

Aces-In-A-Day

of the British and Commonwealth Air Forces in World War II

By C.F. SHORES

During World War II, fighter pilots of the British and Commonwealth Air Forces shot down five or more aircraft in one day on at least twenty-four occasions, becoming "aces-in-a-day." The first occurred during the Battle of France in May-June 1940. Sadly, little detail remains of these early combats, as the records of the retreating Hurricane squadrons were all ordered to be burnt before the units returned to the United Kingdom. The first pilot to accomplish the feat was Sgt. Gareth L. Nowell of 87 Squadron, a native of Wilmslow, Cheshire. During the week of 10-17 May, 1940, Nowell shot down twelve German aircraft, including five in one sortie, and for this he was awarded both a Distinguished Flying Medal and a Bar to it. No details are available as to the types of aircraft shot down or the exact date. On 19 May, a young South African pilot, P.O. Albert G. Lewis of 85 Squadron, shot down five, bringing his total to nine. The final Hurricane pilot to become an "ace-in-a-day" in France was the commanding officer of 73 Squadron, Sqn. Ldr. James 'Hank' More, who on 21 May took off on six occasions, was involved in six fights and claimed six aircraft, bringing his score for the Battle of France to 11.2.

On 29 May, 1940, it was the turn of the U.K.-based pilots to provide some of the 'chosen few'. The two-seater Defiant fighters of 264 Squadron patrolled along the French and Belgian coast of the English Channel twice during the day. On the first sortie, Fl. Lt. Nicholas Gresham Cooke, with Cpl. Albert Lippet manning the four .303 inch machine guns in the power turret behind him, were ready for action when the formation was 'bounced' by German fighters, claiming to have shot down two Messerschmitt Bf 109Es and a Bf 110C. On their second sortie, the squadron attacked a formation of Junkers Ju 87 "Stuka" dive-bombers, Cooke flying beneath these, while while Lippet poured a hail of fire directly upwards into

their unprotected bellies. They claimed to have sent five crashing down. On the return flight to England, they met two Ju 88s, sharing with two other Defiants in bringing these aircraft down also, making their score for the day 8-2/3. Cooke received a D.F.C. and Lippet a D.F.M., but next day this successful pair, whose score was 10-1/4, failed to return, shot down by a Bf 109E. During 29th, a second Defiant piloted by P.O.D. Whitley, gunner Leading Aircraftman Tanner, also shot down five aircraft, claiming a Bf 109E and a Bf HOC on the first sortie, and three Ju 87s on the second. This pair were shot down and killed the following August, having added 1-5/6ths. more victories to their score.

Much has been written about some of the pilots who shot down five in a day during the Battle of Britain, while others have scarcely have been mentioned. Between the beginning of August and the end of October 1940, no less than seven pilots managed this feat, one of them for the second time. On 8 August, the first day of the Battle proper, Fl. Lt. Adrian Boyd, D.F.C, already with 7-1/2 victories to credit, took off in his 145 Squadron Hurricane three times, the first time being the first interception of the Battle. During the day he shot down two Bf 110Cs, two Bf 109Es and a Ju 87B, damaging a second Ju 87B, and also sharing a third Bf 110 with two other pilots. Three days later, on 11th., P. O. Harbourne Stephen, a Scottish pilot of 74 Squadron became the first "ace-in-a-day," also flying three sorties during which he claimed three Bf 109Es, a probable and a damaged, and two Bf 110Cs and a damaged.

Two pilots became "aces-in-a-day" on 24 August, one flying a Hurricane and one a Spitfire. The former Sgt. Anthony Glowacki, a Polish pilot flying with 501 Squadron, accounted for a Bf 109 on his first sortie, a 109 and a Ju 88 on his second, and another 109 and 88 on his third, while Sgt. Ronald Hamlyn of 610 Squadron made four sorties, claiming four Bf 109s and a Ju 88. Both pilots received the D.F.M.



About the Author

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for their exploits. It was again the turn of a Spitfire pilot on 31st., New Zealander Fl. Lt. Brian Carbury of 603 'City of Edinburgh' Squadron, destroying five Bf 109Es during the day, though he claimed two of them mistakenly as 'He 113s.'

By late September F.O. Albert Lewis, D.F.C., had brought his score to 12 and was now serving with 249 Squadron, though still flying Hurricanes. On 27 September he flew three sorties, claiming three Bf 109Es and a damaged, two Bf 110Cs and a probable, and a Ju 88 - six in a day to become an "ace-in-a-day" for the second time. Next day he was shot down and badly burned, before managing to bale out; he received a Bar to his D.F.C. while in hospital. The final occasion in the Battle was on 7 October, when Sqn. Ldr. Archie McKellar, D.F.C., another Scot who was commanding 605 Hurricane Squadron, and who had already shot down four aircraft in one sortie on 9 September, shot down five Bf 109Es, four of them in under ten minutes, and damaged a sixth. Of the seven Battle of Britain "aces-in-a-day," McKellar was the only one not to survive the war. Both he and Harbourne Stephen took their scores to over twenty.

The scene now moved to the Mediterranean area, where the British were involved with the Italian Regia Aeronautica. On 6 December, 1940, the First Libyan Campaign began in the Western Desert, and five days later F.O. Charles 'Deadstick' Dyson, D.F.C., set a record which was to remain unbroken in the R.A.F. Taking off on a lone patrol in his 33 Squadron Hurricane, Dyson came out of some clouds to find himself directly behind two vics, each of three Fiat CR 42 biplane fighters, escorting a Trimotor Savoia SM. 79 bomber on a reconnaissance over the British forward troops. Taking careful aim, he pressed the firing button twice, while kicking the rudder bar to swerve his fire across the two vics. His aim was deadly, the fire of eight .303 inch machine guns ripping into the unarmoured biplanes, all of which caught fire and began to fall. Dyson was then attacked by other CR 42s and became involved in a whirling dog-fight, during which he claimed another CR 42 as probably destroyed. His engine then stopped, probably due to an Italian bullet, and he force-landed in the Desert. It was six days before he returned to his squadron, where his claims were treated with some scepticism, but a signal from the Army commander on the spot finally arrived which settled the issue once and for all. 'Congratulations to the pilot who today shot down seven aircraft' exulted the Army, who had witnessed the whole combat! It appeared that one of the falling CR 42s had crashed into the SM 79, bringing that down also, making a record seven in one sortie.

In Greece in early 1941, the R.A.F. fighters were fighting an epic battle against the Regia Aeronautica, and with the arrival of the first Hurricanes for 80 Squadron in February, some pilots were getting close to the magic score. On 28 February Fl. Lt. M.T. Pattle - claimed four and one probable, while F.O. Dick Cullen, an Australian, got four and a half. Two days later, on 2 March, Cullen got four in one sortie, and next day Sgt. Edward Hewett repeated this feat. It was not until the Germans arrived in the Greek mountains in April that one of these pilots finally



Wg. Cdr. C.R. Caldwell, only British Commonwealth pilot to claim five victories in a day while flying an American aircraft, a Curtiss Tomahawk IIA, 5 Dec. 1941, during Operation Crusader. (Photo-Australian War Memorial No. 15291).

broke five. New information received by E.C.R. Baker, the biographer of Pattle, from an aircraft fitter of 33 Squadron, who worked on Pattle's Hurricane during April when this great South African pilot was commanding the squadron, show that his score was even higher than recent research has proved. On 14 April, 1941, the Axis partners poured air raid after air raid over Greece, Pattle taking off on five occasions during the day, between 0710 hours and 1740 hours. He claims one victory on each sortie, a Bf 109, a Ju 88, a Bf 110, an SM 79, and finally another Ju 88. Five days later, Pattle, still suffering from an attack of influenza (or malaria - opinions differ on this) that had grounded him since 15th., flew five more sorties, claiming two Ju 88s and a probable on the first, a Bf 109 on the second, a Ju 88 and a second probable on the third, and two Bf 109s on the fourth. On another sortie on this day he shared a Henschel Hs 126 army co-operation aircraft with two other pilots, making his score for the day 6-1/3 plus two probables. Next day, 20 April, he was again in combat on three occasions. On the first he claimed two Bf 109s and on the second a Ju 88. At 1720 hours he took off again, shooting down two Bf 110s, and off the tail of one of his flight commanders, but by doing this leaving his own tail unprotected, thus allowing two more Bf 110s to pour cannon fire into his Hurricane, which fell like a blazing torch into the sea near Athens. At the time of his death he had destroyed 16-1/3 aircraft and 2 probables in three days of combat, bringing his score to over 50, a score bettered on the Allied side only by the two top-scoring Russian aces.

We now return to the Western Desert for what was probably the first five in a day claim made by a pilot flying an aircraft of American manufacture. On 5 December 1941, during Operation 'Crusader', the second great British offensive, F.O. Clive "Killer" Caldwell, an Australian, flying a Curtiss Tomahawk IIA with 250 Squadron was one of a number of pilots intercepting a large formation of Ju 87B dive-bombers attacking British troops. In a flaming, twisting dog-fight involving around fifty aircraft, Caldwell rapidly shot down five of the bombers to bring his personal score to 12. Shortly after this combat he was awarded a D.F.C. and Bar.

A few days after this combat the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour and other Far Eastern bases, bringing almost the whole of the rest of the world into the conflict. On 9 April 1942, Easter Sunday, Japanese carrier aircraft attacked the British naval bases and airfields in Ceylon. Cleo Gauthier, a French-Canadian Sgt. pilot serving in 261 Squadron, shot down five raiders in his Hurricane. Few details of the action are available, but on his first sortie he accounted for three bombers, causing two of them to collide. This was to be his only aerial combat of the war, the rest of his career being spent on ground-support missions in Burma.

During August 1942 desperate efforts were made to force a convoy through the Mediterranean to the besieged island fortress of Malta under the very noses of the Axis air forces in Sicily and North Africa. Every available carrier was sent in support of the convoy, including H.M.S.

INDOMITABLE, HMS VICTORIOUS and HMS EAGLE, this latter ship being sunk by a submarine's torpedo one day out from Gibraltar. Aboard INDOMITABLE was 880 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, flying Sea Hurricane, one of the flight commanders of this unit being Lt. Richard Cork, D.S.C., already one of the F.A.A.'s most successful fighter pilots, having flown in the Battle of Britain on loan to the R.A.F., serving in the squadron of Douglas Bader, the famous legless pilot. On 11 August Cork shot down a shadower, but next day brought heavy attacks on the convoy, every available fighter being put into the air. Cork took off and shot down two Ju 88s, landed and re-armed, took off and destroyed a Bf 110. He took off twice more during the day, shooting down an SM 79 on each occasion, being attacked on his fourth sortie by two Reggiane 2001s after he had run out of ammunition, but evading these and returning safely to his carrier. He was awarded a D.S.O. for these two days of action.

That was the last occasion on which a pilot became an "ace-in-a-day" while the Allies were on the defensive. The next time it happened was after the tide had turned, when it was the turn of the Axis to retreat. During April 1943 the Germans made a desperate attempt to supply their troops in Tunisia by air, suffering terrible losses to Allied fighters. It was here that several U.S.A.A.F. pilots became "aces-in-a-day" for the first time. Eventually the Luftwaffe gave up trying to get through in daylight, sending their transports over during the hours of darkness, and it was then that the radar-equipped Beaufighter night-fighters of the R.A.F. came into their own.



Sq. Ldr. M.T. "Pat" Pattle, CO. of No. 33 Fighter Sqdn., 6th from right. Pattle was the RAF's top ace, three times downing five enemy in one day. (Photo—E.C.R. Baker).



Flying Officer C.H. "Deadstick" Dyson by his Hurricane. He brought down seven Italian airplanes in one flight with two bursts of fire. (Photo-W/Cdr Dyson via E.C.R. Baker).

F/Sgt. Alwyn Downing of 600 Squadron and his radar operator, Sgt. J.T. Lyons, were on patrol during the night of 29/30 April, when Lyons directed Downing on to a multiple plot. In the grey of the approaching dawn, Downing spotted five Junkers Ju 52 transports over the sea, all of which he shot down. This was his first combat, and earned him a D.F.M. from the R.A.F. and a U.S. Air Medal from the American authorities. He was to receive a commission and a D.F.C., and bring his score to 12 before leaving the Mediterranean.

The next occasion was also at night and in the Mediterranean area. In July 1943 the Air Ministry decided to send a flight of the more advanced Mosquitos to Malta to reinforce the Beaufighter squadrons covering the invasion fleets during the landings on Sicily, this flight being detached from 256 Squadron in the United Kingdom. The commander of this detachment, Sqn. Ldr. John Allan of Epping, Essex, had already shot down three aircraft over Sicily when on the night of 15/16 July he accounted for a Cant Z.1007 tri-motor bomber and four Ju 88s in one sortie. By the end of the month he had brought his score to 13, all during July, and he was awarded both a D.S.O. and a D.F.C. His radar operator throughout this period was an Australian, Fl. Lt. H.J. Davidson.

A Mosquito again accounted for five in a day on 16 May 1944, this time on a daylight intruder mission - the first time since 1940 that a British-based R.A.F. pilot had claimed such a score in one day. Fl. Lt. Charles Scherf, D.F.C., an Australian pilot, had served with a Canadian Squadron, No. 418, but had finished his tour and been posted as a controller. He managed to return to the squadron on day visits to fly a sortie to keep his hand in, and had brought his score to 8-1/2 in the air and 9 on the ground. On 16 May he managed to arrange one of these 'revision' flights with his old squadron, and taking off with one other aircraft, set out to search for targets over Northern Germany. He

found and shot down a He III, a Fw 190 and a He 177, and then destroyed a second He III on the ground. He then shot down an Ar 196 floatplane, before damaging a Do 18 flyingboat moored on the sea. Finally he saw a Ju 86 bomber-transport and shot this down, a score of 5 in the air and one and a damaged on the ground. He received a Bar to his D.F.C. for this action, and later, a D.S.O. for his general operational conduct.

On 29 December 1944 Fl. Lt. Richard Audet, a Canadian flight commander in 411 Squadron, took off in his Spitfire 14 from an airfield in France on patrol. Although an experienced pilot of several years standing, he had flown in combat since 1942 without once meeting a German aircraft. Today was different, and he made up for the past in no uncertain manner when he ran into a formation of fighters, shooting down three Fw 190s and two Bf 109s all within two minutes. Within a month his score had risen to 10-1/2, with a D.F.C. and Bar arriving, but on 3 February 1945 he was shot down and killed by flak.

The final occasion was just before the close of the war in Europe, when leading Free French ace, Sqn. Ldr. Pierre Clostermann D.F.C. of 3 Squadron flew his Hawker Tempest 5 to attack transport aircraft trying to escape from North Germany to Scandinavia. He shot down a patrolling Fw 190 in the morning, and later in the day shot down a Ju 252 transport and two Do 24 flyingboats, destroyed two Ar 232 transports on the ground and a Bv 138 flyingboat on the water, and then shared Fw 190 and a Bf 109 with another pilot during the return flight, bringing his total for the day to 5 air and 3 ground victories, and for the war to 33 air and 24 ground victories.

It is interesting to note that on these occasions during which pilots became aces-in-a-day, four were flying Spitfires, two Mosquitos, two Defiants, one a Tomahawk, one a Beaufighter, and no less than thirteen Hurricanes.

SUMMARY OF ACES-IN-A-DAY

Date	Name	Victories on this date	Nationality	Squadron	Aircraft	Final Score
Week of						
10-17 May 1940	G.L. Nowell	5	British	87	Hurricane 1	16
19 May 1940	A.G. Lewis	5	South African	85	Hurricane 1	18
21 May 1940	J.W.C. More	6	British	73	Hurricane 1	11.2
29 May 1940	N.G.Cooke	8-2/3	British	264	Defiant 1	10.25
	A. Lippet					
	D.Whitley					
	Tanner	5	British •	264	Defiant 1	6.83
8 August 1940	A.H.Boyd	5-1/3	British	145	Hurricane 1	18.17
11 August 1940	H.M. Stephen	5	British	74	Spitfire 1	22.5
24 August 1940	A. Glowacki	5	Polish	501	Hurricane 1	11.33
	R.F. Hamlyn	5	British	610	Spitfire 1	13
31 August 1940	B.J.G. Carbury	5	New Zealander	603	Spitfire 1	14.5
27 September 1940	A.G. Lewis (2nd.)	6	South African	249	Hurricane 1	18
7 October 1940	A.A. McKellar	5	British	605	Hurricane 1	21
6 December 1940	C.H. Dyson	7	British	33	Hurricane 1	9+
14 April 1941	M.T.St.J. Pattle	5	South African	33	Hurricane 2A	50+
19 April 1941	M.T.St.J. Pattle	6-1/3	South African	33	Hurricane 2A	50+
20 April 1941	M.T.St.J. Pattle	5	South African	33	Hurricane 2A	50+
5 December 1941	C.R.Caldwell	5	Australian	250	Tomahawk 2A	28.5
9 April 1942	C. Gauthier	5	Canadian	261	Hurricane 2	5
12 August 1942	R.J. Cork	5	British	880	Sea Hurricane	13
29 April 1943	A.B. Downing	5	British	600	Beaufighter	12
15 July 1943	J.W.Allan	5	British	256	Mosquito	14
16 May 1944	C.C. Scherf	5+1 on gr.	Australian	418	Mosquito	13.5
29 December 1944	R.J. Audet	5	Canadian	411	Spitfire 14	10.5
3 May 1945	P.H. Clostermann	5+3 on gr.	French	3	Tempest 5	33



Fl. Lt. R.J. Audet entering Spitfire. He shot down five German fighters in less than two minutes (Photo-RCAF).