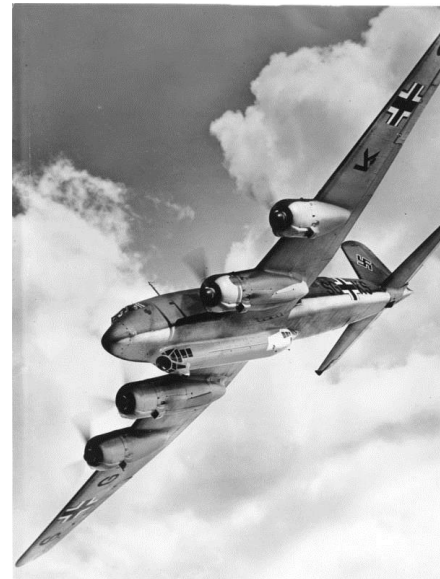


Fox Feather

by

Vixxy Fox



Winston Churchill called the Focke-Wulf 200 the "Scourge of the Atlantic" during the Battle of the Atlantic due to its contribution to heavy Allied shipping losses.



Our instructor stood at the front of our class room taking the time to look at each of us individually. He was an old Wolf and had been flying bombers since the Great War back in the days when flying by the seat of your pants was a given; good luck and God bless. The fact that he was still alive, though he walked with a pronounced limp, was testimony to both his luck and his skill.

“Und zo... how many of you have more than fifty hours flying time? I am speaking here of time controlling an aircraft and not just riding as an observer.”

All but three of us raised our paws. These three he dismissed with assurances they would be back in his class just as soon as they completed their training in lighter more docile aircraft. To the rest of us he asked, “Und how many of you young pilots have made love to a beautiful Fox, eh?”

None of us raised a paw. I’m not sure if this was from the possible stigma of being branded a Fox lover; or if it was the fact that we were all very young. But for Mother Thumb and her four sisters I personally had never been presented the opportunity of partaking in such a thing.

“I thought as much,” he responded. “A Fox,” he continued, beginning a slow pace in the front of the class, “Is not a creature to be jumped upon and brutally pillaged as you might do with a stouter Wolf female. You would crush her bones and leave a wonderful creature forever broken... never to fly again. No matter what you think and no matter what you were taught before; we cannot allow such a thing to happen in love making or in flying.” He paused just long enough for us to give this consideration and then said strongly, “The aircraft you are to master is too heavy for her bones. She was a civilian airliner and suffered from conversion to military life. Yes it has the range to cripple shipping. Yes it has the bombload to cripple shipping. Yes it has the guns to defend itself and to cripple shipping; but this also means landing her must be kept as light as a chicken feather to a Fox’s nipple... which if you must know; excites the vixen to great heights.” He allowed this wondrous thought to seep into us young pilots sitting in the schoolhouse desks before him and then said in no uncertain terms, “Crush her with the weight of the whole chicken und you have had your fun for that one time... then you are sent to the Wehrmacht to fight Wolfhounds on the eastern front.”



We were all volunteers for something secret. The war, being what it was, made this not all that unusual. The twenty pilot’s assembled ranged from already made aces to three rookies with just enough time in the cockpit to qualify them. Across the room I saw Wally Wallace and waved to him. There was also Joey Smith, Clarence Abernathy, Samuel Witherford, and Polly Binford. Polly’s actual name was Thomas but he got the nic because everyone who ever saw him fly remarked that he flew like a bloody parrot. I suppose you’d have to see it to understand.

Someone called ‘attention’ and we were all up in the same motion as Commander Broom strode into the room. Yes this too was a nic; but a well-earned nic and one to be proud of. The Collie’s Vic of four Hurricanes managed a clean sweep; eviscerating two vics of five Wolf bombers heading for Birmingham.

“At ease,” he told us in the same moment we’d stood. “You’re all volunteers so we shall not stand on protocol during your training so long as it is just us present.” He took a moment to regard each and every one of the pilots before him. “So you know; I have no doubt of your bravery,” he finally continued. “Nor do I doubt your ability as flyers. You are here this day not for advanced study on aeronautics, but rather to learn a new process of taking to the air; which is

secret. You will then meet the enemy on the high seas; which is secret. You will then shoot him down; and that is not a bloody secret.”

He gave us a mischievous smile and pulled a chicken feather from his breast pocket. This he tossed into the air letting it float to the floor. Our eyes were drawn to it and there was a questioning silence on our part that contrasted sharply with the rather lecherous smile given over by the Commander. “When you make love to a vixen,” he told us softly, “You can drive her absolutely crazy by using a simple chicken feather poised just before her nipple. I’m not sure if this is because they so crave the taste of chicken or if it is the anticipated tickling that makes them climb the wall. Similar to this, when you were taught to fly you were instructed to be light pawed on the controls... light as a feather, yes?”

We all agreed.

“Well, gentlemen, I am here to tell you that you will now learn to do exactly the opposite in taking to the air. You are going to throw the entire chicken at your takeoff; muscling your aircraft into the air with the strength and finesse of a ham handed house mover.”

We might have laughed except for the Commander’s expression. He was absolutely bloody serious.

“Gentlemen...” he told us, “Welcome to the Merchant Ship Fighter Unit.”



We were taken to the airfield where a converted Condor sat like a malevolent sea god. It was huge and had four engines. Our instructor took us all around the aircraft explaining everything from the nose to the tail. Obviously we were to be responsible for flying the great beast but the six additional crew members manning the many positions would also be our responsibility; so we had to also know exactly how they did what they did.

“To obtain the greatest range,” Herr Kursleiter told us, “You should fly as high as you can. Since you have no oxygen on board and your aircraft is not pressurized, it is suggested that a height of 9800 feet be maintained. Thermos’ of coffee and schnapps are suggested as a bracer against the cold you will be required to endure. Your vixen is capable of more than 2000 nautical miles making it a very long range aircraft. On August tenth and eleventh of 1938, one of them flew non-stop from Berlin to New York City in the incredible time of twenty four hours and fifty six minutes. Zo... you can see that by the time you come back from your patrol you will be tired und stiff and yet you will still have to tickle the vixen’s tit for the touchdown. We have already lost too many aircraft from simple hard landings. They have a habit of breaking in two right behind the wings. Though the vixen is big... her back is not so strong.”

He patted the fuselage affectionately and there was a metallic thump in response to his paw.



I was the first on the practice ramp which would launch my Hurricane into the air. Even though the ship was moored and I was to land at a nearby airfield, my stomach was such that I was ready to stand in the cockpit and puke upon the wing. This was probably due to the thought of strapping two hundred pounds of gunpowder to my ass in the form of a launch assist rocket. Simply explained, a few of the experimental packs had simply gone 'BOOM' rather than 'PFFFFFFffffff'. This was explained to me in the most animated of ways by the ship's Chief Engineer, who was tasked with taking care of the catapult. Our specially modified Hurricanes were naturally dubbed '*Hurricats*'.

Commander Broom stood on my left wing looking calm and distinguished. He too would be shipping out on one of the CAM ships. CAM, of course, stood for '*Catapult Aircraft Merchant Ship*'. We pilots had our own dour version of the acronym which was, '*Can't Actually Make-it*'. I suppose this would be considered gallows humor but it was well meant. In war there are always risks for the greater good. Against this you grit your teeth, cross your fingers, and then press the button clearly marked with a placard reading; 'Caution – DO NOT PRESS BUTTON!'

"The trolley receiving bar will be removed at dawn," the Collie told me. We'd already gone over this a hundred times, but 'rote' teaches by repetition so repeat he did. "This holds your aircraft in place against the pitch and roll of the seas and against water being shipped over the bows. There will be no night flying. So far, and to our great relief, the Wolfs have not figured out to do that anymore than we have. Next, your crew will need to start and warm the engine at set intervals in order to maintain your state of readiness." He paused to look at the skies around us. So far there had been no enemy aircraft reported in the vicinity. Behind us a good deal of canvas was held ready in case we needed to cover what we were doing from the high altitude reconnaissance aircraft which occasionally flew over the port. "When do you climb into the cockpit?" the Commander finally asked in an almost absent minded after thought.

"Only after enemy aircraft are spotted," I responded, "And any time I wish an alone moment to pray."

"Spot on," he agreed.



"You will have to bomb from a low altitude," Herr Kursleiter told us. "Because of this the nose gunner has been given a very large machine gun for strafing. His target will be the bridge. If he kills the command and control the ship will be easier to hit should you miss on the first pass. The bombsight is simple and your bomb aimer will release what you carry in sets of three. This is meant to bracket the target thus ensuring a hit. Remember... every ship you sink means lives

saved among our brethren on the ground.” He paused and then added, “Stay away from the escort ships as they will have an ample amount of anti-aircraft guns to kill you with. This is about stopping the supplies; warships add nothing to that.”



Oddly enough, it was decided that signal flag ‘F’ would be hoisted by the CAM ship when the decision was made to launch. (CAM ships were usually stationed at the head of the outboard port column of a convoy so they could maneuver into the wind for launch.) We naturally called this the ‘Fox Feather’ signal. An airman would then remove the safety securing pins, show them to the pilot, which was me, and then took them to the Catapult Duty Officer (CDO).

“And then?” Commander Broom asked.

I tapped a finger on the checklist fastened to my instrument panel with chewing gum. “I apply 30 degree flaps and 1/3 right rudder to compensate for the engine’s torque.”

“Very good, and bravo for your checklist; I like that. Never trust important things to memory. Next the CDO raises a blue flag above his head to inform the ship's master of his readiness to launch, whereupon that fellow will maneuver the CAM into the wind and raise a blue flag above his head authorizing the launch.” As he spoke, a bug flew into his mouth causing him to gag and spit. I did my best not to laugh.

“The ship's master will stand on the starboard bridge wing to avoid the catapult rocket blast which we have found to sometimes damage the port side of the bridge. This is why the catapult is fastened to the deck in such a cockeyed manner. When you are ready I shall join him there... just in case.” Here he winked at me which I found less than reassuring. “The CDO will wave his flag indicating readiness to launch upon a signal from you. Tell me what you do then.”

Now I recited by rote rather than checklist because everything after the CDO’s signal would go very quick. “I take her to full throttle, tighten the throttle friction nut, press my head back into the head-rest, brace my right elbow against my hip; and then lower my left hand as a signal to launch.”

“Exactly so,” the Commander told me. “The CDO then counts to three, waits for the bow to rise from the trough of the swell and moves the switch to fire the catapult rockets.”

“Very good, sir,” I replied. “Do you have any advice for me once I’m airborne?”

The Collie placed a paw on my shoulder and told me, “Don’t tickle the bastard’s tit. He’s there to kill you and your mates. You throw the whole chicken at him and bugger him good. Make sure he’s done. Do not let him escape. If he makes it back to land they can make repairs and come at us again. Your aircraft will be expended once things are done... do not let her death be wasted.”

“With that he was off the wing and moving quickly back to a safe area. We then launched... and what a gut wrenching experience it was.”



After Action Report
Auxiliary Fighter Catapult Ship Empire Bosworth Bay
Captain Bomont Merryweather
August 8th, 1941

German bomber spotted at 1440 hours.

CAM aircraft launched with successful interception of enemy aircraft during bombing run at 1510 hours.

Damages incurred:

AFC Bosworth Bay strafed with minor damage.

German bomber FW-200 shot down. Three survivors recovered by HMS David.

CAM pilot nearly drowned before recovery. Broken leg suffered during bail out.

God Save Britain!

From mid-1941, Condor crews were instructed to stop attacking shipping and avoid all combat in order to preserve numbers.

With the increase of the availability of escort aircraft carriers, CAM sailings on North American and Arctic Russian convoys were discontinued in August 1942.