

NOT FOR PUBLICATION, BROADCAST, OR USE ON CLUB TAPES BEFORE
0030 D.B.S.T. (i.e. FOR SUNDAY PAPERS) ON
SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 1942

THIS EMBARGO SHOULD BE RESPECTED OVERSEAS BY PREFACING ANY
MESSAGES FILED WITH THE EMBARGO

FIGHTER STATION'S 900TH VICTORY

A Fighter Command station in Kent, with its satellite aerodromes, has become the first in Britain to have reached a score of 900 enemy aircraft destroyed since the war began.

An Englishman, an Australian holder of the D.F.C, and a New Zealander, were responsible for topping the 900 mark - and in doing so they have created a pretty problem for the station intelligence officer, for each of them shot down a F.W.190 at approximately the same time, and it will never be known whether the Englishman, the Australian, or the New Zealander shot down number 900.

"When the boys went up that day our score was 897 and we had great hopes that the station might 'bag' its 900th victim" said the officer in charge of the station intelligence branch. "They got it all right, but they've caused me a headache in the process."

"I listened in to their combats over the radio telephone, and have reviewed the pilots' own times for the combats. But there is nothing between them, and as we can't say who got the 900th we've decided that all three must share the distinction.

"I had planned to give a model F.W.190 to the pilot who bagged the 900th. Unfortunately, I cannot cut it into three pieces, so they will have to toss for it".

In bagging his victim, the New Zealander, whose home is in Wanganui, had one of the most exciting fights of recent months.

While several squadrons from his station were on their way to France to carry out a sweep the New Zealander - a flight lieutenant - was detailed to act as a spotter in case any of our pilots had to bale out over the Channel. He and a companion had only just reached their patrol height when they saw four F.W.190s several thousand feet above them.

"The F.W.'s," said the flight-lieutenant, "split into pairs with one pair of Huns diving on each of us. They seemed pretty eager to shoot us down and made repeated diving attacks. We kept turning in to attack and, eventually, I got a half-second burst of cannon and machine-gun fire into the leader of the F.W.'s. There was a vivid flash and the Hun's whole tail unit broke away. The rest of the aircraft burst into flames and the pilot baled out. The other three we damaged and drove off.

"The pilot I shot down was rescued within a few minutes by one of our launches, and, afterwards, I went to see him in hospital. He was bruised and had a broken toe, but was otherwise all right."

"In some English and excellent French he told me that his score was seventeen and that he had been awarded the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd class and the Goering Bronze Medal. He seemed surprised to have been shot down."

Meanwhile, another station's fighter squadron, sweeping the St. Omer area were having fights of their own in which the Australian flight-lieutenant with the D.F.C. and a pilot officer whose home is in Ramsey, Isle of Man, each shot down a F.W.190 near Calais.

The Australian gave his victim a head-on-burst of fire. There was a flash and the F.W. flicked over, did two rolls, then went into a vertical dive and hit the sea just off Calais. Its pilot did not bale out.

/The Englishman's

The Englishman's combat ended when he was within point-blank range of his victim. He was about to pull up over the F.W.190 when there was a blinding flash and the whole of the after part of the German fighter's fuselage fell off.

"It looked as though the pilot had been blown out of his aircraft by the explosion," he said later, "for I saw his parachute open immediately afterwards".

When news of the station's 900th victim reached group headquarters, the group commander, Air Marshal T.L. Leigh-Mallory, C.B., D.S.O., at once signalled his congratulations. His signal read: "Heartiest congratulations on your 900th Hun. Keep it up".

Fighter Command's leading station opened its scoring on November 21, 1939, with a Dornier 17 and many of the R.A.F.'s most distinguished fighter pilots have contributed to its present score.

One squadron alone accounted for 135 and a half enemy aircraft during its stay on the station. Another passed the 100 mark, and five other squadrons each destroyed between fifty and seventy while on the station.

The station's score now stands at 902 - two night raiders having since been destroyed by one of its night fighter squadrons.

Plans for a party to celebrate the 1,000th victim are already under discussion.

-----oOo-----