

Bugging Out

by sick

Knowing when to bug out, and doing it right, is one of the most important things you learn to do. Once you get a feel for it, your best streaks and your kill/death ratio will shoot up; there's nothing like living through a mission to make your stats look better ;)

The first step is to know when to get out of Dodge. There are no hard and fast rules here, only general guidelines. If there is an enemy with an obviously superior energy state (above you, going fast), that's a good clue that it's time to think about the old homestead - although, there are times when you can stay engaged even then. If you are badly outnumbered, home starts looking good again, although if you have plenty of smash, you can often stick around and continue the fight.

The most important thing is to know when you start feeling uncomfortable or overworked. If you start having trouble keeping track of all the bad guys, or if you feel like it's a strain to keep the fight going, or anytime you lose confidence and think "gee, this might not be going so good anymore", it's time to split. Better to err on the side of caution and live to tell about it than to be just another flying kill decal who got nailed due to poor situational awareness.

When you've decided to bug out, the best way to do it is suddenly, right in the middle of what you're doing, so that all of the sudden you are screaming away at high speed and the bandits never had a chance to even think about following you. The best way to do this is to stop an ACM maneuver half way through and suddenly dive for the deck at full WEP. Use a very gentle nose low turn or split-s to make sure you're headed for home and not into enemy territory, and keep the plane unloaded if at all possible. That is, don't pull any G's, don't force the nose down too much, but dive like a maniac to pick up maximum speed. The P-51 doesn't accelerate very well, so if you were slow when you started your bugout, you may have some harrowing moments at first, but you will lose them eventually.

Get down as low as you feel comfortable flying, but at a minimum get down under 300 feet. This is low enough to drastically reduce the range at which your neon sign shows up, which reduces the number of potential bad guys choosing you as tonight's special. Ideally get down to 50 or 100 feet, so that there is no room to maneuver beneath you. If anyone tries to follow you, execute extremely gentle weaving S-turns. Keep these very soft, in fact, I try to make them using just elevator trim, using the stick only to roll when I reverse the turn. The Pony will retain its speed in these turns, and most other aircraft will not.

This should be enough to get you home, but if someone is sticking with you, you will be in for some rough times. This someone will be:

- An FW, either an A model with smash or a Dora.
- A Ki-84 that either dove or got an acceleration jump on you.
- A Bf109K that likewise dove or out drag raced you.

Any other bird will have wasted their dive advantage during your S-turns. For an FW, the best thing to do is to reengage him. You can out turn him, especially with a click of flaps, so pick the right moment and execute an oblique pitchback, being careful to deny him a shot. If he follows tightly, he will bleed more speed than you, and with one or two reverses you can then run for home. If he goes high and retains energy, you will either have to get into a knife fight with him until you can break off, or you can try to stay low and fast, opening the distance when he goes high so that he has to dive on you again. He'll catch you a second time, more than likely, but a couple or three of these and you will be close to home and friends, and he will be at very low altitude in enemy territory. The smart FW driver will have left you alone by then.

If it's a Ki-84, you are in for some rough times. The main thing to do is to roll like crazy. Don't just roll on your axis with ailerons, since this doesn't actually force him to make any course correction; instead, do wide barrel rolls. This forces the Frank to either break off, go high to retain speed, or slow down to follow your rolls. If he breaks off or slows down, you're home free. If he goes high, he will often lose sight of you and lose his smash advantage, and since the Ki-84 isn't the diver the FW is, it's unlikely he'll be able to reengage. If he does, it's time for more wide, gentle barrel rolls.

A Bf109K that's staying with you at these speeds is compressing in level flight. He's fast and deadly, but at 350+ knots you can fly circles around him. A gentle barrel roll will work, and often a pitchback or half Cuban will work as well. Any of these maneuvers relies on the inability of the 109K to maneuver well at high speed, so the trick is to keep your evasives gentle, retain energy, and keep the fight moving fast. A few twists should leave the 109 driver looking for easier prey. Just don't try to out climb or out zoom him, or you'll need a boat post haste.