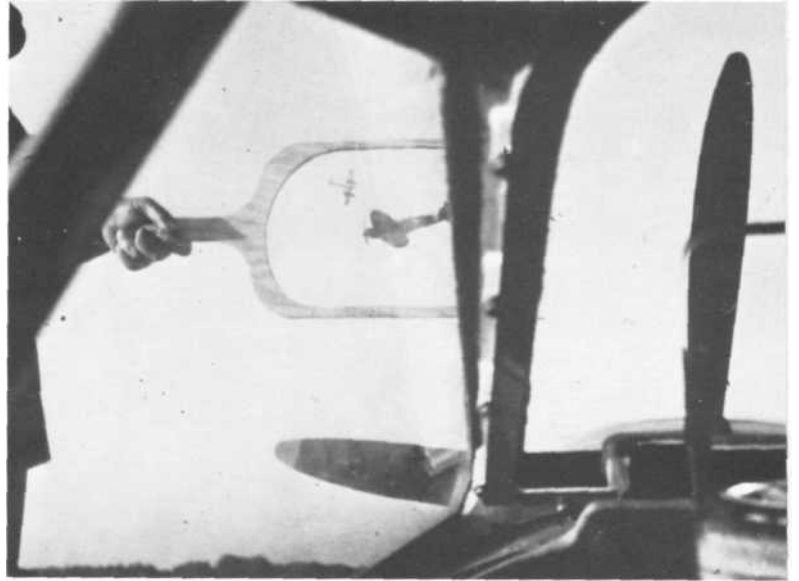


To See Was to Live

Left: With so much at stake, the cleaning of the canopy assumed an almost ritualistic importance prior to an operational sortie. A fragile material, perspex could be scratched unwittingly even by wiping it with a handkerchief; only the very softest of cloths could be used for cleaning it.

Above right: This is why fighter pilots demanded that their canopies and windscreens be absolutely clean and brightly transparent. Hold this photograph 18 inches away from your face, out to one side. Now, imagine that you are in a Spitfire over enemy territory, liable to be 'bounced' at any time. You begin your systematic search of the sky, beginning at the left and the rear. Your eyes move in a slow and deliberate up-and-down zig-zag movement, sweeping from high above to below the horizon and working round clockwise until you get to the right and the rear; then you search once more in the direction of the sun, glance into the cockpit to check that all is still well there and begin all over again. Your life depends upon the efficiency of your search: if an enemy fighter ever reaches a position where its size is that shown in the photograph it will be 600 yards away, with its pilot just about to open fire; if he gets any closer without your seeing him, the chances are that your epitaph will be a simple victory bar painted on his aircraft when he gets home. Whatever the romantics might have one believe, air fighting is a rough and nasty business with no quarter given; the 'sitting duck' usually ended up as a 'dead duck'.





Although the side perspex might appear transparent when looking at objects down sun, Top right, a glance at the same objects into sun soon revealed the extent of light-scattering due to even the slightest scratching on the hood.

A problem, and a solution. Oil slinging was a common occurrence from the constant-speed propellers fitted to

Spitfires. In the photograph (Below) taken immediately after a fight, the left half of the windscreen had been cleaned while the right half had had the oil left on; note the deterioration in visibility caused by the oil. Some Spitfires, like this one (Below right) were fitted with a simple locally-made oil collector ring to prevent the oil from spraying on the windscreen.

