

**A Brief History of
RAAF No.3 Squadron *Curtiss Tomahawk IIB* Operations.**

Syria, Egypt and Libya - May to December 1941.

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AK326 "W" in 3 Squadron service. [AWM 010926]

Introduction

In mid-April 1941 RAAF No.3 Squadron was withdrawn from operations for rest and recuperation, they were also informed their war weary Hurricanes would be replaced by a new fighter. On 27th April the Commanding Officer Squadron Leader Peter Jeffrey travelled to RAF HQ Middle East (HQME) to learn more about the new aircraft and returned with the news that the fighter was the Tomahawk IIB. The aircraft was an American machine manufactured by Glen Curtiss in Buffalo, New York and was designated as a single seat pursuit ship powered by a 1,119 kW (1,150 hp) Allison V-1710-33, V-12 liquid-cooled engine; armed with two .50cal nose-mounted machine guns and four .303 inch wing mounted guns. The aircraft was fitted with cockpit armour, British instrumentation, self-sealing fuel tanks, bomb racks and provision for a jettisonable ventral fuel tank. Jeffreys was also told the Squadron would move to RAF Station Aqir in Palestine, situated 20km south of Tel Aviv. By May 1st all squadron personnel had returned from leave and assembled at RAF Aboukir where final preparations were made for the move to Palestine which took place the following day. After reaching RAF Aqir personnel were given time to settle in to their new home before Tomahawk training for pilots, fitters and riggers was given over the next four days by instructors from a US Army Air Service Training Team. As soon as the introductory training finished the Squadron was ordered to move to RAF Station Lydda located some

8km SSE of Tel Aviv. The short move to Aqir by road was completed on the morning of 9th May and the Squadron was given a week to set up the base for operations before the first Tomahawks arrived.

Meanwhile, CO Peter Jeffrey flew to HQME on 8th May to discuss and arrange a number of issues relating to the re-equipment and the end use of the Squadron in the coming months. Among those issues was the matter of training aircraft so the brand new Squadron pilots could get some flying time before being thrust into the cockpit of the new and powerful Tomahawks. This was an area of concern because most of the new pilots had not flown for at least five months prior to joining the Squadron and were woefully underprepared. Unfortunately, the best Jeffrey could obtain was the promise of two Gauntlets by the end of May and more training aircraft when, and if, any became available.

Tomahawk Flight Training May-June 1941

The Squadron's Tomahawks arrived in crates by sea direct from the USA at Takoradi airfield, Gold Coast (present day Ghana) where they were unloaded and assembled before being ferried to Cairo, Egypt via the famous 3,600 mile Takoradi Aircraft Ferry Route. In Cairo the aircraft were delivered to No.102 Maintenance Unit at RAF Abu Sueir for receipt, inspection, rectification and modification to desert standards. The first two 3Sqn Tomahawks¹ were ready for despatch on 12May41 and SQNLDR Peter Jeffrey with FLTLT Jock Perrin flew to Abu Sueir to accept the aircraft and ferried them back to Lydda on 14May41. A further 11 Tomahawks² were ferried by 3 Sqn pilots in the period 16-31 May, but the arrival of these new aircraft led to a series of accidents and mishaps that showed conversion to the new type would not be easy. Tomahawk flight training began on Sunday, 18th May and soon after commencement of the training FLGOFF Les Knowles failed to correct a take-off swing that developed when he applied too much throttle, too quickly at the start of the take-off run. The aircraft³ ran off the runway and crashed beside the runway causing Cat.B damage. Two days later FLTLT Blake Pelly had an undercarriage failure that resulted in another Cat.B damaged aeroplane⁴. On 26May FLGOFF Davidson ferried AK474 from 102MU and all was well until the landing at Lydda. Davidson had trouble controlling the aircraft after touchdown and ran off the runway then collided with Tomahawk AK365 resulting in extensive and severe damage to both aircraft. As if the loss of four Tomahawks in the first week of training was not enough, the end of the month proved equally vexatious. At 0900hs on 30th May FLGOFF Percy Bothwell landed after completing a local training flight but to his chagrin, he selected 'wheels up' instead of 'flaps up' and the aircraft promptly sat on the runaway causing Cat.B damage to the propeller and undercarriage. A mere two hours later PLTOFF J. Jackson touched down after completing a training flight but the starboard undercarriage collapsed causing Cat.A damage to the airscrew and starboard wing tip. Fortunately, the damage was repairable at the unit and the aircraft was back in service a few days later. Not so however for the last prang of the month. South African pilot Lt A. Smith departed Abu Sueir in AK440 for the delivery flight to Lydda but when landing at Ismailia to refuel Smith lost control and caused the aircraft to crash beside the runway causing Cat.B damage. The crash of AK440 meant that six of the 13 Tomahawks delivered to 3Sqn to date were damaged beyond unit repair and needed to be returned to 102MU for repair, additionally another three aircraft sustained Cat.A damage that was repairable at unit level. Such a high attrition and accident rate naturally came to the attention of senior ranking officers and eventually to the RAF Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, Air Marshall Tedder who, on 3rd June, sent the following message to London *"I am afraid that No.3 with their Tomahawks will not be ready for operations. The Australians are very unexpectedly making heavy weather over the Tomahawks, but I have applied a little ginger which, I hope, will have the necessary effect."* Whatever the 'ginger' was it proved effective for the accident rate quickly dropped to expected levels. One early outcome of the accidents was the edict Peter Jeffrey enforced that only experienced pilots would fly the Tomahawks, all others could after they gained experience on the Gauntlet and Hurricane training aircraft but only with the CO's permission.

At the beginning of June the Squadron held seven serviceable Tomahawks and this total was reduced further within days when two more aircraft were written-off. The first was when the unfortunate South African pilot Lt A. Smith who

¹ AK407 and AK410

² AK354, AK365, AK366, AK378, AK388, AK402, AK439, AK440, AK456, AK464 and AK474

³ AK388

⁴ AK410

landed on an unfinished portion of the runway and struck a metal survey rod that resulted in Cat.B damage to the aircraft. Sadly, the final training accident also saw the first loss of a Tomahawk pilot and his mount. SGT Norm Evans⁵ was on a routine training flight when the aircraft was seen to enter a spiral power dive and crash into an orange grove two miles east of Jaffa: SGT Evans was killed and the aircraft totally destroyed. With the upcoming invasion of Syria HQME ensured the squadron received a hasty issue of Tomahawks and by the end of the first week in June the Squadron held 20 Tomahawks, of which 18 were fully serviceable and two with minor unserviceabilities.⁶ As upcoming events proved, they would need every aircraft they could get to successfully fulfil their assigned tasks.

The British invasion of Vichy French Syria and Lebanon - Operation Exporter Week 1 08-13 June 1941.

After the decision was made to invade Syria and Lebanon to deprive the Germans use of the airfields and ports from which they could open a second front against Egypt, the hard pressed British High Command had to allocate sufficient resources to overcome the Vichy French which, on paper, was a formidable fighting force. The main reason for the small resource allocation was that General Wavell was about to launch Operation Battleaxe with the aim of relieving the Tobruk garrison and the bulk of all British forces were committed to that operation. Nonetheless, a small mixed force of British, Australian, Free French and Indian troops under the Command of General Sir Maitland-Wilson was quickly formed and set the task. The RAF component of the force possessed some 60 aircraft comprised of two fighter squadrons, one light bomber squadron and one army co-operation squadron⁷. The opposing Vichy French Air Force (Armée de l'Air de Vichy) was a potent force enjoying numerical superiority by having 250+ aircraft on strength including 80 modern Morane-Saulnier 406 and Potez 63 fighters and importantly, 25 of the newly arrived Dewoitine D.520 fighters based at Rayak.

In the predawn darkness on 8th June 1941 all 3 Sqn personnel were busily making last minute preparations to ready their Tomahawks for the opening moves in Operation Exporter. The ground crew were double checking that all aircraft were 100% ready while the pilots were undergoing a comprehensive brief for their first attack mission. At 0525hrs the Commanding Officer, SQNLDR Peter Jeffrey, departed Lydda leading four other Tomahawks for the opening air attack on the Vichy Air Base at Rayak airfield located in the Beka Valley, Lebanon. At 0615hrs the formation swept over Rayak and finding no airborne opposition Jeffrey ordered his pilots to strafe targets of opportunity. The formation made two attacks and left six heavily damaged Dewoitine D.520 fighters, a biplane and two twin engined aircraft damaged and, several buildings and hangars ablaze. Later that day the Squadron supplied four Tomahawks to escort Blenheims for a successful attack upon oil storage tanks in Beirut. For the next few days Air Headquarters Palestine and Transjordan employed the squadron on defensive patrols over RN ships off the Lebanese coast and flying intercepts on reported enemy aircraft approaching the Haifa-Tel Aviv area; no enemy aircraft were encountered. As far as the pilots were concerned the only bright spot during this period was on 13th June when eight Tomahawks led by Peter Jeffrey departed Lydda at 1450hrs to fly a protective patrol over elements of the Royal Navy 15th Cruiser Squadron off Tyre and Sidon. The Tomahawks arrived over the ships and sighted eight Ju88s about to attack the British ships; Jeffrey gave the attack order and the Tomahawks set upon the JU88s and in the ensuing hectic dog-fight the Australians claimed three Ju88s shot down and two heavily damaged. Post war records revealed the (reportedly) Italian Marked Ju88s were in fact German aircraft of *II Staffel /Lehrgeschwader 1* from Eleusis, Greece and German records show that two aircraft failed to return, one returned with very heavy damage and two with lighter damage, the successful attackers were SQNLDR Jeffrey [AK476], FLTLT Jock Perrin [AK464] and FLGOFF J.H Saunders [AK427].

The first week of air operations concluded on 14th June with 3 Sqn flying 71 sorties of which only seven were dedicated to air defence missions. The reason for the mission disparity was that AHQ Palestine and Transjordan command was forced to change priorities on a daily basis between interception duties; bomber-escort duties; naval patrols; tactical reconnaissance; strafing of enemy land forces; and. protective patrols over troops. Nonetheless, the squadron claimed three enemy aircraft destroyed and five damaged for no losses and, was credited with numerous vehicles damaged or destroyed when flying close air support for British Army units. One aspect that alarmed the British High Command

⁵ RAAF pilot 402113 Sergeant Norman Arvon Evans (24) of North Sydney, New South Wales b.16 July 1916. KIA 5th June 1941.

⁶ 3 Sqn Operations Record Book p.119

⁷ Fighters: 80Sqn RAF (Hurricanes), 3 Sqn RAAF (Tomahawks), Bombers: 11Sqn RAF (Blenheim) Army Co-Operation: 208 Sqn RAF (One flight of Hurricanes and one of Gladiators)

however was that the Vichy Air Force, whilst suffering a steady stream of losses, was in fact growing as more and more aircraft arrived from France. On the other hand, RAF reinforcements were almost non-existent and squadrons in theatre were hard pressed to keep up with replacement machines.

Week 2 14-20 June 1941. The strain of war soon impacted the Squadron when combat damage, accidents and necessary maintenance meant only eight of the fifteen aircraft nominally held on charge could be provided for operations at any one time. Notwithstanding aircraft availability the squadron managed to provide 110 sorties in the second week of the invasion for air defence; naval support; army close support; and, escorting RAF reconnaissance aircraft. On 15th June at 1330hrs FLGOFF Saunders (AK464) located a large force of enemy AFVs and trucks in the Sassa-Kuneitra area preparing to advance toward the allied front lines⁸. AHQ consequently tasked the Squadron to attack the enemy force and as a result the CO departed Lydda at 1740hrs leading a strike force of seven Tomahawks. At 1755hrs the formation was at 7000ft approaching the target area when two bogies were sighted 1000ft above and heading toward. Peter Jeffrey [AK378] ordered an immediate attack and as he climbed up and over the hostiles he identified them as Martin Marylands with French markings. Jeffrey executed a stern attack and saw strikes on the starboard wing and engine causing a fire which forced the enemy to lose height before crash landing, two crewmen were seen to run from the wreckage. Meanwhile FLGOFF P.G Turnbull⁹ [AK427] pursued the other Maryland eastward while making three stern attacks. The starboard engine caught fire during the third attack and in a desperate effort to evade, the enemy pilot jettisoned his bomb load and dived away but to no avail. The fire consumed the starboard wing and Turnbull followed it down until it crashed and burned, the crew did not egress the aircraft. Captured enemy documents revealed that the two enemy shot down were Glen Martin M167F Maryland bombers of GBI/39 based at Rayak. *Sous Lieutenant* Baron was shot down and the crew captured, *Sergeant Chef* Tanchoux and his crew in Maryland No.118 were killed when their aircraft crashed. Following the air combat the Tomahawks successfully attacked the enemy ground convoy leaving numerous vehicles with varying degrees of damage. On the 19th FLTLT Al Rawlinson [AK366] led a formation of seven Tomahawks to provide escort for an 11Sqn Blenheim on a leaflet drop north of Jezzine, Lebanon. Nearing the target area a force of eight Glen Martin M167F bombers of *Escadrilles 6B & 7B, Flotille 4F* were seen bombing allied troops north of Saida. The Tomahawks immediately headed toward the Vichy bombers but the bombers had also seen the Tomahawks and headed away at good speed. A tail chase ensued and four pilots managed to engage and damage the bombers but none were shot down, Al Rawlinson [AK366], FLGOFF *Woof* Arthur [AK463], FLGOFF Les Knowles [AK476] and PLTOFF Pete Bothwell [AK436] all lodged combat claims for a damaged Martin bomber. Early on 20th June PLTOFF John Jackson [AK476] conducted a tactical reconnaissance along the Beirut-Damascus road and discovered two large and one smaller concentration of enemy MT at three locations totalling more than 150 vehicles of all types. A maximum effort by the Squadron saw eight Tomahawks under the command of FLTLT Jock Perrin [AK464] attacked the two larger columns between 1415 and 1515hrs. Follow-up reports showed dozens of damaged and destroyed vehicles littered along the road, testimony to the efficiency the strafing attacks.

The initial *Exporter* plan called for a three pronged land attack supported by air and naval assets but after two weeks of stiff resistance the plan was not working. A revised plan was implemented on June 18th which called for one major thrust under I Australian Corps (Lt-General John Lavarack) to capture Damascus and Beirut. Allied air reinforcements also started to arrive and 3 Sqn was placed under direct control of I Corps and relieved of the tedious, but necessary, defensive patrols. AHQ then sent a Warning Order for the squadron to move closer to the front at an Advanced Landing Ground near Jenin, 120km NNE of Tel Aviv. Ground elements departed for Jenin the next day and the aircraft moved to Jenin at various times over the next three days.

Week 3 21-30 June 1941 More strafing attacks against enemy MT were carried out on 21/22 June that resulted in a further reduction in the enemies transport capability. Offensive sweeps were also carried out to try and entice the Vichy fighters into the air, but the enemy did not respond. The following day however the Squadron came to grips with the enemy and emerged victorious. At 1720hrs SQNLDR Peter Jeffrey [AK464] led a formation of 12 Tomahawks for an attack on El Qousseir airfield located 35kms south of Homs, Syria. Disappointingly, there were no aircraft present at

⁸ AHQ Levant estimated the force consisted of 12 tanks, 11 Armoured Cars, 40 trucks and 1,500 troops.

⁹ 481 SQNLDR P. St G Turnbull DFC 3, 75 and 76 Sqns, b. Armidale, NSW.09Feb 1917. Killed in action 27 August 1942.

the airfield apart from an abandoned LeO451 bomber of GBI/31 which was destroyed along with a hangar and other buildings. On the return trip to Jenin the Tomahawks were attacked by nine or ten Dewoitines of GCIII/6 from Rayak airfield. FLGOFF Bothwell [AK420] shot down two Dewoitines flown by *Lieutenant Stenou* and *Sergeant Chef Savinel* and both pilots went down with their machines. Bothwell also attacked a third Dewoitine and set it alight but did not see it crash as he was attacked by another enemy soon after. He claimed a probable but the burning Dewoitine was flown by *Sous Lieutenant Le Gloan* and he managed to make a crash landing at Rayak. FLGOFF Knowles [AK436] blew the wing tip off one Dewoitine and claimed it as damaged. On the debit side of the ledger was SGT Reid [AK463] who was hit by explosive bullets damaging the starboard mainplane, aileron and supercharger housing; and, FLGOFF Turnbull [AK456] sustained light damage to the starboard wing and fuselage. The squadron sent ten aircraft to Rayak the next day on an offensive patrol but no enemy were encountered.

On the evening of the 24th the Squadron was tasked to preposition Tomahawks the next morning at LG H.4 in Syria where they were to prepare for a mission to support *Habforce*¹⁰ which had been under increasing air attacks over the last few days as they moved into Syria from Iraq. FLTLT Perrin [AK464] departed Jenin at 1012hrs leading eight Tomahawks and flew to H.4 where they prepared for an Offensive Patrol over Palmyra. The eight aircraft launched at 1341hrs and at 1355hrs they spotted six LeO451 bombers (3 from GBI/12 and 3 from GBI/31) just as they were about to bomb allied troops. All three of the GBI/12 bombers were shot down and one of the GBI/31 bombers. FLGOFF Jackson [AK366], FLGOFF Sanders [AK383], SGT Cameron [AK436] all shot down a bomber while FLGOFF Jewel [AK378] set the starboard engine of a bomber alight which was last seen leaving the area on fire and losing height. Army elements later confirmed this aircraft was also destroyed. Additionally, both remaining bombers were heavily damaged. The squadron was tasked with another *Habforce* support mission the following day and nine Tomahawks under the command of FLTLT Al Rawlinson [AK446] departed Jenin at 0805hrs on 26 June to attack Homs and Rayak airfields. At Homs a devastating first pass destroyed five D.520s, six suffered severe damage and the remainder riddled with bullet holes; effectively almost wiping out GCII/3. The aircraft then flew to Rayak where another D520 was destroyed, two badly damaged and three Potez 25TOEs badly damaged with two more Potez lightly damaged¹¹. Leaving Rayak and heading home the Tomahawks came across a convoy of Vichy MT and proceeded to shoot up the convoy, during this engagement SGT Baillie [AK366] was hit by AAA and crash landed north of Lake Tiberius in Palestine near the Sea of Galilee, the pilot was picked up by an Army patrol and returned to Jenin later. On the 27th and 28th June the squadron was tasked to provide close escort for Blenheims attacking enemy ground forces and supply areas but Vichy fighters were conspicuous by their absence. The bomber escort mission on the 28th went smoothly and after the Blenheims departed for their base FLTLT Al Rawlinson led his nine Tomahawks on a protective patrol of Australian troops in Palmyra. The squadron was spread out in combat formation with two leading with one swinger trailing, and two vics of three well out to either side.

At approximately 1050hrs Rawlinson [AK466] sighted two Glenn Martins attacking allied MT just south of Palmyra and attacked with his section. Rawlinson selected the leader and SGT Wilson¹² [AK429] attacked the second bomber, while PLTOFF Turnbull [AK476] provided top cover. Rawlinson delivered a quarter attack and closed to within 30 yards of the bomber. Large pieces of the enemy's engine, tail plane and fuselage broke away under the onslaught and the enemy pilot quickly rolled over and dived down to make a successful crash landing, two men were seen walking away from the burning wreckage. Meanwhile, Wilson made a stern attack and set his target's starboard engine alight before breaking away to avoid a collision. Setting up for quarter attack he saw the fire had spread and the enemy made a steep rolling dive and attempted to crash land but hit the ground at high speed causing the aircraft to explode into many pieces. Wilson climbed back to rejoin his formation but could not find anyone so he retired from the action and returned to Damascus.

After his successful attack Rawlinson rejoined Turnbull and both aircraft met up with the formation over Palmyra. Soon after, Rawlinson sighted bombs bursting approximately 10 miles to the east and swung the formation in that direction and soon sighted another two bombers preparing to attack the troops. Quickly overhauling the bombers Rawlinson

¹⁰ *Habforce*, short for Habbaniya Force, was a British Army unit located in Iraq that was also used for the invasion of Syria.

¹¹ Canwell, Diane. *Vichy Air Force at War: The French Air Force That Fought the Allies in World War II*. Pen & Sword Aviation.

¹² 407088 Sergeant R.K Wilkinson b. Glen Osmond, Adelaide SA. Killed in action 09 Dec 1941

selected the rear aircraft and delivered a very close range stern attack causing the bomber to burst into flames, roll over and spin into the ground. Having quickly despatched the first of the two bombers Rawlinson quickly manoeuvred onto the leaders tail and opened fire from 100 yards and closed in to 30 yards. Large chunks fell off the bomber and Rawlinson saw three people jump out and chutes open before the bomber crashed and burst apart upon hitting the ground. PLTOFF Turnbull also joined in the spoils when he shot down a third pair of bombers that were discovered soon after the first two pairs were despatched. The elated Tomahawk pilots flew back to Damascus where they refuelled and departed for Jenin. Unfortunately the mission ended on a low note when SGT Randall¹³ [AK427] was killed soon after departure from Damascus when he tried to turn back after his engine failed. For the Vichy Air Force this day was a very bad one especially for *Flotille 4F* who had launched six Martin M167Fs to attack allied positions in and around Palmyra. Of the twenty four crewmen on this fateful mission six officers and fourteen airmen were killed and only four survived, all of them with various wounds.

The final two mission of Week 3 involved a morning bomber escort after which the aircraft landed at the Squadron's new operating base at Rosh Pinna in northern Palestine and, an afternoon airfield attack. The morning mission was uneventful but the afternoon mission added more victories to the Squadron's growing tally. Peter Jeffrey [AK476] led eight Tomahawks from Rosh Pinna at 1750hrs for a low level attack on Ras Baalbeck airfield in the Beka Valley, Lebanon. No aircraft or other worthwhile targets were present at the primary so Jeffrey led his formation north to check the secondary target which was the airfield at Qousseir (Al-Qusayr) some 25 miles south of Homs, Syria. Unfortunately for *GBI/39* and their remaining Glenn Martin bombers, Vichy HQ had that very day issued an order for *GBI/39* to move immediately from Madjaloun airfield to Qousseir, a move which they accomplished without problem and arrived at Qousseir shortly after 1600hrs. At approximately 1640hrs the Tomahawks swept over the surrounding hills and delivered a devastating low level strafing run that destroyed three of the Martin bombers and severely damaged another.

On the second pass a 4-engined Farman.222 bomber, a trimotor transport aircraft also sustained heavy damage while a fuel storage tank, a hangar and ammunition store all went up in flames. Even as the Tomahawks pulled out for their return to Rosh Pinna an enemy Martin was seen by FLGOFF W.G Arthur [AK538] circling the airfield from afar. The aircraft in question was a Martin 167F flown by *Sous Lieutenant* Lefroid that had departed Madjaloun with the other Martins but had diverted to drop off medical supplies. Arthur and FLGOFF Les Knowles¹⁴[AK436] broke from the formation to attack the bomber but things were not as easy as it would appear. Knowles noted in his combat report: '*This Glenn Martin was exceptionally fast and at 41 inches and 2950 revs with IAS of 265mph closing speed would not be any more than 5 miles per hour*'. The two Tomahawks pursued the fleeing Martin for the next 35 minutes at ground level over the plains and into the coastal mountains and Knowles managed two stern attacks during the chase that caused damage to both wing tanks but did not diminish the speed. Eventually Lefroid had to climb over a ridge and Knowles made the most of this opportunity and hit the enemy in the port engine. Lefroid then fled down the opposite side of the ridge and headed out to sea just north of Beirut and as Knowles closed in for the kill his guns stopped and he pulled away to clear the stoppage he called for Arthur to continue the fight. After clearing the stoppage Knowles assumed the lead again and finally made a beam attack approximately 30 miles off the Lebanese coast and hit the port engine again causing it to seize. The two assailants then watched the dying Martin as it pitched up to 300ft before rolling over and crashing back down into the sea. No survivors were seen and after a quick search the Tomahawks departed for home base. The skill, airmanship and courage displayed by *Sous Lieutenant* Lefroid in a hopeless situation was typical of most Vichy pilots involved in air operations during the campaign. Although Vichy lost more aircraft than the RAF during the Campaign in the field of aerial combat the Vichy lost 27 machines and the RAF 26.

End of the Syrian Campaign 01-11 July 1941. At the opening of July the Squadron was still divided with A and B Flights operating from Rosh Pinna and the rear HQ consisting of administration, stores and workshops at RAF Lydda. At 0700hrs Peter Jeffrey departed Rosh Pinna with seven Tomahawks tasked for a low level attack on Furglus Landing Ground located east of Homs, Syria. The formation could not find Furglus and moved on to Homs but no aircraft were present so Jeffrey decided to check on Baalbeck LG. Here they found several Potez 63-11 and Potez 25TOE aircraft

¹³ 407080 Sergeant M.P.A Randell b. North Terrace, Adelaide SA. Killed in action 28 Jun 1941

¹⁴ 456 FLTLT L.E.S Knowles regular air force officer b. Hawthorn Victoria 18 Aug 1917. Killed in action 22 Nov 1941.

(probably from GR.II/39 and EO.595) which they promptly strafed before leaving because of fuel limitations. The one pass strafing attack resulted in a Potez 63-11 and two Potez 25TOE destroyed and five other aircraft damaged. The next couple of missions were strafing attacks along the Beirut-Haifa road in support of ground forces but on the afternoon of 2nd July the squadron was tasked with an unusual mission. FLGOFF J. Jackson¹⁵ departed Rosh Pinna leading seven Tomahawks to attack the Vichy Flying Boat base at Tripoli where they found two monoplane seaplanes and left them in a sinking condition. For the next seven days from 3rd to 9th July the Squadron provided close escort to 45 Sqn Blenheims as the latter were tasked to bomb a wide range of targets in support of the ground forces. Interspersed with the bomber escort missions were Army close air support sorties to strafe enemy troops, transport concentrations and other specified targets. Enemy fighters did not interfere with any of these flights but matters changed on the 10th when the pilots came to grips with the Vichy Air Force again for the last air engagements of the Syrian campaign.

The Squadron was called upon to mount a maximum effort to press the beleaguered Vichy forces and in response launched three flights of six and one of eight Tomahawks during the day: one to attack retreating ground transports north east of Damour; one to attack airfields used by Vichy aircraft to attack advancing Australian 7th Division forces; and two to escort Blenheim bombers. SQNLDR Peter Jeffery [AK476] led with six Tomahawks at 650hrs and successfully attacked more than two dozen vehicles north of Ainzhalta. FLTLT Al Rawlinson [AM386] departed Rosh Pinna at 0625hrs leading six Tomahawks for low level attacks on Vichy aerodromes at Hama, Homs, Qousseir and Talia. At Hama they attacked the LeO451s of GBI/25, destroying two and damaging six others; no aircraft were present at Homs or Qousseir but at Talia they located and attacked a mixed bag of aircraft and left two twin-engined and three single engined (unidentified) aircraft heavily damaged and burning. Both flights were back at Rosh Pinna by 0840hrs where seven machines were quickly serviced, refuelled and rearmed for another mission. At 1005hrs FLTLT J. Jackson [AM378] departed leading seven Tomahawks tasked to escort 12 Blenheims of 45Sqn for an attack on an ammunition dump south of Beirut. The Blenheims successfully bombed the target and were rewarded with a huge explosion before wheeling around and heading for home. Meanwhile, four Vichy bombers of GBI/39 escorted by five Dewoitines of *Escadrille IAC*, were enroute from Madjaloun to attack British forces approaching Beirut. As they neared their target the Dewoitines came across what they thought were 12 unescorted Blenheims directly above them and attacked from below. Three Blenheims were quickly shot down, one damaged so badly it crashed near its base and, six others were damaged¹⁶ to some degree before the Tomahawks arrived on the scene. In a short sharp encounter all five of the Dewoitines were shot down, the victorious pilots were: FLGOFF P.G Turnbull [AK386] claimed two; FLTLT J. Jackson [AM378], PLTOFF E.H Lane [AK526] and SGT G.E Hiller [AK476] claimed one each. The final attack for the day was when FLTLT Al Rawlinson [AM386] led eight Tomahawks as escorts for Blenheims bombing near Damour and after the Blenheims finished bombing the Tomahawks strafed MT in the area

The final day of the Syrian campaign occurred on July 11 and preparation for the first 3Sqn strikes of the day entailed positioning aircraft to forward bases and preparing for missions. This process began at began at 0742hrs when the CO Peter Jeffrey [AK476] led a force of six Tomahawks to Palmyra where the aircraft were refuelled and the pilots together with six Hurricane pilots of 450/260Sqn and six from 80Sqn were briefed on the upcoming mission. The second movement was at 0910hrs when six Tomahawks repositioned to Damascus aerodrome to refuel and prepare for a strike. At 1115hrs the flight departed Damascus to attack artillery and transports on Mazalridge and on this mission FLGOFF L.E Knowles was hit by AAA and headed back toward Damascus but failed to reach there before crash landing some 10 miles NNW of the town. Knowles was picked up by an Army unit and returned to the Squadron.

The penultimate 3Sqn operational mission of the campaign occurred when the combined Tomahawk/Hurricane force departed Palmyra at 1200hrs under the command of Peter Jeffrey to carry out low level attacks on Vichy controlled landing grounds at Abu Danne, Fah, Aleppo and Hama. Nothing was found at Danne but three large three-engined transports were found and destroyed at Fah. At the third LG, Aleppo, the force located approximately nine LeO451s of GBI/25 dispersed on the field and in the ensuing attack they destroyed three and damaged five others before heading for the last LG at Hama. At Hama the force located a mixed gathering of Potez 63.11 and LeO451s from GR.II/39 and

¹⁵ 493 SQNLDR J. F. Jackson, DFC, 3, 4 and 75 Sqn, b. Brisbane, 23 Feb 1908. Killed in action 28 Apr 1942 in New Guinea.

¹⁶ Canwell, Diane. Vichy Air Force at War: The French Air Force That Fought The Allies in World War II. Pen & Sword Aviation. Kindle Edition.

GBII/25 respectively then proceeded to attack vigorously. As the force departed the scene they left behind one destroyed Potez 63.11; one Potez 63.11, three LeO451, 1 Bloch and three other (unidentified) twin-engined aircraft with varying degrees of damage. This was not the end of this raid however, unbeknownst to the attackers a Vichy force of LeO451s with Dewoitine escorts had departed Hama to attack British forces not long before the strike force closed in for their attack on Hama. One of the Dewoitine escorts flown by Lieutenant Lèté experienced some mechanical problems and turned back to Hama and on the return flight he came across three Tomahawks about 20 miles south west of Hama. The Tomahawk flight comprised FLGOFF J.F Jackson [AM378], PLTOFF R.H Gibbes [AK464] and PLTOFF Fischer [AK526]. At approximately 1320hrs Lèté closed up to the Tomahawks undetected and dived down to attack the rearmost machine, his aim was good and PLTOFF Fischer was shot down¹⁷ and listed as KIA. The first intimation the other two had that something was amiss was when the Dewoitine overshot them and dived away to escape. However, the Dewoitine was no match for a Tomahawk in a dive and Jackson soon caught up and delivered two attacks hitting his opponent several times. After delivering a good quarter attack Jackson overshot and Gibbes came in and delivered a punishing quarter attack whereupon the Dewoitine dived to the ground and crash landed. Lieutenant Lèté escaped the downed aircraft and lived to fight another day. As a postscript to the above action the Squadron received news on 20th July that FLGOFF Fischer was not KIA but was safe in Aleppo, he returned to the Squadron at Rayak three days later. The final mission occurred at 1850hrs when the five Tomahawks at Damascus repeated their earlier mission against artillery and transports on Mazalridge. After completing the mission the aircraft returned to Damascus to refuel then returned to Rosh Pinna later in the evening. An Armistice with Vichy Forces was announced late on the 11th of July and the cease fire took effect at midnight. However, the squadron was placed on 5-minute readiness for the next four days in case the Armistice failed but no incidents occurred so the squadron was stood down on the 14th. Operation Exporter began on 8th June 1941 and concluded on 11th July 1941, a total duration of 34 days and during that period 3 Squadron flew 86 operations consisting of 557 individual sorties. Two Tomahawks were lost on operations: one was shot down in aerial combat; and, one crash landed due to damage received from AAA. One other Tomahawk was lost from a non-operational flying accident. Also, six Tomahawks were damaged on operations, struck off Squadron strength and returned to a RAF Maintenance Unit for repair. Squadron pilots claimed 24 aircraft destroyed and eight damaged in aerial combat, plus 25 destroyed and 43 damaged in airfield strafing attacks, giving a total of 49 aircraft destroyed and 51 damaged.

Return to the Western Desert

All squadron elements reunited at Rayak on July 20 and on the 23rd they were tasked to provide air defence for Beirut but only on an on-call basis. The remainder of the month was spent conducting intense flying training to address some of the shortcomings identified during the recent campaign. Also, maintenance crews were finally given the chance to come to grips with the aircraft, bearing in mind the Squadron had only possessed the aircraft for a short period of time. The lull in combat continued throughout August and this lull provided the perfect opportunity to resupply, re-equip and give most personnel at least a few days leave. There was also a change in pilots with some of the more experienced men going to other units and some returning to Australia. Probably the main benefit was the fact that all pilots got to fly many hours honing airmanship skills, air fighting tactics and flight formation drills which not only made them more familiar with their aircraft but gave them confidence in their ability which was to prove a godsend when they engaged the very experienced Luftwaffe in the near future. At month's end the Squadron received orders to move back to the Western Desert utilising Base Landing Ground 86 at Amriya located 16km south-southwest of Alexandria for administration and maintenance matters and, for operational use, at Operating Landing Ground 13 located near Sidi Heneish 200km west of Alexandria and 315km east of Tobruk. The move began on 04 September and all squadron elements were in Amriya on 07 September where they were told to wait while HQ 204 Group reassessed where the squadron would move next. The following day the CO was informed that the entire Squadron would be based at LG102 near Sidi Heneish and the move was made the next day. HQ 204 Group also stated the squadron would be ready for operations on 13th September to conduct defensive and/or offensive patrols between Sidi Barrani and Mersa Matruh.

¹⁷ This was the only 3 Sqn Tomahawk lost on an air-to-air engagement during *Operation Exporter*.

Operations from LG102 Sidi Heneish, Egypt.

As directed, the Squadron was ready for operations on the 13th Sep and at 0635hrs the CO, Peter Jeffrey [Ak476], departed LG102 leading 12 Tomahawks for a defensive patrol over Sidi Barrani aerodrome, no enemy were encountered and all aircraft returned to base at 0930hrs. Similar patrols were flown the next day over Sidi Barrani and Fuka airfields and on the fourth patrol of the day six aircraft led by FLTLT J.F Jackson [AK390] were tasked to attack enemy aircraft at Gambut aerodrome. Reconnaissance reports stated that the Gambut complex of LGs contained more than 50 German and Italian fighters plus large numbers of bombers and transports and was well protected by AAA, for this reason the Tomahawk pilots were briefed to perform a one-pass strafing attack and retreat. At 1900hrs the aircraft approached Gambut in echelon right formation at 1000ft and PLTOFF H.G Roberts [AK439] saw a Ju88 below him in the landing pattern crossing diagonally across his front and attacked immediately. A long burst delivered from the rear quarter resulted in numerous hits on the port engine which burst into flames and started streaming thick black smoke but Roberts was forced to break away when he was attacked by a Bf109 and did not see what happened to the Junkers. PLTOFF L. Lees [AK456] also saw a Ju88 in the landing pattern and delivered a long range quarter attack but did not observe any results as he too was forced to break away when a Bf109 attacked him from the starboard quarter, simultaneously a Me110 attacked him from head on. Lees broke away and headed away from the airfield pursued by two Bf109s and a Me110, but taking the time to strafe a twin engined aircraft that had just landed. The three Germans pursued Lees taking turns to make long range quarter attacks forcing Lees to take avoiding action each time thus decreasing the distance between him and his opponents. Eventually the incessant attacks took their toll and a burst hit the starboard elevator and disabled the right rudder pedal. Soon after that another burst of cannon fire blew off the port aileron causing the aircraft to flick onto its back out of a steep left hand turn, dived and squashed onto the ground at 200mph. The aircraft crashed 35miles south east of Gambut and beside the Trigh Capuzzo road. A dazed and fortunate Lees took stock of his situation and started walking south-east toward allied lines and after spending a cold night in the open desert was picked up by an advance patrol of British armoured cars at 1100hrs atop the escarpment south of Sollum. He returned to the squadron on 18th Sep none the worse for his adventures.

Meanwhile, the other Tomahawks delivered their one-pass strafing attack across the airfield but no claims were submitted other than the one by Roberts. Jackson stated there were indeed lots of aircraft on the airfield but the attack was a very quick low level affair and there was simply no time to pick individual targets. He, and the other pilots, could only open fire and yaw the aircraft from side to side in an attempt to inflict as much damage as possible in the target rich environment. Moreover, the airborne presence of many enemy fighters prevented any realistic chance of lingering to determine the extent of their attack. All the Tomahawks returned to base by 1945hrs and it was then the realization hit that two of the six Tomahawks failed to return and were listed as MIA. PLTOFF Lees fate was quickly determined but that of FLGOFF D.J Burbury¹⁸ [AK464] was not resolved until 29Oct41 when the Red Cross informed RAF London that Burbury was a POW in Germany. Burbury later stated that he was shot down by Bf109s after completing his strafing attack and crash landed approximately 25 miles from Gambut. He then spent seven days evading capture and trying to reach British lines but was captured by Italian troops and handed over to the Germans. Sent to Germany for incarceration as a POW where he remained until his release by the Red Army on 22Apr45. Both *I./JG27* and *153^o Gruppo CT* reported intercepting the Tomahawks, each unit claiming two shot down, although only two were actually lost.

Following the action of the 14th the Squadron was employed on Offensive Patrols over the triangle formed by Bardia, Tobruk and Maddalena, in which German fighters were most likely to be encountered but no fighters were met. Interspersed with the fighter sweeps were convoy escort missions and light bomber escort, again no enemy fighters were engaged. The only air combat during the period occurred on the 24th when twelve Tomahawks were returning to Base at the end of a fruitless Offensive Sweep when FLTLT John Saunders [AK539] spotted a lone Ju88 and broke from the formation with his wingman SGT Geoff Hiller [AK407] to attack the lone German aircraft. Saunders delivered a stern attack that resulted in thick black smoke pouring from the port engine, Hiller also attacked from the stern but did not observe any additional result. Saunders then climbed sunward to position for another attack and Hiller lost contact with his leader and after stooging around for a while rejoined the formation. In the meantime Saunders made a couple of

¹⁸ 250703 FLGOFF David John Burbury (29) of Oatlands, Tasmania b. 26Mar1912. Discharged 23Oct1945

more attacks on the Ju88 leaving the port engine and wing in flames as the aircraft spiralled down. However, Saunders did not observe the Junkers crash as he was bounced by five or six Bf.109Fs and before he escaped into the clouds and set course for base he was hit in the wing by a cannon shell that fractured an oil pipe. Emerging from the clouds he was immediately attacked by a single Bf109 and hit in the engine which forced him to make a crash landing near Sidi Suluman. After coming to rest he quickly egressed the aircraft and watched the 109 destroy his wrecked Tomahawk. Saunders demise was witnessed by British troops who saw both the Ju88 and the Tomahawk crash then rescued Saunders and took him to field hospital to treat his minor wounds and broken toe, he was returned to the squadron a few days later. Replacement aircraft and personnel constantly trickled into the squadron during September at the end of the month 3 Sqn held 19 Tomahawks on charge and almost a full complement of personnel. In addition to the 19 on strength, a further six Tomahawks were held in sealed reserve that could not be used without the direct permission of the Air Officer Commanding.

The first two weeks of October provided more of the same for Squadron with offensive sweeps, convoy and bomber escort missions, all of which met with no fighter opposition. On the 12th FLGOFF Woof Arthur¹⁹ [AN314] departed Sidi Heneish at 0730hrs leading 12 Tomahawks and joined a further 12 Tomahawks from No.2 SAAF to carry out a protective patrol over British forward troops operating in the Sheferzen area, 3Sqn were the designated low squadron while 2 SAAF Sqn provided the high cover. At approximately 0910hrs 3Sqn was at 10,000ft over the forward area in a six fluid pair formation when a group of Bf109s were spotted approaching from the rear and 5000ft higher. FLGOFF R.H Gibbes [AK465] quickly identified the enemy as two formations one of four Bf109E, the other of three Bf109F and broadcast his warning before turning into the enemy. A typical swirling, chaotic dogfight then ensued with aircraft taking snap shots every time a target presented, all the while keeping an eye on their six. The melee lasted for approximately 15-20 minutes and when the opposing groups disengaged there were several gaps in the 3Sqn formation. SGT Tommy Parker²⁰ [AN355] was hit on the port side near the cockpit setting the fuel tank ablaze at which Parker baled out. He was apparently fatally wounded during the attack because he was later found dead in his parachute with serious wounds. SGT Derek Scott [AK566] sustained severe damage to his machine and made a successful wheels up crash landing at LG.05, Scott was uninjured but the aircraft was severely damaged. FLGOFF H.G Roberts [AK516] was hit by cannon shells in the port wing and had the elevators shot away He managed a forced landed behind the allied front lines and taxied the aircraft for four miles to the HQ of C Squadron 4th Armoured Car Regiment of the South African Army, who then arranged transport for him back to base. The following day he returned to the aircraft with his ground crew where they removed the tail unit from a nearby pranged 112Sqn aircraft and affixed it to AK516 which was then flown back to Base on 14Oct41. On the positive side of the ledger SGT A.C Cameron [AK506] claimed a Bf109F destroyed and FLGOFF W.E Jewel claimed another as a probable. Also, FLGOFF Arthur, FLGOFF Gibbes and FLGOFF Fischer [AK390] lodged combat reports claiming damage to a Bf109. The final weeks of October saw no further air combat and consisted of the aforementioned patrols. Late in the month the squadron began to implement new tactics and formations based on lessons learned from their previous encounters with German fighters. The practices began with squadron sized training flights and culminated with three squadrons of 258 Wing's Tomahawks [36+ aircraft] learning their new role before the commencement of *Operation Crusader* in mid-November. An odd aspect of the training was the directive from AHQ WDAF that squadrons were to fly a formation of aircraft pairs in line astern, all weaving. For some inexplicable reason the WDAF was still reluctant to use the proven German 'finger-four' formation which had been in use with most UK based fighter squadrons for several months

Early November saw no aerial fighting and on the 3rd the squadron was ordered to prepare for a move forward to LG.110 located some 50km south of Sidi Barrani to support the upcoming offensive. New aircraft were issued to replace losses and all 19 Tomahawks were brought up to a fully serviceable condition. The squadron saw a change of command when Peter Jeffrey was promoted to Wing Commander and placed in charge of No.2 Operational Wing which necessitated the recall of Squadron Leader Al Rawlinson from No.71 Operational Training Unit to command the squadron. From the 6th to the 13th a flight of six aircraft flew daily to and from LG.110 but apart from futile scrambles no action ensued, all

¹⁹ 565 FLGOFF Wilfred 'Woof' Arthur DSO DFC (22) of Sydney, NSW survived the War and discharged as a Group Captain on 14Feb46. Died on 23rd December 2000 aged 81 years.

²⁰ 402391 SGT Thomas Dudley Parker (28) b. Newcastle NSW 10 Aug 1913. Killed in action 12 Oct 1941.

that changed on the 14th when 19 Tomahawks were flown to LG.110 where they conducted more strenuous training for the battle ahead. On the 15th WNGCDR Peter Jeffrey [AN244] led a formation of 24 Tomahawks from 3 Sqn and 112Sqn RAF for three consecutive days; on the 15th the formation escorted tactical reconnaissance aircraft over Bardia and Gambut; on the 16th the formation flew an offensive fighter sweep over Maddelena and Menastir; and, on the 17th they escorted Blenheims and Hurricanes on a strafing and bombing mission to Beheira airfield. On Saturday November 18, the opening day of *Operation Crusader*, Peter Jeffrey [AN244] led a combined force of 36 Tomahawks from 3Sqn, 112Sqn, 250Sqn and eight Hurricanes from the RN Fighter Sqn on an uneventful protective patrol over advancing British Armoured Divisions and troops. The opening two days of *Crusader* went very well for the British and deep penetrations were made in the German lines, there was however one significant setback when the Italian 132nd Armoured Division soundly defeated the British 22nd Armoured Brigade at Bir el Gubi.

Ground commanders complained it was taking too long for air cover to reach them at the front and on the 19th Jeffrey led 3 and 112Sqn from Sidi Heneish led for another wing sweep over the front lines. This time, in response to the Army demands, the formation landed at LG.122 near Fort Maddelena in Libya which was much closer to the British Army formations. Enroute to LG.122 FLGOFF Frank Fischer [AK407] developed oil problems and was heading back to Sidi Heneish when he spotted four Bf109s strafing Australian Troops 30km north of Maddalena. He attacked and shot down one enemy but was then forced down because of battle damage and his aircraft destroyed on the ground. Fischer²¹ received light shrapnel wounds to arm, leg and chest and was taken to a field clearing station. The next day the squadron was tasked for three missions, an offensive wing sweep in the morning and two bomber escorts in the afternoon. At 0610hrs WNGCDR Peter Jeffrey [AN244] led a formation of 21 Tomahawks from 3 Sqn and 112Sq RAF for a protective patrol over forward troops in the El Adem – Acroma area. At 0720hrs the formation was at 10,000ft five miles SE of El Adem when four Me.110 fighters were reported 4,000ft below on the port quarter, Jeffrey ordered 3Sqn to attack and 112Sqn to remain on high. The Me.110s broke formation with two diving away and two climbing away and in the ensuing wild dogfight 3sqn claimed three shot down and one damaged. FLGOFF Bobby Gibbes [AN465], FLTLT Les Knowles [AN410] and FLTLT J.G Manford [AK390] were credited with two shared kills while SGT R.H Simes [AM507] was credited with one destroyed and one damaged. German records revealed the Me.110s were from 8/ZG26 and stated three were shot down and one heavily damaged. The Tomahawks did not have it all their own way, as reflected in the after action reports which highlighted the intense and accurate fire from all the German rear gunners. FLGOFF Bobby Gibbes had his landing gear damaged forcing him to make a belly landing at LG.122; FLTLT Les Knowles had his cockpit shattered and five other rounds damaged his port wing; and, three other aircraft sustained minor damage from the gunners.

After the initial rapid gains of *Crusader* the German resistance stiffened and this was manifested by increased Luftwaffe operations from the 20th onwards. On the 22nd the Germans began large scale fighter sweeps with the objective of clearing allied fighters from the air so their dive bombers could attack British ground forces, in particular the Armoured Divisions. The 22nd of November will always be known as Black Saturday in the squadron's annals because the squadron lost five pilots killed in pivotal air battles fought this day which did much to shape subsequent course of events when engaging Axis air forces. The day began at 0630hrs when Al Rawlinson briefed his pilots on the morning's mission to escort Blenheims from 45Sqn to attack targets in the Bir Gubi area, he stressed Intelligence reports showed a build-up of German fighters and directed his pilots to maintain extra vigilance. Rawlinson [AN408] departed LG.122 at 0945hrs leading eleven other Tomahawks in two flights of six and rendezvoused with the Blenheims, Rawlinson (A Flt) acted as high cover and FLGOF Gibbes (B Flt) stayed with the Blenheims as close escort. Over the target the high cover was attacked by fifteen Bf.109s (from 1/JG27) and put up a spirited defence that prevent all but two of the enemy breaking through to attack the bombers. The two that did get through only fired a brief ineffectual burst at the bombers before being attacked by the FLGOFF Gibbes [AN224] and SGT Watson [AK510]. Unfortunately, Watson was hit hard by the attacking 109 and Gibbes saw him half roll and go into a lazy spiral dive which was characteristic of a dead or unconscious pilot at the controls. Driving away the two assailants allowed the Blenheims to complete their bombing

²¹ 250626 FLGOFF Frank Fischer DFC (21) b. 01 Feb 1920. Did not return to 3Sqn. Repatriated to Australia, discharged as a Squadron Leader on 10Oct 1944.

task before wheeling around and heading for home escorted by the remaining B Flt aircraft. Meanwhile, A Flt had paid the price for their defence as two of their six aircraft were shot down and two damaged, FLTLT John Saunders [AN416] and PLTOFF Eric Lane [AM378] were killed while the machines of FLTLT Woof Arthur [AN389] and SGT Hiller [AN373] were damaged. During the top cover scrap SGT Derek Scott [AN305] claimed two Bf.109s as probables while Al Rawlinson claimed two damaged and Woof Arthur claimed one. In fact Scott's claim was upgraded to two confirmed destroyed based on the eyewitness accounts of several Blenheim crews. Ultra intercepts confirmed that 1/JG27 reported one missing and one force landed north-west of Bir El Gubi, as usual the German reporting system made no mention of damaged aircraft.

The next squadron mission was purely a maximum effort fighter sweep whose goal was to attrite enemy fighters in aerial combat. At 1540hrs fourteen Tomahawks plus nine from 112Sqn departed LG.122 under the command of WNGCDR Jeffrey [AN244]. However, not long after take-off two of the 3Sqn aircraft FLGOFF J.G Manford [AK506] and SGT Rex Wilson [AM476] developed magneto problems and returned to base. Two waiting spares piloted by FLGOFF Bobby Gibbes [AN224] and SQNLDR Al Rawlinson [AN365] were launched at 1615hrs to replace the unserviceable aircraft. The now complete formation passed over the wire fence boundary between Libya and Egypt climbing through 10,000ft south-east of El Adem when a gaggle of aircraft was seen and identified above the formation heading towards. The Leader turned the formation behind the 20+ Bf.109s as the latter clawed for height and prepared to attack the Tomahawks. The enemy formed a circle above the Tomahawks and started coming down sporadically in twos and threes, make a fast passing diving attack through the formation then climb back to the circle and repeat the process. In response the Tomahawks formed their own circle and in the words of Bobby Gibbes: *'The circle was a recommended tactic and supposedly provided great protection to all aircraft in it. When enemy aircraft attacked, they would be subject to the firepower of one or more aeroplanes flying behind the machine being attacked. What a dreadful fallacy this theory really was. All it did with certainty, was to ensure that the leader was no longer recognisable, and virtually this made all aircraft leaderless. As the pairs were broken up by repeated attacks, we became a gaggle of single aircraft'*.

During this action the Germans held a huge tactical advantage because the Tomahawks were operating approximately 250km from LG.122 and the Germans were operating very close to their own base meaning they could be profligate with the fuel and ammunition during their attacks and return to base for a rapid refuel and rearm before returning to the fray. After a gruelling hour of combat a deadlock developed as the opposing forces circled incessantly and the fight gradually went lower and lower until the Tomahawks were nearly on the desert floor. This lower altitude actually benefited the Tomahawks somewhat because the 109s could no longer dive through the formation at speed after attacking instead, they were forced to break off their attacks much earlier and pitch up which meant they were now exposing their vulnerable bellies to the Tomahawks for a few precious seconds, which the allied pilots took full advantage of and several Germans were hit as they pitched up and away. On the other hand, because of the low altitude the Tomahawks were now in range of German ground elements and a hail of AAA was fired at the formation adding to their worries. In the confused melee that typifies a high speed dogfight a few cases were noted by the participants that were passed on to others and at debriefings: FLGOFF Eddie Jackson [AN441] was hit in the wing by 20mm cannon shells and a big section of the wing was blasted away. Despite this damage Jackson stayed in the fight which spoke volumes for the tough construction of the Tomahawk; FLTLT Lindsay Knowles [AN410] climbed out of the circle and carried out a head-on attack on a diving 109, an incident witnessed by Bobby Gibbes: *'Each held his attack until the last moment before breaking. They left it too long, clipped their starboard wings and each flew in a gentle but steepening dive away from each other to the desert below and hit almost simultaneously. A wing from each aircraft fluttered down almost together like falling leaves, hitting the ground about half way between the crashed aircraft. I watched and prayed that our pilot would bale out but he did not open his canopy, and was probably knocked out by the impact. The 109 pilot also went in with his aircraft'*; and, Gibbes also recounted the demise of another 109 when he broke from the circle and went to the assistance of a Tomahawk under attack, in his words: *'I was trying to get a shot at it, when a Tomahawk dived from somewhere above with a lot of speed and firing from about a hundred yards, hit it cleanly in about the cockpit area. The Messerschmitt disintegrated in a ball of flames. As I watched the wings and bits falling down I could only*

admire such magnificent shooting. The Bf109 in question was shot down by SQNLDR Al Rawlinson [AN365] who retired from the battle with minor damage and returned to LG.122.

The action finally ended after 1 hour and five minutes of combat when the sun was setting below the western horizon and visibility had diminished to near zero. FLTLT Woof Arthur gathered together five surviving 3Sqn Tomahawks and led them to the newly captured LG.134 located some 60km NNW of LG.122 where they landed in darkness with only a few gallons of petrol left in their tanks. The following morning the five aircraft at LG.134 returned to LG.122 and the true scope of their epic battle became evident, the bottom line being that fourteen Tomahawks departed the previous day but only six returned. The overall tally of losses from the two air battles on the 22nd made for grim reading. On the morning Mission: Three pilots were shot down and KIA: 471 FLTLT J.H.W Saunders [AN416]; 845 FLGOFF M.H Watson [AK510]; and, 406002 PLTOFF E. H Lane [AM378]. Two aircraft sustained moderate damage: FLTLT W. Arthur [AN389] and SGT G.E Hiller [AN373]. On the afternoon mission: Two pilots were shot down and KIA: 456 FLTLT L.E.S Knowles [AN410] and 400092 PLTOFF L. Lees [AN305]. Two pilots were shot down and made Prisoners of War: 406082 FLGOFF H.G.H Roberts [AN373] and 260650 FLTLT W.G Kloster [AK390]. Three pilots shot down but returned to base: WNGCDR P. Jeffrey [AN244] managed to force land in allied territory south of El Adem, picked up by the Army and returned to LG.122; 402259 SGT R.H Simes [AM507] baled out and landed in enemy territory but walked through enemy lines during the night and met with tanks of the 4th Queens Own Hussars who returned him to LG122; and, 260652 FLGOFF T.H Trimble [AN389] crash landed near LG.134. Two aircraft sustained serious damage: FLGOFF E.H Jackson [AN441] and FLGOFF R.H Gibbes [AN224]. At the start of the day the squadron had 24 Tomahawks on charge, 18 at LG.122 and a further six aircraft held in Ready Reserve at Sidi Heneish LG102; by day's end the squadron held a total of 16 Tomahawks spread between the two locations of which 11 were serviceable. More disturbing was the human cost, five pilots were KIA and two others were shot down and taken prisoner, thus depleting the squadron's pilot strength by 45%.

Claims by 3 Sqn in the morning mission were: SGT Derek Scott [AN305] two destroyed; FLTLT Woof Arthur [AN389] two damaged; and, SQNLDR Al Rawlinson [AN408] one damaged. Afternoon claims were: FLGOFF R.H Gibbes [AN224] one destroyed; FLGOFF E.H Jackson [AN441] one damaged; SQNLDR Al Rawlinson [AN365] one destroyed, one probable and one damaged; and, FLTLT Woof Arthur [AN389] three damaged. German records showed claims for eleven Tomahawks shot down and two probables for the loss of six Bf109s, no mention of damaged aircraft.. In spite of inferior machines, No. 2 Operational Wing had held its own but the Luftwaffe had clearly come off best from the day's actions, the cost was obviously considered too high, as it was to be the last occasion on which the 109s met Commonwealth fighters in force and dog-fought them. From this time onwards they returned to their normal tactics of utilizing their superior speed and altitude performance to undertake dive-shoot-and-climb tactics, these negating the Tomahawk's superior manoeuvrability and saving the Messerschmitt pilots from further heavy losses.

The squadron was pulled from operations on the 23rd but after three of the ready reserve aircraft were flown up to LG.122 and some of the battle damage repairs completed the CO was able to inform Group HQ they operational. By close of business on the 23th the efficacy of the RAF Policy for resupply and replenishment had worked as advertised and after the earlier travails the Squadron was back to full strength with the exception of pilots. 18 Tomahawks were at LG.122 and three in reserve at Sidi Heneish. LG122 Events on the ground though nearly spelt disaster for the RAF as the faltering Crusader Operation swiftly unravelled following a major defeat at the hands of the Afrika Corp near Sidi Rezegh. Late in the evening Rommel amassed his remaining Panzers and early on the 24th launched a bold counter attack against British 8th Army rear area dumps, administration centres, rear echelon formations and fuel depots. At 1233hrs on the 24th the squadron, unaware of the Panzer thrust, provided eleven Tomahawks along with ten from 112Sqn and escorted RAF Marylands on an uncontested bombing mission against an MT concentration near El Adem. Their final mission for the day was a scramble to intercept incoming bogies but no enemy were encountered. As it happens the reported bogies were probably advance German reconnaissance flights reporting to the mobile Panzer column racing east toward Bir Sheferzen. As a consequence of the Side Rezegh defeat RAF HQ issue orders that all front line fighters, bombers and recce aircraft were to fall back to Maddalena LG immediately. RAF HQ were obviously unaware of Rommel's Panzer force otherwise the order to land at Maddalena would have been rescinded and the aircraft dispersed elsewhere. Thus it transpired that during the night Rommel's Panzer column passed ten miles to the north of the LG where some

175 front line aircraft of the RAF were crammed onto the airfield and surrounds²². One can only imagine the carnage if the Panzers had located the LG.

On the morning of the 25th the situation was clarified somewhat by RAFHQ and orders were issued for reconnaissance missions to locate the German breakout column. The CO himself took on this important task and SQNLDR Al Rawlinson [AN408] with FLTLT Woof Arthur [AN224] were launched at 0625hrs followed by a 2nd search by the same pair at 0720hrs which located the Panzer force approaching Sidi Omar southwest of Sollum on the Egypt-Libya border. At 0815hrs 3 Sqn launched 12 Tomahawks together with ten from 112Sqn to attack the Panzer column and reports indicated that the attack went well with many vehicles wrecked and burning. The attack came at a cost as usual and this time another three Tomahawks were lost and another sustained significant damage but managed to get back to base. FLTLT Woof Arthur sustained multiple AAA hits and immediately returned to base with fuel and other liquids leaking from AN224. FLTLT J.G Manford [AM400] was hit by AAA that shattered his oil feed system causing him to crash land in the desert east of the Sidi Omar LG. His plight was witnessed by members of 451Sqn who in the process of evacuating the LG when Manford crash landed near them, the aircraft was totally destroyed but Manford was returned to the squadron. FLGOFF Percy Bothwell²³ [AM398] was shot down in flames and died when his aircraft crashed into a tank. The next day three Army officers drove to the crash site where they found his body and buried him beside the wreckage. FLGOFF Wally Jewell [AN406] had a unique episode after his aircraft was hit by AAA forcing him to land near the German convoy. A while later he was captured by a German patrol who were enroute to Sidi Omar and the Germans asked him if they were going the right way and he told them they were – of course they were not. In reality they were heading for allied lines, and within two hours were stopped and captured by a NZ Army Bren Gun Company. Wally Jewell was then returned to LG.102 after being a POW for 2hrs and 12 min!

At 1512hrs a maximum effort was called for and Peter Jeffrey led eight 3 Sqn Tomahawks and 12 from 112Sqn on an Offensive Sweep over Sidi Rezegh where New Zealand brigades from XIII Corps were approaching Belhamed on the eastern Tobruk perimeter in an attempt to aid XXX Corps and cause dislocation of Rommel's plans. The Luftwaffe HQ took a dim view of the fresh reinforcements and despatched a sizeable force to hinder their advance and inflict as much damage as possible. The force consisted of some 60-70 aircraft in two groups comprising 30+ Ju87s with a close escort of Bf109s and Me110s in one group; and, in the other group Ju87s, Ju88s with a close escort of Bf109s, Me110, CR.42s and G.50bis. As the Wing approached Sidi Rezegh they met the German force as the latter were preparing to attack the NZ Brigades. Jeffrey ordered an immediate attack with 3 Sqn going down after the bombers and 112Sqn told to handle the fighters above. A typical free-for-all dogfight ensued with nearly 100 aircraft dodging, weaving and ducking all over the sky, each intent on surviving while dealing death and destruction to their enemy. The two antagonists finally pulled apart after 50 minutes of combat and headed back to their respective bases, each with gaps in the ranks. In their after action reports 3 Sqn pilots claimed 10 destroyed, one probable and six damaged while 112Sqn pilots claimed two destroyed and two damaged. The wing lost one Tomahawk from each squadron and a few aircraft sustained light-to-moderate damage. Individual claims were: SGT Rex Wilson [AK506] 1 x Me110 destroyed, 2 x Feisler Storch destroyed and 1 x Bf109 damaged; FLGOFF Bobby Gibbes [AM374] 2 x Fiat G.50bis destroyed, 3 x Fiat G.50bis and 1 x Bf109 damaged; SGT Frank Reid [AN408] 1 x Me110 destroyed; FLGOFF Eddie Jackson 1 x Me110 probable; SGT Merv Baillie 1 x Bf109 destroyed; and, WNGCR Pete Jeffrey 1 x Me110 destroyed and 1 x Me110 damaged. On the debit side FLGOFF Bruce Evans²⁴ [AN343] was shot down and killed plus most of the Tomahawks sustained Cat.A battle damage to some degree. Morale in the squadron certainly took a boost and most felt they had more than avenged their losses on Black Saturday. In the late evening the following message was received from the Air Officer Commanding, RAF, Western Desert:

“A.581 – 25/11. Personal from A.O.C to W/C Jeffrey and the Squadron – Congratulations on the Squadron's splendid fight which has contributed so much to our overwhelming air superiority. I regret your casualties but

²² Herington, John Second World War Official Histories Vol III Chap 9 Page 202

²³ 695 Flight Lieutenant Percival Roy Bothwell of Chatswood in Sydney NSW b .Murree, India 18Aug1921. KIA 25Nov41.

²⁴ 713 FLGOFF Bruce Aitken Evans of Frankston, Victoria b.29Aug1918. KIA 25Nov1941.

they have cost the enemy dearly. The Squadron has been selected for re-equipment with the first available Kittyhawks. Good luck”

Another maximum effort was called for on the 26th but only eight machines could be readied for the mission because of losses, battle damage and unserviceabilities. SQNLDR Al Rawlinson departed LG.122 at 1530hrs leading the eight machines and joined ten from 112Sqn for a wing sweep over the Sid Rezegh area where enemy fighters were reported in the area. At 1600hrs SGT Tiny Cameron [AN294] spotted six Bf109Fs diving down on the formation in line astern and saw a 109 hit a Tomahawk setting it on fire after which the pilot baled out. He then saw another 109 that appeared to be attacking the parachute and dived down forcing the 109 to abort. Cameron then stayed with the parachute until the pilot landed but the surrounding terrain prevented him from landing and picking the pilot up so he began to climb back to the squadron. His return was not to be however as another six Bf019Fs dive down and deliver successive (ineffective) long range attacks on Cameron. Each time the 109s delivered another attack Cameron would break up and into the leader and engaging from head-on. Eventually he hit one of his attackers causing black and white smoke to issue from the nose area and watched as the 109 seemed to falter then fall away in an uncontrolled manner. The remaining five 109s maintained the attack until Cameron was able to slip into a big cumulus cloud where he altered course and slipped into Tobruk and landed. Tobruk defences saw the Tomahawk pilot land safely and soon after another parachute was seen to come down in enemy territory. Cameron remained in Tobruk overnight before returning to base the next morning where he learned the pilot he shepherded down was SGT Geoff Hiller [AM413]. Geoff Hiller had no warning of the attack and his aircraft burst into flames forcing him to bale out. He was wounded in the attack and sustained serious head burns and when he was captured he was admitted to a German Casualty Clearance Station. Unfortunately, Hiller²⁵ developed complications from his extensive burns and died on 5th December 1941.

The next three days proved to be uneventful but by COB on the 29th the squadron was down to 14 aircraft of which twelve were serviceable at LG.122 and two undergoing repairs and/or maintenance at LG.102. The squadron was tasked the following day to join a maximum effort Offensive Wing Sweep with 112Sqn and provide cover to the beleaguered New Zealand Division near Sidi Rezegh. Accordingly, 12 Tomahawks led by SQNLDR Al Rawlinson [AN408] departed LG.122 at 0840hrs and joined with a further 10 from 112Sqn, all under the command of WNGCDR Peter Jeffrey. The formation was led by 3Sqn at 11,000ft weaving in pairs with 112Sqn above and behind at 12,000ft when at 0915hrs bombs were seen bursting about three miles distant at 2 o'clock south of Bir-el-Gobi. Rawlinson immediately led the squadron down to attack the bombers and close escort while 112Sqn remained on high to deal with the top cover. An estimated 50 enemy were identified comprised of Ju87s escorted by German Bf109s and Italian MC.202s, MC.200s and G.50bis fighters. As soon as the enemy bombers noticed the diving Tomahawks they scattered and in response Rawlinson ordered his pilots to scatter and select individual targets. Rawlinson opted for an all-black painted MC.200 and made three attacks from 6,000ft down to 1,500ft leaving the Macchi heading for the ground with an apparently dead pilot at the controls. All during the combat Rawlinson was protected by his wingman PLTOFF Lou Spence [AN457] and after the engagement the pair climbed back up but could not find any aircraft so returned to base.

Meanwhile the remainder of the Squadron was having a field day and for the next twenty minutes made a meal of the bombers and their close escort. When the dust settled the Squadron claimed 12 enemy destroyed and 14 damaged for the loss of one Tomahawk and two damaged; 112 Sqn claimed three fighters destroyed and two damaged for the loss of two Tomahawks. The submitted 3Sqn claims were as follows: SQNLDR Rawlinson [AN408] 1 x Macchi 200 destroyed; FLTLT Woof Arthur [AN224] 2 x Fiat G.50bis and 2 x Ju87 destroyed; FLGOFF Tommy Trimble [AM384] 2 x Macchi 200s destroyed and 3 x Ju87s damaged; FLGOFF Bobby Gibbes [AN499] 1 x Fiat G.50bis destroyed; SGT Tiny Cameron [AK506] 1 x Fiat G.50bis and four Ju87s damaged; SGT Derek Scott 1 x Fiat G.50bis and 1 x Ju87 destroyed and 1 x Ju87 damaged; SGT Rex Wilson 1 x Macchi 200 1 x Ju87 and 1 x Bf109 damaged; and, SGT Wal Mailey 2 x Macchi 200s destroyed and 3 x Ju87s damaged. As recorder in the Squadron ORB *'This was a red letter day for No.3 Squadron'*.

SGT Tiny Cameron [AK506] had just completed his second attack on the Stukas when he was bounced by three Bf109s sustaining catastrophic damage to his aircraft that caused him to crash land in the desert. He rapidly egressed the

²⁵ 407075 SGT Geoffrey Edward Hiller of Glenelg, South Australia b.27Feb1916. Died of wounds while a PoW 2nd December 1941

wreckage before the 109s strafed and destroyed his Tomahawk and set off walking toward allied lines. A short while later he attracted the attention of two low flying Tomahawks one of which, piloted by WNGCDR Peter Jeffrey, landed beside him and to Cameron's great relief picked him up and flew back to Base. SGT Rex Wilson [AM392] and just lost contact with a Bf109 he had engaged when another unseen 109 attacked from low astern and hit the underside of Wilson's aircraft. Wilson immediately half rolled and climbed up sun but could not see his attacker and was about to rejoin the fight when he saw the hydraulic system was damaged and the indicator showed the port wheel and tail wheel were down and the flaps had dropped to 20° down. He then aborted and headed for base but as he neared LG.122 the hydraulics failed completely causing him to crash land on the outskirts of the aerodrome. FLTLT Woof Arthur [AN224] was hit three times by enemy fire which severely damaged the left engine bank distributor. Arthur aborted and headed for home but the problem became progressively worse until the engine cut out and he made a successful emergency landing approximately 20 miles (36km) southwest of LG122. Arthur returned to the base in a borrowed Hurricane at 1700hrs while his Tomahawk was recovered by No.53 RSU and returned to the squadron a few days later. Thus the month of November 1941 came to a close and, upon reflection, it could be regarded as the most intensive combat month in the Squadron's history to date. During the month the squadron flew 408 operational sorties and claimed 21 enemy aircraft destroyed and 26 damaged for the loss of 17 Tomahawks and nine pilots (12 in air-to-air combat; four to AAA on strafing missions; and, one Flying Accident). Additional to the air combat victories were the amount of enemy armoured vehicles and MT destroyed or damaged while performing close air support to Army units and interdiction of enemy supply routes.

December proved to be a momentous month also, albeit for different reasons. On the 1st the squadron was down to eleven Tomahawks of which nine were serviceable and two were undergoing maintenance. Pilot strength was also down following November's losses but replacement pilots would not appear until later. The first action of the month occurred when two Tomahawks were scrambled at 1035hrs to intercept a bogie approaching LG.122 from the southeast. SGT Rex Wilson [AN457] and SGT Frank Reid [AM406] climbed hard and reached 14,000ft when, at 1100hrs, they spotted a bogie straight ahead and slightly higher. The pair circled around the bogie which was now identified as a Ju88²⁶ and Wilson positioned himself for a stern attack from slightly below while Reid provided top cover. Wilson closed the target and fired several short well-aimed bursts until the port engine stopped and the Junkers entered a slow spiral descent through a cloud layer. When it emerged from the clouds the port engine was ablaze with the machine in a full spin, an attitude it maintained until it crashed into the ground and exploded approximately 10km from LG.122. At 1100hrs another pair of Tomahawks were scrambled but the plot faded and the aircraft recalled and soon after this recall a message was received from HQWDAF issued an order stating inter alia '*... in view of the casualties both in aircraft and pilots the Squadron is released from operations until replacement pilots could be found*'. Accordingly, nine of the eleven remaining Tomahawks departed LG.122 at 1530hrs and flew to Sidi Heneish (LG102) and shortly after their arrival at 1630hrs three more Tomahawks were delivered from No.53RSU, bringing the strength up to 14 Tomahawks – 12 at Sidi Heneish and two still at LG.122 awaiting repair. The next day the CO flew to RAFHQ ME to try and obtain new pilots undergoing conversion training at No.71 OTU but HQ would not agree. However, as luck would have it, eleven new RAAF pilots posted to 3Sqn had just arrived in country and Rawlinson was able to convince RAFHQ to forego the OTU course and send the pilots directly to the Squadron.

The next few days were spent getting the aircraft back to operational status and no flying was possible until the 4th when six aircraft carried out a Navex from LG.102 to Berg el Arab and return. Later the same day the CO returned accompanied by WNGCDR Pete Jeffrey who was delivering the Squadron's first Kittyhawk and just before dusk the eleven replacement pilots arrived by air from Cairo. On the 6th the planned acquisition of Kittyhawks and conversion training was shelved when AHQ instructed all serviceable aircraft to redeploy to LG.122 no later than 1200hrs on the 8th December. The aircraft were detailed to provide air cover for XIII Corps as they pursued the rapidly retreating Axis forces, specifically they were to whittle away the Axis fighter forces. At 1000hrs on the 8th Al Rawlinson departed Sidi Heneish leading 15 Tomahawks accompanied by Peter Jeffrey in the Kittyhawk whilst the seven of the new pilots proceeded later that day in an RAF transport aircraft. A quick turnaround was effected at LG.122 and at 1230hrs eleven

²⁶ The pilot and gunner of the Ju88 were captured and they identified the aircraft as Ju88 D-1 '4U+JK' of 2(F)/123

Tomahawks under the command of Peter Jeffrey departed LG.122 with ten 112Sqn Tomahawks for an uneventful Offensive Sweep near El Adem. Tuesday 9 Dec was another bad day for the 3Sqn when Wing Leader Peter Jeffrey led 20 Tomahawks (ten each from 3Sqn and 112Sqn) for an Offensive Sweep over the Tobruk-El Adem area. Just south of El Adem the formation was completely surprised by six Bf109Fs of 1/JG27 and SGT Rex Wilson²⁷ [AN457] and his wingman SGT Tiny Cameron [AK499] were shot down on the 109s first pass from out of the sun. A short confused dogfight followed in which Peter Jeffrey [AN408] shot down a 109 and SGT Merv Baillie [AN374] destroyed a 109 and damaged another. In return, the 109s shot down a third Tomahawk, that of FLGOFF Dave Rutter²⁸ [AK378] who was on his first operational mission. Peter Jeffrey was hit in the engine compartment and was forced to break away and make an emergency landing at Tobruk.

The next few days provided a brief hiatus from combat as the retreating Axis forces were covered by all their remaining fighters thus negating the chances of aerial combat. Nonetheless the squadron was still required to provide adequate air cover to the lengthy British supply lines and on 10th, 11th and 12th they flew 42 sorties without contact with the enemy. As the ground battle with the retreating Axis forces moved quickly to the West British air units strived to keep pace and in the evening of the 11th the squadron was ordered to move forward to El Adem aerodrome the next day. The day ended on an upbeat moment when SGT Tiny Cameron, who was reportedly shot down on the 9th, walked back into the camp and regaled all with his adventurous outing and was immediately placed back on the active roster.

At 0735hrs on the 12th WNGCDR Peter Jeffrey [AN408] departed LG.122 leading 14 other Tomahawks for an Offensive Patrol after which they landed El Adem at 0945hrs. The aircraft were turned around and awaited orders which were not long in coming and at 1530hrs FLTLT Woof Arthur departed El Adem leading ten Tomahawks and joined a further eight from 112Sqn on an Offensive Sweep over the Derna area. Over Tmimi a large force of Axis aircraft was spotted and Woof Arthur ordered his formation to wheel in the direction of the enemy but as 3Sqn turned two Tomahawks collided, FLGOFF Robin Gray [AN224] drifted during the turn and his airscrew chewed off the port wing tip of FLGOFF Fred Eggleston's AN335 causing the aircraft to fall away out of control and was last seen spinning down and when he did not return he was listed as MIA. Gray still had control of his aircraft albeit with a damaged propeller and a lot of induced vibration throughout the aircraft so rolled over and dived into a cloud bank at 3000ft then changed course and headed for base. He soon realised he would not make it so he diverted and landed at Sidi Rezegh where he remained overnight before returning to base the next day. The rest of the squadron came to grips with a mixed force of Ju87s with Bf109 and Me110 escorts and in a short sharp encounter FLGOFF Nicky Barr [AN336] shot down a Me110 whilst FLGOFF Bobby Gibbes claimed a probable Ju87. Elsewhere, Fred Eggleston's fascinating journey had just begun after the Collision with Robin Gray. He quickly recovered the aircraft and found that it responded reasonably well to the controls and although he could not catch the rest of the squadron above him he did see three 112Sqn Tomahawks climbing after five Bf109s who were heading for 3Sqn. He decided to join the fray and from his height advantage dived down and zoomed up to make a stern quarter attack from below. He opened fire at long range to distract the 109s and his ploy worked as the 109s broke down to honour his threat. As the 109s came down at him the 112Sqn Tomahawks joined in and a dog-fight ensued. Eggleston was holding his own in his damaged aircraft until he was attacking a 109 and forgot to check his six and when he realised he was under attack from the rear he flicked into a steep turn and avoided his pursuer but in doing so lost a lot of height and found himself down low (1000ft) with a couple of 109s circling above his machine. It was only a matter of time until one of the enemy fired an accurate burst that shattered the engine oil cooler and setting the engine area alight. Realising his aircraft was about to fail Eggleston baled out and watched as one of the Bf109s began circling his parachute and, fearing the worst, braced for impact but the German pilot held off until Eggleston hit the ground. He then saw the German get low down and turn toward him in preparation for a strafing run and this proved all the motivation he needed to sprint madly into some nearby rocks and take cover. Hiding until nightfall Eggleston set out walking towards British lines and for two days he maintained the routine of resting by day and walking by night. On the night of 14th he blundered into an Italian Army patrol and was captured. After interrogation in Benghazi he was transported by an Italian navy motor torpedo boat to Italy and imprisoned in

²⁷ The next day a RAF Officer from Tobruk buried Rex Wilson in the desert but his grave was never relocated. He is commemorated on Column 246 of the Alamein Memorial in the El Alamein War Cemetery, Egypt.

²⁸ 833 FLGOFF David Rutter (26) mining engineer of Melbourne, Victoria b.03Aug1915. KIA on first operational mission 09Dec1941.

POW Camp PG66 in Capua, 30km north of Naples. From Capua he was moved to Campo PG35 near Padula in May42; to Campo PG78 near Salona in Jul43; and finally to Campo PG19 near Bologna. On 11Sep he was handed over to the Germans and immediately loaded aboard a train with many other allied prisoners for transfer to a German Stalag. Near the town of Trento in northern Italy the train was forced to travel at a snails' pace through thick snow and at this point Eggleston and six other POWs jumped from the train and headed toward Switzerland. They were assisted by Italian partisans and finally reached the Swiss border town of Livigno on 19Sep43. After his release from Switzerland in March 1944 Eggleston was repatriated to Australia where he remained in the RAAF until his discharge on 26 January 1946 with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

The squadron was placed at ready alert on the 13th as a precaution against German raiders and at 1125hrs three Tomahawks scrambled to intercept a flight of three Bf109s that appeared high over the landing ground. The first three were joined by two more scrambled at 1205hrs but despite the best efforts of the five aircraft they could not reach the 109s before they disappeared to the north. At 1400hrs six Tomahawks scrambled when 109s were reportedly seen heading in but the raid did not eventuate however, following the two uneventful scrambles an afternoon mission provided plenty of action. FLGOFF Wally Jewel [AN294] departed El Adem at 1510hrs leading ten Tomahawks for an Offensive Sweep over the Derna-Martuba area. At approximately 1605hrs the formation was south of Tmimi cruising at 5800ft just below the cloud base when they sighted eight Bf109s escorting eight unidentified bombers at their 10 o'clock on the same level. The 109s immediately turned toward the Squadron and dived to the rear left all the while gaining speed before pitching up to attack. The Tomahawks responded by breaking into the 109s and a short while later FLGOFF Nicky Barr [AN366] latched onto a 109 that was sitting on the tail of a clueless Tomahawk pilot and fired two good bursts that forced the 109 to climb toward the clouds before suddenly rolling over and diving toward the ground. Barr followed but did not need to fire again as the 109 entered a high speed vertical dive that ended when the aircraft hit the ground close to another burning 109. By the time Barr climbed back to rejoin the fray he was alone so he swung east intending to RTB but southwest of Gazala he spotted a group of Ju88s bombing a British MT concentration. Turning toward the group Barr noticed a solitary Ju88 off his starboard beam and immediately delivered a short range beam attack followed by a close range stern attack. The Junkers then rolled to port and dived sharply with black smoke issuing from the port engine. At this time Barr flew into some clouds for a brief time and when he emerged he saw wreckage, thick smoke and flames on the ground below him. SGT Tiny Cameron [AN274] celebrated his return by shooting down one Bf109 and sharing another with FLGOFF Tommy Briggs [AK438]. To round off the engagement FLGOFF Booby Gibbes [AM374] damaged two Bf109s and a Ju87; and, FLGOFF Eddie Jackson [AN270] claimed one damaged Bf109F. The squadron also suffered a loss when the popular FLGOFF Tom Trimble [AN384] failed to return and was posted as MIA. Much to the delight of all Trimble returned to the squadron a week later and recounted what happened to him. He said just after the squadron sighted the attacking enemy and turned to engage he was hit in and around the cockpit/engine area and started a fire causing the aircraft to fall away. He also sustained shrapnel wounds to the upper torso and facial injuries that severely reduced his visual acuity. Nonetheless, he managed to crash land southwest of Tmimi and was rescued by friendly Arabs. He was given accommodation, food and basic medical assistance until he was handed over to a British patrol.

The pace of operations continued unabated on the 14th when at 0915hrs WNGCDR Peter Jeffrey led six Tomahawks on a Rhubarb Sweep from N to S thru the Martuba region. The formation reached the Tmimi area at 1005hrs and were cruising at 5500ft below a thick low cloud base when bogies were reported at their six o'clock. Jeffrey wheeled the Tomahawks to attack and at that moment they were hit by previously unnoticed Bf109s from two directions and in the first pass FLOFF Don Knight²⁹ [AN285] and SGT Derek Scott [AN270] were shot down whilst SGT Frank Reid [AN406] and FLGOFF Lou Spence [AN274] sustained damage. Both Knight and Scott were initially listed as MIA but Knight was reclassified as MIA presumed KIA when reports stated he went in with his burning aircraft. Scott on the other hand baled out of his stricken aircraft and was taken prisoner. He was transported to an Italian POW camp in Benghazi before being taken to Crete aboard an Italian Destroyer. From Crete he was flown to Frankfurt, Germany

²⁹ 2762 FLGOFF Donald Erskine Knight (23) of Newstead, Tasmania was KIA and has no known grave. He is commemorated on Column 245 of the Alamein Memorial in the El Alamein War Cemetery, Egypt.

where he was initially interrogated by Luftwaffe Dulag Luft issued POW No.25019 and sent to Stalag VIIIIB then Stalag 344. While incarcerated Scott was commissioned (01May42) and promoted twice more before his release by US 1st Army elements on 26th of April 1945. He was repatriated to Australia in August 1945 and elected to resign from the RAAF on 29 October 1945 with the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

Following the losses on the 14th the next few days saw little in the way of combat and, unbeknownst to the squadron, moves were afoot in high command that would greatly affect the squadron's immediate future. At 1330hrs on the 16th FLGOFF Bobby Gibbes departed El Adem leading six Tomahawks for an Army support patrol but soon after departure two aircraft aborted with technical issues, the patrol was completed and the four aircraft returned to Base at 1535hrs and, although the pilots didn't know it, this was the last time they would fly a Tomahawk fighter. On the morning of the 17th the Squadron received a message from AHQ directing all Tomahawks on strength were to cease flying immediately. Furthermore, all aircraft would be collected from 3 Sqn and issued to other RAF units.

Summary of Tomahawk Operations.

The Tomahawk proved popular with the pilots. It was a well-built machine that could take considerable punishment and keep flying. Many pilots remarked it could hold its own against any enemy fighter encountered in 1941 including the Bf109 Es and Fs of the Luftwaffe. The Bf109s could certainly out climb the Tomahawk but in a dogfight at lower altitude it was proven time and time again that Tomahawk held sway because of its superior manoeuvrability. This is one of the important factors that determined the preferred Luftwaffe tactic of dive-shoot-and-climb, then repeat the process. Of course the Tomahawk had problems but nothing major, in fact the biggest issue early on was not the aircraft itself but the supply of spares and lack of experienced maintenance personnel. Overall the aircraft was in the right place at the right time and did what was asked of it with style.

Information contained in the 3 Sqn Operational Record Books and other references show that a total of at least 82 Tomahawk fighter aircraft served with the Squadron between May and December 1941. The aircraft are known to have flown at least 211 operational mission resulting in at least 1,640 individual 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 much higher than the known operational flights. A typical example of the ratio between operational and non –operational flights was obtained by examining the data contained in Bobby Gibbes log book for the period in question which shows he logged 69 operational sorties and 112 non-operational flights. All things considered, it would be reasonable to state that 3 Sqn Tomahawks made between 3,000 and 4,000 flights while serving with 3 Squadron RAAF.

Attached Tables.

- Table 1. Curtis Tomahawk IIB Fighters Operated by 3 Squadron RAAF May thru December 1941
- Table 2. 3 Squadron RAAF Combat Claims for the period May thru December 1941
- Table 3. Operational and non-operational Tomahawk losses May thru December 1941

Table 1

Curtis Tomahawk IIB Fighter Aircraft

Operated by No.3 Squadron RAAF

May to December 1941

	Aircraft	TOC	From	SOC	Comment	SOC Date
1	AK354	21May41	102 MU	02Jul41	102MU/112 Sqn/5 SAAF/3 SAAF. Shot down Tobruk	25Apr42
2	AK365	19May41	102 MU	26May41	Hit by AK474 ay RAF Lydda. Cat/E	31May41
3	AK366	19May41	102 MU	30May41	102MU, then 5 SAAF. SOC 01Apr44	01Apr44
4	AK370	21Jun41	102 MU	02Jul41	102MU/5 SAAF/2 SAAF. Shot down nr Sidi Barrani	22Nov41
5	AK378	23May41	102 MU	22Nov41	Shot down by 109s nr Bir-El-Gubbi	22Nov41
6	AK382	28Oct41	107 MU	01Dec41	RAF MU/208 Sqn. MIA 11Jul42	00Jul42
7	AK386	01Jul41	102 MU	07Sep41	To 55 RSU/73OTU	01Feb44
8	AK388	16May41	102 MU	03Jul41	102MU/4 SAAF/5 SAAF- MIA 04Oct42	00Oct42
9	AK390	31Aug41	102 MU	22Nov41	Shot down by 109s ne El Adem	22Nov41
10	AK392	24Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	5 SAAF. MIA ne El Adem	11Jul42
11	AK393	03Jun41	102 MU	05Aug41	55 RSU/4 SAAF/73OTU	29Jun44
12	AK398	09Jun41	107 MU	19Sep41	55 RSU/250Sqn Shot down nr Tobruk	26Jun42
13	AK402	30May41	102 MU	19Oct41	51RSU/112Sqn Shot down by 109s	30Nov41
14	AK407	14May41	102 MU	19Nov41	Shot down by 109s ne Maddalena	19Nov41
15	AK408	02Jun41	102 MU	05Jun41	Crashed into orange grove nr RAF Lydda	05Jun41
16	AK410	14May41	102 MU	09Nov41	51RSU/208Sqn/112Sqn. DBR	25Jun42
17	AK420	09Jun41	102 MU	21Sep41	Crashed on take-off at Sidi Heneish	21Sep41
18	AK427	02Jun41	102 MU	28Jun41	Crashed on take-off at Damascus	28Jun41
19	AK429	23Jun41	102 MU	03Jul41	102MU/3 SAAF. Shot down by 109	04Aug42
20	AK435	06Jun41	102 MU	10Jun41	Crashed landing at RAF Lydda	10Jun41
21	AK436	08Jun41	102 MU	11Jul41	Crash landed nr Damascus, flak damage DBR	11Jul41
22	AK438	01Dec41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53RSU/2 SAAF/250Sqn/4 SAAF/73OTU. Crashed	07Apr43
23	AK439	16May41	102 MU	17Dec41	53RSU/5 SAAF. Abandoned after eng fire	04Nov42
24	AK440	31May41	102 MU	01Jun41	Crashed on delivery flight/53RSU/3 SAAF. MIA	26Jun41
25	AK446	21Jun41	102 MU	17Dec41	53 RSU/2 SAAF/208Sqn. MIA	16May42
26	AK456	20May41	102 MU	17Dec41	53 RSU/2 SAAF. Crash landed Tobruk	07Jun42
27	AK462	30May41	102 MU	03Jun41	Crashed landing at RAF Lydda/53RSU/REAF	01Sep43
28	AK463	12Jun41	102 MU	25Jun41	Returning damaged aircraft to RAF Lydda & Crash landed	25Jun41
29	AK464	06Jun41	102 MU	14Sep41	MIA after attack on Gambut airfield	14Sep41
30	AK465	12Sep41	55 RSU	22Nov41	53RSU/208Sqn/73OTU	29Jun44
31	AK474	26May41	102 MU	26May41	Cat.B at Lydda/102MU/112Sqn/4 SAAF. Shot down	25Apr42
32	AK476	06Jun41	102MU	20Oct41	102 MU/112Sqn/73OTU. MIA	13Dec41
33	AK488	07Jun41	102 MU	25Jun41	55RSU/102MU	29Jun44
34	AK499	22Nov41	53 RSU	09Dec41	Crashed nr El Adem, battle damage	09Dec41
35	AK506	06Sep41	102 MU	30Nov41	Shot down by 109s	30Nov41
36	AK510	20Aug41	102 MU	22Nov41	Shot down by 109s	22Nov41
37	AK516	30Jun41	102 MU	15Oct41	Cat/FB to 53RSU	15Oct41
38	AK526	30Jun41	102 MU	11Jul41	Shot down by Dewoitine nr Damascus	11Jul41
39	AK539	31Jul41	54 RSU	24Sep41	Shot down by 109s nr Sidi Heneish	24Sep41
40	AK548	30Jun41	102 MU	20Aug41	Crashed doing beat-up ne Estabel LG	20Aug41

	Aircraft	TOC	From	SOC	Fate	
41	AK566	30Jun41	102 MU	12Oct41	Damaged by 109s. Bellied at LG.05, DBR	12Oct41
42	AM374	05Sep41	55 RSU	17Dec41	55 RSU/ 4 SAAF	01Feb44
43	AM378	01Jul41	102 MU	22Nov41	MIA on bomber escort Bir-el-Gubbi	22Nov41
44	AM384	26Nov41	53 RSU	13Dec41	Shot down 109s nr El Adem	13Dec41
45	AM386	04Aug41	102 MU	01Sep41	102MU/4 SAAF	01Feb44
46	AM392	21Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53 RSU/5 SAAF	01Jul43
47	AM398	21Jun41	102 MU	25Nov41	Shot down by AAA nr LG.122	25Nov41
48	AM400	22Jun41	102 MU	25Nov41	Shot down by AAA nr LG.122	25Nov41
49	AM406	22Jun41	102 MU	17Dec41	53 RSU/5 SAAF	01Aug43
50	AM413	24Nov41	53 RSU	26Nov41	Shot down 109s nr El Adem	26Nov41
51	AM425	26Nov41	53 RSU	00Dec41	53 RSU/4 SAAF/2 ADU crashed Cowley Camp, Egypt	22Feb43
52	AM476	05Sep41	55 RSU	22Nov41	53 RSU/73OTU. Taxied into Harvard, Abu Sueir	17Aug43
53	AM507	03Nov41	53 RSU	22Nov41	Shot down 109s nr El Adem	22Nov41
54	AN224	23Sep41	102 MU	17Dec41	53 RSU/ 2 SAAF, Crashed take-off Antelat	22Jan42
55	AN238	10Oct41	51 RSU	24Oct41	53 RSU/5 SAAF. MIA on sweep	04Sep42
56	AN244	03Nov41	53 RSU	22Nov41	Forced down by 109s nr El Adem. DBR	22Nov41
57	AN270	06Dec41	53 RSU	14Dec41	Shot down by 109s nr El Adem. MIA	14Dec41
58	AN274	10Dec41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53 RSU/112Sqn. MIA	31Dec41
59	AN285	02Dec41	53 RSU	14Dec41	Shot down by 109s nr El Adem. MIA	14Dec41
60	AN291	30Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53RSU/5 SAAF/73OTU.	29Jun44
61	AN294	24Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53RSU/2 SAAF	22Feb44
62	AN300	10Nov41	53 RSU	18Nov41	Crashed take-off LG.130	18Nov41
63	AN305	23Sep41	102 MU	22Nov41	Shot down by 109s nr El Adem.	22Nov41
64	AN314	05Sep41	102 MU	23Nov41	53 RSU	NFT
65	AN325	10Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53 RSU/4 SAAF	19Jun44
66	AN335	01Dec41	102 MU	12Dec41	Shot up by 109s. Baled out from damage	12Dec41
67	AN336	26Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53 RSU	22Jan43
68	AN343	14Oct41	51 RSU	25Nov41	MIA on wing sweep	25Nov41
69	AN355	05Sep41	55 RSU	12Oct41	Shot down by 109s nr LG.05. MIA	12Oct41
70	AN365	23Sep41	102 MU	29Nov41	53 RSU/5 SAAF. Abandoned nr Dabba	07Jul42
71	AN373	10Nov41	53 RSU	22Nov41	Forced down by 109s nr Tobruk	22Nov41
72	AN374	12Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53 RSU	NFT
73	AN384	04Dec41	53 RSU	14Dec41	Shot down by 109s nr El Adem.	14Dec41
74	AN389	15Nov41	53 RSU	23Nov41	53 RSU/Turkish AF	04Jan42
75	AN390	14Oct41	51 RSU	30Oct41	53 RSU/	NFT
76	AN406	22Nov41	53 RSU	25Nov41	Shot down by 109s nr El Adem.	25Nov41
77	AN408	14Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53 RSU/5 SAAF/4 SAAF/73OTU Crashed Abu Sueir	28May43
78	AN410	10Oct41	51 RSU	22Nov41	Mid-air with 109	22Nov41
79	AN416	10Oct41	51 RSU	22Nov41	Shot down by 109s nr El Adem.	22Nov41
80	AN441	20Oct41	107 MU	17Dec41	53 RSU/2 SAAF	01Aug43
81	AN449	26Nov41	53 RSU	17Dec41	53 RSU/REAF	01Mar444
82	AN457	26Nov41	53 RSU	09Dec41	Shot down by 109s nr El Adem.	09Dec41

Erratum

1. Several references state the following 10 aircraft served with 3 Sqn. However, no mention of these Serials appears in the 3Sqn Operational Record Book³⁰ except for AM408. This aircraft was allocated to 3 Sqn but the allocation was cancelled before the aircraft arrived.

1	AK353	Never served with 3Sqn
2	AK413	Never served with 3Sqn
3	AK455	Never served with 3Sqn
4	AK448	Never served with 3Sqn
5	AM389	Never served with 3Sqn
6	AM408	Allocated but never arrived at 3Sqn
7	AM410	Never served with 3Sqn
8	AM420	Never served with 3Sqn
9	AN364	Never served with 3Sqn
10	AN461	Never served with 3Sqn

2. Several references state Tomahawk AM384 was shot down by Bf.109s on 13Dec41. This assertion is incorrect as AM384 was held at ready alert over Sidi Heneish (LG102) on that day and did not take part in any offensive patrols. However, aircraft AN384 did fly that day and was reported MIA. As it happens FLGOFF Trimble was shot-up and made a successful forced landing.

³⁰ 3Sqn Operational Record Book held in the National Archives of Australia and the National Archives UK.

The following Table shows the claims made by 3Sqn pilots while flying Tomahawk fighters. Please note that the claims are based on the hand written RAF Combat (Fighter) Reports submitted by every fighter pilot after they had encountered enemy aircraft on operational flights. No effort has been made to cross-reference claims with the many records, books and articles published on this subject after WW2. The author of this article does not state the claims are completely accurate, they are simply the data recorded on official reports written by the actual pilots. Also bear in mind that when a group of fighters shot down an individual aircraft the pilot that delivered the *coup de grâce* was normally given credit for the kill.

Table 2
3Sqn Claims May-Dec 1941

Date	Pilot	Tomahawk	Claim
13Jun41	FLGOFF F. Fischer	AK388	1 x Ju88 shared shot down and one damaged
13Jun41	FLGOFF R.H Gibbes	AK378	1 x Ju88 damaged
13Jun41	SQNLDR P. Jeffrey	AK476	1 x Ju88 shot down
13Jun41	FLGOFF J.H Saunders	AK427	1 x Ju88 destroyed and one damaged
13Jun41	SGT H.M Smeeton	AK436	1 x Ju88 damaged
13Jun41	FLTLT J.R Perrin	AK464	1 x Ju88 shot down
15Jun41	SQNLDR P. Jeffrey	AK476	1 x Glen Martin M167F shot down
15Jun41	FLGOFF P.G Turnbull	AK427	1 x Glen Martin M167F shot down
19Jun41	FLGOFF L.E.S Knowles	AK436	1 x Glen Martin M167F damaged
19Jun41	FLGOFF W.S Arthur	AK463	2 x Glen Martin M167F damaged
19Jun41	FLTLT A.C Rawlinson	AK366	1 x Glen Martin M167F damaged
23Jun41	FLGOFF L.E.S Knowles	AK436	1 x Morane-Saulnier 406 damaged
23Jun41	FLGOFF P.R Bothwell	AK420	2 x Morane-Saulnier 406 shot down, 1 damaged
25Jun41	FLGOFF W.G Kloster	AK402	1 x Potez 630 shot down
25Jun41	SGT A.C Cameron	AK436	1 x Potez 630 shot down, 1 damaged
25Jun41	FLGOFF J.H Saunders	AK383	1 x Potez 630 shot down
25Jun41	FLGOFF J.F Jackson	AK366	1 x Potez 630 shot down
25Jun41	FLGOFF W.E Jewel	AK378	2 x Potez 630 damaged
28Jun41	FLTLT A.C Rawlinson	AK446	3 x Glen Martin M167F shot down
28Jun41	SGT R.K Wilson	AK429	1 x Glen Martin M167F shot down
28Jun41	FLGOFF P.G Turnbull	AK476	2 x Glen Martin M167F shot down
28Jun41	FLGOFF L.E.S Knowles	AK436	2 x Glen Martin M167F damaged
29Jun41	FLGOFF L.E.S Knowles	AK436	1 x Glen Martin M167F shot down
10Jul41	FLGOFF P.G Turnbull	AK386	2 x Dewoitine D.520 shot down
10Jul41	SGT G.E Hiller	AK476	1 x Dewoitine D.520 shot down
10Jul41	FLGOFF J.F Jackson	AM378	1 x Dewoitine D.520 shot down
10Jul41	PLTOFF E.H Lane	AK526	1 x Dewoitine D.520 shot down
11Jul41	FLGOFF R.H Gibbes	AK464	1 x Dewoitine D.520 shot down
14Sep41	PLTOFF H.G.H Roberts	AK439	1 x Ju88 probable

Date	Pilot	Tomahawk	Claim
24Sep41	FLTLT J.H Saunders	AK539	1 x Ju88 shot down
12Oct41	FLGOFF F. Fischer	AK390	1 x Bf109E probable
12Oct41	FLGOFF B.A Evans	AK407	1 x Bf109E damaged
12Oct41	FLGOFF W.E Jewel	AK476	1 x Bf109E probable
12Oct41	FLGOFF R.H Gibbes	AK465	1 x Bf109E damaged
12Oct41	SGT A.C Cameron	AK506	1 x BF109F shot down
12Oct41	SGT D. Scott	AK566	1 x Bf109E damaged
19Nov44	FLGOFF F. Fischer	AK407	1 x Bf109F shot down
20Nov41	FLTLT L.E.S Knowles	AN410	1 x Me110 shot down
20Nov41	SGT R.H Simes	AM507	1 x Me110 shot down and one damaged
22Nov41	SQNLDR A.C Rawlinson	AN408	1 x Bf109F damaged (am hours)
22Nov41	FLTLT W.S Arthur	AN389	2 x Bf109F damaged
22Nov41	SGT D. Scott	AN305	2 x Bf109 shot down
22Nov41	FLGOFF J.F Jackson	AN411	1 x Bf109 damaged (pm hours)
22Nov41	FLGOFF R.H Gibbes	AN224	1 x Bf109F shot down
22Nov41	SQNLDR A.C Rawlinson	AN365	1 x Bf109F shot down , one probable and one damaged
22Nov41	FTLT W.S Arthur	AN389	3 x Bf109F damaged
22Nov41	SGT R.H Simes	AM507	1x Bf109F damaged
25Nov41	SGT R. K Wilson	AK506	1 x Me110 shot down and 2 x Me110 damaged. 2 x Feisler Storch shot down and 1 x Bf109F damaged
25Nov41	SGT F. B Reid	AN408	1 x Me110 shot down
25Nov41	FLGOFF J.F Jackson	AM406	1 x Me110 probable
25Nov41	FLGOFF R.H Gibbes	AN374	2 x Fiat G.50 shot down and 3 x damaged. 1 x Bf109 damaged
25Nov41	SGT M.J.H Baillie	AK378	1 x Bf109F shot down
25Nov41	WNGCDR P. Jeffrey	AN224	1 x Me110 shot down and one damaged
26Nov41	SGT A.C Cameron	AN294	1 x Me109F shot down
30Nov41	SQNLDR A.C Rawlinson	AN408	1 x Macchi 200 shot down
30Nov41	FLTLT W.S Arthur	AN224	1 x Fiat G.50bis damaged
	FLGOFF T.H Trimble	AM384	2 x Macchi 200 shot down and 3 x Ju87 damaged
	FLGOFF R.H Gibbes	AN449	1 x Fiat G.50bis shot down
	SGT A.C Cameron	AK506	1 x Fiat G50bis shot down and 4 x Ju87 damaged
	SGT D. Scott	AM374	1 x Fiat G.50, 1 x Ju87 shot down, one BF109F damaged
	SGT R.K Wilson	AM392	1 x Macchi 200. 1 x Ju87 and 1 x Bf109F damaged
	SGT W.H.A Mailey	AK446	2 x Macchi 200 shot down and 3 x Ju87 damaged
01Dec41	SGT R.K Wilson	AN457	1 x Ju88 D-1 shot down
09Dec41	SGT M.J.H Baillie	AN374	1 x Bf019f shot down and one damaged
12Dec41	FLGOFF A.W Barr	AN336	1 x Me110 shot down
12Dec41	FLGOFF R.H Gibbes	AN294	1 x Ju87 probable
13Dec41	FLGOFF A.W Barr	AN336	1 x Bf109F and one Ju88D shot down
13Dec41	FLGOFF T.J.L Briggs	AK438	½ x Bf109 shot down and 1 x Bf109F damaged
13Dec41	SGT A.C Cameron	AN274	1 x Bf109f shot down and ½ share in another shot down
14Dec41	SGT F.B Reid	AN406	1 x Ju87 probable

Table 3

The following 36 Tomahawks were lost in combat resulting in the **deaths** † of 14 pilots.

Date	Pilot	Serial	Details
05Jun41	SGT N.A Evans †	AK408	Crashed on a training flight near Lydda. KIA
11Jun41	SGT Smeeton	AK435	Crash landed Lydda, DBR. Pilot OK
28Jun41	SGT M.P Randell †	AK427	Engine failed on take-off from Damascus. KIA
11Jul41	SGT L.E Knowles	AK436	Hit by AAA force landed 10 miles from Damascus, DBR.
11Jul41	FLGOFF F. Fischer	AK526	Shot down by a DW.520 near Hama, Syria. Uninjured
20Aug41	SGT W. Mailey	AK548	Crashed during beat-up at Estabel LG, Syria. Uninjured
14Sep41	PLTOFF L. Lees	AK456	Shot down by Bf109s near Gambut, Libya. Uninjured
14Sep41	FLGOFF D.J Burbury	AK464	Shot down by Bf109s near Gambut, Libya. Captured PoW
21Sep41	FLGOFF J.K Stratten	AK420	Collided with parked aircraft on take-off, DBR.
24Sep41	FLTLT J. Saunders	AK539	Forced down by six Bf109s near Sidi Suluman, DBR. Injured.
12Oct41	SGT T.D Parker †	AN355	Shot down by Bf109F nr Sheferzen, Egypt. KIA
12Oct41	SGT D. Scott	AK566	Shot up by Bf109s crash landed LG105. Uninjured
18Nov41	SQNLDR A C Rawlinson	AN300	Engine failed on take-off, DBR Uninjured
19Nov41	FLGOFF F. Fischer	AK407	Forced down by Bf109Fs nr Maddalena, destroyed. WIA
22Nov41	FLGOFF W.G Kloster	AK390	Shot down by Bf109Fs near Tobruk, Libya. Captured PoW
22Nov41	FLGOFF M.H Watson †	AK510	Shot down by Bf109Fs near Bir El Gubi, Libya. KIA
22Nov41	PLTOFF E.H Lane †	AM378	Shot down by Bf109Fs near Bir El Gubi, Libya. KIA
22Nov41	SGT R.H Simes	AM507	Shot down by Bf109Fs near El Adem, Libya. Evaded & survived
22Nov41	WNGCDR P. Jeffrey	AN244	Forced down by Bf109Fs nr El Adem, destroyed. Uninjured.
22Nov41	PLTOFF L .Lees †	AN305	Shot down by Bf109Fs near El Adem, Libya. KIA
22Nov41	FGLGOF H.G.H Roberts	AN373	Forced down by Bf109Fs nr El Adem, destroyed. Captured PoW
22Nov41	FLTLT L.E.S Knowles †	AN410	Shot down by Bf109Fs near El Adem, Libya. KIA
22Nov41	FLTLT J.H. Saunders †	AN416	Shot down by Bf109Fs near Bir El Gubi, Libya. KIA
25Nov41	FLGOFF P.R Bothwell †	AM398	Shot down by AAA nr Sidi Omar, Libya KIA
25Nov41	FLTLT J.G Manford	AM400	Shot down by AAA nr Sidi Omar, Libya. Rescued
25Nov41	FLGOFF B.A Evans †	AN343	MIA on Wing Sweep near Tobruk. KIA
25Nov41	FLGOFF W.E Jewell	AN406	Forced down by Bf109s near Sidi Omar. Rescued
26Nov41	SGT G.E Hiller †	AM413	Shot down by Bf109Fs near Tobruk. Died in captivity
30Nov41	SGT A.C Cameron	AK506	Crash landed after combat with Bf109s near El Adem. Rescued.
09Dec41	FLGOFF D. Rutter †	AK378	Shot down by Bf109Fs near El Adem. KIA
09Dec41	SGT A.C Cameron	AK499	Crash landed after combat with Bf109s near El Adem. Rescued.
09Dec41	SGT R.K Wilson †	AN457	Shot down by Bf109Fs near El Adem. KIA
12Dec41	FLTLT F.F Eggleston	AN335	Shot down by Bf109Fs near Martuba. Captured/PoW
13Dec41	FLGOFF T.H Trimble	AM384	Shot down by Bf109Fs near Derna. Evaded and returned to Unit
14Dec41	FSGT D. Scott	AN270	Shot down by Bf109Fs near El Adem. Captured/PoW
14Dec41	FLGOFF D.E Knight †	AN285	Shot down by Bf109Fs near El Adem. KIA