

DOUBLE D.F.C. OF THE LAST WAR

Wing-Commander E. Swale, a Chesterfield man who won the D.F.C. twice in four months as a fighter-pilot in the last war, is now with a fighter group in the Second Tactical Air Force.

For more than 26 years, Wing-Commander Swale, who is 44, has been flying either powered aircraft or gliders. He does not fly operationally now but his wide knowledge of aircraft and flying is useful to him in carrying out his present duties.

He thinks that the tactics of air fighting are the same, basically, as in July, 1918, when he won the D.F.C. for attacking five Fokker D.8s, single-handed, over Bruges, and shooting down two. That success brought his total of "kills" to ten. In October, 1918, he was awarded the Bar to the D.F.C. and had brought his score of enemy aircraft destroyed to 17.

His first victim was one of the famous Richthofen circus. "Our squadron ran in to about 60 enemy fighters", says Wing-Commander Swale. "The air seemed full of machines and then, suddenly, a Pfalz Scout, painted bright green, flashed in front of me. I got on his tail in my Camel, and with a Vickers gun firing 800 rounds a minute, I followed him down until he crashed. I made a tactical error in following him down like that, because I might easily have been 'jumped' myself. But I was so excited at getting my first Hun that I forgot all about the 'drill'. That was over La Bassée canal, near Armentières, in June, 1918."

Wing-Commander Swale flew in France for nine months, leading his squadron for three months before coming back to England to join the experimental flight formed with Sopwith Snipe. At this time he was 20 years of age. He had gained his wings when 18 years six months old, flew solo after one hour 50 minutes dual tuition, and went overseas as an operational pilot with 50 hours in his log book. He was the baby of the squadron, the average age of which was 23 - about the same as that of a squadron to-day. But to-day's fighter-pilot has many more hours of solo flying before he becomes operational.

Wing Commander Swale returned to civilian life after the end of the war, and for a time gave up flying. In the summer of 1931 he visited Bournemouth and flew as a passenger in a glider being demonstrated with Sir Alan Cobham's air circus.

"I liked it so much that I decided to take it up" he recalls. "Eventually, in 1933, I joined the Derbyshire and Lancs. Gliding Club. When this war came, I was senior instructor and chairman of the Club which had about 100 members. I flew in national competitions, my best show being 38 miles across country from Dunstable to near Hatfield. I also held the height record for the Derby and Lancs. Club - 7,000 feet.

"My son, Duncan, who is now a flying officer and a Mosquito pilot in the Second Tactical Air Force, was an experienced glider pilot before he was 16 years old."

Wing-Commander Swale volunteered for service with the R.A.F. in 1939. He was posted to a fighter group in the Midlands and when a new group was formed, was responsible for some of the organisation involved. For this work he was mentioned in despatches in 1942.