

Escorting Bomber Formations

"Little Friends"



By

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The strategic game play in World War II online is a complex one that is ever changing. It is imperative that you have basic knowledge of flying and air combat. In order to gain a more complete understanding of the challenges of strategic bombing and its effects on the campaign and its need for escorts fighters.

The recent changes in the game and the players perception of bombing and escorting we have seen a number of large formation of bombers both on the Allied side and the Axis side. With these changes the escorting of bomber formation has just begun to become fun for all. Escort now have to work together and use real world tactics again bomber interceptors. During the war fighter



escort played a vital role in the survivability of bomber formations due to the slow speed and lacking to poor defensive weapons. As the war progressed so did the Bomber defenses but the need for escorts continued because the interceptors were progressively

getting more deadly with each new variant.

Communications

Large bomber groups mean lots of people on TS and text. This make communication difficult for many reasons, yet communications are a vital part of the flight. First of all text is to slow and only gets you killed when you depend on it, you should be on Team Speak. The typical large bomber run should use a minimum of 2 TS channels in the same parent directory. Bomber Flight leads and escort leads should have Channel Commander tuned so they can cross communicate bandits and course headings. The Channel commander is a great tool that is under used by air commands at the moment.

To set this up in team speak you go to your settings tab and select key settings and a key binding box will pop up. At the bottom of the key binding box you'll find a button marked ADD, select this button. When the add button is selected the "define key bindings" box opens and this is where you set your keys. You must select Whisper in the action box and Chan. Commander in the box next to it. This will bring up another box where you must select in channel family. Then in the first box you select a key that you'll transmit with (I use the * on the number pad, but you could use anyone that you like).

Now that your channel commander is set up you may need to break up very large flights into 3 or 4 channels. Having flown a great number of bombing missions we have learned that naming your flight is important so the pilots know whose orders they should key in on. This needs to be kept simple by using Color names for escorts and phonetics for bombers. Red flight (fighter escort), Blue Flight (fighter escort), Alpha or Able Flight (bomber flight), Bravo or Baker (bomber Flight) Here is an example:

You are escorting a bomber formation with 15 fighters. The mission commander decided to use two flights one at the 5 O'clock and one at the 7 O'clock. They group at five will be called Red Flight and the group at seven will be Blue flight. They are escorting 3 bomber flights called Able, Baker, and Charlie (Actually World War II phonetic Alphabet, this has changed to Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie so either is acceptable.)

"Red flight engine setting Cont Max" red flight leader

"Blue flight back off the group we are too tight to the bomber group setting cont 50 till we are 1000 meters off the bomber group" Blue Leader

"Command CH Bandit diving on main bomber group 6 O'clock Red flight engaging" Red Flight leader (Remember command channel goes between the escorts and bomber leaders so both now know where the bandit is and can take actions needed.)

"Command CH Baker flight has Bandit crossing at the group's 12 O'clock low climbing up" Baker flight leader. (Now the fighter escort leaders can relay info to other escorts and engage the Bandit)

You can easily see in each of these if you do not use and some sort of id it could make communications very difficult. The flights can be on the same channel or different ones this is up to the mission leaders.

Communications basic rules

We all like to chatter on the TS channel and this is ok till we enter combat. Once entering combat area or a bandit is sighted all non mission chatter must stop. If you need to call something out and someone is talking transmit "Break, Break, Break" All transmitting will stop and then transmit your Bandit location. This is used in emergencies only.

When we are communicating on TS we want to make sure we are giving good information quickly and accurately. Things we want to make sure we are sending.

Calling bandits and directions.

Use the Main bomber group as your fixed point. Proper way to call a contact is

"Bandit (red circle or known enemy) 5' O clock co-alt of main group heading east towards the bombers"

Make sure that you use the correct terminology as well.

Contact is a sighting of an Unidentified

Vis mean I can see the aircraft in question

No Vis I can not see the enemy

No Joy mean I can not see the aircraft in question

Friendly needs no explanation.

Bandit is an Enemy Aircraft

Bogey is an unidentified one, AKA UFO

Bearing is the direction off of the main bomber group

There are many more that you should have a basic understanding of and you can find that information in Zheriz's WW2OL Dictionary.



The Basics of Escorting (By Trukk, CO 78th FG)

Many players fly escort because they like working with other squads as a team and flying organized, realistic missions. The success of an escort mission is measured on how many of the bombers and escorts return home, shooting down bandits is secondary. (Trukk makes a great point here your success as an escort is measured not in kills but in saves. Getting the bombers to target and home alive, as well as your plane and your wingman's, is your true goal)

The Position

The position of the fighter escort aircraft and their altitude above the formation is critical to groups protection and its survival. The best position to escort bombers in WWIIOL is the high 5 o'clock and high 7 o'clock positions. When the escorts are in either one of these two positions it gives the pilots the best chance of identifying and attacking a bandit as quickly as possible before it gets in among the bombers. Depending on the Aircraft that is available due to RDP your escort altitude may need to be adjusted for the fighter aircraft due to each aircraft's limitations.

Why high 5/7 o'clock

Any escort that is co-alt or lower than the bomber is a target, not an escort. Position is key to escorting as stated above. The high 5/7 o'clock is the best position because:

Position Comparison For a 6 o'clock attack:

High 12 o'clock - You'll never see the bandit and you're too far away to stop the attack.

High 9/3 o'clock - You'll probably see the bandit as he gets close but because you're too far out to get an ID, it can be hard to tell the bandit from a straggler.

High 5/7 o'clock - You've the best chance of seeing him come up the rear, get an ID on them and have decent angles to attack.

High 6 o'clock - It's hard to spot a bandit coming up your low six and if you do spot him when he's directly below you it's hard to get good angles on him for an attack without blacking out, etc.

Position Comparison For a 4 o'clock or 8 o'clock attack:

High 12o'clock - You'll never see the bandit and you're too far way to stop the attack.

High 9/3o'clock - If he comes in your side you should be able to spot him in plenty of time, but because he will be behind you it will take some time to maneuver into position to attack him. If the bandit comes in the other side, you'll never see him in time.

High 5/7o'clock - If the bandit comes in your side you should spot him quickly and be in a good position to attack him. If he comes in the other side you won't see him as quickly but you will have good angles to attack.

High 6o'clock - You will see him coming in from either side and should have good angles to attack

The Threat

If a bandit is spotted early enough the pilot who spotted the bandit and his wingman can attack it before it gets to the bombers, just those two escorts will attack the bandit. If the bandit is an immediate threat, anyone in position to attack will do so. If the bandit dives low or otherwise maneuvers in such a way as to make him no longer a threat to the bombers the escorts will break off and return to their assigned escort position. Too many time escort fighter pilots allow themselves to be pulled out of position. Interceptor have two main goal one is obviously to attack the bombers the other is to draw away any escort or tie them up so that others may get in and attack the bomber formations.

The Bombers

It is critical to the group to stay close together for combined defensive guns and the fighter escort protection. Faster is not better, when flying light bombers that are almost as fast as the escorts, flying at top speed helps the bandits and makes it much harder for the escorts. A mid ranged of speed for a bomber formation is best. This speed will again depend on the type of fighters that are available in numbers to escort the bombers. The bombers must stay in close formation, a strung out group is almost impossible to protect.

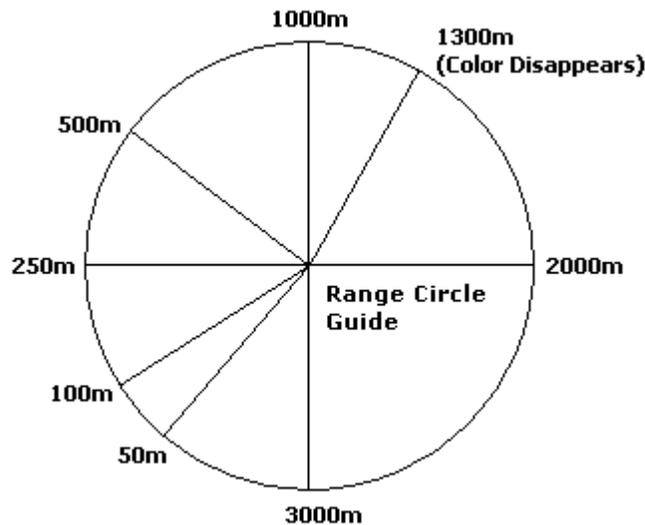
Understanding Range Circles & Convergence

The circles you see in game on the aircraft have a very useful purpose. The Range Circle (RC) are used to provide the player with "depth perception". In real life

you can tell if an object is moving away or towards you. You can do this in WWIOL too, but not very well compared to what you could do in the real world. For ground units this is not a big deal but for aircraft and air combat it's critical.

Visually the RC is that blue (for friendly) or red (for enemy) circle and orange for squad mates circles (these are default colors but they can be changed in your setting prior to loading up and entering the game environment) that appears around an aircraft. As you get closer to the aircraft the circle shrinks (moves counter-clockwise). As you get farther apart the circle gets bigger (moves clockwise).

The RC uses a logarithmic scale, which means that if you double the length of the circle the distance quadruples. So if the circle goes from the 6oc position (the starting point at the bottom of the circle to the 9oc position the distance to the aircraft is 250 meters or about 820 feet away. If the circle is at the 12oc position (ie half a circle) the aircraft is 1000m or about 3,280 feet away, a big difference.



This figure was made by Trukk of the 78th FG.

When to Shoot - Fighters

In WWIOL all fighters have their gun convergence set to about 100 meters or 300 feet. So for a fighter you want the RC to be in about the 8oc position for maximum effectiveness when you fire on a bandit. This "sweet spot" is indicated by the green shaded areas. This does not mean you can't do damage at longer and shorter ranges, it's just best when the RC is in the solid green area. For aircraft with centerline guns (Bf-110, Blenheim I) there is no convergence, so

basically the closer you get the more kinetic energy each round will have so the more damage it can cause.

A typical Mission

On a typical bombing run somewhere along the way the bomber group will be spotted by a bandit. The larger the bomber group the easier it is to spot from a distance so normally the bandit will spot the group long before he is spotted. If you are lucky he will be low, a lone wolf and target fixated. If you are unlucky he will be high, patient and on TS with others.

If he is the first guy, he will be easy to deal with as he'll be slow as he climbs to the bombers which give the escorts plenty of time to spot and bounce him. These types of guys rarely get to the bombers. If he is the second guy it's a different story. Because he sees the bomber group long before he is spotted he has plenty of time to build up lots of E for his attack and when he does attack it will be almost impossible to stop his first pass. The escorts can however, make him rush his initial attack and make it hard for him to make a second pass.

Although normally speed is a good thing, in this case for the bombers it isn't. If the bombers are going max/max the top speed delta between the bombers and the escorts will be small. So when the bandit comes in with lots of E he can close on the bombers, but he also has lots of trigger time because his closure rate isn't that high, and it will also take longer for the escorts to engage because they are so close to their top speed anyway that they cannot quickly close with the bandit.

However if the bombers are slower, the bandit has a harder shot with far less time to shoot. If he hits the brakes to try and saddle up on a bomber (giving him a better shot) the escorts can be on him much quicker because their top speed delta compared to the bombers cruising speed is much larger.

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Normal Attack Vectors

In the over three years the 78th has been escorting bombers in WWII I can count on one hand the number of times a bandit has attacked from the front half of the bomber group (9/3 o'clock). The most common approach by far is between 5 o'clock and 7 o'clock. Even if a bandit is at the bombers 2 o'clock when he spots the bombers he will transition to the rear as he moves to intercept. This is also the position that gives them the best chance of downing a bomber. Focusing on the 5/7 o'clock area is the key.

To Read this information is one thing, to apply it, is another thing entirely. I consider all this information to be rooted solidly in the basics of flying, not only flying but flying well as a wingman and team player. Salutes to all who venture here and double Salutes to all who apply and practice what ole Jcritter has to say!