

SPITFIRES HERE**HIT JAPANESE
AT DARWIN****MR CURTIN'S STATEMENT**

CANBERRA.—Presence in Australian battle areas of Spitfire fighter squadrons was announced by the Prime Minister (Mr Curtin) today.

These squadrons have been in Australia for some time, Mr Curtin revealed, but their presence has been kept secret to exploit to the maximum the element of surprise.

Mr Curtin said this objective had been realised. On Tuesday they took part in the interception of an enemy force over Darwin, inflicting a crushing defeat on the Japanese planes. The enemy lost six out of his total raiding force of 15 machines.

Crews of these squadrons include members of the RAF as well as pilots of the RAAF, who have been trained under the Empire Air

Training Scheme. These men—RAF and RAAF—have taken part in many air battles against the Luftwaffe, and have gained for themselves a high reputation. The squadrons have come to Australia as complete units, bringing with them ground staff and all equipment.

Mr Curtin said he was particularly pleased to be able to make this announcement in advance of the departure of the Minister for External Affairs (Dr. Evatt) on his second mission abroad, because the despatch of these squadrons to Australia was the result of a special arrangement made between Mr Churchill and Dr. Evatt during Dr. Evatt's visit to Britain in May, 1942.

AIR STRENGTH NEED

One of the objects of this mission was to present the case for increased air strength for this theatre, Mr Curtin said. He had previously paid tribute to the great services rendered to Australia by Dr. Evatt during his mission and was pleased to be able to disclose that this contribution by the United Kingdom to our defence was one of the material results which flowed directly from his journey to Britain.

The Prime Minister emphasised that the form of this contribution was determined by Mr Churchill himself, whose response to Dr. Evatt's representations was immediate and characteristic.

While it was recognised that geographical and strategical considerations dictated that the primary responsibility for the South-West Pacific area should be that of the United States, Mr Churchill had always made it clear that this fact had not in any way lessened Britain's interest in the security of Australia.

Mr. Churchill personally conceived the idea of sending these squadrons which were a material

expression of the constant mutual support which bound the nations of the British Commonwealth.

"I have already expressed our thanks to Mr Churchill and the British Government for making these squadrons available, and I take this opportunity of giving public expression to our gratitude for this splendid gesture on the part of the United Kingdom," said Mr Curtin.

"As is well known, the Spitfire has a magnificent record in air operations in other theatres of war. The aircraft with which these squadrons are equipped have been specially adapted for tropical conditions, and will undoubtedly still further enhance the reputation of an already famous machine.

"Our air forces in this theatre which have fought valiantly and with such success against the Japanese will be inspired and heartened by this new accession of strength, and by the reflection that just as Australian airmen are fighting with British airmen in the Mother Country, so British airmen are taking their part in the defence of Australian territory against the Japanese."

Men Who Fly World's Best Fighters

CANBERRA.—The Minister for Air (Mr Drakeford) said that the Spitfire pilots who had battle honors thick upon them were part of the contingent sent from Great Britain to augment Australia's air fighting force.

They slipped quietly into Australia some months ago and were distributed among RAAF stations where they secretly prepared to go into operation against the enemy.

Some of the Australian Spitfire pilots now back in their native land were among the world's best combat fliers.

Included among them were Clive Caldwell, DFC and Bar, who has recently been promoted to the rank of Acting Wing Commander; Squadron Leader R. E. Thorold-Smith, DFC, of Young, N.S.W., and Squadron Leader K. E. James, of Frankston, Victoria.

"There are other distinguished flyers from both the RAAF and the RAF who, it is expected, will add to their already great record," said Mr Drakeford. "Their presence in Australia will be not only a source of pride to Australians, but will provide inspiration to all members of the Royal Australian Air Force.

"It is a comforting thought that the men who have gained such a high reputation against the best

that Germany has put into the air in men and machines are ready to pit their skill against the Japanese and to guard Australian lives and homes. It would be difficult to think of any flying men with more battle honors than these Spitfire pilots.

"Their performances in the ears of Australians are synonymous with the apex in air fighting."

Some of the RAF Spitfire pilots now in Australia were once attached to units which were largely responsible in September, 1940, for driving the Luftwaffe back to Germany.

On arrival in Australia the men were cheerful. The Australians were delighted to be back in their homeland, and determined to take a bitter revenge on the enemy who, while they were engaged against the European tyrant, had stabbed their country in the back. The RAF men were filled with an equally grim determination to carry on in the tropics the fighting traditions they had built up amid the snows and fogs of Britain.

SERVED UNDER ACES

Mr Drakeford said that Squadron Leader Thorold-Smith was a leading member of a notable group of Australian Spitfire pilots, some of whom were still abroad.

At one time Squadron Leader Thorold-Smith served under the late Wing Commander Brendan (Paddy) Finucane, and also with Squadron Leader R. W. Bungey, D.F.C., who was born in Glenelg, South Australia.

Some others in this group were Squadron Leader K. W. T. Truscott, D.F.C. and Bar; Flight Lieut. C. N. Wawn, D.F.C.; and Sergeant K. V. Chisholm, D.F.C.

Squadron Leader James is an Empire Air Training Scheme trainee. He enlisted in the RAAF in June, 1940, having had no previous flying experience, and gained his wings after passing through schools in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. He has taken part in 41 sweeps over enemy territory.

Flight Lieut. Peter Watson, D.F.C., of Vaucluse (N.S.W.), another returned Spitfire pilot, has participated in 45 sweeps over enemy-occupied territory, and on several occasions overseas led a squadron.

"I've got some good mates with these Spitfires, and more will be heard of them," said Squadron-

Leader James in an interview. "We are confident of putting up a decent show against the Japanese. Australia can rely on us doing the very best of which we are capable. That's all I've got to say."

How Spitfires Fly—P. 4.

HERALD 4-3-43

Super Spitfires Over Australia

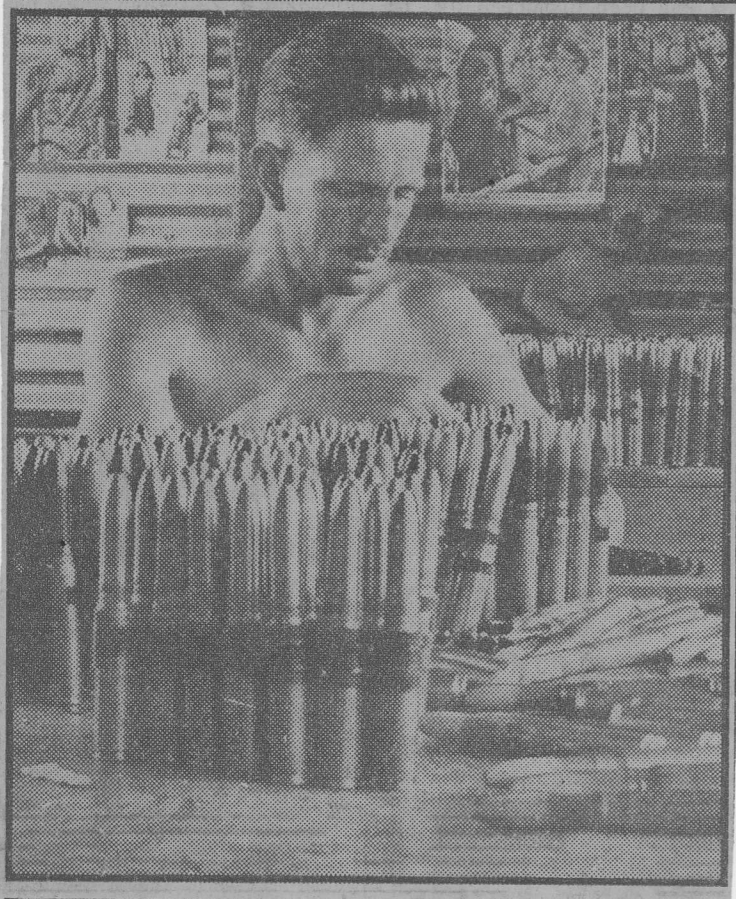


NEW-TYPE Mark 8 Spitfires flying tests at an operational station in Victoria. These new four-bladed type Spitfires have a speed of more than 400 m.p.h. at operational height.

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A58-315 FRONT
A58-395 -

PLAYED ITS PART IN JAPS' 6-0 DEFEAT



Spitfire fighter taking off at a North Australian base. It is one of the machines which took part in the fight with Japanese planes on March 2, which resulted in a six-to-nil victory for the Australian squadron. The wheels were in a semi-retracted position when the picture was taken. LEFT: An armorer loading the ammunition belt for the Spitfires' cannon. —All photographs by R.A.A.F. Directorate of Public Relations.

QID PAPER



HAIR-CUT

RAAF riggers, ever ready, stand by for duty near the Spitfires which they maintain. Here LAC G. E. Stevens, of Brighton (Vic.) and LAC A. R. Chapman, of Bundarra (NSW) look informal, but are officially on duty. Little jobs like cutting a fellow's hair help to pass the time during stand-by periods.

Department of Air Photo.