



MESSERSCHMITTS INTO BATTLE

Messerschmitt Bf 109s of I/JG3 led by Hans von Hahn turn to face an attack by Spitfires of 603 Squadron at the height of the Battle of Britain, 15th September 1940. Hptm von Hahn had just taken over command of I/JG3 and already his colourfully marked aircraft carries the double chevron marking of a Gruppe Kommodore. The yellow nose and rudder was a tactical marking carried by most 109s during this period of the Battle.

The 'Tatzelwurm' on the nose is the emblem of JG3 with green traditionally signifying the Stab Staffel. The cockerel, (hahn in German), emblem was Hahn's personal emblem and was carried on most of his aircraft. He survived the war with 34 victories.

Many people argue about which was the better fighter, the Spitfire or Me109. But in the Battle of Britain, that was irrelevant. The important question was, which one had the altitude? The Me109s nearly always had this advantage, having had more time to climb on the way from France. The Spitfire had a better climb rate than the Hurricane but was still at a disadvantage as it tried to take off and reach 109s at 25,000ft within a few minutes.

This was what made me decide to show the 109s in this painting at high altitude, in control of the fight, although on 15 September, the RAF managed to get its squadrons in the right place and at the right altitude to put up a stubborn fight.



COMBAT OVER THE ISLE OF WIGHT

Messerschmitt Bf 109s of JG53 bounce Hurricanes of 145 Squadron off the Isle of Wight on 12 August 1940. Flying 'White 8' is Hauptmann Hans-Karl Mayer who amassed a lot of victories in the Battle before being killed in action on 17 October 1940.

This painting depicts a classic 'bounce' carried out by JG53 Me109s. Diving from a great height with speed and surprise on their side, they ripped through the Hurricanes without them even knowing what hit them. At the time, JG53 had replaced its 'Ace of Spades' emblem with a red stripe on the nose. It was also experimenting with different camouflage schemes and colours, so 'White 8' is definitely not your standard BoF B Me109!

Mark Postlethwaite



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TO FIGHT ANOTHER DAY

Pilot Officer W C 'Bill' Watling of 92 Squadron struggles to bale out of his burning Spitfire P9372 after being bounced by Messerschmitt Bf109s off Camber Sands on 9th September 1940. Bill managed to escape with burns to his hands and face, whilst his Spitfire crashed just inland near East Guldeford. Bill recovered from his burns and returned to his squadron a month later. Sadly, on 7 February 1941, he was killed when his Spitfire flew into high ground whilst on a weather check in extremely low cloud, it was just two weeks before his 21st birthday.



My old friend Rob Champion asked me to paint this one to commemorate the short life of 'Bill' Watling (left) who had been a pupil at his school (Elizabeth College) a year or so above him. Bill excelled at sport and was a bit of a hero to many of the younger boys when he joined the RAF to fight in the Battle of Britain.

Rob clearly remembered the evening when a teacher came to their room in tears to tell the boys that Bill had been killed in a crash. It had a profound effect on all the boys and ultimately led to this painting.



SPITFIRE DAWN

RAF Fighter Command Spitfires take off at dawn to deploy to a forward airfield near the south coast of England at the height of the Battle of Britain.

The summer of 1940 was a time of little sleep for 'The Few' as they maintained a constant state of readiness from dawn until dusk and flew up to five sorties a day against the massed formations of Luftwaffe bombers and fighters crossing the Channel.

I was fortunate to speak to a lot of Battle of Britain pilots over the years and I would always ask them what their strongest memories were. For many it was the overwhelming tiredness they felt, especially towards the end. On a typical day at the height of the Battle, they would need to be at readiness by 0530, fly up to five patrols a day and only go off duty around 1900. The five patrols would involve quite a bit of physical strain on the body, especially if contact was made with the enemy, and the irregular eating and sleep patterns all contributed to this overwhelming fatigue that they all felt. Some squadrons even had to 'commute' to work, like 616 Squadron, which flew 100 miles from Kirton in Lindsey to Fowlmere to be part of the Duxford 'Big Wing' during September 1940. This is what my painting shows, note the individual aircraft letters were chosen for a reason!



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◀ RED THREE DIDN'T MAKE IT

A symbolic painting of a formation of 602 Squadron Spitfires with a missing man appearing amongst the clouds in the Red Three position.

This painting was inspired by an Instagram post I made with this same title which showed me painting out a Hurricane that was in the wrong position. It got nearly half a million views and hundreds of comments, mainly about leaving the symbolic empty space. I developed the idea over a few months and eventually arrived at this, which shows the missing Spitfire as a negative shape amongst the clouds, have you spotted it yet?



FAREWELL TO THE FEW ▶

A 238 Squadron Hurricane flown by Archie McInnes weaves its way through clouds towards the end of the Battle of Britain.

In 2019, I asked Battle of Britain pilot Archie McInnes what his favourite memory of the Battle was. For Archie it wasn't the combat and shooting, instead he fondly remembered those glorious summer days when, as a 21 year old, he was given his own Hurricane to go up and play in the clouds. That conversation inspired this painting, a copy of which was presented to Archie on his 100th birthday. By all accounts he was overjoyed with the painting and immediately hung it on his wall when he got home. Sadly, he passed away that same night, finally joining those other young boys who also played amongst the clouds back in 1940.