

SQUADRON LEADER CAESAR B. HULL, DFC

**A RHODESIAN BORN FIGHTER PILOT WHO
FOUGHT AND DIED IN THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN**

43 and 263 FIGHTER SQUADRONS

“Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”
Winston Churchill

Written from a Rhodesian Schoolboy's Perspective by Bill Musgrave

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Preamble

I regret I cannot claim to have known Caesar Hull, due possibly to age difference.

At the outbreak of the Second World War I was a boarder aged 15 at Plumtree School in Southern Rhodesia, situated on the border with Bechuanaland (Botswana), and located on the Railway Line linking South Africa with Southern Rhodesia, Central Africa and countries beyond. Caesar Hull was granted a Short Service Commission in the RAF in 1935, and at the outbreak of war was an operational fighter pilot with 43 Squadron based at Tangmere, age 25.

I well remember listening to the radio broadcast by Neville Chamberlain on that solemn occasion on Sunday morning 3rd September 1939 proclaiming a declaration of war with Germany. Amongst school children around the world the word 'war' conjured up many different images of what was to follow. At Plumtree School the first realistic sign of war was the arrival one day of a Military Train assembled by the Special Services Battalion (SSB) of the South African Army. This train contained a complete cross section of military hardware, troops and a band. They spent two days at Plumtree demonstrating their military tactics and hardware - heavy and medium artillery, tanks and armoured cars, infantry warfare and parades. This was exciting stuff – the limit of Plumtree School's Cadet Corps Armoury was a Lewis Gun. The train traveled the length and breadth of South Africa with the aim of recruiting volunteers to serve outside it's borders. At that time military personnel in South Africa were only committed to serve within it's borders. Considering the political climate amongst the Afrikaners, the resulting success in raising volunteers to serve in foreign lands was beyond belief, and the majority were Afrikaners.

Within a short time Troop Trains began to pass through Plumtree heading north, transporting South African troops and all manner of military hardware. The pupils had a panoramic view from the classroom windows, and the teachers wearied of trying to maintain discipline. We watched with intense fascination as the trains pulled out of Plumtree Station heading north, day after day, towards Kenya and the Sudan. This was the precursor of the campaign against the Italians in Abyssinia.

It was a natural tendency for schoolboys to fantasize about which branch of the armed forces they would join when coming of age. From mid 1940 many RAF aircraft began to appear in the skies over Rhodesia. These were part of the Rhodesia Air Training Group set up as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme for the training of aircrew for the RAF. A total of ten Training Stations were set up in Southern Rhodesia to cater for the training of Single and Twin Engine Pilots, Navigators, Observers/Bomb Aimers, Air Gunners and Instructors. Approximately 800 aircraft were deployed for this purpose. The daily visual evidence of aerial activity attracted much interest amongst school leavers in Rhodesia, with the end result that the majority opted to join the Air Force as pilots or aircrew. Most of the RATG pupils came from the UK, supplemented by Greeks, Poles, Norwegians, and Rhodesians.

Up to early 1940 there was no serious pattern of land warfare or intensive air raids involving Britain, and the conflict became known as the "phoney war". Within a few months a British Expeditionary Force had taken up positions alongside the French Army in France, together with Units of the RAF. The "phoney war" ended in May 1940, when the Germans commenced their "Blitzkrieg" invasions of Belgium, France, Holland, Denmark, and Norway culminating in the evacuation of the British Army, and remnants of the French Army, from the beaches of Dunkirk. France fell in June 1940. This afforded the Germans control of the entire European coastline facing Britain, extending from the North of Norway to Cherbourg. It provided the Luftwaffe with the opportunity of moving their bases forward to within easy flying range of British targets, thus creating the scenario for Hitler's Directive of July 1940 dealing with the planned invasion of Britain: "... to crush the RAF and prevent it from offering any resistance to the German crossing of the Channel."

In the meantime British hopes had been enhanced by the appointment of Winston Churchill as Prime Minister. Lord Beaverbrook, a doer with a fiery dynamism, was appointed Minister of Aircraft Production and ACM Sir Hugh Dowding consolidated his position as Head of Fighter Command. Thus was the stage set for all-out war.

Caesar Hull

Caesar was born in the town of Shangani, Southern Rhodesia, on 26 February 1914. The Hull family were farming in the Shangani area on the property known as Leachdale farm. In his early teens the family moved to Swaziland, and Caesar completed his schooling at St. Johns College in Johannesburg. He was a champion boxer, and in 1934 was a member of the South African Boxing Team at the Empire Games at Wembley in London. But flying was obviously Caesar's prime objective in life, and after leaving school he applied to join the South African Air Force, but was turned down on the grounds that he could not speak Afrikaans.

He then applied for and was granted a Short Service Commission by the RAF in 1935. Caesar traveled to England in September 1935, and was posted to No 3 Flying Training School. He completed the course on 3 August 1936. Two days later he was posted to No 43 (F) Squadron at Tangmere for flying duties.

43 Squadron

No 43 Squadron was formed in April 1916 under the command of Major W. Sholto Douglas. At that time the Air Force still came under the RFC – Royal Flying Corps. In January 1917 the Squadron moved to France, equipped with Sopwith 1½ Strutters. No 43 was one of the earliest to adopt ground attack tactics over the trenches with devastating effect. Sopwith F1 Camels replaced the Strutters at the end of the year, and while low level strafing continued, the squadron was progressively drawn into the furious aerial battles high above the trenches.

The squadron emerged with much distinction, including the record score for the number of aircraft shot down by a single pilot in one day, six German aircraft shot down by Captain Trollope on 24 March and repeated by Captain Woollett on 12 April. The squadron was finally disbanded at Spittlegate on 31 December 1919.

It was re-formed as a Home Defense Fighter Squadron in 1925, and by the spring of 1926 was equipped with Gloster Gamecocks. These formed the foundation for No 43's aerobatic prowess, which came to its height with Hawker Furies in the thirties. A Gamecock was chosen as the squadron emblem, from which the label 'Fighting Cocks' emerged as the squadron nickname, with the Squadron Commanders, much to their chagrin, becoming labeled as 'Chief Cocks'. Also, at this time the black and white chequered markings appeared on the aircraft, for no particular recorded reason. In December 1926 the squadron moved to Tangmere where it remained as a rival to No 1 Squadron until World War II.

Squadron Leader Brooke was appointed as CO of the squadron in July 1925 and remained in charge until January 1928. He immediately set about creating a squadron "second to none", and to this end achieved an exceptionally high standard. The early signs of eye-catching achievements were the precision formation flying and aerobatics routines which thrilled the crowds at successive annual flying displays with prize winning awards at Hendon and other flying centres. New techniques were developed continuously, including the tying together of the wings of the aircraft during aerobatics.

In June 1930 the squadron, under Squadron Leader. Lowe, duly laid on their display at Hendon, to astound the aviation world with the first ever display of tethered aerobatics. The aviation press described their performance as “. . . the only absolute new and original event in this year's show.” The sequence commenced with a squadron take off, followed by aerobatics with the three flights of three aircraft tied together. They looped as a squadron, did a succession of loops in line astern, and ended their sequence by looping and breaking away in the 'Prince of Wales Feathers' thus deliberately breaking the connecting cords. Word of their proficiency soon spread and by 1930 they were acknowledged to be one of the outstanding squadrons in the Royal Air Force. In that year nearly all the cadets passing out from Cranwell opted for 43 as their first choice, and the Air Ministry selected 43 to be the first to receive the keenly awaited Hawker Fury, at that time the fastest fighter in the world.

The achievements of 43 Squadron were not confined to aerobatics, which in fact was just one of many attributes resulting from Squadron Leader Brooke's leadership. He demonstrated his ability to command and lead the squadron through establishing a close touch with all personnel. He had an amazing gift for handling people, creating an atmosphere in which there was no stuffiness between officers and airmen, and in which the relationship between all ranks was unusually close. But at the same time discipline was maintained and a spirit of compulsive persuasion materialized amongst all personnel to strive for perfection.

Squadron Leader Lowe, who took command of the squadron in 1928, shared the same ambitions, and consolidated what Squadron Leader Brooke had started. So came about the creation of the best flying team of 1930. But in addition to formation flying and aerobatics, there was a strive for perfection in all aspects of squadron life; maintenance of aircraft was of the highest order; all aspects of routine administration were faultless; various sports were played out in a highly competitive fashion, and 43 became a happy squadron. The famous Business Administration Classic *'In Search of Excellence'* could have been written around 43 Squadron.

Enter Caesar Hull

This was the "state of play" when Caesar Hull joined 43 on the 8 August 1936 as the newest of Pilot Officers. He was tailor made for the job, in full compliance with the standards established by Squadron

Leaders Brooke and Lowe. From the time he joined, no one in the squadron could stand comparison with Caesar Hull, and the story of 43 Squadron while he was there cannot be told without his name coming to the fore time and time again. Much has been written of his outstanding qualities, the man of the crinkly hair and the croaky voice, the laughing warrior who possessed the magic power of creating happiness in others and inspiring them with confidence, the man who did not know what meanness meant, nor weakness, but was tolerant of both faults in others, whose favorite author was Winston Churchill, a man who had a phobia about worms or slugs who would look under his bed in case there were any creepy-crawlies about, then kneel beside it and say his prayers, a phenomenal pilot, bold in the air and a cracking good shot, a great leader completely unconscious of the qualities that made him so, and because of whom the exceptional standards of morale, the high standard of flying, and a true bond of affection were achieved between all the men of the squadron, from which 43 Squadron prospered so much.

It is not surprising that Caesar became involved in aerobatics. One of his early escapades was to team up with the famous 'Prosser' Hanks of No 1 Squadron to change seats in the air in a two-seater Audax. They had to repeat this performance above the aerodrome a second time, after their squadron members accused them of cheating and landing somewhere to effect the changeover on the first attempt. Peter Townsend (Princess Margaret's suitor-to-be) had also joined the squadron, and with the same level of seniority he and Caesar became close friends. The squadron was soon equipped with Hawker Furies, ideal for aerobatics. Together with Sgt Frank Carey they formed a strictly illegal aerobatic flight and thrilled onlookers by flying wing to wing, performing loops, barrel rolls, and stall turns. The annual aerobatic displays continued at Hendon and elsewhere, with 43 always to the fore. Perhaps the most notable of these displays was the aerobatics put on at Hendon on the occasion of the coronation of King George VI in 1937. This included an individual aerobatics display, which was open to the whole of Fighter Command from whom candidates were put forward from virtually every squadron. Through a process of elimination these were whittled down to the winner, Caesar Hull. It was estimated that there were 250,000 people present to watch the proceedings at Hendon on that day.

The following account of the main event was told by Caesar's father, Billy. 'Two of Caesar's Aunts were staying at a hotel in London and both these ladies frowned on their favorite nephew being a pilot, and strongly objected to him getting involved in flying stunts. Nevertheless they listened to the display on the Hotel radio, and their worst fears were confirmed on hearing the commentator's announcement: Pilot Officer C B Hull will now carry out the individual aerobatics in honour of the King. The band will play the 'Suicide's Grave'. The effect on the two old ladies was most mournful'.

The flying display at Gatwick in 1938 marked the end of the traditional pageants, and was to prove the swan song of the Hawker Fury. In the summer of 1938 international events stole the limelight, and the possibility of another war with Germany loomed large on the horizon. It soon became clear that the Luftwaffe, which had started to re-form during the Spanish Civil War, was far superior in every field of aerial warfare. In mid-September, 43 squadron was busy getting ready for war, including the camouflaging of their silver Furies in brown and green war paint, which had the effect of slowing the maximum speed to less than 200 mph. The pilots all became painfully aware that they stood no chance of even catching the Heinkel 111 and the Dornier 17 Bombers, let alone the Me 109 and Me 110 Fighters. All agreed that biplane fighters belonged to a bygone age of aerial combat. Of the 750 fighters that Fighter Command possessed, 660 were out-of-date biplanes. An atmosphere of anxiety and depression descended upon the squadron. Some of the older pilots had just been through one war, and hoped that they would never see another. Caesar, on the other hand, was longing to 'have a crack at the hun'.

Then came the Munich Conference on 30 September 1938, during the Czechoslovakian Crisis, at which the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, with terms set by the Cabinet, met with Hitler and presented

him with a sheet of paper on which was written: 'We consider the agreement as a symbol of the desire of our people never to go to war again with one another'. Hitler read and signed, and Chamberlain returned to England brandishing the piece of paper and exclaiming to the waiting crowd: 'I believe that it is peace in our time'. So at the expense of sacrificing Czechoslovakia, a reprieve of crucial importance was gained for Britain.

Immediately after Munich the Air Ministry went to work to define a plan of action aimed at matching the resources of the Luftwaffe. Top priority was given to re-equipping Fighter Command. For 43 Squadron the 'catching up' process started on 29 November 1938 with the arrival of two Hawker Hurricanes, and by mid-December the squadron was at full strength with sixteen aircraft. Similar transformations were taking place on other squadrons, re-equipping with Hurricanes, Spitfires and Fairey Battles. The main advantages of the Hurricane were its speed and firepower. With a top speed of 318 mph it was 50 percent faster than the Fury, and with eight Browning .303 machine-guns each firing 20 rounds per second, a whole new dimension of firepower was introduced, compared to the previous pair of erratic Vickers Mk Vs on the Furies. Through winter, spring and summer of 1939 the squadron concentrated its efforts on training in the new Hurricanes, following the usual routine of practicing over and over again to achieve their high standard of excellence.

Meanwhile Hitler proceeded to occupy Czechoslovakia and break every promise given at Munich. Also, the reprieve gained by Britain was not lost in the minds of the Luftwaffe hierarchy. It gave the Germans time to set up a new Messerschmitt factory, recruit new aircrew and establish new crew training bases in Austria. Czechoslovakia provided new bases and production facilities for the German war machine, but very few aircrew, as hundreds of them had managed to escape to France and Britain.

As the months progressed clear signs emerged of a crisis of far greater magnitude than the previous year. Hitler was focusing his attention on Poland with the connivance of Russia. The mood in Britain had changed to a strong feeling that another Munich was not acceptable. On September 1 the Germans launched their attack on Poland. Frenzied efforts were made by the British government to send a joint ultimatum to Hitler, but by the evening of September 2 no agreement was forthcoming from the French Government, and an angry debate took place in the Commons threatening to overthrow Chamberlain's government.

A rushed ultimatum was dispatched to Hitler advising that a state of war would be declared if hostilities against Poland did not cease by 11.00 am on September 3. The acting Adjutant of 43 Squadron, John Simpson, walked into the Officers' Mess on the hour to announce a state of war. Amongst a somewhat restrained aircrew Caesar Hull jumped up shouting 'Wizard', his traditional expression of joy.

The Phoney War

The squadron was called to readiness at 11.15 am. Pilots ate at the dispersal point and awaited the waves of Luftwaffe bombers which everyone assumed would accompany the outbreak of war. They were still waiting at 21.30 when the squadron was stood down. The first firing of guns took place on September 8 when Flying Officer Kilmartin shot down a barrage balloon which had broken free from its moorings at Portsmouth during strong gales. The freak windy weather continued and provided similar targets during the next two weeks, in which the following qualified as 'balloon busters': Flight Lieutenants Townsend and Hull, Flying Officers Sullivan, and Wilkinson, and Sergeant Hallows. The 'Phoney War' had started.

Meanwhile No 1 Squadron was dispatched to France, Squadron Leader George Lott replaced Squadron Leader Bain as CO of 43 Squadron, and the Air Ministry delegated the responsibility of protecting shipping within five miles of the east coast to Fighter Command, who in turn assigned this task to 43

Squadron. In compliance with this new responsibility the squadron was sent to Acklington, near Newcastle on 18 November. For a squadron accustomed to the luxuries of Tangmere, conditions at Acklington were extremely dismal, added to which were the discomforts of perpetual freezing weather. But the morale of the squadron was not affected. Firstly, the suffering applied to all, and secondly there was no doubt that during this initial phase of the war, Acklington offered a much better chance of engaging the Luftwaffe.

The little ships that the squadron watched over were the coastal convoys, the colliers from Blyth or Newcastle, the minesweepers and the inshore fishing boats. To the Luftwaffe these might have seemed easy prey, but enemy activity appeared only when low cloud cover provided a means of escape. Hence defensive patrols were flown either at mast height or just below the low level cloud base. By mid January 1940 weather conditions continued to deteriorate and heavy snow clogged up the wheels of the Hurricanes, preventing take-off. Snow ploughs were non-existent, but true to tradition the squadron found the means to improvise, and the ships were not left unprotected. On the afternoon of 30 January a section of B Flight under Flight Lieutenant Townsend were scrambled to defend a convoy which was being attacked, but in the foul weather nothing was seen. On returning to base they passed Caesar Hull and Sergeant Carey who had also been scrambled, but were having difficulty in taxiing out in a strong cross-wind. They got off and intercepted a Heinkel 111 bomber near the Island of Coquet, which in true textbook fashion was shot down by Caesar Hull. The crew of five were rescued by one of the boats they had been trying to destroy. This was 43 Squadron's first "kill". On 3 February a section from B flight led by Peter Townsend intercepted a He 111 attacking a ship east of Whitby, and in a combined effort the aircraft was shot to pieces and crash-landed on a farm near Whitby, the first enemy aircraft to be brought down on English soil in World War II. Two of the crew were killed and two seriously injured. The injured survivors were visited in hospital by Peter Townsend, Caesar Hull and John Simpson, bearing gifts of fruit and cigarettes. The other two crew members were buried with full military honours at Catterick. A wreath was placed on their coffins, with cards reading 'From 43 Squadron with sympathy'.

The German bombers were out in force on the morning of 3 February. At 09.35 Flying Officers Simpson and Edmonds were circling a small convoy when they spotted a He 111 just below the cloud base and climbed to attack. Simpson hit him in the wings and fuselage and bits flew off. Edmonds followed and fired all his ammo. 'He was well alight' when he disappeared into the mist. At 10.30 Hull, Carswell and North damaged another Heinkel and at 11.15 Carey and Ottewill intercepted a He 111 that was bombing ships east of Tynemouth. They attacked it, and with both engines put out of action the Heinkel crashed into the sea.

These spasmodic attacks continued throughout the remainder of February. On 9 February Townsend, Carswell and Hallows attacked two He 111s near the Coquet Islands. As Townsend started the attack he was fired on by the other, but Hallows managed to fire a full deflection burst at the second, and saw bits falling off, and after jettisoning its bomb load it disappeared into cloud, and finally crashed 150 miles from the German coast. Hallows then spotted Carswell's Hurricane gliding towards the sea. He managed to attract the attention of a Swedish ship and to lead them to rescue Carswell who was supported only by his Mae West. This was before parachutes had a dinghy attached in the sitting position. The last victory at Acklington came on 22 February when Townsend, Christie and Ayling, patrolling Farne Island, spotted a black speck sketching a white vapour trail across the blue sky. They immediately climbed at full boost and intercepted the bomber at 20,000 feet flying eastwards towards home. Townsend attacked from astern with devastating results. The bomber staggered, emitting a stream of Glycol vapour, then tipping over into a high speed dive, wrenching off both wings and leaving the mutilated fuselage plummeting straight into the sea.

On 26 February the squadron was transferred to Wick, joining 111 and 605 Squadrons, to help protect the Home Fleet in Scapa Flow. Similar living conditions prevailed but the weather was made worse by the fact that Wick was 400 miles nearer to the North Pole. Convoy patrols were again the order of the day but the absence of the Heinkel shipping raiders in March made the squadron wonder if the Luftwaffe was having second thoughts. This period of calm was broken on 28 March when Hull, Ottewill, Carey and Gough of 43 and Leeson of 605 Squadron sent a He 111 flaming into the sea eight miles off Wick. This decline in Luftwaffe attacks was probably due to the German preparations for the invasion of Norway, and on 8 April a significant force of bombers headed for the Scapa area seemingly intent on countering any threat that the Home Fleet might launch against the German invasion of Norway, which was launched earlier that day. All the squadrons on Wick were scrambled to intercept but only 43 Squadron engaged the enemy. Edwards and Arbuthnot were the first to engage, coming across six bombers east of Copinsay Lighthouse. Edmondson dived head on into the Heinkels and opened fire on one, causing the port engine to burst into flames with the bomber diving into the sea. Arbuthnot fired all his ammunition at another which poured out white smoke and dived into a layer of cloud. In the evening dusk Townsend and Hallows were patrolling east of Duncansby Head and sighted two He 111s. Townsend attacked and saw flames flickering from the starboard engine, then the undercarriage was lowered, the navigation lights came on and the aircraft landed on the water and sank. In the meantime Hallows was ordered to return to base and on the return trip he noticed ack-ack bursts west of Pentland Firth, and on investigating he spotted two more He 111s. At 400 yards he opened fire at the first and within two seconds his guns jammed and the two Heinkels dived away into a rain cloud. Hallows returned and landed along the flare path and to everyone's surprise was followed by the Heinkel he had just attacked. Hallows's brief burst of fire had been extremely accurate and had inflicted serious damage to the Heinkel, causing the pilot to abort the return trip and unknowingly land behind Hallows. As it was, both of the Heinkel gunners were dead.

Two days later the siren's wail brought a rushed scramble of seven aircraft led by the CO, Squadron Leader George Lott. They found a lone raider east of Ronaldsway, and four more of Goering's airmen were to perish in the sea after a skirmish with 43 Squadron. Peter Townsend remarked that the weather that afternoon was too lovely for dying. The combined effect of attacks by seven aircraft was gruesome. The bomber was 'shot to pieces', and with both engines seized was gliding towards the sea. Townsend flew in very close alongside and Caesar Hull stationed himself on the other side signaling them to turn towards the coast. But the Heinkel was unable to fly any further and it alighted awkwardly on the water and disintegrated. The surviving three crew members abandoned the aircraft wearing yellow life jackets and began to swim. Several radio requests were made to fix their position but being twenty miles from the coast the three Germans would be dead long before help could reach them.

There was one more victory for 43 at Wick, providing a finale to the 'Phoney War' period. On 9 May, John Simpson and Sergeant Ottewill destroyed a Dornier 17, the first of its kind to be downed off the British Coast. This brought the Squadron's score to 13 destroyed.

Meanwhile things elsewhere were hotting up fast. The German invasion of Norway was underway; and on May 10 the German panzers burst into Holland and Belgium on their way to Dunkirk. The RAF Squadrons in France had been subjected to deadly attacks by the Luftwaffe with their superior aircraft. By the time of Dunkirk, Dowding's fighter squadrons in France had abandoned 195 Hurricanes, 75 of which were serviceable, to the Luftwaffe. Also, virtually the entire force of 135 Fairy Battle and Blenheim bombers had been shot down or damaged. To make matters worse, Churchill, with a misconstrued idea of the number of fighters required to defend Britain, complied with successive requests from the French government to send additional Hurricane squadrons to France. Dowding, probably at the edge of a serious nervous breakdown, approached Churchill through the War Cabinet and delivered an ultimatum. He had prepared a simple graph in red ink showing the curve of Hurricane losses in the last ten days, and when his turn came he rose and went straight up to Churchill and placed

the piece of paper in front of him saying that 'if that line continues at the same rate for the next ten days there won't be a single Hurricane left either in France or in England'.

As May dragged on, it became essential that 43 be moved back to Tangmere, and on May 31 Squadron Leader George Lott led the Squadron back to its home base, but with no time for any relaxation. On arrival, operational orders were received from HQ 11 Group for every squadron to provide cover for the Dunkirk beaches.

With No 263 Squadron to Norway

It was also inevitable that a major reorganization of resources was required to rectify the disparities resulting from the substantial loss of pilots in aerial conflict and the formation of new squadrons. As part of the balancing act 43 was deprived of eight stalwart pilots. Peter Townsend went to 85 Squadron as CO; Caesar Hull to 263 Squadron as a Flight Commander destined for Norway; and off went Carey, Christie, Thom, Plenderleith, Arbuthnott and Garton.

No 263 Squadron were equipped with Gladiators, a cruel comedown from the Hurricanes. They were armed with only four obsolete machine guns and were 80 mph slower, a biplane fighter which prior to the war had been relegated to history. There was no sign of any complaints or criticism on Caesar's part.

This was the squadron's second expedition to Norway, and on this occasion was sent to fight the Luftwaffe and protect British troops retreating towards Narvik under overwhelming German pressure. The squadron departed during the third week of May 1940 aboard the Aircraft Carrier HMS Furious, and set off for towards the Arctic Circle. The first section of aircraft flew off the carrier at three o'clock in the morning into terrible weather, and headed for Bardufoss in the far north. They were led by a Fleet Air Arm Swordfish, and encountered thick mist near Senja Island. Through an error of navigation the Swordfish crashed into the side of a mountain followed by two Gladiators. The section Caesar was leading got through safely, landing at Bardufoss, but only sixteen Gladiators now remained to carry on the campaign. On 24 May an He 111 strayed over Bardufoss while operating with four other He 111s over Narvik. It was attacked by Flight Lieutenant Riley and Flying Officer Grant Ede resulting in the starboard engine being put out of action. At this moment Caesar Hull arrived at the end of his own patrol and shot out the other engine. The pilot was wounded and lost control, and the aircraft crash landed near the Botneidet Fiord, with two of the crew killed and three taken PoW.

On 26 May three Gladiators flown by Flight Lieutenant Hull, Pilot Officer Falkson and Naval Lieutenant Tony Lydekker were detached further south to Bodo, to provide cover for troops retreating northwards in the face of the German advance. They encountered horrendous conditions at the airfield in Bodo. On landing, all aircraft stuck fast in the mud, and after much manual toil they managed to get the Gladiators to drier ground, and were then obliged to refuel from four gallon tins. While refuelling was in progress a He 111 was seen overhead, and all three leapt into their cockpits to take off. Lydekker got airborne safely, but mud clung to the wheels of the other two, and while Hull managed to get airborne, Falkson crashed. Lydekker's aircraft had only been partially refuelled and had little petrol left, so Hull ordered him to land and refuel again. Hull lost no time in pursuing the Heinkel and caught up at a height of 600 feet. He delivered three attacks from astern and the bomber turned south, streaming smoke from the fuselage and engines. The burning aircraft crash-landed south of Mo, and the crew was rescued by German troops. Meanwhile Hull had broken away to attack a Ju 52 which he had spotted, and rapidly disposed of this second opponent which crashed in flames after the crew had managed to bale out. He then chased a second He 111 without success, before spotting and attacking two more Ju 52s. The first Ju 52 was set on fire, but the pilot managed to reach German-held territory and force landed allowing the crew and paratroops aboard to exit the aircraft safely before it burnt out. The second Ju 52 was set ablaze and six men managed to bale out before the burning aircraft spiraled down out of

control and crashed, killing eight more paratroops. Hull then engaged yet another He 111 and drove this off with smoke pouring from it, but with only one nose gun still operating and out of ammunition he returned to Bodo. In a brief afternoon spell Caesar Hull had destroyed four enemy aircraft and seriously damaged another, an incredible achievement for an obsolete aircraft and a measure of the exceptional abilities of the pilot.

During the evening and night until 4.30 am the three pilots took turns patrolling the Rognan area while the evacuation of 2000 British and Norwegian troops continued. On the morning of 27 May there was a burst of enemy activity when eleven Ju 87 Stukas escorted by three Me 110s suddenly appeared over Bodo and began dive-bombing radio masts only 800 yards from the airfield. Lydekker took off at once and Hull got airborne a few minutes later, after a delay in getting the fighter started. Almost immediately he caught one of the Stukas at the bottom of its dive. He attacked and caused the aircraft to fall in a gentle dive into the sea, where the crew of the Stuka were later rescued by German troops.

At the same moment Hull was attacked from behind by one of the Me 110s, badly damaging his Gladiator. He managed to struggle back to the airfield, but was then attacked again by the same Me 110 and crashed just short of the airfield, wounded in the head and knee. In the meantime Lydekker had been attacked by most of the remaining Luftwaffe aircraft, and badly wounded in the neck and shoulders, and, unable to land at Bodo, had set course for Bardufoss at low level, where he eventually landed with his Gladiator a complete write-off.

Caesar Hull was evacuated back to the UK in a Sunderland Flying Boat for hospital treatment. In a matter of a few flights over Norway he had become a Biplane Ace. While he was on sick leave, on June 17, a telegram arrived from the Air Ministry to inform him that the King had approved the award to him of the Distinguished Flying Cross "in recognition of the exceptional gallantry you have displayed against the enemy". (It was reported at the time that he had been recommended for the VC.) Some time later he found himself 'Mentioned In Dispatches'.

After the war, the Norwegian authorities sanctioned the construction of an imposing memorial at Bodo dedicated to the heroic actions of the acclaimed triumvirate of Flight Lieutenant Hull, Pilot Officer Falkson, and Lieutenant Lydekker in providing air support to cover the withdrawal of remnants of British and Norwegian forces towards Narvik on the 26th and 27th May 1940. The memorial was unveiled on the 17th of June 1977 in the presence of the Norwegian Minister of Defence, invited dignitaries and British guests.

The Sinking of HMS Glorious and Loss of No 263 and 46 Squadrons

Caesar Hull's early evacuation to England was to prove a reprieve. By the end of May the British and Allied Forces were in full retreat towards Narvik from where they were to board ships assembled by the Home Fleet for evacuation to Britain. Two troop convoys had been formed comprising three Aircraft Carriers, several Cruisers and Destroyers, and merchant ships. During the night of 7 June, 20 RAF Fighters from 46 and 263 Squadrons were flown onto the Carrier HMS Glorious. In addition the carrier had on board ten fighters and five Torpedo bombers of the Fleet Air Arm. 46 Squadron was equipped with Hurricanes, and the landing of these aircraft on the carrier was in itself a remarkable feat. On 6 June the CO of the squadron was ordered to destroy his Hurricanes, but in anticipation of the forthcoming Battle of Britain he decided that the Hurricanes would be needed, and the CO and his pilots took the brave decision to attempt to land the Hurricanes on the carrier. None of the pilots had ever undertaken a carrier landing, nor were the Hurricanes equipped for deck landings, and the flight was to be undertaken at night under extreme arctic conditions. In an effort to ensure that their tails would stay firmly on the deck each Hurricane had two heavy sand bags roped to the fuselage just forward of the tail

plane. On the carrier, burly seamen were positioned to grab the tail planes of the slowing Hurricanes as they hit the deck to stop them overshooting. The first section of three aircraft took off around midnight on 7 June heading for the Glorious and the remainder followed within the hour, and by the early hours of 8 June all aircraft had landed safely.

The carriers Ark Royal and Glorious were assigned to the second troop convoy, but immediately after the Hurricanes had landed, Glorious signaled the Vice Admiral Aircraft Carriers aboard the Ark Royal requesting permission to proceed independently to Scapa. The request was approved and Glorious and two escorting Destroyers parted company with the Ark Royal and the rest of the convoy, and headed for Scapa Flow. The two troop convoys reached the UK safely, but disaster awaited Glorious and her escorting Destroyers.

Two days earlier the two German Battlecruisers, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, had put to sea, and they spotted the Glorious and the Destroyer escort on 8 June at 15.45. They opened fire at 16.30 at a range of over 20,000 yards, gaining direct hits on the carrier. Glorious replied with her own guns but was hopelessly outranged, and by 17:20 was sinking fast. The two destroyers did their suicidal best to protect their charge, but were both sunk during the next 45 minutes – but not before one of the Destroyers had gained a direct hit with a torpedo on the Scharnhorst, seriously damaging the aft turret. From the three British vessels 1519 lives were lost, including 1207 from the carrier alone. 41 of these were RAF ground crew and 26 of these were pilots, including Pilot Officer Falkson – one of the three pilots detached to Bodo. All aircraft were lost, including 13 Gladiators and 10 Hurricanes. It was one of the worst disasters in naval history.

A later analysis of the loss of HMS Glorious and the two escorting Destroyers concluded that:

- a) It was imprudent of the VAA to approve Glorious' request to proceed independently to Scapa Flow regardless of the reason and
- b) the earlier lack of German reaction to British operations in the North Sea lulled the Admiralty and the Fleet into a dangerous sense of complacency; and
- c) a complete disregard on the part of the Admiralty of a message received from Bletchley Park warning that two German heavy units (Scharnhorst and Gneisenau) had left the Baltic and might be moving north into Norwegian waters. Receipt of this information by the VAA would in all probability have led to an immediate refusal of Glorious's request to proceed independently.

Return to 43 Squadron

After being flown back to the UK at the end of May 1940 Caesar Hull was confined to hospital for treatment of his injuries, followed by a period of rest and recuperation. After being declared fit to resume operational duties he was posted back to 43 Squadron at the end of August, back onto Hurricanes. This timing coincided with a critical period in the Battle of Britain. The Luftwaffe was concentrating their attacks on Sector stations inflicting considerable damage on both airfield installations and aircraft. From a defensive aspect the situation was made worse by a recent change in the Luftwaffe's tactics, reducing the size of its bomber formations and increasing the numbers of escorting fighters. Twenty bombers with an escort of one hundred Me 109s was not uncommon, and it soon became apparent that Fighter Command's squadrons were now having to face a very serious crisis. Vital Sector stations around London were being damaged faster than they could be repaired, losses in pilots were of an order that made their replacement in sufficient numbers an impossibility, and its sector control system was close to breakdown. Tangmere and 43 Squadron suffered severe losses on the ground and in the air as a result. This was the situation that greeted Caesar Hull, made worse by the loss of the CO Squadron Leader Badger, and Sergeant Dennis Noble on 30 August. Caesar Hull was immediately promoted to take over command of 43 Squadron. There was no one better suited to take over 43 and revive morale. Already a living legend when he left so suddenly for Norway, Caesar's fame

had remained - those who knew him remembered, those who never knew him had heard. To a battle weary squadron he brought a new surge of vitality. Reinvigorated by the return of the legendary Caesar the squadron was further strengthened by the arrival of Dick Reynell and John Kilmartin to fill vacant Flight Commander posts. The former was a Hawker test pilot on loan, who had spent time prewar on 43 Squadron in command of C Flight, and the latter arrived after a period of intensive fighting with No 1 Squadron in France followed by a short spell as an Instructor at 5 OTU. The formidable Tom Morgan, ex-Station Sick Quarters, also re-joined the squadron.

On the second day of Caesar's command, on which the Luftwaffe continued to clobber the airfields, the battered spirit of the squadron was further shaken when three of the squadron's Hurricanes were shot out of the sky in a matter of seconds. These included the courageous Tony Woods-Scawen who fell to his death in his parachute and the veteran 'Crackers' Carswell who suffered from burns and shell splinters, which proved the end of his redoubtable flying career. On the credit side Reynell and Jefferys shot down two Me 109s. As on the first day, the third day was relatively quiet, allowing the squadron a breather before another big battle on 4 September, when Caesar Hull led the unit into a large formation of Me 110s over the Sussex Coast. The Me 110s were massacred by Fighter Command squadrons that day. 43 Squadron's contribution amounted to eight Me 110s destroyed against one Hurricane damaged. The day's tally was: Dalton-Morgan 2, Upton 2, Hull 2, Jefferys 1 and Van den Hove 1.

Scattered attacks continued on 5 September but no major encounters took place. One of the flights was sent off to intercept a plot near the Thames Estuary, and an Me 109 was spotted and attacked by Sergeant Hurry, catching fire and crashing out of control near Appledore railway station. Over 50 years later the crash site was excavated and the body of Lt. Helmut Strobl of 5./JG27 was found in the wreckage. This unveiled a remarkable set of coincidences: shot down on 5 September, body found and recovered on 5 September (1986), Strobl's birthday was 5 September, his flying license was dated 5 September and he was finally laid to rest in his native Austria on 5 September.

Continued attacks on airfields took place on 6 September, ranging over Kent, Sussex and Surrey. During the morning, twelve aircraft led by Caesar Hull engaged Luftwaffe formations between Mayfield and Dungeness. In the resulting flurry of dogfights five Me 109s and one Me 110 were shot down, and one Ju 88 and two Me 109s were badly damaged. Tom Morgan was the only casualty, resulting from an attack by an Me 109, with one bullet smashing the Hurricane's canopy and cutting his face.

Sunday 7 May began as a relatively quiet day. During the early afternoon two new pilots from OTU were able to fly a practice mission, and the Sector controller had indicated that the Squadron might be released before dusk. But around 16:00 radar plots made it obvious that something extraordinary was building up across the channel and within a short time a massive raid began to cross the coast, comprising 350 bombers and 600 plus fighters, staggered between heights of 14,000 to 23,000 feet, and heading straight for London. Unbeknown at the time the Germans had decided on a radical change of tactics, by concentrating their attacks on major cities instead of sector airfields. The force came over in two waves some 30 minutes apart. No 11 Group scrambled eleven squadrons, called another ten to readiness and alerted neighboring groups. Being unaware of the change of Luftwaffe tactics, the first squadrons took up positions to defend the airfields, allowing the leading German squadrons to reach the capital unmolested. No 43 Squadron were one of the ten on readiness and nine aircraft led by Caesar Hull were scrambled later, proceeding directly towards the massed formations. They sighted a large formation crossing the coast near Folkstone at 18,000 feet, comprising 25 Dornier Do 17 bombers with a ring of fighters circling 500 feet above and others behind stepped up to 25,000 feet. Following some miles behind were two similar groups of escorted Dorniers. Caesar led his nine Hurricanes towards the front group, climbing above the bombers with Kilmartin and his rear section of three aircraft positioned 2000 feet higher.

Telling Kilmartin to take care of the fighters, Caesar peeled off and dived down into the bombers, and in his typical croaky voice told his section to 'smash them up'. With Kilmartin's section simultaneously diving into the fighters, what developed next can most aptly be described as 'all hell being let loose'. The resulting melee thwarted any realistic analysis of events, but it was reported that Caesar shot down two Do 17s, used up all his ammunition, and then saw Reynell being heavily attacked and immediately dived to his aid - a courageous action typical of Caesar. But it was a hopeless situation with both pilots at the mercy of the German fighters, and it ended with two exceptional men being shot down and killed. A third pilot, Alan Deller, managed to bale out of his Hurricane unhurt, when it was hit by cannon fire and burst into flames.

The End

When a shocked John Kilmartin landed back at Tangmere after the battle and taxied into dispersal, he was only able to mutter the words 'My God'. This feeling of shock and despair was evident among all pilots and ground crew and it seemed that the cumulative effect of recent losses was too heavy to bear. Perhaps more than any others, the loss of both Caesar Hull and Dick Reynell in the same battle affected the squadron morale very badly, and Caesar's loss ended the fresh hope and vitality that his return a few days previously had brought to men grown weary with weeks of relentless fighting. He had produced a feeling of invincibility amongst the men and a belief that defeat was an illusion. Now the old worries and feelings of weariness came flooding back. Tom Morgan returned that night, to take over command of the squadron. The squadron was now reduced to thirteen pilots of whom six were recent postings from OTUs, and only John Kilmartin could claim any extensive prewar flying experience. Not surprisingly the remnants of the squadron were ordered to retire back to No 13 Group airfield at RAF Usworth to recover and reform for fresh battles.

Caesar was found dead beside his aircraft, in the grounds of a boy's school in Purley, Kent. He had been killed by a bullet during the battle over the London Docks. His remains were buried at St. Andrews Churchyard at Tangmere, amongst fellow fighter pilots. It is poignant that he died on the day that the Luftwaffe changed their strategy to concentrate on bombing the major cities of Britain by night, instead of targeting the Sector station control systems and airfields. This was to prove an historic turning point, when within a matter of weeks the Luftwaffe halted their attacks on London, virtually accepting the fact that they had lost the Battle of Britain.

John Simpson, another squadron stalwart and a very close friend from prewar days, and at the time recuperating in Cornwall from injuries received after parachuting from his shot-up aircraft, wrote to a confidant: "For two days I have been thinking of Caesar. I loved him as I would a brother. There can never be anyone to replace him in character, charm and kindness. We came to 43 together and grew up in it together. We knew each other from A to Z and it was a privilege no one else could share. I don't know what to say. I thought I was quite used to people dying. Do you realize that there are only three of us still alive who were serving with the squadron when the war began? I went for a long walk in the woods when the news came and I cried for the first time since I was little. Dear old Caesar. He commanded the squadron he began in as a Pilot Officer. I would have loved to fly with him as my CO. It seems funny to think that I shall never see him shaking that left foot of his when he was excited. And that laugh!

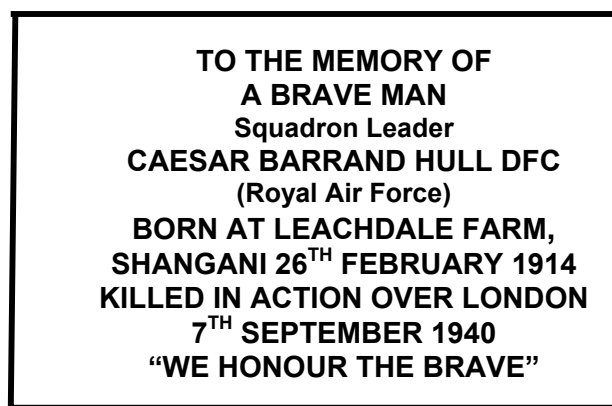
I have never heard anybody say an unkind thing about Caesar and I never heard him say an unkind thing about anybody else. One can't say more than that, can one?"

Rhodesian Backlog

Back at Plumtree School a small group of us became passionate readers of RAF fighter pilot escapades, and early in 1940 the local broadsheet – the Bulawayo *Chronicle* – started publishing day by day details

of the 'Aces' – names, countries of origin and scores – number of aircraft shot down. The *Chronicle* arrived at the school late each morning, so after lunch there was a mad rush to the House Reading Room to check on the latest scores. Initially no Rhodesian's names appeared, only South Africans, Englishmen, New Zealanders, Australians and Irish – Malan, Hughes, Finucane, Tuck, Bader, Deere, Lacey, etc. Then at the end of May 1940 the first Rhodesian name: Caesar Hull. That made our day. This coincided with the period that Caesar was in Norway, when it seemed that he was shooting down German aircraft like he was in a bowling alley. Then followed a period of recuperation from injuries until the end of August, when Caesar became CO of 43 Squadron. For the first few days of September 'kills' were credited to him almost on a daily basis and we became convinced he was going to the top. Then on 7 September tragedy struck. The atmosphere in that reading room when the news came through was one of deep shock and sadness.

After Caesar was killed the citizens of the town of Shangani, where he was born, clubbed together and erected a memorial in his honour. This consisted of a plinth of solid granite into which was affixed a brass plaque with the following inscription:



This Memorial was erected before the end of World War II and located alongside the main road linking the towns of Bulawayo and Gwelo, on the approach to the Shangani River Bridge. Many years later the road system was changed and the monument became isolated, less accessible and overgrown. In 1986 the Zimbabwe Government, in typical Mugabe fashion, de-proclaimed various old monuments, including the Caesar Hull Monument at Shangani. The Hull Family decided to retrieve the metal plaque and to donate it to the Tangmere Aviation Museum, an offer gratefully accepted by the museum authorities. In December 2003 Alistair Hull and a friend traveled to Shangani and attempted to remove the plaque, but it was so well embedded that they had to resort to using a 14lb hammer in place of a crowbar. Without warning they were suddenly shot at by some squatters, who were living in an old shack nearby. Naturally they kept their heads down and moved away cautiously, as an incident of this nature in Zimbabwe could have sparked off anything.

Some time later, "Dave" and "Les", two patriotic Zimbabweans, who were on their way north from Bulawayo to Kwekwe decided to pull into the site of the Caesar Hull Memorial at the Shangani river simply to have a look at it. Les had never seen it before. There were no lurkers in the vicinity this time and after seeing the plaque hanging half out of Caesar's memorial, they decided what had to be done. They continued their journey to Gweru, collected hammers, and drove the 40 miles back to the Memorial. They removed the plaque, put it in the boot of their car and continued on to their destination. From the name on the plaque Dave contacted one of the Hull family, and it was delivered to Alistair Hull, a second cousin of Caesar's, in Harare. It was then very carefully packed in a wooden crate and air-freighted free of charge by MK Airlines to the Kent International Airport at Manston.

This generous gesture derives from past history. MK Airlines is owned and operated by Mike Kruger, an ex Air Force pilot, who is the nephew of Jack Malloch, who in turn owned and operated the country's Air Line 'Affretair' during the Sanctions period after UDI. Jack spent his war years as an RAF pilot flying Spitfires with No 237 (Rhodesia) Squadron in the Middle East. In 1980 he completed the rebuild of a Mk F22 Spitfire – the only successful restoration of this version. In 1982, during the final film shoot for a documentary film he flew into an unexpectedly violent hailstorm. The Spitfire plummeted to the ground out of control and Jack was killed instantly. During the bush war Jack was called up on many occasions to fly his company aircraft on external operations. This created a compassionate link with the Air Force which Mike Kruger respects to this day.

The crate was finally delivered to the Tangmere Museum on Saturday 17 April 2004, with Caesar Hull's sister Wendy Bryan performing the formal handover of the Plaque to the Museum Curator John Edwards.

From the London 'Times', December 3rd. 1940

SQUADRON LEADER C.B. HULL, D.F.C.

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Across the water whence he came – Rhodesia/South Africa – and to the land that he came to serve- his smile and happy nature brought warmth, his courage and unselfishness installed faith and confidence, his keenness, his intrinsic love of Nature's open fields of sport, encouraged and gave zest to all men who knew this man among men. I was but one of those privileged to serve with him and to share the hours of duty, of play, and of rest, and always he was the pillar about which we revolved.

Of his deeds, of his valour, of his determination to help this country exterminate its enemy there can be no need to write. He came back in glory from Norway to command the squadron he loved and who loved him so well, and in the short time he stayed he led his squadron always with distinction and humiliated the enemy.

The sun shall be last of all things to die --- but at its going down our thoughts shall turn to this man.

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Hamilton C. Upton

Acknowledgements

First and foremost to Caesar Hull's adored sister Wendy Bryan and husband Gerald, for their enthusiasm in openly discussing their wide-ranging knowledge and factual details of Caesar's career, and for granting unlimited access to their extensive memorabilia on the subject.

To the two gentlemen who perchance stumbled upon an important piece of history at Shangani and realised the importance of their find.

To Alistair Hull for actively pursuing the recovery of the Memorial Plaque from the Zimbabwe bush country amidst hostile elements.

To Mike Kruger and MK Airlines for air-freighting the two memorial plaques free of charge, and for ensuring their safe delivery to Manston Airport.

And to Group Captain Bill Sykes of the Rhodesian Air Force for additional research on the subject, and for checking details and enhancing the readability of the article.

Additional details on the successive stages of Caesar Hull's RAF career were gleaned from the following books:

Duel Of Eagles by Peter Townsend

43 (F) Squadron "The Fighting Cocks" by J. Beedle

No 43 'Fighting Cocks' Squadron by Andy Saunders

Combat Report by Hector Bolitho.
