

bottom, almost the worse colour for camouflaging purposes. We were so disheartened that we just put the roundels on and that is how the Germans got her.

There was an aftermath to the loss of AB 131. The pilot had recently been commissioned and some time later I received an Air Ministry communication requiring me to state whether the officer in question had acted correctly or through negligence when he was lost. If the latter, he would remain a pilot officer for however long he remained a prisoner of war. Of course, I knew it was his own fault and should have said so. But I was soft and did not. Years after the war I discovered he had become a hero in his own community, many thousands of miles away. In retrospect, did it matter anyway?

One of my first problems when I was given the command was a splendid Belgian, Paul de Jace, a Rhombus pilot with no less than 16,000 hours' flying experience, as he had been a Sabena pilot before the war. He informed me that if he could not fly Pampa flights, at which he would be so much better than the rest of us with his vast experience, he wished to leave the squadron and go elsewhere. I already knew that he had been warned by the Germans that if they caught him flying for the Allies his wife and family would be taken to a concentration camp. Paul said that was irrelevant and I could take it or leave it. I gave in.

A few days later, accompanied by a Sergeant Prag, he was intercepted over Hanover. Prag was killed outright, Paul was mortally wounded and the Mosquito was spinning down from over 28,000 feet. With his last conscious effort Paul got his plane out of the spin and crash landed it on a hillside where he died in the cockpit.

We knew all the details by 4.00 p.m. that afternoon through an agent's report, but the Germans never mentioned it at all, as it was the first Mosquito they had ever captured. There was no mention of Paul de Jace but nine months later Sergeant Prag's body was reported as washed up on Tromsø Island, 2,000 miles to the north, off Norway. We reluctantly decided that airline pilots, used to flying very direct and steady courses, the opposite of what we did all the time, were probably not the best for our type of work.

I was trapped in early September. A Pampa was called for Hamburg in the late afternoon and Command made a rare

mistake. An intruder squadron had gone in over northern Holland at 28,500 feet and I had a nearly identical course and height a couple of minutes later. So, over a place called Enkhuisen, I found two FW 190s coming straight towards me. There was no cloud cover and I had been having difficulty with my port undercarriage; the indicator glowed red to indicate that it was not properly retracted. I reckoned that if I simply stuck the nose down with full throttle, it might not do too much good, so I waited for them to close right up, then dived under the right-hand one to split them up. The main thing was to get down to ground level, but 28,500 feet is a long way to go down with a couple of chaps with the latest fighters itching to make a kill. Aerobatically, I was never very good. My rolls were always barrel rolls because when I was upside down, I could never remember which way to push the stick. I reckoned my odds were not good. The FWs took turns in coming at me. I had my navigator, Sergeant Davis, kneeling up on his seat, facing backwards, telling me how far off the next attack was and from which side. We waited until the last moment to turn just before an FW was almost lined fully up on us and we could begin to see the bullets whistling past.

The Mosquito had a peculiarity. When one came in to land, on the last approach to the runway, one opened the radiator cowls to stop overheating on the ground. But simultaneously one had to trim right forward several times on the elevator trimming wheel, as otherwise the nose would go right up. I had figured out, therefore, that if I was in a steep turn and being out-turned, if I opened the radiator cowls I would get more turn – so I did. The result was miraculous! The aircraft flipped upside down, shuddered as though it would fall to pieces and then righted itself 3,000 feet lower with the enemy scarcely to be seen. We repeated this several times, all the time getting further back toward the Dutch coast. With a final sigh of relief we passed over the coast at sea level – and then there was an FW 190 off my port bow, getting ready to come in behind me. 'Watch him Davis,' I said. 'I can't see him. Must be under our tail by now.' We waited but he did not appear. In the sea-level haze he had lost us, or maybe he had no ammunition left. Poor Davis. Every time we had made that turn, he was thrown badly back on to the cockpit floor and half way into the nose bombing position. He

was black and blue by the end and although neither of us had realised, he had also vomited all over the place. When we landed, however, we had only one bullet hole in the tail and a chunk of the wing had broken off.

The report went through to de Havillands, the aircraft designers and manufacturers, at Hatfield, where Geoffrey de Havilland himself went up to try to repeat it. He could not and I could understand why: one needed those FWs behind you to get one's heart and soul into it! However, the chief designer Mr Tamblin worked out that that was exactly what should happen. Of course, a week later, it came out as a combat report in *Tee Emm* and other such publications, along with strict instructions: 'In no event attempt this manoeuvre – the aircraft should break in half.'

The postscript to this story is that a few weeks later, Sergeant Davis was posted to a short air gunnery course at the Gunnery School at Sutton Bank. One of the questions in his examination paper at the end of the course was: 'What would you do if you were in a Mosquito and intercepted by enemy fighters at 28,500 feet in a clear sky over Enkhuisen in northern Holland?'

In early October, we lost a Rhombus crew on early-morning take off in bad fog conditions. The captain was Pilot Officer Hank Porter from Milan, Missouri, a 30 year-old American who had been on the squadron flying Rhombus since August. He was a large man with a great heart and a wonderful sense of humour. He had four crew with him, one an unfortunate warrant officer who had only arrived at the squadron the previous evening. There was heavy fog and the control tower would not let them take off until first light, by which time the flare path marking the take-off run was of less assistance. As it was, Hank swung seriously off course on the ground and lifted off to fly straight into the station wireless masts which were 60 feet high. The plane, a Hudson, broke up on the masts and then nosedived straight into the ground at the base of the steel pylons, where an intense conflagration consumed everything that there was.

The families of English members of the crew were notified in the usual way, the letters of condolence were acknowledged and they requested that the remains be returned to them. In the case of Hank Porter, however, it was different. He had left as his next of kin two distant female cousins who lived in London, and

these ladies were clearly not interested in taking his remains. They suggested that we bury him locally. So Geoff Foster went down to Bircham village to discuss it with the local vicar. The churchyard was small and all he could offer was a small aviators' corner which already housed two German pilots and Hank had to be placed between them. The funeral was arranged and the cousins, two ladies dressed in black from head to foot, arrived at the station in good time and were escorted by Geoff and me to the graveyard. The funeral detail consisted of eight aircrew and eight ground staff under the command of Sticky Glue. They were to come down by transport from the aerodrome and disembark in a hollow in the road out of sight from the church yard from which they were to emerge at a slow march with the coffin carried by eight of them acting as pall-bearers. Now, there had literally been no remains and some wicked people in the headquarters staff in the station had filled the coffin with wet sand and then loaded it into the transport.

The funeral cortège was late and the group of us at the graveside, including the vicar, waited patiently in the slight drizzle, glancing up the road from time to time to get a sight of the transport coming down the hill. Eventually, it did, at a speed that indicated that Sticky was trying to make up time. Minutes then passed before the pall-bearers appeared, virtually staggering up the 150 yards that still separated us. It was awful, and the two ladies watched with expressionless faces as the cortège came slowly nearer. Eventually they were at the graveside and the coffin was manoeuvred into position over the grave, held by four airmen with two ropes, one at each end. The vicar said a prayer and when he had finished, a bugler from the station blew the Last Post so badly that I had difficulty preventing myself bursting into laughter. Just before he had finished the front rope slipped out of the hands of one of the pall-bearers and the coffin nose-dived into the grave at the feet of the vicar.

I was never so glad to get away from anywhere in my life. As we got into the car to take us back, Geoff told the ladies that a small buffet had been laid on in the Officers' Mess and it was naturally hoped that they would attend before they returned to London. They graciously agreed, and on arriving at the mess they asked to be excused to tidy themselves up. Five minutes later they returned; gone were the veils, gone were the sombre

black dresses. Instead, in walked two of the most smashing blondes I had ever seen, dressed in clinging silk dresses with plunging necklines, high heels and silk stockings over the most ravishing legs. The wake turned into a stupendous party.

The girls, it turned out, were in no way related but they had been briefed by Hank to make sure, in the event of his death, that they gave all his flying chums a great time, in return for which he had left them 'all his worldly goods' in his will. God Bless Hank! We unanimously decided he had had exactly the funeral he would have wanted. The girls went back to London the following day – to the best of my knowledge.

APPENDIX ONE

EVASIVE TACTICS EMPLOYED BY MOSQUITO AIRCRAFT

AGAINST TWO F.W. 190'S.

M O S Q U I T O
S E C R E T

Mosquito aircraft P/521 Squadron (Pilot: S/Ldr. Braithwaite ; Navigator: Sgt. Davis) on "PAMPA" patrol from BIRCHAM NEWTON to NORDHORN and HAMBURG, was airborne from BIRCHAM NEWTON at 1705 hrs. 4th. September, 1942, and crossed the Dutch coast about 10 miles N. of LUSSELMER flying at 28,500 feet on a course 106°T.

Immediately after crossing Dutch coast pilot altered course to 060°T. for about 20 miles and then altered course again to 106°T., which would have brought him over LUSSELMER coast at BIECHUIZEN.

The object of this manoeuvre was to avoid enemy interception (through R.D.F. plot).

When approaching area of BIECHUIZEN at 1740 hrs. on a course 106°T. at 28,500 feet climbing at 160 m.p.h. (i.e.s.) crew of P/521 sighted 2 aircraft (subsequently definitely identified as F.W. 190'S) at a distance of 2000 yards on dead reciprocal at same height. Pilot took no evasive action until enemy aircraft, which immediately climbed slightly and spread fanwise, were almost in position for simultaneous quarter attack. He then went into a vertical aileron turn diving under enemy aircraft on starboard side (220°T.). This split up enemy aircraft and left only the enemy aircraft which had been approaching on port side in position (to carry out an astern attack). This latter was now watched by observer and a steep turn to port at the right moment caused him to overshoot.

Observer of P/521 had immediately on sighting enemy pulled up armour plate, kneeling on his seat facing to rear of aircraft and holding on with both hands (under considerable strain during evasive action) to armour plate handles. He was able to keep watch through perspex, blisters and, on pilot's side of aircraft, through the same by putting his head behind W/T set. The keeping of a constant lookout by the observer in this manner enabled him to keep pilot informed of every manoeuvre by the enemy.

Pilot had opened up to full revs. and boost, but not emergency boost in order to avoid risk of engine failure due to maintained strain. (See also Note 'E' at end). Aircraft was brought down to rated altitude (22,000 feet).

Enemy aircraft attacked in turn after first attack, one diving to attack while other climbed for position. During these attacks, as in most subsequent

attacks, determined endeavours soon to have been made by enemy to approach to attack P/521 on pilot's side. In one attack enemy aircraft fired purposely on the outside of P/521's turn giving the impression that he was hoping to catch P/521 on the reverse turn (which pilot of P/521 was careful not to make).

Evasive tactics (after the first attack) consisted of slight banking turns (to enable observer to cover whole field of flight of enemy aircraft to the rear and to keep pilot informed), followed by vertical turns always towards enemy, coming out at somewhere between 180° and 270° around, and alternately reversing these vertical turns, or steepening them, until high-speed stalls at 260 to 280 m.p.h. (i.e.s.) developed, causing aircraft to whip over upside down with all controls "juddering" fiercely, followed by momentary loss of control during which nose dropped slightly allowing speed and control to be rapidly regained and aircraft to be thrown into vertical turn either side (continued until aircraft was heading into sun and towards own coast) and then to be straightened out. This high speed stall was in the first instance made unintentionally, but proved so successful that it was employed at least six times. During steep turns observer was compelled to fold up on the floor and was unable to move due to centrifugal force. On aircraft straightening out, however, he was able to rise and resume watch for next attack.

Observer took pains (necessitating keen judgement and greatest restraint) to wait until enemy aircraft was "in range" and its sights dead on P/521 and obviously about to fire before instructing pilot "turn your side" or "turn my side" as case might be. "Port" and "Starboard" were not used in this emergency in case of error in the excitement of the moment. Crew considered this delay to the very last moment before giving instructions to pilot to turn as being very effective tactics as enemy aircraft was unable to follow in close turns made by P/521 especially the closer and faster he approached.

When about 5 minutes had elapsed from the time of the first attack one of the enemy aircraft which had been successfully out-turned in the course of a manoeuvre was seen to dive vertically out of sight. It is thought that the pilot may have blacked out and lost control in a high speed stall. This took place approximately over ALICIAN at 22,000 feet.

The remaining enemy aircraft continued the pursuit carrying out a dozen or so attacks during the next 25 minutes during which tactics as above were mostly used.

P/521, during a lull, then came down to 9,000 feet, employing gentle fish-tailing in a fairly steep dive westwards into sun. Level of 9,000 feet was chosen as it is generally considered that this is probably best height at which to out-maneuvre F.W. 190 aircraft and, as the difference in performance of enemy aircraft and that of Mosquito at latter's rated altitude left much to be desired, no experiment was considered unworthy of trial.

At 9,000 feet however the attacks seemed to become more frequent and evasion less satisfactory; pilot of P/521 therefore descended to about 2,000 feet. At this point (about half way across North Sea) enemy aircraft was seen on reciprocal 1000 feet above apparently about to turn for another dive attack, but enemy maintained course and was not seen again, due perhaps to ammunition shortage or P.L.E.

P/521 landed BIRCHAM NEWTON 18.5 hrs. Casualties to personnel - NIL except for cuts, bruises and strains. Damage to aircraft - 1 bullet hole in starboard tail plane (fired from pilot's side and from slightly above) and broken perspex on wing-tip due to air pressure.

NOTES

- (a) Whereas pilot of one enemy aircraft seemed to suffer black-out neither of crew of P/521 blacked-out, but observer suffered considerably from bruises, strains and vomiting.
- (b) At least 15 attacks were carried out altogether.
- (c) The i.a.s. of Mosquito was approximately 260 m.p.h. at 25,000 feet. F.W. was estimated to be considerably more at same height (they were possibly faster type than hitherto encountered). Maximum i.a.s. attained by Mosquito at rated altitude (22,000 feet) was 350 m.p.h. i.a.s. in gentle dive. (Note: approximately 15 m.p.h. gained by closing radiator shutters).
- (d) The accuracy of the interception (if it was such) may perhaps be accounted for by the fact that other aircraft (Bomber Command (Mosquitos) had been operating at 27,000 feet over HERR area at about the same time as P/521 was approaching.

(c)

After first high speed stall port undercarriage indicator read down. Both pilot and observer mistook "juddering" for bullet strikes. Indicator reading was therefore accepted and repeated attempts were made to raise wheel. This had the effect of making the pilot consider that the enemy's apparent superiority of speed was due to the above and was responsible for his not attempting to run for it by using emergency boost.

G.R. Bellens

F/Lt.
Station Intelligence Officer, Bircham Newton.

6th. September, 1942.

M O S T S E C R E T

To :- S/Ldr. Braithwaite, No. 521 Squadron.
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With compliments of Station Intelligence Officer,
R.A.F. Station, Bircham Newton.