

UFO-Battle of Britain

by Jeff Warshaw

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I. The Phoney War 9 September 2003

Space Intruder Detector Four hung motionless in the void, a burned out shell as the shuttle from Moonbase approached.

"Jesus!" Ed Straker said. He surveyed the damage from the shuttle cockpit. "They did that much damage with a single beam from a single UFO?"

"It's a good thing Col. Lake destroyed that UFO," Thor Halvorsen said, piloting the shuttle closer.

"That was a stroke of luck, Lieutenant," Straker replied. "We still lost Dr. Taylor and the only working TWD Interceptor."

"Well, at least Henderson got the replacement costs pushed through the IAC Funding Committee," Thor said.

"You can thank Colonel Lake for that, too," Straker said. "If she hadn't proved SkyDiver Zero One was worth the investment, we'd be in big trouble. We still might. We have no way to detect stealth shielded UFOs until we get SID Four fixed."

"Then I suggest we get started," Thor said, firing braking rockets. "It's going to take at least six weeks to get her online again."

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During those six weeks, SHADO was more vulnerable to UFO attack than at any other time during its history. With SID 4 out of action, Dr. Taylor dead and the tachyon wave detectors in Interceptors 15 and 16 malfunctioning, Moonbase was an open target. They were on twenty-four hour Red Alert. All leaves had been cancelled. Nerves were frayed; people were harried and weary. It was the perfect time for a devastating, all-out attack. But the attack never came.

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"I don't understand," Straker said to Paul Foster. He was glad to be back on Earth after six weeks spent repairing and reprogramming SID 4. "It was the perfect opportunity to wipe us out. And they didn't take it! There hasn't been one UFO sighting in almost two months. I don't like it, Paul. They're up to something."

"I think you're right," Foster said. "The aliens don't miss opportunities like that. They went to a lot of trouble to kill Dr. Taylor and take out SID 4. They're planning something, all right."

"I think those attacks might have been diversionary," Straker said. "Meant to draw our attention to the stealth UFO problem, while they were planning something else. Something bigger."

"You mean your idea about a mass attack?" Foster said, frowning.

"What else could it be, Paul?" Straker said, looking at his Earth-Moon orbit model. "Why else would they turn down the perfect window of attack?"

"Ed, I disagreed with you about that twenty years ago," Paul said. "Remember? You wanted four new, fully automated Moonbases. I told you Henderson would never go for it, and he didn't. He almost handed you your walking papers. I still don't see any evidence that the aliens even have the capacity to launch a massed attack."

"If you can offer a better explanation," Straker fumed, knitting his eyebrows. "I'd like to hear it, Commander."

"I don't have one," Foster admitted. "I can't imagine what the aliens are thinking. That's the whole problem, isn't it? They're alien. We never know what they're thinking!"

"I doubt that will carry much weight with Henderson," Straker frowned. "I have to see him in an hour to report on the repair costs from SID 4. We went twenty thousand Eurodollars over budget. He's not going to be a happy camper."

"He was never a happy camper," Paul joked. "A grouchy camper, maybe. Probably made his Boy Scout troop account for every tent peg!"

II. "Give Me Spitfires"

"New Interceptors? You must be mad!" James Henderson said, slamming down Straker's report. "There's no way the IAC will agree to finance a whole fleet of new Interceptors!"

"We need them, General," Straker argued. "We may need them very, very soon. You've seen the reports."

"Yes, no UFO sightings for two months," Henderson said, his white eyebrows arching. "That's an argument against you, Colonel."

"Not if it means a gathering of forces," Straker countered. "Why didn't they attack Moonbase while it was vulnerable?"

"Maybe they don't have the manpower," Henderson said. "Maybe they only had that one ship with the powerful beam weapon."

"Or maybe their ships were gathering for a mass attack," Straker said. "You and I both agreed from the beginning that there would probably be a long, protracted space battle at some point. Why hasn't it happened yet?"

"Because we were wrong," Henderson insisted. "The aliens can't mount a mass attack. They can only attack in twos and threes. They're dying, Commander."

"No," Straker said, staring straight into Henderson's eyes. "I don't believe that any longer, General."

"Care to explain yourself?" Henderson said, knitting his hands.

"Twenty years ago, we believed the aliens were a dying race," Straker explained. "A desperate people, their resources exhausted, who needed the Earth and human beings for organ transplants, and perhaps even colonization. But the facts don't bear out that theory."

"What facts?" Henderson said, lighting up a smelly cigar. He blew smoke at Straker. "You haven't got any solid facts regarding the aliens."

"The stealth UFOs, for one," Straker said. "A dying race doesn't have the resources necessary to construct new technology like that. It doesn't add up. They're not dying; they're growing stronger, expanding. I think that's why without these new Interceptors, SHADO could be vulnerable. We could be facing total annihilation."

"Assumptions!" General Henderson spat. "Conjecture, speculation, nothing solid. No facts. They could have had those stealth UFOs the whole time, and just decided to use them now. No. I don't buy your theory. You'll have to convince me."

"What did you do during the war, General?" Straker asked.

"What the hell are you on about?" Henderson frowned. "You're getting totally off the subject."

Straker held up his hand.

"Just indulge me, General," Straker asked. "What did you do during the Second World War?"

"You know damned well I was a fighter pilot," Henderson said. "Then they transferred me to Intelligence. All that's a matter of public record."

"Then tell me, what two things saved England during the Battle of Britain?" Commander Straker asked.

"What is this, a history quiz?" Henderson snarled. "What are you getting at?"

"Just answer the question, General," Straker insisted. "Believe me, I have a valid reason for asking."

"Courage and determination," Henderson replied. "That's what beat back the Nazis. They

could bomb our cities, but they couldn't crush our spirit."

"Nonsense," Straker replied. "Two things saved Britain and you know it. The first was radar. If we hadn't had the Chain Home radar system, we'd never have been able to stop the Luftwaffe."

"Okay, Mr. Know it All," Henderson puffed. "What was the second thing?"

"The Supermarine Spitfire," Straker said.

"What has any of that got to do with these new Interceptors?" the big man fumed.

"We stand on the same brink," Straker insisted. "But now it's not just England. It's Earth and Moonbase too. With the new long-range tachyon wave detectors, SID 4 is our Home Chain radar."

"And you think these new Interceptors will be your Spitfires?" Henderson scowled. He stroked a wooden Spitfire model on his desk. "I flew Hurricanes myself. Never got my chance in a Spit. But the Hurricane was a damned fine plane. More than equal to the task."

"Of shooting down enemy bombers, yes," Straker said. "But it couldn't quite handle the Me-109 in a dogfight, could it?"

"Your saying your current Interceptors are like my Hurricane?" Henderson said. "Preposterous! They're equipped with our latest technology. Technology the public won't know about for decades."

"But they're old, General," Straker replied. "Old designs based on a war that's changed."

"What about the new multiple rocket launchers?" Henderson objected. "You know how long it took for me to get the Commission to agree on funding those little upgrades? Nearly two years!"

"That's all well and good," Straker said. "But it's not enough! We don't need upgraded Hurricanes, General. We need Spitfires. A new breed. Stronger, faster, better armed. Able to engage these new, stealth-shielded UFOs, to match their firepower measure for measure."

"I've read the report!" Henderson said, slamming a fist on his desk. "It's not possible, Ed! You've asked for too much this time. You don't even have a prototype. Hell, you don't even have a prototype for the weapons system!"

"Yes, we do," Ed said, sliding a red-covered report with NASA markings on it across Henderson's desk.

Henderson's eyes bulged and his eyebrows flared.

"You went over my head?" he fumed, looking over the report. "You built a prototype without the IAC's approval? Oh, you've gone too far this time, Straker!"

"It was paid for by NASA and the CIA," Straker said. "An American project. There are no ties to SHADO in the paperwork. It's simply a new step in the ongoing American and Russian race for an effective missile shield, as far as anyone knows."

"Are you saying the damned thing works?" Henderson asked, checking the figures, looking at a photograph of the anti-hydrogen laser weapon.

"Yes, the damned thing works," Straker reported, lighting up one of his trademark cigarillos. "Now can we talk about budget?"

"All right," Henderson said. "But I'm not promising you anything!"

"Of course not," Ed smiled. He already knew he'd won.

III. The Channel Dash

16 March 2003

8:34 a.m. Lunar Time

"This is Space Intruder Detector Four," the mechanical voice shouted over the tannoy system. "I have positive track on five stealth-shield UFOs. Speed, SOL decimal 8 and decreasing. Trajectory, Grid 145 Blue. ETA to Moonbase, 14 minutes."

Gay Ellis ran to the Command Desk and switched on the mike.

"Red Alert! Red Alert! Interceptors 20, 21, 22 and 25, immediate launch!" she called over the intercom. "Repeat, Interceptors 20, 21, 22 and 25 immediate launch!"

Moonbase had been greatly expanded in 20 years. There were now six separate launch bays. The newest, Bay Six, almost a mile from Central Command held the new Mark II Interceptors. Sleek, twin engined, equipped with both missiles and the new particle beam weapons, the V-shaped fighters made the old Interceptors seem like Model-A Fords next to a modern Jaguar hovercar.

Heather Kent, the leader of the new Mark II squadron switched on her tachyon wave detector and warmed up her antimatter engines. She'd been training for six months, and today was her first combat sortie. She knew how important the next few minutes were to SHADO. If she and her "Delta Flight" couldn't eliminate the threat of the stealth-shielded UFOs, the whole future of the Interceptor Mark II was questionable. Just like those first Spitfire Mark I pilots, she was meeting the enemy for the first time. She hit her retros and lifted off the lunar surface in a smooth "vee formation" with the three other ships.

"Interceptor 21 to Leader," Inga Halvorsen (Thor's beautiful blonde sister) called. "I have a positive TWD reading at Grid Blue 144. Am closing to beam range."

"Confirmed, Interceptor 21," Joan Harrington's voice crackled over the intercom in Inga's helmet. "You are cleared for attack. Repeat, cleared for attack. Fire at will."

Inga nudged her joystick to port and kept her ice-blue eyes on the TWD panel. When the red, fuzzy dot in the center of the screen began to resolve, she slid the safety off the gun button. She felt an almost sexual excitement as she closed on the unseen UFO. Her breasts heaved as she took a deep breath. As her Viking ancestors had done, she let out a scream before firing.

"For Norway!" she screamed, feeling the Berserker gang raging in her brain. Then her slender, gloved digit pressed the button. The invisible beam of anti-hydrogen photons lashed out into space. For a few tense moments, nothing happened. Then there was huge flare as the stealthed UFO exploded.

"Interceptor 21 reporting, destruct positive!" Inga shouted. "Repeat, destruct positive."

"Congratulations, Inga," Ed Straker's voice said. "Return to base."

"Thank you, Commander," Inga said. She peeled her new fighter off as the others closed in on their targets. Four more flares erupted shortly. The first "channel dash" had proven the superiority of Straker's "Spitfire Squadron" as they called themselves from that day forward.

IV. Clash of Eagles

4 June 2003 to 12 August 2003

"All right," General Henderson said, his hands folded. "So you proved your new ships can handle the stealth UFOs. That doesn't prove your idea about a mass attack."

"It's always been on the cards, General," Straker countered. "You used to believe it too. You told me before I started this job that one day the aliens would mount an all out offensive. I've been preparing for that day all my life."

"Well, I hope to God it never comes," Henderson said. He arched his white eyebrows and frowned. "But I'm glad to know that if it does, you'll be ready."

"Only if you pass this new budget," Straker said. "Four Spitfires isn't enough. I want to replace the whole fleet. I want twenty in six months."

"Twenty?" Henderson laughed. "At four billion a piece? You must be mad! Why not ask for fifty, or a hundred while you're at it?"

"I'm serious, General," Straker said, slamming his fist on Henderson's desk. "Damn it, stop playing high and mighty with me. The IAC has penny-pinchd this organization nearly to death, and I'm sick of it! If you won't give me the money, I'll get it from NASA or the Japanese!"

"Fine!" Henderson spat. "Tell the Emperor I said 'hello!'"

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But the IAC gave in to Straker's requests, especially when waves of twenty UFOs began to routinely attack Moonbase. Thanks to the new ground defense lasers and the Spitfire Squadron, damage was kept to a minimum. One dome was smashed, and three people killed, and two of the old Mark I Interceptors were destroyed, but SHADO got all of the UFOs. The ones that slipped through were quickly dispatched by SkyDiver Zero One and SkyDiver Zero Two.

After two months, the aliens stopped sending stealthed UFOs. The new model, though visible, was harder to destroy. It took two or three direct missile hits or beam blasts to bring down the new UFOs. In effect, the aliens had countered Straker's "Spitfires" with a new mark of Me-109, the Me-109 F that had appeared late in the Battle of Britain. But like its historic counterpart, it couldn't outmaneuver the Spitfire in a dogfight.

"Hello, Commander," Gay Ellis said, greeting Straker as he entered Moonbase Command Dome. "Here to oversee the battle?"

"I want to meet the Spitfire Squadron," Straker said. "Especially the one who made "ace" first, Inga Halvorsen."

"They're just returning from a patrol," Gay said, pointing to a computer screen. Four blips appeared on a grid map of cis-lunar space, moving closer to Moonbase as they watched. "Won't be in for about forty minutes."

"Time for a cup of coffee," Straker smiled. "Care to join me?"

After the break-up of his marriage, Straker had never allowed himself to enter any romantic situations. He'd seen too many cases where the aliens had manipulated human emotions, used people's feeling against them. He hadn't wanted to endanger any of his excellent female staff. But if anyone had ever tempted him, it was Gay Ellis. He was fairly certain she knew how he felt about her, but she also knew why he'd never pursued her actively. He was Ed Straker, Commander of SHADO first, and Ed Straker, lonely bachelor second. Alec Freeman had tried to fix him up with casual affairs, but Ed wasn't interested. He

didn't have Alec's "devil may care," live fast, die young attitude. Ironically, Alec had died young. Too young, at any rate.

"I'm still on duty," Commander Ellis smiled. "But I'm free in half an hour."

"Fine," Straker said. "I'd like to study the technical reports. I'll meet you in the Leisure Sphere in thirty minutes."

"I'll be there with bells on," Gay smiled. Then she returned to her monitors and checked the flight paths of the incoming Interceptors. She too felt the burden of being Commander Ellis first, and an attractive, single woman second.

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"Major Halvorsen," Straker said, shaking the tall woman's hand. "I have something for you. Had it made up special."

"What is it?" she said, staring at the black box with the red borders.

"Take a look," he said, handing her the oblong box.

She opened it. Inside was a medal. It was a cross with a circle in the middle, and a Mark II Interceptor engraved on it. Across the top was a purple and white striped ribbon supported by a gold bar.

"What's this?" Inga asked, staring at the strange medal.

"The SHADO Flying Cross, First Class," Straker smiled. "For distinguished service in combat, and exemplary bravery. Here, let me pin it on you."

Straker's hands shook slightly as he pinned the medal above her left breast. Inga was a very beautiful woman, and had the buxom figure of a Norse goddess. But Thor Halvorsen was one of Straker's best friends. He wouldn't have appreciated the way the Commander was looking at his "kid sister" at that particular moment.

"How does it look?" Inga asked, looking in the mirror.

"Fine, Major," Straker said. "Just fine. Keep up the good work, and you'll make Colonel inside a month."

"Thank you, Commander," she smiled. "My mother was in the Ling, the Norwegian underground. She killed five Nazi saboteurs. She would be proud of this."

"I'm proud of you, Major," Straker countered. "I'm proud of all of you. But the battle's not won yet. Eagle Day hasn't come yet."

"Eagle Day?" Inga said. "What is Eagle Day?"

"The big push, Major," Straker said. "The climactic point in the Battle of Britain. It started on August 13th, 1940."

"I hope this Eagle Day does not come," Inga said, her pretty smile turning to a frown.

"I hope so too," Straker assured her. "But it's coming, Major. I can feel it."

V. Alder Tag

August 13, 2003

"This is Space Intruder Detector Four," SID said. "Red Alert, repeat, Red Alert. I have detected a fleet of non-stealth shielded UFOs closing at Sol decimal 1.9, Grid 249 Blue."

"This is Space Intruder Detector Three," the closer satellite relayed. "I confirm SID 4's sighting. I am tracking Twenty inbound UFOs in groups of five. They are on a direct intercept course with Moonbase. Repeat, target is Moonbase."

Inga Halvorsen jumped into the launch tube. Her heart was beating like a kettledrum. She'd been nervous ever since Straker's visit. She kept the medal pinned to her uniform, as a good luck charm. So far, she'd had six additional UFO "kills" since that day. But there had never been a massed attack before. She hoped that unlike her Battle of Britain counterparts, her life expectancy was more than three weeks.

Inga sighted the first UFO a few seconds before her tachyon wave detector confirmed its location.

"This is Interceptor 21," Inga said. "I have visual sighting, Grid 149 Blue. Confirm please."

The lag time was ten seconds, but to Inga it seemed like days. The silver cone shape solidified on her monitor screen, and her heads-up display began to scroll information in green letters.

"Confirmed, Interceptor 21," Nina Barry's voice said. "You have permission to fire at will. Repeat, fire at will!"

"Fire at will, aye," the Nordic beauty smiled. She felt the pleasant grip of the Berserker gang washing over her again, taking over her actions. "Freya, guide my lightning!"

She centered the silver cone in her cross hairs and pressed the firing stud. The invisible beams lanced out across the void. The ship took a full on burst and kept coming, but two more followed, finishing it off in a silent orange flare. Inga rolled Interceptor 21 to meet two more incoming UFOs. They didn't stand a chance.

Inga watched in horror as two UFOs closed on her childhood friend, Norda Lindstrom.

"Watch your six, Interceptor 24!" she called over the com, but it was too late. The lead UFO had locked on. Deadly red beams flared across space, and Interceptor 24 exploded silently in the vacuum. Inga went crazy. Her eyes flared red and she jammed her throttle forward, pushing the Interceptor Mark II past its design limits. She howled like a mad wolf as she closed on the fleeing UFO.

"Die, you green-gilled scumbag!" she screamed as she pressed the firing stud again and again. She kept firing after the UFO disintegrated, blasting the wingman to atoms as well. Her total score that day was six confirmed kills and two damaged.

"What was that howling?" Stan Winston, a handsome American who had a crush on "Inga the Viking" asked. "It sounded like you'd gone mad."

"The bastards killed Norda," she said, a tear rolling down her cheek. "My ancestors used to scream like that to scare their enemies."

"Well, I don't know if it worked," Stan laughed. "But it sure as hell scared Commander Ellis! She thought you'd popped your cork!"

"Tell her I was under the Berserker gang," Inga said, peeling off her helmet and gloves.

"The what?" Stan said, staring at the statuesque beauty.

"Never mind," Inga said. "Get to debriefing, Captain. I'll tell her myself."

"Yes, Major," Stan saluted. "Good shooting. I'm proud to be in your squadron."

"Dismissed, Captain," Inga said. He saw the look in her ice-blue eyes, and knew better than to ask any more questions.

VI. After the Battle

Ed Straker looked at the report.

"Not bad," Paul Foster said, pouring himself a tall scotch from Straker's drinks dispenser.

"I think we can be really proud of our new crop of Interceptor pilots. This Inga sounds like a wild one. They say she howls like a wolf when she goes after a UFO."

"Too bad the aliens helmet have built in sound baffles," Straker said. "They'd piss themselves."

"So what's the verdict?" Paul said. "Is Henderson going to give us our appropriation?"

"I think he'll have no choice," Straker said. He thumped the report. "Twenty seven UFOs destroyed to only four Interceptors lost? That's a hell of an argument."

"But is the battle over, I wonder?" Paul asked, sitting in a chair, lighting a cigar.

"No UFO sightings in almost a month," Straker said. "I think we concluded that 'Operation Sealion' has been cancelled."

"God knows what the bastards will throw at us next," Paul laughed. "Maybe they've got their own 'Spitfires' out there somewhere."

"I hope not," Straker said, knitting his hands. "I truly hope not. But if they do, we'll be ready for them, as long as we have pilots like Inga Halvorsen."

"Oh, I almost forgot!" Paul said. "She's waiting for you on the com link from Moonbase."

"You, forget a pretty girl?" Straker laughed. "That must be good scotch, Colonel!"

Straker turned on the com link. A small hologram of Inga Halvorsen appeared on his desk.

"You wanted to speak to me, Major?" Straker asked. "Or should I say, Lt. Colonel?"

"You're promoting me?" Inga asked.

"More than that, Inga," Straker said. He held up a new medal, a set of wings on a long, electric blue ribbon. "I've commissioned this especially for you. I call it the Inga Cross of Valor."

"With all due respect," Inga said. "I'd like to suggest a name change. My dear friend Norda Lindstrom gave her life during 'Alder Tag.' I think it should be called the Norda Cross."

Straker glanced over to Paul Foster, who nodded in agreement.

"Very well," he said. "The Norda Lindstrom Memorial Cross it is. Anything else, Lt. Colonel?"

"Yes," she said. "I'd like permission to decorate my Spitfire."

"Decorate?" Straker said. "In what way?"

"I'd like to name her," Inga said. "Just as World War Two pilots named their planes. And I'd like paint kill markers on her nose."

"Seems like a good idea," Straker said. "Might serve as a moral booster. Very well. You can requisition the paint from Moonbase Supply. What do plan to name your ship?"

"Straker's Spitfire," she said. She showed him a hologram. It showed a sultry blonde Viking woman clearly based on Inga herself. She was flying a Spitfire Mark I, holding in silver lighting bolt poised in her left hand.

"I approve," Straker said. "Oh, and Thor says to tell you he's very proud of you."

"Tell big brother I can take care of myself," Inga said. "Oh, and Commander are you alone?"

"Yes?" Straker said. He gave Paul an odd glance. Paul nodded and left the office. "I am now. What's going on?"

"Has it been that long, Commander?" Inga smiled, her ice-blue eyes sparkling like rare

gems. "I'm asking you out. I think I'm due for some Earth leave. I'd like to buy you a drink."

"I'm flattered, Inga, really, I am, but---" Straker began, feeling an old pain in his heart. The pain's name was Mary.

"No one ever turned down a date with me, Commander," Inga said. "I don't intend to let you become the first."

"We'll discuss it once you're Earthside," Straker said, severing the link. He dialed up SkyDiver Command. A fresh-faced young boy in a blue SHADO uniform appeared.

"SkyDiver Base," the boy said, saluting crisply. "What can I do for you, Commander Straker."

"Get me Colonel Virginia Lake," Straker said. He needed female advice, and Virginia was his closest female friend.

"Yes, Commander," the beautiful blonde Colonel said, giving her patented icy smile.

"Virginia, is this line secure?" Ed asked, his hands trembling.

"Yes, of course," she said. "What's the matter, Commander? You look like you've seen a ghost."

"On the contrary," Straker smiled thinly. "I think I've finally lost one."

The ghost's name was Mary.

The End