

Flight OCTOBER 12, 1939

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We were a handful of British 'planes out on a reconnaissance flight over the Siegfried Line. The Germans spotted us almost at once, and their A.A. batteries opened fire, but we went up well above 20,000ft. and continued our work. We were three in the 'plane, the pilot, the observer and myself as gunner. It was a wonderfully clear day and we could see for miles. There were no clouds anywhere and all Germany stretched beneath us. Suddenly we saw enemy 'planes swirl up towards us from far down below. They were Messerschmitts—three formations of six each. We were outnumbered by more than three to one, but we prepared to give battle. The enemy began with their favourite tactics of diving up at us from underneath, machine-gunning as they came. Then one of the 'planes attached itself to the tail of my machine and a terrific duel began. I could hear the bullets ripping through the fabric beside me. I looked round and saw the observer in a crumpled heap in his seat. He had been shot through the head. The enemy were using incendiary bullets, and suddenly I realised that it was only a question of seconds before the flames reached me. Then, just as my clothing began to smoulder, the 'plane behind us swooped up and offered me a lovely target. I gave him all I had got, and as the flames blazed up into my face I just had time to see him go into a spin and disappear down beneath me.

If I hadn't been on fire I could have easily shot down two more. It was real bad luck. But my pals accounted for three besides the one I hit.

" Half unconscious I started to struggle out of my cockpit. I must have pulled the string of my parachute, for I suddenly saw it open and felt myself dragged out of the plane. I got a nasty blow on the leg from the tail of the machine and then for a moment I suppose I fainted. Next I remember floating down while the battle continued above me. I knew it was Germany below me, and I began to calculate whether there was any hope of the wind carrying me over to the French lines. It seemed very doubtful. I saw a German aerodrome below me, but I couldn't identify it. Then, when I had got quite low, I heard firing, and realised that bullets were whistling near me. I was above the German lines and they were shooting at me. It was a terrible situation, but I saw that there was just a hope that I might get right past the German lines before I landed. They went on firing at me almost until I was on the ground. I released my parachute and started to crawl desperately to a little thicket in the hope of hiding there. There was a wood on one side and flat country on the other where the Germans had their lines. I saw the Germans leave their trenches and come running towards me. I thought I was done for. Then suddenly I saw that men were running from the wood as well. I recognized them as French Algerian soldiers. Both sides were racing for me. Most of the French began to fire at the advancing Germans, but one man came running straight towards me as hard as he could go. He picked me up, slung me over his shoulders, and staggered with me into the woods. I was safe but it was a very near thing. The pilot of my plane did not have to jump out until a little later and he came down in French territory safely, though very badly burned. The observer must have died at once. He was shot right through the head."