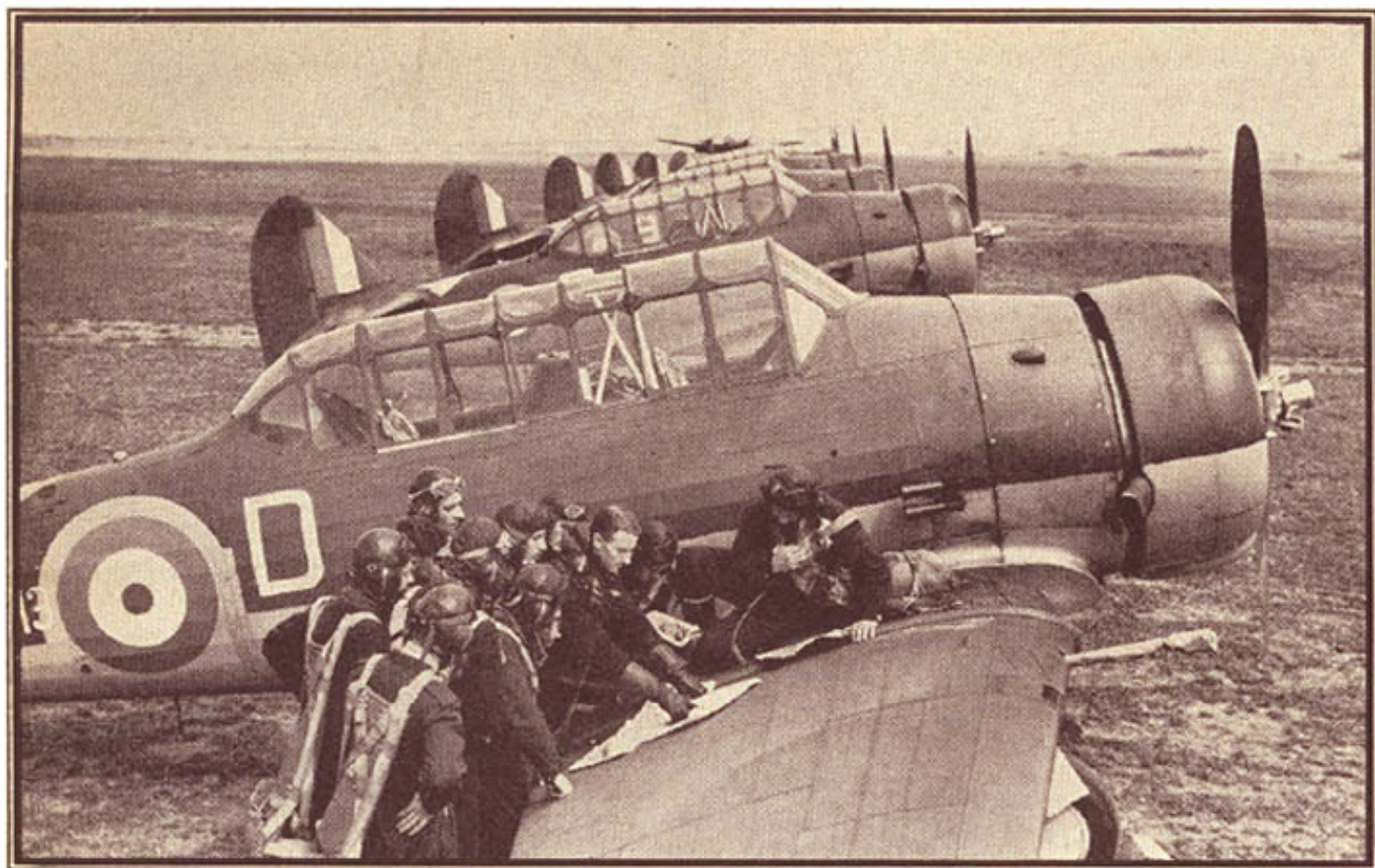


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BOOKS

Luftwaffe and the RAF: Contrast in Viewpoints Revealed in Two Books on War Flying



Diaries of death: British skyfighters respect their opponents...

An extremely interesting study in contrast was afforded by the publication this week of two books on flying in this war. One of these is called **THE AIRMEN SPEAK**—a compilation from 150 personal accounts of combat broadcast by some of the personnel of the Royal Air Force. The second is **I WAS A NAZI FLIER**, which is a diary kept by a young pilot in the German Luftwaffe until he had to bail out over England in January of this year. His book makes startling, unpleasant, even maddening reading. It's instructive, though.

Gottfried Leske is an average Nazi; he is 27, son of a middle-class family, and had been a Storm Trooper several years when Hitler came to power. Infatuated with aviation since boyhood, he went to the flying school at Gatow, where the German Republic trained her airmen and which was crawling, even in those days, with National Socialists. Later he served as a pilot in the commercial Lufthansa; when war broke out, he was already a flight sergeant and saw his first action in France, piloting a Heinkel bomber, then in the Low Countries, Dunkerque, and England. He was "in on" Coventry, Birmingham, and London.

Leske kept this diary for his personal



but embittered Nazis have only hate

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use. According to him, many men in the Luftwaffe did the same, despite a vague ruling against it. A little before he was shot down, Leske sent his journal to a friend. He was afraid some of the entries about a casual love affair he had at the front might upset his family if the book fell into their hands. The friend smuggled the diary out of Germany and brought it to America.

Leske writes in a lingo of his own; his style bristles with pomposity and warmed-over clichés from Goebbels' and Göring's speeches. He has a superman cockiness. He thinks German fliers are a race apart, better than other people, and finds it quite natural that he and his comrades should lord it over the ground crews, who occasionally become restive as they watch the Luftwaffe boys gorging on juicy beefsteaks while they eat ersatz.

Chivalry is the bunk to Leske, and he constantly crows over the miseries of his enemies. Deploring the German leniency toward the French, he writes: "And as long as they're going to hate us anyway, they might as well have a good reason for it." After expressing satisfaction for what he and his comrades did over Coventry, Leske refers to an article he read describing King George's difficulty in getting around the shattered city: "It must have been funny as hell. Too bad the King didn't cut his dear little foot on some of the glass."

Comparing a Nazi's private diary with broadcasts prepared for public consumption by British fliers is perhaps unfair to the Nazi. But there are points in common. Both Germans and British are thrilled at dangerous assignments and pull wires to get them. They both relish fights: "Come on, you beauty," says an RAF pilot, slapping his Hurricane under the belly, "plenty of Huns today, please!" But the British have a totally different attitude about the war; they are, strangely enough, more confident than the Germans and much less temperamental. The British respect their opponents but don't hate them; the Nazi sneers at his—he also sneers at his Italian comrades in flight. The RAF boys don't talk about how tough they are; the Nazi talks of nothing else. Only time is going to tell which is the tougher. (**THE AIRMEN SPEAK**. 299 pages. Illustrations. Doubleday, Doran, New York. \$2.50. **I WAS A NAZI FLIER**. 351 pages. Dial Press, New York. \$2.50.)