

Faith, Hope & Charity



Faith (Left click for larger image)



Gladiator (possibly 'Hope' destroyed by German aircraft 4th February 1941 on Hal Far airfield.
Photo courtesy of Michael Longyear.

To say Malta's air defences were small at the beginning of WWII would be an under statement. The total air power on Malta consisted of 4 Gloster Gladiator biplanes. These were packed in crates & left at Kalafrana flying boat base by HMS Glorious which left to join the Norwegian campaign. In fact, there were enough parts to make up 8 biplanes but the Navy wanted 4 back to join the aircraft carrier HMS Eagle. The remaining 4 were assembled, 3 were to be used on operations with the remaining 1 kept in reserve. After assembling the biplanes the Royal Navy decided on having them back for work in Alexandria, so they were taken apart for re-packing.

Following talks between Air Commodore Maynard & the Royal Navy it was decided to leave the biplanes on Malta & they were re-assembled. Their first use in combat came at 0649 on the 11th of June 1940 when 10 Italian Savoia Marchetti 79 bombers bombed Grand Harbour. No aircraft were shot down in this encounter. On the 7th raid of the day the Gladiator's drew blood by shooting down a Macchi 200 fighter. Although the biplanes were slower than the Italian fighters they were more manouverable.

Flying Officer John Waters nicknamed the aircraft 'Faith, Hope & Charity'.

Three bladed propellers were fitted in place of the usual two to give the biplanes a faster rate of climb. Other parts were later used from a Swordfish. Superchargers were left on maximum during the climb after take off (which was against orders) so they could gain height faster. This put extra strain on the engines & 2 of them blew pistons. Maintenance crews converted Blenheim bomber engines to fit the Gladiators.

Faith, Hope & Charity fought for 17 days without relief & played a fundamental role in fooling the Italian intelligence into thinking Malta had a substantial fighter defence.



Faith in the Malta War Museum.
Photo courtesy of Michael Sanderson.

References:

Websites: This site is only a small sample, see these sites for more details.

Group Captain George Burges http://surfcity.kund.dalnet.se/commonwealth_burges.htm

Flight Lieutenant William Josef 'Timber' Woods http://surfcity.kund.dalnet.se/commonwealth_burges.htm

Books:

Faith, Hope & Charity. Kenneth Poolman.

Visit:

The National War Museum, St.Elmo's Fort, Valletta. Home of 'Faith'.