

# STAGING FOR DEPLOYMENT



# 1

## STANDING DOWN BUZZARD PLUCKER

### **Somewhere in France**

OPERATION BUZZARD PLUCKER, THE SNIPING OF GERMAN FIGHTER pilots at their landing grounds in enemy occupied France, had been ordered to stand down. Strategic Raiding Forces, the small Commando unit conducting the mission, had been alerted for another operation with a higher priority. The two Lovat Scouts—wearing gillie suits in the hide position from which they now observed Luftwaffe Landing Ground 279—had no way of knowing their mission had been called off. Their only means of communication was a pair of carrier pigeons carried in little cardboard containers, each about the size of a softball. The snipers, Scout Jock MacDougal and Scout Bill Frazier, could send a message back to Seaborn House, Raiding Forces' headquarters located in the south of England, but they were unable to receive one.

The team had been inserted by HMY *Arrow*. They had encountered no problems making their way ashore, both going barefoot, Scout

MacDougal walking backward carrying Scout Frazier piggy-back. Any German beach patrol happening along the following morning would see only the innocent-looking footprints of a lone swimmer and have no cause for alarm.

The team laid up for a half hour to see if the landing had been detected or if the beach was under observation.

After determining that everything was clear, the Lovat Scouts found a good hide position and put on German Army boots so their prints would blend in with the million or so other pairs of Wehrmacht boots tramping around Normandy. Britain's Political Warfare Executive had wanted to create the impression the Lovat snipers attacking Luftwaffe landing grounds were anti-Nazi dissident members of a resistance movement within the German Armed Forces, not British Commandos. No such anti-Nazi resistance movement existed, but British intelligence wanted to strike at the psyche of the German High Command.

The Lovat Scouts had no knowledge of that. They did not have a need to know. What they were perfectly clear on was that the purpose of the exercise was for them to shoot as many Luftwaffe fighter pilots on Landing Ground 279 as possible when the opportunity presented itself as the squadron scrambled for takeoff.

The pair of snipers moved out toward their objective, taking the normal precautions not to be tracked—walking backward at times, circling, stepping on rocks and wading in streams, carrying each other piggyback for short stretches. They moved inland for a mile.

At approximately 0400 hours they reached the vicinity of their objective. The men moved into an area of thick forest where they waited in deep concealment until daylight gave them an opportunity to glass the German airfield and select the most suitable position from which to take their shot.

The Scouts would take the better part of the day to take up their final position. The Lovat Scouts were peerless stalkers. Raiding Forces, being shot through with men from the Kings Royal Rifle Corp and the Rifle Brigade, had a number of men that were as capable marksmen but no one was in the same league as the Scouts when it came to sneaking and peeking.

The shooter, Scout Jock MacDougal, was armed with a scoped

Wesley-Richards 7x57 rifle that his father before him had carried in the Great War as a Lovat Scout Sharpshooter and had presented to his son on his twelfth birthday. The commonplace 7x57 caliber was in fact a German military round ideal for the mission because a spent cartridge case was not a giveaway as to who had fired it. It could be anyone. With a little luck Nazi intelligence would find the brass and believe the sniper was a German soldier.

The Glassman, Scout Bill Frazier, the team leader, was carrying the 20X Ross telescope he used in happier days to spy out the wily red stags that inhabited the remote Scottish highlands. He was armed with a captured German MP-38 submachine gun.

Both men were highly trained reconnaissance troops skilled at what the Lovat Scout Regiment called SOS—Scouting, Observation and Sniping. The glassman carried a SOS log. On each page of the book was a grid for Time, Map Reference, Event and Remarks. They carefully recorded what they observed, being scrupulously careful not to give their opinions or interpretations of events.

The landing ground before them was laid out exactly as they had been shown in the aerial photos they studied prior to the mission. It was a military airstrip designed for function not beauty: A single grass strip was surrounded by concertina and razor wire. Twenty-foot tall guard towers built on telephone pole stilts were spaced every two hundred yards around the airfield. Several small buildings sat at the far end of the landing ground. The open-topped control tower was mounted on the roof of what they had been briefed to believe was the field operations building. It was sandbagged waist high at the top.

A squadron of Messerschmitt Bf 109s was operating off the field. A total of thirteen high-performance, single-seat fighter aircraft were in sight. Each plane had a large red heart painted on the side of the nose just behind the propeller. Each heart had an arrow piercing all the way through it, slanted down from left to right. A sketch of the insignia went in the Scouting, Observation and Sniping logbook Scout Frazier carried in the billows pocket of his sand green Denison smock.

The two Scouts observed enemy pilots, ground crew, operations staff, and maintenance and security personnel. Guards were manning the front

gate and the towers and were roving the perimeter. No sizeable number of ground troops to mount a quick reaction force appeared to be stationed at the landing ground. The Scouts thought that was good.

None of the aircraft had an individual guard posted it, and the perimeter guard towers were manned by one sentry only at all times. An occasional two-man foot patrol strolled around the perimeter road running inside the strands of barbed wire. Nevertheless, the German soldiers appeared to be thorough and professional, taking their time to check for any visible signs of an intruder crossing the fence.

The pilots, the Eagles, spent their time playing with a soccer ball, lounging in overstuffed chairs their batmen had moved outside on the lawn for them, or sleeping on cots beside their airplanes.

The Raiding Forces' sniper team expected the German pilots to launch a dawn patrol, and they were not disappointed. Beginning Morning Nautical Twilight, however, was still too dark to allow the snipers to take their shot as the Me-109s took off.

Eventually the squadron returned, landed, rearmed, and refueled. The pilots went back to their soccer, lounging, and napping as per the day before. Ground crews worked on individual aircraft.

"AH-OO-GHA, AH-OO-GHA, AH-OO-GHA" the klaxon sounded at 1023, and the pilots scrambled. The instant the signal went off, one of the ground crew jumped in the cockpit of each fighter and fired up the engine while the thirteen pilots raced to man their machines. Some pilots ran on foot, some rode bicycles, and others hopped on the back of a flatbed truck that drove around the perimeter dropping off the Eagles at their assigned aircraft.

The snipers coolly waited until the pilot selected to be the first target was seated in his aircraft and his crew chief, standing on the wing, had finished helping him buckle up his parachute and safety harness. Then, after the crew chief had jumped down but before the plane had started to taxi, on signal from Scout Frazier, Scout McDougal squeezed the trigger.

With the canopy pulled back on the fighter, it was an unobstructed shot. The high velocity 7x57-millimeter round struck the pilot just below the right ear. He slumped instantly. The Me-109's engine continued to crank over; there was no visible sign of any alarm from the ground crew.

As tests conducted by Raiding Forces had proven at a Royal Air Force fighter strip, the scream of fighter aircraft engines on a flight line would effectively drown out the sound of a shot.

By the time the Scouts shifted their attention to their second target the ground crew still had not realized anything was wrong with their pilot.

The aviator in the second Me-109 targeted was waving off his crew chief and preparing to taxi when Scout McDougal lined up the rifle scope's crosshairs on his flying helmet. On signal from his team leader, the Scout took the shot, hitting the flyer high in the neck at virtually the same time he released his brakes. The fighter began to roll with a dead man at the stick.

Once again, there was no discernable reaction to the shot from the ground crew or any of the security forces. A great deal of confusion did erupt, however, when the airplane slowly began taxiing slantwise across the infield of the landing ground into the oncoming traffic pattern, nearly colliding head-on with another ME-109 halfway through its takeoff run. The plane with the dead pilot continued on across the perimeter road, ploughed through the barbed wire fence, and out of sight, the maintenance crew in hot pursuit on foot. Crash wagons, fire trucks, an ambulance, and other ground personnel responded while the rest of the fighter planes in the squadron continued taking off.

The Me-109 forced to dodge the out-of-control ground-looping fighter lifted up before gaining sufficient airspeed, veered right, clipped one of the guard towers with its right wing—knocking the startled guard over the side—lost more airspeed, wobbled unsteadily for a moment then cartwheeled into the forest and exploded in an orange fireball.

The remaining aircraft continued to scramble. Approximately three minutes passed, the Scouts carefully noted, before the distracted ground crew of the first pilot shot realized their man was not taking off. A mad frenzy of activity took place around his aircraft but it was not clear whether the German ground staff actually understood at this point if or how they had been attacked.

The Lovats stayed put in the shoot position and continued to observe the target for approximately half an hour. While there was a great deal of pandemonium among the ground personnel, with people and vehicles

frantically coming and going, nothing in the way of an organized response to the attack developed.

The two raiders moved off slowly, taking the normal precautions. Initially, they traveled in the opposite direction of their extraction location, which was a small remote lake inland rather than on the coast as the Germans would expect.

The two men were not surprised to hear the sound of dogs braying in the distance. Apparently some effort was being made to come after them. No problem. Each man simply produced a small silver canister that had been supplied to him by Captain the Lady Jane Seaborn. The men used the secret ingredient in the canisters to salt their back trail. The formula, which had been provided by Captain “Geronimo Joe” McKoy, a Wild West showman and firearms expert who trained Raiding Forces from time to time, consisted of cocaine laced with black pepper and dried chicken blood. It was one favored by the Apache Indians, or so he claimed. In trials at Seaborn House, with Security Police from the Vulnerable Points Wing acting the role of Nazi pursuers and hounds borrowed from the Home Guard, it had worked every time. The tracking dogs were in no mood for man hunting once they sniffed the magic dust.

Being very stealthy the Scouts exfiltrated for a distance of seven miles, employing every trick in the book to throw off trackers, with no further sign of pursuit. By then the sun was beginning to go down. They found a secure hide deep in the forest that offered good concealment. Taking up position the team remained in place under cover until it was time to move out to the extraction site three miles away.

When it was the appointed hour, the team patrolled to the lake. The extraction aircraft, a Supermarine Walrus Mark I amphibian nicknamed “The Duck” (as in ugly) piloted by Squadron Leader Paddy Wilcox, arrived on schedule almost to the minute and splashed down silently. Signals were exchanged, and the airplane’s rubber dinghy, paddled by a Life Boat Serviceman, beached where the Scouts waited.

By the time the team climbed on board the gently bobbing float plane, they were already wearing their dark blue Lovat Scouts berets with the blue and white dicing and their silver regimental badge—a Royal stag emblazoned with the words JESUIS PREST, which when translated

meant "I AM READY." The Scouts were pleasantly surprised to find their commanding officer, the American, Major John Randal, MC, King's Royal Rifle Corps, sitting in the copilot's chair.

"Hop in men," he said. "Let's get the hell out of Dodge."

Neither Scout could have agreed more.

The Lovat Scout Regiment has a saying: "It is all right to take soldiering seriously in peacetime, but you should never do so in war." Strategic Raiding Forces was the perfect unit for fighting men with that kind of military outlook.

As the little amphibious Walrus leaped into the purple sky and banked sharply for home, Major Randal ordered over his shoulder, "Give me a report."

"One ME-109 destroyed, sir, two buzzards plucked."