The Vic in Down in Flames

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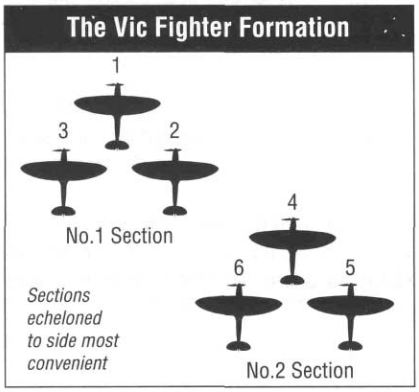
t the start of World War II the standard tactical fighter formation for the Royal Air Force was the Vie. The Vie was a tight formation of three aircraft spaced about 50 or 60 yards apart. The center plane was the leader and flew in front of the other two aircraft forming a vee shape, which gave the formation its name. Tactical doctrine dictated that the only time the spacing in the formation would be changed was when the flight leader ordered certain types of fighter attacks on an enemy bomber group. During normal maneuvering the formation would be maintained as best as possible. This meant that any turn that the formation made had to be fairly gentle as the outside fighter had to accelerate to maintain position while the inside fighter throttled back. This also meant that the trailing aircraft spent more time watching the leader and his moves than watching the sky around them.

The standardization of the Vie formation was enacted by the Air Fighting Development Establishment (AFDE) in the thirties. The AFDE felt that the primary threat to Britain lay in large formations of unescorted enemy bombers. It was considered that the dog fighting of the previous war was a thing of the past and rigid air fighting tactics were the future. The AFDE introduced the Vie and devised a set of complicated maneuvers meant to bring the most guns to bear against a bomber formation. While these tactics did seem to be effective against unescorted formations (the attack on unescorted Ju-88s from *Luftflotte 5* on August 15,1940 was a prime example of this), the rigid formation and tactics put the British fighters at a huge disadvantage when faced with a fighter escort.

"In the summer of 1940, Fighter Command had good aeroplanes, a sophisticated radar system, an excellent chain of command and a highly respected leader of impeccable integrity, but our main weakness was our abysmal fighter tactics."
Air Vice-Marshall J.E. (Johnnie) Johnson



Officially Fighter Command kept the outmoded Vie formation and tactics in effect until the spring of 1941. However, many squadrons discarded the rigid formation and time wasting maneuvers during the Battle of Britain. But certainly, many Fighter Command pilots paid with their lives for following the tactics.

"We learned tactics pretty quickly, but there wasn't much time during the Battle. We learned to spread the Vies. One chap was put in as 'weaver' - arse-end Charlie - weaving about behind our formation, keeping a look-out. They were often shot down, weaving behind and never seen again."
Air Commodore Alan Deere

Using the Vie formation in the game:
Add the following rules when playing with the Vie formation:

1. For each British fighter element, add a second wingman card. The player designates one as the first wingman and the other as the second wingman.

2. During the Wingman Attack Phase, attacks are resolved for both wingmen in the Vie.

3. Vie wingmen may never attack unengaged enemy fighters. When the wingmen attack enemy fighters, the first wingman attacks normally, but subtract one (-1) from the second wingman's Offensive Rating.

4. Vie wingmen may only attack bombers (including fighters armed with bombs) if their leader attacked the bombers in the previous turn. The second wingman does not have his Offensive Rating reduced when attacking bombers (including fighters armed with bombs).

5. When defending against an attack, subtract one (-1) from each wingman's Defensive Rating (this may reduced the Defensive Rating to zero). If only one wingman is left, this restriction is removed.

When to use the Vie formation rules:
While players could use the Vie rules in any game involving British (or Commonwealth) fighters up to early 1941,1 recommend that you use it in the following games:
• For British Fighters in a dogfight before August 1940.
• For British Fighters in the *Invasion of the West* campaign.
• For British Fighters in a July game of the *Battle of Britain* campaign.
• For British Fighters in a 1940 game of the *Malta Under Siege* campaign (C3i, Nr.3)