Fog! Fog! Fog! That seems to be all there is around this bloody country. The two Jimmies, Roy and myself were again planning maps, seeking targets for our rhubarbs (two aircraft smashing at enemy installations etc. during bad weather). Jim and I had decided on a target and were maping our approaches (that is the quickest way in and the quickest way out). Tomorrow is our turn and as Jimmie Daley and Roy had been in close to our apending target we were getting a few tips on anti-aircraft fire in that vicinity. This is all that we have been doing and we were thoroughly disgruntled pilots.

The C.O.'s voice thundered through the fog: "Mac and Jim, come here". This was the start of one of the war's greatest adventures for Jimmie and I. In his hand the C.O. held transports, (Oversease Shipment Orders) for Jimmie and I. "Proceed immediately to "PDC" (Personnel Dispatch Center) in Northern England. Destination unknown!

Upon our arrival in Glasgow, Scotland, on the 25th of February, we learned that we were to sail immediately on the Queen Victoria. Having heard of several of the English ships of the "Queen" type, I visualized a tremendous trans-Atlantic liner,

which turned out to be nothing but a lowly, tiny tramp steamer. Prior to embarking on the boat we met our new companions of this never to be forgotten trip. Our boss, the C.O. Squadron Leader "Jumbo" Gracie, famous Battle of Britian pilot and two Flight Lieutenants, Tony Barton and Johnny Johnson, of whom there will be told much more later. I will give descriptions of the individuals involved in this escapade. Sixteen members made up this squadron that embarked on this unknown story of the Island of Malta.

The C.O., Gracie, known as "Jumbo" to all of us amongst ourselves, but when in his presence, always a very definite "Sir". "Jumbo" was as rough a character as you or I would ever care to meet. A veteran of many air battles in the defense of Britain during the terrible onslaught. In that direction we could have had no finer leader on our enterprise than a man who had once broken his neck and came back to fly and fight again.

Tony Barton, Flight Lieutenant, known to all and especially to his enemies as "Killer Barton". One line would be sufficient to describe Tony. He was shot down five times and ended up by destroying twice as many Huns as had knocked him down.

Flight Lieutenant Johnnie Johnson--Johnnie had just recently been attached to Third American Eagle Squadron. A quiet reserved Oxford graduate who spent his time in being a big game hunter in Africa and who was to become in the eyes of every pilot the most intrepid, daring and courageous a man as one would hope to meet. Johnnie's name should pop up quite often in this story as every flight he made became almost an epic.

Pilot Officer Graves--Mike was an Irishman. The same kind of

an Irishman as an Irishman would expect to meet. Towheaded, pink-cheeked and shaved about once each month. Fiery tempered, brusk in tone, but a hell of a flyer. He asked no quarter and gave none.

Pilot Officer Bisley--"Bis" was an Australian. A die-hard, confirmed "Aussie" who would fight at the drop of a hat and who lived to the fullest extent. A hell for leather individual, typical of Aussie fighting men. "Bis" gave and took a lot of lead.

Pilot Officer Bailey--The type you would expect to find teaching school and carrying a piano lesson brief case with him. He was the unassuming kind of man. We often wondered if he ever got excited, but it was this level-headedness and his inborn courage that kept "Ba" alive through many battles.

Pilot Officer McCarthy--Mac was a Canadian. A renowned and famous swimmer from Ottawa, Canada. Hard-headed but with a good sense of humor which we didn't have time enough to appreciate. Mac never really had a chance for he was shot down in flames on his first mission. But I am sure if Mac had had a chance, he would have gone on to unknown heights.

Flight Sergeant Miller--Quite unassuming and a level-headed kid. Quiet until the reports of battle came in. By persistent work he progressed to the officer class and was able to leave the Island intact, although he was seriously wounded at one time.

Flight Sergeant Milner--Milner was a Canadian. He was small of stature and of the good-natured sort. He would fight only when cornered on the ground, but continuously while in the air.

Flight Sergeant Crist and Flight Sergeant Rickman--These two must be mentioned together. Inseparable comrades from the birth of their training in Canada until "Rick's" tragic end on April 20, 1942. Junior, as Crist was known, avenged in a tangible way the

loss of his bosom comrade in future air battles.

The three remaining members, Sergeants Dodd, Bolton and Bush were unseparables. One from New Zealand, one from Australia and one from England, two of who left us for different squadrons on the Island because of their fighter experience in Hurrican type aircraft.

Aboard the Queen Victoria, February 27, 1942.

We were traveling under sealed orders. We were allowed to carry one bag due to limitations on weight. We had brought important things such as candy bars, cigarettes, etc. And now it came to pass that we were aboard a dingy tramp steamer which had been converted slightly in the hold into our luxurious(?) quarters. There were nine of us in one small room and six in the other. Of course, the C.O. had himself a cabin, such as it was. On looking over the entire ship, we found that there were tons of sand abroad for ballast and the remainder consisted of sixteen brand new Spitfires in crates.

"This", we said, "Must be something". Sixteen pilots and sixteen Spitfires. Nothing else on board. We had no idea at the moment of where we might be going. Some said Australia, some said India and some said Canada. Jimmie and I even hoped it might be the USA. It gave food for thought as we steamed slowly out of the Clyde River, past the river towns of Glenark and Gurick, Scotland, into the misty, choppy Atlantic. With our meager knowledge of celestial navigation we tried to set our course in our minds. Were we going north, south, east or west? Jimmie with his very limited knowledge deduced that we were proceeding in a west, south-westerly direction. Immediately we, Jimmie and I, said, "West, south-west. That's the USA".

The next evening I deduced that we were sailing due west. So the hopes of all our Canadian brothers arose as Canada was in that direction. But low and behold! On the third night we deduced that we were sailing south. Due South! We gave up wondering and our answer was given to us the next morning.

Fifteen solemn pilots, their minds racing back and forth as to what we faced, listened intently for the C. O. who finally said, "Gentlemen, you are in this war to fight. I think that I can offer you that fight." "Men", in words I will never forget, as he held a cigarette in his mouth with the aid of a cigarette holder, "We are going to Malta." The name itself vibrated around the room and there was a sudden hush. Because Malta was the apparent last stronghold of the British, but in a year to be an allied stronghold in the war. We knew that Malta was close to Africa, when the battle was going bad and with Africa would go the second supply route to Russia and after that--no one knew. Then a barrage of questions. How? When? Where? What? No one could conceive or possibly imagine what was being done to save that island. Just what would this next month take us through?

We had been aboard fourteen days and each day seemed to get worse and worse with monotonous regularity. After the first evening the only form of amusement we were to have was to see the same faces and do the same things time in and time out. The one redeeming feature of the entire trip was the wonderful food which we, for the first time since the entry into the war, were having.

I might add that during the trip we were well protected insofar as surface vessels held present. Our escort was a destroyer and two Corvets. The only excitement we had was the approach of

two submarines, which were driven off very comfortably as far as we were concerned by our escort. As a matter of fact their stay was only brief. Depth charge explosions were heard and we learned later that our two subs had been driven off.

On the fifteenth evening we steamed into Gibraltar Harbor. At night Gibraltar, through necessity, was desolately and completely blacked out. While a seemingly stone's throw away, Tangiers, a neutral section on the African coast was lit up like a Christmas tree. It seemed so strange that war and peace, as far as lights were concerned, could be so close together. Of course, it had been our expected desire to look at Gibraltar and run around into the towns and partake of the goodness of life in its various forms, but we were to be sadly disappointed. As we steamed into the Harbor in the black of night, we were informed that we were to remain in quarters aboard the ship during all daylight hours. I can think of no more sadly disappointed men than we fifteen were upon receiving these orders. It became very obvious to us after two days why these orders had to be carried out, for it was not just involving we sixteen, but thousands of other lives as well.

Gibraltar Harbor, March 12, 1942.

Due to the close proximity of Spanish territory and the tremendous amount and number of Spanish workers, one might well have been immediately aware of what might have happened had not we all been cautious and all activity as to future endeavors aboard ship and otherwise been kept secret.

At night, during dismal, dark hours, when all else was still, special crews of men lifted from the hold of the ship the crates which carried our trusty Spitfires and deposited them on the docks

of Gibraltar. On the next dock to us was the Aircraft Carrier Eagle. In the dark of night these crates were put aboard the Carrier Eagle and stowed below dock. To all appearances there had been no change in our ship or the carrier, but relentlessly, all the crates were put from the Queen Victoria inside the Aircraft Carrier Eagle.

During and after this operation a special crew of mechanics, aircraftsmen, projector specialists, enginemen, hydraulic men, all carefully selected from combat crews in England, were flown to Gibraltar for the special purpose of assembling these aircraft within the confines of the innards of the carrier. In other words, in a very confined space, these men had the sole responsibility of putting sixteen aircrafts together from the crates, adapting long range tanks to the same and making sure that when a pilot flew their particular aircraft for the first time from the 430 foot deck of the carrier, no minor detail would be incorrect, as one slip meant death for the pilot. Never in the history of aviation have men been entrusted with such a job and never have pilots depended so much on ground men for the success of their individual accomplishments. It is hard for individuals not connected with sea or land fighting to realize just what this meant. An average fighter plane, not equipped for sea flying, but built especially for land defense as our Spitfires were, would require a minimum of 800 feet for take-off. They would at any time during the operation of their flight try to land at an air field so designated if any minor trouble would occur. But in this case, the aircraft were to take off from a deck 430 feet long of which only 400 feet could be used. We were to take off at high dawn in the Mediterranean, approximately 700 miles from the

Island of Malta and close to 400 miles from Gibraltar. Had any mechanical failure such as oil pressure, failure of long range gas tanks to work, or propeller trouble, no matter how minor, or had even one wheel failed to retract entirely, would have meant failure for the aircraft to reach its destination. The pilot, therefore, had he become airborne, had three choices, the first to try to land on the carrier, which would have been utterly impossible, due to the fact that we had no restrainer hooks to catch the landing wire. The second was to bail out into the sea and hope to be picked up by an approaching war ship, and the third was to fly into neutral territory and be interned for the duration. None of the three offered much consolation for the pilot.

On the evening of March 19, we left our chubby little home on the Queen Victoria and boarded the Aircraft Carrier Eagle. The crews of the Eagle knew nothing of our enterprise. The exact plan was known only by sixteen men. I imagine many rumors and thoughts flew through the ship, but I know from their remarks that they didn't realize just what was going on. We were assigned two pilots to a stateroom, sharing them with Royal Navy pilots, who were already aboard the Eagle. Needless to say, they did not entirely agree with our pushing in on their homes and we were relegated to the top bunks. As the Navy would say-- "top side".

Just before dawn, we steamed majestically into the Mediterranean and when I looked out in the morning I saw a sight which made my heart sink. There we were, sixteen pilots and sixteen Spitfires, being escorted by the entire British Mediterranean fleet, right out into enemy territory. It was a sight and feeling that can be felt only upon being present. The huge battleship

Malaya, which was in the very near future to write history as one of the six leading battleships, was there for our protection. Cruisers by the numbers, destroyers by the many, Corvets, and every type ship imaginable including two other carriers lay all along our route. A truly great Naval armada.

I remember remarking to Jimmie, "The sure must want to save that Island."

At dusk the fleet loud speaker system went into operation and as we stood by, every ship in the fleet received the same message The Admiral of the fleet, aboard the "Malaya" called attention and told every man in the fleet this story:

"We are glad in a small way to play our part in one of the most daring episodes in aviation history. We are carrying aboard the Eagle sixteen fighter pilots and sixteen Spitfires, who tomorrow, at a designated time will fly from that carrier to the Island of Malta. That word Malta is a symbol in our age. I wish to give these men God Speed and good luck." I think I have never heard a more effective speech.

Out of sight of land, going over the pounding waves of the Mediterranean, wherever we looked, our eyes met those brave Navy men, and yet they considered themselves but a minor part of our operation. They were carrying us much farther into enemy territory than safety could actually afford them to, but they had to or we could not have reached Malta. (You should have been there and have seen the patience and courage on the part of the Naval personnel.)

I arrived back in my stateroom with Jimmie to find my Naval friend resting on the top bunk. There was nothing they wouldn't

do for us. Then the wondering as to when events would start unfolding themselves started.

Just prior to retiring on the night of March 20, Jimmie and I were called up to the Captain's quarters. As we had just left the Eagle Squadron, he wondered if we had ever seen the placque that had been sent by him to the Eagles from Singapore. Naturally we had, which made him very happy, and then he added a little bit of a humorous touch to what proved to be a very enjoyable evening. After we had a short talk with him we retired to normal life. We were not used to hanging around too much "braid". We retired at a fairly early hour. Although we had no idea of the time we would take off, we imagined that it would be at dawn. Without closing our eyes and smoking as many cigarettes as the time limit would allow we awaited the knock on the door which would start us getting into the state of readiness. Four A.M. the knock, light as it was, sounded like the pounding of a hammer on a brass bell. It brought us out one and all from our sleepy dreaming as to what might happen and put us into a tumult of reality. A quick shave, up to the mess room for a hot cut of tea and a biscuit, then off to the ready room.

It was dark and dismal. The sun had not yet come over the line of clouds on the horizon. The wind was howling and the carrier tossed to and fro like what to me seemed a match box. Then began the process of bringing the Spitfires from below deck to the top. And while we went through the carefully laid plans for the last time, eight "Spits" were deposited on the upper deck of the carrier. We had been told over and over again, and once more it was repeated: "Don't Panic!" This can be done. If you get lost, fly a set course and you will strike land and then fly

a set course and you will hit Malta, so easily said but--. Do not fire unless you have to. Obey all signals from the carrier deck on take off. We were given our maps and were just ready to depart when the radio operator rushed into the room and handed a message to "Jumbo" which he decoded and read to us. "The air field on Malta has been bombed to shambles. Land at the only other one. If that is gone when you arrive, make the best of your situation." We couldn't have had anything more to build our morale. This was the crowning glory. Even if we got there, what then?

Carefully depositing our toothbrushes, a couple spare packs of cigarettes and other small incidentals we knew we would need in the empty gun compartments of our plane (only cannons were loaded, machine guns empty to save weight), we stowed small amounts of candy in the cockpits, and we in Flight "A" took our parachutes, stowing them in the cockpits and went back to the ready room and awaited further orders.

By now the sun had risen above the clouds, putting a more cheerful aspect on the scene. The chopping of the waves seemed to have subsided and the wind was blowing as we desired. It was necessary for our operation be to a success that we have a wind of 30 miles per hour. This coupled with the forward speed of the carrier, approximately 27 miles per hour, allowed us to make the remaining 35 to 40 miles per hour on the 400 foot deck run of the carrier. If we did not obtain flying speed in the short run, obviously the aircraft would tumble into the waves and be run over by the carrier. If a pilot could possibly have gotten out, which was a very remote possibility, a destroyer was assigned to follow the carrier for such happenings. At 7 A.M. the wind was considered correct and we were told to stand by our own aircrafts.

at 7:15 we were still standing by. At 7:30 we started engines, getting more nervous by the minute. At 7:31 we were told to cut engines. Valuable gas was being wasted. At 7:45 we started engines again. "Jumbo", our C.O. was pushed into the starting position. I saw the man with the flag. I could see the aircraft shaking as if it were wanting to jump. The flag descended and his plane jumped from the start and then seemed to slow down. Actually it was just the lull of the start and the after effect. He rolled down the deck slowly. To me he seemed to have no speed at all. As he reached the end of the deck I saw his plan hover for a second in the air and then disappear downward from view. It was a hollow feeling to know that I was the second from him to go. As I watched him the second plane had been pushed into the starting position. The same roar, the same movements. I still looked once more for "Jumbo" and no sight of him. The flag went down and the same way, slowly, slowly he got to the end, but instead of doing the same way, as "Jumbo", he pulled the stick back hard and his plane shot into the air on one wing and disappeared from my view as I was being pushed into the starting line. He appeared to be in a very embarrassing position. No sight of "Jumbo" as yet. I remember, out of the corner of my eye, seeing the deck controller jump on my wing and shout meaningless words. He smiled, patted me on the back. I know he was trying to reassure me, but I was beyond that stage. I again saw that same flag. My engine was wide open, brakes full set. I was getting every ounce of power, every possible bit of full momentum was being gathered that was within my means of getting. Down came the flag, off came my brakes and down that same deck I went. Halfway down I passed the main section. It looked to me like I was slowing down. I didn't see

how it was possible that I could fly. I could not quit now. Had I tried to stop I would have gone into the drink. I had no alternative left. I must go on. I must get off that deck or I was a gone pidgeon. I passed off the deck and seemed to hover. I felt that feeling of emptiness. I knew that I was in the air. One-fifth of a second would decide whether I would fly or swim. I hung in the air, seemed to settle momentarily and then received that wonderful feeling of being airborn. I had made it. With a deep sigh I said, "It's over."

I had no time to look for anyone else. I picked my wheels up. They worked. I checked my propeller, It worked. I climbed to 1000 feet and tried my extra tank. It worked and was I happy! My oil pressure was good. My plane felt fine. I was as happy as I have ever been in my life, but not quite as happy as when I looked in front of me and there in the distance were two Spitfires.

ENROUTE TO MALTA

During the time that I was busily checking my instruments, etc., and seemingly trying to keep my new found buddies in front of me, five other Spitfires had winged and were safely off the Carrier. Our plan had been to climb to 8,000 feet in a slow circle to form up and fly a set course for Malta. By the time we had reached our altitude, all eight aircraft which composed Flight "A" were in fairly close formation. "Jumbo" set course for Malta and the rest of us tagged along in our own positions. My last look at the fleet made me feel like a chicken just leaving its mother. It had been a haven of safety and a refuge until now. And now I felt pitifully small and weak without it. There was nothing it could do for me, or anything I could do for it.

Having been previously warned that there would be no radio communications interplane, quiet reigned supreme in that Mediterranean blue sky.

Just after we had set course, a plane slid upside of me, waggled its wings and then it slipped off to my right and once again Jimmie and I were together. I purposely left Jimmie out of previous descriptions so that you could get to know him a little better than the other chaps in the story. It did not seem so far back, not more than a year ago, Jimmie and I met when we joined the Royal Air Force. Jimmie was a 19 year old kid. As American a boy as any boy could be. Outstandingly brave and afraid of nothing. He was small where I was large, slight where I was heavy, dark where I was fair and quiet where I was boisterous. Jimmie and I had been through the war up until now together, side by side. We had joined the Royal Air Force together, had flown in England together, went to the same training school for three long weeks of grueling training. We had shared our first leave together and joined the Second American Eagle Squadron together. This "together" story was to keep on and on until-- but that's another story which we will get to presently.

After flying for a little over an hour we were able to pick up the Gliete Islands in the distance. They lay off the north coast of Africa near the Tunisian border. As we approached that island, the Flight Leader gave a pre-arranged signal and we closed into a tighter, but more defensive, battle formation for just beyond the Gliete Island, just past the beautiful cities of Tunis and Bizerte lay the Island of Pentelleria. Intelligence had informed us that we were to be aware of ME 109's--German fighters, as well as Italian fighters based there. As we flew over Tunis and Bizerte

and looked down into the beautiful Tunisian cities, it was hard to realize or visualize, had we any way of knowing, that in just one short year all hell would be raging in one of the greatest battles of World War II. For it was through this tiny beautiful looking section of Africa that the Allied armies routed the trapped army of Rommel. Standing past Tunis a small majestic island came into view on our left. It was Pantelleria. It looked so beautiful with its green grass stretching out into the blue water with many houses that dotted the island. We could easily distinguish the airfield and kept a close eye on it, but no aircraft took off to intercept us.

Shortly before sighting the island I had run out of gas in my long range tank and had spent an anxious moment transferring to my main tank. A gasp in the engine let me know that gas was being fed to the engine immediately upon transfer to my main tank and which now purred like a kitten.

As we headed for Malta many thoughts passed through my mind. How big was it? Would we be able to find it? Would the Hun be waiting for us? Just what awaited us at Malta.

Presently in front of us there were billous cumulus clouds which was a tipoff as to what lay underneath. We had previously been told that these clouds usually formed over the island during the day. We first sighted the Island of Gozo which lay directly beside Malta. As we approached the Island we gradually lost altitude so that we were coming in practically on the deck.

The two islands jutted out of the water into small cliffs and looked seemingly like the trunks of two trees. Gozo very small and Malta very large. The brownish look the Islands gave against the blue Mediterranean and blue sky made a very pretty picture to

the eye.

At this moment we could hear the C.O. calling Malta to let them know of our approach. We no sooner heard his voice than a smooth, even quiet voice came back on the radio warning us that fighters (Messerschmidts and 110's--twin engined fighters) were bombing the Island and to BEWARE! You could easily see smoke and dust rising from the bomb blasts as we came in.

This was almost too good to be true. Were we to get a fight before we even landed? This truly was a fighter pilot's paradise. But no. We were immediately directed to Luqa airfield where we landed. It had been a long flight. I had been airborn four hours, which was unusually long for a spitfire in those days. As we rolled to a stop on the bomb battered runway we were flagged quickly to the end and then taxied off into a small wooded section about a quarter of a mile from the runway and the aircraft was parked. Jumping out I noticed how really stiff I was. My head ached from the tension and my back ached from the position. We immediately started spreading camouflage over our aircraft and took our few precious amounts of gear from the panels in which we had hidden them. The all clear signal sounded from the raid and we were picked up in a truly dilapidated bus which was lacking in practically everything except a motor which sounded like most used cars nowadays. It was dusty, dirty ride of about a half a mile to the so-called Mess, where a hot meal consisting of stew, hot tea and biscuits awaited us. As we complained about this meal, as so many of us did, little did we dream that in a few weeks hence we would have been so glad to get one like it.

In due time we had completed our "Meal" and our good old

rattletrap bus was waiting to transport us to the other airfield at Takali on the other side of the island. We wound our way from Luqa through the tiny Maltese streets and out into the open country as we made for the airport which was about eight miles away. We had gone about half way, never once failing to be amaxingly impressed by the damage that had been done to the civilian homes and other non-military objects as we passed them. We also noticed that the one movie we passed in the town featured, when last opened, the new picture named "Ben Hur" of 1926 vintage. About half way to our new field we saw a motorcycle that had lost its rider, the friver lying prone across the street, apparently injured. We stopped the bus to administer what aid we could and had been there only five minutes when from out of the sky all hell seemed to break loose. We were parked directly beside an artillery battery consisting of heavy guns and I don't think I ever hear anything make more noise than those babies. Looking in the direction of the onrushing procession in the sky we could see J8's and 88's dropping bombs and diving on Takali, our new field destination with monotonous regularity. In amongst the heavy bombers you could see tiny specks shooting in and out. Those were Messerschmidt's 109's. It was a sickening sight to see one and than another until sixty or seventy 88's had dropped their bombs and headed for home. It was with pleasure we saw two hit by anti-aircraft fire and come spinning to the ground in flames. No matter how hard we looked we saw not one of our own planes airborn. The reason being that they had none. The ones we had just brought in were the only aircraft on the Island.

As soon as the all clear signal rang we jumped into the bus and started roaring at twenty miles per hour to our new post. As

we rolled along the so-called highway, dodging bomb holes, being very careful that we did not drive into any holes made by duds (unexploded bombs) we wended our way to the town of Rabat, overlooking the Takali airfield. As we pulled up we noticed a large crowd of people and smelled that burning powder and flesh smell which is so hard to misunderstand once you have smelled it. Getting out of the bus we noticed that the crowd was gathered in one spot.

There was a chap, one I had known in California almost one and a half years before, who had gone to Malta and flown Hurricanes. He had finished his tour and was awaiting passage home. I was just hoping that I would get to see him before he left. But fate had been cruel to us because Eddie had been standing with six other pilots watching this raid when an "88" apparently jettisoned his bombs after being hit by anti-aircraft fire and one of them fell directly in where the boys were standing. The boys had received their passage early! All seven had been blown to bits. It brought home the meaning of war so close to us in this particular moment. It let us know again, as war does, that this was not a plaything. We were not finished fighting this war until the war itself was over. One could never relax or take it easy at a place like this.

But this would not stop us from fighting. It did nothing but encourage our appetites and it had taken a large toll in the morale of the boys that had been on the Island prior to our arrival. It had not been so bad watching boys shot down in the air or get killed in measures that had involved their own skill against the other fellow, but to see seven strapping young boys

who had done their jobs, and done them well, be blown to eternity in one short second had hit everybody about the same.

Our arrival was in a way a blessing to those on the Island. Many boys had come down months and months before flying Hurricanes and we found out that a few had flown in two weeks before us in Spitfires. This was a surprise to us and we were glad to hear that they had all made it. But since their arrival, all the Spitfies had been torn asunder.

We were properly bedded in the Villa overlooking the Island's sacred town of Rabat, where centuries before the Turks had catapulted rocks against the walls in an effort to break into the Holy City. Truly this was an historical Island.

Malta was known as the Halfway House on the Naval Highway going through the Mediterranean. It had suffered in the course of its history two major seiges, as well as this, the third. The first of the epic seiges of Malta was when the Knights of Saint John successfully defended their Island against the Turkish invaders. The second was when the same Maltese people in 1800 refused to be conquered by Napoleon. In history almost everyone in that section of the world at one time or another became involved in the Island.

Malta is about eighteen miles long and almost nine miles wide. It was made up of many little towns, the principal of which was Valetta. The towns of St. Julian, St. Pauls Bay, Luqa, Floriana and numerous other small villages made up the structure of the Island. The island itself is made of soft stone, which the Maltese people cut up and make their home of. It is often said that in the ancient days Malta was a completely barren Island and that all the dirt, etc., and other forms of growth covering

the island was carried by boat or mud scow from Italy and Greece. It is made up of small fields and plots of land enclosed by rock fence which extend from one end of the island to the other.

Rabat, which was where we were to stay, was known as the Holy City, famous for its many cathedrals of beautiful architecture. The island was honeycombed from one end to the other by underground passages. It was possible to walk from end to end of the island, branch out at various side channels and come forth in the free air at any given point you would desire. In fact a school teacher and her thirty students going through the catacombs was never heard from and it is imagined that they walked into an endless cavern and perished before they could reach outside air. A strange twist of fate made the Island of Gozo lying slightly to the west of Malta a neutral Island. Neutrality which was respected by both the Germans and Italians at this time.

March 23rd.

It was so decided that the 249th Squadron and ourselves, known as the 126th Squadron, would divide the aircraft serviceable on the Island and fly as a unit. This was to conserve aircraft and give us the most number of pilots available. We had waited and waited for our other eight pilots and planes to appear, but apparently they had some trouble in taking off the Carrier, or the fleet had been intercepted by enemy warships and they had to abandon their venture for the time, for Flight "B" had failed to make an appearance. It would probably be a week or so before they would be attempting such a feat again.

At dawn on the 23rd we wound our way to Luqa airfield to alert ourselves for readiness. The night before two ships from a

convoy from the Middle East had been bombed. The navy was trying to get supplies in from Cairo and Alexandria. A ship famous to all Maltese people, the Brocksenshire, had limped into the shelter of the easterly side of the Island. It was taking water fast and could not be moved into port. It was given as close a naval escort as was possible for it had valuable stores of oil, ammunition and food aboard. The first hop of the morning sent Johnnie and Mike out to protect this ship as far as was possible. We were to work in relays of two's because of the lack of planes, so that it would be covered at all times. In what seemed to be a very short time Johnnie and Mike came back and each had shot down an "88" that had been trying to bomb the "Brock". I jumped into Johnnie's kite while it was being gassed, prepared to make my trip, when the crew chief called and said there would be no more flying this particular aircraft this day. Johnnie had picked up two bullets, one in each main spire of his wing and this started the many, many hits that Johnnie was to receive until he was shot down in flames at a later date. I jumped out of that aircraft into the next and "Jumbo" and I headed for the "Brock". It was one of those foggy days so typical of England. I remember saying to myself, "Does the sun ever shine in this vicinity of the continent?" Directly ahead of me I could see the "Brock" listing badly from a bomb hit and as "Jumbo" and I approached we could see the Navy destroyers firing. I saw an "88" trying to get back into the clouds. "Jumbo" followed him into the clouds In the turn I had lost him, so I shot under the clouds hoping he would break out the other side. In what was no longer than ten or fifteen seconds I spotted another "88" making for the ship.

I turned towards it as fast as possible, but he saw me just in time and pulled up into the clouds. I contacted "Jumbo" on the radio and he had lost his also. Things went along fairly smooth after that until we were relieved.

The "Brock" was beached in Calafrana Bay after it became impossible to get it to port.

The next morning Jimmie and I were on standby and at ten in the morning the Very Pistol fired our signal of a raid and we were scrambled after an unknown plot of enemy aircraft. As our two trusty Spitfires wheeled down the runway we both wondered how many of them there were. As it was to our great advantage to get height we strained ouraircraft for every ounce of climbing speed possible, climbing higher and higher into the bright Mediterranean sun. As we approached the north part of the Island, still in a climbing status, we were being directed by a quiet, relaxing voice from way down deep in the Rocks of Malta. It was our Group Captain Woodhall, known to us all and dear to us all as just plain "Woody". Over my radio I heard "Woody" say, "Mac, there should be two just below you. Keep a sharp lookout." "Okay, Woody". Jimmie came on the radio and said, "Mac, I've got oil all over my windscreen, you'll have to spot them". As well as looking down we had to keep looking up to make sure there were no aircraft above us.

If it were true that there were only two, this would be the biggest opportunity of a man's lifetime. For in those days man never fought the Hun in even terms. It was always against big odds. Against the glar of the sun I made out two small forms far below me which at first seemed so small and tiny. They turned out to be enemy planes. I called to Jimmie to follow as

I feared to take my eyes from the forms I had seen. Then we started diving, 20,000, 18,000, 16,000 feet. By this time we were both going at terrific speeds. We were probably going over 600 miles per hour in our dives and the closing speed on the enemy was very fast. I called Jimmie at the last minute and said, "Do you see yours, Jimmie?" I opened fire and just as I did I heard Jimmie say, "The sons of B's." as I kept pouring lead into the nearest one. I saw Jimmie turn wide and then I zoomed past him. Jimmie's "ME" turned directly into me with Jimmie on his tail. I did a quick stall turn, made a three-quarter head-on pass at what was now a flaming ball of fire. It was then I saw a flash and I knew his bomb had exploded. And then I could see parts of flaming aircraft spinning, disintegrating in its rush to a watery grave.

I called to Jimmie, "Have you got yours yet?" "No, not yet, not yet".

As I headed in the last direction I had seen Jimmie I heard a scream overthe radio, "I got him." Jimmie had finally got him on the deck and he went into the water. I called Jimmie and asked if he needed help. No, he was okay. We joined up and then we headed back for the Island. I called Woody and said, "Woody, two up and two down, coming home".

We came home and had no sooner landed than our crew chiefs were patting us on the back. And thus the first two fighters had been met and destroyed.

During the time that Jimmie and I had been coming back from our scrap, Mike and Johnnie had taken off and were climbing to meet a fresh onslaught from the Huns. This was the beginning of the very unequal odds which we were to run up against. Whereas

Jimmie and I had only a couple to combat, Mike and Johnnie ran into several fighters escorting many bombers.

The Hurricane Squadron on the other end of the island had managed to put up two Hurricanes as their part of the defense. The two of them had combats with the fighters while attempting to get to the bombers. Mike and Johnnie made many fake attacks as they preyed on the fighters, saving their ammunition for the bombers. Their job in the air was primarily not to knock down enemy fighters, but to keep the bombers off any given target. Johnnie was able to knock down a Stuka, but Mike had been continuously kept busy by the 109 fighters and had been unable to engage the bombers. The Hurricanes made no claims and said afterwards that they had been harrassed by the fighters also. This raid was the beginning of the contingent of heavy raids on the Island which were to come to an end only after we received added support in the way of Spitfires much later on.

On the next day we drew up what we jokingly called the "Malta Wing", which actually had only six Spitfires and four Hurricanes airborn. This was the first time in which we combined pilots from any other Squadron with our own.

As it isimpossible to put down an air battle on paper, I will try to pass this one over lightly. Our total score that day was two 109(s two Stuka's confirmed and six Stuka's probably destroyed. We had no losses and only a few bullet holes. It was truly as good mathematics as our Squadron was aiming for.

These battles continued in the air day after day and we were having the same phenomenal luck of getting a few each trip without any damage to ourselves. It got so even we began thinking

and wondering how long this luck could hold out. We had a day off due to bad weather and we spent our time moving into new quarters in Rabat. Johnnie Plagis of South Africa and "Pete" Nash from 249 Squadron joined Johnnie, Jimmie, Mike and I, sharing a room. Beds were out of the question so we just rolled up on the floor. Our billet was right on the edge of the great wall that overlooked Takali airfield. We did not relish the thought of being so close to the bombing run of the Germans. We had three little Maltese batmen, namely, Charlie, Jimmie and Manuel who were supposed to take care of our rooms and clean the place generally. It seemed to us that they spent most of their time jabbering in the corridors and cooking food for themselves. We often wondered where they got all the food and later found out it came from our rations. We were all eating, or so-called eating, in a central mess which conserved food. Our meals by this time consisted of very little bully beef, commonly called "Spam", bread with marmalade and the inevitable tea. There had cropped up what seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of eggs which we could get by paying a little more, of course. In due time we discovered where the eggs came from and had chicken for dinner and then we had neither eggs nor chicken. By this time, of course, there were no electric light facilities or any of the other comforts of home to be had. We used candles for lights and used them sparingly as there were not too many of them.

We were all working on the airdromes, building pens for our aircraft, shoveling sand and dirt into bags and piling them up so as to protect our aircraft which were becoming more and more dilapidated from flying splinters from bombs.

Up to this time we had had a small supply of beer and liquor to pass away the quiet hours, but even this was failing, now that the brewery had closed down due to the lack of barley and to the lack of imports, plus bomb damage, and what liquor we had was that which we could borrow, beg or steal from hoarded stocks.

The Germans were running their raids almost by clock work. We were inevitably having a raid at dawn, one at ten in the morning, one at four in the afternoon and one at dusk. Daylight bombing, bad as it was, never seemed quite as bad as the continual night bombing which we were soon to receive.

On Sunday the balance of our Spitfires and pilots arrived safely, having flown off the Eagle that morning. They had been intercepted by enemy warships on their previous trip, but this trip had been uneventful.

On Tuesday we stayed in readiness all day and the raids that came in were too large for our small unit. At 7:30 we were released for the night and we walked from our planes to the dispersal hut. We had been there not more than five minutes when we were informed that there was a large raid coming in. We tried to get permission to take off, but were refused. It was one of those spectacular after-dusk raids when the enemy aircraft would be caught in the beams of twenty or thirty search lights and the tracers would go up from the ground with their fiery red appearance, just missing and then hitting the aircraft. The sight gave a thrill to all that watched.

So far in the story we have mentioned only aircraft. The real heroes on the Island of Malta in the eyes of everyone, including the eyes of the pilots were the anti-aircraft men.

Men who had to sit by the guns under all circumstances. Men who would put up a terrific barrage, eclipsing the sun over a given target and who shot down many Navy German aircraft during this long hard battle. These men were subject to many attacks aimed directly at them, as it was good German logic to realize that if they could knock out the anti-aircraft guns their path of flight would be much smoother over the Island.

Many times when we all got together at night, the discussion of invasion would come up. We knew the situation that presented itself in Africa. At this time Rommel was making an all out push in the direction of Cairo. He had been steadily making an advance in that direction and was now waiting on supplies to further his push. If Rommel was supplied before the British Eighth Army could get to their supply, it was obvious that nothing could stop the German conquest on the Nile Canal and area beyond. It seemed that Malta was the thorn in the side of the German plans. Would they invade Malta, the last Allied stronghold in the Mediterranean, and thereby give himself clear sailing for the convoys, or would he try to neutralize the Island by saturation bombing? We could expect no help from the Navy in case of invasion. It would be purely an offshore rebellion of the horde.

All we could do in Nazi offensive was an occasional photographic reconnaisance over Sicily over the runway being lengthened for large stores of supplies in the vicinity and an occasional Junker 52 which was used for troop transport.

Many of the prisoners of war which had been shot down over the Island were of the belief that we would be invaded and that there would be no stopping the enemy. He he tried to invade us he no doubt could have conquered the Island, but at a tremendous

cost to both.

Due to the physical impediments which the Island offered to the seaborn invaders, and the fact that we had thousands of troops, we knew invasion would have been a fight to the death. With this thought in mind we knew that with the number of men he had involved in his other fronts he would probably keep on bombing and bombing and bombing us. We were more than busily engaged in keeping up what aircraft we had and in holding this island. And too, if they were not bombing us they most certainly would have been bombing our friends and allies on the various other fronts.

On April 2nd our luck ran out. We had been having phenomenal luck in knocking the Hun down without getting hurt ourselves. This day Johnnie, Canada, Jimmie and I scrambled in the air, climbed into a layer of clouds and kept climbing up and up. When we reached the altitude of 21,000 feet we were informed that there was a large formation of bombers coming in from the North. I called Ground Control and asked them where the "Little Boys" were and they said they were with the bombers. I spotted this large formation of Junker 88's approaching about nine or ten thousand feet below. This was a fighter pilot's dream which was soon to turn into a nightmare.

As we turned down to dive on the bombers, the first thing I remember was that horrid clack of enemy fire hitting me and I knew instantly, but not soon enough, that we had been jumped from above. Just to my right was a sheet of flame which turned out to be Canada going down! I tried to work my controls and found that my left leg was numb and my left arm hung limply by

my side and there was again the shudder of cannon shells ripping into my aircraft. I had long since lost the desire to attack the bombers and my one thought now was to get away from the fighters that were attacking me. It so happened that there were 20 Messerschmidts above us and they attacked us out of the sun. The sun can be a pilot's best friend and his worst enemy. We had not been able to see them until they had struck.

My ship was badly crippled and I knew it was hopeless to jump out so far away from the Island. There was a possibility that had I been nearer I might be picked up by the Air/Sea Rescue Unit. But then, too, they might be unable to go out after us because they were being strafed by German fighters. As a matter of fact, it had been two months since anyone had been picked up in the drink. I resolved that I would get back to the Island if it was humanly possible.

During my descent from 21,000 feet to about 1000 feet I was continuously attacked and my aircraft was full of cannon holes. I had been hit several times in the cockpit destroying my instrument panel, knocking off my throttle and primer. But luckily none had hit me personally save the first attack.

I was about two or three miles off the Island when I went into a small cloud formation, closely pursued by the Hun. My aircraft was shot up badly, in fact I could make practically no offensive or defensive movements, just barely skid. My controls and actuating gear were so badly gone that by holding full forward pressure in the stick I was just able to hold a slow dive angle. As I got down to about 500 feet my engine burst into flame and the Spit did a sudden flip and I had no choice but to leave my trusty

Spitfire. How I got out I do not remember. The first thing I know I was falling head first toward the water. I pulled the rip cord and received a sudden jerk upright and almost immediately I hit the water. I did not have time to release the parachute and I was being dragged along under the water as the chute had a 30 mile per hour wind to pull it along. The British type chute I was wearing had instantaneously released, but my radio cord had jammed in the release. What was probably ten seconds, while I was releasing it, seemed more like two hours. I grabbed the dinghy with my one good arm, pulled off the covering and inflated as much of it as would be inflated by the CO_2 bottle which automatically fills your liferaft with air. I pulled myself into the dinghy by a half-conscious effort by one arm and just as I relaxed and took notice saw that I was drifting away from Malta. Remember saying, "Well, Cairo's only 1000 miles away". A German fighter appeared, turned his nose towards me and naturally I immediately rolled out of my dinghy and to underwater safety. Water deflects bullets. If he strafed me I will never know because he did not hit the dinghy and my being underwater saved me. I watched for him to return, but he failed to do so and I began once again the effort of getting back in the dinghy. I sat there, helpless, as the Germans bombed the Air/Sea Rescue Depot and I gave up all hope at that time of being picked up. From out of the corner of my eye I saw a Hurricane circle over me, waggle his wings to give me encouragement and suddenly dart off to the shore and then fly straight at me, circle again and repeat the performance and all of a sudden in the distance I saw the Air/Sea Rescue launch coming out to get me. I was getting cold and

weak as the launch pulled alongside of me and I remember them throwing over a large rope ladder. They climbed down and grabbed hold of me, pulled me onto the launch, wasting no time getting back to land. The same Hurricane boy who I never got to thank protected us on the way in. He was shot down the next day in an engagement with enemy fighters.

One of the pleasant parts of this trip was the tall glass full of Bourbon, prewar mind you, that was poured into me. It tasted so good and I was so cold that they gave me another.

In the hospital, over the rocks of Calafrana Bay, they put me under a heating lamp to take the chill out of me and picked the few pieces of shrapnel from my arm and leg. I could not understand until I remembered the two glasses of Bourbon why I was getting so tight. I call combining two glasses of Bourbon and a heating lamp the simplest way I can ever remember of getting a jag on.

In a few hours Jimmie, Johnnie, Biz, Australia and Chris came in to visit me. It was clearly a bad day as far as we were concerned. We had received the first of our many casualties and it was with a good bit of sorrow that I heard of Canada's going. All through our climbing for altitude I had called Canada several times to open up his position and as this was his first combat mission over the Island I felt more or less responsible for him. The great ball of flame that I had seen just as I was hit myself had been Canada going down in flames. Jimmie had looked for him, but without success. It was quite obvious that he had been killed in the initial attack. Johnnie had seen the enemy fighters approaching at the last instant and my radio had balked and I did

not hear him yell. The double fact of losing Canada, plus two Spitfires was not so easy to take.

I was feeling pretty good at this moment. The sense of feeling had returned to my leg and arm. Outside of a stiff neck received when my parachute had opened I felt all right. My neck turned out to be fractured and I was grounded for a while. As we lay in the hospital talking, the air raid went on and it turned out to be our old friend "Steamboat Charlie". This was a name we had tagged onto the German photographic plane. He would come over sometimes before and sometimes after a raid. It became the goal of all pilots to attempt to send "Mr. Steamboat Charlie" to his ancestors. He would come over at high altitude out of range of our anti-aircraft fire and leisurely fly around the island taking pictures. I had gone at him at one time, as had almost everyone else in the Squadron, but due to the terrific speed of his stripped down plane, we were always unable to catch him. It fell to the lot, at a later date, of one of the most colorful pilots on the Island, "Buck" McNair, to finally catch up with "Steamboat" and send him down into the sea right near his home base. Of course we all missed "Steamboat", but as you can well imagine, he was replaced by "Steamboat Charlie the Second" in very short order.

The next couple of days we had to repair the aircraft and spent most of our time looking around the battered wrecks trying to get them into flying condition. The ground crew were having a tremendous job trying to keep a striking course of aircraft in serviceable condition.

We had since had several other pilots join us: Bruce Downs, an Old Eagle Squadron mate, "Tex"--a big Texan, "Goldie" a Canadian, a chap from Malaya and an Englishman. "Tex" and "Goldie" had been flying with the valiant Hurrican Squadron on the Island, but the others were new. We were truly an International Squadron at this point.

As usual, many rumors flew around. Some said they had been given out by the Rome radio and probably a lot of them had been started by fifth columnists. Rumor had it that the Holy City of Rabat was going to be bombed. At this time were living in Rabat and we as well as the civilians were becoming very jumpy, that is, a little more than usual. At that time even the gun fire and the crash and exploding of dropping bombs not even near, sent everyone rushing to shelter. We often wondered what the Maltese people thought of seeing so many pilots on the ground. It was hard to make them understand why we could not have more planes and why we could not fly those we did have. We learned one very good lesson though while in a shelter. We could hear the people of Malta mumbling and it go so that it got on our nerves. I remember asking a small Maltese boy who spoke English, "What in the world are they jabbering about?" He said, "Oh, they are praying for the pilots that are in the air and for the gunners who are above the ground unable to get protection". It made all of us more than a little ashamed for having been annoyed at their jabbering. During the air raid I struck up an acquaintance, in shall we say an athletic way, with the Maltese Priest whom I used to call "the Midnight Express". I found out that although I was very slow afoot ordinarily, my speed on foot when advancing in

the direction of a shelter increased tremendously when bombs were falling. I took off my hat to no one except "The Midnight Express". I could not for the life of me beat my dark-robed friend to a shelter and believe me I was trying. With one hand on his head, holding his ancient type hat, and the other hand pulling up his skirt to allow freedom to his legs, he soundly trounced me in every one of our many prints.

It was this same afternoon, while we still were jittery at having passed the first raid that we decided it wasn't all rumors. For in about two hours there was a gang of us on the roof, when suddenly, from out of nowhere there appeared about twenty-five Stukas. They were flying in crocodile straggle fashion. When directly above us, they started diving directly at our building. There was a dilapidated pool table on the floor below where we were standing and inside of split seconds there were about thirty individuals under that pool table. Why I don't know, as it didn't offer much protection from the crash of the falling bombs. The bomb crash came, but luckily they had aimed them at the airfield which lay directly underneath us. We were truly on edge and needed a good rest.

During some of our off times we would wander through the catacombs and the ruffian of a guide told some good stories about the various skeletons seen. Primarily he was more interested in vending his displeasure at catacomb keepers in other sections of the Island. He gave us his worthy knowledge for the price of ten shillings, which we afterwards found he had taken word for word from a booklet which could be bought for six shillings.

We dropped up to the hospital to see Australia who had since been wounded and had another chat with Kurt, the German pilot, who had been shot down and had broken his legs. Kurt was a young German, one of the quieter ones. He did not seem to be depressed and there was no doubt in his mind which was the better plane and who was going to win the war. The German pilots had tremendous faith in their aircraft and would not believe that they could be shot down by Spitfires or Hurricanes.

I remember when "Buck" Buchannan shot down Neuhof, the German ace. Neuhof had close to forty victories and had been shot down as "Buck's" first victory. He would not believe he had been shot down by a fighter and we all laughed when he said to Buck, "And you, how many victories do you have?" And Buck, with a little grin, pointed his finger at Neuhof and said, "You are it!" The German could hardly contain himself.

Everywhere you would go you would see signs written by the Maltese people, "Bomb Rome", "Bomb Rome". This was quite easy to write, but not so easy to do as we had no bombers. They could not understand that.

It had been the idea of all the pilots that the only way we could get the German bombers was to go into the anti-aircraft fire after them as the German fighters did not do this. They would escort their bombers to the barrage and wait for them outside, very sensible, I'll admit.

We were having a spot of luck with the bombers inside until one day when Nippy Hepple was chasing an "88" in the barrage and we saw him open fire on the "88" and then suddenly the Spitfire was no more. It just disentegrated in mid-air. Nip had received

a direct hit from a heavy shell and it had blown his plane to bits. It was a very fortunate thing that Nip was blown out of the cockpit. He remembered nothing of pulling his rip cord. He came to while floating downward with bombs falling all around him. He landed in a shell hole and spent many, many hard minutes watching bombs fall all around as he lay unable to move. He was rescued by the gunners of nearby gun replacements and spent many, many days in the hospital. It was one of the miracles of the Island that he was able to live.

Mike had a queer thing happen to him. He had been shot up by an "88" one day while trying to get home. His engine became overheated and at the last minute he discovered he could not make the field, so he rolled the plane over and baled out at 400 feet, pulled his rip cord and his chute opened just as he hit the ground in such a fashion that he did not even fall down. This is truly remarkable at such a low altitude.

Then there was Bill Kelley who jumped out at 1000 feet, after being shot down and his chute streamed. Bill pumulted to the sea without the aid of a chute. A plane went over to see what had happened, expecting to see nothing and there was Bill swimming on his back towards shore, the streaming chute had kept him erect and had hit the water at a peculiar angle and had received nary a scratch. Quite a fall, 1000 feet. Oddities were common on the island regarding flying--so many that space does not permit mentioning.

We were able for a price to get fish and chips at a so-called black market place. We went until such time as the supply was exhausted, to fill our stomachs, which were gradually getting very

empty. Busutil's Pub was where we went to get those priceless morsels of food. In the usual time she ran out and we went back on a rigid diet and never did find out how or where she got the stuff for our meals.

We usually managed to get the radio reports from the Italian radio and some of their wide-staked claims brought joy to us all. Their claim on this day was the usual thirteen Spitfires destroyed for the loss of none of their aircraft. This was certainly news to us, as there had been no Spitfires flying that day.

Many times we had talked and discussed the old Knights of Malta and their stand against invaders. We tried to see how we compared with them. Of course, they were professional soldiers and the services we were in were more or less all amateurs. The order was religous and service sacriligous. The rank and file of the Knights was probably the same as the rank and file of the pilots. We wondered if among the Knights, insofar as intergroups went, if team work was the essential and necessary feature in the success of their fighting. Team work is so necessary to our well-being and something we all should strive for regardless of how much interceptance we may run up against. A thing where each individual depends almost entirely upon others to a certain extent for survival. The fact that men would have become more dependent on each other and individuals would not have risen to the point where they could control the lives of so many persons by their own say-so is entirely due to the definite lack of the so-called team work. It has been proven time and time again in air squadrons that racial creeds and personal feelings mean

exactly nothing when you are considering the group as a whole. We found that petty jealousies, hates, things large and seemingly very important, though prevalent on the ground were to be forgotten when air fighting was involved. Because each individual, no matter what, becomes dependent upon the rest of the group for protection and all become comrades. Very few pilots ever fought alone and fought very long.

George Buerling, a Canadian, who by his very accurate shooting and skillful piloting, managed to roll up one of the most fantastic scores of this war practically on his own. But George ran out of luck in the end and although he lived, was badly wounded on his last day on the Island.

We began to hear fantastic rumors. Rumors which we would have loved to believe, but which we were prone to take as just rumors. The Maltese civilians somehow managed to hear all the news first, especially the news of military importance long before we got it. It was really fantastic. No matter what it was they knew it first. They would tell us and we would later get confirmation on it. The rumor spread about the Island that the USS Carrier WASP was going to bring many, many Spitfires onto the Island. This was truly great news, could we only believe it. But though we tried hard to believe it, we still doubted it. We needed Spitfires badly and sure enough on the 20th of April, while walking down to readiness, we looked up and saw the first twelve Spitfires, then twelve more and then another bundh of twelve. As our hearts gladdened and our hopes raised, fifty-six Spitfires landed on the Island. It gave us all a feeling which is as hard to describe as that of the first Christmas

morning look when we were all children looking at the many new and shiney presents which with anticipation and great enjoyment were expected. As we neared the airfield our steps quickened because we were all eager for news and sure that the pilots that had come in were sure to be some of our old buddies from England and we wanted to know of the things that happened to our old outfits and how many kills they had made. Running the first three aircraft which were dispersed as soon as could be expected we saw no familiar faces and it was only the tired faces of pilots who had made the grueling fight. As we ran across the small opening to the next group of planes our joy turned immediately to apprehension as we heard the wailing of the air raid siren once again. We knew that the planes that had just landed would be short of fuel. They would be handicapped by long range flight tanks and therefore would be unable to combat the Hun immediately. It must be realized that to gas these airplanes each one had to be gassed out of 5 gallon tines of which each plane took 35 or more. It was our one hope that the Germans would be spotted by radar somewhere along their flight to Malta. We pinned our one small hope on the thought that this would be our old friend "Steam boat Charlie" on a reconnaisance flight. We dared to hope that we might have at least one hour to prepare these planes for combat. But once again we underestimated the Hun. Shortly we heard the bursting of heavy anti-aircraft batteries. We realized that they alone at this time could save our aircraft. Climbing madly into the sun were the remaining six Spitfires we had on the Island in the hope that they might ward off any threat to our new prizes. Standing there we realized that there was nothing we

could do to save the lives of what we classified as our new babies. We watched the JU 88's starting their bomb run on our airfields. Needless to say we immediately dove into slit trenches and cowered there during the crescendo of the falling bombs.

Part of our airplanes had landed at Takali and part at Luqa and we could hear the distant bomb blasts between our own shambles at Takali. We knew, too, that Luka was getting a going over the same as we were. Since it had started what seemed to be a really fantastic number of bombers heavily escorted by fighters, had come into Malta at the right time for them and had caught our Spitfires on the ground and blasted practically each and every one into unserviceable condition.

Gazing around my eyes met the horrible picture of burning aircraft and the smell of smoke and torn asunder aircraft. We began now to see the men appear one by one, some with still high hopes, though most all with a definite solemn tired look on their faces. This surely was the straw that was going to break the camels back. Yes, they got the planes to us all right, but we did not get to use them. The morale, already low, descended to the depths. The fury and hate which was already present against the enemy, rose to a new and even higher peak, but all to no avail. We could not fly without planes. We had the planes all right, what was left of them!

I remember running into Jumbo during the shambles and I never have seen a man so made in all my life. What could you say? What could you do? The Jerry had beat us to the punch.

It must have been a bunch of pretty pleased German pilots that winged their way back to Sicily after they had destroyed more planes, the lay of which must have been visible to most of them on the ground, in five minutes than they had been able to knock out of the sky in two months.

The next day we had our usual few planes, nothing but battered wrecks from which the crews managed to salvage a piece here and there and in time even managed to put a few of them in the air.

The Germans continued to harrass the Island daily and almost continuously at night. We had to keep moving our outfits from one place to another and it seemed that no matter where we moved we became the target of the Huns. They certainly must have a Fifth Column on the Island somewhere. The only good feature of the entire show was the fact that several of our buddies had arrived on the Island with the new planes.

Tilly, called "Florida" and "Tiger" Booth, two buddies of Jimmie's and mine in the Eagle Squadron joined our outfit along with Rip Jones from Cooperstown, New York. Jonesy had been a Naval aviation pilot with the Navy, but had resigned his commission to come and join in the fighter type of aircraft which he desired more.

During this week everybody, crewmen, groundmen and pilots, all man power available in fact, continually and earnestly made sand bags and revetments that we might possibly get some more aircraft. And it wasn't until the night of May 8th that we finally got the story.

Jumbo had disappeared from the island about a week or ten days previous and we all figured that he had gone to another theatre. But such was not the case. As we waited, there was a group meeting of all of the pilots on the island. Woody, our director, was in excellent humor, which was not the usual thing for Woody when things were going bad. Woody was a Group Captain who had flown in the first world war, but was now Ground Control Officer of the Island and there was no more important a man in the air battle of Malta than Woody. His quiet, calm, assuring voice directed pilots time and time again on their prey, the German bombers and fighters. I think, without a question of a doubt, that one of the great, truly great men of the war was Group Captain Woodall. He was in the eyes of the pilots the savior of the Island of Malta. As Woody smiled, and sort of laughted to himself, he said, "Iwould like to tell you yhis myself, but the Air Commodore is coming up presently and he will give you the story." Air Commodore Lloyd, commonly known as "Hugh Pugh", only, of course not in his presence, was a well-liked boss of the air battle of Malta. A man of indominable courage and with a tremendous hate against the Hun. It wasn't long before Hugh Pugh came in and a very short but effective talk. "Men, you all know what happened two weeks ago. To those of you who are now on the Island that was only a taste of what the Hun has thrown at us here. It has not as yet been possible for us to strike back at them in the way we all want to. But by the Grace of God, gentlemen, tomorrow we will turn the tide of the Battle of Malta. We will start the end of the destruction of the greatest enemy of mankind, the Nazi Hordes.

Tomorrow, gentlemen, the fate of many lives will be born on your shoulders, the fate of the African armies, the fate of the Russian supply route and the fate of them as individuals, depends upon the glorious success on the morrow. The plan in part is this, gentlemen, your individual outfits will go over this very shortly and more completely in a very few minutes."

"Wing Commander Gracie, flew to London ten days ago in accord with the plan formulated in his mind to beat the Hun to the punch. As you all well know the U. S. Carrier WASP sailed into the Mediterranean to bring the last Spitfires to us. It is inconceivable to me how Gracie has formulated his plans so quickly, but nevertheless, tomorrow morning sixty Spitfires will arrive from the decks of the aircraft carrier WASP. The WASP being as large as she is will sail into the Mediterranean approximately the same distance as most of you did when you came in here. The pilots from the carrier will be just as tired when they arrive here as you were. The aircraft will be assembled in England and come directly here aboard the WASP. The fact is that each squadron on the Island namely the 126, 249, 601 and 603 have definite plans in the air battle. That I will leave to your respective squadron leaders. Tomorrow"and as he began to utter his final words, the wistle of bombs, not so far away, caused most of us to duck into corners, but without breaking a word in his sentence, and almost drowned out by the crash of bombs, he said, "We must not fail". There was a tremendous uplift of the morale of all the pilots. Hopes rose as we all got into our different groups to get the final words.

Tony Barton, now acting as C. O. said, "Fellows, this is it". One half of the aircraft will land at Takali and one half at Luqua. As you all know there are many pens built. Each of these pens will house an aircraft. At each pen there will be a number of men of whom one will be an experienced Malta Pilot. The minute the aircraft touches the ground he will be flagged immediately into a pen in the dispersal area. Ground crewmen will instantly tear off the long range gas tanks, another crewman will begin pouring gas from already handy five gallon tins. Each squadron will have a definite purpose. Our purpose will be to intercept combat enemy fighters. The positions of the other three squadrons will be varied.We will then attempt the dirvesion of the bombers from the targets. The other aircraft from the Island will be used in defen-ding you and other squadrons in their efforts. In other words the success of the entire operation depends upon you becomming immediately airborn. With units cooperating as usual and with good luck gentlemen, we can turn the tide of this, our little war. The minute that our radar picks up a bomber strength building up over Sicily every aircraft will become airborn.

Immediately upon arrival at your pen you will get the pilot out of the aircraft who flew it in, put him to work in some handy way, get yourself into the aircraft, strapped in and ready for instant takeoff. When your flare is given from the dispersal hut, each section of aircraft will give it the gun and take off. When your flare is given you will have a clear field. If you should have only a half tank of gas take off anyway". Needless to say we all like a bunch of kids that night. Whether or not we could beat

the Hun to the punch we were soon to know.

Down on the field quite early making sure that everything was in readiness we awaited the arrival of our aircraft. Men were busily repairing bomb hole damage done to our field during the night and morning raids. After what seemed hours the first of the Spitfires arrived and landed. I could see the happy but grim face of Jumbo who had brought the outfit in. The system began working and aircraft began going immediately to pens. Special pilots were already strapped into cockpits and crewmen were buisly tearing off gas tanks. Men were pouring gas faster than it seemed humanly possible to do it. There was a lull of maybe five minutes and then far into the field a Very Pistol fired. It did not seem to me that the planes had time to even stop rolling. But a great deal had been accomplished and aircraft were no good on the ground when they could be flying. One column, then another and another until the last one. The dust was as thick as if we had been bombed. Pilots were making practically blind take offs and going on the assumption that the system was working.

Aircrapt quickly started for their rendezous with the Hun.

As the aircraft were climbing the feeling of complete willingness and domination to fight was present among all the pilots. Now, could the Spitfires get high enough? Would they have time before the Germans on flight would arrive? And would the anti-aircraft guns aimed at the sky know the approximate vicinity of the enemy aircraft? Forward onto the Island flew the German 88's and Stukas and every available "Spit" waiting for them. Did the Nazi with his wild imagination feel that this would be another

picnic? Before these bombers ever made their bomb run all Hell broke loose. Sixty Spitfires had gone into the air and the plan was working perfectly except for one thing. The Germans made a mistake. They sent very few fighters to escort their bombers. They figured we'll catch the boys on the ground again. It will be that easy.

Shooting in among the German bombers the Spitfires were like fleas on a stray dog. What few fighters there were were quickly put out of commission. They were sent hurtling and spinning in flames to the ground and the warm Mediterranean sea. One by one the bombers fell as panic broke out among them, jettisoning their bombs, turning and twisting and running, diving, and turning, but there was no escape and no denying the power of the Spitfires. It was a very solemn and scared bunch of Huns that made their way back to Sicily that memorable morning. The Spitfire losses were negligible, but the German losses were terrific. The Spitfires landed, were serviced and were ready to go once more.

No, we hadn't been asleep this last time and there were many Germans sleeping their final sleep because of that. The battle continued throughout the day as more and more German fighters appeared, but the back of the German Air Force in Sicily had been broken.

The battle diminished in intensity during the next few days and this was followed by a lull. No air force in the workd could stand the terrific battering that they had received. The Island of Malta now had fighter superiority and would start to dictate its own terms.

In many minds, one of the turning points of the war was this achievement of aerial success over the Island of Malta

It was with a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure that each of us heard of the diminishing supplies to Rommel and of the increased supplies to the 8th. Army. We even got so well off that we sent a squadron to help pursue Rommel through the hot sticky desert and as you all know it wasn't many months, not more than four, before the Allied pincher movement started at Cairo on one end and an by the invasion of North Africa on the other end that ended up in wiping out the desert rats of Rommel in Tunisia.

LITTLE MALTA, just a spot on the ocean, just the half-way point on the Mediterranean Highway, remained unconquered, badly battered, but certainly proud.