

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

See here & units
Enc. 334
Av. 6/18^A (DFC)

OFFICERS & AIR CREWS

See M.E. file enc: 175.

The following biographical details are required for use at R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, LONDON.

Photographed UK 537.

SURNAME..... COWPER..... NUMBER..... AUS 407666.....

CHRISTIAN NAMES..... ROBERT BARSON.....

AIR FORCE RANK AND MUSTERING..... PILOT OFFICER PL PILOT 11/12.....

DEGREES, DECORATIONS ETC..... DFC..... Became flight commander 456 Sq. on 23/12/45.

PRESENT APPOINTMENT AND LOCATION..... PILOT #153 SQUADRON.....

DATE OF BIRTH..... 24.6.22..... PLACE..... N.S.W......

EDUCATED..... QUEEN'S COLLEGE NORTH ADELAIDE 5TH AUS......

DATE OF ENTERING SERVICE..... 9.12.40.....

PREVIOUS SERVICE EXPERIENCE..... -.....

PLACES OF TRAINING..... 3 YRS. 9 Mths WESTERN AUS. : 11 Mths CANADA : 60 DTD SCOTLAND :.....

CIVILIAN CAREER AND ACTIVITIES..... DRAFTSMAN FOR 3 YRS AT
HORWOOD BAGSHAW LTD. ADELAIDE. 5TH AUSTRALIA......

SPORT (TEAMS REPRESENTED), RECREATIONS, CLUBS ETC..... TENNIS. CRICKET
PLAYED FOR STURT LACROSSE 1st & 2nd. FOOTBALL (AUST.).....

FATHER..... WILLIAM HENRY COWPER.....

WIFE..... -.....

CHILDREN..... -.....

HOME ADDRESS..... 58 DOVER ST., MALVERN, SOUTH AUSTRALIA......

SIGNATURE..... R. Cowper.....

DATE..... 8.2.42.....

DATE EMBARKED..... 6.4.41.....

DESTINATION..... CANADA.....

(These forms are to be filled in and handed to the Adjutant of the Unit immediately after receipt).

R.T.D.

FCO. FORM.
P/R. 5.

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE.

Overseas Headquarters,
Kodak House,
Kingsway, W.C. 2.

SECRET & CONFIDENTIAL.

The following biographical details are required for R.A.A.F.

Historical Records, Overseas Headquarters. These forms are to be filled in and returned to the Officer Commanding Repatriation Disposal Section, No.11 (R.A.A.F.) P.D.R.O.

NAME (in full) ROBERT BARSON CONPER NUMBER 402666

RANK AND BRANCHING S/LDR G.D. PROT DESIGNATION DFC + BAR

NUMBER I.T.S. COURSE 9 O.T.U. - A.F.U. etc 11 SFTS (can) 100TH (G.A.)

DATE LEFT AUSTRALIA) 23/4/41
CANADA) 9/12/41?
Sth. AFRICA) DATE OF ARRIVAL U.K. 28/8/41?

SQUADRONS 153 Sqdn. 89 sq. 108 sq. 456 sqdn.

AIRCRAFT FLOWN Spit. Hurricane, Beau, Mos.

COMMAND & TYPE OF ACTIVITY Fighter Night-Fighter + Gun.

OPERATIONS OR TRAINING WITH AMERICAN PERSONNEL, SQUADRONS, OR AIRCRAFT

DETAILS OF OPERATIONS - with dates: to be given as fully as possible under the following applicable headings;

- (a) Number Operational Hours
- (b) Number Operational Sorties, Day-night.
- (c) Targets attacked.
- (d) Attacks on enemy surface vessels - type, size, etc.
- (e) Attacks on enemy submarines.
- (e) Outstanding sorties or incidents.
- (f) Combats with enemy aircraft.
- (i) Personnel in Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, Transport Command, etc., should give a brief report of their work.
- (h) Other Australians in crews.

(a) 350.00 (b) Day 11. Night 170

(c) Leads rail targets & aerodromes in Italy, Germany, Bomber support on Berlin etc. (4 trips). Anti-convict patrols. Short-continental patrols.

(d) nil (e) nil

(f) Have destroyed 6 enemy a/c & probably 1 a/c. 3 Ju 88's. 2 ME 177. 1 Do 217. Prob. 1 ME 410.

(g) Spent 4 days behind enemy lines & held out a/c.

(h) nil.

(i) N/A.

Date 23/7/45 SIGNATURE R. B. Conper

(use other side, or attach extra sheets, if necessary)

10/6/44. - No. 72

Air Ministry News Service

Air Ministry Bulletin No. 14299

BEACH-HEAD "BAG" OF FOUR FOR A.D.G.B.

Continuing their defensive patrols over the battle areas in Northern France last night, pilots of Air Defence of Great Britain added another four enemy aircraft to their beach-head bag.

Two Junkers 188, a Junkers 88 and a Dornier 217 were shot out of the air, and another Junkers 188 was blown to pieces on an airfield as it was about to take off.

One of the Junkers was destroyed by the Canadian crew of a Mosquito 40 miles south of Le Havre after four bursts of cannon fire had been poured into it by S/Ldr. Richard S. Jephson of Argyll Road, Victoria, B.C.

"We took our time and picked him off quite unsuspectingly", said the squadron leader.

Another of the victims revealed itself by releasing three yellow flares.

"It was probably in the act of taking some pictures" said S/Ldr. Reg. Pargeter of Guildford who was flying with F/Lt. Robert Fell, of Swindon, as his navigator.

Meanwhile, F/Lt. R.B. Cooper, D.F.C., an Australian pilot in another Mosquito was heading out towards the eastern tip of the Cherbourg Peninsula when he spotted a Dornier 217 coming in the opposite direction.

"We were going in from the north, it was coming out from the south. We whipped round behind and finished it off without any exchange of fire. The aircraft went up in a sheet of flame after a short burst".

Another Mosquito, manned by a pilot and navigator of the Fleet Air Arm, was carrying out a patrol in the Paris area when the crew saw an airfield fully lit up and a string of bombers taxiing round the perimeter track getting ready to take off.

"Three of them were lined up at the top of the runway" said Lt. D. Price, pilot of the Mosquito. "I was not in a position to attack so I circled round and saw the first bomber take off. As it did so it switched off its navigation lights and I lost it. Then I saw a second bomber just turn in to wind to take off, so I gave it a good burst and it caught fire.

"The lights of the airfield were still blazing and there was no attempt by the ground defences to fire at me, so I went on circling with the idea of taking a picture of the blazing aircraft, when it suddenly blew up with a terrific explosion, and smoke, flames and debris shot up into the air for a thousand feet. Almost simultaneously the airfield's lights went out and up came the flak, so I beetled off".

Mrs Coates. Personal file - F/Kt-R.B. Cowper

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE OVERSEAS HEADQUARTERS

(Caution to Cartoon)

(Ref: 1513.)

Flight Lieutenant R.B. Cowper D.F.C., Mosquito Pilot, of South Australia, who capped an already adventurous career on Friday night by blowing to pieces in the air one of the four 'kills' secured by Air Defence of Great Britain over the beachhead areas that night. Cowper has other kills to his credit, but this was his first Mosquito success. The Australian came to England from service in the Middle East, where in one adventure last year he was forced down in the desert, had an encounter with a German sentry and a gun duel with nomadic tribesmen, and escaped in a British armoured car. The cartoon is by an Australian Service Artist.

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10.6.44.

R.A.A.F. Release No. 596

June 15, 1944.

Subject to SHAEF approval

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GETS ANOTHER
OVER INVASION AREA

A short burst from the guns of Flight Lieutenant R.B. Cowper's Mosquito night fighter which sent a Ju.88 crashing into the Channel near the beach-head last night gave the South Australian his second success since D-Day and marked up the 12th post-invasion kill scored by the Australian squadron with which he serves.

With Flying Officer W. Watson, of Dumbartonshire, Scotland, as his navigator -- they were together when Cowper's earlier kill was scored on June 9 -- they were on patrol near the French coast when they spotted the Ju. Cowper opened fire. There was a large flash of flame and much flying debris, and the enemy went down into the water. Three of the crew of the Ju. were seen to bale out as it fell. (The Ju.88 carries a crew of three or four, occasionally five).

In daylight yesterday, in the last hour before sunset, two forces of Lancasters of Bomber Command, covered by fighters, and including Lancasters of the R.A.A.F. crossed the Channel to attack dockside installations and a concentration of E-boats at Le Havre.

The first force went in with heavy high explosive bombs, including 12,000 pounders, on the moorings of a large number of E-boats. At the same time the second force of Lancasters were attacking important targets in the dock area -- one of the largest in northern Europe.

The attack was the first high level precision bombing in daylight by Lancasters of Bomber Command. Soon after the first bombs had found their mark the enemy began to put up a screen of smoke which mingled with that of the bursting bombs. Flak was fairly intense, and one pilot thought there must have been at least 200 guns firing at them.

These Lancasters were part of the force of more than 1100 aircraft despatched by Bomber Command from the hour before sunset until two or three hours after midnight.

Soon after midnight other strong forces of Lancasters and Halifaxes, including a force of Australian bombers, attacked concentrations of troops and transport which had been detected close behind the battle areas at Evercy and Aunay-sur-Oden, about 9 and 18 miles respectively from Caen, and railway centres in the Pas de Calais area, where German military traffic had become greatly congested. Large concentrations of rolling stock made good targets for the heavy bombers and the cutting of lines would undoubtedly add to the confusion in this area. The Australian Lancasters went to Aunay-sur-Oden and the Halifaxes to Evercy.

CHANNEL KILL RECALLS DESERT ADVENTURE

The "kill" secured in a R.A.A.F. Mosquito near the Channel beachhead on Friday night by Flight Lieutenant Bob Cowper, R.A.A.F., of South Australia, and his navigator, Flying Officer W. Watson, of Dunbartonshire, Scotland, recalls at least one previous adventure together -- on the ground.

Lost in cloud over North Africa in a long-range Beaufighter, they had landed on the desert sand less than a mile from a road on which they could hear transport --- whether British or German they did not know. While Cowper prepared the Beaufighter for burning, Watson, revolver in hand, reconnoitred. Meeting a sentry guarding a cross-road, Watson asked him in English if he spoke Italian. The guard replied in German, and advanced menacingly. Watson had to shoot him.

They destroyed their aircraft and, carrying a bottle and a small tin of water, their rations and 500 cigarettes, they began a 65-mile desert trek to Tripoli.

Almost exhausted after 8½ hours' walking, they were accosted by two Arabs, one on a horse. The one on foot began to fire a shotgun he carried, and the Australian and the Scot made a dash for safety, zigzagging as they ran. The gunman abandoned his shooting, and the horseman, brandishing a long, curved sword, charged after them, making wild slashes at them, and gradually heading them towards the German lines. Unable to run further, the airmen turned to fight. They made a short stand, and then, jettisoning their coats and cigarettes, made yet another dash for it.

At last, exhausted and desperate, Cowper stopped again to face his fate. But this time, when the horseman approached, his face was all smiles, and he was calling "Inglisi." He had found their English cigarettes in their discarded coats, and declared an armistice. Watson and the Arab with the shotgun, however, were chasing each other round a tree. They stopped when Cowper told Watson the "war" was over.

The Arabs took them back to their tent, where they lived for three days and nights, eating dates and raw eggs, and drinking goats' milk. On the third day they were picked up by an English army car, and driven to Tripoli, and from there they flew on to Malta.

As a Beaufighter pilot in the Sicilian campaign, Cowper destroyed two Ju.88s. When the bombs of one of his victims exploded, Cowper's aircraft was damaged by the blast, and he had to bail out into the sea. He was rescued by a British hospital ship. His Channel success was one of a remarkable series of 12 shot down since D-Day by the Australian squadron with which he serves.

MARKED PORTION SUBJECT TO SHAWY CENSORSHIP

R.A.A.F. ONE NIGHT KILLS HEAVY
BLITZ AIRFIELDS

An airfield blitz by Halifaxes and a Mosquito night-fighter the "kill" were the highlights of R.A.A.F.'s part in the air phases of the invasion last night.

Bomber Command sent out a strong force to attack four airfields in Northern France, the nearest about 35 miles from the battle area. The object of the attack was to crater the airfields with high explosive bombs, prevent aircraft already there from taking off, and deprive the enemy of the most convenient places for aircraft intervening in the battle. The airfields were at Flers, Rennes, Laval, Le Mans.

As on the previous night, the bombers had to fly through thick cloud and extremely heavy rain.

Several pilots described how they had seen the flashes of ground artillery, and over the Channel some of them saw the coast being bombed from the sea.

Almost at the same time as these attacks on the airfields, Lancasters were making a heavy raid on the railway centre at Staples, about 30 miles south of Paris. Three important lines meet at this junction, and damage to it would undoubtedly block German military traffic moving from south to north, and east to west.

In defensive patrols over the battle areas in northern France last night pilots of ADGB added another four enemy aircraft to their beehive bag. One of these fell to a Mosquito of an Australian squadron which has already had 22 previous confirmed successes this year.

The Mosquito was piloted by F/Lt. B.C. Cooper, D.F.C., of Halvern, South Australia. He had a Scottish navigator.

Cooper was heading out toward the eastern tip of the Cherbourg Peninsula when he spotted a Do. 217 coming in the opposite direction.

"We were going in from the north; he was coming out from the south," Cooper said. He whipped around behind him and finished him off without any exchange of fire. He went up in a sheet of flame after our first burst.

Cooper, who will be 22 in a fortnight, was born in New South Wales, entered the R.A.A.F. in December, 1940, trained in Western Australia, Canada and Scotland.

To Cooper, last night's adventure is another high spot in an already adventurous career.

The citation to his D.F.C., awarded last August, tells how he blew a Junkers 88 to pieces during the landing in Sicily. Earlier in January, 1943, he figured in a night encounter with a German sentry after a forced landing in the desert, a gun duel with naked tribesmen, and an eventual rescue by a British armored car.

Last night's was Cooper's first success as a Mosquito pilot, but his tally is now at least four enemy aircraft destroyed. ?

Photograph of Cooper available at R.A.A.F. H.Q., Melbourne, Ref. No. U.K.

537.

Personal file - F/Lt. R. B. Cowper

19.6.44 - No. 21

AIR MINISTRY NEWS SERVICE

AIR MINISTRY BULLETIN NO. 14394

AUSTRALIAN MOSQUITOS STING

Engaged on Air Defence of Great Britain, an Australian Mosquito Squadron of night fighters have, since the invasion started, destroyed 12 enemy bombers, with others probably destroyed, and damaged. Most of their successes have been made off the Cherbourg Peninsula, with a few between the Isle of Wight and the beach-heads.

The squadron has had only two blank nights ^{from} ~~since~~ ^{to June 14th} D-day. The enemy aircraft destroyed included HE.177's, one Dornier 217 and two JU.88's.

The best night so far was that of June 6/7 when the squadron shot down four; two by one Australian crew on the same sortie.

One of the Ju.88's took evasive action before the squadron commander, Wing-Commander K.M. Hampshire, D.S.O., D.F.C., of Western Australia, and his observer, Flight Lieutenant T. Condon of Queensland, shot it down. The wing commander and his observer have destroyed two during the nine days. F/O P.S. Stevens of Victoria, and his observer F/O W.A.H. Kellett got two in the one sortie. The next night S/Ldr. B. Howard of New South Wales with F/O J.R. Ross of Victoria, got another two Heinkel 177's. F/Lt. R.B. Cowper of South Australia, with a Scots observer, F/O "Jock" Watson, got the Dornier and probably destroyed a Heinkel 177 and later they added another JU.88 to the total.

Watson who has done operations on intruders, and has served in Malta and Sicily had been flying with an Australian pilot for a considerable time, but this is his first R.A.A.F. squadron.

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RECORDED

Press
London
20.5.42

Bulletin No 15

R.A.A.F. IN NORTHERN IRELAND

American soldiers arriving recently in Northern Ireland were possibly surprised to find many Australian airmen already well installed. From early in the war, R.A.A.F. officers and men have been there on active service guarding the western sea approaches and patrolling the Atlantic life line.

Wing Commander T. C. Curnow, of Ballarat, served for a year as Commanding Officer of a reconnaissance squadron based in the extreme north. With him were two other R.A.A.F. pilots, Flying Officer J. N. Wright of Sydney, and Flying Officer H. Jenkins of New South Wales.

Duties of the squadron were anti-submarine sweeps and convoy protection - important factors in the Battle of the Atlantic. Excellent co-operation developed between the unit and the Royal Navy.

Another R.A.A.F. officer who has served for some time in Northern Ireland is Squadron Leader K. S. Hennock of Young, N.S.W. who, like Wing Commander Curnow, came to England on exchange to the R.A.F. He commanded a flight in a reconnaissance squadron engaged on Atlantic and Arctic patrol and also on the routine Iceland express flights taking mail to the Arctic ports. Serving with him were Pilot Officer A. W. Fraser of Millaa (Queensland) and Flying Officer E. J. Wooseley, also of Queensland.

Pilot Officer P. C. J. Brickhill of Greenwich, N.S.W., Sergeant E. A. Daley of St. Arnaud, Victoria, and Sergeant H. C. Bastion of Port Macquarie, N.S.W. are Australian pilots serving with a famous fighter squadron stationed near Belfast. This squadron had one of the highest scores of enemy aircraft destroyed in the Battle of Britain. Other fighter pilots in the Group are Pilot Officer R. B. Cowper of Malvern, South Australia and Sergeant S. D. Wills of Armadale, Victoria. Sergeant H. D. Rodger of Wauchope, N.S.W. is a radio observer in a night fighter squadron. Two wireless operator air gunners from N.S.W., Sergeant J. R. Bell of Lismore, and Sergeant R. C. Abbott of Bondi are with a reconnaissance squadron.

Pilot Officer C. B. Hugall, well-known West Australian oarsman is with a General Reconnaissance Squadron based on a beautiful Irish Lake.

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Please submit to Censor.

W.B.T

Personal file — Flt. R. B. Cowper

R.A.A.F. Release No. 634

July 5, 1944

Subject to SNAEF approval

R.A.A.F. Daily Cover

AUSTRALIAN MOSQUITOS GET FOUR ENEMY
AIRCRAFT IN NIGHT

Four enemy aircraft were destroyed last night over the Channel by Mosquito night fighters of an Australian squadron which had destroyed already had a total of 12 destroyed since D-Day and/27 this year. The crews comprised six Australians, a Yorkshireman and a Scot.

One crew's kill was its third since D-Day, two others scored their second post-invasion kill.

The ^{pilots} were Flight Lieutenant R.B. Cowper, D.F.C. of Malvern, South Australia, pilot, and Flying Officer W. Watson, R.A.F., of Dunbartonshire, Scotland, observer (Heinkel 177 --- third kill since D-Day); Flying Officer S.J. Williams, of Swan Hill, Victoria, pilot, and Flying Officer K.W. Havard, of Sydney, observer, (Dornier 217 --- second post-invasion kill); Pilot Officer I.W. Sanderson, of Condobolin, New South Wales, pilot, and Sergeant C.H. Nicholas R.A.F., of Yorkshire, observer (Heinkel 177 --- second post-invasion kill); and Flying Officer B.C. Radford, of Perth, Western Australia, pilot, and Flight Sergeant W.B. Atkinson, of Bathurst, New South Wales, observer (Heinkel 177).

Across the Channel in Normandy last night Australian Mosquito fighter-bombers attacked rail communications south of Paris to prevent the movement of Panzer divisions to the battle area.

Wing Commander Panitz, D.F.C. of Southport, Queensland, brought his score to 18 trains damaged when he halted one south of Tours. Steam poured from the locomotive. Then he attacked a road convoy and finished by bombing a tunnel mouth.

With a slight improvement in weather, Australian Lancasters again took part early today in further attacks on the flying bomb installations and on German-held railway communications in France.

The marshalling yards at Orleans was the target for one force -- an attack designed to block German reinforcements coming from the south-east.

Above Orleans, just after 1 a.m. the Australians found a thick cloud at a height of two miles, but the sky beneath was clear, and the crew easily identified their target, and the flares were punctual and accurate. These were soon put out by the bombs.

Pilot Officer J.F. Lunn, of Sydney, said, "I could see several explosions, and before I left, a heavy pall of smoke hung over the target area." Another pilot, Pilot Officer R.S. Stott, of Melbourne, also saw explosions. "It was a most satisfactory attack," he said. "Everything went according to plan. The bombs I saw falling went smack into the yard."

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Selections
made by
A.L.

F/Lt B. Couper.

Fro, H.I. Williams, "Sydney Morning Herald" Correspondent with
Second Tactical Airforce (C/N 3700)

PRESS COLLECT AGSUP SYDNEY

exwilliams with second tactical airforce 1430 10/6 paragraph
mosquitoes one when flightlieutenant bob couper sydneyite mosquito
nightfighter pilot sought german heavy bomber superchannel yesternight
he put three bursts into its starboard wing and saw one of its gliderbombs
breakaway and fly in flames beside plane stop this bomber which heinkel
177 turned inland with wing afire and tie claimed only as probable but
couper and his scottish navigator found dornier 217 soon after and downshot
it paragraph since deeday this mosquito squadron commanded by wingcommander
hampshire dso dfc has taken almost nightly toll of german heavy bombers
off cherbourg peninsula its score is eight definite one probable seven
of those down shot being heinkels 177s dash the curious fourengined
type with two propellers stop in fact first nightfighter quote kill unquote
of invasion is claimed proone this squadrons pilots flying officer rg pratt
of undercliffe sydney whose navigator is flightlieutenant sdp smith
of corinda queensland.

"Sydney Morning Herald" 85, Fleet Street to "Sydney Morning Herald"
Pitt Street, Sydney.

Score as at 1/8/44:

4 8 1 probable, ~~in the~~⁶
while Britain-based.

1 2 1 in Mid East.

"WITH THE AUSTRALIANS IN BRITAIN"

by

407666. F/Lt. R.B. Cowper, D.F.C., of Melbourne, S. Australia. (456. Sqdn.)

PRODUCED BY: MRS. E.J. DAVY.
CENSORED BY: MR. R.S. LEE.
CENSORED FOR SECURITY BY: F/O. PAT SYKES, P.R.J.
CENSORED FOR SECURITY BY CENSORSHIP UNIT, C.S.

RE-RECORDED ON DCK 36338, 18th July, 1944. DURATION: 11'29"
TRANSMISSION: TUESDAY AUGUST 1st, 1944 - 0615-0630 GMT PACIFIC SERVICE

My operational experience began in 1941 on a night-fighter squadron in Northern Ireland, flying Defiants. During my twelve months there nothing exciting happened, but things livened up suddenly when I was posted to Malta. In fact, getting there proved to be most exciting. We were flying a Beaufighter from the U.K. to Malta. The first part of the trip as far as Gib., was nice and quiet, but near the end we ran into foul weather, then our wireless failed and we weren't able to find Malta - in fact it took us some time to find any land at all. When we did make landfall it proved to be the Tunisian coast, and as we hadn't enough petrol to go back to Malta we tried to make Tripoli, which was our nearest base at that time. But our petrol ran out and we were forced to land in enemy territory, just near the Tunisian border. My observer - Bill Watson, from Scotland - scouted around and surprised a German sentry. Unfortunately, the sentry saw him too, but Bill was a good shot. He came tearing back to me and we tried to destroy the aircraft. I'd no idea what a job it was to set fire to an aircraft with a box of matches and nothing else - especially when you're out of petrol. In the end the Verey pistol did the job and we left with great haste on foot, looking over our shoulders expecting the German army to be chasing us. We kept going all that day as hard as we could lick towards Tripoli, which was about 60 miles away. But late that afternoon we were chased by a couple of nasty looking Arabs - one on foot, he had a gun, and one on a horse - he had a sword. The chap on the horse started a sort of encircling movement, while the other one had a few shots at us. We realised then that it was only a shotgun and our chances

continued/

from then seemed brighter. But they were persistent devils - the soft sand made the going tough, and we were exhausted before they were and threw away all our unnecessary equipment, including 500 cigarettes. As we'd hoped, they stopped to pick up the cigarettes - English, of course - and then their attitude towards us changed completely. Shouting "Inglese" and grinning broadly, the chap on the horse came up to me and the four of us had soon made friends. We stayed with them in their camel hair tent for three days and three nights, and were treated as honoured guests. But we weren't the only guests in that tent - there were about a thousand other little blokes that crawled over us the whole time.

After a couple of days the Eighth Army had advanced within reach of the camp, and Mohamed went out and contacted an advanced Armoured Car Unit. He led them on to us - and were we glad to see them! They took us back to Tripoli, and a couple of days later we arrived in Malta.

We came over the island on a bright sunny day, and my first impression was that I was looking at an aerial photograph of a bombed city. It was rather wierd, but didn't surprise me because by this time (this was January 1943) Malta had already suffered its heaviest bombardment by the Germans and Italians, and we expected to find it pretty badly knocked about. But actually I was mistaking the fields for roofless houses. I found later that the fields are very small, with thick stone fences - and from the air they did look just like bombed houses.

We were billeted in a big hotel on the waterfront, on the north of the island. It really was pretty comfortable considering the shortage of most things in Malta; nearly all our food came out of tins, of course, but it tasted all right. What we missed most were fresh vegetables and fruit. We spent most of our spare time swimming; we just had to walk of our front door and dive off a rock into the sea.

Ours was a Beaufighter squadron doing night-fighter and intruder work over Sicily, and from the very beginning we found there was quite a lot we could do to worry the Buns and Italians. Our first trip over Sicily was on a very clear moonlight night, and as new boys we were sent over what they thought was a quiet part; but this night, coming in as low over the hills as we could, we saw a train right away. We attacked it several times with our cannons and machine guns; we got hits on the engine, the train stopped, and steam poured out. By this time we'd

continued/

seen another train coming from the opposite direction, and as the first one seemed to be pretty successfully piled up we went over to look after the newcomer. We hit this one twice although it was half hidden in the shadow of a deep cutting. We patrolled further up the line then, and found another train which we managed to get one shot at before it disappeared into a tunnel. By this time I'd used a good bit of ammunition, and when the fourth train came along, and I'd fired my last round into him, I had to call it a day, or a night, and go home. Although we did many more trips we never had another night like that first one, and certainly never had the chance of chasing four trains in one night.

Ours was one of the night squadrons which covered the invasion of Sicily; it was a pretty busy time for us and the squadron bagged a fair number of Huns. We picked up the invasion fleets when they came into our area, and provided air cover for the men as they went ashore. The Italian and German air forces did their best to bomb our transports and supply ships and to interfere with the landings. Our job was to stop them doing this, and on the whole the night squadrons were very successful.

One night I got on to the tail of a JU-88 which exploded so violently when I hit him that large pieces were blown off my own aircraft; so many things were damaged that she was out of control. I tried to keep her in the air as long as I could and to send off a message that I was baling out, but before I could bale out the aircraft went into a spin; this made the getting out difficult. in fact I don't quite know how I did get out because I don't remember any more until I came to in mid-air. I wondered what had happened to my parachute - I'm so used to feeling the weight of it when I've got it on. I didn't feel the weight any more, and for one awful moment I thought it must have been dragged off as I got out of the aircraft. I put my hand down to feel for it. It was still there, thank goodness, and I wasted no time pulling the rip-cord. The chute opened O.K. just in time to check my speed before I went into the water. Luckily I was able to get out of my parachute harness without any trouble. Then I inflated my dinghy and climbed in. There was a heavy swell on and I was feeling pretty sick. It was still dark so I felt there wasn't much chance of being picked up before dawn. But after an hour or so a destroyer passed quite close to me - less than half a mile away. I fired a Veray light, but they didn't see me. Some time later I could see the lights of a Hospital Ship and fired another

continued/

Very light; they didn't seem to notice me either, so I paddled furiously towards them and when I was much closer fired another one. This time they saw me and came to pick me up. By now I'd been in the dinghy three hours and it was daylight. They were able to manoeuvre alongside my little dinghy which was a pretty skilful operation in that choppy sea. They dropped a rope-ladder over the side, a chap came down and helped me up. I was put to bed and tidied up, and was allowed to get up after a few hours. This ship was evacuating casualties from Sicily and they took me with them over to Tripoli.

A few days later I was back on the squadron, resumed flying, and on my second trip we managed to destroy another JU.88 - without getting hurt ourselves this time, although our front windscreen was covered with oil and molten metal. I was able to wipe the oil off but of course the metal hardened and I couldn't see a thing in front of me; it was absolutely maddening because we saw two more 88's through the roof, but weren't able to get our sights on them.

My turn for a rest came just after this, and I was sent back to the U.K. and spent the next eight months on instructing duties in England and Scotland. But we all treat a rest as a necessary evil and it was a pretty uninteresting time.

That's over now, and a couple of months ago I joined an Australian night fighter squadron in this country. The squadron was formed early in the war, but it had a pretty quiet time till the last twelve months. Much of the time was spent in converting on to a different type of aircraft. They're flying Mosquitoes now and since D-Day this squadron's role has been to protect shipping, much the same kind of work as we were doing from Malta, and to patrol against enemy bombers over this country.

The night before the invasion started was quiet for us. We patrolled over the shipping lines as part of the air cover for our invasion fleet. We knew there were thousands of ships below us, but of course in the darkness we couldn't see them. And all that night in spite of the terrific things that were happening, we didn't see a single enemy aircraft. The squadron opened their score the next night - D-night, - by shooting down the first enemy aircraft to be destroyed at night after the landing in Normandy. Since then they've been credited with seventeen enemy aircraft destroyed and two probables.

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We came over the island on a bright sunny day, and my first impression was that I was looking at an aerial photograph of a bombed city. It was rather weird, but didn't surprise me because by this time (this was January 1943) Malta had already suffered its heaviest bombardment by the Germans and Italians, and we expected to find it pretty badly knocked about. But actually I was mistaking the fields for roofless houses. I found later that the fields are very small, with thick stone fences - and from the air they did look just like bombed houses. ^{Copfer was} We were ~~was~~ ^{was} billeted in a big hotel on the waterfront, on the north of the island. It really was pretty comfortable considering the shortage of most things in Malta; nearly all our food came out of tins, of course, but it tasted all right. What we missed most were fresh vegetables and fruit. We spent most of our spare time swimming; we just had to walk of our front door and dive off a rock into the sea.

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DFC *30/8/43* *678A.*
Flying Officer Robert Barson COWPER, R.A.A.F. No. 108 Squadron. This officer

has completed 68 sorties and has displayed great courage and determination. During a sortie in January, 1943, Flying Officer Cowper was compelled to make a forced landing behind the enemy's lines but he displayed great resource in out-witting the enemy and regained our own lines on foot. One night in July, 1943, he engaged a Junkers 88 and caused it to explode. The enemy aircraft disintegrated and a large portion struck and so disabled Flying Officer Cowper's aircraft that he was forced to leave it by parachute. He was later rescued from the sea and re-joined his squadron to resume operational flying. Since then, Flying Officer Cowper has destroyed another Junkers 88.

educated at St. George College, Salisbury, S. RHODESIA. He was
R.A.F.V.R. and was commissioned in January 1943.

Directorate of Public Relations,

Air Ministry,
King Charles Street,
Whitehall, S.W.1.

SECRET

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AUS407666 PILOT OFFICER R.B.COWPER, PILOT, OF MALVERN, S.A.

He was on No. 5 I.T.S. course at Pearce and trained at an E.F.T.S. in Western Australia. He left Australia on 6/4/41 on the Awatea for Canada where he trained at No. 11 S.F.T.S., Yorkton, Saskatchewan.

He arrived in the United Kingdom at the end of July, 1941. From Bournemouth he went to No. 60 O.T.U. at East Fortune and from there to No. 153 Beaufighter Squadron on November 18.

No. 153 Squadron is stationed at Ballyhalbert in Northern Ireland and the squadron sees practically no action. Patrols and practice flying are all they have to occupy their time and they are all very bored.

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AUSTRALIAN NIGHT-FIGHTER PILOT AT PALACE

RAAF Mosquito night-fighter pilot ⁴⁸⁷⁶⁶⁶ ~~Flight Lieutenant~~ ^{Flight Leader} Robert Barson Cowper, ^{456 Sq} of Malvern, South Australia, who has six "kills" to his credit, is to be invested with the DFC at the next Investiture at Buckingham Palace.

Cowper destroyed two enemy aircraft as a Beaufighter pilot in the Sicilian campaign. His DFC citation tells how, when one of his victims exploded, his aircraft was badly damaged and he had to bale out into the sea.

He was posted to Britain, and went on to secure three of the 13 "kills" made by an Australian Mosquito night fighter squadron over the Channel and northern France in the first eight days after D-Day, and he added his sixth "kill" in the following month.

One story told of Cowper relates to an adventure in the Desert in January, 1943, when, with his Scots navigator, ^{Flight Lieutenant} ~~Flying Officer~~ W. Watson RLF, of Dumbartonshire (with whom he later secured his successes in Britain) he made a forced landing behind the enemy lines in North Africa.

The pair set out to walk 65 miles to Tripoli, after destroying the aircraft. After 8½ hours' walking, two Arabs saw them. One fired with a shot gun, but missed; the other chased the airmen on horseback, waving a long curved sword. At last, exhausted and desperate, the fugitives stopped to fight it out. But something had happened during the chase, for now the horseman was smiling and calling: "Inglese! Inglese!" He had found their English cigarettes.

Watson and the other Arab, who were chasing each other round a tree, stopped when they noted that an armistice had been effected.

Cowper and Watson lived three days and nights in the Arabs' tent on dates, raw eggs and goats' milk. Then they were picked up by a British Army car and driven to Tripoli, whence they flew to Malta.

Born on June 24, 1922, in New South Wales, Cowper was educated at Queen's College, North Adelaide, and became a draughtsman. He enlisted on December 8, 1940, and trained in Australia and Canada. He is now a flight commander.

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Photograph available from RAAF Overseas HQ, London, and RAAF HQ, Melbourne. Ref. No. UK.537.

Note to Australian Press:— Cowper's desert adventure was recounted in RAAF Release No. 584 of 14/6/44.

Copy of Citation of Immediate Award Bar to D.F.C.

Gazetted, 9-1-45.

Acting Squadron Leader Robert Barson, ^{COWPER} DFC. (407666) R.A.A.F. No. 456 Squadron.

Flight Lieutenant W. Watson (49287) R.A.F. No. 456 Squadron, and Squadron Leader R. Cowper have completed a second tour of operational duty and have consistently displayed a high degree of skill and co-operation. Their keenness to engage the enemy has always been evident and they have been responsible for the destruction of 5 hostile aircraft.

"GIVE THE AUSTRALIANS IN BRITAIN"

by

AO7666. F/Lt. R.B. Cowper, D.F.C., of Melbourne, S. Australia. (A56. Sdn.)

PRODUCED BY: MRS. E.J. DAVY.
CENSORED BY: MR. R.S. LEE.
CENSORED FOR SECURITY BY: F/O. HAT SYKES, P.M.A.
CENSORED FOR SECURITY BY CENSORSHIP UNIT, C.S.

RE-RECORDED ON DOL 36338, 18th July, 1944. DURATION: 11'29"
TRANSMISSION: TUESDAY AUGUST 1st, 1944 - 0615-0630 GMT PACIFIC SERVICE

My operational experience began in 1941 on a night-fighter squadron in Northern Ireland, flying Defiants. During my twelve months there nothing exciting happened, but things livened up suddenly when I was posted to Malta. In fact, getting there proved to be most exciting. We were flying a Beaufighter from the U.K. to Malta. The first part of the trip as far as Gib., was nice and quiet, but near the end we ran into foul weather, then our wireless failed and we weren't able to find Malta - in fact it took us some time to find any land at all. When we did make landfall it proved to be the Tunisian coast, and as we hadn't enough petrol to go back to Malta we tried to make Tripoli, which was our nearest base at that time. But our petrol ran out and we were forced to land in enemy territory, just near the Tunisian border. My observer - Bill Watson, from Scotland - scouted around and surprised a German sentry. Unfortunately, the sentry saw him too, but Bill was a good shot. He came tearing back to me and we tried to destroy the aircraft. I'd no idea what a job it was to set fire to an aircraft with a box of matches and nothing else - especially when you're out of petrol. In the end the Veray pistol did the job and we left with great haste on foot, looking over our shoulders expecting the German army to be chasing us. We kept going all that day as hard as we could lick towards Tripoli, which was about 60 miles away. But late that afternoon we were chased by a couple of nasty looking Arabs - one on foot, he had a gun, and one on a horse - he had a sword. The chap on the horse started a sort of encircling movement, while the other one had a few shots at us. We realized then that it was only a shotgun and our chances

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from then seemed brighter. But they were persistent devils - the soft sand made the going tough, and we were exhausted before they were and threw away all our unnecessary equipment, including 500 cigarettes. As we'd hoped, they stopped to pick up the cigarettes - English, of course - and then their attitude towards us changed completely. Shouting "Ingless" and grinning broadly, the chap on the horse came up to me and the four of us had soon made friends. We stayed with them in their camel hair tent for three days and three nights, and were treated as honoured guests. But we weren't the only guests in that tent - there were about a thousand other little blokes that crawled over us the whole time.

After a couple of days the Eighth Army had advanced within reach of the camp, and Mahomed went out and contacted an advanced Armoured Car Unit. He led them on to us - and were we glad to see them! They took us back to Tripoli, and a couple of days later we arrived in Malta.

We came over the island on a bright sunny day, and my first impression was that I was looking at an aerial photograph of a bombed city. It was rather wierd, but didn't surprise me because by this time (this was January 1943) Malta had already suffered its heaviest bombardment by the Germans and Italians, and we expected to find it pretty badly knocked about. But actually I was mistaking the fields for roofless houses. I found later that the fields are very small, with thick stone fences - and from the air they did look just like bombed houses.

We were billeted in a big hotel on the waterfront, on the north of the island. It really was pretty comfortable considering the shortage of most things in Malta; nearly all our food came out of tins, of course, but it tasted all right. What we missed most were fresh vegetables and fruit. We spent most of our spare time swimming; we just had to walk of our front door and dive off a rock into the sea.

Ours was a Beaufighter squadron doing night-fighter and intruder work over Sicily, and from the very beginning we found there was quite a lot we could do to worry the Buns and Italians. Our first trip over Sicily was on a very clear moonlight night, and as new boys we were sent over what they thought was a quiet part; but this night, coming in as low over the hills as we could, we saw a train right away. We attacked it several times with our cannons and machine guns; we got hits on the engine, the train stopped, and steam poured out. By this time we'd

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Ours was one of the night squadrons which covered the invasion of Sicily; it was a pretty busy time for us and the squadron bagged a fair number of Buns. We picked up the invasion fleets when they came into our area, and provided air cover for the men as they went ashore. The Italian and German air forces did their best to bomb our transports and supply ships and to interfere with the landings. Our job was to stop them doing this, and on the whole the night squadrons were very successful.

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