

Spitfire Rhubarb

Right before D-Day in early June of 1944 Alan Geoffery Page led five other Spitfire IXs into German airspace on a "low-level penetration mission" to seek out enemy aircraft. These sorties were called rhubarbs and their intent was for a small number of planes to basically go out and look for trouble. The Spits carried drop tanks for a long flight of this sort for maximum range.

"I warned my pilots that if we came across German night fighters doing their daytime flying practice where they had to check their radios and radars, I told them never attack an airplane called a Messerschmitt 110 head-on because they had four big cannons in the front of the airplane. So one of my pilots, a New Zealander, and I were going along at treetop height when across our path came this Messerschmitt 110.

Unbeknownst to us it was piloted by one of their top night fighter aces called Hans(?) Joachim Jabs. My New Zealander went off, attacked him head-on, paid the penalty and was promptly shot down and survived. So I chased this Messerschmitt and fired. I could see my bullets and cannon shells were hitting but he hadn't read the RAF book of air fighting and he didn't burn up! Then I noticed that in front of him, as I continued to fire, was a German airfield and he calmly put his wheels and flaps down as I kept on firing and hitting him. At this point every single flak and anti-aircraft gun opened up on us and my number two wingman was hit and killed as I broke off."

Upon crashing Jabs jumped into a vehicle and picked up the New Zealand pilot and looked after him giving him some cigarettes.

Years later when Page met Jabs he related his side of the shoot down. He was frightened because all the flak aimed at Page was also headed in his direction. But after jumping from his burning plane he was angry since he'd left behind in his aircraft several kilos of bacon, which he'd gotten from another airfield for his officer's club. So after having met Jabs, Page send him a kilo of bacon that Christmas to make up for it!

Jabs ended the conflict with fifty victories and Page had fifteen.

Hans-Joachim Jabs

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Lüdenscheid, 10th Jan. 1980

My dear Geoffrey

Back from my Christmas holidays I found the ham you send us.

You cannot imagine, dear Geoffrey, how this kind gesture pleased me.

Not only me, but also my family and our friends were very pleased of the kind of your present for us.

Thanking you very much indeed, I should really like to get this ham tinned in order to conserve it in Memory to you.

With our best wishes and regards to yourself and your wife, I remain, as ever,

Yours

Admir and Ruth