

From Dogfight to Teamwork

DONALD WHITE

A squadron of Fokker D-7's is flying along over No-Man's Land; the pilots in their open cockpits are alert, scanning the skies for Allied planes. Suddenly they find them, roaring out of the clouds above. Each Spad picks out a Jerry, breaks formation, and goes after him. From then on it is each man for himself, shooting one plane down and going after another. The only chance for survival lies in out-maneuvering the enemy and letting him have it with the single .30 caliber machine gun. When one side has had enough, it runs for home. This is an aerial battle of World War I.

The planes of those days were flimsily constructed, holding a small motor which had little power. The planes were maneuverable enough, but they were very slow, because of the many struts and brace wires which held the two wings on. Weak engines and lack of streamlining also lowered their speed, which was from 115 to 140 miles per hour. These planes were built for what they did best, single combat. This was the principal part of aerial fighting then.

A similar scene takes place today. A squadron of Zeros is flying along on patrol. American radar picks them up, and P-38's are sent out from an advance base. They dive into the Japs, filling

them with lead as they come. Here enters the change from the tactics of 1918. Instead of breaking apart and engaging in the old dogfights, single combat, they stay together, and the whole squadron fights as one. If a Zero gets on the tail of a P-38, he is promptly knocked off by another Lightning, which covers the tail of the first. This is accomplished by a weave, each plane being on a different level. On the other hand, if a lone P-38 dives on a Zero, he finds himself boxed in completely, and the lone eagle turns into a dead duck. The dogfight has become obsolete.

With the changes in strategy we have changes in aircraft. Instead of the flimsy biplanes, our pilots now streak through the air at more than 400 miles per hour in sleek low or midwing monoplanes. These planes have as many as eight .50 caliber machine guns. In contrast to the engines of World War I, today's engines are up to more than 2,000 horsepower. The modern plane is made for speed and striking power.

Just as in World War I, the object is to get the enemy in one's own sights and to keep out of his, but the method of going about it is different. The dogfight of 1918 has given away to the teamwork of 1944.