

'SAILOR' MALAN

A.G. 'Sailor' Malan was one of RAF Fighter Command's best air-fighting tacticians of the early period of World War II. He served as a fighter pilot from the outbreak of war until March 1941, becoming the RAF's leading ace during that time, with a total of 27 enemy planes destroyed and 16 damaged.



Adolf Gysbert 'Sailor' Malan had joined the RAF in 1936 following 12 years at sea – hence his nickname. Born on 3 October 1910, in Wellington, South Africa, to an Afrikaner family, he had initially served as a naval cadet from the age of 14 on board the training ship *General Botha*, prior to becoming an officer cadet with the Union-Castle Line in January 1928.

In late 1935, Malan applied for a commission in the RAF, which was then in the process of rapidly expanding its pilot cadre. He gained his first flying experience in de Havilland Tiger Moths at an elementary flying school near Bristol, going aloft for the first time on 6 January 1936. Soon christened 'Sailor' by his fellow students, Pilot Officer Malan completed his training by year-end and then received a posting to Hawker Demon-equipped No. 74 Squadron at Hornchurch airfield. By the time Malan had been promoted to flying officer in May 1938, the squadron had switched to Gauntlet biplane fighters.

Malan became a flight commander (and was promoted to flight lieutenant) in March 1939, just as No. 74 Sqn received its first Spitfire Is. A highly experienced aviator by the time Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, Malan

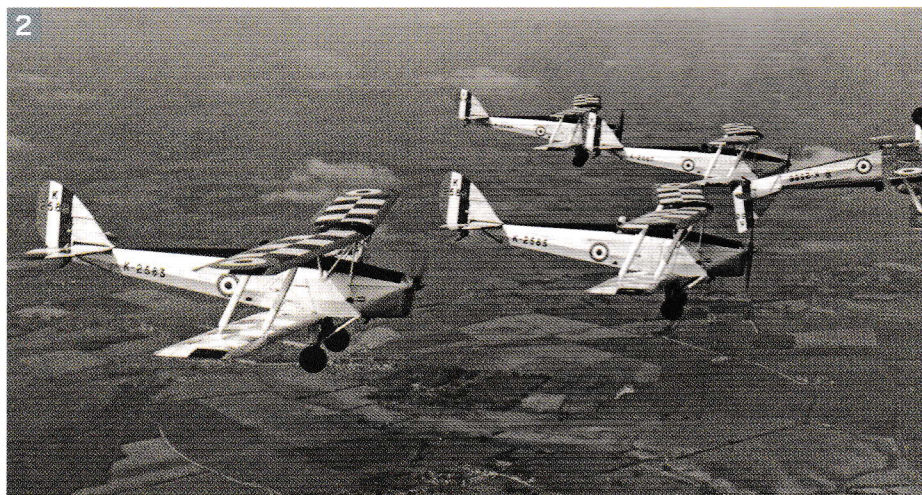
was involved in the friendly-fire incident three days later that resulted in the downing of two No. 56 Sqn Hurricanes and the death of Pilot Officer Montague Hulton-Harrop.

MALAN AT DUNKIRK

After many months of inactivity, No. 74 Sqn was committed to the defence of Dunkirk from 21 May 1940. Malan led a number of patrols over the evacuation beaches that resulted in him being credited with three enemy aircraft destroyed, two shared destroyed and three damaged. He was duly awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross on 28 May for these achievements, followed by a Bar to this decoration after he succeeded in downing two He 111s during the Luftwaffe's first large scale night raid on 18–19 June.

1 Air ace A. G. 'Sailor' Malan seen here in the cockpit of his Supermarine Spitfire at Biggin Hill, where he was station commander. Malan was always keen to fly on operations, often ignoring standing orders for station commanders not to risk getting shot down.

2 A flight of RAF de Havilland Tiger Moth biplanes, one flying upside down. These were primarily training aircraft, and Malan learned to fly in one, taking his first flight in 1936.





3 Supermarine Spitfire Mk Is of No. 610 Sqn, based at Biggin Hill, Kent, flying in 'Vic' formations. The 'Vic' formation was first used in World War I and comprised three or sometimes more aircraft flying in close formation, with the leader at the apex and the rest of the flight to left and right, the whole resembling the letter 'V'. The formation was abandoned by Malan and his senior pilots in mid-1940 in favour of the looser 'finger-four' formation. When viewed from above, the positions of the planes in the 'finger-four' formation resembled the tips of the four fingers of a human right hand (without the thumb), giving the formation its name.

4 An intelligence briefing at Hornchurch airfield before pilots and their aircraft embark on a mission over Nazi-occupied France. The briefing was conducted by a senior officer, who would give instructions on aims and tactics and provide any information available on the weather conditions and so on.

On 8 August 1940, Malan was given command of No. 74 Sqn, by which point he and his senior pilots had already abandoned the RAF's rigid 'Vic' formation for a looser 'finger-four' formation as employed by the Luftwaffe Messerschmitt Bf 109E *Schwarm* that the unit had been encountering with increasing frequency. When the unit was withdrawn to Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincolnshire, shortly thereafter, Malan used the break from combat to write *Ten of My Rules For Air Fighting* (right) With more than 12 victories to his name by then, Malan drew on his experience to develop a set of rules for successful aerial combat that were subsequently published and widely distributed throughout Fighter Command.

AIR WAR OVER EUROPE

Malan remained in command of No. 74 Sqn until March 1941, when he became one of the RAF's first Wing Leaders charged with taking Fighter Command onto the offensive over occupied Europe. Flying from Biggin Hill, Kent, Wing Commander Malan had taken his score to 27 and seven shared destroyed, two shared unconfirmed



destroyed, three probables and 16 damaged by the time he was posted away from Biggin Hill in August 1941. A series of training and staff jobs then followed, including a spell as station commander of Biggin Hill. Malan returned to operations as officer commanding No. 19 Fighter Wing in October 1943, after which he led No. 145 (Free French) Wing.

Resigning from the RAF in 1946, Malan returned to South Africa, where he became active in politics with the Torch Commandos, who were opposed to apartheid. Tragically, Malan was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in the late 1950s and passed away on 17 September 1963 at the age of 53.

Ten of My Rules for Air Fighting

- 1.** Wait until you see the whites of his eyes. Fire short bursts of 1 to 2 seconds and only when your sights are definitely 'ON'.
- 2.** Whilst shooting think of nothing else, brace the whole of your body, have both hands on the stick, concentrate on your ring sight.
- 3.** Always keep a sharp lookout. "Keep your finger out!"
- 4.** Height gives YOU the initiative.
- 5.** Always turn and face the attack.
- 6.** Make your decisions promptly. It is better to act quickly, even though your tactics are not the best.
- 7.** Never fly straight and level for more than 30 seconds in the combat area.
- 8.** When diving to attack always leave a proportion of your formation above to act as top guard.
- 9.** INITIATIVE, AGGRESSION, AIR DISCIPLINE and TEAM WORK are words that MEAN something in Air Fighting.
- 10.** Go in quickly – Punch hard – Get out