

7 SQUADRON IN WORLD WAR II

(Part 2: 1943-1945)

Middle East

On 2 January 1943 Group Captain Cross of 219 Group visited the Squadron. He outlined the future of the Squadron. The Squadron was to intercept Ju 88's which the enemy used to attack the Suez Canal, and would also supply cover to convoys. Arrangements were made for Maj Blaauw and six pilots to give an anti-tank demonstration at Maqubeilia in Palestine at 74 OTU.

The following day 7 Squadron received instructions to move to Benina. At 1315 hours the Squadron had packed up and left Sandur. The journey to Benina was completed on 29 January.

On 4 February one section of the Squadron's aircraft escorted convoy 'Dimale' to Benghazi. Another convoy, 'Table', was escorted when it left Benghazi. On 7 February six aircraft led by Capt Kirby left for Martuba to



Members of 7 Squadron in World War II

Before 7 Squadron assumed duty, practise interceptions were carried out daily. A friendly Bogey, normally a Beaufort, was used. 7 Squadron also went out on night flying exercises. On 22 January Lt Lovemore was killed on one of these night flying exercises. He had been on a cross-country flight to Damietta and Tel-el Kibir.

assist the Squadrons of 16 Sector with shipping patrols. Top and bottom cover were provided for the convoy 'Outwit'.

On the 9th orders to move to Bersis were received. The Squadron arrived on the 12th at Bersis. The same afternoon a section of the Squadron provided cover for convoy

'Pilot', which was attacked by a Ju 88. In the ensuing combat the enemy aircraft was shot down. Unfortunately the Squadron lost Lt Rosholt who was shot down by AA fire from the ships in the convoy. Another aircraft piloted by Lt King was also damaged. Another two escort missions were carried out for convoys 'Roman' and 'Cannon' on the 19th. On the 22nd the Squadron again provided cover to convoys 'Season' and 'Casing'.

Despite the fact that the Squadron supplied cover for convoys, training continued. Night flying exercises were carried out including oxygen climbs.

On 26 February the SASO AHQ Egypt, Air Commodore Saunders, paid a brief and informal visit to the Squadron. The same afternoon cover was provided for a special convoy 'Curly'. This convoy consisted of a passenger ship, hence the importance. A less important convoy 'Dimple' was also covered by the Squadron. On February 28 three convoys, 'Major', 'Angel' and 'Pilot' were covered. During February the Squadron flew 697 hours of which 340 were operational.

On 9 April Capt Frewen announced that the Squadron was to return to the original task of tank busting. 3 Squadron was to return to take over 7 Squadron's operational commitments. Maj Van Vliet, DFC was posted to the Squadron as the new Officer Commanding.

Tank busting training was resumed immediately and arrangements were made to build a concrete harmonising base for the Hurricane Mk II's with which the Squadron was to be equipped.

On April 12 the AOC-in-C, Air Chief Marshal Sholto-Douglas, visited the Squadron and informed the OC that 7 Squadron was to be attached to the First Army in Tunisia. The following morning Maj Blaauw left Bersis to take up his new post. Ten new Hurricane Mk II D's were delivered on the same day.

On May 1 news was received that the Squadron was to return to shipping protection. The men found this move a little mortifying but nothing deterred the morale of 7 Squadron and soon the Mk II D's were



Maj Blaauw with 7 Squadron's ground personnel

handed back and 3 Squadron returned the Mk II C's to 7 Squadron. The task of escorting convoys commenced once again. During this period a shortage of serviceable aircraft was once again experienced.

On 24 May instructions were received that the Squadron was to move to Derna. The following morning the Squadron moved off to Derna via Barce, Marava and Lamluda. By the 29th the new camp was completely organised.

The Squadron immediately resumed duties. On 1 May four aircraft intercepted two Me 109 Recce aircraft. Speed proved a vital factor and 7 Squadron's Mk II C's lost their prey. In June the Squadron had to take extra precautionary measures against sabotage attempts. Sabotage was expected as a large number of Italian parachutists were dropped in the southern region of Derna.

Despite this threat 7 Squadron continued its duties. On 20 June the Squadron escorted convoy 'Naval'. On 25 June four aircraft were sent to Gazala to assist 15 Sector in escorting convoy 'Across' and on 1 July a convoy from Bi Amlid was escorted.

On 2 July the Squadron took delivery of four Spitfires to be used as interception fighters. Test flights carried out by Maj Van Vliet

and Capt Kirby proved highly satisfactory. By 14 July the four Spitfires were fully operational and had been fitted with all the necessary requirements.

A combined operation of 7, 80, 237 and 94 Squadrons took place on 23 July. The operation involved a ground strafing attack on German troops in Crete. 7 Squadron provided nine aircraft under leadership of Maj Van Vliet. Although the targets were neither numerous nor as good as had been anticipated, all the pilots participating were delighted with the operation. The Squadron did a substantial amount of convoy patrol work and although a number of Spitfire interception sorties were carried out, no enemy aircraft was sighted.

On 6 August a signal from HQ 212 Group informed the Squadron that they were to proceed to St Jean where they were to hand over their Hurricane aircraft to 127 Squadron. The Squadron would in return be supplied with Spitfires. By the third week in August the Squadron had sixteen Spitfire Mk V's of which thirteen were operationally serviceable.

On 27 August orders were received for the Squadron to move to El Gamil airfield at Port Said.

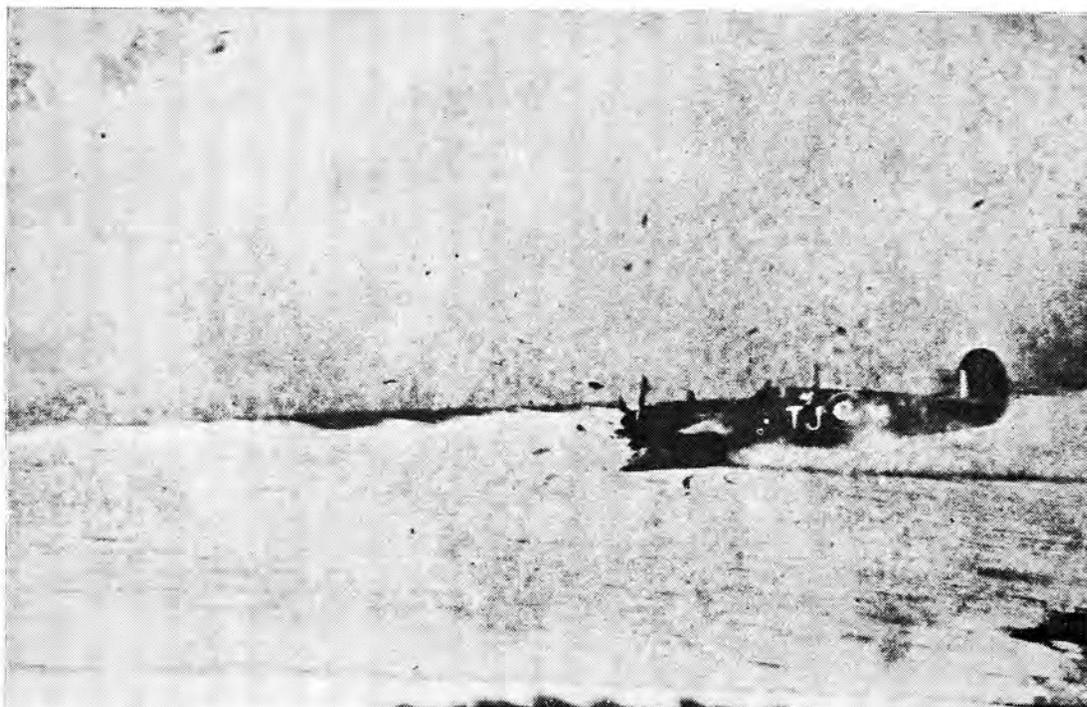


Groundcrew with a Spitfire. Note the 20mm gun

On 3 September news was received of the Allied invasion of Italy. On the 8th news was received of Italy's surrender. Instructions stating that Italian aircraft or shipping might under no circumstances be attacked, were also received.

The Kos operation

On 10 September six pilots under leadership of Capt Kirby were instructed to leave on a secret mission. Their destination was only described as 'The Island'. A very secretive



Lt C. Logan doing a wheels-up landing after bursting a tyre on take-off. Note the propeller's splinters



Lt Logan climbing out — unhurt!

atmosphere pervaded the entire Squadron as to the new commitments. On 21 September it became known that 7 Squadron had landed on the island of Kos from where they would be operating in the Dodecanese Islands.

After the Allies had invaded Italy, they started making preparations to secure a foothold in the Aegean. They wanted to seize the island of Rhodes because its capture would prepare the way for ultimate invasion of Greece. The Germans realised this fact and doubled their garrisons on Rhodes so that the Allies would once again have to rely on their air forces for support. This was not forthcoming, for though the strength of the Allies in the air was considerable, it lay rather in bombers and short-range fighters than in long-range fighters.

The Allies then decided to invade Kos, Leros and Samos. Kos with its airfield at Antimachia would be the key to the Aegean and from there Rhodes and the other islands of the archipelago could be invaded.

On 12 September the British invaded Kos and on the 13th the Spitfires of 7 Squadron followed.

The Germans on nearby Rhodes and Crete were soon mounting a counter attack. Kos

was subjected to heavy bombing by Stukas and Ju 88's for a few days. The airfield of Antimachia was also attacked.

On the 26th the enemy resumed his air offensive and soon made conditions in Kos very difficult. The Spitfires of 7 Squadron took a heavy toll of the attacking planes over the period of pre-attack bombing. On the 27th five Me 109's attacked and shot down Lts Prescott and Hynd (of 7 Squadron) who had been on patrol. Immediately afterwards the island was bombed and ground-strafed by three successive waves of Ju 88's. They concentrated on the dispersal and take-off areas. During these raids Me 109's remained in the air, giving top-cover to the bombers. One Spitfire was damaged and the landing ground was made unserviceable. During that afternoon, after the airfield had been rendered unserviceable, Maj Van Vliet and Lt Basson were attacked by Me 109's while on patrol. They managed to destroy two enemy aircraft.

On the 28th at 1500 hours another attack was made by Me 109's and Ju 88's. Capt Rorvik and Lts Taylor and De Jager retaliated.

Two days later news was received over the radio that Kos was being attacked by German



ME 109 salvaged at Mersa Matru

Paratroops and seaborne forces. On 2 October news came that another German attack was taking place. The Adjutant was instructed by the Air Force Commodore to hold the Squadron in readiness for immediate evacuation. The enemy was advancing rapidly. On 5 October the advancing German troops dropped mortars on the perimeter of 7 Squadron's airfield. The Squadron then made a hasty departure to the nearby beaches and took to boats on which they managed to escape to another island. Kos was once again in the hands of the Germans after a brief period (only three weeks) of Allied occupation.

During the German offensive 7 Squadron and 77 Squadron (RAF) took the brunt of the attack. By the end of the day (26 September) 7 Squadron had only four Spitfires which were still able to fly. They fought gallantly and stubbornly before they were overwhelmed and put out of operation for a period.

7 Squadron had to be brought up to strength again. Immediate arrangements were made for new postings. Training was to commence as soon as possible.

On 23 October orders were received for the Squadron to proceed to Luigi Da Savoia. The Squadron handed over its commitments to 238 Squadron (RAF) and left.

After Kos

At Savoia the Squadron fell under 212 Group RAF and operated under direction of 16 Sector. By 1600 hours the entire Squadron had settled down, taking over billets from 94 Squadron. Capt Stanford (the new OC) was promoted to Major. Lt Ray Burl was awarded the DFC as result of his stout efforts on the Island of Kos.

On 7 November orders were received stating that the Squadron was to move to Kabrit on the Suez Canal as soon as possible. The men started their journey on the morning of the 9th. The destination of the Squadron was changed to El Gamil, thus it was back to 12 Sector and 219 Group again. Being the only Squadron operating on the station, 7 Squadron had quite a difficult task as both fighter and shipping standbys and shipping patrols had to be dealt with.

By November 12 the Squadron had settled down at El Gamil. An order from Group Captain Aitken instructed the Squadron to fit four aircraft with 90 gallon long range tanks. Upon completion they were to fly to Nicosia and Cyprus to relieve a detachment of 74 Squadron. The pilots designated for this tour were Capt Connel and Lts Deakin, Bolding and Montanari. A skeleton party of ground crew, sufficient for the maintenance of the aircraft, also accompanied the four aircraft. Further aircraft piloted by Lts Burl, Ground, Kelly and Van Heerden were detailed to proceed to the same destination on the following day. The intention was to employ these aircraft in fighter sweeps over Mauritza (Rhodes).

The OC returned from a conference at 219 Group HQ and informed the Squadron that while its base remained at El Gamil, all operations were to be conducted from Cairo-West. Lt Burl received the news of his promotion to Captain on the 21st and heard that he was to be transferred to 41 Squadron. He was at this stage one of the few original members still with the Squadron.

On 22 November the OC decided to replace four of the more experienced pilots in Cyprus. Thus Capt Burl and Lts Deakin, Ground and Montanari were replaced by Capt Hughes and Lts Binedell, Richter and Atmore. There were no incidents involving enemy aircraft, either at El Gamil or in Cyprus. A total of 25 operational hours was flown by 7 Squadron during the stay at Cyprus.

The men returned to Cairo-West via Loku on 30 November. The pilots handed over their aircraft to 237 Squadron and went home from Loku by truck.

On 7 December twelve aircraft (under the leadership of Maj Stanford) escorted a York aircraft carrying President İnönü of Turkey from Cairo to Ismailia.

On 12 December thirteen aircraft took off from Cairo-West and flew to Gamil, where the Squadron was to be based. There it severed operational room ties with 238 Squadron. It was decided that as far as operational requirements were concerned, the two Squadrons would work 'Standby' and 'Convoy' patrol duties on alternate days.



7 Squadron's Personnel 1944

1944-45

7 Squadron continued its patrol duties until instructions were received that four aircraft were to proceed to Daba and six to Maryut on the 16th. No indication was given of the duties these detachments were required to perform, nor of the length of the stay. The pilots designated for these operations were briefed on their duties after they had reached their destination. All other Squadrons in 13 Sector's area had temporarily been withdrawn for other duties and the two detachments were assigned to take over their commitments, normal standby and patrol duties. On the 17th the two detachments were ordered to proceed to Idku.

On 22 January seven officers and one hundred and one NCO's and other ranks received the 'Africa Star with clasp'. Thirteen officers and fourteen NCO's and other ranks received the 'Africa Star'.

On 8 April 1944 a signal was received from 216 Group finalising the move to Italy. Four flights of four aircraft each were to proceed to Marble Arch (refuel) then to Castel Benito (lunch and refuel). The last hop on the first day was to Catania via Malta. The following day the Squadron was to carry on to Trigno.

The four aircraft landed at Trigno and surprised everybody with a perfect landing. Trigno's landing ground had an evil reputation with newcomers and apparently 7 Squadron was the first Squadron to carry out a perfect landing.

Italy

Intense activity prevailed while the pilots were settling into their new environment. The ground crew worked like Trojans overhauling the machines and doing their utmost to get the aircraft ready for active operations against the Germans. By the 13th all but two of the aircraft were ready for the initiation flights.

On 14 April twelve aircraft under the leadership of Lt Col Bosman did a sweep over the line. This was to enable the pilots to familiarise themselves with the terrain. The area covered was: Base — Avezzano — Rieti — Terni — Aquila — Base.

The following day the first operational flight took place. At 1300 hours four aircraft led by Maj Stanford, together with four aircraft from 1 Squadron, escorted twelve Kittyhawks on a mission near Spoleto. After this mission various sorties were carried out in conjunc-

tion with 1 and 2 Squadrons. These sorties were mostly as cover to Kittyhawks and Baltimores.

On 17 April the Squadron drew blood. Returning to the base from a Kittyhawk cover sortie, twelve enemy aircraft (Me 109's and Fw 190's) were spotted flying in the opposite direction. The Squadron attacked and Capt Richter was credited with a kill. Unfortunately the pilots experienced difficulty in manoeuvring their aircraft to favourable positions as the extra fuel tanks proved something of a handicap.

In April the Squadron moved from the comparative backwater of the Eastern Mediterranean to the front line. 7 Squadron would not only go out on patrol flights but would also carry out escort missions, recce flights and supply cover for bombing raids. The aircraft that 7 Squadron provided cover for had remarkable success in their bombing raids. Bridges, railways and convoys were destroyed. Credit must be given to the Squadron for their effective display in such a fine combined effort to destroy the enemy.

Thunderbolts of the 57th Pursuit Group often attacked the formations 7 Squadron provided cover to. These unfortunate incidents involving USAAF aircraft became a real menace in the air.

On 14 May orders were received that 7 Squadron was to move to a new landing ground at Sinelli, six miles north of Vasto. The camping facilities at Sinello gave the men a real change. The site was in a wheatfield and tents were pitched under the trees.

On the 17th the Squadron was back to bomber escort missions. The 30 gallon tanks were removed and replaced by 90 gallon tanks again.

Col Human DFC led the Squadron on the first mission the following morning. The object was to sever the railway link between Sulmona and Aquila using 500 lb bombs. The results proved that dive bombing required an enormous amount of practice and better results were anticipated on future sorties. These bombing raids continued and the Squadron improved with every sortie. Over a period of ten days three hundred and seventeen 500 lb bombs were dropped and an enormous amount of .303 and 20 mm ammunition was expended.

The news of the occupation of Rome by the Allies reached the Squadron on 5 June. The news was followed by the announcement that the invasion of Europe had begun. 7 Squadron celebrated the news and was proud of the role it had played in the Italian campaign.



Sgts Landman, Ruitter and Vize

After Rome

Bombing and strafing attacks continued. On 11 June the Squadron was ordered to move to Marcigliana aerodrome about ten miles north of Rome. The pilots soon realised that the opposition was stiffer than the resistance they had encountered in the Adriatic Sector. Practically all enemy convoys were protected by LAA with HAA scattered all along the main routes. Adverse weather conditions also made flying difficult.

The bomb line advanced and 7 Squadron was moved to Orvieto. Since the arrival of the Squadron at Orvieto the routes were changed to conform to the new area that was concentrated on. The new routes were:

Route "A2": Pontassieve — Dicomano — Rocca San Casciano — Bagno.

Route "B2": Bagno — near Forli — Pennabilli.

Route "C2": Sansepolcro — Pennabilli — Kimini — Fano — Aqualagna.

Later, owing to a wider range of operations, a new route was worked out.

Route "D": Poggibonsi — San Casciano — West towards Leghorn — Cecina — Poggibonsi.

Lt De Jager was the first pilot to complete a tour of two hundred hours with 7 Squadron. He attained this honour on 30 June and was duly grounded.

7 Squadron continued their strafing recess and bombing operations with great success. They caused havoc and during these operations caused considerable damage to railways and motor transport. Five hundred and seventy nine sorties were flown in June.

On 3 July Capt Connel led an offensive party over the 'B1' Route. Intense LAA and HAA were encountered and the aircraft piloted by Lt Matthews was hit.

On the 7th orders were received from Wing Headquarters for the Squadron's 'A' party to move to their new landing ground near Foiano Di Chiana, while the rest remained at Orvieto. The order finalizing the move to Foiano LG was received on the 16th and on the same day the rest of the Squadron settled at their new base.

The role of the Squadron changed from ground strafing to dive bombing in close support of the advancing armies. The primary object of the bombing was to cut or block roads, thus hampering enemy communications. The move to Foiano created a change of bomb line again.

On 18 July the Squadron received four new aircraft, fitted with Merlin 63 engines. This was in accordance with the new policy of re-equipping the Squadron with aircraft fitted with Merlin 63 engines. The aircraft that were replaced were handed over to 2 and 4 Squadrons.

On 23 July the Squadron went on to bomber escort duties and fighter readiness. This was, by way of change, warmly welcomed as the pilots longed for operations of longer duration. 45 gallon tanks replaced the bomb racks on seven of the aircraft. These seven machines were sent to Fermo LG to carry out bomber escort duties from there.

The news was received that His Majesty King George VI was on a visit to Italy. On 27 July the Wing was honoured by his visit. After he had inspected the operations- and briefing-rooms at Wing, Maj Stanford and other Squadron Commanders were introduced to him.

July was a very successful month for the Squadron. A total of six hundred and fifty five sorties were flown making a total of 813 hours. Several members of the Squadron received citations signed by the King in recognition of their services.

1 August brought the first air raid alarm since the Squadron's arrival in Italy. Three JU 87's carried out a hit-and-run raid. No damage or casualties were reported and Beaufighters shot down one enemy aircraft and damaged another.

On 3 August a call for close support on 5th Army front led to an attack on gun positions. The target was very difficult to locate, and only one of the four pilots succeeded in bombing the target area. Moderate LAA was encountered in the area. More bombing raids were carried out during the day against gun emplacements, and various strafing attacks against light motor transport resulted in one motor transport vehicle destroyed and other damaged by strikes.

Handcuffing the enemy

Raids continued despite the adverse weather conditions. On the 4th operational flying was limited to four sorties. Only one raid had a certain degree of success when the bombs which were meant to hit a railway line missed the target and scored direct hits on a road alongside the railway line. On the 6th the weather cleared up at mid-day and one flight took off at 1410 hours. On approaching Florence they found 10/10 cloud to the north and west. It was clear over Borgo San Lorenzo. Failing to find any MT targets, they bombed a road junction and scored one direct hit on the road.

On the 17th four aircraft led by Maj Stanford rendezvoused with eight aircraft of 2 Squadron in a raid on the Headquarters of the

278th German Division. 2 Squadron bombed first and by the time 7 Squadron's aircraft reached the target there was anti-aircraft fire over the area — 88m flak at 11 000 feet, 40 m at 8 000 feet and 20 mm at 3 000 feet. They bombed and saw all their bombs fall in the target area and also saw that 2 Squadron had two direct hits on the buildings.

Various sorties against railway lines and gun emplacements were carried out during the day with moderate success and no incidents were recorded until four aircraft led by Capt Meikle took off to bomb gun positions. The target was located and in order to verify it Capt Meikle and Lt Symons went down to 5 000 feet. A barrage of light Anti-aircraft opened up and Lt Symons' aircraft was hit.

On 22 August four aircraft were sent out on a rather unusual task. Lt Schneider of 1



Maj R. H. C. (Bob) Kershaw, DSO, DFC

Squadron had been hit by flak north of Bologna and had to crash land in a field. He was not seen to leave the aircraft which appeared to be more or less intact. Lt Tweedie of 1 Squadron led to show the exact spot and then they had to destroy the machine. Before straffing the pilots made sure that nobody was in the cockpit and the two vehicles standing close to the crash were not straffed owing to the possibility of Lt Schneider being in one of them.

loading in the station yards. It was on these MT's that the first attack was made. They both went up in flames.

Then the tank-cars standing in the siding were attacked. In a matter of moments there was a huge conflagration. Dense columns of black smoke rose to 100 000 feet and the BBC announced that 'the fire and smoke could be seen when the aircraft were 50 miles away'. Strikes were also obtained on



Administration staff with Capt Geering sitting in the middle second row

Reports were received from Intelligence that all pilots had to avoid haystacks as far as possible. The Germans were camouflaging their multiple pom-pom guns as haystacks and these innocent-looking objects would 'open up' as the aircraft flew over.

On 25th the Squadron's already rapidly mounting score of destroyed enemy vehicles was raised when Lts Binedell, Griessel, Ferrar and Theron destroyed a train of 15 fuel-tank trucks. They had been on a reconnaissance mission of the Bologna—Ferrara—Ravenna area but failing to find any straffing targets in this area, Lt Binedell led the flight north of the Po. This was the first time 7 Squadron penetrated that area.

At the small station of Boschi, a few miles north-east of Legana, two MT's were seen

four other covered trucks but when the aircraft left, they were not yet burning.

Still they were not satisfied with their achievement and the flight carried on. Before coming home another three motor transport vehicles were destroyed as well as a trailer.

In view of a forthcoming offensive certain movements of the Squadron were aimed at fooling the enemy, so that he would have no idea from where the Allies were going to attack. Some of 7 Squadron's aircraft were employed on a special mission — they had to fly in the vicinity of the aerodrome using the call-signals of the other Squadrons.

On 1 September two formations (three aircraft led by Lt Tribelhorn and four led by Lt Atmore) took off to attack Bivonac north of Pisa. Both formations reported bombs had

fallen in the target area. Later that day the same targets were attacked again. The first formation had two near misses and the second formation had three bombs in the target area. On the same day four aircraft led by Capt Hughes were sent out to attack motor transport reported on the Bagni-San Marcello road. The motor-transport was not located but a road junction was bombed.

On 2 September four aircraft led by Capt Hughes flew to investigate the Pistoia-San Marcello-Bagni-Lucca-Florence area for movement. Failing to find any they bombed the buildings that were their alternative target.

north of the perimeter and ground dispersal, a few fell among the tents occupied by NMC details inflicting casualties and damaging tents. Near misses were also scored at the fuel dump but the situation was taken care of by Lt Theron and Cpl Uys of the equipment section, who managed to put out all the fires in the vicinity.

The rest of September was spent on bombing missions. 53 missions were flown against buildings, guns, flak positions, dumps, railways, bridges, headquarters and tanks. Forty direct hits were recorded on buildings, 10 on roads and one on a bridge. Only 5 MT were



Spitfire Mk VIII

On 9 September twelve sorties were flown against the village of Mersca during which several buildings received direct hits. An attack led by Lt Richter bombed a factory and a bomb falling north-west of the factory caused an orange explosion and on to the east a column of black smoke. The factory itself received a direct hit.

In September the Squadron was employed solely on bombing missions and as a result all missions were of a shorter duration. Snags in serviceability also hampered operational flying. Despite this setback the Squadron dropped 434 bombs.

On the night of 30 September/1 October Rimini LG was attacked by 10 Ju 87's. Anti-personnel and incendiary bombs were dropped and while most were dropped 100 yards

destroyed and two more damaged. Two HDV's and two locomotives were also damaged.

So it was not a very enterprising and eventful month compared to some of the previous months when the Squadron had been in operation. In November they were more active and continued their bombing missions. The targets varied between close support to the Army and armed recces. During the second week the Squadron moved from Rimini airfield to Bellaria and with a runway only 1 000 yards long, the pilots were not at all impressed with this move.

Lt Jenkinson, the Squadron's engineering officer, devised and perfected a method of carrying two 500 lb bombs under the Spitfire's belly. Maj Kershaw (OC) carried out a test



Maj R. H. C. Kershaw, O.C.

flight and to everyone's surprise the extra bomb had very little effect on the aircraft's performance. Preparations were then made to modify all the Squadron's aircraft to carry two 500 lb bombs instead of one.

November was one of the Squadron's most successful offensive months. Numerous direct hits were scored on enemy positions destroying a considerable amount of material and transport. The operational plan 'Timothy' proved devastating to the enemy. (A large number of aircraft from various Squadrons were used to cover an area 1 000 yards ahead of the front line.)

Captured German POW's confirmed the fact that the close air support of the Allies was a major factor in their defeat. They also felt that the intensity of the attacks from the air was something they had never seen before.

Winter was setting in and the weather continued to worsen. All the mountain peaks were covered with snow. Bad weather made flying impossible on a number of days, despite the Army's calls for air support.

On 2 December 12 aircraft took part in a close support mission in co-operation with the Army to invade the town Russi. Intense and accurate 20 and 40 mm flak was en-

countered over the target area, but considerable destruction was caused by the air attacks and the Army took Russi the next day.

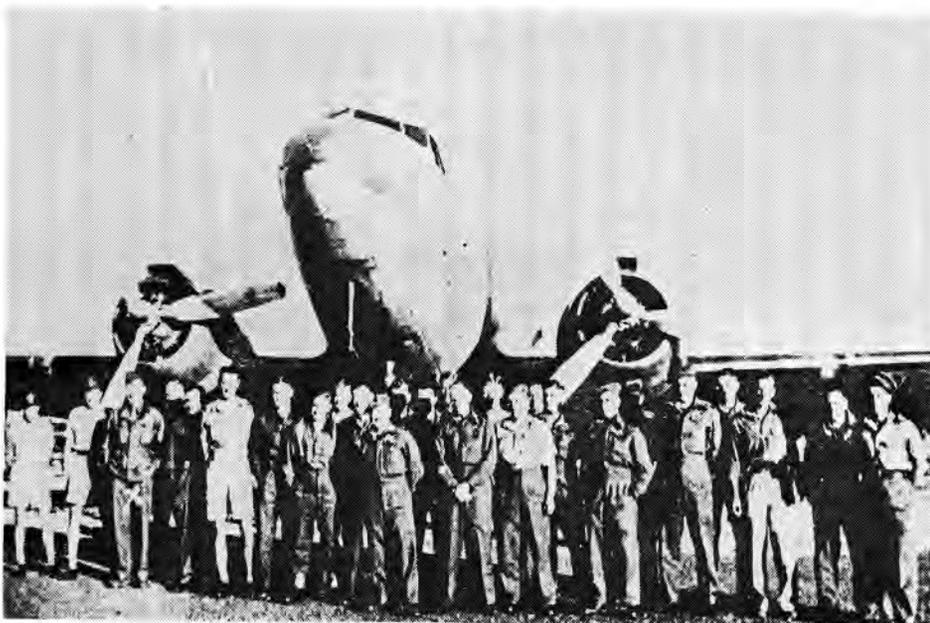
Attacked by Germans

The Germans retaliated and their Ju 87's attacked 7 Squadron's airfield. Fortunately the intense barrage of flak sent up by 7 Squadron's AA avoided a catastrophe. The Germans had placed their incendiary markers very accurately in and around the dispersal area but failed to follow up with bombing attacks. The following evening the Beaufighters were waiting for them. They attacked at 2030 hours but the Beaufighters shot down two and damaged a third. After this episode there were no further attacks on the airfield.

Although the Squadron did not do as many sorties as the previous month, its results were the highest in the Wing. The Squadron can look back on a very successful 1944.

In 1945 the Squadron continued with bombing missions. During the first four days it flew 142 sorties.

The Squadron also went on bomber escort missions to Yugoslavia and the Voine area.



Maj Kershaw returning to the Union of South Africa after being released from a P.O.W. Camp

The weather worsened and hampered missions. On a number of occasions the aircraft had to turn back due to poor visibility.

Because of weather conditions operational flying was limited and so several personnel were able to have short periods of leave.

In March the Squadron moved to a new camp at Marina Di Ravenna. The new site was in pleasant surroundings beside the shores of the Adriatic. The front line was only eight miles away.

This move increased the Squadron's rate of activity. More bombing missions were carried out. The pilots encountered a lot of retaliation from the enemy flak and at times found themselves in vulnerable positions. The Germans also increased protection around ammunition dumps and raids became difficult.

A number of armed reces were flown to ensure that the enemy did not make a mass evacuation of the forward areas. Main roads

and all important junctions were bombed to impede the enemy's lines of communication.

In April 7 Squadron was very active. The final defeat of the Germans in Italy seemed imminent, but it was not until May that they surrendered unconditionally.

Their surrender provided the men with an opportunity to take leave until the future of the Squadron was decided on. On the 16th May the Squadron was moved to Tisso LG. It was decided that no operations would take place until the Squadron was ordered to another theatre of war.

On 11 July the Squadron moved off to Lecce in Southern Italy. On 8 August they left for Taranto where they embarked on HMT Bergensfiord. They arrived at Durban on 10 September 1945.

7 Squadron had carried out its task with great credit and came out with top honours thus upholding the motto of the Squadron:

BULALA UMTHAKATI.