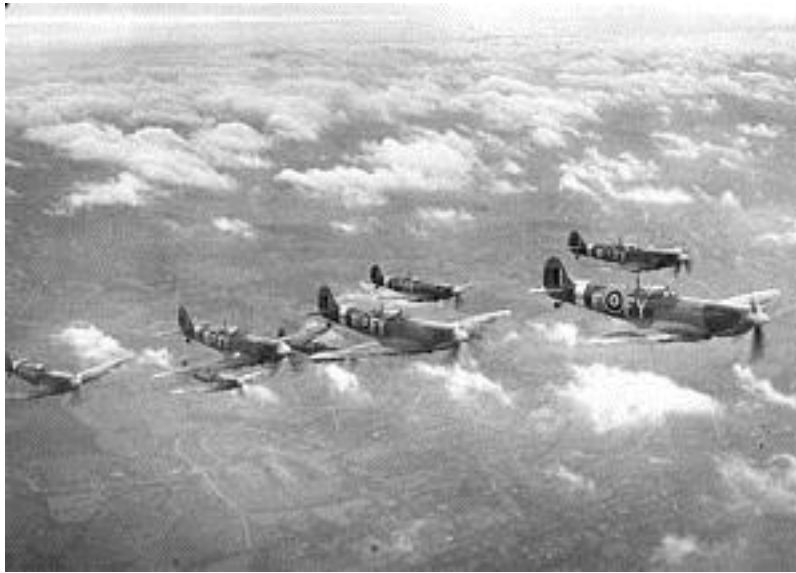


Context

by

Vixxy Fox



Flight Lieutenant Archie Corn kept an eye on the girls across the room as he nursed his beer. Smiling to himself he watched as each of the blustery pilots in the Officer's Club gave it a go; trying to get them out on the dance floor. All were politely but strogly rebuffed. This would definitely give the girls the tag of 'Huffy' but apparently they didn't care. He knew two of them personally and understood their long standing desire to have a quiet drink; but there was also a new girl sitting at their table who had the look of being quite lively. Where the two regular females were vixens, one Arctic and one a Fennec, this one was a long furred Dog. She was also wearing the same non-descript flying jacket as the desert Fox. If he had to venture a guess it would be that she was a Husky and also obviously belonged to the ATA (Air Transport Auxiliary).

The white Fox, on the other paw, was a WAAF and specially assigned as their escort at the airfield. Her Corporal's stripes clearly should have barred her from the officer's club but for the fact she was acting in her official capacity. Currently there were no less than three rounds of drinks sitting upon their table sent by the 'gentlemen' fliers and judging by their smiles the ladies were more than feeling it.

The record player finally made it to the end of the 78 RPM vinyl disk and skipped a few times before the barkeep picked up its arm and placing it upon the spindle rest. Conversation slowed then even for the mostly inebriated pilots present.

“Corn!” someone shouted.

“Here!” he replied looking up; recognizing the voice as belonging to Lieutenant Henry Badcock. The old Bulldog was supposed to meet him for dinner and a drink so there was no surprise at the shout. What was a surprise was that his wingman didn’t even stop at his table, but strode directly over to the table of females, greeting them in his most friendly of manners.

In here, the Corporal was a guest and though she should have risen on the approach of an officer, she remained seated, accepting the Lieutenants extended paw. “I’m pleased to see you again, sir.”

“And I, you,” he replied. “And who might your friends be?”

“You know dang good and well who I am you ugly old booger,” the long eared Fox growled. She then climbed up on her chair and held her arms open for a hug. “And that’s all you’re going to get too,” she whispered in his ear as they embraced.

“But what about your young friend there?” he whispered back. As he did this, he winked at the Husky and smiled as much as his dour looks allowed for.

At this exact moment a young pilot, quite sloshed and slurring his words, swung round the table.

“Wood ya like ta dance Mish?” he managed, placing a paw on the table to steady himself. The bar became suddenly quiet. Most there were very familiar with Lieutenant Badcock’s reputation and obviously the pup was about to suffer a very rude awakening.

Vixyy felt the Bulldog’s body tighten under her hug and growled, “Don’t concern yourself Henry, I’ve got this.”

“But... my honor is being accosted, luv.”

“You males and your honor are all a bunch of fools,” she muttered, “All machismo and no brains.”

Climbing down from her chair she faced the young pilot and said loudly, “How many hours you got in the cockpit Junior?”

The pilot, a Fox Hound by the looks of him, turned to look at her. Seeing her large ears, he laughed. “How do you tuck those whoppers into the cockpit Missy?”

No sooner had the words left his mouth and there was a quick movement of a foot with a resulting ‘whap’ of a boot connecting with the pup’s groin. As he doubled over there was a loud collective groan and then muffled laughter amongst those who witnessed the ‘take down’.

“Lesson number 1,” she shouted at his inert form, “You let a 109 get that close and you’re not coming back.” She felt a paw on her shoulder and turned quickly raising a fist. “You want some of this?”

The Stag looking down at her was unperturbed. He smiled a sad smile. “On the contrary Miss Fox,” he said in a gentlemanly fashion, “I would like to invite you and your friends to the

Operations Shack so we might discuss aircraft. If my information is correct, I believe you might have personal knowledge that we could all benefit from.”

Dropping her small fist, the Fox looked to the Bulldog. “Where’d you get this one Henry? I kinda like him.”

Covering his mouth, the other pilot made a noise like a low cough but with which his words said, “He’s the boss.”

The Operation’s shack was small but comfortable. It had a blackboard and chairs enough for a dozen pilots. Archie dismissed the duty communications Sergeant telling him if the phone rang it would be answered. For the time being the man was to station himself outside and prevent anyone coming in.

The young pilot who’d been so obnoxious was dragged along by Lieutenant Badcock with time given for him to puke his guts out.

“He’s going to be useless,” Archy told the Bulldog as they walked, “Why in bloody hell did you bring him? I say leave him off flying for a week. Let him wash dishes and mop out the barracks for a time to teach him some civility.”

“He’s young and brash,” Henry argued as they stopped again to the sound of the retching. “Let him learn a lesson in this Arch. Besides, I’ve got an idea that I think the girls are going to like.”

“But I’m not?” the Stag asked.

“Possibly not,” his friend told him with a wink and a smile, “But it might also get you some face time with some very lovely young ladies.”

“It might get my jewels kicked too,” the Stag retorted and the pair laughed.

The ladies talked as well while waiting a distance off.

“I think he’s cute,” the Husky said.

“Who? Certainly not that snot assed little Hound?” Vixyy asked her.

“No, no, no, the Stag.”

“That would be Lieutenant Corn,” Corporal Bering told her. “If you’re going to address him it would only be proper to use his name and rank.”

“I don’t know,” the other Fox offered, “He looks a bit horny.”

That got her a hip nudge from the Husky and the unspoken lip speak of ‘that was so bad’.

“So have you flown a Spitfire Miss Vixyy?” the Artic Fox asked.

“You know that would be totally against regulations. We females are allowed to fly anything but the Hurricanes and Spits; those are only for the boys. This time in we brought a pair of Bristol Beaufighters, the time before that was a Manchester and the time before that a Lancaster we brought all the way over from Canada. Those take two pilots.”

“What about you Miss Husky?”

“It’s Huskyteer,” she corrected. “Everyone always assumes it’s just the one name and nothing more.” She swished her tail a bit. “Just another pretty Dog, eh?”

“No offense meant.”

“None taken. I have about a hundred hours on the Curtis Tomahawk and a thousand more on other models. Most of it was ferry flights from the states when they needed things in a hurry. All that distance and we never lost a one of them I’m pleased to say.”

“How does the Tomahawk fly?”

“Steady enough. It’s a good platform but doesn’t dogfight so well. It’s true strength is in the dive. I dare say there’s nothing that can catch it. Make a slash attack and keep on going is the best way in any case.”

In the next moment, the males were with them again including the washed out looking Hound who babbled his apologies to the smaller Fox. This lasted until she threatened to kick him again and he quickly fell silent.

In the shack the Fox’s memory was quickly picked as to the flying characteristics of the ME109 she’d ferried.

“You flew an enemy aircraft?” The Hound asked, his jaw dropping slightly.

“Wake up and smell the coffee Junior,” she told him. “It’s top secret so you don’t say a thing to anyone.” Turning to Lieutenant Corn she told him, “The flaps are adjustable unlike on the Spit which only has the two fixed settings. You give that to the right pilot and it’ll turn inside of what you can do.”

Archie smiled at her. “Thank you for your insight, Miss Fox.”

“And now we have a proposal,” Henry added, “But like your 109, it must remain higher than Top Secret. How would the pair of you like to fly with our group tomorrow? It’s only a training mission, but it would give you some stick time in the Spit.”

There was a moment’s hush and then the young hound turned around and began vomiting into a waste bin.

“Well that was a bit anti-climactic,” Henry muttered. Turning back to the ladies, he told them, “His name really is Junior.”

The next day the training group was summoned to the Operations shack and Henry was given the honor of briefing the pilots for their mission. "There are six of us, should you not be able to count. We are to take off and head due north at angels fourteen. When the Flight Leader calls it, we break apart in groups of three and head in opposite directions for exactly three minutes. We are then designated Blue and Green flights. Flight Lieutenant Corn's flight consisting of myself and Pilot Officer Junior McFee will be Blue 1, 2, and 3. Pilot Officer Harris will lead Sergeant Willis and Vernon and you will be Green 1, 2, and 3, respectively."

There was a moment of good natured rivalry chit chat and then Flight Lieutenant Corn rose from his chair. "There will be one more thing. Though there was nothing of this in the content of the training orders, we can read between the lines and come up with a different context for the written word. There is more to flying a Spitfire than dog fighting so on taxi out we will simulate high wind conditions and will 'tail' the aircraft for taxi. We have made arrangements with our assigned WAAF's. They will be standing by to drape themselves over the tails of your aircraft for weight which is how we keep the tails down should there be high wind conditions. You will please hesitate prior to take off and give them the thumbs up with your arm well out of the cockpit so they will know to dismount. Keep things open until then and pull the canopy closed just before your take off roll. As soon as they dismount they will slap the side of the fuselage for your notification. Feel for it and check your rearview. Green flight will take off first, and then Blue."

There was no question to this order. If the Flight Leader wanted to take off last then it must have been because he wished to watch the junior birdmen during take off and climb.

When the group arrived to their aircraft they were met by their WAAF's with a salute and a brief, 'Ready, sir.' Oddly enough, two of those meant to 'tail' the aircraft were in flying gear.

Change out occurred at the end of the runway; far enough away from prying eyes that nothing was noticed. Corporal Bering rode Archie's 'Egham Spit' while Vixxy rode Henry's and Huskyteer rode Junior McFee's as he'd been pulled into the plot as part of his punishment. As it was, the youngster was so hungover it was all he could do to get out of bed in the morning. He, of course, swore never to drink again. With the change out, Henry, with the Pilot Officer in tow, made his way back to the opposite end of the runway where they would make the swap again when the group got back. Once there they would stay in the bushes where Junior might nap as they waited. That they might actually be shot for this offense was never spoken of... some things you just had to do.

Blue and Green formed up and Archie moved around the formation checking the details of the aircraft making sure all was well and each was in flying order with nothing flapping in the wind. Flight at three hundred miles perhour could easily rip such a thing right off and then they would be down an invaluable aircraft and perhaps even a pilot if his exit was not picture perfect. When he was sure all was well he gave the order for the two groups to fly a bit more seperated so each section could get used to flying with their leader.

When they had done this he called for Green 2 and 3 to form up on him wingtip to wingtip, one on each side. Once they were there and both, unlike the newer pilots he had to contend with, rock steady to the inch, he noted that Henry had been right; behind the oxygen mask you really could not tell who the pilot was. He made hand signals querrying their status and got a thumbs up from both. His order for the two groups to separate was then given and he swung around to due south. When the required time had expired, he radioed, "On your guard Blue, here we come."

Two mock dog fights occurred over forty five minutes with Green gaining the advantage each time. "My compliments to Green 3," Blue leader called, "Junior really seems on top of things this morning. Perhaps we should let him drink every night and then give him a good kick; it seems to have worked wonders."

There was much unheard good natured laughter over that one as the plots kept the radio at minimum use; especially by Huskyteer.

"Green 2's awful quiet today," one of the other pilots called out. "Everything all right there Henry?"

There was a moment's hesitation and Archie called back, "Hand signals gentlemen, and he says he apparently has radio transmisson problems."

"We should be so blessed every time we fly," Blue 2 chirped to more unheard laughter.

"92 Squadron Training Flight, this is Command are you gunned and available, over?"

"Roger," Archie answered immediately, "We are gunned but at half fuel. Currently at angels twelve. Can you give me intercept coordinants?"

"Bomberflight inbound at angels 21 fifty miles south of your position. They are confirmed HE-111's with escort."

"Bloody hell!" Archie said into his mask and then keyed his mike. "On our way."

"You are now designated Green Flight," the controller told him, already knowing this was the call the flight commander had used for training. On the board in front of her another WAAF moved a marker representing his flight.

"Green Flight, roger," the Stag replied. To his group he said, "Form up and follow me lads; we need to get up above quickly. Estimated intercept time will be five minutes. Eyes sharp and call out when you see them. Beers on me tonight to whoever spots them first."

There was a series of microphone clicks in answer and they were on their way.

Exactly six minutes and ten seconds later a female voice called out, "Bandets at eleven'o'clock! Possible 110's."

"Command, Green Flight," Archie called, "Bandets at angels twenty six, possible 110's, no sight yet of the bombers."

“Bombers below at seven ‘o’ clock,” Blue One called, “Four flights of three... looks like Heinkels.”

Green Flight... Command,” the sweet voiced WAAF called back, “Orders are to take the bombers.”

Archie looked left and then right and wagged his wings. “Tally Ho!” he called out as he nosed his aircraft over. “Lead your target, use short bursts, and mind your ammunition.”

Without looking back at the fighters diving on them, all six of the Spitfires followed their leader, fanning out slightly and picking out a target beginning with the lead Kette. As they approached towards the bombers’ left flank, tracers began floating towards them. Blue One opened too soon and his rounds went over the bomber he was targeting. The two fighters following him were quick to follow suite and though they punched holes in the bombers targeted; they did no real damage. As they streaked past one of the Spits was struck by the gunners trying so hard to hit them and his engine quickly began streaming smoke.

“Blue Two... I’m hit.”

Archie’s thumb pressed down upon the ‘fire’ button. Through the roar of the engine he could feel the vibration of the eight .303 Browning machine guns spitting death at his chosen target. The bomber absorbed this punishment like a sponge. Though its ventral gunner was killed and bomb aimer wounded, it kept right on flying as if never taking a hit. Then the Stag was through the Kette and banking to come back around from the right. There was a flash of an explosion from that direction causing him to instinctively bank back hard in the opposite direction to avoid debris. His eyes noted the wing of a second bomber shear off leaving its airframe to spin down out of control like a maple tree seed. His mind captured the image of the crew bailing out.

“Scratch one,” called a female voice.

“Me too,” said another.

“Green One... Blue One... fighter escort coming down... 110’s. We’re coming back through.”

“Copy... hit them if it presents but keep after the bombers.”

“Green One and Two following on your six.”

“We’ll take the next Kette,” he told them.

Archie pushed his throttle full on looking for the second Kette in the formation. Rather than go after the rear most his theory was go after the leaders that the others might be encouraged to turn back. The sky was clear and though he’d strayed a full mile from the bombers, he was now turned around and closing the distance quickly. This time his group was coming from behind so his closing speed was much less and there would be no deflection to his shot.

“BREAK LEFT!” came over the radio and instinctively the Stag followed the command understanding without thinking about it. A stream of tracers cut through the sky where he would have been a second later. The attacking Messerschmit 110 followed next with the tail gunner

rattling off as many rounds as he could while able to bear. Two holes appeared in his perspex as a bullet struck the one side and continued on through exiting the other. Unfelt blood began to trickle down his face as a shard of the canopy cut him.

"I'm on it," Huskyteer called, and her Spitfire roared past following the German fighter.

"Take the last one in line," Archy called to the Fox flying with him and heard a clicking of the mike in his headset.

As they fired his mind watched as if everything was happening in slow motion. Tracers floated back and forth between the aircraft with pieces of the tail plane and rudder on the bomber flying off as if ripped from the ship by an unseen hand. Smoke began spewing from both engines as it was attacked from two different sides and then it nosed over into a very ungraceful death spiral.

Then they were through the formation and racing ahead of the bombers.

"Green Flight... Command," called the WAAF controller, her voice as calm as spring morning, "Break off and return to base; Yellow Flight will take over."

"Wilco," he called back and then waited for the rest of his flight to catch up. Checking his fuel reserve he saw it would be tight, but they should be all right.

Blue One and Three were the first to land and they cleared the far end of the runway quickly not sure if the other aircraft would have trouble. Archy was next to touch down followed by Green Two and Three. Just before landing, this pair rolled back their canopies in preparation to an unscheduled quick change. Once at the far end of the runway both aircraft turned right and paused as if taking a required breather. What was not seen from the Operation's shack area was the side doors banging down and the pilots leaping from their mounts as if they were on fire. Just as quickly, two other pilots emerged from the bushes, climbed the wings, and squeezed into the cockpits. Without hesitation, the brakes were released and they began their taxi back to the staging area where the aircraft would be quickly fueled and rearmed with any superficial bullet holes patched.

Once there, Henry and Junior McFee shut the engines off and dismounted as if their routine training mission was nothing but boring. Archy, coming up between their aircraft greeted them with a smile and a very loud, "Well done chaps!" When they were closer, he put an arm around each of them and said softly, "Henry, you got one Heinkel and we shared a second. Junior, I would especially like to congratulate you on two kills, a Heinkel and a 110. Please do play the part when your mates get you good and sloshed tonight, eh?" When the young pilot made to protest, his Flight Leader told him, "We shall discuss this later; for now just play along. We were thrown into the breach and we did well for our King and country."

When they entered the Operations shack to report the results of the flight, the pilots were more than surprised to find Wing Commander Falstaff standing behind the Squadron's Yeoman; watching as the fellow dutifully wrote what they reported in his ledger. No sooner had he done this and the Wing Commander granted him a smoke break. In the same breath he told the fliers

to 'stay put'. When the shack's door banged shut and they were alone, Henry winked at his old friend and said, "I didn't expect you would be here today, sir."

"I'm sure you didn't," the other Bulldog growled at him. "I had a good time listening in on the radio. You were Green Two?"

"Yes, sir, I was."

"And you, Pilot Officer... you were Green Three?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm thinking then that the oxygen was affecting your voice. You sounded a lot Huskier over the com set."

Junior swallowed and then replied, "I suppose it did, sir."

The Wing Commander huffed, his cheeks moving in and out with the action as he tried to decide what to say next. "There will be no Swastickas painted upon your fuselage as your kills will be listed as 'unconfirmed', is that understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"Should you ever try something like this again, you will receive far worse than a kick in the testicles, is that too understood?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. You are dismissed." To Henry and Archie he said, "You two are not dismissed."

The Wing Commander sat at the desk and took out his pocket notebook and pen. "How did they fly?"

"Rock solid," the Stag told him.

"How did they fight?"

"Like seasoned veterans, sir. They were fearless and for never having flown a Spit, seemed to know the aircraft as well as... well... me and Henry."

The Bulldog standing next to him raised an eyebrow as he looked at his friend. "Really?"

"Indeed. Might I ask where the ladies are, sir?" the Flight Commander asked his superior.

"They have been whisked away to their next ferry mission."

"Can we at least say goodbye?" Henry asked.

"No." The Wing Commander closed his notebook with a quiet thump and looked up at the pair. "Some years ago," he told them, "Before the war. I was visiting our American cousins in an exchange program we had at that time. One night I was in the O club regaling the young fliers with stories of The Great War. During this exchange, I'm afraid I drank too much, which

loosened my lips a bit. One of those fliers had a lady friend with him and when I learned that she too was a flier I made the bad mistake of laughing at her very large ears. I made some rude comment about them not being very streamlined and should she be in an open cockpit it would make the aircraft too unstable to fly should they stick out into the slipstream." He paused in the telling and gave a soft chuckle. "She kicked me in the testicles for that."

"You desearved it," said a voice from the back of the room, "And I'd do it again. I'll match you in the cockpit anytime you feel up to it Sparky."

He looked up while Henry and Archie turned. There, exactly where they should not have been, were the three females... two transport pilots and their escort.

The Wing Commander stood. "Ladies," he addressed them, "You have my country's undying gratitude for what happened today; but under no circumstances can you speak of it ever again. If for one second the Germans thought we were so desperate to use female fighter pilots Hitler would be across the channel in half a heartbeat."

"We'll keep mum," the vixen countered, "But there's some stipulations."

"Stipulations?" All three of the males asked in unison.

The Fox smiled, knowing she had the old boy right where she wanted him. Pointing to Corporal Bering, she said, "This one gets her Sergeant's stripes." Then pointing to Huskyteer she said, "This one gets a dance with Flight Lieutenant Corn; and I get to dance with you."

"Here now," Henry complained, "What about me? After all; it was my bloody idea."

The old Fox winked at the Wing Commander and then told the pilot, "I've got something very special lined up for you."

That evening, Sergeant Bering smiled as she watched her friends out on the dance floor at the Officer's Club swaying to the scratchy records and not seeming to have a care in the world.

On a chair near them and at the edge of the dance floor sat Flight Lieutenant Henry Badcock wearing a polkadot dress and bright red lipstick. Around his neck was a sign that read, 'WILL DANCE FOR BEER!'

So far, he was still very very thirsty.

