

Welded Wing

by sick

Flying welded wing is the simplest form of advanced wing tactics. While there are many disagreements about the best combat formation, the essence of welded wing is to fly right next to your wing leader, do whatever he does, and shoot at whatever he shoots at. Simultaneously, you are expected to check six and inform the leader of any threats, while the leader monitors targets and picks and chooses the engagements.

In Warbirds, its as difficult, or more difficult, to fly in formation than it is to run the whole show yourself. There are some tricks that can make it possible, and even very rewarding, however. First, fly line astern formation. While this is, theoretically, inferior to both echelon and line abreast formation, it is also much easier to actually fly, especially given the viewing constraints of Warbirds. Stay about d4 to d5 behind your leader, and follow him exactly. When he makes a pass on a target, shoot at it as well, but not at the expense of staying with the leader. The combined firepower, along with the fear that a good formation inspires, can be very effective. You will be able to check six, but not constantly; that's ok, since the leader will be checking things out as well.

As a wing leader, your job is to fly predictably enough to keep your wingman, but unpredictably enough to win fights. This means, more than anything, fly a strict boom and zoom mission. In the Pony, this is simple enough, since its pretty close to the natural fighting style of the P-51 anyway. Make one pass on a target, then reassess. Remember that you still have to check six often, since your wingman is bogged down just trying to follow you. Also remember that with double the firepower, you can make one pass kills pretty consistently, so a single well planned attack is worth a lot more than an uncoordinated brief snapshot opportunity.

The benefit of welded wing to the leader is really just extra firepower, plus the fact that your wingman is likely to get shot at before you are (since he's behind you), and a pair of identical planes flying in formation actually causes many pilots to rethink engaging you at all. Your wingman won't really be able to check six for you, except incidentally. For a wingman, the benefit of flying welded wing is really the learning possibilities. If you have an experienced leader, you can learn a lot just by doing what he does, following his attacks, watching how he makes his kills. This is invaluable experience. Also, you are adding your leader's skill to your own for this sortie, meaning you are likely to score more kills and land more often (assuming your leader is a more experienced and capable pilot). As a training activity, flying welded wing is invaluable.

Welded wing communications revolve around identifying your target, and calling out any possible threats. Only the wing leader should be calling targets, but both wing and lead need to call threats. Targets can usually be specified by plane type (e.g., '190', 'spit', 'zeke', etc.), but may need a qualifier (e.g., 'hi 190', 'rt zeke', 'lt b25', etc.) if there is more than one of a plane type that presents itself as a possible target. Bandit calls, bugouts, and rtb's will probably be the extent of any additional communications.