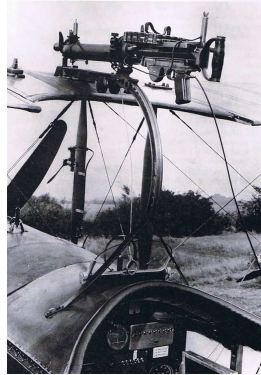


New

by

Vixxy Fox



“I prefer my machine gun to fire above the prop. Through the prop is only good so long as your synchronization works. Best case if it’s not working; you’re pulling splinters from your face. Worse case; the prop’s gone and your engine comes off from the sudden vibration.”

***2nd Lieutenant Jeffry Gregson
Royal Flying Corp***

“Gregson is an asshole!” Bart yelled at the top of his lungs. “He’s going to get us all killed!”

We’d been drinking and the frustrations of the war were fast upon us like maggots on what lay in the latrines.

“Calm yourself,” Michel advised, just before blowing his big walrus mustache out for taking another sip of beer. “The old boy is new at the game. He’ll come to an understanding soon enough, or die doing so.”

“If he doesn’t I’ll shoot him down myself!”

“Now that’s the wine talking,” Sebbie muttered. “Best you not talk like that aloud less’n someone hears and reports ya to old South by Southwest.”

“South can go North for all I care!” Bart managed just before his eyes rolled up in his head and he fell face first into the dirt. He’d giggled before falling and we all laughed for it. Other than throwing a blanket over his form, however, we left him where he was. None of us was quite ready to go in just yet.

“He’s right, you know,” Michel muttered, “Gregson is an asshole. He damned near crashed into me jumping the Phaltz I was about to down. Fine thing he lets me empty the observer’s gun and then helps himself. Fuk me but the Phaltz got away in any case he’s such a lousy marksman.”

“Bart told me he shot his right wheel off coming in from under to attack a balloon,” I reported. “That’s one of the reasons he’s so upset and rightly so. The poor lad wasn’t aware until he came in to land and went nose up. If the ground crew hadn’t taken his pistol he would have shot the bugger between the eyes, I’m sure of it. I mean, look at him; he’s still right pissed.”

“And pissed drunk,” Michel chuckled. “That’ll help get it out of his system. Truth, though, as hard as it is just to stay alive I think I would rather fly alone than fly with Gregson.”

“Pity we couldn’t arrange a duel between him and Baron Lukscrodni,” I offered. At least I surely must have said this as everyone present was looking at me. I was the new pup with perhaps only ten hours in the seat patrol time but that did not mean I wasn’t experienced in life. I had my own beef with Gregson but it was more personal in nature. When I’d taken the time to relieve myself in between patrols, he’d snuck a peek at my equipment and snidely told me I shouldn’t be allowed in the cockpit because I was too small.

“Surely you might be useful driving one of those new fangled tank things,” he told me, “Lot’s of armor there to protect the little kitten you’ve got... but to fly or make love to a bitch you need some heft to your stick.”

“Lukscrodni is right behind the Red Baron in score,” Sebbie informed us all. “I hardly thing he would single out one aircraft from among the rest of us in a dog fight.”

“Not unless he had a reason,” I countered, the Fox in me taking charge.

Well, that started it. Between the four of us... well... three in the beginning because Bart was passed out cold, we came up with a diabolical plan to have the Wolf do our dirty work for us. Gregson had crossed the line on all of us in one way or another so we all wanted it. In the air war you found out early on that a body’s precious time fast runs out. We reasoned we were just helping things along a little.

Leaving Bart where he lay and giggling like school children eating from the glue pot, we made our way to the paint locker, gathered up the brushes and colors we would need and made our way to Gregson’s aircraft. We were flying the old Avro 504K at that time and painting her up was not that large of a job.

“Lukscrodni’s aircraft is bright green with a yellow tail and a yellow upper wing,” Sebbie informed us happily. “I think I can mix paints to match it pretty well.”

“Leave the bottom wing the green it is so the paint there will be dry in the morning for his mount up. I’ll take the yellow and do the upper. I need to do this right away so what I have in mind does not run in the slipstream.”

“What do we tell Gregson when he asks about the colors,” Michel asked. “Old South by Southwest is going to be really pissed too because it’s not now painted regulation, eh?”

We tell them both the same thing,” I told them, “To catch a mouse you need the right trap, and since 2nd Lieutenant Gregson is the best among us he’ll be the one to take the old rat out.”

“He’s a Wolf, not a Rat,” Sebbie muttered as he applied yellow paint to the tail. We were painting by the few lanterns we had and trying hard to make it look good. “Be sure not to cover up the roundels,” he added, “That way the Germans don’t think we’re trying to trick them. They hang spys and trickers, and I’d not see that happen even to the likes of Gregson.”

Standing on a step ladder, I first lined out the areas I did not want to paint. Once I had that done, I applied the yellow paint liberally and in the end my little bit of artistic ability turned the trick. The yellow was bright and new looking while the words the lined out area formed stood out beautifully.

Lukscrodni ist eine Möse gesehen.

“I like the way you stretched that all the way across the top wing,” Michel told me through his huge mustache. He was perched on the step ladder giving it an eyeball. “What does it say?”

“Lukscrodni is a cunt,” I told him and everyone laughed.

It was quickly agreed that Gregson would lead our little band in the morning as we went in search of our arch enemy and a plan of action was formed.

The following morning, as we stood next to our aircraft, South by Southwest actually took a moment to peer at Gregson’s aircraft. “Here now, what’s the meaning of this?” he asked, his riding crop tucked firmly under his left arm. We never could figure the reason for this implement as we had no horses but it was as much a part of his uniform as the pistol on his side.

“I’m going after Lukscrodni!” the Lieutenant told the commander happily. We’d pumped him full of it during breakfast and told him we’d prepared a huge surprise for him. Of course he hit upon the lure like a large mouth bass and would have gone up all by himself if we’d allowed for it... which we would have except we wanted to be there for the show. “I shall wear his colors just to show I am not afraid of him.”

“I see,” was all S by SW replied and then continued on with our flight instructions. As anticipated, neither of them could see what was written on the top wing and the rest of us fairly well hummed with the humor of it.

That morning at breakfast, we sat shoulder to shoulder and rightly pointed out to Gregson that we needed to get word back to the German Wolves we were gunning for them. This was accomplished by finding one of their observation planes and toying with it until the rear gunner ran out of ammunition. We then formed up around him all cordial like; boxing him in so the pilot would know without a doubt there was a message to be passed on. The lieutenant, patting the side of his aircraft pointed to the colors and then gave the fellow a two fingered salute. He then

made a circling motion and held up three fingers indicating three of the afternoon. After this we returned to our field for lunch.

Our meal was certainly cheery with all of us telling the ‘asshole’ what a wonderful and brave pilot he was. He ate this up like warm porridge on a cold morning.

“Certainly you have brass balls,” Bart told him with a wink. “At the very least I expect you will shoot the German’s wheels off.”

“I’ll do more than just that,” the pilot told him with a wink, totally missing the intended jibe, “He’s all mine and I expect none of you to interfere while we’re mixing it up.”

This brought a cheer to our table and we all clinked glasses.

True to form, the Germans arrived right on time, coming in from head on at eight thousand feet. Everyone began a circle to the right trying to close for an action and quite visible at the front of each formation was a yellow and green bi-plane, each gunning for the other.

This is where well laid plans fall apart as fate and the intentions of your enemy work against you. Every one of the Wolf aircraft had their sights well set upon the yellow and green flying point in our formation. Perhaps this was due to what was written on top of the wing as they did have at least a five hundred foot advantage and could clearly see it.

You might think we would have been overjoyed at this prospect, but now our feelings for this aerial foe overwhelmed even the thought of a comeuppance for Gregson.

Within seconds, the lieutenant’s first pan of ammunition was expended and he was standing in his cockpit trying to reload his machinegun. While he did this the Germans all took turns banking and potting at him. This, for some reason, infuriated all of us.

Bart latched onto the tail of one of the Wolfs and gave him a good squirt which was right on the money. His engine streaming smoke and the pilot bloody in the cockpit, that aircraft headed nose down to the trenches below us. We were told later that an entire battalion heartily cheered at the sight.

Sebbie and Michel did the same while I jammed my aircraft in behind Gregson’s. Each of us then found his own aircraft to whirl and twirl with and the fight was on.

Every now and again I managed to look around for Gregson only to find the bastard hanging on and still trading shots with Lukscrodni. As I did this, I also caught sight of Michel, streaming smoke and turning to head back towards our side. One of the Germans lined up on his tail for the kill, but of all things, Gregson latched onto him and peppered his craft with a good burst, emptying his gun to do so. The English Setter deftly stood again in his cockpit and threw another pan of bullets on his gun as the German flamed and went down.

With a whine and twang of bullets passing through wing fabric, I turned to find a yellow and green aircraft on my own tail. This caused me to push the old stick over as far as it would go and then pull it back to my belly as I forced my plane into a full left banking turn trying to wiggle out of the German's sights. In this he had the advantage on me and his bullets let me know this as they whizzed past my head and punctured the fuselage.

It was one of those moments in your life where you know you're dead and your mind accepts it. Everything in your last seconds become pinpoint clear as if it's required of your soul to record the exact end in order to report the incident at the pearly gates.

And then came Gregson like an avenging guardian angel, floating right in behind Lukscrodni before giving him the entire fifty rounds of his magazine.

As soon as their leader was down, the rest of the Wolf flight quickly dispersed and headed back to their own lines.

For our part, we did the same.

When we arrived at the aerodrome, there was a rush of all types coming out to hear the results. Michel, having arrived first, gave word with physical evidence of the engagement and the excitement had built from there. Before landing, we circled and did many wing waggles just happy to be alive and then through hand signals indicated to Gregson he should land last.

Though I nosed up on landing it was gentle and didn't even damage the propeller. This gave me a moment or two pause as extricating myself from the cockpit was a bit more difficult. In this time, Gregson, acting totally unlike the glory hound he'd been, ignored the well wishers and rushed right over to my aircraft where he firmly gripped my paw and then hugged me as well.

"Absolutely brilliant what you wrote on the top of my wing," he told me during the hug. Breaking the hug, he furthered, "I know it must have been you because Bart told me this morning the plan was your idea. I didn't see it until I stood to reload. I wish to give you half credit for Lukscrodni."

Naturally I politely declined this offer. Nor did any of us ever speak of the original intentions of the ruse, though I did have words with Bart about loose lips.

Per ardua ad astra (Through adversity to the stars.)