” Arthur was shot down (...). Lex Witton [Winten] had an explosive round in one hand and he bailed out. Gatward [Gatward] and Boyd both crash-landed. So we had five, and that was a really very bad day for the Squadron (...) It was a very traumatic sort of experience but the Squadron was very resilient and picked up very quickly and the people who’d – apart from Witton who was a casualty because of his hand - the others were back flying again next day or in a few days’ time. To a certain extent, you know, you expected these things but that was just a bit bigger than we normally expected. And seeing as we’d had so much success prior with virtually no casualties it hit us a bit hard.

With only two serviceable aircraft available the Squadron was effectively out of the War until new pilots and aircraft could be supplied, nonetheless the remaining two Gladiators departed Bir Mella at 0800hrs the next day on an Offensive Patrol. However, soon after take-off N5780 aborted with compressor problems so the other aircraft L9044 (FLGOFF John Jackson) joined up with a flight of 112Sqn Gladiators to complete the mission. The same two aircraft responded to the order for 3 Squadron to provide an afternoon Offensive Patrol over Sollum and departed Bir Mella at 1500hrs. Unbelievably, no sooner had the two aircraft departed when N5780 again aborted, this time with electrical wiring issues.

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<sup>6</sup> FLGOGG Lex D’Arcy Winten 270526 spent considerable time in hospital before repatriating back to Australia in July 1941. He went on to serve with 75Sqn in New Guinea and No.2 OTU in Mildura. He resigned from the RAAF on 23Jun44 with the rank of Squadron Leader.

FLGOFF Jackson (L9044) again elected to join up with a 112Sqn patrol but this time failed to return. He did however return the following morning explaining that he landed at Gerawla because of low fuel reserves.

Four replacement aircraft were collected from 102MU and flown back to Gerawla on 17<sup>th</sup> December where they joined four other Gladiators that were repaired and awaiting redeployment. The eight aircraft then departed Gerawla at 1630hrs and flew to Bir Mella. The following day nine Gladiators took off from Bir Mella at 11445hrs for an Offensive Patrol over the Capuzzo-Bardia area. No enemy aircraft were encountered but flak was plentiful and FLGOFF Arthur (N5756) was hit and part of his port aileron shot away, two other aircraft sustained minor damage. Accordingly, a call for a maximum effort later that day resulted in only six Gladiators departing Bir Mella at 1600hrs for an uneventful 75min Offensive Patrol over Sollum. The next few days saw no action and the Squadron maintenance staff performed wonders in repairing all squadron aircraft to operational status. On 22<sup>nd</sup> December the Squadron flew 24 missions spread over three patrols in the Bardia area with no opposition other than ineffectual flak, which was indicative of the Italian retreat to the West in face of the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army advances. Later that evening HQ 202Grp directed the Squadron to move forward approximately 110km from Bir Mella to a new ALG located 9km south west of Sollum. All ten serviceable Gladiators duly departed Bir Mella and flew to the new ALG on the morning 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec40.

#### Operations from Sollum ALG from 24<sup>th</sup> December 1940 to 8<sup>th</sup> January 1941

The Squadron quickly settled in to the new Sollum ALG and for the next few days they were only called upon to supply escorts for 208Sqn Lysander aircraft performing artillery reconnaissance work over the front, in particular around Bardia. From the early morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> until late morning on the 26<sup>th</sup> they flew 33 uneventful recce missions without engaging any enemy aircraft but constantly fired upon by the enemy AAA defences. During this relatively peaceful interlude the Squadron replenished their aircraft, performed all necessary maintenance and recovered mentally from the mauling they'd received on Black Friday.

The second operation on 26Dec40 called for eight Gladiators led by FLTLT Gordon Steege (N5810) to rendezvous with a 208Sqn Lysander but the Lysander failed to arrive at the meeting point so the Gladiators returned to base. The same eight Gladiators were turned around and departed again at 1320hrs for an Offensive Patrol in the Sollum area. At 1405hrs they spotted a force north east of Sollum Bay consisting of 10 x SM.79 bombers [five each from 34<sup>o</sup> and 41<sup>o</sup> Stormo] with a higher, trailing escort of 36 x CR42 [22 from 10<sup>o</sup> Gruppo and 14 from 23<sup>o</sup> Gruppo]. Two Gladiators attacked the bombers and the rest headed for the escorts and in the ensuing dogfight the Gladiators acquitted themselves very well against the attacking force escorts who were four times more numerous. It would be foolish to think all the CR.42s managed to come to grips with the Gladiators but whatever enemy fighters did close the Gladiators come out the victors on this occasion. Two CR.42s were shot down, one claimed as a probable and four as damaged; Steege (N5810) and Arthur (N5753) both claimed one CR.42 destroyed and one damaged, Rawlinson (N5782), Jackson (N5756) and Perrin each claimed one damaged.

Italian records revealed that *Capitano* Guido Bobba, the CO of 74<sup>a</sup> Squadriglia, 23<sup>o</sup> Gruppo, was shot down in flames and crashed into the sea. Similarly, *Tenente* Lorenzoni was seen to fall out of the formation in flames but managed to crash land at an Italian LG. The aircraft of *Senior Tenente* Luigi Prati, *Tenente* Antonio Angeloni and *Sergente* Mario Veronesi, all of 84<sup>a</sup> Squadriglia, 10<sup>o</sup> Gruppo force landed before reaching their home base. Also, the CO of 23<sup>o</sup> Gruppo, *Maggiore* Tito Falconi's fighter was heavily damaged in the combat but managed to struggle home.

After the action on the 26<sup>th</sup> the squadron was called on to provide aircraft for various tasks but none involved contact with the enemy. From the 27<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> inclusive the Squadron flew a total of 39 flights spread over seven discrete missions and this total would have been higher except the Squadron had no aviation fuel from the afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> until the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> which meant several missions were scrubbed.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

SUK14909

January 1941 Sollum ALG.

*A staged PR photograph of 3Sqn pilots examining a map before an operation over Bardia*

At the start of January the Squadron held 18 Gladiators on charge which were a mixture of Mk.I (12) and Mk.II (6) aircraft. The six Mk.II Gladiators were all that remained of the 19 Mk.IIs issued to the squadron between Sep-Dec 1940 and the attrition highlighted the wear and tear associated with desert warfare. Four more Mk.IIs were replaced in early January and by the middle of the month the Squadron held 12 x Mk.I and 2 x Mk.II Gladiators.

The first mission of the new year was an uneventful escort for a 208Sqn Lysander on an artillery reconnaissance over Bardia, followed by Offensive Patrols in the Bardia-Tobruk area but the *Regia Aeronautica Italiana* was conspicuous by its absence in the Squadrons' sphere of action. On 3<sup>rd</sup> January the British assault on Bardia commenced and 3 Sqn were tasked to fly Offensive Patrols in the Bardia-Tobruk region and continued these patrols for the next four days without any contact. In all, the Squadron flew 91 sorties spread over 13 missions during the period 01Jan to 06Jan without firing a shot. Bardia fell to the British Army on 5<sup>th</sup> January and the Italian Army was in full retreat to the West. On 7<sup>th</sup> January 202Grp HQ directed that the dispersed squadron elements were to merge at a new site where they could engage the retreating enemy forces and so the following day 3Sqn HQ, A, B and C Flights moved from Gerawla airfield to the new operating location at an ALG near Gambut Main aerodrome. Simultaneously the Advance Flight at the Sollum ALG moved to the Gambut location and the Squadron became a complete unit for the first time in many months of gruelling desert warfare. The squadron not only moved location on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> January but then provided a maximum effort Offensive Patrol of nine Gladiators in the late afternoon.

Squadron operations from Gambut ALG saw them fly 24 uneventful sorties from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> before severe sandstorms curtailed flight operations for several days. On the evening of January 15, HQ 202 Grp directed the deployment of nine aircraft to Bir Hacheim LG located some 90km SSE of Tobruk, Libya. The next day nine Gladiators flew to Bir Hacheim at 1345hrs and two hours later departed on a protective patrol to cover the advance of 11<sup>th</sup> Hussar elements into the Mechili area in Libya. The aircraft returned to Bir Hacheim where they remained overnight before returning to Gambut. From the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> January to the Squadron flew 49 uneventful sorties spread over 14 missions before they received their marching orders to a new operating base. The new base was the former Italian aerodrome of Tmimi located 100km east of Tobruk but their tenure was brief and after flying 22 sorties over two days they were again given fresh marching orders. However, the realities of war struck on the last mission from Tmimi when four Gladiators departed the base at 0730hrs to provide cover for Armoured Brigades operating in the Mechili area. Eight miles SE of Mechili the patrol was attacked by five Fiat G.50 fighters and PLTOFF J.C Campbell in K8022 was shot down and killed. The other three aircraft K7963 [FL Rawlinson], L9044 [FO Turnbull] and N5857 [SL D. Campbell] all sustained minor damage but returned safely to Tmimi where they were repaired and then flown to Martuba later that day.

The move to the abandoned Italian air base at Martuba, 55km north east of Tmimi was completed on the evening of the 25<sup>th</sup> January and this proved to be the last base from which Gladiators operated before the Squadron re-equipped with Hurricane fighters. Eleven Gladiators made the move to Martuba and between 26<sup>th</sup> Jan and 4<sup>th</sup> Feb five of the 11 aircraft were returned to No.102 Maintenance Unit at RAF Abu Sueir where the pilots remained to familiarise themselves on Hurricanes. Twenty two individual sorties were flown from Martuba but no contact was made with the enemy who had withdrawn to Benghazi and further west. The final operational hurrah for Gladiators was an uneventful patrol by six aircraft on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 1941 and these six were flown back to 102MU by RAF pilots on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1941.

#### Summary of Gladiator Operations.

Information contained in the 3 Sqn Operational Record Books and other references show that a total of thirty three Mk.I and Mk.II Gladiators served with the Squadron between 23 September 1940 and 08 February 1941. The aircraft are known to have flown at least 523 individual operational sorties; the number of non-operational flights will never be known as this data was not recorded. However, it would be safe to assume the total number of non-operational flights would be significantly higher than the known operational flights. All things considered, it would be reasonable to state that 3 Sqn Gladiators flew more than 1,000 flights.

Six Gladiators were lost in combat resulting in the deaths of three pilots and 18 aircraft sustained various degrees of damage during operational missions, resulting in a range of non-lethal injuries to five pilots. The Australian pilots made the following combat claims:

Date	Destroyed	Probable	Damaged
19Nov40	4 x CR.42	2 x CR.42	1 x CR.42
10Dec40	1 x RO.37		
	1 X CR.42		2 x CR.42
11Dec40	1 x SM.79		
12Dec40	3 x CR.42		
13Dec40	1 x SM.79		1 x SM.79
	2 x CR.42		
26Dec40	2 x CR.42	4 x CR.42	3 x CR.42
25Jan41		3 x G.50	

Gladiator Aircraft used by 3 Squadron RAAF  
September 1940 thru February 1941

	Aircraft	Mk	TOC	SOC	Fate
1	K6142	I	31Dec40	31Dec40	Crashed on take-off from Gerawla for delivery to ALG
2	K7893	I	00Jan41	26Jan41	Returned to 102MU
3	K7901	I	00Jan41	26Jan41	Returned to 102MU
4	K7913	I	00Jan41	08Feb41	Returned to 102MU
5	K7922	I	31Dec40	01Jan41	Returned to 102MU
6	K7947	I	00Jan41	08Feb41	Returned to 102MU
7	K7963	I	00Jan41	26Jan41	Returned to 102MU
8	K8022	I	00Jan41	25Jan41	Shot down by Fiat G.50 fighters 8 miles SE of Mechili, Libya
9	K8048	I	00Jan41	24Jan41	Returned to 102MU
10	L7615	I	31Dec40	22Jan41	Returned to 51RSU
11	L7616	I	31Dec40	08Feb41	Returned to 102MU
12	L7617	I	31Dec40	26Jan41	Returned to 102MU
13	L8008	I	00Jan41	08Feb41	Returned to 102MU
14	L8009	I	00Jan41	01Feb41	Returned to 102MU
15	L9044	II	25Sep40	08Feb41	Returned to 102MU
16	N5750	II	25Sep40	19Nov40	Shot down while escorting a recce aircraft by Fiat CR.42 fighters
17	N5752	II	23Sep40	13Dec40	Shot down by Fiat CR.42 fighters near Sollum, Libya
18	N5753	II	23Sep40	28Dec40	Returned to 51RSU
19	N5754	II	17Dec40	16Jan41	Returned to 102MU
20	N5756	II	23Sep40	16Jan41	Returned to 102MU
21	N5763	II	17Dec40	07Jan41	Returned to 102MU
22	N5764	II	23Sep40	13Dec40	Crash landed after combat with Fiat CR.42 fighters. DBR
23	N5765	II	23Sep40	13Dec40	Shot down by gunners of SM79 bombers
24	N5766	II	23Sep40	13Dec40	Pilot bailed out after damaged by CR.42 fighters
25	N5768	II	25Sep40	11Dec40	Returned to 102MU
26	N5769	II	23Sep40	10Nov40	Returned to 102MU after training flight accident
27	N5777	II	23Sep40	24Dec40	Returned to 102MU
28	N5779	II	12Dec40	14Dec40	Returned to 102MU after combat damage
29	N5780	II	23Sep40	24Dec40	Returned to 102MU
30	N5782	II	23Sep40	12Jan41	Returned to 102MU
31	N5786	II	17Dec40	27Dec40	Returned to 102MU
32	N5810	II	05Dec40	26Dec40	Returned to 102MU
33	N5857	II	17Dec40	08Feb41	Returned to 102MU

## Table 1

Operations from Helwan airfield Egypt September-October 1940

Date	Time	Details	Aircraft Serial
23Sep40	n/a	10 Gladiators TOC from 33Sqn	L9044 N5750 N5752 N5756 N5764 N5765 N5766 N5769 N5777 N5780
25Sep40	1745	3 Gladiators TOC from 102MU	N5753 N5768 N5786
03Oct40	1425	Training flight accident	N5679
05Oct40	1130	Training flight accident	N5756
07Oct40	1500	Training flight accident	N5764
29Oct40	0615	Ferry to ALG	N5764 N5765

**Table 2**

Operations from Gerawla airfield Egypt  
03November 1940 to 40 to 08January 1941

Date	Time	Details	Aircraft Serial
03Nov40	1155	Arrived from Helwan	L9044 N5750 N5752 N5753 N5756 N5766 N5768 N5777 N5780 N5782
10Nov40	1000	Ferry from Helwan	N5750
13Nov40	0930-1115	Reconnaissance Mission	N5777 N5780
14Nov40		Ferry to 103MU for repair	N5777
15Nov40	0900-1052	Reconnaissance Mission	L9044 N5750
	1025-1200	Reconnaissance Mission	N5752 N5764
17Nov40	0930-1103	Reconnaissance Mission	N5750 N5752 N5764 N5765
19Nov40	1340-1502	Reconnaissance Mission	L9044 N5750 N5752 N5753
	1420-1610	Reconnaissance Mission	N5765 N5766 N5780
20Nov40	n/a	Aircraft SOC	N5750 shot down 19Nov
1-4Dec40		No operational flights	
05Dec40	1215-1405	Escort Lysander on photo recce	N5766 N5782
6-7Dec40		No operational flights	
08Dec40	0710-0845	Patrol over forward troops between Bir Mella and Alam-El- Qatrani	L9044 N5752 N5753 N5756 N5764 N5765. N5766 N5768 N5780 N5782 N5810
	1445-1645	Patrol over forward troops between Bir Mella and Alam-El- Qatrani	L9044 N5752 N5753 N5756 N5765 N5766 N5768 N5780 N5782 N5810
09Dec40	0650-0840	Patrol over forward troops between Bir Mella and Alam-El- Qatrani	L9044 N5752 N5753 N5756 N5765 N5766 N5768 N5780 N5782 N5810  <u>Five aircraft landed at ALG 74</u> L9044 N5765 N5766 N5780 N5810 <u>Five landed at Gerawla</u> N5752 N5753 N5756 N5768 N5782
	1125-1307	Patrol over forward troops between Sofafi and Sidi Barrani	N5752 N5756 N5768
	1455-1630	Patrol over forward troops between Sofafi and Sidi Barrani	N5753 N5756 N5768
10Dec40	0609-0755	Patrol over forward troops between Sofafi and Sidi Barrani	N5752 N5753 N5756 N5768
	1055-1310	Patrol over forward troops between Sofafi and Buq Buq	N5752 N5753 N5768
11Dec40	0615-0815	Patrol over forward troops near Sidi Barrani	N5752 N5753 N5768
	1130-1310	Patrol over forward troops near Sidi Barrani	N5752 N5768
	1410-1630	Patrol over forward troops near Sidi Barrani	N5752 N5768
12Dec40	1202	Three detached to ALG	N5752 N5764 N5782
13Dec40	1400	One to ALG All serviceable Gladiators now at ALG.	N5779
15Dec40	1125	One Gladiator returned for repair	N5810



Date	Time	Details	Aircraft Serial
16Dec40	1244	One Detached to ALG	N5782
17Dec40	1150	Four new Gladiators arrived from 102MU	N5754 N5763 N5786 N5857
	1430	Detached to ALG	N5754 N5763 N5786 N5857
18Dec40		From ALG for repair	N5756
19Dec40		Ferried to ALG	N5756
		Ferried from ALG	N5786
21Dec40		One new aircraft from 103MU	N5777
22Dec40		Ferried to ALG	N5777 N5786
26Dec40		Returned from ALG	N5753 N5782
31Dec40	1130	Six Mk.I Gladiators arrived	L7615 L7616 L7617 K6142 K7922 K8048
	1610	Take-off accident	K6142 damaged – to 51RSU for repair
02Jan41	1115	Ferried to ALG	N5782
03Jan41	0900-1500	Attack on Bardia	24 sorties flown but Serials are unknown
04Jan41	0645-1715	Attack on Bardia	24 sorties flown but Serials are unknown
	0845	Ferry to Gerawla	N5754
	1210	To 51RSU for 180 hourly	L9044
	1410	Ferry to Sollum AGL	L7616
05Jan41	0655-1615	Attack on Bardia	23 sorties flown but Serials are unknown
	0930	Ferry to Sollum AGL	L7617
	0932	Burst tyre on TO	N5763
06Jan41	1030	Ferry from Sollum AGL	N5782
	1038	Ferry to Sollum AGL	N5754
08Jan41	0610	All Sqn elements at Gerawla moved to ALG nr Gambut about ½ way between Bardia and Tobruk	

**Table 3**Operations from ALG74 - 9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> December 1940

Date	Time	Details	Aircraft Serial
09Dec40	0840	Five Gladiators arrive	L9044 N5765 N5766 N5780 N5810
	1230-1350	Patrol over forward troops between Sofafi and Sidi Barrani	N5765 N5766 N5780 N5810
	1605-1755	Patrol over forward troops between Sofafi and Sidi Barrani	L9044 N5765 N5766 N5780 N5810
10Dec40	0635-0820	Patrol over forward troops between Sofafi and Sidi Barrani	L9044 N5765 N5766 N5780 N5810
	1200-1325	Scramble to intercept EA near Tummar West camp	N5765 N5766 N5780 N5810
	1540-1710	Scramble to intercept EA near Tummar West camp	N5765 N5766 N5780 N5810
11Dec40	0625-0812	Patrol over forward troops in Tummar area	L9044 N5765 N5766 N5810
	1020-1205	Patrol over forward troops in Tummar area	L9044 N5765 N5766 N5810
	1405-1555	Patrol over forward troops in Tummar area	L9044 N5765 N5766 N5810
	1605-1812	Patrol over forward troops in Tummar area	L9044 N5765 N5780 N5810
12Dec40	0730	Three aircraft from Gerawla	N5752 N5764 N5782
	0752-1005	Patrol over forward troops in Sidi Omar area	N5752 N5766 N5780 N5782
	1125-1333	Patrol over forward troops in Sofafi area	N5752 N5764 N5766 N5780 N5782
	1600-1815	Patrol over forward troops in Sofafi area	N5752 N5764 N5765 N5782 N5810
13Dec40	0600	All aircraft depart for Bir Mella airfield	L9044 N5752 N5764 N5765 N5766 N5780 N5782 N5810

**Table 4**Operations from Bir Mella airfield - 13<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1940

Date	Time	Details	Aircraft Serial
13Dec40	0615	aircraft arrive from ALG74	L9044 N5752 N5764 N5765 N5766 N5780 N5782 N5810
	0800-1010	Patrol over Sollum-Fort Capuzzo area	N5752 N5764 N5765 N5766 N5782 N5810
	1600	Tyre burst landing. Severe damage, collected by 51RSU	N5779
14Dec40	0800-1005	Patrol over Sollum	L9044 N5780
	1500	Patrol over Sollum	L9044 N5780
	n/a	Aircraft SOC	N5752 shot down on 13Dec
	n/a	Aircraft SOC	N5764 shot down on 13Dec
	n/a	Aircraft SOC	N5765 shot down on 13Dec
	n/a	Aircraft SOC	N5766 shot down on 13Dec
15Dec40	1015	to Gerawla for repair	N5810
16Dec40	1320	Ferry from Gerawla	N5782
17Dec40	1515	Received from Gerawla	N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5780 N5786 N5810 N5857
18Dec40	1145-1415	Patrol over Fort Capuzzo - Bardia area	L9044 N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5780 N5786 N5810 N5857
	1500	to Gerawla for repair	N5756
	1600-1820	Patrol over Sollum	L9044 N5780 N5782 N5786 N5810 N5857
19Dec40	0930	Ferry from Gerawla	N5756
	1000	to Gerawla for repair	N5786
22Dec40	0445-0655	Patrol over Bardia	L9044 N5754 N5756 N5782 N5810
	0800	Ferry from Gerawla	N5777 N5786
	1000-1210	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	L9044 N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5777 N5780 N5810 N5857
	1615-1825	Patrol over Bardia	L9044 N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5780 N5786 N5780 N5810 N5857
23Dec40	0710	All moved to Sollum ALG	L9044 N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5777 N5780 N5786 N5780 N5810 N5857

**Table 5**Operations from Sollum ALG - 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1940 to 8<sup>th</sup> January 1941

Date	Time	Details	Aircraft Serial
23Dec40	0800	aircraft arrive from Bir Mella	L9044 N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5777 N5780 N5786 N5780 N5810 N5857
24Dec40	1030-1242	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	L9044 N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5780 N5786 N5780 N5810 N5857
25Dec40	1030-1206	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5780 N5782 N5786 N5810 N5857
	1445-1700	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	L9044 N5753 N5754 N5756 N5763 N5780 N5786 N5810 N5857
26Dec40	0630-0850	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	Six aircraft but Serials not known
	0915-1155	Patrol over Sollum	Eight aircraft but only four Serials known N5753 N5756 N5782 N5810
27Dec40	1245-1335	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	Four aircraft but Serials not known
	1600	to Gerawla for repair	N5782
28Dec40	0945-1050	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	Four aircraft but Serials not known
29Dec40	0805-0920	Patrol over Sollum	Six aircraft but Serials not known
	130-1415	Patrol over Sollum	Seven aircraft but Serials not known
31Dec40	0830-1008	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	Six aircraft but Serials not known
	1110-1225	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	Seven aircraft but Serials not known
01Jan41	0810-0930	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Bardia	Seven aircraft but Serials not known
02Jan41	0910	Ferry from Gerawla	N5782
03Jan41	0650-0925	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Five aircraft but Serials not known
	0910-1130	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Four aircraft but Serials not known
	1135-1405	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Five aircraft but Serials not known
	1400-1530	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Five aircraft but Serials not known
	1535-1715	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Five aircraft but Serials not known
04Jan41	0645-0900	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Nine aircraft but Serials not known
	1155-1330	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Nine aircraft but Serials not known
	1320	To 51RSU	L9044
	1410	to Gerawla for servicing	N5754
	1555-1725	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Nine aircraft but Serials not known
	1800	Ferry from Gerawla	L7616
05Jan41	0955-1130	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Nine aircraft but Serials not known
	1245-1430	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Eight aircraft but Serials not known
	1250	accident	N5763 crashed on TO for above.
	1530-1725	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Eight aircraft but Serials not known
	1810	Ferry from Gerawla	L7617
06Jan41	0700	to Gerawla for servicing	N5782
	0810	Ferry from Gerawla	N5754
	0945-1130	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Seven aircraft but Serials not known
08Jan41	0710	All moved to Gambut ALG	Eleven aircraft but Serials not known

**Table 6**Operations from Gambut/Bir Hacheim/Gambut ALGs - 9<sup>th</sup> January to 8<sup>th</sup> February 1941

Date	Time	Details	Aircraft Serial
08Jan41	0820	Arrive from Sollum ALG	Eleven aircraft but Serials not known
	1545-1810	Patrol Bardia -Tobruk	Nine aircraft but Serials not known
09Jan41	1545-1730	Patrol Bardia-Tobruk	Eight aircraft but Serials not known
10Jan41	0800-1000	Escort Lysander on Artillery Recce over Tobruk	Eight aircraft but Serials not known
	1050-1255	Patrol Tobruk	Eight aircraft but Serials not known
12Jan41	1025	To 102MU for servicing	N5754 N5756 N5782
16Jan41	1300-1345	to new ALG at Bir Hacheim	K7893 K7901 K7913 K7947 K7963 K8022 L7616 L8008 N5857
	1545-1712	Patrol Bir Hacheim	K7893 K7901 K7913 K7947 K7963 K8022 L7616 L8008 N5857
17Jan41	0730-0814	to new ALG at Gambut	K7893 K7901 K7913 K7947 K7963 K8022 L7616 L8008 N5857
19Jan41	1030	From 51 RU	L9044
21Jan41	0700-0900	Patrol Acroma	K7947 L7615 L7616
	0830-1030	Patrol Acroma	K7913 L8008
	1000-1200	Patrol Acroma	K7901 K7963 L8008
	1130-1330	Patrol Acroma	K7947 L7615 L8022
	1300-1500	Patrol Acroma	K7913 L7617 L8008
	1430-1630	Patrol Acroma	K7901 K7947 K7963
	1600-1750	Patrol Acroma	K7947 K8022 L7616
22Jan41	0900	To 51RSU for repair	L7615
	1020-1110	Anti-ship strike	K7963 L8008
	1530-1725	Patrol El Adem	K7913 K7963 K8022 L7616 L7617 L8008 L8009 L9044
23Jan41	0700-0905	Patrol Mechili area Landed at Tmimi airfield	K7901 K7913 K7963 K8022 K8048 L7616 L8008 L9044
	1005-1050	To new base at Tmimi	L7617 L8009 N5857
24Jan41	1000-1200	Patrol Martuba-Derna	K7901 K7913 K7963 L8008 L9044 N5857
	1300-1450	Patrol Martuba-Derna	K7901 K7913 K7963 L7617 L8008 L9044
	1530-1755	Patrol Martuba-Derna	K7893 K7963 L7616 L8008 L9044 N5857
25Jan41	0730-0845	Patrol Mechili area	K7963 K8022 L9044 N5857
	1400	All to Martuba airfield	K7893 K7901 K7913 K7947 K7963 L7616 L7617 L8008 L8009 L9044 N5857
26Jan41	n/a	Aircraft SOC	K8022 shot down on 25Jan
28Jan41	0958-1020	Scramble Derna area	K7913 K7947 L7616 L8009
29Jan41	1520-1700	Recce over Slonta area	K7913 K7947 L7616 L8008 L8009 L9044 N5857
31Jan41	1120-1210	Recce Derna airfield	K7913 K7947 L7616 L8008 L9044
01Feb41	n/a	Returned to No.102MU	K8048
02Feb41	1200	Escort recce Lysander	K7913 K7947 L7616 L8008 L9044
03Feb41	n/a	Returned to No.102MU	K7893 K7901 K7963 L7616
05Feb41	n/a	Returned to No.102MU	L8009
08Feb42	1100	Last six Gladiators returned to No.102MU at Abu Sueir	K7913 K7947 L7616 L8008 L9044 N5857