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WING COMMANDER FLIES AGAIN

Technical officers of Fighter Command do not generally fly Spitfires into action, but this is the story of one who did, and shot down an Me.109.

The officer, a wing commander, was commissioned from the rank of sergeant in 1935, and had fought in the Battle of Britain. He is now an engineer specialist, and was with a New Zealand squadron when he heard that it was about to take part in an offensive sweep. On the ground that it was important for him to know in practice as well as theory how our latest fighter aircraft behave in combat, he obtained permission to accompany the squadron into action.

On the way home, a few miles out from Cap Gris Nez, he saw his No. 2 about to be attacked by an Me.109. He turned back to help, and the two Spitfire pilots were soon separated from the remainder of the wing. At least 12 Me. 109s, some in pairs and others flying singly, attacked the two Spitfires, which had to fight their way out in steep turns and quick dashes for home. The wing commander attacked one Me.109 almost head on, but the speed of the approach prevented him from seeing what happened to it. He learnt later that pilots of another squadron had seen it crash.

Once before, this officer - a well-known Olympic hurdler and former European champion - left his engineering work on the ground for operational flying. That was in the early days of the battle of Britain when, though he had often flown Gladiators, his experience of Spitfires was limited to four or five flights. He was shot down, but when he had recovered from his injuries he was given command of a Spitfire squadron that fought through the remainder of the battle.

Later he returned to his ground duties as an engineering specialist.

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