

A 'Last' For No.6



Looking pleased with himself is Sgt Ron Walter after his only air combat victory.

VIA ANDREW THOMAS

THE EXCELLENT account of 6 Squadron (*FlyPast* February) did, of necessity, overlook many aspects of the history of the unit. One small, but significant 'niche' it gained was in the desert near Kufra Oasis in late 1941.

Designated as a tactical reconnaissance unit because of a general shortage of aircraft, for a time 6 Squadron flew several obsolescent types. In August 1941 'C' Flight took on strength a number of Gloster Gladiator biplane fighters that had been replaced in the fighter role. On August 28, in company with four Lysanders, 'C' Flight's four Gladiators were detached from the squadron's base at Wadi Halfa to the oasis at Kufra deep in the Egyptian desert for local reconnaissance tasks and for the defence of this small, but vital, location.

There were occasional enemy incursions toward the oasis by both the Luftwaffe and Regia Aeronautica and on September 21 a Heinkel He 111

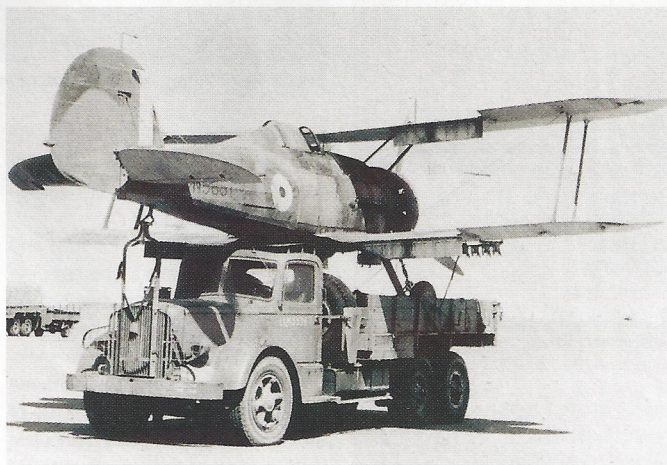
approached and bombed British positions at Kufra. Immediately Flt Lt Lee and Flt Lt Hillier scrambled in Gladiators N5851 and N5821 respectively to intercept the intruder, but unfortunately made no contact.

On the 26th an Italian Savoia S.81 attacked and Sgt Ron Walter in N5851 scrambled after it. He soon spotted the bomber but his overtaking speed was slight, but Walter nonetheless persevered and pursued it as far as Rodani at a distance of about 400 yards. He fired intermittently some 1,400 rounds and the bomber was thought to have come down and was credited as destroyed.

Ron Walter's only air combat victory was also a rare one for 6 Squadron, but more significantly was the RAF's final victory by a Gladiator and also by an RAF biplane fighter – a small, but very significant 'last' for what soon became the 'Flying Canopeners'.

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The distinction of the RAF's final Gladiator victory went to 6 Squadron when this aircraft, N5851, brought down a Regia Aeronautica S.81 that had attacked Kufra Oasis on September 26, 1941. GENERAL LONSDALE