

AN OUTSTANDING 6 SQUADRON R.A.F. 'FLYING CAN-OPENERS' FIGHTER PILOT'S D.F.M. GROUP AWARDED FOR GALLANTRY IN PERFORMING EXCEPTIONALLY DANGEROUS LOW LEVEL ATTACKS IN HURRICANE MK.IVS EQUIPPED WITH THE ROCKET PROJECTILES. HE HAD PREVIOUSLY FLOWN HURRICANE'S WITH 274 SQUADRON AT EL ALAMEIN AND DURING THE TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN. COMMISSIONED PILOT OFFICER THE MONTH HE WAS RECOMMENDED FOR THE D.F.M., HE WAS TRAGICALLY KILLED 4 MONTHS LATTER WHEN DEMONSTRATING ROCKET ATTACKS TO NEW PILOTS. BY THE TIME OF HIS DEATH HE HAD COMPLETED NO LESS THAN 209 OPERATIONAL SORTIES!



DISTINGUISHED FLYING MEDAL GVI, '1002237. FLT SGT. H. R. LYLE. R.A.F., 1939-45 STAR, AFRICA STAR, ITALY STAR, WAR MEDAL.

D.F.M. *London Gazette* 8 September 1944

"Lyle, Hedley Robert. 100237 Flight Sergeant, No.6 Sqn. Sorties 171, Flight hours 254. Pilot.

This Flight Sergeant Pilot of No.6 Squadron has, during the past month carried out 21 sorties against enemy shipping and land targets in Hurricane aircraft fitted with rocket projectiles. Although with no prior experience of this type of weapon, Flight Sergeant Lyle has pressed home his attacks at low level with outstanding success, being personally responsible for the destruction of a considerable amount of enemy shipping. During the period between the 2nd and 7th of June 1944, he took part in introducing the new technique of rocket firing at night at very low altitude and displayed magnificent spirit in the manner in which he overcame the difficulties caused by the intense glare of rocket firing at night, and the attendant danger when firing very close to the water. During the five attacks cited he flew eight sorties against enemy shipping, pressing home his attacks at close range in spite of heavy flak defences. This N.C.O. has displayed courage and determination of a very high order while his keenness and initiative have proved to be an excellent example to the remainder of the squadron. I strongly recommend this Flight Sergeant for the award of the Distinguished Flying Medal. 5th July 1944"

The DFM recommendation was made by Air Vice Marshal Lloyd, Air Officer Commanding Mediterranean Allied Coastal Air Force, and was written on 5th July 1944.

Hedley Robert Lyle, the son of Major Norman and Marian Lyle, was born on 2 March 1922 in Hillhead, Glasgow. Attending Kelvinside Academy 1927-39, at the outbreak of the Second War Lyle was serving as an engineer in Glasgow. He enlisted into the Royal Air Force on 3 June 1940, initially serving as a qualified Motor Boat Crewman and would have been involved in Air Sea Rescue launches, tenders for Flying Boats or such. On 24 September 1940 he was recommended for training as an Airman Pilot but it wouldn't be until July 1941 that he attended Elementary Flight Training School. Having passed as a pilot, he was promoted T/Sergeant on 26 February 1942 and on 17 March 1942, reported to 55 O.T.U., which was an R.A.F. Operational Training Unit, for Hurricane fighter pilots. On completion of this course in May 1942, Lyle embarked for the Middle East but his records also list him at Takoradi (West Africa). On 8 August 1942, he was admitted to hospital in Egypt but was soon after discharged and on 26 September 1942, he was posted to 274 Squadron, which at the time was flying Hurricane II's in the Western Desert campaign. Lyle would fly just two non operational flights in September and several more at the beginning of October, however with the opening of the Battle of El Alamein towards the end of that month, Lyle was quickly flying on operational sorties. By the end of November, Lyle had taken part in 17 operational sorties and although December and January 1943 were relatively quiet, 274 Squadron were heavily involved in the Tunisian campaign, where they mainly served in a fighter bomber and ground attack role. In February Lyle flew 15 operational sorties (also survived a crash landing) and in March, he flew on an incredible 43 sorties! By the time he left the Squadron in September 1943, Sergeant Lyle was a highly experienced fighter pilot with no less than 155 operational sorties flown in Hurricane's of 274 Squadron and a further 107 non operational flights.



274 SQUADRON HURRICANE

Moving to 203 Group HQ in October 1943, Lyle transferred to 22 P.T.C. (Middle East) in December, Ismaila in March 1944 and to 3 B.P.D. in May that year. On 14 May 1944, Sergeant Lyle joined 6 Squadron, "The Flying Can-Openers", who flew Hurricane Mk.IVs equipped with rocket projectiles from bases in Italy. Over the next two months, Lyle would excel in highly dangerous low level rocket attacks on enemy shipping. Quickly establishing himself as one of the Squadron's finest pilots, he would be recommended for the Distinguished Flying Medal for his gallantry in June 1944 and was Commissioned Pilot Officer on 19 of that month (LG 7 November 1944). Continuing to fly rocket attack missions, he would complete 54 operational sorties by the end of September 1944. In October, he flew no sorties but was killed flying Hurricane KZ556 on 8 November 1944 when demonstrating rocket attacks to new pilots on the firing range near Torre Canne, Puglia. On his third run he

broke too steeply, and the aircraft performed a high-speed stall and flicked over into the edge of the sea. By the time of his death he had completed no less than 209 Operational sorties 1942-44. The 6 Squadron Operational Record Book states:

'It is with the deepest regret that the death of one of the Squadron's finest pilots is recorded.'

Pilot Officer Lyle is buried at the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery in Italy and is also commemorated on the Kelvinside Academy War Memorial. In 1988 the Hedley Lyle Memorial Prize was founded in Pilot Officer Lyle's memory at the University of Glasgow. It is awarded annually in the form of books to the student with the best overall performance in the second or third year of the degree course in Aeronautical Engineering.

Service papers note at the time of his death, he was entitled to wear the 1939-43 Star Ribbon with Rosette and the D.F.M.



274 SQUADRON RAF

No.274 Squadron spent most of the Second World War serving as a fighter squadron in North Africa. Initially flying fighter sweeps over the Western Desert, it continued to perform this role as the army advanced and retreated across the Libyan Desert. Having been equipped with Hurricane IIB and IIC's from October 1941, in May 1942 the Hurricanes were modified to carry bombs, and the squadron took on a fighter-bomber role. It took part in the battle of El Alamein and the advance across Libya as a fighter bomber unit, but after the fall of Tunisia was allocated to defensive duties. The squadron received its first Spitfire VB's in April 1943, and had completed converted to the new aircraft in September, by which time it was based on Cyprus.



6 SQUADRON ROCKET EQUIPPED HURRICANE'S

6 SQUADRON RAF

No. 6 Squadron spent the entire Second World War in the Mediterranean theatre. In the spring of 1944, the squadron moved to a coastal field south-east of Termoli, Italy. The squadron flew Hurricane Mk.IVs equipped with rocket projectiles. Moored Axis ships were attacked at Yugoslav harbours and the Dalmatian islands. They were strongly defended by anti-aircraft gunners on Siebel ferries with their multiple guns, as the ships were being used to supply the German forces. Squadron detachments were also made to Bastia in Corsica, Araxos near Patras in Greece, Brindisi, and near Ancona. A fixed 44-gallon extra petrol tank under the port wing increased the Hurricanes' duration to almost three hours at 160 mph cruising speed. Land strikes against enemy forts, coastal gun positions and strong points were pressed home with the same gusto. Offensive shipping patrols with attacks on enemy strongholds and Radar stations in Albania, Yugoslavia and Corfu resulted in the score from April 1944 to April 1945 of 191 ships sunk and 157 damaged.

Main airfields: 24 February-4 July 1944: Grottaglie (Italy), 4 July-14 August 1944: Foggia, 14 August 1944-9 April 1945: Canne

The final production version of the Hurricane was the Mk IV. This was a dedicated ground attack aircraft, normally armed with either 40 mm cannon or rocket projectiles. 6 Squadron was known as "Flying Tin Openers", due to their heavily armoured Hurricane's armed with an array of heavy weapons.



Condition small EK to D.F.M. at 8 o'clock, otherwise GVF. D.F.M. with original ribbon pin. Group uncounted. Sold with a large amount of copied research, including service papers and 6 Squadron Operational logs for 1944. Additionally digital copies of 274 and 6 Squadron Operational logs for the periods of Lyle's service and other research..

A quite outstanding group to an exceptional fighter pilot