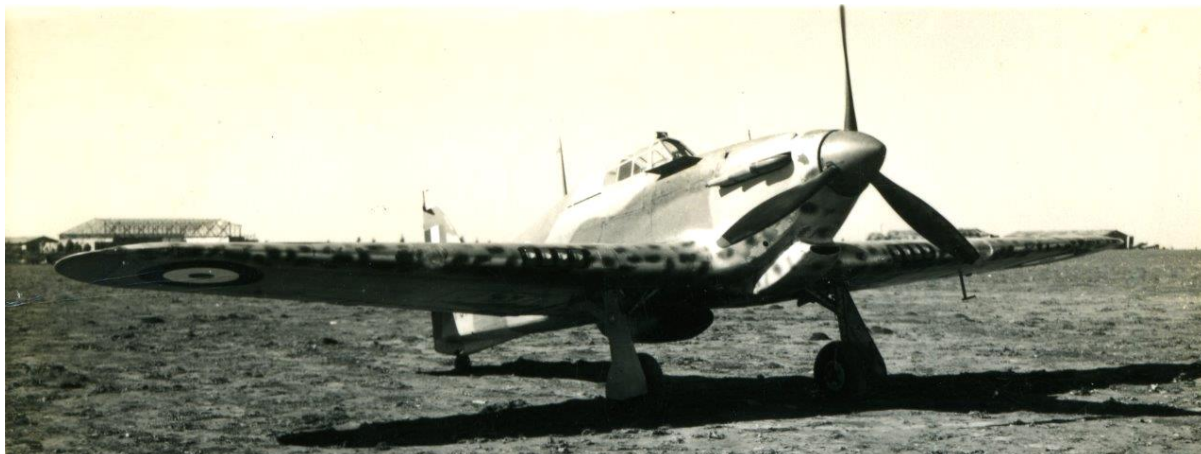


Hawker Hurricanes

3 Squadron RAAF, January 1941 – April 1941

by Paul McGuinness



A 3SQN Hurricane Mk I at Benina, Libya. (Serial P3763.) Note the “blinkers” above the engine exhaust pipes – meant to protect the pilot from being dazzled by exhaust flames during night-flying. This aircraft has “spaghetti” camouflage applied to the leading-edges of its wings and cowling, which made the dark (ex-UK) finish of the Hurricanes less obvious when viewed from ahead in the blue desert sky. [Peter Cuthbert Collection.]

On the 12th of January 1941, No.3 Squadron RAAF was informed that their obsolescent *Gladiator* biplanes were to be replaced with 16 of the more modern *Hawker Hurricane Mk.I* fighters.

The introduction of the Hurricane began that same day, when three pilots¹ flew Gladiators back to *No.102 Maintenance Unit* at RAF Abu Sueir, then journeyed by road to RAF Station Amriya. There they began a short but intense introduction to the Hurricane, delivered by RAF personnel. The original three pilots were joined by three more² on the 22nd and all six pilots continued their familiarisation training for the rest of the month.

Meanwhile, the Squadron had moved from Gambut to Bir Hacheim, then Tmimi and finally to Martuba airfield, located some 268km ENE of Benghazi, Libya. *HQ 202 Group* informed the Squadron on 28 January that the first Flight of six Hurricanes was available for collection and that a second Flight of six would be available from 31 January. Accordingly, the six pilots at Amriya were ordered to No.102 MU to collect the first Flight of Hurricanes.

FLTLT G.H Steege and FLGOFF A. Boyd departed Abu Sueir on the morning of February 1st with Hurricanes P3967 and P5176, on a delivery flight to Martuba, via Amriya. Two more Hurricanes, V7295 and V6737, were delivered on February 2nd by FLTLT J.R Perrin and FLGOFF A.A Gatward; followed by the third pair, V7299 and V7770, by FLGOFFs J.F Jackson and J.H Saunders on February 3rd.

¹ The pilots were Steege, Perrin and Boyd.

² The pilots were Gatward, Jackson and Saunders

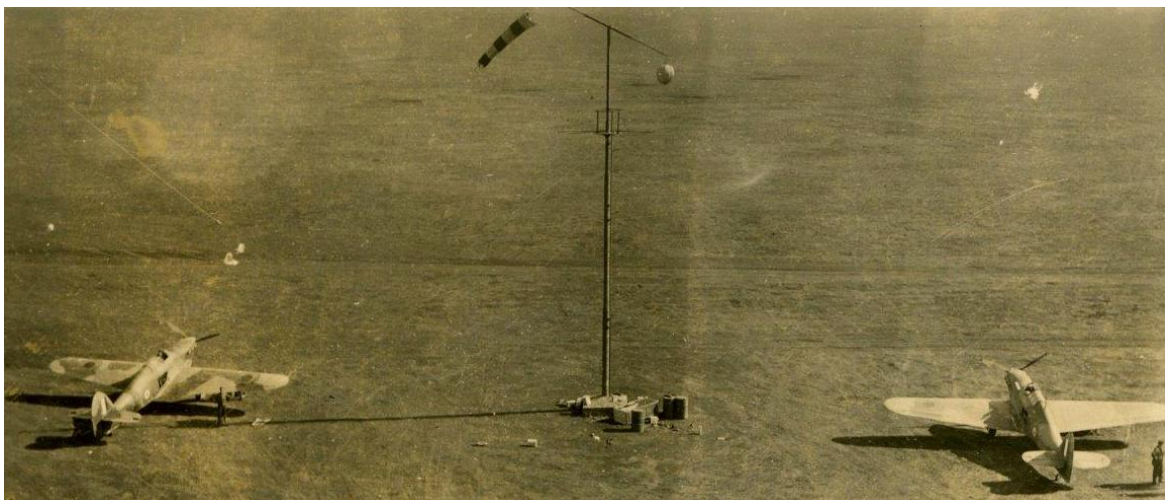
Another three pilots³ had been sent to Amriya / Abu Sueir on 1st Feb to collect the next three available Hurricanes, which they flew back to Martuba on 6th Feb.

Inoffensive Initial Operation

On 5th Feb the first six Hurricanes were tasked with the Squadron's **initial Hurricane operation**; to fly to Mechili airfield, refuel and then carry out an *Offensive Patrol* between Mechili and Benghazi. One aircraft failed to start and the remaining five departed Martuba at 0730hrs, arriving at Mechili by 0805hrs, but unfortunately the promised fuel was not yet at the field. (It was supposedly *en route*.) The crews waited until 1530hrs but when the fuel still hadn't arrived they departed Mechili and returned to Martuba at 1620hrs.

The next few days saw no flying, because severe dust storms blanketed the entire region. On the 9th Feb pilots of 274 Sqn delivered five additional Hurricanes to the unit, but took two of the original six aircraft back to Abu Sueir. This left 3 Squadron with 12 Hurricanes, of which eight were serviceable and four unserviceable.

That evening, *HQ 202 Group* ordered the Squadron to begin moving forward the next day from Martuba to Benina airfield, some 20km east of Benghazi, Libya. The majority of 3 Squadron personnel and equipment departed Martuba at 0800hrs and overnighted at Barce, before arriving at Benina on the afternoon of 10th Feb. Eight serviceable Hurricanes made the transit flight from Martuba that same day and landed at Benina. (The military situation after the Italian retreat was quiet enough for Australian *Prime Minister* Robert Menzies to visit on the 12th.) The whole Squadron was settled-in at Benina once the last of the Squadron's aircraft were ferried in from Martuba, on the afternoon of 13th Feb.



3SQN Hurricanes parked beside the windsock at Benina. [Peter Cuthbert Collection.]

The next day the Squadron was tasked to provide continuous air cover over Benghazi during the daylight hours. Seven aircraft provided that cover between 0645 and 1800hrs. Given Benina's proximity to the front-line, combat was inevitable and this proved so when 3 Squadron **engaged a Luftwaffe aircraft for the very first time on 15th February.**

³ The pilots were Campbell, Rawlinson and Turnbull

Operations from Benina airfield, Libya. February to 3 April 1941

FLTLT Gordon Steege (V6737) and FLGOFF John Saunders (V7476⁴) departed Benina at 0630hrs on the 15th for a defensive patrol over Benghazi harbour. At 0745hrs a lone Ju88 was spotted approaching Benghazi from the north. Saunders dived to attack while Steege provided top cover. After two attacks Saunders lost sight of the Ju88 in the clouds and returned to base, claiming a 'Probable'. Later that day his 'Probable' claim was upgraded to 'Confirmed', when a Royal Navy Minesweeper crew stated that they saw a Ju88 crash 9km west of Benghazi, and rescued the German airmen. [There is some confusion regarding the outcome of this clash, as German records show that Ju88-A5 "L1+JR" WNr3214, from III/KG1, crash-landed at Tripoli with heavy damage after a mission to Benghazi. No other Ju88 was reported as missing.]

By this time, German aircraft were becoming more prevalent, providing close air support to the *Afrika Korps* armoured columns advancing across Libya. Allied troops were defending a line anchored on the coastal town of Agedabia, some 150kms south of Benghazi. No.3 Squadron was tasked to provide air cover for the hard-pressed Allied formations. Three Hurricanes [FLTLT Gordon Steege (V6737); FLGOFF John Jackson (P5176); and FLGOFF John Saunders (V7770)] departed Benina at 1010hrs on 18th Feb and flew south to Agedabia, where they were refuelled. They then launched again at 1450hrs for an *Offensive Patrol* between Agedabia and Agheila.

At approximately 1600hrs the trio was returning to Agedabia at 4,000ft, about 30km north east of Agheila, when Jackson sighted three unescorted Ju87s directly below, at 1,000ft. After warning the other two Hurricanes, he dived to attack the unsuspecting Stukas. As Jackson dived, he saw another nine or so Ju87s following behind the first three. He warned his comrades, who then attacked the larger Stuka formation.

Jackson stated in his diary, "*I did a diving attack on a Ju87 and seemed to pepper it well and it eventually sheered away. I attacked another bloke by a shallow-dive quarter attack and peppered him until he also sheered away. Both looked as if they were going to land. Then I did a dead astern attack on a third bloke and followed and peppered him until he started to break up in front of me and eventually crashed in flames, and I had to pull up over him, as by this time we were only at about 200 ft. I then encountered fairly heavy ack-ack and machine-gun fire from our own troops and climbed like billyo to get away, and lost sight of the other Huns.* [Jackson Diary, published as "[A Lot to Fight For](#)" - by his daughter and son, P & A Jackson, 1996. - For official reports see [3SQN Combat Claims](#) file, from page 53.]

Steege and Saunders waded into the main force of Stukas, which split apart and headed in all directions to escape the Hurricanes in their midst. Both Australian pilots shot at targets as they presented in the melee, but could not press their attacks. As the Stukas had scattered and the Hurricanes were low on fuel, they disengaged and returned to Agedabia. All three Hurricanes sustained minor damage. The final claims were Jackson one destroyed and two damaged; Steege one probable and one damaged; Saunders one probable and one damaged. German records show that Ju87R-1 WNr3351 with *Feldwebel* Hans Drolshagen and *Unteroffizier* Wolfgang Schaefer of *I/Stg1* was shot down near Agedabia and the crew killed. Also, *Feldwebel* Erich Morgenstein and gunner were wounded and their aircraft severely damaged. The Germans also incorrectly claimed one Hurricane shot down.

⁴ The Squadron history sheet for that day lists Saunders in "V5476", but this Serial was never issued to a Hurricane. However, V7476 was held on charge at this time and it was this aircraft Saunders was flying.

Earlier that morning, FLGOFF Jewell had made a very heavy landing in V7414 when returning from a local post-maintenance test flight. The aircraft sustained *Cat.B* damage [beyond the unit's repair capability] to the undercarriage and lower fuselage. It was sent to RAF El Adem for repair, but unfortunately had to be destroyed by the RAF in early April, when El Adem was overrun by the *Afrika Korps*.

The following day (**19th Feb**) the Squadron again sent patrols from Benina to operate from Agedabia, with the first patrol of four departing Benina at 1000hrs. When landing at Agedabia FLGOFF Alan Gatward (P2556) landed badly, damaging his port wing and undercarriage. Gatward took over PLTOFF Kloster's machine (V7752) and departed at 1200hrs with FLTLT Jock Perrin (V7557) and FLGOFF Alan Boyd (P3725) for an *Offensive Patrol* in the Agheila area. Approaching the patrol area they spotted a number of apparently unescorted Ju87s from *II/StG2* dive-bombing the village. Perrin looked all-around for an escort, but seeing none led the flight down to attack the Stukas. Perrin shot down Ju87R-1 *WNR.5455* of *5./StG2*, flown by *Unteroffizier* Kurt Stuber and *Unteroffizier* Walter Neutwig (gunner), which crash-landed near Nofilia with both members of the crew wounded.

Immediately after sending off the Stuka, Perrin was bounced by four Bf110s of *III/ZG26*, who set his gravity fuel-tank on fire. However this did not stop Perrin from turning the tables on the 110s and shooting down *Leutnant* Wehmeyer's Bf110E-1, *WNR.3886*, which the pilot managed to ditch into the sea. Wehmeyer and his wounded gunner, *Obergefreiter* Wilhelm Wüst, got into their dinghy and were picked up 24 hours later by an Axis rescue craft.

Perrin⁵ then managed to crash-land and egress his burning machine before the 110s strafed the wreck. Gatward was also bounced by several Bf110s and was shot down in flames without getting out of his aircraft. Interestingly, all four Bf110 pilots claimed a Hurricane shot down. Later examination of the records shows that Perrin was shot down by *Feldwebel* Richard Heller and Gatward by *Leutnant* Alfred Wehmeyer.

To replenish combat losses, SQNLDR Campbell, FLGOFF Davidson and FLGOFF Turnbull flew to 102MU at Abu Sueir and collected three more Hurricanes. At the same time, HQ detached three Hurricanes and pilots from 73Sqn, which arrived at Benina on 22nd Feb: V7533 (FLGOFF J. Storrar); P3767 (PLTOFF R.L. Goord); and P3769 (PLTOFF D. Scott *DFC*).

These additional aircraft arrived at just the right moment, as the *Afrika Korps* leading elements had made contact with the British defensive line on 20th Feb, between Agheila and Marsa Brega, and were pressing hard against the line.

⁵ Perrin was wounded in one eye and burned around the arms and face, fortunately he was soon rescued by a British patrol car and taken to Benina. He recounted to his fellow pilots that as he staggered from his burning aircraft following the crash-landing, half blinded by oil and blood, he was repeatedly shot at by the Bf110s as he made a desperate dash for shelter behind a tree: "*It was the fastest 100 yards I have ever run and, when I barged into that tree in my haste, I saw stars by the thousands.*" He recovered relatively quickly from his wounds, despite later being bombed in a Tobruk Hospital and then having a Hospital Ship sunk from underneath him! Jock returned to active service with 3SQN at the end of April 1941. He was later awarded a *DFC* for his actions on 19th February.

Also on this day, the first British mobile radar station, *AMES 216*, began operation to aid in the air defence of Benghazi. In the very near future 3 Squadron would become the **first RAAF unit to be vectored to intercept an enemy aircraft**.

The remainder of February saw the Squadron fly 108 defensive patrols over Benghazi without seeing any action, with one exception. SQNLDR Duncan Campbell was scrambled at 0905hrs on the 28th in Hurricane P3980 to intercept an incoming bogey detected by the newly-operational radar at Benghazi. Campbell was guided into visual range of the enemy, which he identified as a Ju88. After making two firing passes, it went down three miles south of Benghazi. The wreckage was identified as Ju88A-1, "4D+HR" *WNR.6021*, of *III/KG30*.

A Lull in Air Combat

March 1941 would later be considered the "calm before the storm", as 3 Squadron personnel saw very little in the way of aerial combat. Their primary task was to maintain defensive patrols over Benghazi, supplemented by six one-day deployments to Agedabia, with no enemy aircraft being encountered until the final day of the month. This hiatus allowed maintenance staff to get all available aircraft up to scratch and get the Squadron prepared for the inevitable confrontation with the *Afrika Korps*. Prior to month's end, the Squadron flew 312 individual sorties, which resulted in five accidents:

- 02Mar FLGOFF John Saunders in P5176 completed an *Offensive Patrol* and was taxiing back to his dispersal area when he struck a truck, causing *Cat.A* damage to the starboard wing tip and the forward edge of the mainplane.
- 04Mar FLGOFF Al Rawlinson in V7484 departed Benina at 1135hrs for a tactical recce over Agheila / Ras Lanuf. After completing the recce and homeward-bound, the engine failed and would not restart. Rawlinson force-landed near Mersa El Brega and sustained an eye injury. The aircraft was extensively damaged. The next day an *R.A.F. Recovery & Salvage Unit* crew arrived on scene and assessed the aircraft as damaged beyond repair, stripped it for spares and destroyed the remains.
- 20Mar FLGOFF Lindsay Knowles in P3763 was returning to Benina after a scramble, when the port wheel would not lock down correctly. The undercarriage collapsed on landing and the aircraft sustained moderate damage. Recovered by a *RAF RSU* for repair and returned three days later.
- 24Mar V7558 was being taxied to the standby area by a groundcrew *Fitter* when the tailwheel assembly snapped off, causing *Cat.A* damage.
- 25Mar SGT J.A Berridge in P3725 was landing at Sidi Barrani when the undercarriage collapsed. *Cat.B* damage.



P3763 on its nose after a landing incident. Most likely Benina 20/3/41.
(Pilot Lin KNOWLES.)

The Squadron did carry out several operations against German forces, the first being on **16 March** when six Hurricanes were despatched to help stop a German *Panzer* reconnaissance force 20 miles west of Agheila. Five days later, five Hurricanes staged through Agedabia on a raid against the LG at Marada Oasis, some 200km south of Agedabia. On this occasion intelligence had made a mistake and the only aircraft present was an abandoned Italian SM.79 bomber, which was duly strafed and left in flames. Another four Hurricanes set out to repeat the mission on the **22nd**, but were forced to abort when they encountered a severe dust storm enroute.

Nothing further of note occurred between the 22nd and the 30th, but a much more intensive period of action began the next day.

Muddled Interception

At 0915hrs on **31 March**, ten Fiat BR.20M bombers of the recently-arrived Italian 98 *Gruppo BT* departed Tamet LG for their first daylight raid, the target being 3SQN's Agedabia Landing Ground. The formation split into *240^a Squadriglia* and *241^a Squadriglia* elements and headed towards their target, picking up their escort over Marble Arch (four Bf110 fighters from ZG26).

Acting on intelligence reports, twelve Hurricanes from 3SQN had departed Agedabia LG at 1015hrs, in staggered flights at 3,000ft / 7,000ft / 10,000ft respectively.

The two Italian formations arrived over Agedabia at about noon and bombed their targets before turning for home, with *240^a* leading and *241^a* a few minutes behind. The 3 Squadron Hurricanes were actually orbiting the target area, but when the Italian force was spotted, the

Hurricanes were flying at the far side of the LG and could not prevent the enemy bombers from unloading. They did however catch up to the rear group, heading north, and fell upon the five BR.20s of 241^a Squadriglia and their pair of escorting Bf110s.

The centre flight of Hurricanes attacked the two escorts. SQNLDR Campbell was credited with shooting down Bf110E-1 WNr.3948 “3U+PR” of 7/ZG26, flown by *Oberfeldwebel* Josef Bracum and *Unteroffizier* Kasper of 7/ZG26. Both airmen died in the fiery crash.

Meanwhile the other two flights were ideally placed to attack, but a combination of bad decisions, bad airmanship and woeful radio equipment saw only two Hurricanes actually attack the bombers. The other Hurricanes never achieved an attack position. The C.O. (SQNLDR Peter Jeffrey) was ropeable and tore strips off his pilots when they returned to base.



Pete Jeffrey [far left] and 3SQN pilots on standby at Benina. Note the gramophone and accordion to help pass time.

FLGOFF Jackson later wrote: “*Found out when I got back to Benina that John Saunders and Lindsay Knowles had got in attacks on the bombers and John had badly damaged one, Knowles probably two. They were the only two to attack the bombers – good work. Actually, we all should have been able to attack the bombers, but through breaking formation and milling about, the Squadron lost its effectiveness and a lot of chaps had gone off home singly or in pairs and didn’t even see the bombers.*”

As stated, only FLGOFF Lindsay Knowles (V7566) and FLGOFF John Saunders (V6730) managed to engage the bombers and between them made repeated attacks until they ran out of ammunition. Italian records show that four of the five bombers were seriously damaged and all four force-landed at Marble Arch, the fifth bomber was also damaged, but managed to return to Tamet LG. In BR.20 MM21910, *Air Gunner* Luigi Ambrosino was killed and two other crewmen wounded. Similarly, crewmen in BR.20 MM22245 and BR.20 MM21921 were wounded. If the bulk of the Hurricane force had been able to join the fray, the results would probably have been catastrophic for the Italian bombers.

In contrast to March, the month of **April 1941** proved to be a very eventful time. Within three weeks, the Squadron was to be withdrawn from the Western Desert and sent to RAF Aqir in

Palestine to reequip and regroup, after fighting a **gruelling retreat** in face of the seemingly invincible *Afrika Korps*.

The action started on **Wednesday 2 April** when Rommel unleashed a two-pronged attack to retake Benghazi, with his Panzer divisions targeted on Benghazi and the Italian *Brescia Division* and *Ariete Armoured Division* targeted on Mechili.

First blood went to 3SQN when FLGOFF M.D Ellerton and FLGOFF A.M Edwards were scrambled to intercept an incoming bogey approaching Benghazi at 20,000ft. They were vectored to the target and at 1820hrs identified it as an *SM.79*, which both pilots then attacked and chased for 30 miles out to sea. The trimotor constantly lost height as it strove to get down into the ever-present concealing heavy sea mist. It was last seen entering the mist with smoke pouring from the starboard engine, whereupon the 3SQN pilots returned to base and claimed a shared '*Probable*'. However, the aircraft was not shot down, but returned to Castel Benito airbase badly holed, with the Observer *Tenente Ugo del Curto* and *Air Gunner 1° Av Anceschi* killed in the action. Neither was the aircraft an *SM.79*, it was in fact a *Cant.Z.1007bis* (MM33372) of *175^a Squadriglia RST*, which was so badly damaged it was written-off and scrapped for spares.

Fighting Retreat

On the evening of **2nd April**, the Squadron was warned by *HQ Cyrenaica* to be prepared for **evacuation** at short notice, given the rapid German advance. At 1145hrs the next morning the Squadron was tasked with a *maximum effort* to cover the now retreating British and Australian troops in the Agedabia / Antelat area. Soon after, 10 Hurricanes accompanied by three 73Sqn Hurricanes departed Benina for the patrol over the Sceledina area. No sooner had they arrived on station than they were informed that all Squadron ground elements were withdrawing to the east. The aircraft were ordered to land at Got-Es-Sultan LG, some 45km to the east of Benina, at the completion of their mission. Not long after, a force of Ju87s from *II/StG2*, escorted by Bf110s from *ZG26*, was spotted approaching Sceledina and a typical swirling dogfight ensued. The outcome of this skirmish has been discussed many, many times over the years and the results are still as unclear today as they were then.

The Squadron *Operations Record Book* states that “... *none of the pilots who took part in the fight agree as to the number of E/A, but it is probable that there were 8 Me110s and a similar number of Ju87s. It is probable that 5 Me110s and 3 Ju87s were shot down with three other Ju87s damaged.*”

Notwithstanding the words recorded in the ORB, the following claims were made:

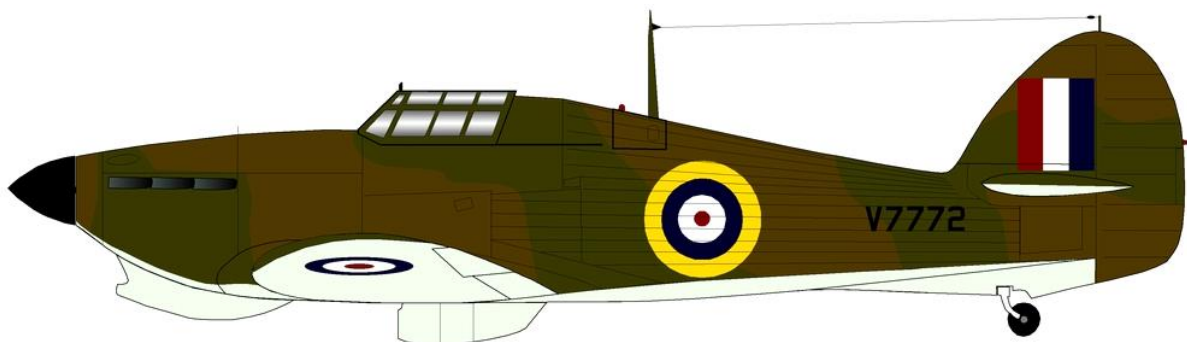
- FLGOFF Peter Turnbull (V7492) claimed two Bf110 destroyed and two damaged. He was later credited with four destroyed.
- FLTLT Gordon Steege (V3937) claimed one Bf110 destroyed.
- FLTLT Alan Rawlinson (V7772) claimed two Ju87s destroyed.
- South African LT G.K Smith claimed one Ju87 destroyed.
- FLGOFF J.H Jackson (V7677) claimed one Ju87 probable.
- FLGOFF Davidson (V7566) claimed one Ju87 probable.

Hurricanes V7292 and V7566 both sustained *Cat.A* [repairable] damage.

FLGOFF John Jackson wrote of the engagement: “...*They turned out to be about ten Me 110s escorting about 15 Ju87s, which were dive-bombing and ground-strafting our retreating*

ground forces. I only spotted two Me110s and didn't see any of the other enemy aircraft. I followed Gordon Steege into the attack and got on the tail of a Me110, just after he had fired a few bursts at it and sheered away from it. I fired two bursts and my guns stopped – rotten luck. Just as I was getting very close, I saw a few bits and pieces and sparks flying from the Me110. Pete Turnbull followed me into the same Me110, and gave it a burst also. Gordon Steege got credit for this kite, as he attacked first and probably got in the best attack. Immediately my guns stopped I did a steep spiral to gain speed and went like hell to get out of the area as I reckoned it was useless to remain without guns firing. I flew back to Benina, where I knew the C.O. was still waiting, and gave him news of the fight. Pete Turnbull had a go at two more Me 110s and blew an engine out of one and bits off another, and fired at a couple of others. Smith, one of three South African pilots attached to us, attacked the Ju87s and blew the tail clean off one and sent it down in flames. Jimmy Davidson also claimed one Ju87 and Alan Rawlinson sent two 87s down in flames.”

At 2200hrs on **3rd April**, HQ Cyrenaica ordered the Squadron to begin evacuating Got-Es-Sultan LG immediately, as the enemy was closing rapidly. The main body of the Squadron departed by 2300hrs for Maraua LG, some 165km NNE of Benghazi. Left behind were the aircraft, pilots and a very small servicing echelon - to launch the aircraft as soon as possible on the next day.



A profile of V7772, in which Alan RAWLINSON claimed two Stukas on 3/4/41. [Artist: [Steve Mackenzie](#).]

Operations from Maraua LG and Martuba LG in Libya. And Sollum & Sidi Heneish LGs in Egypt. 4th - 19th April 1941.

All Squadron aircraft departed at first light on the **4th April** and arrived at Maraua well before the main road party, which did not arrive until 1100hrs (slowed by heavy road congestion). Notwithstanding their late arrival, the groundcrew swung into action and readied the aircraft for a *maximum effort*. They launched nine aircraft for an *Offensive Patrol* above retreating Allied troops in the Maraua-Sceledina-Msus area. FLGOFF Davidson (V7566) aborted and returned to Maraua after 30min with a dud engine.

The Squadron then managed to provide five Hurricanes for a second patrol later in the afternoon, over the Msus area. No enemy aircraft were met during either patrol.

Late that night HQ Cyrenaica gave the Squadron two orders: one was to fly a *maximum effort* at first light to provide air cover for Allied forces retreating through the Barce Pass, located 40km east of the LG. The second order was to move the Squadron from Maraua to Martuba, a further 150km to the east.

At the crack of dawn on **5th April**, eight Hurricanes (seven 3SQN and one SAAF) departed Maraua and orbited the Barce Pass until their fuel situation forced them to retire, no enemy aircraft were encountered.

While the patrol was in the air, at 1000hrs a Squadron convoy with the bulk of the personnel and equipment departed for Martuba by road, for the estimated 7-hour journey. Once again a small servicing echelon was left to prepare the aircraft for further operations or transit to Martuba. While the aircraft from the early patrol were being turned around, the pilots consumed a hasty meal.

“Stuka Parties”

At approximately 1350hrs, five 3SQN Hurricanes and three 73Sqn machines headed back to Barce Pass to resume the air cover. At 1405hrs a formation of Ju87s was sighted bombing Allied troops south of the Pass. After carefully checking for the presence of German fighters, the Hurricanes made a concerted attack that led to claims for three Stukas of 6/StG2 being shot down. (Two to PLTOFF Ellerton in V7353 and one to PLTOFF Kloster in P5176.) German records confirm that three Stukas were either shot down or crash-landed.

On the reverse side of the ledger, FLGOFF A.M “Mort” Edwards⁶ was hit by return fire and forced to land with a damaged engine. He was picked up almost immediately by a patrol from the 2nd Armoured Division, but unluckily Edwards and his rescuers were then captured by German forces.

A third patrol of seven 3SQN and two 73Sqn Hurricanes under the command of SQNLDR Duncan Campbell in V7567 departed Maraua at 1635hrs for Barce Pass and a short time later intercepted 12 unescorted Stukas from 4/StG2 attacking Allied convoys near Barce Pass and after the usual check for fighters waded into the Ju87s.

FLGOFF John Jackson described the action thus: “...decided to do another patrol immediately, led by Duncan Campbell, to search for Mort Edwards and at the same time protect our retreating troops from enemy dive-bombers. We had gone no distance before we bumped into a large number of Ju87s, unescorted by fighters. We attacked immediately and I saw Jock Perrin send one down in flames. I then attacked another and gave it a good burst and reckoned I had damaged it badly, when another Hurricane came at it from my starboard and, doing a beam attack, sent it down in flames. I then attacked two others, damaging them, and got on the tail of a fourth and gave it a couple of bursts and silenced its rear guns, when my guns ceased to fire. I then had the enemy at about 100ft and felt enraged that he looked like escaping, and his rear gunner appeared to be dead, so I thought I might dive at him and clip him with my wing, I decided it was too low to get away with this, so I made a couple of dummy attacks at him, and much to my delight and surprise, he crash-landed in a Bedouin cultivated wadi and his aircraft hit the side of the wadi and spun around in a cloud of dust. I flew around a few times and eventually the pilot got out, looking a bit dazed. I gave him a wave and returned to Maraua, but pinpointed the spot in case I ever get back over the area and will ground-strafe the aircraft and completely destroy same, though I doubt if it could ever be flown out of the wadi. Score this patrol was Jock Perrin three, self one and two

⁶ 250711 Albert Mortley Edwards was POW No.2526 and was incarcerated in Italy at Isarco, then Rezanello, Campo 17, and Campo 78 before going to Stalag Luft III in Germany. He was liberated in May 1945 and repatriated to Australia.

possibles, Jewell three, and I forget the rest. [The 3SQN Hurricane I, "OS.B", Serial P3967, was flown by Jock Perrin when he claimed the three Ju87s of II/StG2 on 5 April 1941. Two days earlier, FLTLT Gordon Steege had used it to claim a Bf110.] Jewell saw Duncan Campbell losing height with a stream of white smoke pouring from his aircraft and he has not been seen since. I feel confident that both Mort and Duncan force-landed safely, though they may be taken prisoners."

A total of nine Stukas were claimed shot down, six by 3 Sqn and three by 73 Sqn. Examination of German records showed that five Stukas failed to return in the late afternoon and all those that did return sustained serious damage and casualties. Whatever the inaccuracies of the claims, the fact remains that German records show **eight Stukas destroyed** and several others heavily damaged in one day. This represented an unsustainable rate of attrition for the Stuka Gruppen.

On the debit side, 3 Squadron lost two aircraft and two pilots, one as POW (Edwards) and one *Killed in Action*. SQNLDR Duncan Campbell had been shot down near Barce when his Hurricane was hit by return-fire from one or more of the Stukas. Campbell's Hurricane was last seen on fire and diving steeply towards the ground.

Air Umbrella over the Allied Retreat

After the battle with the Stukas, the surviving Hurricanes returned to Maraua, where they were ordered to immediately fly on to Martuba. This they did without waiting to refuel. The small servicing party also left Maraua after completing the destruction of 48,000 rounds of ammunition and other equipment and transport that had not been removed by the main party.

Eventually, all elements of the Squadron reunited at the Martuba LG by 2100hrs on 5th April. Only one hour later, *HQ Cyrenaica* ordered them to move to Gazala East LG, located 50km west of Tobruk. However, the C.O., SQNLDR Jeffrey, decided that in view of the movements over the last two days the Squadron convoy would get a night's rest and move out on the following day.

Accordingly, the road convoy departed at 0730hrs on the 6th and reached Gazala East LG by 1100hrs, where they awaited the arrival of the Hurricanes from Martuba.

As soon as the Squadron united again at Gazala, they were ordered to move immediately to 73 Sqn's old base at Sidi Mahmoud LG, just east of Tobruk. The road convoy departed at 2130hrs, but were forced to stop at 0230hrs by a very strong dust storm. As luck would have it, when the morning came, they found themselves right alongside the airfield.

The aircraft arrived in the early morning of 7th April and the Squadron was able to launch three patrols during the day. The first mission was a defensive patrol over retreating Allied forces in the Derna area during which no enemy aircraft were encountered. The second mission was an *Offensive Patrol* in the Mechili area and at the Mechili LG they found and destroyed two Ju52/3m transports belonging to III/KGrzbV1.

The third mission proved once again the adage about the *best laid plans of mice and men*. The aircraft departed for an *Offensive Patrol* in the Derna / Martuba area, but found nothing and were returning to Sidi Mahmoud when FLGOFF Lindsay Knowles, in P5176, developed

engine trouble and was forced to land at Gazala East. Unbeknownst to Knowles, the *Flight Leader* had radioed Base and arranged for a fast vehicle to go to the aid of the stranded aircraft. Knowles had waited patiently beside his aircraft for rescue until the twilight, when the Army personnel manning the base told him they were evacuating, as the enemy was only a short distance away. Under strict orders to prevent aircraft from being captured, Knowles took the only way out, burnt the machine and departed with the Army personnel. A short time later the vehicle from Base arrived on the scene to find a destroyed aircraft and no pilot!

At 1600hrs *HQ Cyrenaica* ordered the Squadron to move immediately to LG.E79, located approximately 40km east of Sollum, Western Egypt, and 210km SSE of Tobruk. The convoy duly departed at 1730hrs, but as per the other evacuations, the aircraft and a small servicing party were left at Sidi Mahmoud with orders to depart the following morning at first light. The convoy completed a demanding 25-hr road trip across some of the most inhospitable terrain on the planet before arriving at E79 at 1830hrs on **8th April**. Seven aircraft departed Sidi Mahmoud in the afternoon and carried out an *Offensive Patrol* in the Mechili area, before flying on to E79. PLTOFF W.E Jewell in V3818 force-landed 20km from Gazala East LG when his engine failed, but was quickly rescued by an Army patrol. In an almost identical scenario to Lindsay Knowles the previous day, the proximity of enemy forces compelled him to burn his aircraft and escape with the Army patrol.



An Axis propaganda shot of German and Italian troops inspecting a burnt-out Hurricane in the desert.

The Squadron spent the next three days at E79. They were only required to fly one mission on the **9th April**, so took the time to service and repair their aircraft, equipment and vital transportation vehicles.

In the late morning of **12th April** the Squadron was informed that the Army had evacuated Sollum and withdrawn back into the Tobruk pocket. The C.O. decided to move the Squadron and informed HQ of his decision (the Squadron was now part of the newly-formed *204 Group*).

The aircraft departed E.79 at 1600hrs and flew 200km NNE to Mersa Matruh airfield, located some 300kms east of Tobruk, but enroute they were ordered to land further on at Sidi Heneish airfield. Meanwhile the road convoy departed E.79 at 1700hrs and arrived at Matruh the following day at 1000hrs, only to be told they had to go another 50km east to Sidi Heneish. The convoy duly reached Sidi Heneish and quickly prepared the aircraft for two *Offensive Patrols* over Tobruk and surrounds during which no enemy aircraft were met. That evening *204 Grp HQ* provided the Squadron with several tasks that were essentially reconnaissance missions.

The first mission of **14th April** was an *Offensive Patrol* over Tobruk, but FLGOFF A. Boyd in P2638 was forced to abort when his guns would not fire. Simultaneously, other patrols were sent out to Tobruk, Sollum, Fort Capuzzo and to a suspected new Axis LG south near Mersa Gargub. While 3 Sqn Hurricanes went about their business, the Axis launched the first of many air raids against Tobruk and its harbour. At approximately 0800hrs an estimated 70 aircraft attacked. As soon as SGNLDR Jeffrey learned of the attack he dispatched his last two Hurricanes to investigate and assist the Tobruk defenders.



V7728 photographed at a base behind the front lines.

FLGOFF W.S Arthur in V7728 and Lieutenant A.A Tennant (SAAF) in P3725 were approaching Tobruk from the east at 1,000ft when they spotted three Bf110 fighters about to attack them. They quickly reversed the situation and turned to attack the enemy. Both pilots claimed a '*Probable*' and both stated that they saw their victim dive away steeply toward the sea, with blueish smoke issuing from the fuselage, before disappearing into the low cloud/mist cover.

German records show that Bf110D-3 *Wnr.3418* of *III/ZG2* was lost in the engagement. After this clash Arthur and Tennant resumed their patrol and found a Ju52 on the ground at Menastir LG, which they proceeded to strafe.

In total, 3 Squadron flew 16 reconnaissance sorties on this day, with only one resulting in combat.



3SQN Pilot "Woof" ARTHUR [centre] at Benina with ground crew 8216 AC1 Flight Rigger Don STEWART [left] and 5704 AC1 Flight Mechanic Oscar BARTON [right]. The aircraft is P3763.

Early on **15th April** FLGOFF Arthur in V7728 flew a solo low level attack against enemy MT on the Tobruk / Bardia road, destroying or damaging several vehicles and in the process sustaining some *Cat.A* damage from the impressive amount of AA fire put up by the vehicles.

Later that morning the 3SQN C.O., SQNLDR Jeffrey, received word that enemy aircraft were again at the Menastir LG and were to be attacked. Jeffrey decided to do go alone in V7770 and found Menastir devoid of aircraft, but at another field near Fort Capuzzo he spotted four Ju52 transports⁷ about to land. Searching the skies he could not find any escorts, so he attacked and shot one down in flames while the other three were landing. Another took violent evasive action and crash-landed. Jeffrey then strafed the other two until they were flaming wrecks and attacked the last one, but ran out of ammunition before it was destroyed. During the afternoon FLGOFF Kloster in V7482 was leading an *Offensive Patrol* in the area and two of the flight, FLGOFF Lindsay Knowles in AS990 and PLTOFF Donati in V7834, dived down and strafed the last Ju52 until it erupted into a ball of flames, obviously loaded with petrol.

A bit later FLGOFF John Jackson in V7770 spotted *Lockheed Hudson* AX682 of RAF 267Sqn, which had force-landed 15km NW of Sollum, while carrying Field Marshall Wavell and his staff. As the aircraft was now in enemy territory, Jackson, following standing orders, strafed the Hudson until it burned.

By the morning of the **16th**, the hard-working ground crew managed to present eight serviceable Hurricanes for operations. Seven of the aircraft departed for an *Offensive Patrol* over the Tobruk-Bardia area. No worthwhile targets were detected and enemy aircraft were conspicuous by their absence. The worsening situation along the Bardia-Tobruk line demanded every assistance and the Royal Navy sent the 10,000 ton *Town Class* Cruiser *HMS Gloucester* to provide close naval gun fire support from her twelve 6" (152mm) guns. Spotting the gunfire around the Bardia-Fort Capuzzo area was done by the ship's *Walrus* seaplane. This was, in turn, covered by Hurricanes from 3SQN. Some Bf110s arrived and made feint attacks but were chased out to sea by the Hurricanes. However the chase was quickly abandoned when the flight leader FLGOFF Turnbull suspected they were being decoyed away from the *Walrus*, so he aborted the chase and returned to the naval units.

⁷ The four transports were Ju52/3m of I/KGrzbV9, which recorded one shot down and three destroyed on the ground.

The next three days proved entirely uneventful for the Squadron. They flew a total of 23 sorties on tactical reconnaissance and offensive/defensive patrols in the Tobruk-Bardia region. No enemy contact was made during this time. On the morning of the 19th the C.O. Peter Jeffrey was informed by *HQ Middle East* that because of the Hurricane losses in 3, 73 and 274 Sqns, all Hurricanes from 3 Sqn and 73 Sqn were to be **handed over** to 274 Sqn immediately. Furthermore, 3 Squadron was to proceed east to RAF Aboukir the next day and commence 10 days leave, before being re-equipped with the new *Curtis Tomahawk* fighters.

Summary of 3SQN Hurricane Operations

Information contained in the *3 SQN Operations Record Book* and other references show that a total of at least 40 Mk.I Hurricanes served with the Squadron between 01 February and 19 April 1941. The aircraft are known to have flown **at least 894 operational sorties**. The number of non-operational flights will never be known, as this data was not recorded; however it is safe to assume that this number would be significantly higher than the known operational flights. All things considered, it would be reasonable to state that 3 Sqn Hurricanes flew between 1,000 and 2,000 flights. 3SQN pilots made the following **combat claims**:

Date	Pilot	Hurricane	Aircraft	Claim
15Feb41	FLGOFF J. Saunders	V7476	Ju88	Destroyed
18Feb41	FLGOFF J. Jackson	P5176	Ju87	1 x destroyed and 1 x damaged
	FLGOFF J. Saunders	V7770	Ju87	1 x probable and 1 damaged
	FLTLT G. Steege	V6737	Ju87	1 x probable and 1 damaged
19Feb41	FLTLT J. Perrin	V7757	Ju87 Me110	Destroyed Destroyed
28Feb41	SQNLDR D. Campbell	P3980	Ju88	Destroyed
31Mar41	SQNLDR D. Campbell	P3980	Me110	Destroyed
	FLGOFF L. Knowles	V7566	BR.20	2 x damaged
	FLGOFF J. Saunders	V6730	BR.20	2 x damaged
02Apr41	FLGOFF M. Ellerton	V7353	Cant.Z	Shared probable
	FLGOFF A. Edwards	V7566	Cant.Z	Shared probable
03Apr41	FLTLT G. Steege	P3967	Me110	Destroyed
	FLTLT A. Rawlinson	V7772	Ju87	2 x destroyed
	FLTLT P. Turnbull	V7492	Me110	2 x destroyed and 2 damaged
	LT G.K Smith	Unk	Ju87	Destroyed
	FLGOFF J. Jackson	V7677	Ju87	Probable
	FLGOFF S. Davidson	V7566	Ju87	Probable
05Apr41	PLTOFF M. Ellerton	V7353	Ju87	2 x destroyed
	PLTOFF W. Kloster	P5176	Ju87	Destroyed
	FLTLT J. Perrin	P3967	Ju87	3 x destroyed
	FLGOFF J. Jackson	Unk	Ju87	1 x destroyed 2 x probables
	FLGOFF Jewel	Unk	Ju87	3 x destroyed
07Apr41	FLGOFF L Knowles	P5176	Ju52	1/3 share of 2 x Ju52 destroyed
	Unk	P2765	Ju52	1/3 share of 2 x Ju52 destroyed
	Unk	V7770	Ju52	1/3 share of 2 x Ju52 destroyed
14Apr41	FLGOFF W. Arthur	V7728	Me110	Probable
	Lt A. Tennant	P3725	Me110	Probable
15Apr41	SQNLDR P. Jeffrey	V7770	Ju52	3 x destroyed
	FLGOFF L. Knowles	AS990	Ju52	Share Ju52 destroyed
	PLTOFF Donati	V7834	Ju52	Share Ju52 destroyed

3 Squadron Hurricane Losses

Seven Hurricanes were lost in combat, resulting in the deaths of two pilots. 17 aircraft sustained various degrees of damage during operational missions, resulting in a range of non-lethal injuries to four pilots.

Date	Pilot	Hurricane	Details
19Feb41	FLTLT Gatward	V7552	Shot down in flames by Bf110s near Mersa El Brega. Pilot <i>KIA</i> . [The Luftwaffe's first aerial victory over the Desert.]
19Feb41	FLTLT Perrin	V7557	Shot down in flames by Bf110s near Mersa El Brega. Pilot shaken and wounded but survived crash-landing.
04Mar41	FLTLT Rawlinson	V7484	Force-landed near Mersa El Brega and was extensively damaged. Pilot injured. Aircraft destroyed to prevent capture.
05Apr41	FLGOFF Edwards	V7347	Force-landed in the desert, picked up by British 2nd Armoured Division, but captured with his rescuers.
05Apr41	SQNLDR Campbell	V7567	Shot down while attacking Ju87s. Pilot <i>KIA</i> .
07Apr41	FLGOFF Knowles	P3980	Force-landed Gazala East LG with engine problems. Aircraft destroyed to prevent capture. Pilot OK.
08Apr41	FLGOFF Jewel	P3818	Force-landed 20km south of Gazala with engine problems. Aircraft destroyed to prevent capture. Pilot OK.

Table 1

**Hawker Hurricane Mk.I Aircraft
Operated by No.3 Squadron RAAF
January 31 to 19 April 1941**

	Aircraft	TOC	From	SOC	Fate
1	N2628	29Mar41	274Sqn	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
2	P2556	08Feb41	274Sqn	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
3	P2638	01Apr41	73Sqn	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
4	P3720	03Apr41	73Sqn	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
5	P3722	27Feb41	274Sqn	01Mar41	To 274Sqn
6	P3725	13Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
7	P3726	22Feb41	73Sqn	10Mar41	To 73Sqn
8	P3727	22Feb41	73Sqn	03Apr41	To 73Sqn
9	P3729	22Feb41	73Sqn	02Mar41	To 73Sqn
10	P3763	13Feb41	102MU	07Apr41	Force-landed in the desert, destroyed to prevent capture.
11	P3675	13Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 103MU
12	P3818	19Feb41	274Sqn	08Apr41	Force-landed in the desert, destroyed to prevent capture.
13	P3822	13Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
14	P3967	31Jan41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
15	P3977	08Feb41	274Sqn	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
16	P3980	13Feb41	102MU	07Apr41	Force-landed in the desert, destroyed to prevent capture.
17	P5176	31Jan41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
18	V6737	31Jan41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
19	V7295	31Jan41	102MU	08Feb41	To 102MU
20	V7299	31Jan41	102MU	08Feb41	To 102MU
21	V7347	08Feb41	274Sqn	05Apr41	Force-landed near Barce, destroyed to prevent capture.
22	V7353	19Feb41	274Sqn	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
23	V7414	06Feb41	102MU	18Feb41	Destroyed on evacuation from El Adem
24	V7424	27Feb41	274Sqn	19Apr41	To 102MU as non-repairable.
25	V7482	13Apr41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
26	V7484	08Feb41	274Sqn	04Mar41	crash-landed in desert near Mersa el Brega - DBR
27	V7492	22Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
28	V7552	08Feb41	73Sqn	19Feb41	Shot down by Me110s near Mersa el Brega
29	V7553	22Feb41	73Sqn	02Mar41	To 73Sqn
30	V7557	16Feb41	102MU	19Feb41	Shot down by Me110s near Mersa el Brega
31	V7558	24Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
32	V7566	24Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
33	V7567	22Feb41	102MU	05Apr41	Shot down attacking Ju87s
34	V7728	12Apr41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
35	V7734	12Apr41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
36	V7753	09Mar41	102MU	05Apr41	To 33Sqn
37	V7770	31Jan41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
38	V7772	06Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish
39	V7858	16Feb41	102MU	10Mar41	To 102MU
40	AS990	24Feb41	102MU	19Apr41	To 274Sqn or 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish

Note: Of the 20 aircraft on charge when 3SQN was withdrawn from operations, six Hurricanes went to 274 Sqn and 14 went to 204 Group Aircraft Pool at Sidi Heneish. No serial numbers were recorded in the ORB, so it is not possible to state which aircraft went where.