

Bandits At Angels Ten

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**Sir Winston Churchill*

"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

** Manfred von Richthofen*

"The great thing in air fighting is that the decisive factor does not lie in trick flying but solely in the personal ability and energy of the aviator."

Air Vice Marshal Smithe looked down upon the situation board and frowned. Four Collies of the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force, the ladies of which were respectfully referred to as 'Waafs') presently pushed small aircraft tokens around the map using long pool cue like sticks.

Another four stood in the background wearing large headsets and speaking into microphone like mouth pieces. These four were English Shepherds and were on duty as his communications officers; chosen from the ranks for their calm demeanor and sharp minds. These females were live on the communications grid with hundreds of spotting stations and radar sites all around England. Each of them knew every voice by name, where they were stationed, and their reliability factor. As soon as the reports came in, it was their job to decide on the spot what was put up on the situation board as reliable information. On their instructions the four positioner Waafs would add, take away, or simply adjust the tokens.

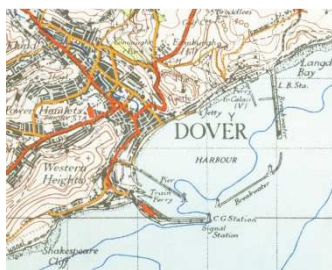
The Duty Fighter Control Officer, the position Smithe now filled, would observe their undertakings and then make a threat assessment. If it was warranted, flights of the Royal Air Force would be scrambled to intercept on his command. He personally had control of the entire

country's protective prowess; which was extremely thin at best. What pilots he had were suffering from battle fatigue and their aircraft were being pushed to a limit never envisioned by their designers.

As he watched, one of the talkers said something to her positioner and a token was placed upon the board over Dover. "Inbound fighters at Angel's ten," the talker said loudly.

"It's confirmed?" Smithe asked her from his seat above.

"Pukka Gen, sir," (good information) she replied. "Anthony caught them on the RDF (radar) and it was confirmed just now by a visual from the bell tower at Western Heights. Reginald's a Sheltie of the Old Guard, sir. He might be aged but he has the eyes of a hawk. He calls them as 109's with yellow noses."



"I could use the talons of a hawk right now," the Air Marshal muttered. A yellow painted nose designated an ace and there were four of them flying together. Looking at the board he saw no one and nothing available to throw at this threat. To be sure they were on a Free Hunt[*Freie Jagd*] strafing run. It was much easier to kill aircraft on the ground when they were not moving. Hit fast, hit hard, and then fly home again.

"What's their incoming direction?"

"Direct route towards London, sir," the talker reported. As she spoke, one of the positioning Waafs pushed the token six inches further along the board. "Estimated arrival is ten to fifteen minutes."

"Scramble 92 Squadron at Biggins Hill."

"92 has just landed from a bomber intercept, sir," the talker responsible for that section reported. "They are out of fuel."

"The Polish 302



out of Duxford is also not available, sir," added a third, "They're north on intercept."

"Bloody hell!"

The fourth talker quietly said something and a positioner on the other side of the table placed a single aircraft token on the board, carefully pushing it to a position directly over London. "We have one maintenance ferry up and in the area, sir," she reported. "He's coming from 759 Spitfire Maintenance, HMS Herron en route to the 92."

“A ship?” he asked, not being familiar with the ‘HMS’ designation named.

“Shore station, sir, at Yeovilton.”

“Who is it?”

The Waaf notifying the Duty Fighter Controller consulted her note pad. “A Stag by the name of Lieutenant Corn, sir. He is flying the Egham Spitfire.”

“Lord Beaverbrook was an absolute genius suggesting communities purchase Spits for our boys,” the old Bulldog rumbled. “Get him on the radio!”

[*Note: Lord Beaverbrook (yes that really was his name) was placed in charge of fighter production by Sir Winston Churchill and in this role he personally invented ways to increase fighter inventory; one of which was for communities to purchase an aircraft and then donate it to the RAF. Another idea he had was an appeal for aluminium, stating to the country, ‘We will turn your pots and pans into Spitfires and Hurricanes’]

From a third battery of Waafs, a radio operator picked up her microphone and pressed the key. “Egham Spitfire, this is RAF Command, do you read, over?”

There was a crackle of static and then a voice came clearly over the radio speakers, “How’s it I rate a call in from Command? Is that you Mable? Do you fancy a brandy tonight m’dear? No pun intended of course.”

“Bloody cheeky ex-Auxiliaries,” the Air Vice Marshal grumbled. Moving to the radio operator’s table he held out his hand for the microphone. “Lieutenant Corn, this is Air Vice Marshall Smithe. Please do maintain proper radio decorum. We have four 109’s coming your way. They are estimated over ‘Sacred Ground’ (a pilot’s home base) in ten minutes time most likely to strafe. 92 Squadron is in between and bloody well stark naked. I need you to fly intercept. Direction will be from Dover at Angels Ten. Over.”

“Well why didn’t you just say so?” the pilot called back. “Wilco, AVM. I’m bangers fuel (half full) and three hundred ammo. (full load - three hundred rounds for each of the eight .303 machine guns) Clearing guns – fangs out. Be sure you inform Archie (London’s anti-aircraft batteries) that’s there’s a friendly among the Wolves. Over.”

“Chase them away, and I’ll buy the brandy tonight,” Smithe responded.

“And if I shoot them down?”

“A bottle for each smoking hole,” the AVM called back. When the radio operator looked at him, he asked her, “What?”

“Proper radio decorum, sir?”

“As good as it gets under the circumstances,” he responded grimly. “Oddly, I believe I served with this fellow’s father during the first war.”



Lieutenant Archie Corn held a thumb up to eclipse the sun in order to view that area of sky. He knew the enemy was coming so that gave him the advantage. If he could gain enough altitude, he would dive on them and at least have a running start towards a chance of survival. *'Yellow Nosed Bastards'* were no one to fool with. One rookie mistake and they would have you dead on the bull's eye; actuality - not a pun. His eyes made a quick circle of his instruments looking for anything amiss, but so far the old girl was ticking along like a living and breathing race horse.

With solid information such as was given, he normally would have found a convenient cloud to skirt in and around while lying in wait. Unfortunately, and oddly for English weather, the sky was devoid of any cover at all. This was a detriment but not a stopping point; he would simply have to out fly the adversary.

In the distance, four small dots appeared, heading in his direction. The splash of yellow on their noses made them easy to identify. "Tally-ho," the Lieutenant called over the radio.

The wit and playful sarcasm were now gone from his voice as he became all business. Pulling on his oxygen mask, he banked slightly to the left, wanting to move more to the side of the incoming fighters. With a major amount of luck, they might not see him and he would be in position to rake all four as he passed broadside to them. They were flying their finger four ([Finger-four](#)) formation, however, so it was doubtful he would be allowed that pleasure. This formation made things extraordinarily difficult as the tail always afforded cover for the lead. That, and the fact he would undoubtedly be spotted long before he could intercept, turned the odds directly against him. Pushing the throttle to full power, Lieutenant Corn rolled the dice in this Devil's crap shoot and hoped for a seven.

Within a minute, at a combined closing speed of some seven hundred miles per hour, the dots became well defined outlines. The Spit pilot, tipping his yoke over spun his aircraft around on its axis and began a diving attack. Even as he did so, however, the four Messerschmitts began their evasive manoeuvres.

Maintaining their lead/wingman positioning, the *Schwarm* split into pairs with the forward most unit continuing on to the intended target. The rearmost pair turned into him and climbed to the attack. The hope and theory was simple: that the lone aircraft would consider the odds and run away. In breaking off, the roles of attacker and defender would reverse and a victory would be scored if the Germans could catch up. In the meantime they were free to raid without the threat of another aircraft present.

The Stag, with his eyes on the two other fighters, left his throttle at max, braced himself, and pressed in as he had to do.

Closure to range flying head to head took only seconds. The lead Messerschmitt began firing long before the Spitfire could even think of it, but the burst was high by a scant foot. All noise within the Spitfire's small cockpit flattened out and joined together as, with tracers flying all around him, the pilot pressed his own firing button and the Egham Spitfire physically jittered with the recoil. He too missed and the two aircraft, in a flash of yellow and green, flew past each other head to belly.

As soon as the first enemy fighter was past, the Spitfire was again subjected to a hail of fire from the following wingman. This was at more of an angle so there was no response to be made other than an involuntary duck of the head. Ten of the German's heavier machine gun bullets and one cannon shell punctured the Spit's fuselage just behind the cockpit. Miraculously they did no damage other than the holes they created.

"Command," the Lieutenant called calmly, "Two of the Bandits have broken off and are behind me. The other two are inbound to Sacred Ground. Call up Archie and have them open fire; I'll take my chances. Over."

"Copy, Egham Spit," replied the Waaf radio operator, "Waggle your wings for ID, please."

Immediately with her request black puffs of smoke appeared all around the sky; but especially in front of the two inbound fighters. The Lieutenant quickly did a wing waggle at his friends on the ground and the black puffs around his craft diminished. Archie was obviously abreast of the situation and stood ready and tracking.

With everyone now at full power, the chase was on. Advantage, however, went to the Spitfire as its pilot flew straight into the ugly black clouds with little thought to his own safety. The Messerschmitts, however, slowed considerably to effect evasive manoeuvring.

By the time the airfield was in sight, the Lieutenant Corn had a choice to make. Having overtaken the pair, he was sitting in a prime position to easily pick off the trailing fighter. This then left the lead aircraft to rake his fellows on the ground, taking a good many of them out of action perhaps permanently. To attack the lead aircraft, however, would place him directly in front of a very angry wingman.

Pulling back on his stick slightly, he raised the nose of his aircraft and pressed the fire button as he overflew the rearmost aircraft and the leader came into his sights. Smoke began to flow back from the yellow nose. The attack on the airfield was immediately broken off as the fighter broke left and climbed trying to escape his attacker.

The young Stag, mindful of the situation he'd placed himself in, broke sharp right and did the same just as a stream of tracers shredded his left wingtip. He had no time to rubberneck as he corkscrewed back up to altitude, but he did spy a telltale plume of smoke and a parachute.

There was no celebration in his heart over this... there was simply no time as he again scanned the skies for enemy aircraft. In this case, Archie was a good indicator, as his black puffs of death readily pointed to where the pilot should look.

Lieutenant Archie Corn removed his oxygen mask and throttled back his engine at the sight of two retreating specs in the distance. There was a third closer on that he might have chased, but the pilot knew he would never catch up. Moving his throttle back further to cruise, he toggled his radio button.

“Command, this is Egham Spitfire,” he called, “They’ve had enough I suppose; they’re headed back to the Channel. Might we be expecting bombers, over?”

There was a silent moment with but light static and then the radio operator called back, “No inbound reports Egham, what is your situation?”

Archie looked around his aircraft and then made a quick observation of his instruments. The engine was still running rock solid. “The Spit’s a bit shot up but nothing that can’t be fixed. Twenty minutes fuel remaining. Shall I stay cover for a bit?”

“Negative Egham, you are instructed to land forthwith... AVM’s regards, he says ‘good job’.



(images from The Battle of Britain Memorial)



And so it was, through the quiet bravery and selflessness of a people as a whole, a nation was saved and the tide was turned upon something unspeakably evil. Though they flew, and they achieved some victories; there were also defeats, anguish, and much pain.

Through this we can live...

We have lived...

We do live...

In the end, as a whole people we celebrate just the fact that we are still free. With patches over holes made in an attempt to kill, and a fresh marker on the hull indicating the same having been done to the one who tried; the victor is awarded a promised bottle of brandy and then is ordered aloft once again.

