

SPITFIRE VIEW of a ZERO

By F/Lt C. N. WAWN, DFC.

ANYONE who has flown against a Zero in combat is impressed mainly by one thing—its amazing manoeuvrability—and Allied fighter pilots base their tactics accordingly on that factor. No sane pilot would attempt to stay and manoeuvre with a Zero in a dogfight; he relies on surprise and speed to "bowl 'em over." That these tactics are good is proved by a glance at the squadron scoreboards in NE and NW Areas.

It is pretty hard to analyse accurately the fighting qualities of a plane when you are fighting with it—you've got so many other things to think about, and you rarely have an open go at one because either one of your cobbler butts in to help you or one of the other fellow's cobbler does the same for him.

For that reason I found the trials we carried out between a Spitfire and a Hap very interesting and very informative. We had the whole sky to ourselves, and, what's more, we used a fair bit of it.

When all is said and done, a fighter is only a flying gun platform, and in that respect the Zeke or Hap isn't so hot. Its armament sounds quite impressive on paper, but it is a little misleading, because neither its cannon nor machineguns have the same hitting power as our equivalent calibres. However, there are a few pilots around who will tell you it was good enough on certain occasions.

You don't want to run away with the idea that the Zero is manufactured in the same factories as the Made in Japan goods you used to see in the two and sixpenny stores. It isn't. Although lightly constructed, it is strongly made and well designed.

There is a well known story about the Kittyhawk pilot who looked around and saw a Zero chasing him.

"So I dived her up to 300," said the pilot, "and there he was, still following me. Then I dived her to 400, looked around and he was still following me. So then I dived her up to 450 and looked around. He was still following me, but he didn't have any wings."

I think that is a good story.

"But the Zero hasn't got any armour plating," everyone has either heard or said that at some time.

The Japs rightly reason that the



Nearly two years ago a captured Zero and a RAAF Spitfire went up together for some very interesting trials. The story could not be told until now for security reasons.

best defence is manoeuvrability. In other words, if you can't get a shot at another plane, you can't shoot it down. And a fighter should be designed to dish it out, not to take it. If you can't get your guns pointed at the other fellow, you can't shoot him down.

It was quite warm at 27,000 feet, and the nearness of that Hap—complete with markings—made me perspire anyhow. We broke off right and left, counted four, turned towards each other, and it was on.

Hap on my tail

Just to reassure myself, although I knew the inevitable result, I used the tactic we employed with success against ME109's and FW190's in Europe—that is, a climbing right or left hand turn at slow speed on the stall all the time.

No good. In less than 20 seconds the Hap was on my tail, turning inside me, while the Spit was ruddering and flicking and doing its best to fall out of the sky.

So down I went, straight for the earth, with the Hap after me. As my speed built up I turned on a few aileron rolls to make it tough for him.

He followed me round the first couple, but as our speed approached the 400 mark I noticed he was having trouble in following them round. So when I had gained half a turn on him I sneaked out the side and lost him temporarily.

At high speed the ailerons of a Hap are inclined to "freeze," causing a loss of manoeuvrability in the rolling plane. They do in most aeroplanes, for that

matter, but more so in the Hap than our best fighters.

We tried loops, one after the other, and although he could not get much of a shot at me, he could stay on my tail all right. Rolls off the top—same results. These manoeuvres are never used in dogfights, anyhow, but we tried them for fun.

With the Spit on the Hap's tail, it was quite easy to stay there as long as speeds were not allowed to drop too low. If they did, then the superior manoeuvrability of the Hap at slow speeds showed up again.

Straight and level, flat out, the Hap would only run into a place, especially if the race were a long one. Whereas a Spit will take "full bore" for as long as your petrol will last. I think the Jap fitters would have a lot extra work if little Yum Yum, or whatever his name may be, came in after flying round the skies for hours with the "teat pressed." That is, if he got home at all.

It is quite a good motor, for all that, and the Jap pilot seems to have plenty of faith in it, because at times he crosses large expanses of water to escort his bombers.

Japs don't like headon attacks in Haps or Zekes. The reasons are, firstly, their firepower is not as good as ours, and, secondly, they have no protection in the shape of bullet proof glass in the windscreen.

They are not, in my opinion, very good pilots. They don't seem to get the best out of their machines, and do silly things at times, such as leaving a perfectly good position behind an Allied fighter to skid out and up to the

side to make a deflection shot out of it. That doesn't make it any easier. Although they vary a good deal, the Army pilots in particular don't seem to be very good shots.

I'm glad the ex-Kittyhawk pilot who flew the Hap was not flying it in New Guinea on the side of the Japs . . . (W/Cdr Les Jackson, DFC. . . Ed.)

All of which boils down to the fact that you can't dogfight with a Hap at slow speed. No aeroplane can. Keep your speed up, though, and you have several advantages. Manoeuvrability is about equal, you have better fire power and armour and speed.

Six second delay

The last war axiom of "get above him before you attack," applies to the Hap, too. We tried it, with the Spit at 19,000 ft and the Hap at 15,000 ft. The Spit could dive down, have a squirt, and be back at 19,000 ft before the Hap knew what had happened. And there was nothing he could do about it.

Incidentally, quite a few Jap pilots seem to suffer from what we call a "six second delay." It was noticed in New Guinea on several occasions.

Zeros flying along unconcernedly with tracer from our Kittyhawks whistling round them, even under their noses. But they still continued to fly along straight and level. Suddenly they would realise all was not well and they would take most violent evasive action, sometimes in the wrong direction.

Those were Army pilots. Apparently the Navy pilots are 100 per cent on those chaps, and some of them seem to be quite good.

Summing up, the Japs have a good aeroplane in the Hap. But all round the Spitfire is better, especially at height.

As for the pilots who fly them . . . the Japs aren't in the race.