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FIGHTER COMMAND'S FIRST AUSTRALIAN WING LEADER

The first Australian to lead a Spitfire wing of Fighter Command on offensive operations is Wing Commander J.R. Ratten, a mining engineer from Kingston Beach, Tasmania.

From a station in the Home Counties he flies a Spitfire with the name "Shangri-la" painted on the fuselage, also on the fuselage is a drawing of "The Saint" (from the series of detective stories) under which is the word "Tekkie", a New Zealand lucky charm which is also his wife's nickname.

Wing Commander Ratten has made about 150 offensive sweeps from this country. He was a mining engineer in Queensland when war broke out, and entered the R.A.A.F. One of the first recruits in Australia to be asked to transfer to the Empire Training Scheme, he completed his training in Tasmania and came to Fighter Command in November 1941.

The Wing Commander carried out over 70 offensive sweeps while with a squadron at Fighter Command's top scoring station. On one occasion he and three other pilots were attacked by three F.W.190s over France. They destroyed two of them and probably destroyed the third.

"Since those days tactics have changed and whereas at one time the Hun could decide whether to engage or not, we now have the initiative, and can, if we are lucky, bring him to combat" he said today.

"My section has what it calls its tea party, on which our Spitfire wing gives cover to Whirlwind bombers or Typhoon bombers in attacking German fighter airfields. We had a successful raid on Tricqueville the other day and I think there is no doubt we destroyed several F.W.190s on the ground".

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NOTE. Photographs of Wing Commander Ratten are available at B.I.P.P.A.